

DON'T MESS *With This* MAMA

Risking It All to Rescue Our Daughter



A TRUE STORY

MISSY MAXWELL WORTON

FOREWORD BY CHRIS OVERSTREET

Chapter 12

GOING STEALTH

*“Peace was leading me
where my mind could no longer go.
In that moment,
I chose peace instead of understanding.”*
—Missy Maxwell Worton

The loud ring of the phone startled me, and I jerked my hand back from the receiver. After the last conversation with Pochi, we were apprehensive about who would be calling. It kept ringing. Mark and I stood paralyzed, wondering if it would ever stop.

“Hello!” McKenzie’s voice came from the bathroom. “Anybody going to answer that?...It’s a tad annoying and it’s disturbing our fabulous spa experience!” Long pause. “Hello? Am I just talking to myself here? You hear me, right Favor?” Mark and I started laughing. Leave it to McKenzie to break through the tense moment with her off-the-cuff humor.

The phone stopped ringing, so I quickly picked it up and called Pochi.

“Pochi, did you just try to call us?”

“Yes,” Pochi said, “but that was a few minutes ago.”

“Did you hear anything?” I asked.

“No,” Pochi said, “but I hope I did not scare you, Missy. There is nothing he can do. Favor is yours.”

“I don’t trust him,” I said. “To tell you to grab our child from us...our guard is up.”

“He is not thinking right,” Pochi said. “It is good you are careful. Are you staying at the hotel tonight?”

“Probably,” I answered.

“Good,” she said. “Dave can come by in the morning to take you to the market if you still want to buy gifts.”

“Let me see how I feel about it in the morning,” I said. The last thing on my mind was going shopping, but I had promised to take McKenzie for her upcoming birthday.

“Okay,” she said. “Let me know by 8 a.m. Dave can be your bodyguard, and I would not take Favor with you.”

I felt sick when I hung up, and had a growing desire to leave. The talk of a bodyguard made me feel weary—not secure. The tremors I felt under my feet grew with intensity. I didn’t know how out-of-control this man was, and I definitely didn’t want him to lay a hand on my family.

It had been a little too quiet in the bathroom, and when I opened the door to check on my bathing beauties, I found bubbles over everything and everyone! Buried within the mountain of bubbles, I saw two very big smiles and two sets of wide eyes looking up at me.

“You said to keep her happy,” McKenzie said. “Well, look at her—she’s one happy girl!”

I didn’t know whether to laugh or cry. I had a treasure in my beautiful older daughter, always

bringing light and laughter into every situation. She was comedy in this dark hour.



Favor and McKenzie having a ball in a bubble bath!

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After cleaning the girls and the bathroom up, we were ready for a change of atmosphere. The phone had been ringing nonstop since I had hung up with Pochi an hour earlier. Mark's stomach was in knots, and both of us became very suspicious of anyone around us. We kept the girls within reach every moment.

I watched with a bit of amusement as Mark went into stealth mode. You would've thought he knew covert operations. After learning that Adefere had told Pochi to grab Favor, he never let us catch the elevator on our floor, but instead he'd lead us up or down a few floors to get on the elevator. It became a game to Favor, who would giggle as her daddy would sneak around, but McKenzie knew something was up. Mark went before us and scoped out the lobby before we came in, and then we dashed into the back of the restaurant. He had discovered a perfect hidden area near the Pizzeria that became our go-to place. Those looking from the outside in couldn't see us sitting there, but Mark could watch the entrance to see if anyone—especially Adefere—might enter. It reminded me of a scene in an old Western, when the man sat with his back against the wall, facing the door in case he had to protect himself or his family. The only thing missing was the gun and the cowboy hat.

As we got back to just outside our room door, we could hear the phone ringing inside. Mark waited until it stopped, then called the front desk to ask them to stop forwarding calls.

Then I called Pochi. "Pochi, did you just try to call?"

"No," she said, "but he is asking where you are. He is so worried that you will leave the country with her. He sounds very agitated."

"Why?" I asked. "You said there is nothing he can do. She's our legal daughter! He needs to leave us alone."

"He isn't thinking right," she said. "Pray he will see what is the right thing to do."

I hung up the phone and went to my computer. I was exhausted, but I knew I needed to touch base with our prayer warriors to let them know our situation.

Looks like we can't get out until this Friday night. The flights are overbooked. People trying to get back to America after the big storm. We trust that what God has started,

He will be Faithful to complete. We fully trust in His timing as far as leaving the country...no matter how nerve-wracking it can be. We will be arriving in Nashville Saturday at 4:30 p.m. I'll let you know if that changes, but I have a feeling God is taking care of everything. The victory was won the moment we set foot on Ethiopian soil!! Hope to see you soon. She is amazing in every way! Such a bountiful blessing! Just can't believe how good God is to us!

I hit the send button. I was so tired. I didn't wait to see any responses, but instead went and laid down on the bed. I thought about what I had written. *Did I really fully trust God's timing? Why was the feeling of an impending volcanic explosion still there? If I trusted Him, wouldn't that be gone?* I was resolved to the fact that right in that moment, I had no choice but to believe. I was forcing myself to believe it was going to be okay, and I was too exhausted to fight it.

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I was abruptly awakened by a loud knock on our hotel door. Mark jumped up and walked cautiously over to the entry. The girls were still sound asleep.

Someone slid an envelope under the door. Mark reached down to pick it up. The hotel envelope simply had our room number "616" written on the front. Mark looked through the peephole to see who had left it, but the person was out of view. He opened the door and warily looked down the hallway.

Nobody was there.

He walked back in the room and opened the envelope. It contained a type-written note from the front desk—an urgent phone message from Adefere:

I have tried calling you many times. You need to return the kid. There is a problem with your paperwork and you are unable to leave the country until it is cleared up. You need to call me immediately!

Adefere

In that moment, Mark recognized the severity of the situation. His head flooded with a rush of information, falling like dominoes before him and confirming his buried fears: *We had recognized that something wasn't right with Adefere since the first time we met him. He didn't want anyone to know we were in Addis Ababa. Then there was that awkward talk in his office after Favor was rescued. Pochi warned us that he had told her to grab Favor. He didn't want us to leave the country with Favor. Adefere is connected to a person at the U.S. Embassy that is feeding him our information. Had the regional office gotten to him? Or the satanist?* All signs were pointing to a desperate man who could ultimately put our family in danger to protect himself.

"I'll be right back," Mark said.

"Where are you going?" I asked. "What did the note say?"

"It's Adefere. He says we can't leave. There are problems with our paperwork."

"Mark, you know that's a lie!" I said emphatically. "He's lying. He's trying to scare us."

"I know he is," Mark said, "but I have to make sure we are safe!"

"Wait! What are you going to do?"

“I’m going to the front desk and talk to the manager,” Mark said. “I’ll alert them that we have a person harassing us. I want to make sure they don’t give him any information about us.”

“Just be careful, Mark,” I said as he walked out the door with the note in hand.

I sat on the edge of the bed. I could feel my neck and shoulders getting heavy and tight. My stomach was numb. I looked at the girls, who were still my sleeping beauties. My breathing had become shallow. I wanted to go after Mark and tell him to check again for available flights, but I didn’t want to leave the girls in the room alone. I couldn’t just sit there. I jumped up and started to pack our suitcases. I knew we might not be able to fly out for another day, but it eased my tension to do something that made me feel like we were leaving.

A few minutes later Mark walked back in. “Okay,” he said, “They’ve shut our phone off so he can’t bother us anymore today. I talked to the concierge and he said they are very careful not to allow anyone from the outside to know our whereabouts.”

“Can you please go check on flights again?” I asked with a tinge of desperation.

“I told you we can’t,” Mark said. “The flights are all overbooked to the U.S.”

“Check England, Germany...anywhere,” I begged. “Just check, please!”

Mark paused and looked down before answering me. “I said we can’t because we have no money and our credit card is full.”

“So we can. There are flights out. We’ll get the money.”

“No!” he shot back. “We have no money! We have to rely on God getting us out of here tomorrow.”

“Can’t we borrow it?” I pleaded.

“No!” Mark said.

My mind was suddenly hit by a shock wave of fear. The reality was that I would’ve sold our home and everything we owned to catch a flight out of this place. *How could he not see that or feel the same? How did he think everything was going to be okay?* We had a desperate man pursuing us and telling others to grab our child. Now he was harassing us, using lies. It was almost 24 hours before we could board our plane, and I’d never been so ready to leave. I didn’t want to take any chances and find out what this man would do next.

I recognized that I was going into a very dark place in my thoughts. I knew they weren’t from God, because they were filling me full of fear, anxiety, and anger. *What was that scripture? Be anxious for nothing, but in everything...with thanks and...* My mind went blank. I kept pushing forward. *I will not fear!* I said to myself. *No weapon formed against me will prosper, and I will not be frightened! God, please just calm my heart and mind. I know you won’t forsake us.*

I looked at Mark. He was done talking about this, and I could see his mind was made up. I walked to the bathroom, closing the door behind me as I began to cry. I was hurting and frightened. *Where was that fearless woman who had bravely stepped on a plane and flown across the ocean to rescue her little girl?* Instead, I stood like a scared child alone in a cold bathroom, begging her Father to let her go home with her family.

I took a deep breath. “Father, help me please,” I prayed. “I am so afraid. Please help me be the warrior You created. Help me to not fear...whatever might come. I need Your strength. I need Your peace—I need You to make a way for us to leave, now.”

I sat there in silence, as if I knew that I just needed to wait and be still. I longed to hear or feel something—anything—from God.

All I felt was alone.

I closed my eyes. I didn't feel like it, but I started thanking God for what He was doing in this hour and in my life. I didn't know what that was yet, but I knew I needed to thank Him. I knew we were past the point of changing things. Although I desperately wanted to go, I submitted to Mark's decision, trusting he had heard from God. I was just being over-cautious.

Then I noticed it. Somewhere in between thanking and praising Him, God freed me from the fear and anxiety—and replaced it with His peace, flooding in like a cool glass of water on a parched soul. Peace was leading me where my mind could no longer go. In that moment, I chose peace instead of understanding. I didn't know what tomorrow would bring, but I knew that whatever would come, I was meant to face it with God by my side, with faith held up before me like a shield.

That night I slept like a baby.