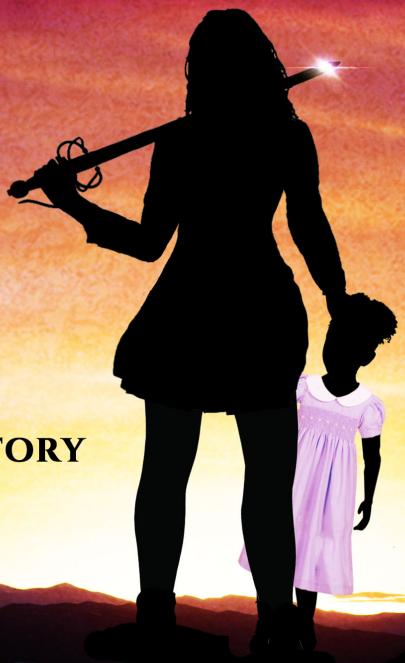


# DON'T MESS *With This* MAMA

Risking It All to Rescue Our Daughter

A TRUE STORY



**MISSY MAXWELL WORTON**

FOREWORD BY CHRIS OVERSTREET

## Chapter 10

# BEHIND BLUE GATES

*"Courage is a demonstration of faith.  
The Lord never promised that His way would be easy,  
But He has assured us that it would be worth it."*  
—Rick Joyner, *The Final Quest*

A small blue door swung open within the large EAI gate and Jamila stuck her head out. "Come into the office area," she directed us with her hands.

Our moment had been abruptly stopped, but the joy continued, especially for McKenzie and Favor, who were unaware of the underlying situation.

Once we were inside, Jamila closed the door and then disappeared through a side door. Mark and I looked at each other, not knowing what to do, so I pulled out my camera and asked Pochi to take some pictures in front of the blue gate that separated us from the outside world.

It is often said that a picture is worth a thousand words, and if our picture could've had a voice, it would've said something that would be etched in our minds forever. My arms were wrapped around Favor, saying, "I will never let go of you again. My arms are holding on, no matter what may come." Favor's little hands grabbed my hands, saying, "I've got my mom, and I'm not letting her out of my sight." Her little head leaned toward McKenzie, and McKenzie's head leaned back into Favor, saying, "I want to get close to you. I'm excited to have a sister." Then there was Mark, who wrapped both arms around his wife and girls, saying, "This is my family who I love, and I am their protector."



*Mark and I being reunited with Favor, and McKenzie and Favor meeting for the first time behind the blue gate at EAI Ethiopia.*

At one point, I took Emebet aside to talk to her privately. I could see by her eyes that she was very sick. She was a private person, and I knew my questioning would embarrass her, but I was concerned for this newly-discovered heroine standing in front of me.

“You were in the hospital?” I asked.

She nodded yes. I could tell she was already a little uncomfortable about the topic, but I had a motive. I saw how God had healed my mother, and I believed He could do the same for her. Favor was back in our arms—and it was all because of the risk that Emebet had taken to bring her to us. I wanted to ask God to give her back something of value: a gift of healing—straight from God to her.

“Do you believe that God loves you and can heal you?” I asked.

She smiled and nodded yes.

“Can I pray for you to be healed?” I asked.

“Yes, please,” she responded.

As we both bowed our heads, I prayed a simple prayer that God would touch her and heal her body. I prayed that He would bless her for what she had done for us. When the prayer was done, Emebet wrapped her arms around me.

“Thank you!” she said through tears. Her eyes still showed me sickness, but faith said she was healed.

\* \* \* \*

A young man came out of the building and invited us inside. As we walked in, Jamila walked up to Emebet and whispered something in her ear. Without a word to us, Emebet followed her down a long hallway.

Pochi leaned into me and said under her breath, “Jamila is trouble. Many say she is very much trouble. I don’t trust her.” My stomach turned. *What if we had been led into a trap?*

I sat down, and put Favor between McKenzie and me. It was clear that Favor wasn’t letting go of her new big sister. She had both arms wrapped around McKenzie’s neck and had crawled into her lap. Mark nervously paced back and forth, glancing down the hallway from time to time.

A man with glasses appeared at the end of the hallway and asked for Mark and me. Pochi stood up.

“No,” he abruptly said, “only them.” Pochi shrugged her shoulders and sat back down. I told Pochi not to let the girls out of her sight, and then I walked with Mark down a hallway lined with offices.

We stepped into a crowded office. Adefereese sat behind his desk. Jamila was on his left, sitting quietly with her hands in her lap. Emebet was sitting closest to the desk with some papers in her hand. She looked up and gave me a nervous smile. I grabbed Mark’s hand in mine as we took a seat directly across from Adefereese.

Adefereese looked up at us briefly, then back down to a paper on his desk. The room was silent. A woman’s high heels clicked down the hallway, coming toward us. The noise was coming from the same woman we had seen at the Embassy, who had been wearing a long black skirt. She placed some newly-copied papers in front of Adefereese. He glanced over them and handed them to Emebet, who

examined them closely. Adefereese impatiently watched her for a few minutes, then said something in Amharic. She shot back confident words, as a woman unmoved by anyone else's schedule. When she finally finished reading the papers, she thanked Adefereese, who nodded at her and dismissed her. Adefereese then asked everyone to leave the room except Mark and me. We took a deep breath, unsure of what was happening.

Adefereese took a long pause, playing with the pen in his right hand, then looked up at Mark and me. I could feel the tension in the atmosphere.

"You are lucky to have your daughter," he stated in a matter-of-fact tone.

Mark and I remained silent.

"You are very lucky," he said again, as if we hadn't heard him the first time.

Mark and I said nothing. *Where was Adefereese going with this?*

"You do know that there was another family that left last week without even seeing their daughter, don't you?"

I nodded my head. "It would be very bad if this family ever finds out that you got your child and they did not," he said, raising his eyebrows to put an exclamation point on it. "You need to keep this very quiet. Do not tell anyone...understand?"

Mark and I sat motionless, watching Adefereese stare us down. Mark made a quick nod toward him.

"You tell nobody that you were here! If anyone finds out about this, we could be in trouble over what we did today. I don't want you to have any more contact with us while you are here. Do you understand me? Do not say anything to anyone." He looked over his black-rimmed glasses at me.

*Was I missing something? We had done nothing wrong. Why would anyone get in trouble?* I looked him in the eyes and for the first time, spoke up. "So, you want us to say we never saw anyone from EAI, although we are sitting right here?"

"Yes!" he said.

"Okay?" I said.

"Good," he said. He put his hand out to shake Mark's hand, then he looked at me and paused before extending his hand.

I noticed.

"Mr. Adefereese," I said, "we did nothing wrong today. A little girl has a family who will love and value her. People prayed. We know God did this, not luck. We should be celebrating."

He rolled his eyes, withdrew his hand, and shook his head. He was done with me.

"Thank you," Mark said, and we walked back toward the girls and Pochi.

Pochi gave us a questioning look. "What was that about?" she asked.

"Not sure," I whispered. "All I know is we're not really here."

About that time, the gentleman who came to take us back to the office was telling Pochi and Pastor that Adefereese needed to talk to them. As they got up, Pochi gave me a look that told me she did not trust what was going on.

\* \* \* \*

We waited for what seemed like an hour. Then I saw Pochi come out of the office with a look of

disgust. “Are you ready to go?” she asked, then looked past me, “I will tell you in the car.”

We said goodbye to Emebet and thanked her again for her bravery. Then we piled in the car and headed back with joy-filled hearts, despite the confusion of the afternoon.

“What did they say to you back there?” Pochi asked.

“They just wanted us to deny that we ever had contact with them,” I said.

“He made it very clear that we are not to have any further contact with the EAI office while we are here,” Mark pointed out.

“He said the same thing to me,” Pochi said. “He threatened me to not say anything. They are afraid we will tell the other family that you got your child and they did not. This is foolish. Why would I do such a thing? He is so concerned with how this looks.”

“He says that he knew nothing about what the regional government office did to these four children, until last week when I told them,” Pochi continued, “but I told him back when it happened months ago. He saw the paper the official signed to let her be adopted. He never has come to visit my orphanage to see if the children are okay and being taken care of. Never. He should’ve fought for those children and for the families that were already adopting them. He does not care.”

Mark and I listened as Pochi unleashed.

“He sits in his office, and he has no idea what we do for these children. He doesn’t care that we believe every child is carefully placed with the families we choose. We pray for God’s direction. God puts families together. Adefereese—he doesn’t care.” She threw her hands up in frustration. Whatever was said in that back room between her and Adefereese had stirred a fire within Pochi—her passion for the children fueled her.

“He says,” Pochi continued between breaths, “why must they have *this* child? We have plenty of orphaned children. They can pick another one. We have people who want them here. Of course, he doesn’t say they want the orphans to cook, clean, take care of their kids, or whatever they want to do with them. They don’t want these children to love as *their* children.”

The picture of who this man really was became increasingly clear the more Pochi vented. He saw no value in placing children within families who would raise them up to fulfill their God-given destiny and purpose. He saw them as commodities, and these four children who interrupted his world were seen as a problem. But he now had a bigger problem on his hands—us—and we weren’t going away.

\* \* \* \*

Our second evening back in Ethiopia was filled with firsts. McKenzie showed Favor the drawer that we had filled with new clothes for her. Squeals of excitement came from both of them as they would grab an outfit and run into the bathroom to try it on. We were happy that Favor had taken to her sister. McKenzie was the perfect, loving, big sister—and from that moment on—they would remain side by side.

When we settled in for the night, I made a decision to not post anything on Facebook until we were past the Embassy and held Favor’s passport and visa. Although Favor was in our arms, an unsettled feeling was in the air. The events and conversations of the day bothered us. Something wasn’t right. We could sense something lurking in the shadows, watching and waiting to pounce. An underlying fear was steadily growing...*Would they try to take her from us?* Our thoughts were filled with

what-ifs, and so went another sleepless night.

\* \* \* \*

The next day, we grabbed a quick swim at the hotel before Pochi and Pastor came to pick us up for our trip to the Covenant Orphanage in Holeta where Favor lived when we met her on our first trip. This visit would give Favor a chance to say goodbye to her friends before heading to America. We were thrilled for another opportunity to love on the children. Pochi had done a wonderful job with bringing them from a traumatic time of loss to a place of acceptance and healing. With every child, you could see that they felt loved and valuable.

We had driven about 20 minutes when Pochi looked in her rear view mirror at us. “Adefereese called me today,” she said.

“Everything okay?” Mark asked.

“He is concerned about you leaving the country with Favor,” she said.

Mark and I glanced at each other. Our hearts sank.

“Something has happened, and he is changing his mind concerning letting you leave with her,” she said.

“How could he do that?” Mark asked. “She’s our child!”

“You may not be able to take her until everything is cleared up with the Debre Birhan officials. He wants me to pressure you to stay. He said, ‘We can’t let them leave with the kid.’”

I looked at Mark. My heart was in my throat, and all the fears that kept us awake the night before were now a reality. All I could think about was getting out of the country as soon as possible before we lost our daughter. I waited until Pochi was looking straight ahead, then mouthed, “We need to get out of Ethiopia!” Mark nodded in agreement. An urgency was burning in my chest to leave. If it had been humanly possible, I would’ve started walking home.

We arrived at the orphanage. Favor grabbed McKenzie and showed her around the place while they waited for the children to return from school. Mark and I removed ourselves to the garden where we could talk without being overheard.

“We need to get the earliest flight out of here when we get her passport and visa. I can pack tonight,” I whispered.

“I agree,” Mark answered. “I’m going to the Embassy when they open to see if I can pick up her documents. I don’t trust EAI. They’re not going to give us her passport.”

“I know,” I said. “I feel it too. They’re turning against us.”

“Something must have happened since we saw Adefereese,” Mark said.

“I wonder if he is getting pressured from someone more powerful?” I said.

Mark looked at me for a moment.

“What?” I asked.

“I hope we can get a flight out with Hurricane Sandy stranding so many here,” he said. “A lot of people are trying to get back to America.”

“I don’t care where we go. Let’s just get out of here,” I said in despair.

Mark nodded his head in agreement.

We grabbed hands and looked at each other. We were on the threshold of making a life-changing

decision. We were going against the norm of doing what we were instructed to do for the sake of saving our new daughter. We had to rely on a higher wisdom than our own.

"We should pray," I said, and without hesitation Mark started.

Father, I pray for protection over our family. I ask You to give us a clear path to get out of Ethiopia safely with Favor. Help me get the passport and visa without delay, and Lord, please give us wisdom, so that above all, we are in Your perfect will and not doing things in our own strength or ways. In Jesus' name. Amen.

We took a deep breath. We could feel the weight and anxiety of stepping out beyond our comfort zone. We had to continue walking one step at a time, placing our trust in the promises that God had given us. He would finish what He had begun in our lives, but it was scary to believe what we had yet to see. Abraham in the Bible dared to believe that God would do the impossible in his life. He went blindly, moving by faith. That unknown place was where we found ourselves in that moment. We were believing that God was able to do above and beyond all that we could ask or think, according to the power that was working in us...faith.