



# Let It Believe

A Misty River Romance

BECKY WADE

Author of the 2018 Christy Award Book of the Year

# Let It Be Me

A Misty River Romance

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Let It Be Me • Becky Wade

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For the Lord God Almighty.

You have faithfully called and equipped me  
to write year after year. Thank you for allowing me,  
with each novel, a fresh chance to “fix my eyes  
on the author and perfecter of my faith.”

Partnering with you in this work  
has been one of the greatest joys  
and privileges of my life.

## CHAPTER ONE

**M***om and Dad are not my biological parents.*

Leah Joanna Montgomery blinked slowly, then squinted at the DNA test results displayed on her computer screen, straining to digest the information displayed there. But no. She couldn't digest it. The very fast brain she'd relied on all her life was currently sitting in the corner, immobilized by shock, sucking its thumb.

*Mom and Dad are not my parents?* A metaphorical ghost reached past her skin and squeezed her organs in a cold, tight fist.

How could Mom and Dad not be her parents? She was twenty-eight years old, and this was the first time that any entity, human or computer, had given her a reason to think that they weren't—  
“Do we have any snacks?”

Leah startled at the question and jerked her head up. Her seventeen-year-old brother, Dylan, had made an unusual excursion from his room and was standing very near the dining room table where she sat.

“Earth to Leah.” It was what he said every time he discovered that she'd gotten lost in her own mind.

Subtly, she angled her laptop's screen away from him. She typically got lost in her own mind while navigating labyrinths of pure math. This was the first time she'd become lost in the rubble of a genealogical bomb. “Snacks?” She was finding it hard to switch from a life-altering revelation to the mundanity of food.

“Do we have any?” He’d dressed his six-foot-tall, thin, slouch-shouldered body in a Misty River High Football T-shirt and narrow joggers that hugged his calves. He had a mop of artful brown curls, expressive eyebrows, big and dark Bambi eyes, and a pale complexion. He resembled a poet who specialized in morose verse.

“We have whatever snacks are in the pantry,” she said.

“Oh,” he responded, as if this had not occurred to him. “Do we have Cheez-Its?”

“I think so.”

Scintillating conversation concluded, he slunk toward the kitchen.

Almost cautiously, Leah looked around herself. If Mom and Dad weren’t her parents, then could she trust these walls not to melt? The roof not to vanish? Another dimension not to suck her away?

“Father God,” she whispered, those simple words asking for things she couldn’t even name.

She gazed out the expanse of windows on the front side of her rectangular box of a home. The large panes of glass overlooked a steep, wooded valley with a creek at its base. On this seventh day of May, the crisp, vivid green of the trees blanketing the north Georgia Blue Ridge Mountains contrasted with the cheerful orange azaleas blooming in her front planting bed. She’d painted the interior walls of the house a calming off-white and stained the wood floor ashy beige. No clutter marred her simple mid-century modern furniture.

Her Friday afternoon had been following an entirely predictable routine. She worked as a math teacher at Misty River High, where Dylan was finishing up his junior year. They’d both returned home from school less than thirty minutes ago. She’d cracked open her computer and spotted an email from YourHeritage.com with a subject line proclaiming *Your DNA results are in! Discover your heritage!*

A balloon of interest inflating within her, she’d logged onto the YourHeritage site and clicked the button to reveal the results of the saliva sample she’d mailed in six weeks before.

Then she'd been walloped with the information that she was not biologically related to her mom or her dad. And her ordinary Friday had jumped its track and careened into a gorge.

"Where are the Cheez-Its?" Dylan called.

Leah joined him in front of the pantry. "I never fail to marvel over your assumption that my two X chromosomes function as GPS locational devices for household items." She plucked out the Cheez-Its and handed them to him.

"But they do." He held up the box. "See?" Popping the top, he made for his room.

"Nope," she said. "That box can't migrate to your room."

His sigh was so melodramatic that it would have been comedic had an adult attempted it. He leaned against their small square breakfast table and rattled Cheez-Its into his mouth.

Leah didn't let him eat in his room because she didn't want mess. But much more than that, if she let him eat in his room, he'd never come out. She'd have no one to socialize with except Han Solo . . . in her daydreams.

"What's for dinner?" Dylan asked.

She pulled several items from the freezer. Lasagna. Chicken pot pie. Burritos. "Any of these intriguing choices. Help yourself when you feel so inclined."

He looked unimpressed.

She returned the items to the freezer. "Are you doing okay?"

"Yeah."

"Sure?"

"Yeah."

"Have any plans tonight?"

"Nah."

"Want to watch *Star Wars* with me?"

"Which one?"

"Any one. Your choice." Dylan was the primary love of her life, and *Star Wars* had been their shared passion since he was little. Sadly, it had been months—maybe a year—since he'd deigned to watch one with her. When he wasn't at school or football practice,

he spent his time with his friends, creating ink on paper drawings, or staring at YouTube in a concerted effort to avoid homework. “Please, O brother of mine?” she wheedled. “Humor me.”

He gave a bored shrug and shook his head. “I think I’m done with *Star Wars*.”

She covered her heart with her hands. “That’s blasphemy, you realize.”

“Uh-huh.”

“What are you going to do with yourself all evening if not watch a movie?”

“I thought I’d look up the recipe for heroin.”

This was their running not-so-funny joke. He knew very well that despite all the parental controls she’d instituted over the electronics in their house and her own careful oversight, she really was afraid that he’d find a way to do things like make heroin.

An amused grunt issued from him; then he set the Cheez-Its on the table and walked away.

“Contrary to what you might think, you will not perish if you spend a few hours outside the force field of your room,” she said.

He didn’t answer.

“Dearest boy of my heart!” she called with gusto.

His door shut behind him.

Leah pondered the view of the empty space where he’d been.

*If Mom and Dad are not my parents, then Dylan might not be my brother.*

As if she’d just pressed on a broken tooth, pain flared, warning her away from that line of thought. Dad had vanished from her life fifteen years ago. Mom had been an infrequent presence since she’d left to serve overseas in the Peace Corps ten years ago. As jarring as it would be to part with her biological connection to her parents, it would be a thousand times worse to part with her biological connection to Dylan—

*That line of inquiry is premature, Leah. No need to ponder that until you must.*

For the past several months, Mom had been on a genealogy



kick. In February she'd gifted Leah a DNA test kit for her birthday, though Leah would have preferred the book on category theory she'd requested. That said, she was someone who loved to accumulate knowledge, and since she knew next to nothing about her ethnic heritage or her ancestors, she'd sent in her sample with a sense of pleasant anticipation.

She slid back into the dining room chair and retraced the steps she'd taken after logging on to YourHeritage. The first screen full of results informed her that she was 72% Scandinavian, 20% Irish/Scottish, and 8% German. Noteworthy, but no great surprise, since she was fair, with blond hair and grayish-blue eyes.

She moved to the next screen of results. Right beneath the first heading, *Closest DNA Matches*, her mother's name should have appeared.

It did not. Instead, the site designated Leah's closest DNA matches to be people with faces and names that didn't ring a bell in her memory.

Riley Haskins. David Brookside. Margie Brookside Schloss. Emilie Donnell. Doug May. Ryan Brookside.

Who?

No Everly relatives from her mother's side in this list. No Montgomery relatives from her father's side.

Weeks ago her mom had granted Leah permission to view her YourHeritage data so that Leah could access the family tree Mom had been compiling. She visited her mom's page of DNA matches. Leah ought to appear here as her mom's closest match . . . but didn't. Mom's list included several relatives Leah knew—relatives who were conspicuously absent from her own list.

She checked her profile settings. Not wanting any of the strangers connected to her by DNA to see her pop up as a surprise cousin, she switched her settings to private, then knotted her hands in her lap.

She'd spent a lifetime trusting in the answers math provided. The world was not always logical. But math was. And she loved math for that.

Her saliva sample + laboratory analysis = the results she'd just

received. Her inclination was to believe this sum because it was highly unlikely that there'd been a flaw in the equation.

The ghostly fist that had a hold of her insides squeezed harder.

She logged off and cleared her browser history. Grabbing her phone, she stepped onto her back patio and closed the sliding glass door behind her to ensure she was safely out of earshot of Dylan.

She dialed her mom, bracing herself the way she did for doctor's appointments and other such duties, which were occasionally necessary but never enjoyable. Mom rarely picked up when Leah called. Even so, Leah murmured, "Answer."

Mom did not pick up.

"Hello," Leah said, when invited to leave a message. "I just received the results of my DNA test at YourHeritage.com, and the findings are perplexing. Please call me back as soon as you receive this. Thank you."

Back when Leah had set up her account at YourHeritage in preparation to submit her sample, the site had given her a solemn warning about how upsetting the conclusions of DNA testing could be. She'd checked the box to acknowledge that, yes, she understood and was willing to accept the results.

At the time, she hadn't had an iota of concern.

Her fingers trembled slightly as she placed a call to the customer service phone number provided in her email from YourHeritage.

An agent named Heather politely and patiently assured her that the site stood by the outcome of her test.

Leah could only imagine the calls Heather must receive: "You got my mother right, but that man isn't my father!" "She's my half sister? I always thought she was my cousin!"

If Leah had concerns about the test's validity, Heather suggested that Leah take a retest, which Leah was most certainly willing to do once she'd discussed this with her mom.

After disconnecting, she stood immobile, her ballet flats planted on a flagstone paver. Stalwart trees encircled her.

The story of her conception was well-known to her and somewhat south of disappointing. Her mom and dad had fallen in love

while attending Georgia State. Mom had become pregnant the summer before her senior year. Even though Mom had dreamed since childhood of traveling around the globe, she'd instead settled down, married Dad, and had Leah.

Why would a young woman who longed for independence and adventure adopt a child at the age of twenty-two? After nine months of pregnancy? Leah had seen the photos that documented her mother's pregnancy.

Had Mom been pregnant and lost the baby tragically?

Then gone on to adopt her? And kept her adoption a secret?

If something bizarre like that had occurred, why would Mom have given her a DNA kit as a gift, knowing what Leah would discover?

Was the DNA kit Mom's warped way of revealing to Leah that she'd been adopted?

That sort of subterfuge sounded nothing like Erica Everly Montgomery, her mother. Mom said things outright—unafraid of what people thought, uncowed by confrontation.

Leah hadn't been adopted, surely.

And yet . . . It was true that she'd never had a great deal in common with the rest of her immediate family. Her father, mother, and brother had brown hair and brown eyes. All three were more athletic than she was, messier than she was, grumpier than she was. None of them were interested in academics, the joy of Leah's life.

Even so, she hadn't imagined that her otherness had anything to do with genetics. A lot of people felt as though they didn't fit within their families. She'd simply concluded herself to be the odd one out.

Until now.

I received the results from the YourHeritage DNA test kit you gave me for my birthday," Leah told her mom on Sunday evening. "You're not listed as my mother and no Everly or Montgomery relatives are listed as matches."

Silence multiplied between them.

Leah had been gnawing over this for two days—two days!—while she'd waited for Mom to return her call. She'd practically given herself arthritis in the knees thanks to the time she'd spent kneeling and praying.

"That's ridiculous," Mom stated emphatically. "I'm your mother."

"Not according to my DNA."

As soon as Leah had answered her phone, she'd shut herself into her car inside her one-car garage so Dylan couldn't overhear. In sharp contrast to Leah's surroundings, her mother was currently in Guinea, working on an agroforestry project. On the other end of the call, Leah pictured orange earth, palm trees, and huts. Mom had likely clothed her sinewy body in safari khaki. Her curls, which matched Dylan's, would be zigzagging from her head, and her close-set eyes and long face would be pinched with consternation.

As usual, contact with her mom submerged Leah in a complex mix of resentment, love, and resignation.

"Two weeks before your due date, I started bleeding," Mom said. "My back hurt. My belly hurt. We rushed to the hospital, and they diagnosed me with placental abruption."

This information was not revelatory. Leah had gone through a phase in elementary school when she'd been obsessed with her origin story and had peppered her parents with questions about her birth and herself as a baby. "The placenta had pulled away from your uterus," Leah said.

"Right, which is dangerous. They worried that you might not be getting enough oxygen, so they put me under and performed an emergency C-section. I have the scar to prove it!"

"I've seen the scar."

"Of course you have."

"I'm trying to reconcile all of that with the only logical explanation for my DNA results, which is that you adopted me."

"You can't always trust logic."

"On the contrary, the wonderful thing about logic is that you *can* always trust it. So I began to wonder . . . What if your baby

didn't survive the placental abruption? And, in your grief, you adopted me?"

"I most certainly did not adopt you, Leah. The emergency C-section saved you. They placed you in my arms shortly after I regained consciousness."

Leah remained quiet.

"Why in the world would I have adopted a baby?" Mom demanded, gathering steam. "I was trying to finish college at the time that I had you. I wanted to see the world! I wanted to travel. I was not ready for children. You know this about me."

"I do."

"I did not adopt you."

"And yet we're not related by blood. How do you propose to explain this?"

"Clearly the lab made a mistake."

"My DNA matches include people with surnames like Brookside and Donnell and May. Do you recognize any of those?"

"I don't. Listen, humans are involved in the process of DNA testing. If humans are involved, there's the possibility of human error. I'm guessing that your test tube was mistaken for someone else's test tube. Will YourHeritage let you retest?"

"They will."

"Good. Make sure they expedite your retest since this was their mistake."

Leah swallowed a sigh. Her intuition did not think this was the lab's mistake. "A new test kit is already en route to me. Once I send it in, I should hear back in less than two weeks."

"Tell them to give us our money back for both tests. They owe us that after the trouble they've caused." She didn't wait for Leah to reply before saying, "I'm off!"

Mom's words hung in Leah's ear as the line went dead.

If Mom had not adopted her, then only one theory remained that honored both her mom's version of events and the DNA test.

That theory: her mother's biological child had been switched at birth with someone else's baby.