

My Mom and the Clovers

The best way to find a four-leaf clover is to look. They can be pretty hard to locate if you're not looking. And while there may be many different ways to look, I only know of one that works, that being the way my mom taught me when I was a kid.

On a mild day in a seemingly endless ocean of summer vacation, I complained to her of being bored. She always hated when I did this. *Only boring people get bored*, she'd rebuke me, time after time. But that rarely helped.

Well, what should I do? I asked on this particular day. She thought about it for a second and said, *When I was your age and I didn't know what to do, I'd go out into the yard and look for four-leaf clovers. I'd collect them.* That sounded fine enough to me, so I asked, *How do you look for four-leaf clovers?* She told me she'd show me.

My mom led me to a spot where the front lawn ended and the mulch before our porch's deck skirt began. Somehow, she already knew where the clovers grew. She crouched down around a small patch and I crouched next to her. *You should always start by looking at the edges*, she said, running her fingers over the green leaves where they met the grass. *That's where most of them sprout.* I followed suit and traced the threshold, meticulously scanning stretches of clover in search of an outlier. Quickly, though, I discovered the problem with looking for one clover unlike the others is that no two are ever quite alike. Their uniqueness reveals itself under close examination: this one is bigger than that one, this one more crooked and misshapen, that one over there entangled in another so as to look like it has four or five or six leaves but really only has three, this one half-eaten by a caterpillar and trying to bounce back, and so on. You can't rely on a four-leaf clover to be obviously different from any other because when you begin to really look, you find that each is different in its own way.

Still, I drew spirals with my finger along the edge of the patch. And after significantly less time than I had expected, I came across a clover with a stunted fourth leaf. At first I suspected it was another trick of the eye; one clover pressed up against another only seeming to bear four leaves. But examining its solitary stem disproved my incredulity. This was the real deal.

Mom, mom! I said, calling her over while I pinched the clover so as not to lose track of its connection to the ground. *I found one!*

Good! she said. *Now follow it down. Look around it. Four-leaf clovers tend to grow in clusters, and there are probably more stemming off that same root. See if you can find any, and when you're done, I'll show you how to press them.*

My mom went inside and I stayed out, tugging at the clover's stem, gently at first and then with increasing force. With a bit of digging and wiggling I managed to loosen the soil enough to unearth a segment of root. I pulled harder still, and all the branching stems drew tight, the tethered clovers bobbing like buoys over the grass. I followed their motion and found another four-leaf clover in short time, and then another after that. Before long the patch began to seem

nearly inexhaustible. So instead of trying to exhaust it, I searched until I didn't feel like searching anymore, and then went inside to meet my mom in the kitchen.

It looks like you got quite a few, she told me. I had. Now you've got to save them. She took a large red hardcover cookbook down from the spice cabinet and turned to its last pages. Inside was a folded piece of parchment paper which, when opened, revealed a scant collection of dull brittle four-leaf clovers. *The coating keeps the leaves from sticking, and the weight of the book presses them flat so they can't curl up, she said. Go get a big book and try it yourself.*

I hopped up the stairs and ran to my bedroom and searched for the biggest book on my shelf, which was a complete collection of Ray Bradbury's short stories I had purchased at a flea market. The volume was massive; well over a thousand pages and in large format to boot. It was perfect. I plucked it and ran back downstairs to the kitchen where I tore a long sheet of parchment paper along the cardboard shell's perforated edge, folded it in half, and laid my newfound four-leaf clovers inside. I even spaced them far apart in opposing corners so as not to risk any sort of accidental overlap. When I closed the book, I pressed firmly on the front cover to make sure that the weight would take. Then I immediately became impatient and opened it back up to check on my clovers. *They look a little flatter,* I supposed to myself before closing the book once more. Then I got impatient again and went back outside to look for more four-leaf clovers.

Of course, my impatience waned over the next few months. But wherever I found myself getting bored, I'd remind myself not to, and to go outside and comb the yard instead. Most of these excursions produced at least a couple four-leaf clovers. I even had to add a second page of folded parchment paper in order to store them all spaciouly. But after a summer spending countless hours scouring the lawn, I began to wonder about the middles of the clover patches. Did fewer four-leaf clovers really grow there? Were there clusters I was missing? Of course, it was true that I rarely found anything noteworthy close to the center—but then I rarely spent much time looking there.

Maybe there really were more four-leaf clovers in the edges, or maybe the four-leaf clovers in the middle were just harder to distinguish. Maybe the simple application of a methodology—*any* methodology—was enough to set a clover hunter on a path towards bountiful harvest. And maybe there were dozens of four-leaf clovers well within the borders of the field, passed over in plain sight. If so, oh well. I was not lacking in four-leaf clovers, and always found my mark in the periphery whenever I remembered to look.