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Four Leaves of Renewed Luck

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Author Bio

Merrill Fortier is a senior. She is a Psychology major and an English minor and is slowly starting to face the real world, as scary as it is! While at Gettysburg, she has enjoyed getting involved in a variety of things such as playing for the women's golf team and holding leadership positions in various clubs around campus such as the CCL, Psi Chi, and Omicron Delta Kappa. She loves hanging out with her friends, laughing, playing the guitar, and writing as much as possible because that is how she truly loves to express herself.

Four Leaves of Renewed Luck

A single stem keeps each of the four clover leaves in place. A symbol of luck, or at least that's what you are led to believe. I remember being a little girl during recess, quietly sifting through blades of grass in search of one of these rare treasures. My eyes played tricks on me every time I stared off into the fields, leading me to suspect that I had finally located one; however, each clover I found only had three leaves. Most of them did, actually, and I cannot recall ever finding a single four-leaf clover.

My mother, on the other hand, was luckier than me, or at least so I thought. She had seen such a fortune first-hand. I remember the day she recounted the memory of her discovery. I could not have been more than five years old at the time when she first told me. It was late in the afternoon and I had noticed that my mother had been spending quite some time alone in her room that day. The day was August 23, 1991: the solemn anniversary of my father's death was once again upon us.

That summer, only five years earlier, my father had grown very ill. During that season when one is supposed to spend time out under the warm sun, he spent days in the hospital that soon turned into weeks, and eventually into months. He was diagnosed with stomach cancer, and unfortunately the doctors had not caught it in time to help him recover. He passed away on August 23, 1986, a little less than two months before I was born.

I stood quietly in the hallway outside my mother's door only five years later, lost in thoughts of my father, a figure in my life that is surrounded by so much mystery. I have bits of stories that I have tried to piece together to make some sketch of his existence. Some stories stick out more clearly in my mind, while others I have heard have been forgotten, maybe purposefully so I could hear them being retold again. I've asked to be told multiple times about how he used to love playing golf because it makes me feel connected to him, as I share the same level of adoration for the game. Maybe it is the reassurance that the words I hear from these stories bring me; they comfort me when nothing else can. This brought me back to the four-leaf clover and the reality of the moment, as I stood there in the hallway drifting off trying to recall several memories of my dad.

I walked up to my mother's door and gave a few gentle knocks against the cold wood. "Who is it?" she replied, even though she knew it could only have been one of her two children. I volunteered my identity and she allowed me to enter. Without even glancing up at my presence, she sat there on the edge of her bed, calmly flipping through the pages of a worn leather journal. I sat by her side letting my legs hang off the corner of her bed, swinging them to and fro as I peeked at what she was so wrapped up in.

...Without her even having to say anything, I knew that her one wish must not have come true.

This journal was filled with crumpled, faded papers with scribbled writing, quotes, old black and white photos, and other mementos she had collected over her lifetime that she now was so willing to share with me. My tiny fingertips glided over the surface of old memories as together we turned each page, glancing over each little marking, analyzing the moments from my mother's past.

Together, we grabbed the edge of the next page and pulled the sheet over only to notice that something fell from the journal and slowly floated to the ground. My mother picked up the stained Saran Wrap that contained a pressed four-leaf clover, its shape maintained over the years by the weight of the journal's filled pages. I was very curious about why my mother had kept such a thing for so many years. She looked at me and smiled as tears slowly began to build at the edges of her hazel eyes. She pulled me into the cozy nook of her arm as she let me carefully hold the fragile phenomenon. I did not understand at first why my mother was crying, but I sat there patiently waiting for the words to come.

The story took me back to a time that I could not remember, that summer in 1986 and I had yet to make my introduction into the world. "You see, your father was very ill in the hospital. I went to visit him one day and received terrible news about his state," her words were struggling to come out, "they gave me little hope that he would ever recover." She continued to tell me about that same afternoon when she returned home. "I went outside and was walking around the front yard. I remember it was a perfect afternoon, a cool summer day, clear of any clouds and any of the awful D.C. humidity that we're both so used to. I guess I just wanted to look at my flowers and my garden because they make me so happy," she said. She always loves to garden, especially when she has a lot on her mind. I continued to patiently listen. "I walked back and forth through the yard, flooded with terrible thoughts. Then all of a sudden, there it was." My mother's daydreaming eyes had somehow stumbled upon that single four-leaf clover that stuck out in the middle of the yard. She bent over and grasped the stem until she felt it snap. Once she picked the four-leaf clover, the only thing left to do with it was to make a wish. Closing her eyes she dreamed of all the things that she had ever hoped for, but the one thing she wanted was the obvious wish that stuck out clearly in her mind.

She paused for a moment. I could hear her choking down the tears that wanted to flood her eyes. She gave my left shoulder a reassuring squeeze; she always had this way of comforting me that everything was going to be okay even in the toughest moments. Then, without her even having to say anything, I knew that her one wish must not have come true. A few weeks after her discovery of that four-leaf clover, my father passed away at the age of thirty-nine.

We sat there together, tears quietly rolling down both of our cheeks, and even though the words never left her mouth, it was almost as if the person I had looked up to my whole life was telling me that she had lost hope. It was for this reason that out of every story I had heard about my dad thus far in my lifetime, there was never one that had impacted me to the extent this one had. Instead of hearing all of the things about myself that reminded my mother of my dad, this story was not uplifting nor was it filled with optimism; it was depressing and painful. For a long period after, I stopped looking for four-leaf clovers; I had no

desire to. I felt empty inside, not just because I missed my father, but because I constantly was questioning why he had to die at such a young age.

There was a long period of time where I blamed myself for my father's death, not that I had any reason to, but I did it anyways. I would torture myself day in and day out, making myself feel guilty for something that I had no control over. I felt overly envious of other girls in my class who always had their dads to come watch them in their sports games, or their school plays, or to take them to work on those ridiculous "father-daughter" school holidays. My school seriously had that day as a holiday, which made me furious that I was stuck going to school that day when all of my other friends could go to work with their fathers. I was the one who had to suffer through forty-five minutes of grueling math class while Katie and Julia, two of my closest friends at the time, were showered with fancy pens that lit up in multiple different colors and stickers with their father's company logo on them. It wasn't fair. What did I do to deserve this fatherless life?

But no matter how many times I asked myself that same question, nothing changed. Nothing could bring back my father no matter how angry or upset I was about him not being in my life. Maybe four-leaf clovers are just a symbol of luck; maybe they have no way of actually making wishes come true. Maybe I'm missing the point of what they represent.

My mother still has that four-leaf clover, concealed in that old, dirty Saran Wrap in her journal. Every few years I'll go in and look through the tattered pages to make sure it's still in there. It reminds me that no matter how hard life gets, there is still always another way of looking at a situation. Even when my father was dying and my mother probably knew in the back of her mind that he was not going to get better, she still had the hope to wish for something that would probably not come true. She held faith and optimism, showing strength in a situation where many people would have broken down and given up. Even after my father passed away, she never turned her back on my brother or me, and she gave us everything we could have ever needed to feel fulfilled in our lives. To my mother, the purpose of that four-leaf clover was to execute a wish that she knew would never come true. It was almost as if each of the four clover leaves represented each one of us, and now with my father gone, it seems as if that fourth leaf is more meaningful now than ever before. Even though our family is not complete, the four leaves of that clover are still held together by time, proving to my mother and myself that we can still feel whole even without my father in our lives.

Now that I'm older and don't necessarily believe in the "fairy-tale" ideas that four-leaf clovers and shooting stars grant us wishes, or even that Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny exist, I still feel that there is something to be gained by seeing things magically from all situations, good and bad. Although the loss of my father still affects me in certain ways, I have been blessed with a new way of looking at life, and for that reason I feel lucky.