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## Two Shoes

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Class of 2008

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# Two Shoes

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**Author Bio**

Geoff Calver is a member of the class of 2008 at Gettysburg College. He is a writing major and a political science minor. He also is co-managing editor of the Mercury and an avid reader and writer. He hopes to one day be an author and is planning on studying abroad in southern France next year, where he will continue to work on his writing.

## Two Shoes

Two shoes. Two shoes lie abandoned on the blacktop at the bottom of the hill. Two shoes on a cold winter night. The stars are shivering in the sky, and he lies there, in the snow. Quiet, not moving. I wonder if he feels anything at all. I wonder if he hurts. I want to lie down next to him and listen to the cars whistle past on the road. I want to know if he's okay.

Sometimes I hope that I get shot. Not shot as in, "Bang you're dead," but shot as in, "Damn, that really hurt." Something Monty Python-esque. Just a shot in my back shoulder as I'm walking to 7-11. Or I imagine getting hit by a car, just clipped at a high speed, my body sent flying onto the sidewalk, a crowd of pedestrians screaming for someone to call 911 for God's sake, and a kind brunette holding my hand. It's not that I want to die. Sometimes I just want obscene amounts of attention. I want to be ogled over. I want to have "Get Well Soon" cards spread out across my hospital room, acres of them, from all of my distraught friends and the sad, stone-faced throngs of admirers in the parking lot beneath my hospital room.

I want to get hurt because I want to be helpless. I want to have a condition that requires someone paying attention to me completely. I want someone to laud my heroics. I want them to forgive me for my mistakes and cry over the times they hurt me and didn't treat me as well as I deserved. It's sick. I know. But I crave attention. I want to be the center of it all. I want to be the talk of campus for weeks.

I guess I'm being selfish. Thinking like this. After all, everyone wants attention; why do I deserve to revel in it more than others? God help me, but there's a little something (someone?) deep inside of me that celebrates when I get in trouble and dances with joy as I take a soccer ball to the nuts or slip and fall on the stairs at the bottom of my dorm in front of a large crowd.

And I like to think that a little someone exists in everyone. That all of us have a little someone or something in us, living only to suck up attention like a large black hole. Me! Me! Me! This creature screams enthusiastically.

The girls' quad is covered in Frisbees. And there are kids too, chasing the Frisbees, diving through the air, laughing. There are baseballs too. And gloves. And soccer balls. Everyone is having a good time. My roommate Hazen, Casey, and I sit by the dining hall, which affords us a commanding view of the quad. I spy Jenn Reilly and Justin Simon, squatting behind the faculty garden in the middle of the quad, their lips locking. I can see Marta Heinen running (gloriously). Mr. Ford is marching around, a smile on his face, plotting. Plotting to catch someone doing something wrong, plotting to put an end to the fun. Not that he wants to. But it's his job.

I finish my ice cream sandwich and grab my baseball glove.

"Hazen," I say, nodding towards the quad, "we should go throw a ball."

He nods and agrees, picking up his leathery glove, and shoving his fingers up inside it. "Let's do it," he says, jogging.

We nudge our way into an opening and promptly begin to expand our territory, throwing the ball a bit farther after each catch. Girls scatter out of the way, guys snarl at us and storm off. We command attention, our tosses arcing gracefully through the purple sky. The sun is a tiny orange globe swimming behind the tall maples that grace the edge of the quad. The hum of cars on the highway below assails us. A loud rumbling eighteen wheeler chugs by, heading north towards Franconia Notch, the White Mountains, the Northeast Kingdom and Canada.

Casey eventually rejoins us, adjusting his popped collar against his thick neck. He brushes his dirty blonde hair out of his eyes and sits down on the grass (grooving). We don't know when he smoked or where, but his eyes are bloodshot, and he's eating a third (third!) ice cream sandwich. Casey is stoned.

We like Casey. He's a good kid, and one of our best friends. Okay, he is our best friend. Hazen and I like to think of him as a brother. We don't really do anything apart. We are on the ski team together, we live across the hall from each other, we take the same classes together, we skip classes together, and we eat together.

The grass is soft. I enjoy lying in it, watching people as my baseball glove and ball lie at my side. Music courses out of the speakers set in the middle of the quad, reggae, Bob Marley I guess. Casey, Hazen and I watch as Ali Neal walks by, her hips swaying back and forth, her tan legs hardly covered in her very short shorts. Weston stands next to her, his hand on the small of her back, laughing.

I'm jealous. Mostly because Ali talks to me, which means that she likes me, right? She's popular, part of a separate social clique, most of whom don't really talk to me. They sort of just ignore me - us. The exceptions to the rule are Gillian, a Canadian from New Brunswick who I have been friends with (and been in love with) since the first day of school, and Ali. Ali is bubbly and excitable. Her blue eyes glow with happiness and she always has a big wave and greeting for me whenever I see her.

In the competitive nature of boarding school a wave from Ali is more than a wave, a smile is more than a smile, and a greeting is more than a ....well, you should be able to see what I'm getting at. Holderness is a massive congregation of cliques and any cross-clique fraternizing is regarded as unusual, to say the least. It is somehow...special.

Yes, Ali is a jock, and a preppy. And I am a shy kid. Correction, we (Hazen, Casey and I) are shy kids. And so it is slightly shocking and amazing each and every time she waves to me, which leads me to falsely believe that we somehow could (gulp) be together someday. I am delusional. I know. But I can forgive myself because I am a teenager.

Weston (the guy with his hands on Ali's back) is a jock, and he carries himself like one. His shoulders are thrown back. His head is held high. His curly locks seem to shine in the fading light of day, as if God were naming him "favorite son." I do not like Weston all that much.

I'm sitting in the diner on Main Street. A plate of hot eggs rests in front of me, on a fake marble table top. Pack, who's from Chevy Chase, Maryland, sits across the table from me. He's using the ketchup to make a smiley face on his poached eggs. Gillian sits next to me, her hair long, straight again. Not braided like it had been earlier in the year, when we had been out in the woods. Mr. Henriques, a middle-aged English teacher, sits at the front of the table and addresses us. "It's good to see you guys again," he says, smiling. "I thought we could get together this morning, before class and remember the good old days."

The good old days he is referring to ended about two months ago. It had been freezing and I had holstered the seventy pound backpack onto my shoulders. I could feel the pain in my muscles. Felt them crying out for me to sit down and rest. It had been twenty-two degrees below zero and the mountains, normally shrouded in clouds, were disturbingly unobstructed. Snow covered the mountains, in places eight feet deep. Our snowshoes had left deep tracks in the woods. We had been on Outback.

Outback is something juniors at Holderness have the option of participating in. (Optional only in the sense that, with great shame and your head hung, you could opt out.) In March, when it is still freezing out and winter is (supposedly) just winding down, we have to go camping in the White Mountains for two weeks. As luck would have it, our Outback had taken place in the middle of one of the worst cold spells in years.

"To the coldest Outback ever," Henriques exclaims, raising his glass of orange juice. "I didn't think you guys would all make it, (cough, cough) Pack, but as far as I can count, we're all here and I think we had a lot of fun while we were out there."

The truth is - it was great out there. In fact, it was the greatest experience of my life. It wasn't exactly fun (frostbitten fingers and overcooked meals come to mind), but it was unique and I suppose I learned something from it. I take pride in the fact that I did it, I stuck through, and I took part in something completely unique to Holderness School.

I remember cold nights, all of us hunkering around the fire, a hint of rubber in the air. "Oh man, my feet are toasty," I proclaimed moments before Bubba pointed out that the toe of my boot was melting. A potentially dangerous situation given my feet would be exposed to thirty-five below zero temperatures that night. Luckily he caught it in time and I patched it up.

I remember Ben and Gillian and me, sitting in a hut by a lakeside high in the mountains, the wind blowing viciously cold air against the blue tarp we had put up across the front. The smell of couscous wafted in from the outside, where it was cooking on the fire and I plugged my nose. "I hate that stuff," I said. They both concurred. We lay in our sleeping bags and talked about *Dumb and Dumber*, a warm shower, the radio.

"In just a few days, I'll be in Florida, sitting on a beach, listening to music on the radio" I said, smiling in the dark, my breath lifting off my tongue.

"I'll be in Canada," Gillian said, chuckling. "It'll probably be warmer than this."

Ben was silent a moment before saying, quietly, "In just a few days

I'm going to take a shower. And that sounds pretty nice right now."

I remember Pack, Bubba, Gillian, Ben, Mr. Henriques, Eliza, Sam and I sitting around a fire, telling jokes. I remember each and every face being warm and friendly. I remember feeling accepted.

I recall climbing on the bus at the end, old faces shining at us from within the warm, heated interior. Other groups that had been picked up before us, their hands pink and warm. I remember the way that the cliques, dissolved in the woods, instantly reformed. "Hey," I said to Pack, moving over to the window so he could squeeze into the seat right next to me. He kept walking, waving to his friends in the back.

I try and remind myself everyday that these kids I can't get along with at school are actually good guys. I tell myself that when we erase the cliques, anything is possible. That we could be best friends if we could just wander outside the protective cocoon that was Holderness. We had all been best friends in the woods. It is astoundingly clear that we are no longer best friends now. We sit around the fake marble table top rather awkwardly.

Pack is cordial. Sam is non-committal, only speaking to Bubba. Eliza sits and stares at the wall, smiling at Mr. Henriques' joke. Gillian is quiet, but friendly, talking in small bursts with me and Ben. We have lost our sense of accomplishment; we have since given up our grip on friendship and fun between us. We are divided, even at the table. Popular, shy, nerdy, foreign; we all sat in different corners.

When the food is finished and Mr. Henriques, our faithful Outback leader, is paying the bill, Gillian turns to me and says, "Remember how I told you, when we started solo – that if I got scared I would come to your tent?" I smile at the memory and laugh nervously. After a week together as a group we had been split up and told to walk into the woods, pitch camp and stay there alone for three days. They gave us food to eat and that was about it. We were all relatively close together, but far enough apart that we never saw each other. Each tent was situated several hundred yards from the next. We were expected to remain alone, by ourselves.

It gets pretty boring, being by yourself. I heard the rushing of the trees, squirrels running up and down my tent, coyotes, and my own voice. Inner monologue for three days straight. We were given journals, but I hardly wrote in mine. Instead, I walked through the woods for hours at a time, nervous that I would get lost in a sudden slew of snow. My tracks would become buried and I would yell aimlessly at the mountains, their peaks laughing at me from above.

"Yeah, yeah I do."

"You know," she says, leaning forward and smiling, whispering, "I tried to. I was afraid one night, all alone, I could hear the coyotes in the mountains and I put on my snowshoes and walked down the path, but in the night I couldn't tell which site was yours. Where you'd, you know, pitched your tent? So I headed back and slept alone. But I had Geoff, I had gone looking for you. I wanted to stay up all night, talking, laughing, forgetting about all the noises in the woods. It would have been fun."

I smile, my cheeks contracting, my eyes squinting like they do when I'm happy. "I wish we had."

I wake up cold, my alarm is gently prodding me awake. It sits at the base of my bed and I punch the snooze button. I pull the covers around my shoulders and sink into the warmth of my blankets. Minutes feel like seconds and the alarm roars to life again. Hazen struggles in the bunk above me. "Geoff, wake up, you've got class man." He mumbles, and I guess that his head is still stuffed into his pillows. He has first period off. He can sleep in.

The day is a brilliant orange, red and yellow. It is fall, and the mountain hovering over the town is covered in a light snowfall. I have art class to go to.

I walk into class late, and straddle my stool quietly. Ali sits on the stool next to me, her hands clumsily dragging charcoal across a brown piece of paper. She is frustrated, I can tell by her body language, the way her shoulders are slumped and her mouth pouts.

"What are we -" I begin to ask out of the corner of my mouth when Ms. Finster notices that I have arrived.

"Well, well, well Mr. Calver. Nice of you to show up on time."

"I'm sorry Ms. Finster, my alarm didn't go off." I smile sheepishly at Ali and she smiles back. Mrs. Finster walks away and Ali leans in and tells me that we're working on a still life in charcoal relief. I shake my head and sigh, pull off a new sheet of paper and begin to sketch, my hands slow, methodical. I am terrible at art, but it's okay. Ali smiled at me and I feel accepted, popular, just for a moment. As if, for once, I was in on the joke.

Weston moves across the ice smoothly, his skates fly. His stick serves to balance him, his shoulders heave back and forth. The air is cold and the wind bites our cheeks as it sweeps in through the open sides of our hockey rink. We are all crowded around the boards, our breath fogging up the glass. We cheer as the game begins. Arla, a freshman on the ski team with me, leans over and says, "Did you hear Boston College is looking at Weston?"

I nod. I have heard the rumor going around, and it isn't hard to believe. He is talented with the puck. He is a winger and he scores regularly.

We are playing Deerfield. The Big green. Their team is made up of post-grads, guys who are doing a second senior year to get into a better college or improve their grades. They are all twenty-year olds with beards and wide shoulders. They are essentially a young college team.

There is hot chocolate over in the corner and there is a long line waiting to wrap hands around mugs, hats pulled down over ears.

We score and I see that Weston has his hands in the air. The school cheers loudly and we bang our hands against the glass. I join in. I have nothing against him when he's on the rink. I have no problem with talent. I merely hold his popularity against him.

We lose 3-2. But we assure ourselves that it was a good game, because Deerfield is the top ranked team in New England, or is it Cushing? Either way, they're up there and we held our own. At least for a day.

It is cold out and we are huddled under sweatpants and sweatshirts in the room. We are still reeling from it all. Sam, a kid in my dorm and a friend of Weston, has a visibly swollen tattoo on his arm. It's a simple design, the

number four. He displays it proudly, his face beaming. It obviously means a lot to him. So much so that he was willing to carve it into his arm with a sterilized (and hot) end of a coat hanger. We smile sadly and acknowledge him. "It's great Sam. Really." I ache just a bit inside.

It is the first day of the ski season. We have been doing dry-land training for weeks, and I could scream with joy when the snow covered mountain rises into my view. It is fake snow, but Casey and I still bounce in the seats of our bus eagerly. I clutch onto my ski poles, run my hands over the finger guard, and pull my backpack around my shoulders. I swing my boots over the top of my bag, and pick up my skis. As we sit on the lift I am giddy. The snow on the ground is fake, and probably hard, but any skiing is better than no skiing. I look at Casey and smile, he is pulling on his poles and lifting the bar. "Let's do it, man," he says, looking over at me.

We tear down the mountain, following our coach. The ski hill is covered in large rolls of icy snow. The rolls are a result of snow making. They haven't groomed the trail yet, so they are spread out across the mountain where the snow has been dumped out of those big hoses lining the mountainside. I crest one hill after another until I hit the ground, hard. I can feel myself losing balance, my ski pulling out from under me. It's the ice. I know it. My legs splay and one foot rises up in the air. I am on my back, looking up at the sky seconds before I crash face first, flipping in mid air. My ski pops up and hits me in the mouth, my boots are still buckled in. I slide for a bit and then come to rest at the base of another roll. The team crowds around me and I taste blood on my lips. Swell.

The attention is focused on me for a minute, and I can feel that little something inside of me dancing with pained glee. Arla helps me stand up and brushes snow off my back. Casey gives me a playful slap on the side of my helmet and all is well. I choose not to exaggerate my injury. I clear off my goggles and pull them over my eyes again. "Let's go," I say, deciding that it would have been much better not to hurt myself at all.

The dining hall is unusually quiet. A large piece of paper clings to a billboard when I walk in with Hazen.

"Due to yesterday's events we will not be having class today."

I am delighted. A day off from class! No responsibilities! I think that, maybe Hazen, Casey and I can go skiing. Maybe we can take Casey's video camera and try to do some tricks in the woods behind the school. Then I see Mrs. Weymouth.

Mrs. Weymouth, my old English teacher and the dean of students stands in the doorway, picking her nails. Her eyes scan over the student body inside, who are whispering in hushed tones to each other. Someone sobs. A guy has his arm around a girl, comforting her.

"Mrs. Weymouth," I ask, "what happened yesterday?" I am speaking in hushed tones, conscious of the atmosphere inside the cavernous hall.

"Geoff," Mrs. Weymouth sighs, "Hazen." Mrs. Weymouth says our names slowly, and she puts her arms on our backs and turns us away from the dining hall and the silent students inside. "Last night, two of our students



were killed in an accident.”

All I can say is oh my God.

“Oh my god.” Hazen echoes my sentiments.

“Who was it,” I ask, not sure I want to know.

“Weston. And Mike. Mike D’Amico.” Weston registers immediately but I am not sure who Mike is. I do not want to seem rude and ask, my eyes drift to my feet. Mrs. Weymouth is now sobbing. “I’m so sorry to have to tell you guys. It happened late last night, most kids didn’t find out until today. It was just before curfew. They were walking back from Irving when they were hit by a drunk driver. The guy drove away but there were witnesses and they found the guy early this morning.”

I now remember seeing flashing lights on the road below campus the night before. I remember walking back from the gym with Casey and wondering what had happened. I can’t recall anything else though. I don’t remember hearing kids cry or scream. The lights, those cop lights, they had seemed so...inconsequential...and they still sort of did. I’m not sure how to feel. What are you supposed to do, how are you supposed to act when someone you didn’t really like dies? I stand there dumb. “Father Weymouth will be in chapel all day today if you need counseling,” Mrs. Weymouth says. I feel a kick in my gut. I don’t feel like skiing anymore. Maybe I’m in shock.

Hazen is playing Sim City on Casey’s computer. He just got it in the mail but his computer can’t play it. I guess his computer doesn’t have the requirements. Casey and I are sitting on the couch underneath Casey’s bed in his freezing cold single. His fan is in the window, blowing cold air into the room on a January day.

“Casey, it’s freezing.” I say. Casey nods and closes the window.

I play with my hands and watch Hazen click on the mouse, directing roads and cities to be built, lives to spring up all over a city map on the screen. We are waiting patiently for the memorial service, which is in fifteen minutes. Some of my dorm mates don’t want to go. “Why should I?” this kid, Bill, asks. “It’s not like I knew the guy.”

I guess I’m going to go on principle. I wasn’t friends with him, but I interacted with him, I saw him all the time. I knew his girlfriend pretty well. I would feel like an ass if I didn’t go. So I get onto a bus into town, along with nearly everyone else from the school.

There are cameras everywhere. We file into the church in the center of town and there are cameras everywhere. Concord Monitor. Manchester Citizen. The Boston Globe. I guess Weston and Mike’s deaths have made big news. At this point I just want the assholes to go away. “They don’t care who died,” I think to myself, “they just care about getting the details everyone wants to hear. How many kids were there, how they were crying and howling, how good Mike and Weston were, how their deaths were such a great tragedy.” I hang my head as I walk inside, I feel something tugging at the corner of my eyes.

James, a friend of mine from home, is in the church. He is sitting in a pew as I walk in. We catch eyes and I saunter over to him. He went to

Holderness for a year before leaving. It wasn't his thing. But he knew Weston, they were pretty good friends. His eyes are bloodshot. "Fuck man. This sucks," is all he can say.

Everyone is so eloquent in their speeches. I am near the back but I can see the podium, where, one by one, students, faculty, and parents stand up to talk. Some of their speakers deliver short monologues. Like our Athletic Director, Mr. Low. He grips the podium and chokes back tears; "They were good boys," he says. I nod my head in agreement. Some deliver long, rambling speeches. Like Mr. Ford, the dean of faculty. He stands at the podium, his tie loose around his plaid shirt and he rambles on and on about Weston and Mike, telling story after story.

There are sobs all around. Everyone is crying. Ali is standing at the podium, shaking. She is trying to form words, she is trying to explain the fire in her gut. She chokes on the words that are trying and come out, swallows and wails.

I choke back something. Hazen has his head down. Casey stares at the flowers arranged around the podium. I think about how Weston was there one minute and gone the next. I remember the last time I saw Weston, earlier on the day he was killed, in assembly, when the student body gets together. I sat one row behind him, my feet propped up on the back of Ali's seat. He had been breathing. His skin had been warm.

I think about Jason, a kid I went to elementary school with. He had red hair. He had a temper and he liked to call me a "flatlander" because my family was from Montreal. I remember we weren't always best of friends, but he did come to my birthday parties, I went to his. I remember getting a call from my mom, telling me that Jason had taken a gun and killed himself in his old trailer home, a year after his dad had done the same. I think about how I used to hang out with Jason, how he had blown his brains out. How quickly life can leave you. How sure we are that we will live another day. There is nothing certain about life. I cry. My chest heaves, loud, dry sobs escape my throat and I bury my head in my hands.

Weston's hockey and soccer jerseys are up on the wall of Bartsch, the athletic center. They are retiring his number. I am standing in the hallway outside the trainer's office, surrounded by team photos and the pungent smell of hockey gear. A year has passed since he died. A year. I remember the images on the news. Two shoes on the road, and a blue Holderness baseball hat. The one with a white H on it. He'd been hit so hard that he had been knocked out of his shoes and into the snow bank which covered the sidewalk he should have been walking on, if only it had been plowed by the town. Like they were supposed to.

I place blame on them. I place blame on the drunk driver, now serving 38 years in prison on two counts of vehicular manslaughter. I place blame on myself for not being friends with Weston. He was a good guy, I tell myself. I think about Outback. I think I could have really gotten along with him if

we'd been hiking in the woods together, devoid of cliques.

His jersey is all that's left of him for me to see. His number on both jerseys is white. It's a number four, like the tattoo Sam carved into himself on the fifth day after he died.

Sometimes I wish life was like a good movie or a book. I wish everything could make sense. I wish everything could be coherent and spelled out clearly for me. I wish I could grasp a sense of order and put it in my pockets to carry around like a trusty paperback. I sigh and give in to the fact that sometimes life doesn't make sense. That some things just don't add up. That life is confusing and disorienting.

The night is cold and the air is quiet. I can see my breath, can't feel my hands. I trudge through the snow, forging a path towards the road. The snow bank is still there, rising up out of the road like a tiny mountain of white ash. I take a deep breath and look at the stars. The moon hangs lazily above the clock-tower watching over the college in town. I am overwhelmed and I lie down on the snow, my hands behind my head. It is freezing, I can feel the snow against my bare back. I stick the bouquet of flowers into the snow. They sit alone in the cold air, trembling.

CAITLIN CLARKE

## clumsY

clumsy I'm  
clumsy with my hands and  
often with my feet but  
I'm worst with my words  
clumsiest, clumsier  
with explanations articulations  
definitions descriptions  
and worstly most recently  
cumbersome and under some  
horrid heaviness when I  
speculate on -  
gosh how to say this  
- my  
    feelings.