



THE GIRL WITH THE BLUE SHOES

by Leah Osakwe



She's the happiest girl in Sunny Springs.

Everyone says so.

Even the jolly bus driver who whistles warmly as he rides around town. Or the chirpy shopkeeper who greets everyone with glee. Or the cheerful waitress who serves food with a smile.

They say it, too.

Sure, there are heaps of happy people in Sunny Springs, but the girl with the blue shoes is the happiest of them all.

She gives the town its name, the people say.

Her shoes are as blue as the sky in July, as shiny as an oyster's pearls, and as captivating as the deep sea. They make her glide, not stomp; float, not strut. The wind sweeps through her curls as she drifts through awestruck crowds.

The people of Sunny Springs are envious. Why wouldn't they be? The girl with the blue shoes doesn't have a worry in the world. She's calm, confident, carefree. They all want what she has.

She knows what they say about her. She hears them every day.

The green-eyed gasps in the bakery, by the buttery croissants and flaky pastries. "Wow. She's so happy."

The wistful whispers in the supermarket, beside the sweet oranges and juicy lemons. "I wish I was in her shoes."

And the sombre sighs in the park, amidst the tall trees and crisp leaves. "I bet she has it all."

The people of Sunny Springs *a*lways talk about the girl with the blue shoes.

But they never talk *to* her.

They have conversations with friends, strangers, even dogs. They sit in huddles on benches and talk about their days. They ask how each other is doing. Sometimes, they'll smile and say, "I'm great, thanks", their eyes twinkling, their souls bright.

Other times, they'll frown and say, "Actually, I'm having a really bad day", their brows furrowed, their hearts heavy.

The girl with the blue shoes watches longingly, wishing someone would ask her how she's doing, if she's okay.
But, of course, she looks happy, so nobody does.

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One day, the girl with the blue shoes visits her friend and asks, "How are you?"

"I'm not great," her friend replies. "But I love your shoes! Can I try them on? They'll definitely make me feel better."

The girl with the blue shoes hands them over, wondering if her friend will understand how she really feels once she wears them.

Her friend breezes around in the blue shoes, her aura glowing. Then, suddenly, a strong feeling sweeps over her. She sways gently, her hand on her heart, then takes a seat.

As soon as she takes off the blue shoes, her brightness begins to fade.

She looks up, and this time, she actually sees the girl with the blue shoes. Truly sees her. She stands and walks towards her, her arms outstretched, then gives her a long, loving hug.

"How are you?" she asks.

The girl with the blue shoes has never heard that before. Her eyes well with tears.

"Actually, I'm having a really bad day..."



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