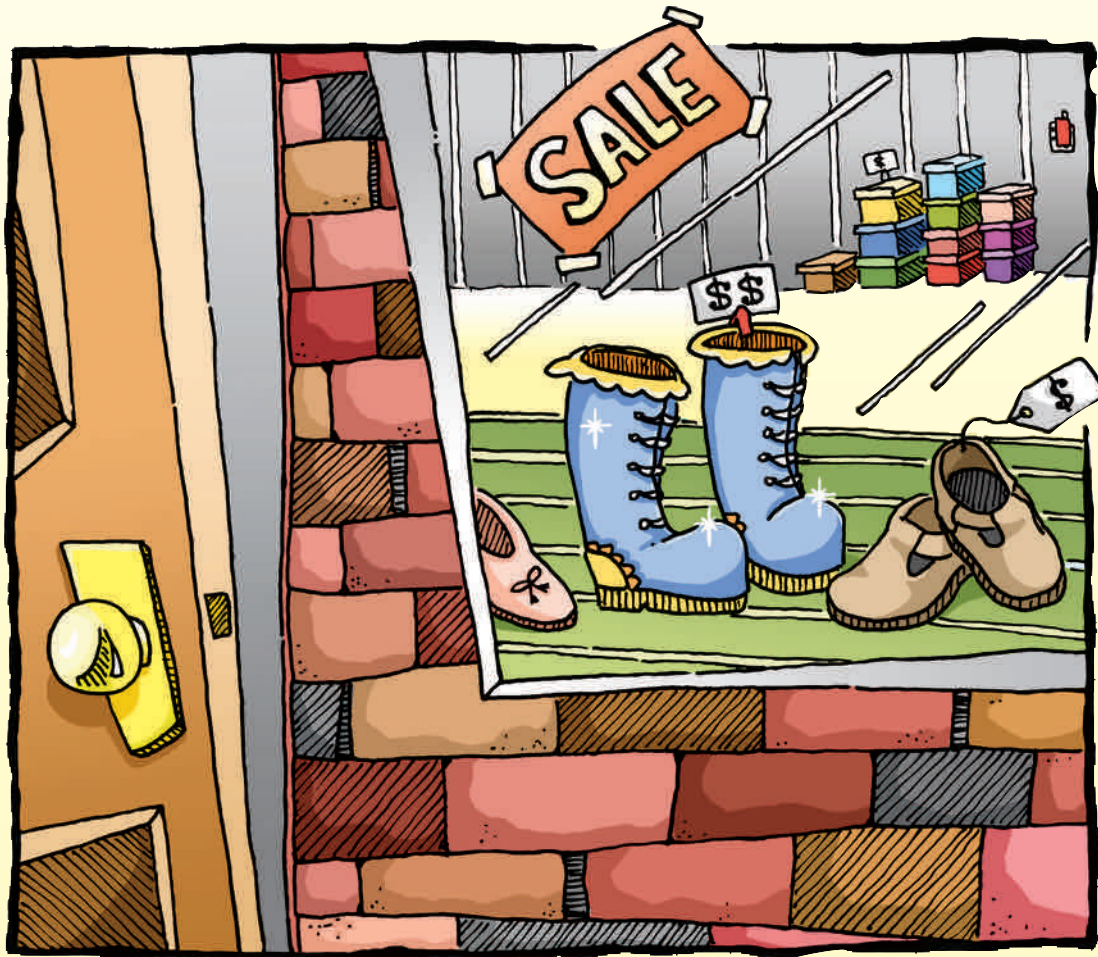


Serena's Simple Shoes



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Illustration by James Bravo



“**M**om, I need a new pair of shoes,” Serena said.

“Why’s that?” asked Mom.

Serena said, “The lace is broken, and the heel flaps.”
Serena showed her mother. She walked around the kitchen. The heel of the left shoe flapped.

FLAP. FLAP. FLAP. FLAP.

Serena danced around the kitchen.

FLAPPITY FLAPPITY FLAPPITY FLAP!

Serena sort of liked the sound her old shoes made.

But her mother did not. “That’s enough,” she said.
“We’ll go to the shoe store.”

“Hooray! The shoe store! There’s more in store—
much, much more—at the shoe store!” Serena sang.
Serena liked to say things that rhymed.

It was raining outside. Serena had to prepare to go out in the rain. She found her rain slicker. It was shiny and blue. She found her yellow rain hat. Then she found her galoshes. She put her galoshes over her old shoes.

"I'm ready to go, Mom," Serena called.

"Just a moment, Serena," said Mom. Mom looked for her umbrella. She looked in the closet. It wasn't there. She looked in the hall. It wasn't there.

Mom said, "I can't find my umbrella."

Serena knew where it was. "It's in the TV room," she said.

Mom found her umbrella. She put on her own raincoat. It was also blue.

"We're all set," Serena said. "Two blue ladies, going to the store. Let it rain. Let it pour!" she sang.

Mom smiled.



The rain was coming down hard. Serena splashed through puddles.

SLOT! SPLAT! SLOT!

“I’m glad I have my galoshes,” Serena said, “or my socks would get wet.”

Serena and her mother walked to the corner. They waited for the bus. They waited and waited. Then they waited some more. Mom looked at her watch. “The bus should be here any minute,” she said.

“The rain comes down all over town,” Serena sang. She held her mother’s hand. “I like the rain, Mom. Do you?”

Mom said, “I don’t mind it, especially with my umbrella.”

Then the bus came, and they got on.

The bus driver tipped his hat. "Hello ladies," he said. "It's a wet one out there."

Serena smiled. Mom smiled and closed her umbrella. She put in precise change for her fare. Serena didn't have to pay. Kids rode free on the bus.

Mom pointed at two seats. They were empty. Serena and her mother walked down the aisle. They plopped into the seats. Serena sat by the window. She took off her wet hat.

Serena looked out the window. She looked at people. Some drove in cars. Some walked on the sidewalk. Everyone on the sidewalk got wet. Serena saw a man get splashed by a car. The car drove through a puddle.

SPLASH!

Serena laughed and pointed. "Look, Mom! A man got wet! Now he's drenched. This I bet!" she sang. Serena watched through the window. She looked for more things to sing about.

Serena enjoyed riding the bus.

Serena looked across the aisle. There was a boy with his father. They both had green raincoats.

Serena leaned over Mom.

“Hello,” said Serena to the boy.

“Hello,” the boy said back.

“Where are you going?” Serena asked.

The boy said, “We’re going home. We just went to the shoe store. I needed new shoes.”

Serena clapped. “That’s where we’re going!” she said. “I need new shoes too!”

The boy said, “There are many shoes at the shoe store. Pick a good pair.”

“I certainly will!” Serena said. Then she sang, “Hooray! Hooray! It’s a shoe-shopping day!”

“That’s a good song,” the boy said.

“Thank you,” said Serena. “I like to sing.”

The time came to get off the bus. "This is our stop," said Mom. She rang the bell. The bus pulled over to let them off. Serena and her mother walked up the aisle. They walked down the steps. Off the bus they stepped.

It had stopped raining. "The rain is gone, so let's move on!" sang Serena.

"I think the shoe store is just around the corner," said Mom. "Hold my hand."

Serena and Mom strolled up the street. They turned the corner. They stopped. There it was.

Frank's Fancy Footwear, read the sign.

"The doors are open wide, so let us go inside!" sang Serena, tugging on Mom's arm.

"Okay, Serena," said Mom. They entered the store.

The store was brightly lit. There were shoes everywhere. High-heeled shoes. Moccasins. Pumps. Sneakers. Cowboy boots. Cowgirl boots.

Serena and Mom walked through the store. Serena loved the shoe store. She touched some of the shoes. She pointed at some of her favorite ones. "Mom, look at those!" she said. She pointed at a pair of knee-high galoshes.

Mom guided Serena through the store. "Come, Serena," she said. "The children's shoes are in the back of the store."

Serena sang, "Kids' shoes are in the back of the store, and that's just what I'm looking for!"

"That's right," said Mom. She smiled.



Mom and Serena strolled through the children's shoes. Very soon Serena found a pair she loved. They were blue and yellow boots. They were shiny and leather. They were very fancy.

"Mom, Mom, can't you see these pretty boots are right for me," she sang.

Mom looked at the boots. She said, "Serena, those shoes aren't very practical. You need an everyday shoe."

Serena frowned. Mom held up a pair of simple, brown leather shoes. "These are perfect," she said. "You can wear these everywhere."

Serena didn't like the brown shoes. But she knew not to argue with Mom. Serena put down the tall, shiny boots. She looked more closely at the brown shoes.

Serena said nothing. She took off her galoshes and her old shoes. She tried on the brown shoes. They did feel good. They fit her feet. Her toes weren't too snug. Her heel didn't hurt.

She walked around the store. She couldn't hear the FLAP FLAP FLAP of her old shoes. Instead, she heard a soft PLOP PLOP PLOP as she walked on the floor.

“Do they fit?” Mom asked.

Serena said, “They fit me well. That is true. I know the choice is up to you.”

“Good girl,” said Mom. Serena took the brown shoes off and put her old shoes back on. Mom boxed the brown shoes. She paid for them at the counter.

Serena took one more look at the shiny boots. Then she and Mom left the store.

The next day was a school day. Serena went to school in her new brown leather shoes. As she walked to school, she noticed that her heel didn't flap, flap, flap against the ground anymore.

She arrived at school. She saw her friend Monique. Monique said, "Look at my new shoes! I got them yesterday."

Serena looked down. Monique was wearing the yellow and blue fancy boots!

Serena said, "I almost bought those shoes too." Then she pointed at her own brown leather shoes.

Monique looked at Serena's new shoes. She said, "Those are nice, but I think mine are very fancy. Don't you?"

Serena said quietly, "They are fancy. Yes it's true, those colorful boots in yellow and blue."

All morning, Serena thought about her new, leather shoes. They were comfortable. They felt cozy. But they just weren't as fancy as could be. She wished she had Monique's boots.

At recess, Serena and Monique went out to play. Some kids were playing soccer. The ball rolled over to Serena. The kids called for the ball.

"Kick us the ball, Serena!" they yelled.

Serena sang, "I listen and I hear your call. Watch me as I kick this ball!" She kicked the ball as hard as she could. The ball flew through the air. It flew far, very far.

The other kids cheered. "Hooray, Serena!"

Serena wondered if Monique could kick the ball that far in her fancy new boots.

After school, Serena and Monique walked home together. Monique said, "I have a fancy dress that goes with my new boots. I will look pretty when I wear it."

"I'm sure you will," Serena said. She thought about her simple, brown leather shoes. More than ever, she wanted a pair of fancy boots. It didn't matter what color.

As they walked, Monique had an idea. "Let's race each other home!" she said.

Serena thought this was a good idea. Serena knew she could run very fast. She said, "Watch me run! I'll run real fast. I'll come in first. You'll come in last!"

Monique said, "Ready! Set! Go!"

Off they went!

Serena ran as fast as lightning. She ran down one street. She ran up another street. She leapt over puddles. Her shoes felt great.

She noticed that Monique was far, far behind her. Serena sang to herself, "Running fast is my thing. I can outrun anything."

Before she knew it, she was at the corner of her street. She waited for Monique to catch up.

At last Monique arrived. She was carrying her shoes. She said, "As I ran, my boots hurt my feet. I had to stop and take them off."

Serena smiled to herself. She said, "That's too bad. But I still won!"

Monique said, "Good job." The two girls went to their own homes.

Serena whistled while she walked toward her house. For the first time, she felt good about her new shoes. They helped her kick a ball far. They helped her run fast. Maybe they were better than the fancy boots. Serena thought so, anyway.

Serena was too busy thinking. She wasn't watching where she walked.

SLOTCH!

She stepped into a mud puddle from yesterday's rain. She pulled out her foot. Her shoe was covered in mud and dirt. She almost cried.

Serena said to herself, "Oh dear, this is bad luck. My new shoes are covered with mud and muck."

She didn't know what to do.



Serena took off her shoes at the door to her house. Then she went inside. She went to the laundry room. She made an old towel damp with water. Then she wiped off the muddy shoe. Back and forth, back and forth, she wiped.

Before she knew it, the shoe was as clean as could be. The mud washed off very easily.

Serena was surprised. She had feared her shoe might be ruined by the mud.

She whistled as she cleaned. Then she started to sing. "I scrubbed it once. I scrubbed it twice. And now my shoe looks new and nice!" That's what Serena sang.

She couldn't wait to tell Mom about her shoes.

Mom was in the kitchen when Serena walked in. She was cutting carrots. "Would you help me cook?" she asked.

"Sure," said Serena. Serena helped with the salad.

As they worked, Serena told Mom about her shoes. She told her about kicking the ball far. She told her about running home fast. She also told her about washing the mud off her shoe.

Mom listened. Then she said, "That's why simple shoes are better, Serena."

Serena nodded. She sang, "Some think fancy shoes are oh so grand, but simple shoes are best. I understand."

Serena went to school the next day. She looked for Monique. She couldn't see her. But soon she heard Monique's voice.

"Hey, Serena," called Monique.

Serena spun around.

Monique said, "Look at my new shoes." Serena looked down. Monique was wearing the same simple leather shoes! They were exactly like Serena's.

"What happened?" asked Serena.

Monique said, "The boots weren't very useful. My mom and I exchanged them."

Serena smiled. She sang, "We both thought fancy boots were neat. But simple shoes just can't be beat."

Then Monique said, "Let's race home after school again."

"Okay," said Serena. "That's a plan."

“Ready! Set! Go!” shouted Monique later that day. The girls ran. They ran fast. Sometimes Serena was in the lead. Sometimes Monique was in front. They kept up with each other. They smiled as they ran.

When they reached their street, it was too close to call. Monique said, “I think we were even!”

Serena said, “I think you’re right! Let’s call it a tie!” They shook hands.

Monique said, “I learned an important lesson yesterday. Thank you, Serena.”

Serena said, "Of course!" Then she sang. "It's not how you look or how you're dressed. It's what you do that is the best!"

Monique sang too. She sang, "Our shoes may be simple, leather, and brown. But they're the best shoes in all our town!"

The girls walked the rest of the way home, singing a song about their simple shoes.