

## Aqua Blue Shoes

I see the shoes first—aqua blue running shoes. The shoes must be at least a size twelve, maybe more. The man wearing them is a short distance away, slightly elevated, because he's standing on a narrow veranda. The veranda runs along the front of a gray building that houses professional offices.

I'm sitting in my car with the windows open, parked in the shade of an old elm tree. The man with the aqua blue running shoes is the only other person in view. My gaze travels upward from his shoes to his heavy black jeans and his black tee shirt. He's tall, at least six feet. His back is to me, but his head is turned just enough that I can see his thick, dark beard. There are tattoos on his muscled arms. On the back of his tee shirt, emblazoned in bright letters, are the words Sweet Home Choppers. All I know about Sweet Home is that it's a town east of here. If this man's tee shirt is to be believed, there are bikers there, and he's one of them.

In his right hand, held at an angle, there's a red-and-white checkered umbrella. I'm wondering at the incongruity of it—this bearded biker, holding a checkered umbrella, dressed all in black except for his bright blue shoes.

And then I see her. A little girl with soft brown hair, wearing blue jeans and a tee shirt, aqua blue tennis shoes on her feet. She's beaming up at him. And I think to myself—he's wearing those shoes for her. She wanted their shoes to match, so he found aqua blue shoes to fit his big feet. And the umbrella he's carrying, meant to protect her from the hot August sun—the red-and-white checkerboard pattern is her choice.

She reaches her arms out and he scoops her up and lifts her to rest against his chest. He walks toward the double glass doors at one end of the building and shakes the umbrella out. With one swift motion, he pushes the tiny button that closes the umbrella. He smiles at his little girl.

“Ready?”

She shakes her head. Yes.

He walks forward, the automatic doors swing open, and they step inside to the doctor’s office.

END