

SHOT IN THE FOOT

by Carolyn Jourdan



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author of
Heart in the
Right Place

VIP status. But as she reveals in Heart in the Right Place, what she gained in return had far more value, though the picture wasn't always pretty. And sometimes it was even necessary to avert her eyes.

reception desk on one booted foot, generating enough force with each hop to shake the entire office. If I'd closed my eyes, I could've imagined a dinosaur was walking nearby.

I went around the reception desk to open the connecting door and waved them through, saying, "Come on back."

Wormey hopped down the hall with Jason gamely trying to guide his wobbly trajectory. "Room 3?" Jason guessed. That was Wormey's usual room.

"Yeah," I said, trailing along behind their procession. "What's happened this time?"

"Wormey shot hisself in the foot," Jason said.

"Pistol, rifle, or shotgun?" I asked.

"Nail gun."

"Oh," I said, relieved.

Wormey flopped onto the surgical table with a sigh and lifted his booted foot for Daddy to inspect. Before I could stop myself, I leaned in to take a

EDITOR'S NOTE: *When Carolyn Jourdan returned home to become the receptionist for her father's rural medical practice, she thought she was giving up everything that really mattered, from her salary to the parties to her*

When I worked in Washington as a lawyer at the Senate, I relished the opportunity to gawk at famous and important people about whom I knew absolutely nothing. Now that I was back home in the Smokies, I dreaded seeing all the ordinary and obscure people I'd grown up with—about whom I knew absolutely everything.

Momma was recovering from a heart attack, which meant I was *forced* to cover her job and help Daddy out in his tiny rural medical office. This career detour prompted a lot of moping and sulking as I manned my post behind the reception desk.

"Is the Doc in?" a man called out from across the waiting room.

I glanced up to see who was asking. It was Wormey, the most accident-prone construction worker in America. His boss, Jason, was holding the door open for him. Wormey bounced toward the

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look, too. There was a nail protruding about a half inch from the sole. The head of the nail was harder to find. It was driven in flush with the top of his work boot. I jerked upright, instantly sorry I'd just added that particular image to my mental library of podiatric horrors. I turned my head toward Jason and mimed an exaggerated wince without saying anything.

Jason had a handsome face with sharp cheekbones, dark skin, and straight black hair that marked him as part Cherokee. He winked.

"Doc, you wouldn't believe what I been through," Wormey said.

Daddy rummaged around in the cabinets containing his surgical supplies. I wondered what he could be looking for. The only thing I'd ever seen him use to remove a nail was a crowbar. Of course, I'd never seen him remove a nail from anything but a piece of wood. What would he use on a person?

Possibly a crowbar, so I decided to go back to my desk while I was still able to stay upright, but then Wormey started talking again and I couldn't make myself leave.

"We're working on a house over in Puncheon Camp," he said, panting in his misery.

Puncheon Camp was about forty miles away in an area so downtrodden it was actually named Poor Valley. Puncheon was an old logging term for a whole tree that had been laid on its side and planed off a little bit to flatten it so it could be used as a floorboard for a cabin—or a tent in a logging camp.

"I rested my nail gun against my foot for

just a *second* while I was lining up a board and damn if the thing didn't go off when I reached to get it!" Wormey said this as if such a possibility was utterly inconceivable.

"Damn gun nailed my foot to the floor. I couldn't get a loose! I was stuck there till Jason come."

"I couldn't get him a loose either, Doc," said Jason. "I pulled on his leg but he hollered and cussed so much I had to slip a hacksaw between his boot and the floor and saw the nail in two."

Ouch. That little scenario gave new meaning to the phrase "foot-loose and fancy free."

"And that ain't all!" Wormey said. "We was over on the other side of the mountain, so we went to one of them new walk-in clinics in Luttrell. But them people's crazy! You know what the nurse said when I showed her my foot?"

Daddy, his nurse Alma, and I shook our heads in fascination, unable to imagine what an innocent stranger might say when encountering Wormey for the first time.

"She said, 'Why the hell did you put your boot back on?' Can you believe that? She told me, 'This'd been a lot easier if you hadn't put your damn boot back on over that nail!'"

We all broke out in laughter. Everyone except for Wormey.

Then he said, "I got out of there *quick*. I told Jason to bring me on down here. This place ain't fancy, but at least you got some sense. Know what I mean?"

Daddy nodded and smiled.

I knew what Wormey meant, too. ■

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—CAROLYN JOURDAN