



LATE FOR DINNER/ Kelley

When Dayna is late for Thanksgiving dinner, is she talking turkey or stork?

Jace and Dayna were born at Samhain and have grown to fill an entire year of freebie stories! I hope you enjoy their latest adventure. You can read their story from the beginning at <http://inezkelley.com/funstuff/>

Enjoy and Happy Thanksgiving! ~Inez Kelley

*I will not commit murder on a holiday.*

*I will not commit murder on a holiday.*

*I will not commit murder on a holiday.*

“You don’t have chocolate cake for Thanksgiving. You have pumpkin pie.”

Dayna glared at her father and repeated the mantra three more times before she could slap a fake smile on her face and reply. “Jace doesn’t like pumpkin pie, Daddy. He likes fudge cake. I made both. And apple pie and pecan pie. There’s enough pie here to put you in a sugar coma.”

“And you didn’t make the green bean casserole?”

“No one ever ate it and you hate mushroom soup.”

“But it’s tradition.” Paul Thompson frowned at the array of desserts. “No green bean casserole and chocolate cake. It’s un-American.”

“Daddy,” Dayna gritted her teeth so hard she would be financing her dentist’s retirement. “Go watch the football game with Mark and Callie.”

He ambled back to the living room grumbling under his breath. Dayna tried not to imagine his skull as she mashed the steaming potatoes. The TV blared with some hidden play and Mark whooped in delight. Marissa’s commentary quieted him. Tyler no doubt was parked between them, a little seven year old chaperone. Family therapy was doing wonders for them. There might even be a remarriage in the near future. If Dayna didn’t commit family-icide first.

“What’s this word?” Trevor shoved a notebook two inches in front of her nose. The scraggly widespread letters took her a second to figure out. The twins had learned to read early but someone lit a fire under Trevor and he was intent on learning every word he could find. Dayna fully expected him to be ready for Harry Potter by Christmas at the rate he was going.

“Incarceration, it means to go to jail. Stay out of Jace’s police magazines. They are not for little kids.”

“He’s adorable.” Nora grinned as Trevor went in search of new words. Dayna bit back a few other descriptors and just smiled. *Adorable, yes, and destined for a life as either a C.E.O. or a mastermind criminal.* Jace’s mother looked at her hopefully. “Do twins run in your family?”

“No.” *Fate wouldn’t do that to her, would it?* Dayna recalled some of the twins’ adventures and shuddered. *Dear Lord, I’ll give up chocolate. No more cussing. I’ll donate blood. Anything, but please, not that!*

“What’s this word?”

Trevor thrust his notebook at Nora. She smiled and read. “That is pomegranate. It’s a fruit.”

“It’s a berry,” Callie corrected, coming in from the living room. She stepped to the side so Trevor could pass then looked to her brother. “Score’s tied.”

“Big deal,” Jace mumbled from inside the fridge. Dayna grinned. Jace wasn’t much on contact sports unless they were played naked.

Mark entered the room behind Callie. Jace handed him a beer and Callie a soda. Dayna tuned out the conversation at the word “offensive tackle”. Grumbling she could make a really offensive tackle if someone didn’t move, she turned sideways to slide behind Mark as her father came back into the room.

“Heard you passed that test.” Paul locked his narrowed, hard look on Jace. Tension layered into the room like butter on a biscuit.

“Not only did he pass, he passed with the second highest score.” Motherly pride poured from Nora’s shining face like a sunbeam.

Paul’s face was more partially cloudy with the possibility of a sudden thundershower. “So it’s Sergeant Rafferty now, huh?”

Jace stared just as sternly and nodded his head once. Paul twitched back some macho silence code of an answer. For two men who didn’t move much, there was a whole lot of invisible chest thumping going on. Dayna shook her head. She would never understand men.

*Okay, no playing chicken in my kitchen on turkey day.*

“One of you blink or something before we trip over the machismo in here.”

Paul blinked. “So how’d you rate the holiday off?”

Jace shrugged one shoulder. “I have to work Christmas Eve and Christmas day.”

“That sucks.” Mark propped his hip against the counter.

“Excuse me, Daddy.” Her kitchen was like one of those tiny little cars. You just never knew how many clowns were going to spill out when the door opened. Angling around the clowns, er, men, Dayna cracked the fridge door open for the cream.

Callie stole Jace’s beer and handed him her soda. He reached for his bottle and she stepped beside Dayna for protection. Her move bumped Dayna’s arm, sending cold liquid onto the hot burner. A loud hiss sounded as dark smoke barreled up. The alarm blared like a cat birthing a hedgehog. In the mudroom, Gunner went nuts, barking and scratching at the door.

*And in other news, a small house overflowing with useless relatives and one harried schoolteacher burnt to the ground today. Experts on the scene claim the losses were extensive but the turkey was definitely not dry and the potatoes had been made from scratch. The owner of the house was last seen fleeing into the street, blubbing about ‘should’ve gone to Denny’s’. No desserts were harmed during the incident. Film at eleven.*

“What’s going on in there?” Marissa peeked in the doorway but quickly vanished. Most likely in fear she would be asked to lift something heavy, like a finger.

“Nothing, Barbie,” Dayna muttered, grabbing the damp dishcloth. Mark reached up to smack the alarm as Paul opened the window to air out the room. Nora came running and Jace opened the mudroom door, trying to calm Gunner. Dayna stepped on Sinjin’s tail. The cat let out a piercing screech and hightailed it for the stairs, darting through Callie’s feet.

Dayna’s ears rang and her temples throbbed. She ran her fingers through her hair, gripping it tightly. Something inside snapped like a twig.

“Quiet!”

Dayna’s frustrated shout echoed in the sudden silence. Every set of eyes locked on her and she straightened her spine. There were entirely too many people in her little kitchen doing nothing. That stopped now.

She thrust the mixer at Jace’s sister. “Mash.” Whirling, she looked at her father and Mark. “You two, go set up the card table for the boys and you—” She pointed to Jace. “—get the turkey out of the oven.”

Mark and Paul vanished like two belches in the wind, Callie flipped the mixer to high and Jace hefted the roasting pan. Nora announced she'd find a tablecloth and Trevor pushed the notebook in her face.

"What's this one?"

"Trevor." She snapped her lips shut before she could growl and gripped the paper. "Phi, it's a letter in the Greek alphabet. Stay out of my jewelry box. Now out of here. The oven is hot."

"Damn, babe, how big is this bird?"

"Twenty-two pounds, not counting stuffing." Dayna uncovered the golden-brown turkey and slathered a layer of butter across the top. "And so help me Gawd if one person says a word about it being dry, you better keep your gun away from me."

"Dayna." Jace reached for her hand and took the aluminum foil away. "Stop. Everything is fine. Quit trying to be Martha Stewart. This is supposed to be a celebration of family, not a chore."

She glowered at him. "You want to cook it next year? Feel free, Emeril."

Callie snorted. Jace sent her a dirty look then returned his gaze to Dayna's face. "Do I have to remind you that you're the one who set all this up?"

"No, I remember that. I clearly was clinically insane and had no idea what I was doing."

"You say that every year," Mark complained. "Where are the folding chairs?"

"Same place they are every year, Mark," she snarled. "Basement." Mark thudded down the stairs and Dayna scrubbed her face. "I'm sorry. I'm just really crabby today."

Jace brushed the hair from her eyes and smiled. "Tell me what to do."

"Love me despite the fact I'm Oscar the Grouch's bitchy third cousin twice removed?"

"I can do that." He dropped a fast kiss across her lips. The knots left her back.

Chaos settled back to a minimum. Mark and Paul set up the folding chairs, Callie slid the rolls in the oven and Nora finished setting the table. Dayna pulled out the olives, pickles and gerkins for the cold platter. She stuffed a chunk of longhorn cheese in her mouth and forked olives onto the divided plate.

Trevor darted into the room. "What's this word?"

Callie squinted at the paper. “Sorry kid. That’s not a word...I don’t think. I mean, *inept* is a word but *ept* isn’t, right?” She looked questioningly at Dayna. Struggling to open the pickle jar lid, Dayna shook her head.

“It is so a word!”

“Trevor, did you write it down wrong, maybe? Did you mean *apt* or *kept* or *opt*?”

Dayna ran the jar lid under hot water.

“No. I’ll show you.” He stomped out of the room. Nora, Mark and Paul streamed in.

“Where do you keep your carving knives, princess?”

“Beside the sink, top drawer,” Dayna grunted, twisting with all her might. How could one jar of Vlasic Dill spears be so damn tight?

Mark waited until his father left the kitchen then dropped his voice low. “Jace, you carving the turkey?”

Jace took the jar from her, popped the lid with a simple hand twist and handed it back without looking at it. “Doesn’t Paul do it every year?”

“Yeah, but I thought maybe... you know.”

Crunching a dill pickle spear, Dayna waited for Jace’s response and filled the divided container. She didn’t even attempt to open the sweet pickles, handing the sealed jar to him.

“I’m not taking the job from him,” Jace muttered as the vacuum seal popped.

Trevor stormed back into the room and slammed an oblong box on the table. “There, see? *Ept* is so a word!”

There in big bold letters was E. P. T.

*Oh shit.*

Callie gasped. Mark’s jaw dropped. Nora smiled. Jace stared.

From the living room, sounds of a blaring commercial echoed in the now silent house. All life seemed focused on a small white box that could conceivably change the course of history, at least within these walls. Slowly, Jace’s head turned to gawk at her. His eyes dropped to the pickle in her hand then shot back up to her face. The jar broke in his hand, splattering his shirt and spilling seasoned brine all over the floor.

Dayna couldn't breathe, couldn't swallow the sour mushiness in her mouth, couldn't tear her eyes from Jace's wide ones. So many questions stretched between them and not one sound broke the tension.

"So what is it?" Trevor was far too short to feel the visual strain of the adults bouncing over his head.

"Oh boy," Mark muttered. "Uhm, yeah, Trevor, let's go get...uhm, come on." He grabbed the boy's shoulder and spun him around.

"But what's it mean?" Dayna heard him ask but she couldn't make out what Mark answered. Her pulse pounded too loud in her ears.

Nora dropped to her knees and started picking up pickle spears and glass while Callie grabbed a roll of paper towels. Jace never moved. Dayna flashed on a picture of a prophet, followers kneeling at his feet while he held a hand out, spreading his teachings. Like that ancient philosopher, Jace didn't acknowledge the women. Instead, he swallowed hard and drew a breath.

"Dayna, do you have something to tell me?"

*If I had something to tell you, the box would be open.*

*I don't know what to tell you.*

*I have to tell you something.*

"I have to make the gravy."

His eyes went wide and his mouth opened. Paul stomped into the room and saw the box. He whipped around and glared at Jace. "You damn well better—"

"Not now, Paul." Jace shot into action. He threw the pieces of glass still in his hand in the trash, grabbed the box and Dayna's hand. "Ma, make the gravy. We'll be right back."

Jace pulled her through the hallway, up the stairs and into the master bathroom. The door shut behind him with a bang. The heavy wooden door muffled the chaos reigning downstairs but sent her quivering stomach into nervous spasms. This was not how she wanted to tell him anything if she in fact did have something to tell him.

"Are you pregnant?"

His direct question seemed simple enough.

If only she had a simple answer.

“I don’t know. I’m late. I bought the test yesterday but I didn’t want to take it with the house so crazy. I planned to take it in the morning.”

Jace sagged against the door, stunned disbelief blanking his face. Tension echoed in the quiet bathroom, eddying around Dayna with the whisper of his controlled breathing. The rise and fall of his chest remained slow and steady despite how his hands shook. A harsh gulp worked the lines of his throat. He focused on the overhead light, every muscle in his body tense and poised for a blow.

“How late?”

“Well, that depends on your definition of late,” she hedged. Jace’s chin snapped down and he gaped at her. “I completely skipped October. So either I’m really, really late for that, or if you’re talking about November, just a week late.”

“Shit.” The curse was soft and his eyes slid closed for one brief second. Jerking upright, he asked, “Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I was going to.”

“Before or after your water broke?”

“Honey, don’t. I just wanted to be sure.”

“So let’s be sure. Take the test, Dayna.”

She tucked her bottom lip behind her teeth. He was right, she knew it but this ranked like number four thousand and eight on the ways she wanted him to find out. It scored even lower than posting it on his Facebook page.

DAYNA MARIE THOMPSON > JACE S. RAFFERTY: *You’re going to be a father. Congrats!*

*2 seconds ago · Comment · Like · See Wall-to-Wall*

It ranked lower than having dispatch blurt it out in the middle of a traffic stop.

*Dispatch to 33-64, be advised your half unit has a concealed quarter unit with an approximate seven month ETA.*

It even fell lower than telling him in a text message.

*PK UP MILK. UR MOM CALD. IM PREG. CHKN 4 DINR.*

A knock rattled the door. Tyler’s whine was loud even through the wood. “Aunt Dayna? I have to pee really bad.”

Jace groaned and hung his head while Dayna rolled her eyes. Good hell, she couldn't even have a moment's peace to go crazy in private today. "Use the bathroom off the kitchen, Tyler."

"But Grandpa was just in there."

"Light a match," Jace growled.

Dayna's eyes bugged. "You did *not* just tell half of Satan's Spawn to play with fire in our house."

Panic shot across Jace's face and he whipped his head around to yell at the closed door. "Tyler, you touch the matches and I'm cuffing you to the stair railing. Use the Lysol under the sink."

Youthful grumbling faded away and the bathroom once more fell silent. Her gaze locked with Jace's. After last month's terrible misunderstanding, he'd cut down on the overtime drastically, now only pulling an extra shift or so every two weeks. The circles under his eyes had faded and the spark had returned to their bedroom. Had that spark ignited something neither of them intended?

"Come here," he said. She went eagerly and easily into his arms. His embrace grounded her, gave her strength. Whatever happened, they'd face it together.

"We've never talked about this." Her words were muffled by his shirt, the damp pickle smell nauseating her. *Oh, that's not a good sign.*

"Yes, we have."

"No." She sniffed and shook her head. He let go and she leaned, grabbing a length of toilet paper to blow her nose on. "We talked about... maybe, one day...possibly having children. We never talked about if we had an accident."

"Dayna, you do know I'm not going anywhere, don't you? This is my baby as much as yours."

"We don't know for sure there is a baby, Jace."

"Have you ever been this late?"

"No."

"Then we need to know one way or the other, so we *can* talk about it."

"I know." Could she sound any less enthusiastic? It wasn't a hard test, she didn't have to study for it, so why was peeing on one little stick so daunting? Because if that

line appeared, then life as they knew it just went bye bye. The unanswered question hung over them like a dark cloud in a comic book, waiting to spit rain and lightning. She needed to give them both some peace, even if it opened them up to new worries. She picked up the box. The cardboard top tore loudly but he made no move to leave.

Dayna looked hard at him but he didn't budge. She arched one brow. "You need to leave."

"Oh no. No way in hell am I leaving this bathroom until we know for sure. My vest is in the cruiser and I wouldn't put it past your father to be waiting with a shotgun out there."

"Don't be melodramatic. I don't want an audience while I pee on the stick, okay?"

"I'm your lover, not an audience. I think this has a fairly significant impact on my life, too."

"Damn it, Jace. Why don't you just ask your mom to join us? She's probably down stairs sacrificing a stork to the Grandchild Goddess right now and picking out baptism gowns."

"Leave my mother out of this. If you are pregnant, then I was there when it happened and I'm going to be here to find out. Take the damned test."

"Jace, I am not peeing in front of you."

"Well I'm not leaving."

Stubbornness crowded into the tiny room. He crossed his arms and she mimicked him, the long plastic indicator in her fist. He was like a damn cat. She never could win a staring contest with him. Gawd forbid she was carrying his baby. The damned thing would probably refuse to budge from her uterus for twelve months just to irritate her.

"Fine, you win. But turn around." Conceding, he faced the door. Dayna snapped the sink faucet on high. The roaring water wasn't that loud but she unbuttoned her pants. And sat. And...nothing.

"I can't do this. Sing, Jace."

"What?" His incredulous voice echoed in the tiled room.

"Sing, damn it, so you can't listen to me pee."

"Oh, for Christ's sake, Dayna!"

"Sing!"

“What the hell do you want me to sing?”

“I don’t care as long as it’s loud.”

With his hands braced shoulder high on the door, Jace started singing ‘Ninety-nine Bottles of Beer on the Wall’, loud, and off-key. After a few verses, Dayna did her thing. By ninety-one bottles, he was bouncing his forehead on the wood in a rhythmic beat that brought a reluctant smile to her face. He was on eighty-four bottles when she flushed and rinsed her hands.

“You can turn around now.”

His palms pressed to the door and his back was steel-straight. Slowly he turned around. His gaze dropped to the white stick in her hand. “Well?”

“We have to wait a few minutes.”

The stick shook in her hand so she carefully laid it on the sink edge. Her knees quaking, she sat on the side of the tub. She’d managed not to freak out in October. Occasionally she skipped a period. Stuff happened. No need to go nuts. Trust the Ortho-Cyclen. Then last week, she’d waited, crossed every day off and wondered but she hadn’t gone spastic. Why was her stomach now dancing to a Chubby Checker tune?

Because before, it was ‘what if’.

Now she would know for sure.

This was crunch time.

Jace hadn’t moved from his sentry-like stance in front of the door. She couldn’t imagine what was running through his mind. Well, she could, she just didn’t want to. He’d lived this before, numerous times with his ex, Crystal. Every time he got close to leaving her, she’d revved up an “I’m late” drama. He’d always doubted her but the slimmest chance held him in Crystal’s grip.

That story hadn’t come easily for Jace. Not until she brought up the issue of replacing the condoms with pills had he told her. For him, it was a huge step in trust. She hadn’t pushed him, needing him to be as secure in her love as she was in his. Crystal had put him through hell. Dayna never wanted him to go through it with her.

Licking her lips, she whispered. “I didn’t miss any pills, Jace.”

He startled as if she’d slapped him then lowered to the tub edge beside, taking her hand in his.

“I never thought that, babe. Look, we both decided... we knew nothing was one hundred percent effective. We waited until after our physicals to ditch the condoms. We waited for the pills to start working. We knew the risks. Neither one of us did anything wrong. We were responsible.”

“You’re right. We were the poster children for safe sex.”

His upper lip quivered. “Well, there was that one time...packing up my apartment.”

“That was back in April. I think you’d notice if I was seven months pregnant.”

Elbows on his knees, he leaned forward and steepled his fingers to his mouth. His cheek twitched, fighting a smile. “The night the boys broke the window?”

A hot flush bloomed on her face. “That would be my best guess.”

“Yeah, that night was pretty...”

“Yeah,” she echoed rubbing her cheek on his shoulder.

“A baby wouldn’t be the worst thing in the world, would it?”

“No.” Lacing her fingers in his, she smiled. “It wouldn’t. But it would change everything in our lives.”

Jace looked at her, one brow dipping low. “Are you saying... you wouldn’t want to have it?”

“I’m not saying anything like that. I’m saying... There are a lot of things to consider— finances, insurances, is this house big enough, are we ready for this, am I ready for this?”

“Are you?”

“Are *you*?”

His eyes closed and he inhaled slowly, deeply. Dayna thought he muttered something about “plans of mice and men” but she wasn’t sure. She was sure when he slid off the tub edge to kneel before her on one knee.

*One knee.*

The piece of cheese and pickle she’d eaten congealed into a quivering lump and volleyed toward her throat. It slammed into her heart lodged there.

*Oh Gawd, he’s going to propose...*

Jace took her hand—

*in the bathroom...*

— looked into her eyes —

*waiting for the stick to change colors...*

— and gave her a gentle smile.

*with a twenty-two pound turkey in the oven.*

“Dayna, I *am* ready. I love you. Will you ma—?”

“Don’t.” Dayna slapped her hand over his mouth.

Tiny lines appeared at the corners of his eyes when he squinted at her in confusion. A tsunami of nerves roiled in her bones, rattling them in her skin and erupting in goose bumps along her skin. With her hand still clamped across his lips, she pressed her forehead to his.

“Please. Don’t *say* anything. Don’t *ask* anything.”

She wanted to swim in his ocean-blue eyes, to feel weightless, blameless, guiltless but she couldn’t. She knew that this one second would be etched into his mind, into his heart. But she simply couldn’t face it. Not like this. Not out of duty or obligation.

Jace tugged her hand away from his face and sat back on his heel. Stunned pain deepened the groove between his brows.

“Why not?” Those two whispered words carried so much hurt.

“Because I’d always wonder. Was it love or responsibility? Would you have... if things were different? Would my... answer have been different? Will one of us regret it ten years from now?”

“I won’t.” The pledge, the vow in his voice was so strong tears filled her eyes.

“Please, Jace...don’t. Whatever you wanted to say, to ask... not like this, not under pressure, with a cloud of doubt over us, in a rush.”

“I don’t have any doubt, Dayna. I’m not going to change my mind.” Stone determination erased the shock from his words.

“Then there will be another time, right?”

Still on one knee, Jace squeezed her fingers and nodded. He glanced to his left, to the sink and the stick on the edge. “It’s been several minutes.”

Dayna gripped his hand until her knuckles whitened and her fingertips screamed in pain. “You look.”

Jace straightened his shoulders, reached out and grabbed the indicator. She searched his face for the smallest hint as he flipped it over. One dimple carved into his cheek and a slow smile spread across his mouth. The sapphire eyes that found hers sparkled.

“There’s a line.”

An exhale whooshed from her belly with a giggle. *Oh my Gawd.* “Really?”

“Yeah,” Jace laughed. “Look.”

The smile on her lips quivered then slid away. “It’s an indicator line. It means the test worked. There should be two lines.”

“Two?” Jace whipped the test back to stare at it, his grin fading. His fist clamped around the stick. “So you’re not pregnant?”

“No. Apparently I’m not. I guess it was just stress.”

“Yeah.”

Neither of them spoke. Noise from downstairs seeped through the floorboards but Dayna kept her gaze focused on Jace’s blank expression. He abruptly tossed the stick in the trash, dropped her hand and stood up.

“I need to change my shirt before we go back downstairs.”

His briskness tightened her chest. “You’re sorry, aren’t you?”

“No. You were right. It would’ve changed everything in our lives.” He opened the bathroom door, but paused on the threshold. “But I was starting to get used to the idea so... yeah, maybe I am a little sorry.”

She touched his arm, stroking with just the tips of her fingers. He leaned over and caught her lips in a soft kiss. She nuzzled his jaw and he pressed his cheek to hers then pulled her close. She never wanted to leave his arms. This was Thanksgiving to her. Forget turkey and cranberries and pumpkin pie. She was grateful Jace was in her life, that he was the type of man who would stick by her no matter what, that he loved her.

His kiss skimmed her hairline, his breath soft against her ear. “I would have meant every word.”

Her grip around his shoulders tightened. “I would have said yes.”

\*

Dayna wanted to fix her make-up, so Jace entered the bedroom alone. He tossed the pickle brine damp shirt in the hamper and tugged on a clean one, his thoughts still on the test stick. Without thought, he pulled out his keys and knelt to open the gun safe. After the boys and their B&E routine, it became obvious it wasn't safe to leave his side arm lay out anymore, even out of reach. It had been a smart purchase, one a man planning on a family would make.

The lock clicked silently and he shifted the leather holster to the side. In a dove gray box, three rings caught the light from the hall and sparkled like fire. He reached out and touched the tallest diamond on the smallest ring.

Another time. No regrets. No pressure.

Not in duty but in love.

*I would have said yes.*

His whisper rang with hope. "Merry Christmas, Dayna."

Content with his plan, he closed both the box and the safe door, twisting the key as the bathroom door opened. Did she realize how beautiful she was? At some point in time, he must have done a hell of a good deed to some hidden angel to be blessed with her in his life. Her smile was just a bit sad and he stood, cupping her cheek. The sadness faded away. Hand in hand, they descended the stairs...and walked into a sea of expectant faces.

His mother appeared ready to fly, Mark sent him a sympathetic look and Paul stared. Trevor was the first to pounce. "Dad says you're having a baby."

"No, Trevor. We're not having a baby." Dayna's fingers twitched in his but her voice was steady. She turned her face to him and blushed. "Someday maybe."

Nora deflated briefly, her shoulder sagging. A resigned sigh echoed but then she smiled. "Dinner's ready. Come sit down."

Paul said a short prayer and the boys fidgeted at the cloth-covered card table. Callie picked at her fingernail. Mark and Marissa held hands and Nora pressed her clasped fingers to her lips. The heavy fragrance of turkey and yeast rolls wrapped around the room and Jace locked each face into his memory. This was his family, blended and bizarre as they were, they were his. Dayna had brought them all together.

In a flash of comprehension, he knew she would be the glue that secured their future. It wasn't money or job titles or even gold rings. It was Dayna, with her seven-freckled-

nose and quirky humor, her love is what would make them a family. He wrapped his arms around her waist from behind and buried his face in her hair. He sent his own silent thanks upward. The scrape of chair legs and clank of tableware brought his head up and he murmured a late ‘Amen’.

Dayna’s father stood at the head of the oblong table, carving knife in hand, staring at the golden brown bird in front of him. Slowly, he looked over at Dayna then his eyes fell on Jace. He stepped back from the table and held out the knife.

“Jace, it’s your table, you should do it.”

Dayna gasped, a soft sweet sound. Jace gaped at the offered blade. Paul didn’t smile, but their eyes met and he nodded. His eyes were the same deep shade of green as his daughter’s. For the first time, Jace saw acceptance there. He tried to keep his hand steady as he took the carving knife that suddenly symbolized so much more.

“Thank you, Paul.”

Paul stepped back from the head of the table but never blinked. “She’s all yours, son.”

**Inez Kelley** writes what she reads, which is pretty much anything with a romantic flair. Deep in the boonies of the Appalachias, she lives with her hero and three spin-offs. They make finding a time to write a challenge but she’s never bored with life.

Visit <http://inezkelley.com/>

<http://samhainpublishing.com/authors/inez-kelley>