

A Turkey of a Day/Heather Graham

A Turkey of a Day



New York Times Bestselling Author

Heather Graham

A Turkey of a Day

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Angela Hawkins Crow is delighted! It's Thanksgiving Day and it seems that her world is going well—she and Jackson are home and about to enjoy a real holiday together with their children, Corby and Victoria.

All is going so well, until . . .

A strange sound from the basement brings them both racing downstairs. Victoria is playing in her room, and Corby is supposed to be playing with his cornhole game.

And he is, except . . .

They hear the sound again. Jackson investigates. And caught on a tree, tied by a leash is a turkey. There is no sign of Jimmy.

Corby doesn't want to give away a friend's situation. But his good buddy Jimmy Rodgers has run to his house for help. Jimmy is still getting over the death of a beloved cousin. The turkey had been purchased for his parents to do a natural meal with the bird raised and prepared by themselves. But Jimmy had fallen in love with the turkey and people came to his house and he was sure they'd come to kill the bird, even though he'd been told that if he needed the pet so badly, he could keep it. Weird pet, but . . .

But as Jackson and Angela prepare to head to the house to see what they can do, they're stopped by a guardian Jimmy never knew he had, the spirit of his long-lost grandfather.

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Yah! For once, a holiday was approaching, and all was quiet at the office.

Of course, it wasn't quiet across the country or even beyond. But they also had units across the country and beyond who were dealing with the strange, frightening, horrific, or weird events that never failed to occur within humanity across the world—holiday or no.

But Angela Hawkins Crow was excited. Or maybe excitement wasn't the right word; she was strangely at peace.

They had enjoyed a pre-holiday dinner at the office yesterday with everyone in the vicinity; they'd even managed special Zoom calls with those in the field. It had been nice, joyous—and also a time when they'd all gotten to be thankful for each other, for their families, for the fact that at the Krewe they were far more like family themselves than just co-workers.

And today! Today she was already in the kitchen. Pancakes for breakfast, then later they'd go about doing the whole Thanksgiving thing with their own little family—herself, Jackson, and the kids, Corby, and Victoria.

And they were lucky! It was time, indeed, to be thankful. Corby was a teenager in high school, and he was still one of the most decent kids anyone could imagine. Victoria

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was growing up to be a sweet child as well, not quite ten years old, but already aware of so much that was so important!

And they were going to have a day together. A real family day, something that was precious and rare since Jackson headed the entire Krewe along with its newer units, and she was second in charge, head when it came to research and discovery and their tech units and more.

But they were off! Ready off for the day!

Jackson walked into the kitchen, and she smiled. He'd actually slept late! His dark hair was a wild mess over his head. He was wearing a worn terry robe, and she still thought of her husband as one of the most impressive men she'd ever met. His heritage was mixed Native American and Northern European; he was tall and fit and had the best cheekbones one could imagine.

And she loved him more, she realized, with each year that passed between them. They were incredible partners at work.

And at home. Both loving and caring for the children, neither ever assuming their own work more important than the other's, and both ready to pitch in for anything necessary with their home or their kids.

It was an unusual life. Because they were unusual and managed unusual people, but in was equally an amazing life.

"Happy Thanksgiving!" she told him.

"Happy Thanksgiving!" he replied. He made a face. "Um, guess I need a wake-up shower, but I wanted to see if you needed anything . . ."

He broke off, his brows shooting up in question as they heard a strange squawking sound from the basement.

“The kids—”

“They’re up. Victoria is in her room playing with her make-up. Corby was out in back playing with the cornhole game,” Angela told him.

Jackson, tattered bathrobe and all, quickly hurried down the basement stairs at the rear of the kitchen.

Angela followed him as quickly as she could.

But when they reached the basement, there was nothing to be seen.

Another door led out to a little stairway that led up to the yard. When they reached the yard, Corby was there.

Right where he should have been, throwing the little bean bags at his cornhole game.

But he turned to look at them. And Angela knew that something wasn’t right.

“Hey, Mom, hey, Dad!” he said.

Angela smiled in return but glanced at Jackson. He glanced at her in turn and they both nodded.

He was a good kid. No, a great kid. They adopted him from strange and rough circumstances several years ago; and they had been proud of him ever since, loving him more every day if possible. He didn’t lie to them; he owned up to mistakes, and he was wonderful with his little sister.

And because he was usually so good . . .

They knew something was wrong.

They both faced him; he looked at them in turn and his eyes fell.

“We heard something really strange from the basement,” Jackson told him.

Corby’s continued to look down.

“What’s going on?” Angela asked softly.

“Nothing,” Corby said.

“Don’t lie to us, son,” Jackson told him quietly.

“Um, what if the truth would hurt someone else?” Corby asked, almost whispering.

“You know that we don’t hurt others, Corby. You know to trust us,” Angela said.

Corby took a deep breath and looked toward the basement stairs and then to the trees that grew to the rear of the yard.

“Um, the noise. It was . . .” Corby paused, his face scrunching up. “I’m sorry; I made sure there was no mess. It was a turkey.”

“A turkey?” Angela repeated, glancing at Jackson.

Then suddenly, their son couldn’t talk fast enough. “It’s Jimmy Rodgers; his folks bought the turkey. I guess they wanted to have their own for the last weeks going up to Thanksgiving. They watched and fed it, that kind of thing. But, um, Jimmy started to care too much for the turkey and someone came and he heard his parents going with whoever and his mother was upset and . . . well, he figured that the men had come to his house to kill the turkey for them for Thanksgiving, and so he grabbed the bird and came over here. And, Mom, Dad, please don’t be upset! Jimmy has had it hard since his cousin got killed in that automobile accident. They were so close. So, anyway, he somehow made a pet out of the

turkey and . . . he's crying, so afraid they're going to kill it, and he knows he'd never be able to eat it and . . . anyway, I guess his mom had said that he could keep it, but then the men came and he heard people shouting and . . . don't be mad at me, please! I had to help Jimmy. I mean, people keep parrots, right? And parakeets. And even pigeons! If a turkey is helping Jimmy . . ."

His voice trailed. He looked at the two of them in misery.

Jackson looked at Angela.

She'd met Jimmy's parents a few times. Jimmy and Corby were in the same grade at school. They seemed to be nice, decent, caring people. If Jimmy's mom had said that he could keep the turkey . . .

"I have an idea!" she announced.

"I'm ready to hear it," Jackson assured her.

"I, um, well, we have lots of fish and shellfish in the freezer. I can take it out now, and we can see if Jimmy and his folks want to come over and have a bit of a different Thanksgiving dinner with us. What do you think?"

Corby's eye lit up. "Shrimp, yeah! That won't be like eating anybody's pet! Um, I shouldn't say that. But not anyone I know, anyway."

Jackson shook his head but smiled slowly. "Okay."

"Okay?" Corby repeated.

Jackson nodded. "Call Jimmy out of the woods. We'll put the turkey back in the basement, get Victoria, and head over to the Rodgers' house and give them our invitation.

Although, Corby, I don't know who came to his house, and I can't promise you that Jimmy's parents will agree."

"But we can try!" Corby said. "Jimmy!" he shouted. "Jimmy, come on out—my parents have a solution to the problem!"

He was excited when he spoke, happy.

But no one emerged from the trees.

Jackson started across the yard. Corby meant to follow him. Angela wasn't sure what instinct seized her, but she caught him by the shoulders. "Let Dad go," she told him.

"But—"

She was soon glad that she had stopped Corby. Jackson emerged from the trees appearing perplexed.

Stranger still was the fact that he was leading a large turkey on what appeared to be a thin leash and collar, the type that some people bought to walk small dogs or even cats.

"Corby, I need you to get in the house. Take the turkey. And you're responsible for watching your sister right now. Stay inside and keep the door locked."

"Dad, what's wrong? Where's Jimmy?" Corby asked.

Jackson took his son by the shoulders and looked him in the eye. "I need you to help me so that your mom and I can find Jimmy. The turkey was back there; Jimmy was not."

Alarm filled Corby's expression as he looked at his father.

Jackson returning with the turkey and not Jimmy had alarmed Angela, too.

Had the kid just abandoned his precious turkey? Most probably not.

She moved closer to her husband and son, softly saying, “Corby, we need you to be strong. The dogs are in the house, and your sister is upstairs playing. Right now, we need you here so that—”

“So that you can find Jimmy or what happened to him!” Corby said. He swallowed hard. Corby knew what his parents did for a living—and that their jobs were also true vocations. They had met the boy they had adopted on a case years before.

And discovered as well that he was a kid with their own peculiar, “special” talents.

“Right,” Jackson said. “I’ll be honest with you son, and you be strong and brave for your mom and me. I don’t know where Jimmy is; we intend to find him. You go upstairs and keep an eye on Victoria. Your mom and I will head for the Rodgers’ house. Wait—get the turkey into the basement first.”

Corby nodded and turned to head for the house.

Angela looked at Jackson. “Did his parents see him and decide just to leave the turkey and bring him home and ground him—”

“Parents don’t make their kids bleed,” Jackson said darkly. “What the hell is going on with that family?”

“Bleed?”

“I saw what looked like a little splash of blood on the leaves back there. Enough to make me wary.”

“Let’s get over there and find out. I can’t believe they would really hurt their child.”

“They wouldn’t!”

The simple statement surprised them both.

Angela turned to see that an elderly man was now standing at their side.

And Angela knew . . .

It was an elderly dead man. A spirit who had remained on earth.

“Jimmy’s parents didn’t hurt Jimmy—they didn’t hurt anyone!” The ghost spoke anxiously. “They’re *all* in danger!”

“What—” Jackson began.

“You see me!” the ghost exclaimed with relief.

“We do,” Jackson assured him.

“They seized Jimmy because his dad wouldn’t give them what they wanted!”

“What do they want?” Angela asked.

“The codes. The codes to a vault in a jewelry store,” the ghost said. “Please!”

“We’ll head over; we’ll stop this!” Jackson promised. “Angela—”

“We need a plan,” she said.

“You knock like a friendly neighbor; I’ll be back up.”

“Let’s do it. Oh, wait! I’m not armed and you’re wearing a bathrobe!”

“True—let’s move *fast*!”

They ran back into the house, the ghost in tow. Hurrying to the bedroom, Jackson grabbed jeans and threw on a T-shirt and a jacket—along with his holster and gun.

Angela retrieved her Glock, throwing on a jacket as well to cover her gun and holster.

They quickly left their house, moving across the street and down to the Rodgers’ house. Jackson stepped back.

Angela hurried to the door.

She knocked hard. “Mrs. Rodgers! Hey, it’s just Angela from across the street! Mr. Rodgers? I’m sorry; we really need to see you—”

The door opened. Jimmy’s mom looked at her and swallowed hard. She was evidently trying to appear normal.

Angela couldn’t remember her first name!

“Sarah,” the ghost whispered to her. “It’s Sarah!”

“Sarah, hey!” Angela said. “I’m so sorry, but I’ve been going crazy. I haven’t been able to find my phone, and Jackson suggested I might have left it over here the other day, that maybe it fell by the sofa where I was sitting. I know it’s Thanksgiving; I’m really so sorry to bother you, but please, may I come in and look! Oh, I know you have guests, and I do apologize!”

The woman was trying so hard to behave normally, but Angela’s request left her staring into space.

Then a man spoke.

“Sarah, invite your friend in!”

“Oh, thanks! Like I said, I’m so sorry to interrupt you all!” Angela said. As she stepped in, she smiled at the man who had spoken, taking in the rest of the Rodger’s living room as well.

Only one man. And Jimmy’s dad was seated in a chair near their mantle.

She was sure that meant that the second perp was in a room—with Jimmy. And the threat was surely that Jimmy would be killed if there was any problem.

“They have my grandson!” the ghost said with dismay.

“I’m Angela, from across the street,” Angela told the stranger, shaking his hand.

He was a young man, mid-twenties, she thought. Dark shaggy hair, light brown eyes, about five-eleven and slender. He appeared both hardened and angry and somewhat anxious.

Drugs, she thought. And that’s what it might all be about. Jimmy’s dad was the manager at a jewelry store—one that carried precious stones and high-priced jewelry.

“Yeah, you’re pretty rude,” the man said. “Find your phone and let us get on with Thanksgiving!”

“Again, I’m sorry!” Angela said. “I’ll try to hurry!” She heard a squeaking sound, as if a chair had moved. The sound was barely discernible, and she hoped that no one noticed it—or that she had heard it.

The sound didn’t seem to register to the man or to Sarah Rodgers.

Sarah just stood there, silent.

“Oh, man, I’m sorry, too!” the man told her, probably realizing that if he was trying to appear like invited guests—and keep from anyone else knowing that something sinister was going on—he needed to be a bit more polite. “I’m Joe. Joe Smith.”

“Joe. Nice to meet you. Thanks—and thank you, Sarah!” Angela said. She hurried over to the sofa, dropping low to search the floor, hoping the ghost would join her.

He did. “Get to Jackson. Tell him front bedroom,” she said.

“Right!” the ghost said. “They moved him, they moved our boy!”

The ghost left her. Angela continued to make a show of searching for her phone, and then finding it.

She stood, pretending to just talk “turkey” with Sarah Rodgers while she studied the man in front of her, trying to determine if he had a weapon on his person.

The odd thing was that it appeared as if he did not.

But then he twisted, and she saw that he had a small handgun stuffed into his waistband at the back.

He didn’t need to wave it around.

If another man had a gun on her son, there was no way on earth Sarah would do anything other than exactly what she was told.

“So! Sarah, I understand Jimmy has fallen in love with the turkey you decided you wanted to feed yourself before Thanksgiving. Did you decide to let him keep the animal as a pet?”

“I . . . well, I mean, a turkey,” Sarah murmured.

“We wanted to take out that bird the minute we got here!” the man who had introduced himself as Joe said lightly. “It’s a turkey, not a pet!”

“Hey, people have dogs, cats, horses, lizards, parrots—why not a turkey?” She asked, grinning.

“Because it’s a turkey!” Joe exclaimed. Then he frowned. “Then again, you’re right, living, breathing . . . well, lots of things we eat are or were . . . I mean, I love turkey. But I guess if a kid is in love with a turkey . . .”

“He needed something,” Sarah said softly.

“Well, we didn’t kill the turkey,” Joe muttered.

Then Angela heard it, the commotion from the bedroom.

Jackson had figured a way in.

She drew her own gun before Joe could go for his.

“Don’t make me shoot you, please, Joe. I think you may be a nice guy. A nice guy in need of some serious help. It’s so easy to have drugs with friends as a lark—and then find out you’re addicted, and they then become expensive as hell while they’re killing you!” she said.

His hand was on the hilt of his gun.

“Maybe I should just die,” he said.

“No. Living, breathing—and our moms always said it—while there’s breath, there’s hope!”

She prayed he wouldn’t pull the gun. She would defend the family under attack first; that’s what law enforcement had to do. Defend the innocent.

But in a few minutes of studying the man, she had developed a certain—strange, perhaps—empathy for him.

People could too easily become addicted. And it didn’t make them worthy of death. Not that they set out to kill anyway, but she believed somewhere, deep within “Joe” there was a good heart.

His hand twitched over the butt of the gun.

“Joe,” she said quietly. “You don’t really want to die.”

He laughed. “You can’t tell I’m an idiot jerk. If I go to prison, someone will shiv me for sure!”

“No, Joe, that’s not true at all. Please, please, drop the gun!” Angela said. “I can talk to the district attorney, I can help you, get you real help, medical help—and mental help!”

“Who are you?” he asked, confused.

“I’m a federal agent. And I’m telling you the truth. Joe, drop it. Please, I can see you’re a decent guy caught in bad circumstances.”

“I never wanted to hurt anyone!” he said.

“I can see that. Please. Drop the weapon.”

He winced and did as he was told. Thankfully, just in time, because Jackson strode out of the hallway to the bedrooms, Jimmy Rodgers ahead of him with one of Jackson’s hands on his shoulders.

Jackson wielded his Glock with the other.

“It’s good; we’re all good here,” Angela said quickly.

Sarah Rodgers cried out and raced toward her son, taking him into her arms as tears streamed down her face.

“Backup is on the way,” Jackson said. He looked at her and walked toward Joe.

But Jimmy squiggled away from his mother, rushing back toward Jackson. “Don’t hurt him—he’s the one who saved my turkey!” Jimmy cried.

Joe shrugged. “I thought it was dumb when Jeffrey wanted to shoot the bird. Why kill the dumb bird and make a lot of noise neighbors might have reported? Besides, the bird is kind of . . . well, it seemed to like the kid. That’s why we had to tie it to the tree with that little leash thing the kid had.”

“Please, don’t hurt Joe!” Jimmy repeated.

“I won’t hurt him,” Jackson assured the boy. “I promise. We’re just going to make sure he doesn’t hurt anyone else.”

“He won’t. Go easy,” Angela said softly. “And the other—”

“He can’t hurt anyone—an ambulance and backup are coming. He’s not that bad; he might have a broken jaw. I had to hit him—couldn’t risk alarming anyone out here with a shot. We have another serious problem.”

“And that is—” Angela began.

“Oh, my God! My husband,” Sarah said, holding Jimmy more tightly.

“My dad!” Jimmy cried. “My dad; the other guy took him to the store so that he could get him into the vault.”

“Other guy—” Angela began.

“Third in this group,” Jackson said.

“The one who made us do this. But he’s vulnerable,” Joe said, swallowing hard and offering his wrists to Jackson so that he could be cuffed. “He’ll call. The guy in the bedroom is Jeffrey Uxbridge. We were supposed to . . . threaten the kid until he had the vault open. Then, um, take care of things here and join him.”

“So, he won’t have backup now,” Jackson said. “But it’s a store in the mall, cameras and security, I would imagine.”

“That’s why he had to go in with Mr. Rodgers,” Joe told him. “Rodgers is supposed to go in all cheerful and say he just needs to get something for a customer.”

Angela looked down for a moment. Thankfully, they’d come when they had.

Because she understood what Joe was saying. Once the vault had been opened, the two here were supposed to have killed Jimmy and Sarah and then gone on to help with the jewelry heist.

“We need officers or agents in here—” Angela began.

“On the way. We need to move on—as in the two of us. Because we have help,” Jackson reminded her softly.

She hadn’t realized their ghost had followed Jackson in.

“And I will help get my son!” the ghost told her passionately.

She nodded.

Officers and agents arrived; Angela was glad one of their key people, Bruce McFadden, was among them. She explained she wanted real help for Joe. He promised her he would do what was necessary to get him into a medical facility within the law enforcement system.

“I don’t know the other guy; I haven’t even seen him,” she admitted. “But I do know the signs of a drug addict needing a fix. And I believe he’s only here because of that.”

“I swear!” Joe whispered. “And thank you.”

Angela looked at Sarah, hugging her son, at Joe . . .

“The guy in the bedroom?” she asked. “He . . . he would have killed us!”

“I don’t know,” Joe said. “He, um, he was supposed to.”

Sarah was holding Jimmy, sobbing softly, when Angela and Jackson managed to escape.

With their ghost in the backseat.

The mall was close.

They reached the parking lot in a matter of minutes.

“All right, police and a few agents are already in the mall, watching the store.

Rodgers and his captor arrived just a few minutes ago—we were lucky we discovered Jimmy had disappeared when we did. There are three employees in the store along with Rodgers. We need to get them out . . .”

“So, let’s be in love!” Angela said.

“What? I mean, we are in love, but—”

She laughed. She had taken her partner and husband by surprise.

“You’re going to buy me a massive diamond because we’re going to have the wedding of the century!” she explained.

“Sure! On our federal salaries. Yep. And we’ll honeymoon around the globe, right?”

“We need an in. There could be other customers in there, too, all in danger.”

“I even understood all that!” the ghost said.

“And she’s right,” Jackson agreed. “I guess I’m going to need to be rich, really, really rich!”

“Hey, it’s a fun idea!” Angela assured him.

Jackson was quickly on the phone, advising the local detective who had ordered his people to the Rodgers’ house and the mall what their plan was.

The detective was agreeable; he had eyes on the store, and there were two customers inside as well.

His people would wait until he had a signal from Jackson. They wanted the situation to end without anyone getting shot.

“Shall we?” Jackson asked.

“Oh, we shall!” the ghost told them. “By the way, I’m Arnie Sr. My son is Arnie J. I’m glad they finally changed and called Jimmy the incredibly new and different name—Jimmy! And my son must live!” he added passionately.

“He will,” Angela promised him. She turned to Jackson. “Although, hm, I’d rather have a gigantic emerald instead of a diamond. Or maybe a sapphire—sapphires are so pretty!” she told him.

“Whatever!” he said, laughing.

He took her hand. And swinging it, he headed into the store.

Two young women were looking in a showcase that highlighted semi-precious stones in different settings, rings, necklaces, bracelets, and even key chains. One employee, nervous and ill at ease, was with them.

The ghost of Arnie Rodgers, Sr. quickly hurried through the store and into a small hallway that led to the back offices.

And the vaults.

Neither Mr. Rodgers nor the other two employees were in the showroom.

“They are in the back,” the ghost whispered, hurrying back to them. “At gunpoint,” he added.

Jackson gave him an imperceptible nod and looked at Angela. They were ready to go.

“Hey! We need some help here! My wife wants the biggest emerald in the place!”

Jackson said.

She glanced at him, then lowered her head, grinning slightly despite the gravity of the situation. She was going to tell him later that he did rich and obnoxious far too well!

But the uncomfortable employee who had been helping the young women looked up at him with panic on his face.

“Sir!”

“I have cash, cash, do you understand? Darling, see to whatever you would like.”

Cash. There was surely not a better way to draw out a thief!

She gave him a nod, pretending to look at the jewelry in all the cases, but moving toward the wall against the little hallway that led to the back offices—and the vault.

The thief played right into their hands. Forcing Mr. Rodgers ahead of himself, his gun against the man’s back, a tall, rough-looking man in his thirties emerged.

But he didn’t get far. He started to speak, ready to demand Jackson’s cash or he’d start shooting.

He never got a word out.

He’d glared at Jackson. He never saw Angela behind him against the wall.

She slammed the butt of her Glock down on his head so hard that he reeled, his handgun falling harmlessly to the floor and sliding across the linoleum as he stumbled against the wall and fell to the floor.

Jackson retrieved the fallen gun.

The police moved in.

“Thank you!”

Artie Rodgers, Sr. the ghost, and Artie Rodgers, Jr. the man who was alive and well, said the words at the same time.

Angela and Jackson smiled at one another as the police moved in, taking control of the situation.

★

There was paperwork, of course.

There was always paperwork.

But they handled it, and the evening was really just beginning when they finished and returned to the house at last.

They released the officers who had been watching over Sarah and little Jimmy; and as they did so, Jimmy was begging his mother to let him keep the turkey.

“I have no heart to kill and cook anything,” Sarah told them.

“Then, I think it’s settled,” Angela said, looking at Jackson. “Come to our house; I, um, have a massive tray of shrimp and cod fillets. We’ll have that for dinner!”

“Oh, we couldn’t do that to you! Not after all you’ve done for us today!” Sarah Rodgers protested.

Jackson had lowered his head. He was laughing, Angela knew. She had a defrosted turkey they should have had for dinner.

Tomorrow night or maybe Saturday night.

It just didn’t seem right to have a pet turkey in the basement and dine on a bird.

“We’d love to have you!” Angela assured them.

By then, of course, they'd called Corby. He knew that everything was all right.

And when they all came in, he hugged Jimmy, and Jimmy hugged him, and with little Victoria, they rushed down to the basement to make sure the turkey was doing fine.

The seafood made for a fine meal.

There was time for speeches, but they were simple and sweet.

"I'm so thankful to you people, and to God, of course, that my precious son is alive, that my wife is alive! Thank you, thank you!" Mr. Rodgers said.

"Oh, me, too! I'm thankful for every day that I live with a loving man and a great son and . . . well, now I know! I'm thankful that I have amazing neighbors!" Sarah said.

Jackson smiled. "I'm thankful for my home. I'm thankful for children who know that every human being is unique and special. I'm thankful for having an amazing wife. Even if she doesn't have amazing emeralds!"

"I can fix that," Arnie Rodgers, Jr. said quickly.

Angela laughed, lifting her glass. "I'm thankful for my incredible family, for this strange man who is the best in the world and still capable of playing absolutely obnoxious so well! I'm beyond thankful for my beautiful children." And looking across the table she added, "So very thankful to have such amazing friends!"

She was looking, of course, at Arnie Rodgers, Sr.

The ghost stood at the foot of the table, looking at them all with such sheer happiness that it all seemed to bring an incredible warmth into her heart and soul.

Of course, Jimmy made the last toast, lifting his glass of milk high.

"I'm so thankful that no one killed and ate my turkey!"

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As if he could hear the words, from the basement, the turkey let out a loud squawk.

And they all laughed.

Because . . .

Yah! Okay, it didn't turn out to be a quiet holiday.

Rather . . .

It had been one hell of a turkey day!

But in the very best way!