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Isabel's Daughter
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Your story reveals a love affair with New Mexico and its eclectic population (not to mention the food!). Did you ever live in New Mexico, or did living in Texas influence your intimate knowledge of the land?

Traveling through the Southwest as a child was probably the beginning of my interest in all things southwestern — that and growing up with a Texan for a father. When I was researching *Isabel's Daughter*, I lived in Santa Fe for several months. I rented a tiny old adobe casita on the east side of town, very near to where Paul DeGraf would have lived. During the days I wandered around town, visiting galleries, museums and libraries. I drove up into the mountains to some of the Indian pueblos and little villages where Spanish is still the predominant language. At night I did a lot of reading, cooking and eating. I met so many interesting people who were happy to share their knowledge of New Mexico, its history and culture, and of course, southwestern cooking. My husband and I have recently fulfilled a longtime dream of ours by moving to Santa Fe.

Avery and her mother both share similar characteristics, in particular the brown and amber mismatched eyes. Were the eyes a device to clearly illustrate the relationship between the two women, or were they a way of illustrating an imbalance in their lives?

The mismatched eyes turned out to be a convenient way of connecting Avery and Isabel, but that was almost an afterthought. I first gave Avery two different colored eyes as a way of emphasizing her apartness from other people. Not only does it symbolize her status as an outsider, but it's also a physical manifestation of the other "sight" that she possesses.

So many years had passed since Avery left Will. And then suddenly there he is, in the diner. He's angry at first, but comes back again, almost as if he had time to remember and understand all of Avery's issues and what makes her tick. And then he's gone again until the very end when Avery has a vision of them lying in bed together. Did you always know the story needed to end with Will and Avery getting back together or did you decide the young lovers' fate as you were coming to the end of the book?

I just couldn't imagine that with all the change and growth that Will and Avery had both gone through, that they wouldn't somehow get together at the end. Having said that, though, I wanted to avoid the neatly packaged ending where he comes riding up on his horse (or in his truck) and they ride off into the sunset together. I also wanted to show her certainty about it — that she had learned to trust not only him, but her own instincts and her "sight."

Avery is a character you both sympathize with and also want to rattle some sense into. Yet she grows into the compassionate woman she always could have been, had her early years been different. When developing her character, did you feel maternal in shaping her from this angry girl into a successful, ultimately loving young woman?

Absolutely. Here was a girl with no mother, so I felt like a sort of surrogate mother. But then I feel that way about most of my characters. The interesting thing is that, just like real children, they don't always do what you would like them to. They all definitely have minds of their own.

What is your next project?

I've finished the manuscript for *The Baker's Apprentice*, which is the sequel to *Bread Alone*. It's scheduled for publication in April 2005. I'm in the early stages of research for my fourth book, which seems to be taking a somewhat different direction for me, although readers who know my books will probably find the settings familiar. So I'm just going along for the ride, interested to see where it all ends up.