

# When Will There Be Good News?



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF KATE ATKINSON

Kate Atkinson was born the daughter of a shopkeeper in York, England. She studied English literature at Dundee University, graduating in 1974. She wrote several award-winning short stories in the 1980s and 1990s, then published her first novel, *Behind the Scenes at the Museum*, in 1995. The novel won the Whitbread Book of the Year award, beating out such accomplished writers as Salman Rushdie, and it was adapted for radio and theatre. Atkinson has written plays for Edinburgh's Traverse Theatre. She is perhaps best known for creating the Jackson Brodie detective novels. The first four Jackson Brodie novels were adapted for television in the BBC's *Case Histories* in 2011. Atkinson was named a Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) in 2011 for her literary contributions.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Both Reggie's unnamed father and Jackson Brodie are veterans of the Gulf War (1990-1991), a war between a United States-led coalition of 35 nations and Iraq in response to Iraq's invasion and annexation of neighboring Kuwait. The United Kingdom had the strongest European presence in the coalition, deploying more than 50,000 members of the British Armed Forces. The theme of heroin addiction and its ravaging effects on poorer parts of Edinburgh was explored in the 1993 Irvine Welsh novel *Trainspotting* and the 1996 film of the same name. Despite being tormented by her drug-dealing brother, Billy, and lacking the means to stay enrolled in her private school, Reggie perseveres in studying for her A-levels, a series of advanced qualifying exams expected for university admission.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Although Atkinson's novels are considered to be more "soft-boiled" mysteries than Ian Rankin's grittier Inspector Rebus crime fiction, the latter series, like some of the Jackson Brodie books, is set in Edinburgh. Ruth Ware's [The Woman in Cabin 10](#) is another example of this kind of character-driven thriller set in the United Kingdom. Reggie Chase identifies with and quotes from many different literary works and characters throughout the novel, perhaps especially [Great Expectations](#), because of her fascination with fellow "plucky orphans." *When Will There Be Good News?* is preceded in the Jackson Brodie series by *Case Histories* (2004) and *One Good Turn* (2006); it's followed by *Started Early, Took My Dog* (2010) and *Big Sky* (2019).

## KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *When Will There Be Good News?*
- **When Written:** 2008
- **Where Written:** United Kingdom
- **When Published:** 2008
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Mystery/crime
- **Setting:** Edinburgh, Scotland, United Kingdom
- **Climax:** Joanna Hunter is found by Jackson Brodie and Reggie Chase
- **Antagonist:** Andrew Decker
- **Point of View:** Alternating third person limited

## EXTRA CREDIT

**BBC Adaptation.** *When Will There Be Good News?* was adapted for television in 2011. It was the third episode of a three-part BBC miniseries, *Case Histories*, based on the first three Jackson Brodie novels. English actor Jason Isaacs plays Jackson Brodie.

**Reggie's Reading List.** Many of the chapter titles in *When Will There Be Good News?* are drawn from literary works referenced by characters throughout the novel, especially works covered in Reggie's curriculum as she studies for her A-levels. These include Virginia Woolf's [Mrs Dalloway](#), Dickens's [Great Expectations](#), Virgil's [The Aeneid](#), and Hemingway's short story "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place."



## PLOT SUMMARY

A family is walking down a country lane in Devon, England—a mother, Gabrielle, and her three children, eight-year-old Jessica, six-year-old Joanna, and a baby, Joseph. Suddenly, a knife-wielding young man appears out of nowhere and kicks the family's **dog** into the nearby wheat field. He stabs Gabrielle, Jessica, and Joseph to death. Joanna escapes, running into the wheat field. Later that night, the police find and rescue her.

Thirty years later, on a December evening, "Security Consultant" and private detective Jackson Brodie visits a remote village in the Yorkshire Dales. He sees a little boy, Nathan, playing football on the village green. Jackson believes Nathan is his son, although his ex-girlfriend, Julia, denies this. He finds a chance to ruffle the boy's hair in greeting, stealing and keeping a strand as he does so. That evening, he catches a crowded train, believing he's headed home to London, but he belatedly discovers that he's boarded a northbound train to

Edinburgh. On the outskirts of Edinburgh, the train derails and violently crashes. While pulling an injured fellow passenger to safety, Jackson falls out of the train car and down an embankment. He realizes he's badly injured and is dying himself.

In Edinburgh, Scotland, 16-year-old Reggie Chase works as "mother's help" for Joanna Hunter, the woman from earlier in the story whose mother and two siblings were murdered when she was six. Now an adult, Joanna works as a doctor. Reggie, whose mother recently died, lives in a poor neighborhood and makes a long daily bus commute to care for Joanna's baby son, Gabriel Joseph. Though she's dropped out of school, she is avidly studying Greek and Latin classics in preparation for university. Reggie is devoted to the Hunters and regards them as her family.

One December evening, Detective Louise Monroe visits Joanna. She warns Joanna that her family's killer, Andrew Decker, has been released from prison, and there might be a media circus. Joanna doesn't tell Reggie, who knows nothing about Dr. Hunter's childhood tragedy.

Louise Monroe recently married a cheerful, well-off widower named Patrick Brennan. Though Patrick is a good husband, Louise feels trapped in her marriage and like an impostor pretending to be a good wife. Louise is obsessed with cases concerning women who've run from killers, like Joanna Hunter. She's lately discovered that Joanna's husband, Neil Hunter, whose businesses have fallen on hard times, might be mixed up with drug dealers in Glasgow. He's also suspected of burning down one of his arcades for insurance money.

Reggie has a weekly dinner with Ms. MacDonald, her former classics teacher, who's now retired and is dying of cancer. In exchange for tutoring, Reggie runs errands for Ms. MacDonald and watches her elderly terrier, Banjo, while Ms. MacDonald goes to prayer meetings. This evening, she's watching television with Banjo when she hears a terrifying crash. When she learns about the train wreck nearby, she immediately goes to help.

On the scene of the train wreck, Reggie, who learned first aid from Dr. Hunter, finds Jackson and saves his life. Afterward, the police inform Reggie that Ms. MacDonald caused the crash by driving off the road and into the train's path. Jackson fades in and out of consciousness in the hospital for the next day or two. When he wakes up, he learns that he's survived a severed artery and a concussion. Based on a wallet that was found in his pocket, the hospital has identified him as Andrew Decker, the killer of Joanna's family. That name doesn't sound right to Jackson, but he can't remember his identity or the accident right away. Later, he remembers his real name and the name of his wife, Tessa, whom he married just two months ago.

The morning after the train crash, Neil Hunter calls Reggie and tells her not to come to work that day, since Joanna and the baby have gone to visit Joanna's sick, elderly aunt in Yorkshire.

Reggie is confused by Dr. Hunter's uncharacteristically sudden departure. She's also disappointed not to be able to tell her about last night's events. Reggie goes home to her flat and finds that it's been completely trashed by thugs, searching for her drug-dealing brother, Billy.

Reggie goes to the Hunters' to walk their dog, Sadie. Neil, looking disheveled, suggests that she take Sadie home with her while Joanna is gone. While at the Hunters', Reggie dials Dr. Hunter and thinks she hears her mobile ringing somewhere inside the house. Sadie also finds the baby's beloved blanket, which looks bloodstained. Reggie fears that something bad has happened to Dr. Hunter. She meets with Louise Monroe to warn her, but Louise figures that Reggie has an overheated imagination. When Reggie shows her a postcard she'd salvaged from Jackson Brodie the night before, though, Louise rushes to the hospital. She and Jackson worked together and had a close relationship in the past, and although they're both married now, they still have feelings for each other. Jackson is hazy while she's there, and later he's unsure if he just dreamed about her visit. Later, Reggie finds Jackson in the hospital and introduces herself as the girl who saved his life.

The next day, Louise returns to the Hunters' house and finds Joanna's abandoned cell phone. She's beginning to think that Reggie is right and even to suspect Neil's involvement, especially when she discovers that Joanna and her "sick aunt," Agnes Barker, didn't call each other recently, and that Joanna's Prius is still in the garage. Later, Reggie lets herself in to the Hunters' in search of Joanna's phone, too. While she's there, she narrowly avoids being found by Neil and two of his shady business associates. She overhears the men saying that Joanna and the baby have been kidnapped. She also finds Joanna's purse left behind, which contains, among other things, her aunt's address. She begs Jackson to help her find Joanna. Jackson is eager to escape the hospital, so he finally agrees.

Meanwhile, also Louise drives to Yorkshire with her young assistant, Marcus, to track down Joanna's aunt. They learn that Agnes Barker recently died, so Joanna and/or Neil have been lying about Joanna's whereabouts. They also learn that "Andrew Decker" has been arrested and taken to the hospital after a car accident. When they reach the hospital, they discover that "Andrew" is Jackson, who used Decker's license to rent a car, then caused a minor wreck while driving on painkillers. He and Reggie had been attempting to find Joanna and her alleged aunt, too. Louise, Marcus, Jackson, Reggie, and Sadie head back to Edinburgh, with Louise and Jackson occasionally sniping at or flirting with one another. They also discuss the case, unable to figure out how Andrew Decker's ID was seemingly swapped with Jackson's and whether Decker's disappearance has anything to do with Joanna's own. Reggie finally hears the truth about Joanna's past.

After Louise drops Jackson and Reggie off at Ms. MacDonald's house for the night, they find Billy there. He threatens Reggie

and leaves after being attacked by Sadie. He has trashed Ms. MacDonald's Loeb Classics editions, and that night Reggie discovers that Billy has been hollowing out the books and smuggling heroin inside them.

Early the next morning, unable to sleep, Jackson, Reggie, and Sadie continue their search for Joanna. A Nissan is parked at the Hunters', the same one driven by the men who'd threatened Neil. They find a spare key and steal Joanna's Prius to follow the Nissan. They tail it down a country road outside of Edinburgh. When they reach a remote house, the men in the Nissan look inside and quickly flee. When Jackson approaches the house, Joanna emerges from the bushes, covered in blood. Neil's associates had been holding her and the baby hostage until Neil signed over his businesses to them. Joanna found an opportunity and stabbed both men to death. She asks Jackson for help, and he burns down the crime scene. He drops off Joanna, Reggie, the baby, and Sadie near the Hunters', and they sneak inside to bathe and change. The police, including Louise, are there to question Neil, and they are dumbfounded when Joanna appears, claiming to have suffered amnesia and to have no idea what happened to her over the past few days.

When Jackson returns to London, he finds Andrew Decker dead in his apartment, apparently having shot himself. The mystery of the swapped identities is never resolved. Jackson also learns that he's been conned by his wife, Tessa, who'd assumed a fake identity and cleaned out his bank accounts. Though depressed, Jackson decides to make a fresh start. He almost throws away the lock of hair he took from Nathan, but he holds onto it. He's encouraged to keep going when he remembers finding Joanna the first time—it turns out that he was the young soldier who found six-year-old Joanna lost in the wheat field after her family was killed. He figures he will continue being a "crusader."

Louise, though pregnant with Patrick's baby, decides she will leave him after Christmas. She interviews Joanna several times but never draws a conclusive connection among Joanna, Decker's death, and with the burned-out bodies in the remote house. Reggie, meanwhile, moves in with Joanna, who is now estranged from Neil. She finally has a happy family life, and she never asks what happened the night Joanna escaped.

was obedient and preferred to let others do her thinking for her. As an adult, feeling guilty about her failure to save her little brother's life, Joanna maintains that "there are no rules," and that the only thing that matters is "love." She becomes a doctor in hopes of helping and healing others. As a mother, Joanna is extremely protective of her infant son, Gabriel Joseph (whom she only calls "the baby"), and she trusts her **dog**, Sadie, with her and the baby's life. She hires Reggie Chase as "mother's help," and Reggie idolizes Joanna, finding her competence and maternal warmth comforting. Joanna often sings nursery rhymes and bits of poems to the baby. After Louise informs Joanna that Andrew Decker has been released from prison, Joanna disappears with an uncharacteristic lack of communication. Neil claims that Joanna has gone to visit a sick aunt, Agnes Barker, in Yorkshire, but thanks to clues that Reggie picks up, Jackson Brodie later discovers her at a remote farmhouse in Penicuik, outside of Edinburgh. She has just killed her two captors (whom she'd named Peter and John in an attempt to humanize them), and Jackson burns down the farmhouse to destroy the evidence. Later, Andrew Decker is found dead in Jackson's London flat, apparently having used a handgun which Joanna bought, though his death's connection to Joanna is unclear. Joanna claims to have forgotten all the details of her kidnapping and moves on with her life, inviting Reggie to live with her and rejecting Neil.

**Jackson Brodie** – Jackson is a "security consultant" and private investigator. He is about 50 years old and a veteran of the Gulf War. At the beginning of the novel, he visits Yorkshire to see Nathan, the little boy he believes is his son (though his ex-girlfriend, Julia, denies his paternity). Jackson also has a daughter, Marlee, by his ex-wife, Josie, and he is newly married to Tessa. On his way back home to London, he gets on the wrong train and is nearly killed when the train crashes outside of Edinburgh. Reggie saves his life and later befriends him when she tracks him down in the hospital, claiming him as a father figure and also an ally in her search for Joanna Hunter. Having lost his sister, Niamh, to murder when they were both teenagers, Jackson has a lifelong obsession with finding and rescuing missing women, often thinking of himself as a shepherd or sheep**dog**. He has worked with Louise Monroe in the past and still has strong feelings for her. At the end of the novel, it's revealed that Jackson was the young soldier who found six-year-old Joanna in the wheat field. With Reggie's help, he finds Joanna again in the Penicuik farmhouse and destroys the evidence of the men she killed. When he finally returns to London, Jackson finds Andrew Decker dead in his flat and also learns that Tessa was an imposter, having cleaned out his bank accounts and fled. Though he fears he's too old to start fresh, Jackson remembers that he's a "crusader" and resolves to keep going.

**Regina "Reggie" Chase** – Reggie is 16 years old but looks much younger. She lives alone in a small flat in the downscale



## CHARACTERS

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Joanna Mason Hunter (Dr. Hunter)** – Joanna is a 36-year-old Edinburgh doctor who is married to Neil Hunter and is the mother of Gabriel Joseph Hunter. When she was six years old, Joanna's mother, older sister, and baby brother were all murdered by Andrew Decker in a random knife attack in rural Devon, England. Joanna survived because she hid in the wheat field when her mother screamed at her to run. As a girl, Joanna

Edinburgh neighborhood of Gorgie. Her father died in the Gulf War, and her mother, Jackie, died recently in an accidental drowning while on holiday. Reggie is bright, clever, and bookishly inclined, avidly studying English, Latin, and Greek literature even though she's dropped out of the "horrible posh school" she once attended on scholarship. Reggie is a hard worker who budgets carefully to support herself, working weekend shifts in Mr. Hussain's shop and working weekdays as mother's help for Joanna Hunter, caring for her baby boy, Gabriel Joseph. Reggie also has a ne'er-do-well brother, 19-year-old Billy, who's gotten mixed up with heroin dealers and even uses Reggie's beloved Loeb Classics editions to smuggle drugs. After her mother's death, Reggie gets first-aid training from Dr. Hunter and is especially sensitive to the needs of anyone who's alone or vulnerable. She helps her old classics teacher, Ms. MacDonald, with errands and watches Ms. MacDonald's elderly **dog**, Banjo, in exchange for tutoring. When the Musselburgh train crash occurs nearby, Reggie rushes to the scene and saves Jackson Brodie's life. She later tracks him down in the hospital, befriends him, and eventually talks him into helping her find Joanna Hunter. Reggie is deeply loyal to Joanna, whom she regards as a mother figure, and is intimately familiar with the family routines. When Joanna goes missing, Reggie's observant nature and dogged loyalty help Jackson and Louise to eventually track down and rescue Joanna. After Joanna's ordeal, Reggie moves in with the Hunters, finally finding the stable family environment she's craved.

**Louise Monroe** – Louise is Detective Chief Inspector with the Lothian and Borders Police, headquartered in Edinburgh. She is 40 years old and recently married to Patrick Brennan. She also has a 16-year-old son, Archie. Louise grew up with an alcoholic single mother and makes references to a difficult youth, though she seldom elaborates. Louise has a maternal fondness for her protégé, Marcus McLellan. Louise is obsessed with stories of female crime victims who run and hide, like Alison Needler, whom she obsessively guards, and Joanna Hunter, whom she idealizes as a "good survivor." Louise also feels trapped in her new marriage and middle-class lifestyle, believing she's not good enough for Patrick. Louise informs Joanna that Andrew Decker has been released from prison, and after Joanna goes missing, Reggie tracks Louise down and eventually talks her into searching for Joanna, though Louise cynically dismisses her at first. Louise and Jackson Brodie used to work together and still have romantic interest in one another, though this usually takes the form of barbed insults. Although Jackson goes back to London at the end of the story, he gives Louise a Border Collie puppy for Christmas, which she names Jackson. Throughout the story, Louise is sick, tired, and irritable, and by the end, she's discovered that she's pregnant. She plans to give birth to the baby, but makes up her mind to leave Patrick after Christmas.

**Neil Hunter** – Neil Hunter is Joanna Mason Hunter's husband and the father of Gabriel Joseph Hunter. He is originally from Glasgow, Scotland. Joanna met Neil when she was working in the emergency room and Neil had just been beaten up by some thugs. She married him because she found him refreshingly self-sufficient, not in need of her protection and help. Neil is involved in sketchy business ventures, including amusement arcades, health clubs, private-hire vehicles, and beauty salons. Louise Monroe is investigating Neil for arson, for which he's ultimately charged. When he gets into financial trouble, he gets mixed up with Michael Anderson, a suspected Glasgow drug dealer, and Anderson's thugs, Peter and John, kidnap Joanna and the baby as the price for Neil's businesses. Instead of signing the businesses over to Anderson immediately, Neil delays and tries to come up with the money another way, to Louise's disgust. After she escapes from captivity, Joanna kicks Neil out while she decides whether to take him back, but it's heavily implied that she never will.

**Gabriel Joseph Hunter ("the baby")** – Gabriel Joseph is the baby son of Joanna Hunter and Neil Hunter. He is named after Gabrielle Mason and Joseph Mason, Joanna's mother and baby brother who both died. The baby has just turned one year old at the time of the story. As Joanna's hired help, Reggie takes care of the baby during the day. She and Joanna refer to him simply as "the baby." Joanna is obsessive about the baby's health and safety. He carries around a square of his favorite green blanket like a "talisman." Along with Joanna, the baby is kidnapped by Peter and John, but Joanna protects him by killing their captors and destroying the evidence.

**Ms. MacDonald** – Ms. MacDonald was Reggie's classics teacher at "the horrible posh school." She quit working after being diagnosed with terminal brain cancer. She also "got religion," joining a fringe, Rapture-obsessed Christian church. She is a rather bitter person, but she is good to Reggie and loves her **dog**, Banjo. She tutors Reggie in exchange for errands and dog-sitting. On her way home from a prayer meeting, Ms. MacDonald is killed when she drives onto the train track, which causes the Musselburgh train crash. Reggie takes responsibility for her remains and her funeral, since Ms. MacDonald had no one else. Ms. MacDonald leaves half of the proceeds from her house sale to Reggie, allowing Reggie to go to college.

**Billy Chase** – Billy is Reggie's older brother, aged 19 in the novel. He was Reggie's hero when they were children, but over the years, he's gotten involved in petty theft and drugs. Thugs associated with Billy trash Reggie's flat and later burn it down, and Reggie discovers that Billy, on the premise of doing odd jobs for Ms. MacDonald, has been smuggling heroin in hollowed-out Loeb Classics editions. He later threatens Reggie with violence and, at the end of the book, muses that he's going to kill his sister. It's unclear whether this is an idle threat or not. It also happens that Billy sold a Russian handgun, his father's Gulf War souvenir, to Dr. Hunter—though Reggie is unaware

that Joanna had any knowledge of Billy.

**Gabrielle Mason** – Gabrielle, a painter, is Howard Mason’s wife and mother to Joanna, Jessica, and Joseph. She grew up in “faraway places” and is “warm-blooded.” She was born into a wealthy family but was disinherited when she eloped with Howard. Gabrielle dislikes life in the Devon countryside and often fights with Howard. She is “clever and funny and surprising”—quite unlike other mothers. She is 36 when she dies, fighting until the last moment to defend her children.

**Howard Mason** – Howard Mason, a novelist, was married to Gabrielle and is the father to Joanna, Jessica, and Joseph. He moves his family to rural Devon because he wants a place to write, then abandons them there and moves in with his poet girlfriend, Martina. After Gabrielle and two of his children are murdered, Howard ultimately marries four more times and becomes better known for his series of dead wives than for his writing, which doesn’t stand the test of time. He dies in Brazil, and Joanna reads about it in the newspaper. Though Joanna lived with him and Martina for a while as a child, Howard never loved her.

**Jessica Mason** – Jessica is Joanna’s older sister, age 8 at the beginning of the novel. Joanna remembers her as “loyal, resourceful, confident, [and] annoying.” Joanna followed Jessica’s lead as a child, feeling that she “filled the spaces Jessica left behind.” Jessica loved to train her **dog**. When Andrew Decker attacks her family and kicks the dog into the field, killing him, Jessica confronts him in a rage, gets stabbed, and dies in the field, embracing her dog.

**Joseph Mason** – Joseph is Joanna and Jessica’s baby brother, just short of a year old when Andrew Decker attacks the family. He died strapped into his stroller, and Joanna chooses to believe that he never woke up, but she doesn’t know for sure. Joanna blames herself for not rescuing Joseph when she ran away.

**Patrick Brennan** – Patrick is Louise’s husband, whom Louise describes as Irish, wise, and amiable. Patrick is a well-off orthopedic surgeon who was widowed when his first wife, Samantha, was killed in a car crash. He is relentlessly cheerful and health-conscious. Louise believes she isn’t good enough for Patrick and buries herself in her work to avoid him and his visiting in-laws, Bridget and Tim. At the end of the novel, Louise decides to leave him, although she’s pregnant with his child.

**Andrew Decker** – Andrew Decker murdered Gabrielle, Jessica, and Joseph Hunter in a random, unpremeditated knife attack in rural Devon when he was a young man. He serves a 30-year sentence, is a model prisoner, and converts to Catholicism while in prison. Joanna goes to visit him a month before his release, apparently in an attempt to understand his motives. Less than a week after his release, Decker goes missing and is found dead of apparent suicide in Jackson Brodie’s flat, having somehow swapped his ID with Jackson’s. The gun at the scene

is the same model that Billy Chase sold to Joanna Hunter.

**Marcus McLellen** – Marcus, age 26, is a Detective Constable who works for Louise. Louise has a maternal affection for him. He is cheerful, likes helping people, and is keen to advance in his work. Louise is protective of his innocence and thinks of him as her “sweet boy.” When Marcus responds to a call at Alison Needler’s home, he is shot in the chest by David Needler and dies a week later. Louise, Marcus’s mother, and Marcus’s girlfriend, Ellie, are devastated. Marcus’s mother kills herself the day after his funeral.

**Jackie Chase** – Jackie is Reggie’s and Billy’s mother, who dies before the novel begins. Jackie’s husband had died in the Gulf War while she was pregnant with Reggie. Later, she has a string of unsuccessful relationships, dating Gary and The-Man-Who-Came-Before-Gary. Jackie drowns at age 36 when she dives into a hotel pool in Spain and gets her hair caught in a drain when nobody else is around. She and Reggie had a warm and affectionate relationship.

**Martina** – Martina is Howard Mason’s “other woman,” a poet. Howard left Gabrielle and the children in order to move in with her. Martina shows kindness to Joanna after the deaths of the rest of the Mason family, but she carries a Swedish “gloom in her blood” and commits suicide when Joanna is nine. She published one volume of poetry, *Blood Sacrifice*, which Joanna later understands was written about her family.

**Tessa Webb** – Tessa is Jackson Brodie’s wife, a 34-year-old curator at the British Museum. They met at a posh party hosted by Jackson’s old boss, Bernie. Tessa is beautiful, smart, and has a mysterious past. While Jackson is hospitalized in Edinburgh, Tessa is allegedly attending a conference in the United States. When Jackson finally returns home to their London flat, however, he learns that Tessa and Bernie had conned him all along, designing “Tessa’s” personality to suit him. Tessa has cleaned out Jackson’s bank accounts and disappeared.

**Julia** – Julia is Jackson Brodie’s ex-girlfriend and the mother of Nathan. Jackson believes that Nathan is his son, but Julia denies it. Jackson refers to Julia’s husband disdainfully as “Mr. Arty-Farty,” “the false dad.” Julia is an actress, and Jackson claims she was “born to lie.” Her sister dies of breast cancer in the novel.

**The Strolling Woman** – When Jackson Brodie is briefly lost in rural Yorkshire, he passes a woman in a cardigan and scarf, around age 40, who’s casually strolling through the countryside. When he offers her a ride, she laughs and tells him, “You’re going the wrong way.” Jackson never knows the woman’s identity, but her memory haunts him when he finds himself on the wrong train and later when he’s near death.

**David Needler** – David Needler is Alison Needler’s estranged husband. He shot several people at his young daughter’s birthday party, and his family now lives in terror of his eventual return. At the end of the book, he returns and holds his family

at gunpoint until Marcus McLellen shows up; David shoots Marcus and then kills himself.

**Agnes Barker** – Agnes is Joanna Hunter’s aunt, with whom she lived during school holidays as a teenager. Joanna found Agnes and her husband, Oliver, to be cold and unloving and has never forgiven them for this. When Joanna disappears, Neil claims that she’s gone to visit Agnes, but Louise’s investigation soon reveals that Agnes recently died of a stroke and that she and Joanna had not been in contact for a long time.

## MINOR CHARACTERS

**Mr. Hussain** – Mr. Hussain is the owner of the corner store in Reggie’s downscale Edinburgh neighborhood. Reggie works an early morning shift for him occasionally, and he is kind to Reggie. He is originally from Bangladesh. Reggie spent “a surprisingly Victorian Christmas” with the Hussain family after her mother died.

**Nathan** – Nathan is Julia’s toddler son. Jackson believes that he is Nathan’s father, but Julia denies it, claiming that Mr. Arty-Farty is the father. Jackson meets Nathan in Yorkshire at the beginning of the novel and takes home a lock of his hair, presumably for a paternity test.

**“Mr. Arty-Farty”** – Jackson Brodie’s disdainful nickname for Julia’s husband. He is otherwise unnamed. Julia claims he is Nathan’s father, but Jackson thinks of him as “The False Dad.”

**Josie** – Josie was Jackson Brodie’s first wife, mother of Marlee.

**Marlee** – Marlee, age 12, is the daughter of Jackson Brodie and Josie. Jackson carries a postcard from her in his pocket.

**Tim** – Tim is Patrick’s brother-in-law. He and his wife, Bridget, visit Patrick and Louise.

**Bridget** – Bridget is Patrick’s sister. She and her husband, Tim, visit Patrick and Louise.

**Gary** – Gary was Jackie Chase’s boyfriend at the time of her death. Reggie thinks he is okay (a vast improvement over The-Man-Who-Came-Before-Gary), just lazy and cheap. He takes Jackie on a two-week vacation to Spain and moves on quickly after she dies.

**The-Man-Who-Came-Before-Gary** – Jackie Chase’s boyfriend before Gary. He was married and often leered at Reggie.

**Banjo** – Ms. MacDonald’s elderly terrier. Reggie takes care of him in exchange for tutoring. Banjo dies the morning after Ms. MacDonald’s death.

**Sadie** – Sadie is Joanna Hunter’s beloved **dog**, a German Shepherd. She faithfully guards Joanna and the baby, and later becomes Reggie’s companion after Joanna’s disappearance. She even bites Billy in Reggie’s defense.

**Scout** – Scout was Jessica Mason’s beloved **dog**, killed by Andrew Decker when he came to the family’s defense. Joanna can’t remember his name until the very end of the novel.

**Niamh Brodie** – Niamh was Jackson Brodie’s older sister. She was murdered at 18. When Jackson is dying, he sees a vision of Niamh, inviting him to follow her into the light.

**Archie** – Archie is Louise’s 16-year-old son. He’d fallen in with a bad crowd when he was younger, then began attending a prep school and thrived among his new, geeky friends.

**Samantha** – Samantha was Patrick’s first wife, killed in a car crash 10 years ago. Louise constantly fears she doesn’t measure up to her.

**Michael Anderson** – Glasgow drug dealer with whom Neil Hunter is alleged to have a connection. Peter and John work for him.

**Karen** – Karen is one of Louise’s coworkers at the police station. She is pregnant, and her constant snacking annoys and nauseates Louise because, as it later turns out, Louise is pregnant as well.

**Alison Needler** – Alison Needler’s husband, David Needler, attempted to kill her and their children some time ago, and Alison now lives in a safe house, certain that David will return any day. Louise is obsessed with the Needler case and often watches the house and visits with the family.

**Sheila Hayes** – Sheila is Joanna Hunter’s friend, a midwife who is employed at the same surgery where Joanna works as a general practitioner.

**Bernie** – Bernie is Jackson’s old commanding officer and boss. He and Tessa join forces to con Jackson out of all his money.

**Blondie and Ginger** – These are thugs who, looking for Billy, trash Reggie’s flat and later pour petrol through the letterbox, burning it down. They also threaten Reggie’s life if she reports them to the police.

**Peter** – A thug who works for Michael Anderson and threatens Neil Hunter by taking Joanna Hunter and the baby hostage. Joanna kills him and escapes.

**John** – A thug who works for Michael Anderson and threatens Neil Hunter by taking Joanna Hunter and the baby hostage. Joanna kills him and escapes.

**Ellie** – Marcus McLellen’s girlfriend.



## THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



## TRAUMA, SURVIVAL, AND RECKONING WITH THE PAST

*When Will There Be Good News?*, Kate Atkinson's 2008 mystery novel, is very much a survival story.

Multiple characters—detectives Jackson Brodie and Louise Monroe, and especially crime survivor Joanna Hunter and orphan Reggie Chase—carry memories from traumatic events and are coming to terms with how their pasts impact their relationships with others in the present. By focusing on the struggles of Joanna and Reggie to deal with their respective pasts, Atkinson argues that trauma can shape people in ways both dangerous and heroic, and that sometimes there isn't a clear line between danger and heroism in people's resulting actions.

Joanna Hunter, who at six years old was the lone survivor of the knife attack that killed the rest of her family, spends her adulthood trying to outrun her traumatic past. Ultimately, her survival instinct—especially her desire to protect her son—makes her dangerous in her own right. When Joanna was little, the only reason she survived the attack was because she “obeyed her mother when she screamed at her. “Run, Joanna, run,” she said, and Joanna ran into the field and was lost in the wheat.” In effect, Joanna never stops running from the trauma of this incident. Out of survivor's guilt, Joanna tries to recreate some of her lost childhood family through her baby son (Gabriel Joseph, named for her dead mother and brother) and her **dog**, Sadie. Joanna even admits this attempted compensation to herself: “her whole life [was] an act of bereavement, longing for something that she could no longer remember [...] [I]n dreams, she heard their old dog barking and it brought back a memory of grief so raw that it led her to wonder about killing the baby, and then herself [...] A contingency plan for when you were cornered, for when you couldn't run.” Joanna senses that, on some level, she can't make up for what she's lost, and there might come a point when she can no longer run and is forced to confront her past directly.

Even as she's aware that she can't truly recreate her lost family, Joanna discovers real love for her son and transfers her survival instinct to protecting the baby: “She had spent the thirty years since the murders creating a life. It wasn't a real life [...] but it worked. Her real life had been left behind in that other, golden field. And then she had the baby and her love for him breathed life into the simulacrum and it became genuine.” In a way, the fierceness of this newfound love makes Joanna more vulnerable—and, as she soon discovers, more dangerous. When Joanna and her son are kidnapped, presumably by her husband Neil Hunter's shady business associates, she ultimately escapes by attacking and killing the men holding them hostage. She persuades detective Jackson Brodie to burn down the house in which the attacks occur, so that the ordeal won't continue to haunt them. “She said she killed the two guys who were holding her in the house because they were

intending to kill her and the baby [...] For the rest of her life she would have been the woman who killed her kidnappers, and the baby would have been the son of that woman. [...] She'd spent thirty years running from one nightmare only to crash headlong into another.” While Joanna seems to have acted in self-defense, the grisly nature of the killing implies that she was reacting as much to her childhood trauma as to the situation at hand, grim as it was. This conclusion confirms that, in the end, Joanna can't outrun her past. It also shows that, haunted by her childhood vulnerability, she'll do anything—even commit crimes—in order to shield her son from the same trauma.

Sixteen-year-old Reggie Chase, who works as a mother's helper for Joanna, fell through the cracks after her mother's death and has no one to look out for her, so she copes by making sure others don't fall through the cracks, too. The narration notes that “[N]obody really took any notice of Reggie at all [...] It was very easy to slip between the cracks, especially if you were small.” Though Reggie's care for vulnerable people seems at times like a potential weakness, her love (motivated by her own loneliness) ultimately saves the day. Reggie is drawn to other vulnerable people. She has no experience with children but gets a job as a nanny for Joanna Hunter on the basis of her empathy: “[Babies] were small, they were helpless, they were confused, and Reggie could easily identify with all of that.” She also provides company to dying, eccentric Ms. MacDonald, her former classics teacher, and even takes responsibility for Ms. MacDonald's remains following her death. Though she's no expert on babies and isn't fond of Ms. MacDonald's religious quirks, her attraction to the lonely and helpless governs her actions. After her mother's drowning death, Reggie learns first aid from Dr. Hunter so that she can rescue anyone else who's in a critical situation. When a catastrophic train wreck occurs nearby, she goes to help without a second thought, even rescuing detective Jackson Brodie's life. Reggie's empathetic, and self-sacrificial attitude suggests that, having been left abandoned and lonely after her mother's death, Reggie is coping with her trauma by preventing that same fate from befalling others.

Because she seems to attract the vulnerable, and so many she has cared about have died, Reggie wonders whether she's truly capable of helping people or whether she's an “angel of death”: “It was like being cursed. [...] [Perhaps] instead of saving [Jackson Brodie] she had killed him, simply by being near him. Not the breath of life but the kiss of death.” Like Joanna Hunter, Reggie is haunted by past trauma, and it seems possible that said trauma compromises her ability to relate to others in a healthy way. Others wonder, too—when Reggie first reports Dr. Hunter's supposed disappearance, cynical police detective Louise Monroe supposes that Reggie “was a romantic, quite possibly a fantasist. Catherine Morland in [Northanger Abbey](#). [...] Training to be a heroine, that was what Catherine Morland had spent her first sixteen years doing, and she wouldn't be

surprised if Reggie Chase had done the same.” However, the truth is that Reggie is the only person who is observant enough to realize that Joanna Hunter is in trouble (she notices Joanna’s car is still parked at her house; she recognizes the baby’s missing blanket) and persistent enough to demand help. Reggie’s love and loyalty leads Jackson Brodie to the Hunters and ultimately saves them.

Atkinson ends the novel on an ambiguous note, not drawing a definitive moral from Joanna’s and Reggie’s respective outcomes. It is unclear whether Joanna and her son will be unscathed by Joanna’s defensive killings, or whether Joanna’s actions have compounded the trauma they’ll both carry throughout their lives. Will Reggie’s loyal affections keep her innocent, or will she, too, experience darker fallout (perhaps through her devotion to Joanna herself)? These questions are left to speculation, but in the world of the novel, even loving intentions, when shaped by one’s past trauma, can lead to unforeseen results.



### APPEARANCES VS. REALITY

In *When Will There Be Good News?*, many characters feel like misfits in their surroundings, cross socio-cultural boundaries, and forge unlikely personal ties in an effort to find meaning in their lives. Sometimes characters embody unusual contrasts, such as Reggie’s bookishness amidst poverty, and Joanna Hunter’s underworld ties amidst middle-class gentility. These improbable boundary-crossings often signal an unresolved tension in a character’s life. Through such contrasts—both relatively innocent ones like Reggie and darker ones like Joanna Hunter’s—Atkinson suggests that people are rarely what they seem, and that outer appearances often mask a more complicated, even ominous reality.

Reggie is a vivid example of the contrast between appearance and reality, as her highbrow passions are at odds with her meager existence. Reggie never fit into the social hierarchy of the “horrible posh school” she attended on scholarship, but she maintains her classical studies even after her circumstances change for the worse, forcing her to drop out. Despite being poor and recently orphaned, Reggie finds studying the classics to be a source of continuity, pride, and enjoyment even while struggling to make ends meet—working two bus journeys away for well-off Dr. Hunter while living in a shoebox-sized apartment in a depressed area. Reggie is drawn to others who embody similar contrasts, spending time with retired classics teacher Ms. MacDonald, who’s helping her prepare for college. Despite Ms. MacDonald’s lack of social graces and the apocalyptic religious views she embraces in her dying days, she, somewhat improbably, owns “every single Loeb Classic that had ever been published, red for Latin, green for Greek.” Ms. MacDonald doesn’t seem like someone who would care about classical literature, but she patiently tutors Reggie and even leaves her an inheritance that will allow Reggie to go to college.

Though Reggie finds aspects of her teacher’s life crazy and even pathetic, she appreciates and cares for her, instinctively understanding that people can’t be neatly categorized. The invasion of Reggie’s intellectual turf symbolizes the vulnerability of this contrast in her life. Reggie’s brother, Billy, uses the beloved Loeb Classics editions to smuggle drugs. Reggie discovers that “Trojan horses had surprising insides and so did Ms. MacDonald’s *Iliad*. When Reggie opened the pages, she found it had been the subject of razor-sharp surgery, its heart cut out in a neat square.” Reggie—herself a “Trojan horse” of a sort—finds that even the spaces she’s carved out for herself as safe havens are subject to violation. This proves to be even more true in the person of Joanna Hunter.

Despite her professional middle-class lifestyle, Joanna Hunter has criminal ties at odds with others’ perceptions of her, especially Reggie’s. Reggie can’t put Joanna Hunter in the same mental category as her brother Billy, who “knew a lot of ungrammatical people.” She is wary of Billy even crossing paths with the Hunters and never tells Dr. Hunter about his existence. Yet, at the end of the novel, there’s an implied connection between Joanna Hunter and Billy. Earlier in the book, Reggie mentions that Billy had stolen a Russian handgun, a Makarov, that their father had brought back from the Gulf War. Much later, after Jackson Brodie comes home to his London flat, he discovers the dead body of Andrew Decker, the killer of Joanna’s mother and siblings, next to a gun: “a Russian number—Makarov, Tokarev, he couldn’t remember—there’d been a lot around in the Gulf.” Later, in an offhand remark, Billy reveals that “At least he had the money that Reggie’s precious doctor gave him for the Makarov. He couldn’t imagine what she wanted it for. Funny old world.” Atkinson gives no further clues in the novel as to how this unlikely collision of worlds has occurred. Reggie insists that she has kept her brother and Joanna Hunter apart, but it turns out that, not only did Dr. Hunter know about Billy, she transacted a gun purchase with him—and was implicitly involved somehow in Decker’s death.

Atkinson leaves many unanswered questions. Did Dr. Hunter’s hiring of the inexperienced Reggie have something to do with a previous connection with Billy? What was the nature of her hinted involvement with Decker’s death? Atkinson explains nothing, only suggesting that no one is quite who they seem to be, and that sometimes the appearances people maintain mask complicated realities. The most shocking such contrast in the novel occurs when Joanna Hunter kills her captors. Just before she is rescued by Reggie and Jackson, Joanna obeys her captors by carefully writing an appeal for rescue. “She crossed the *i*’s and dotted the *t* and underlined the *Please*, and when John came back for the note, she jammed the pen into his eyeball as hard as she could. It surprised her how far it went in.” Hardly missing a beat, she then sings a soothing nursery rhyme to the baby as he wakes up. Far from being a helpless victim, Joanna is, contrary to her impeccably bourgeois and maternal

appearance, prepared to manipulate others and commit violence to save herself and her son. Later, as Detective Louise Monroe talks with Joanna about Andrew Decker's death in London, Joanna mentions an apparently inconsequential visit she'd made to her family's killer before his release from prison. Louise thinks afterward, "Good explanation [...] Worthy of a doctor. But who was to say what else she had murmured to him across the visitors' table. [...] She'd certainly rather fight with [Joanna] than against her." Louise's thoughts suggest, in other words, that Joanna's darker side contrasts starkly with her trustworthy, professional exterior.

While pondering how Andrew Decker could have committed heinous murders, Louise Monroe reflects, "Men like Decker were inadequates, they were loners, maybe they just couldn't stand to see people enjoying the lives they never had." But most of the novel's characters appear to be misfits in one way or another—the difference lies in how they leverage that status. Some, like Reggie, carve out a niche for themselves, defying the assumptions or intrusions of others. Others, like Dr. Hunter, rely on an appearance of normalcy to mask improbably dark ties. As Reggie remarks, "Trojan horses [have] surprising insides," and in her characters, Atkinson allows the tension between inside and outside to go unresolved.



### LIES AND DECEPTIONS

Throughout *When Will There Be Good News?*, characters' relationships are marked by dishonesty: lies, omissions, and deceptions of various kinds.

Often these deceptions are part of the way characters represent—or fail to represent—their own lives to one another. For instance, Reggie doesn't tell Dr. Hunter about her criminal brother, Billy ("She hadn't lied, she had simply left him out of the story of her life"), and Dr. Hunter never mentions her troubled past to Reggie (Reggie "imagined herself saying, 'What's your story, Dr. H.?' but it didn't sound right"). By making lies a key part of the novel's action, Atkinson argues that people tend to construct reality—including representing their own stories—in the ways they imagine best promote their interests. This comes through notably in Jackson Brodie's and Louise Monroe's attitudes toward their respective marriages.

Though Jackson Brodie sees himself as a cynical veteran and ex-cop, he's actually very naïve and gullible, seeing what he wants to see about the people he loves. Jackson doesn't actually know his new wife, Tessa. It's clear from the beginning that his and Tessa's relationship is on a less than fully truthful footing, as Jackson makes a fateful trip to Yorkshire to see his (alleged) son, Nathan, from a past relationship, but doesn't tell Tessa about the trip because he's never mentioned Nathan's existence to her. "So [there were] quite a lot of sins of omission going on, and in such a new marriage, when there should have been no secrets." That there *are* secrets suggests that Jackson is already feeling insecure about his new marriage. Jackson's

gullibility comes through in his attitudes about Tessa herself. Tellingly, he reflects, "He couldn't have designed a better woman. She was [...] much smarter than he was but, unlike the previous women in his life, didn't find it necessary to remind him of this fact at every turn." Though Jackson is self-aware about what he desires in a wife, Tessa's willingness to marry quickly and her lack of transparency fail to raise his suspicions, further underlining his readiness to be deceived. At the end of the book, it's revealed that Jackson's marriage was a mirage after all—Tessa had conned Jackson in cooperation with a mutual friend. No one at her alleged workplace, the British Museum, has ever heard of Tessa, and Jackson discovers that Tessa has cleaned out his financial accounts. "It had all been one big setup, right from that initial 'chance' encounter on Regent Street. Between them they had designed her to appeal to him—the way she looked, the way she behaved, the things she said—and he had fallen like the biggest fool ever." Because Jackson otherwise proves himself to be a competent detective, this event suggests that Jackson talked himself into believing lies out of sheer loneliness.

Detective Louise Monroe's insecurities provide a parallel to Jackson's, as she tells small lies to conceal the fact that she feels like a "bad wife" posing as a "good wife." In contrast to the deceived Jackson, Louise is the deceiver in her marriage. Her dishonesty suggests that she toys with the truth in order to confirm her own reading of the world, much as Jackson believes what he wants to see. For example, after lying to her husband, Patrick, that she didn't have an extensive sexual history before their marriage, she thinks, "Liar, liar, pants on fire. Louise was ever a good deceiver, she often thought that in another life she would have made an excellent con woman [...] She should have said, 'I have no idea how to love another human being unless it's by tearing them to pieces and eating them.'" In other words, Louise doesn't believe herself capable of being "a good wife" and tells relatively superficial lies in hopes of concealing her "real" self for as long as possible. Louise's experience of, in her mind, pretending to be a good wife inclines her to be suspicious of others. When she ponders Joanna Hunter's case, for example, she suspects that she sees a like-minded liar in Joanna: "She suspected that if push came to shove, Joanna Hunter could dissemble with the best of them [...] Had she nurtured revenge in her heart for thirty years and now wanted to execute justice? That was an outlandish idea, people didn't do that. Louise would have [...] but Louise wasn't like other people. Joanna Hunter wasn't like other people either, though, was she?" Louise's perception of being "abnormal" causes her to perceive the same in others, whether that hunch is justified or not. Later, Louise's suspicions are partly confirmed when Joanna casually reveals that she'd gone to visit her family's murderer about a month before his release from prison. "She never said, Louise thought. She had gone to see Joanna Hunter in her lovely home and sat in her lovely living room [...] and she had told her that Andrew Decker had

been released and Joanna Hunter said, 'I thought it must be anytime now.' She didn't lie, she simply didn't tell the truth. Why?" As in Louise's case, Joanna's efforts to conceal the whole truth help to maintain a "lovely" façade where, in fact, there might be uglier facts just under the surface.

After Jackson Brodie rescues Joanna and helps her cover up the evidence that she killed her captors, he realizes his actions have repercussions for his relationships, especially with Louise, a longtime romantic interest: "She was police and he used to be. There was a chasm between them now that could never be bridged because he could never tell her the truth." Lies and omissions, though they are usually intended to protect relationships, actually destabilize them. Arguably, in fact, Atkinson uses the ubiquity of lies in the story to unsettle the reader as well—by the end of the book, the believability of characters' stories about themselves (especially Jackson's, Louise's, and Joanna's) is rather in doubt.



## FAMILY

All of the book's major characters have suffered through major dysfunction in their home lives—often involving the traumatic deaths of loved

ones. Reggie, Jackson, and Joanna all long to piece back together the families that were taken from them when they were young, and they each do this through the means most readily available to them—whether through jobs, childbearing, or even detective work. Through the characters' various attempts to reconstruct their broken families, Atkinson argues that, beyond any biological impulse, the desire for family is fundamentally a longing to secure what has been most lacking in one's life.

For Reggie, family means an affectionate, consistent shared life. Reggie's mother, Jackie Chase, had gone through a series of unhealthy relationships and then abruptly died, so for Reggie, Dr. Hunter and her baby represent a stable, loving home. Until now, she has patched together family relationships wherever she's been able to find them—spending Christmas day with the family of Mr. Hussain, her boss at the corner store, sharing a weekly meal and tutoring session with her old teacher, Ms. MacDonald—but in the Hunter home, she finds what has been lacking throughout her own formative years. Reggie's poignant longing for inclusion in the Hunters' life is evident throughout the novel. Reggie daydreams "that one day soon Dr. Hunter might say, 'Why go home, Reggie? Why not move in here?' and then they would be a proper family — Dr. Hunter, Reggie, and the baby and the **dog**. ([Mr. Hunter] didn't really figure in Reggie's daydream of family life.)" This daydream suggests that Reggie isn't so much looking for a traditional household configuration; she just longs for an environment in which she can find constancy and affection.

Short of being able to join the Hunter household, Reggie immerses herself in the pattern of the family's life as their

nanny, learning the baby's habits and Dr. Hunter's comings and goings. This caretaking instinct—interpreted cynically as an "overexcited imagination" and "training to be heroine" by Louise Monroe—eventually leads to the Hunters' disappearance being investigated, and their lives being saved. In a way, then, Reggie's care for the Hunters is an attempt to prevent the disintegration she felt powerless to stop in her biological family. For Jackson Brodie, despite multiple long-term relationships and children, the nearest thing to family is the collection of those he's protected and defended over the years as a cop and detective. Jackson grew up in a dysfunctional household (it had "a whole vocabulary of violence. It was the nearest they could get to expressing love for one another") and then his beloved sister was murdered at 18. He describes his attitude toward family as a kind of herding instinct: "Jackson was a shepherd, he couldn't rest until the flock was accounted for, all gathered safely in. It was his calling and his curse. Protect and serve." Like both Reggie and Joanna, he feels compelled to save the vulnerable.

As Jackson makes up his mind to search for the missing Joanna, he reveals the fatherly instinct that undergirds his detective work: "She had been found once, she would be found again. She wasn't Joanna Hunter anymore. She wasn't a GP or a wife [...]. She was a little girl out in the dark, dirty and stained with her mother's blood." At the end of the novel, it's revealed that Jackson, as a young soldier, was among the search party who found the orphaned Joanna after her family was killed, not long after his own sister had died. So, in a way, his entire career has been framed by this impulse to gather and care for the vulnerable. Jackson's personal experiences with loss are reflected in the fierce emotions he experiences when he meets his young son, Nathan: "Love wasn't sweet and light, it was visceral and overpowering. [...] Love was ferocious, love knew how to play dirty." It seems that his "shepherding" instinct informs his fatherhood rather than vice versa, especially since his ex-girlfriend, Julia, denies his paternity, making it impossible for Jackson to gather the boy into his "flock." His sense of helplessness in this matter only deepens his desperation to find and help others.

Joanna Hunter shares Jackson's perception of love as "ferocious" and "dirty," especially when new motherhood reconnects her to the sense of family she lost at such an early age. Joanna's family of origin had been obliterated in an unthinkable act of violence when Joanna was only six years old. All her life, therefore, she has been "longing for something that she could no longer remember." Having been so abruptly deprived of a tangible family, she struggles to piece together an approximation of one as an adult. With her husband, Neil, "[i]t wasn't a real life, it was the simulacrum of one, but it worked. [...] And then she had the baby and her love for him breathed life into the simulacrum and it became genuine." This suggests that, for Joanna, family love is something more than simply creating a household; becoming a mother awakens a visceral

survival instinct and allows her to somehow reconfigure in the present what she lost as a child. This comes across most clearly when Joanna kills her captors at the end of the novel, doing for her son what she couldn't do for her mother and sisters as a helpless child.

The novel's picture of family love is best summed up when, in a domestic scene near the beginning of the book, Dr. Hunter and Reggie are bathing baby Gabriel Joseph. Dr. Hunter suddenly tells Reggie, "There isn't a template, a pattern that we're supposed to follow. [...] What you have to remember, Reggie, is that the only important thing is love. Do you understand?" Reggie doesn't understand what has prompted Dr. Hunter's words, but as she proves through the rest of the novel, she instinctively understands a family life founded on shared bonds of affection, commitment, and fierce loyalty. All the book's major characters yearn for this, in fact, though none of them find it without disillusionment and heartache.



## SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



## DOGS

In *When Will There Be Good News?*, Atkinson uses dogs to symbolize faithful companionship and protection, particularly when humans fail to provide the same. Most often, this symbol works on a and direct level. For example, Jessica Mason's dog, Scout, tries to protect the family from being killed by Andrew Decker, and, later, search dogs find Joanna Mason lost in the wheat field, saving her life. In adulthood, Joanna trusts the loyal German Shepherd, Sadie, with her own and the baby's life. Later, Sadie proves herself faithful to Reggie as well, biting Billy to stop him from attacking his sister. Although Joanna and Reggie both face continuous trauma at the hands of other people, dogs like Scout and Sadie are ongoing representations of the good that still exists in the world. Additionally, The elderly terrier, Banjo, elicits "soppy, maternal love" from the prickly Ms. MacDonald, who is practically alone in the world. Extending the symbol to a metaphor for human behavior, Atkinson has Jackson Brodie frequently think of himself as a herding dog who "couldn't rest until the flock was [...] all gathered safely in." At the end of the book, Jackson even sends Louise a Border Collie puppy, the anonymous gift tag reading, "A Faithful Friend." After destroying a crime scene and lying about it, Jackson believes he can no longer be the friend that Louise (a cop) deserves, but the puppy (whom she names Jackson) symbolizes his continued watchful devotion in her life, in spite of his personal failings.



## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Little, Brown and Company edition of *When Will There Be Good News?* published in 2008.

### Harvest Quotes

☹️ Of course, she should have taken Joseph with her, she should have snatched him from the buggy, or run with the buggy (Jessica would have). It didn't matter that Joanna was only six years old, that she would never have managed running with the buggy and that the man would have caught her in seconds, that wasn't the point. It would have been better to have tried to save the baby and been killed than not trying and living. It would have been better to have died with Jessica and her mother rather than being left behind without them. But she never thought about any of that, she just did as she was told.

"Run, Joanna, run," her mother commanded. So she did.

It was funny, but now, thirty years later, the thing that drove her to distraction was that she couldn't remember what the dog was called. And there was no one left to ask.

**Related Characters:** Andrew Decker, Gabrielle Mason, Jessica Mason, Joseph Mason, Joanna Mason Hunter (Dr. Hunter)

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 11

### Explanation and Analysis

This quote sums up the mature Joanna Hunter's reflections on the terrible trauma she experienced as a small child: the murder of her mother and siblings before her eyes. It also suggests that Joanna has replayed the events countless times over the years, thinking about how she might have handled things differently, despite the fact that she was only six years old and helpless when it happened. She attributes her survival to the fact that, in contrast to her spirited older sister, Jessica, Joanna was a timid, obedient little girl. These thoughts suggest that, even with an adult perspective, Joanna blames herself for not being brave enough and perhaps even for not being the right sister to survive—perhaps Jessica would have done better. This shows just how devastating this event was for Joanna and establishes its ongoing weight in her life and identity. Her inability to remember the dog's name also underlines the fact that her entire family was eliminated at once; she has

no remaining connection to her childhood or anyone to confirm or correct her memories (implying that perhaps Joanna's memories can't be fully trusted).

## The Life and Adventures of Reggie Chase Quotes

●● Reggie had never actually had a close encounter with a one-year-old child before, or indeed any small children, but what was there to know? They were small, they were helpless, they were confused, and Reggie could easily identify with all of that. And it wasn't that long since she had been a child herself, although she had an "old soul," a fortune-teller had told her. Body of a child, mind of an old woman. Old before her time.

**Related Characters:** Joanna Mason Hunter (Dr. Hunter), Gabriel Joseph Hunter ("the baby"), Regina "Reggie" Chase

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 24

### Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Reggie Chase thinks about how she got her job as a mother's helper for Joanna Hunter, caring for baby Gabriel Joseph. Reggie lies to Dr. Hunter about her childcare experience, but figures that she has enough in common with a small, helpless human to make things work. Her sense of being an "old soul" also hints at tragedy that Reggie has undergone herself at a young age—something she has in common with Joanna Hunter, although she doesn't know this until much later. The contrast between Reggie's childlike exterior and her relatively mature and courageous outlook on the world is a recurring theme in the novel. Notably, also, there isn't much of a hint as to how Reggie gained her position with the Hunters—later, it turns out that Dr. Hunter knows and has probably even purchased a gun from Reggie's troublemaking brother, Billy, whom Reggie has taken pains to keep away from her beloved employer. There is always more to Dr. Hunter than even Reggie, for all her idolizing of Joanna, suspects.

●● On one of these evenings, apropos of nothing (apropos was another new word), when Dr. Hunter and Reggie were giving the baby a bath, Dr. Hunter turned to Reggie and said, "You know there are no rules," and Reggie said, "Really?" because she could think of a lot of rules, like cutting grapes in half and wearing a cap when you went swimming, not to mention separating all the rubbish for the recycling bins [...] She said, "No, not those kinds of things, I mean the way we live our lives. There isn't a template, a pattern that we're supposed to follow. There's no one watching us to see if we're doing it properly, there is no properly, we just make it up as we go along."

Reggie wasn't entirely sure that she knew what Dr. Hunter was talking about. The baby was distracting her, squawking and splashing like a mad sea creature.

"What you have to remember, Reggie, is that the only important thing is love. Do you understand?"

**Related Characters:** Joanna Mason Hunter (Dr. Hunter), Gabriel Joseph Hunter ("the baby"), Regina "Reggie" Chase

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 49

### Explanation and Analysis

These quiet domestic scene at the Hunters' house is loaded with hints about the larger story. There is a contrast between Dr. Hunter's own strict adherence to rules and her assertion that there *aren't* any rules. Having lost her own baby brother as a child, Joanna establishes all kinds of household regulations—arguably rather paranoid ones—to ensure that baby Gabriel Joseph is as safe as possible. It's as though putting guardrails around every part of his life, like cutting grapes in half, can insulate him from disaster—something Joanna herself surely knows isn't possible, yet does anyway, as a way of coping with her past loss. Reggie's ignorance of Joanna's past in this regard is obvious; she takes Dr. Hunter's "no rules" claim at face value. Indeed, what Joanna means is not entirely clear, but as will become evident later in the story, she doesn't refer to love in terms of soft affection, but of a fierce willingness to protect her loved ones at any cost. Having grown up without a conventional family structure or typical expectations for her life, Dr. Hunter believes that there's no bigger pattern to adhere to—you do what you must to survive. Reggie will come to understand what Dr. Hunter's outlook on "rules" and "love" mean as the coming days unfold.

## To Brig o' Dread Thou Com'st at Last Quotes

☛☛ The mechanics of fatherhood turned out to be infinitely more primitive. He fingered the plastic bag in his pocket. A different pregnancy, a different child. His. He remembered the surge of emotion he had felt earlier in the day when he had touched Nathan's small head. Love. Love wasn't sweet and light, it was visceral and overpowering. Love wasn't patient, love wasn't kind. Love was ferocious, love knew how to play dirty.

**Related Characters:** Julia, Nathan, Jackson Brodie

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 87

### Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Jackson is reflecting on fatherhood as he rides toward Edinburgh on the train, reflecting on his just-completed errand of stealing a lock of Nathan's hair, presumably for paternity testing. Though the details of Jackson's past with Julia aren't revealed, Jackson is convinced that Julia's son Nathan is his, while Julia flatly denies it and won't allow Jackson in Nathan's life. Jackson's reflection that "love knew how to play dirty" also sums up the parental love seen elsewhere in the novel, especially from Joanna, as she fights for her baby's life by killing their captors and then destroying the evidence. For both of them, there is something "primitive" about love that can't be contained within neat, decorous categories. Finally, the title of this chapter, "To Brig o'Dread Thou Com'st at Last," is a line from the bleak English folk song, "The Lyke Wake Dirge," that Jackson has stuck in his head during his time in Yorkshire. The song depicts a soul's journey from earth to purgatory, reflecting Jackson's own feeling of being stuck between worlds as he tries to make sense of his relationship to Nathan.

## The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie Quotes

☛☛ Andrew Decker didn't destroy his own family, he destroyed someone else's. He destroyed Howard Mason's. Men like Decker were inadequates, they were loners, maybe they just couldn't stand to see people enjoying the lives they never had. A mother and her children, wasn't that the bond at the heart of everything?

Hide or run? Louise hoped she would stand and fight. If you were on your own, you could fight, if you were on your own, you could run. You couldn't do either when you were with children. You could try. Gabrielle Mason had tried, her hands and arms were covered in defensive wounds where she had tried to stave off Andrew Decker's knife.

**Related Characters:** Gabrielle Mason, Howard Mason, Andrew Decker, Louise Monroe

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 120

### Explanation and Analysis

Police detective Louise Monroe is sitting outside the home of Alison Needler, a woman who lives in a safe house, in an attempt to protect herself and her family from her homicidal husband. Louise is obsessed with Alison's story, as well as with other women who are attacked by men, like Joanna Hunter. Most of the time, the women in such scenarios do one of two things: hide or run. Louise hopes that if she ever finds herself in such a situation, she will be in a position to fight, unfettered by the need to protect anyone else. She also reflects on the motives of men who attack in this way. A man like Andrew Decker is a mystery because he had no connection to the Mason family whatsoever, Louise figures that he acted out of his own rage at not having a family. However, Louise herself struggles with the sense of being "inadequate" and a "loner," a self-conception that haunts her marriage and friendships throughout the book, and she only seems to find purpose by channeling this loneliness into her own quest to watch over vulnerable women like Alison and Joanna.

The chapter title, "The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie," is the title of a 1972 French surrealist film in which an upper-middle-class dinner party is repeatedly interrupted. This is a wry reference to the fact that, while Louise is parked outside the Needler house, lost in thought, she is supposed to be preparing a fancy dinner party for her new husband and in-laws.

## Funny Old World Quotes

☛☛ Reggie opened the front door and stuck her head out into the wind and rain. "A train's crashed," a man said to her. "Right out back." Reggie picked up the phone in the hall and dialed 999. Dr. Hunter had told her that in an emergency everyone presumed that someone else would call. Reggie wasn't going to be that person who presumed.

"Back soon," she said to Banjo, pulling on her jacket. She picked up the big torch that Ms. MacDonald kept by the fuse box at the front door, put the house keys in her pocket, pulled the door shut behind her, and ran out into the rain. The world wasn't going to end this night. Not if Reggie had anything to do with it. What larks, Reggie!

**Related Characters:** Banjo, Ms. MacDonald, Joanna Mason Hunter (Dr. Hunter), Regina “Reggie” Chase

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 136

### Explanation and Analysis

This quote describes the immediate aftermath of the train crash that occurs in Musselburgh, Scotland, right outside where Reggie is staying. It also provides insight into Reggie’s character. Reggie provides company and help for her old classics teacher, Ms. MacDonald, and is watching over Ms. MacDonald’s old dog, Banjo, when the crash occurs. When she hears what’s happened, Reggie instantly springs into action. Reggie recently lost her own mother to a drowning accident, so she has made a point of learning first aid from her employer, Dr. Joanna Hunter. She doesn’t hesitate to put her newfound skills into practice as soon as she learns that people are in need, no doubt thinking of her mother’s helplessness and not wanting to assume that others will rise to the occasion. This illustrates Reggie’s quickness to come to others’ defense, especially those who are vulnerable and defenseless—a position she personally knows too well. The phrase, “What larks, Reggie!” is a reference to the expression, “What larks, Pip!” found throughout Dickens’s *Great Expectations*, which is one of the literary works Reggie is focusing on in preparation for her university entrance exams. Such references often pop up in Reggie’s thoughts and conversation, showing both her love for her literary studies and the whimsical outlook on life that helps her cope with daily hardships.

## Reggie Chase, Girl Detective Quotes

☛☛ This was the third dead body Reggie had seen in her life. Ms. MacDonald, Mum, and the soldier last night. Four if you counted Banjo. It seemed a lot for a person of so few years.

She’d identified a dead body, had her flat vandalized, and been threatened by violent idiots, and it wasn’t even lunchtime. Reggie hoped the rest of the day would be more uneventful.

**Related Characters:** Banjo, Jackie Chase, Ms. MacDonald, Regina “Reggie” Chase

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 187

### Explanation and Analysis

This quote sums up the series of events 16-year-old Reggie faces in the first half of the novel and how she copes with those tragedies. Reggie has to identify the body of Ms. MacDonald, who died when her car crashed onto the train track (thus causing the train wreck as well). The previous night, Reggie had helped resuscitate Jackson Brodie, who was bleeding out from an artery and approaching death as a result of the train crash; while doing so, she’d passed by the soldier whom Jackson had pulled out of the wreckage, who didn’t make it. Before all this, of course, Reggie’s mother had died in an accident while on vacation. The overall effect of all these deaths is to make Reggie suspect that she’s an “angel of death” whose mere presence invites catastrophe. The fact that her flat is vandalized by drug dealers—an event brought on by Reggie’s brother, Billy—does nothing to dissuade her from this assumption. However, Reggie’s dry humor and concern for others keep her from becoming too morbid or self-pitying—as shown by the fact that, even after all this happens, she immediately goes to the Hunters’ house to track down the whereabouts of her beloved employer, Joanna Hunter, who’s gone missing. Reggie’s youthful resilience, spurred by her childlike admiration for Dr. Hunter, works to her advantage throughout the novel, keeping her from becoming jaded and cynical like some of the other characters do. If it weren’t for this attitude, Dr. Hunter would likely not be found at the end of the novel.

## “An Elderly Aunt” Quotes

☛☛ Louise sighed inwardly. The girl was one of those. An overexcited imagination, could get stuck on an idea and be carried away by it. She was a romantic, quite possibly a fantasist. Catherine Morland in [Northanger Abbey](#). Reggie Chase was a girl who would find something of interest wherever she went. Training to be a heroine, that was what Catherine Morland had spent her first sixteen years doing, and she wouldn’t be surprised if Reggie Chase had done the same.

**Related Characters:** Joanna Mason Hunter (Dr. Hunter), Regina “Reggie” Chase, Louise Monroe

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 207

### Explanation and Analysis

In Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey*, Catherine Morland is a naïve teenage girl who loves Gothic novels and wants to

experience a thrilling mystery in her own life. Jaded police detective Louise Monroe meets Reggie at Starbucks when Reggie insists on sharing the clues she's collected pertaining to Joanna Hunter's disappearance, and Louise supposes that Reggie Chase is a modern-day Catherine Morland. She figures that Reggie, inclined toward dramatics in her everyday life, is seeing disaster in events that actually have a perfectly ordinary explanation. Ironically, though (and unlike Catherine Morland) Reggie is actually correct in her belief that something is wrong with Joanna, and her clues—things she's noticed because of her deep devotion and love for Joanna's family—do point to the truth that Joanna has been kidnapped. Louise is right, in a sense, that Reggie has been "training to be a heroine"—but in a different way than she imagines (through personal loyalty to Joanna, not through a gift for melodrama). Humorously, too, both Louise and Reggie have a tendency to see literary references wherever they go (Louise has a master's degree in literature). So, despite Louise's and Reggie's very different personalities, cynical Louise has an imaginative streak herself.

## Grave Danger Quotes

☛☛ Andrew Decker was fifty years old and he was free. Joseph would have been thirty-one, Jessica would have been thirty-eight, their mother sixty-four. [...]

Sometimes she felt like a spy, a sleeper who had been left in a foreign country and forgotten about. Had forgotten about herself. [...]

The baby woke with a squawk and she held him tightly to her chest and shushed him, cradling the back of his head with her hand. There were no limits to what you would do to protect your child. But what if you couldn't protect him, no matter how much you tried?

He was free. Something ticked over, a click in time, like a secret signal, a cue, implanted in her mind long ago. The bad men were all out, roaming the streets. [...]

*Run, Joanna, run.*

**Related Characters:** Gabriel Joseph Hunter ("the baby"), Gabrielle Mason, Jessica Mason, Joseph Mason, Andrew Decker, Joanna Mason Hunter (Dr. Hunter)

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 229

### Explanation and Analysis

After Joanna Hunter disappears, she is seldom heard from in the story, with the exception of a couple of short chapters

consisting chiefly of Joanna's reflections. Because the circumstances and the setting are concealed in this chapter—all that's shown is that Joanna is isolated somewhere with her baby—the reader is pulled into the primal fear Joanna is feeling, the sense of being cut-off and helpless. This passage also provides misdirection, allowing the reader to assume that Andrew Decker is the one who's after Joanna, which is disproven by the end of the book. Here, Joanna is thinking about the fact that Decker, the killer of her family, has just been released from prison, which leads her to wondering what her family members would have been like had they survived. As the only survivor, Joanna has gone through life with the feeling of being a forgotten "spy," watching others live their ordinary lives but unable to achieve a normal life herself—until, that is, the baby is born. Now that she's a mother herself, Joanna's life becomes more "real" and also much more vulnerable as a result. Her biggest fear is finding herself in a situation like her own mother, Gabrielle, unable to protect her children from harm. With Decker now free, the "secret signal" in her mind primes her to do everything possible to protect the baby. She hears this signal in her mind as an echo of her mother's last words, urging her to run for her life.

## Jackson Risen Quotes

☛☛ In the dream he had opened his heart and let Louise in. The dream had unsettled him. Tessa hadn't existed in the dream world, as if she had never entered his life. The train crash had caused a rift in his world, an earthquake crack that seemed to have put an impossible distance between him and the life he shared with Tessa. New wife, new life. He had proposed to her the day after Louise texted him to tell him she was getting married, it had never struck him at the time that the two things might have been related. But then he'd never been much good at figuring out the anatomy of his behavior. (Women, on the other hand, seemed to find him transparent.)

**Related Characters:** Tessa Webb, Louise Monroe, Jackson Brodie

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 234

### Explanation and Analysis

This quote, at the point in the story when Jackson is still hospitalized after the train crash, sums up the confusing situation in Jackson's personal life. Jackson and Louise began a platonic but powerful friendship some years ago

while working together, and their feelings for one another have never faded, despite the fact that each of them has since married. While Jackson is still groggy in the hospital, Louise comes to visit him, and Jackson assumes it must have been a dream. He's troubled because the "dream" Louise is far more vivid and desirable to him than his real wife, Tessa, who is only mentioned in the book after Jackson emerges from amnesia. The train crash, with its near-death experience and the confusing jumble of dreams, memories, and emotions it stirs up for Jackson, is a point of reckoning in his life. He's forced to deal with his feelings for Louise, and even after he returns home to Tessa, he soon learns that she's duped him and cleaned out his bank accounts—confirming his hunch that his marriage was a sham all along. This sequence of events illustrates Jackson's fundamentally gullible character when it comes to love and relationships. He struggles to understand his own behavior and to maintain healthy relationships, while making himself vulnerable to people who take him for granted (like Tessa).

## Abide with Me Quotes

☹️ Joanna didn't believe in God, how could she, but she believed in the existence of the soul, believed indeed in the transference of the soul, and although she wouldn't have stood up at a scientific conference and declared it, she also believed that she carried the souls of her dead family inside her and one day the baby would do the same for her. Just because you were a rational and skeptical atheist didn't mean that you didn't have to get through every day the best way you could. There were no rules.

The best days of her life had been when she was pregnant and the baby was still safe inside her. Once you were out in the world, then the rain fell on your face and the wind lifted your hair and the sun beat down on you and the path stretched ahead of you and evil walked on it.

**Related Characters:** Gabriel Joseph Hunter ("the baby"), Joseph Mason, Jessica Mason, Gabrielle Mason, Joanna Mason Hunter (Dr. Hunter)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 271

### Explanation and Analysis

This quote provides further insight into Joanna Hunter's mind while she is being held captive and has little to do besides think about her past. It especially gives a glimpse of the thought processes behind her life philosophy, "there are

no rules." Joanna is an atheist and prides herself on her scientifically rational outlook, but that doesn't stop her from clinging to beliefs that help her manage her grief (namely, that the souls of her murdered family live on through her life and the baby's life). What others might see as inconsistency, Joanna sees merely as survival. Whereas the young Joanna had preferred to be guided by others and obedient to a fault, mature Joanna, coping with the loss of her family, decides that it's up to her to find meaning in her life, even if her findings don't accord with others' "rules." Joanna was happiest when carrying the baby safely inside her; now that he's out in the world, she imagines herself back on the country lane ("the sun beat down on you and the path stretched ahead of you..."), both of them exposed and vulnerable to "evil." This helps explain Joanna's violent actions later in the book as well.

☹️ She couldn't really remember any of them, but that didn't stop them from still possessing a reality that was stronger than anything alive, apart from the baby, of course. They were the touchstone to which everything else must look and the exemplar compared to which everything else failed. Except for the baby.

She was bereft, her whole life an act of bereavement, longing for something that she could no longer remember. Sometimes in the night, in dreams, she heard their old dog barking and it brought back a memory of grief so raw that it led her to wonder about killing the baby, and then herself, both of them slipping away on something as peaceful as poppies so that nothing hideous could ever happen to him. A contingency plan for when you were cornered, for when you couldn't run.

**Related Characters:** Gabriel Joseph Hunter ("the baby"), Joseph Mason, Jessica Mason, Gabrielle Mason, Joanna Mason Hunter (Dr. Hunter)

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 271

### Explanation and Analysis

As Joanna reflects on the family she's lost, she can't remember much about them—she was only six years old when her mother, older sister, and baby brother died. Over the years, though, they've become the most powerful reality in Joanna's world—an abstraction of family for which she constantly longs, but can never attain. The baby is the

nearest Joanna can come to reclaiming her lost family. Interestingly, she never thinks of him by his real name—Gabriel Joseph—but only refers to him as “the baby,” as if tacitly acknowledging that he symbolizes a reality of wholeness and familial love much bigger than his small self. Joanna’s desperation to protect him, therefore—in everything from her obsession with safety to her willingness to kill on his behalf—is also an attempt to strike back at the killer of her family, to somehow bring closure to her lifelong bereavement. This also explains why she would sooner kill the baby than lose him, if they found themselves in a situation where Joanna could no longer run.

### Reggie Chase, Warrior Virgin Quotes

☝️ She picked it up. Same neat hole cut into its center. She ran a finger around the sides of the little paper coffin. Was someone hiding secrets inside Ms. MacDonald’s Loeb Classics? All of them? Or only the ones that she needed for her A level? The cutout hole was the work of someone who was good with his hands. Someone who might have had a future as a joiner but instead became a street dealer hanging around on corners, pale and shifty. He was higher up the pyramid now, but Billy was someone with no sense of loyalty. Someone who would take from the hand that fed him, and hide what he took in secret little boxes.

Reggie didn’t mean to cry, but she was so tired and so small and her face hurt where the book had hit it and the world was so full of big men telling people they were dead. “*Sweet little wife, pretty little baby.*”

Where did a person go when they had no one to turn to and nowhere left to run?

**Related Characters:** Gabriel Joseph Hunter (“the baby”), Joanna Mason Hunter (Dr. Hunter), Billy Chase, Ms. MacDonald, Regina “Reggie” Chase

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 281

#### Explanation and Analysis

When Reggie attempts to go back to her apartment to retrieve her phone charger, she discovers that her flat—its contents already trashed by thugs—has now been burned down. As she leaves the scene, one of the thugs throws a book—the Loeb Classics edition of Virgil’s *Aeneid*—at her. Reggie discovers that it’s been hollowed out inside. The handiwork is skilled, and she recognizes it as that of her brother, Billy, who had once showed promise as a future

joiner (a carpentry-related profession) but has since fallen into more and more serious crimes. Reggie later figures out that the hollowed-out books are meant to house packets of heroin, but right now, the ruined book just strikes her as one more piece of her life being taken away from her—this time her beloved classic literature, a lifeline after her mother’s death and her dropping out of school. The thugs’ threats also echo the warnings of Mr. Hunter’s associates, who warn him that Joanna and the baby will be killed if he doesn’t come up with money or goes to the police. Reggie feels stuck in a world controlled by dangerous men with power. Even at this low moment, however, she’s soon able to return to her resourceful self, turning to Jackson Brodie (who, battered from the train crash, is rather the opposite of dangerous or powerful) for help.

### The Prodigal Wife Quotes

☝️ He had no idea how sexually incontinent Louise had been in her life and she wasn’t about to enlighten him [...] “A handful of guys – if that – pretty long-term relationships, really. Lost my virginity at eighteen to a boy I’d been going out with for a couple of years.”

Liar, liar, pants on fire. Louise was ever a good deceiver, she often thought that in another life she would have made an excellent con woman. Who knows, maybe even in this life, it wasn’t over yet, after all.

She should have told the truth. She should have told the truth about everything. She should have said, “I have no idea how to love another human being unless it’s by tearing them to pieces and eating them.”

**Related Characters:** Patrick Brennan, Louise Monroe

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 290

#### Explanation and Analysis

Throughout the novel, Atkinson often has characters wander off on personal tangents in their thoughts, prompted by the events right in front of them. Louise’s musings here are a good example. As she and her protégé, Marcus, head for Yorkshire to search for clues to Joanna’s whereabouts, she can’t help comparing Marcus’s youthful naivete to her own, more reckless youth. She had many relationships before her current marriage to Patrick, many of them with much older men. The point isn’t Louise’s sexual history, but her inability to be honest about it with Patrick.

Louise believes that Patrick is too good for her and feels that she's constantly pretending to be "a good wife" while actually feeling trapped in her newly stable, upper-middle-class existence. So she keeps Patrick at an emotional distance by lying to him, trying to postpone the day when he'll realize how damaged Louise (in her own mind) really is. She believes her underlying problem is that she has no idea how to love. By constantly believing the worst about herself, Louise creates a self-fulfilling prophecy, making plans to leave Patrick by the end of the book. Yet her decision to bear the child she's carrying ("the door in her heart had been wedged open") also suggests that she's not as devoid of love as she believes herself to be.

☞ Louise was an urbanite, she preferred the gut-thrilling sound of an emergency siren slicing through the night to the noise of country birds at dawn. Pub brawls, rickety roadworks, mugged tourists, the badlands on a Saturday night — they all made sense, they were part of the huge, dirty, torn social fabric. There was a war raging out there in the city and she was part of the fight, but the countryside unsettled her because she didn't know who the enemy was. She had always preferred [North and South](#) to [Wuthering Heights](#). All that demented running around the moors, identifying yourself with the scenery, not a good role model for a woman.

**Related Characters:** Louise Monroe

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 297

### Explanation and Analysis

When Louise drives to Yorkshire in search of Joanna Hunter, she finds herself ill at ease amidst the rural scenery and picturesque villages. Louise feels at home in the middle of the crime, noise, and urban strife of Edinburgh, fighting for justice. In the absence of those things, she loses her sense of self because she doesn't know what or whom to fight. Showing her background as a student of literature (an incongruous past that suggests that Louise is more complex than she lets on), Louise compares rural Yorkshire to the bleak moors of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*. She feels much more at home with the industrial unrest depicted in *North and South*, where problems are more readily named and good and bad more easily categorized. This comparison also points to Louise's larger internal conflict at this point in the story—she understood her life better when dealing with her son's behavioral problems as a single mother, but now

that her life has taken a turn for the more conventional, she feels disoriented, unsure how to name the conflicts in her life and determine what side she's on.

☞ She suspected that if push came to shove, Joanna Hunter could dissemble with the best of them.

She had run and hidden once, now she was doing it again. She must have been upset by Decker's release. She was the same age as her mother when she was murdered, her baby was the same age as her brother. Might she do something stupid? To herself? To Decker? Had she nurtured revenge in her heart for thirty years and now wanted to execute justice? That was an outlandish idea, people didn't do that. Louise would have done [...] but Louise wasn't like other people. Joanna Hunter wasn't like other people either, though, was she?

**Related Characters:** Andrew Decker, Joanna Mason Hunter (Dr. Hunter), Louise Monroe

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 302

### Explanation and Analysis

Louise continues to ponder Joanna Hunter, with whom she has an admitted fixation. She sees Joanna as a "good survivor," whereas Louise, having grown up neglected by an alcoholic mother, feels like a "bad survivor." Louise's attitudes toward Joanna are an interesting contrast with Reggie's attitudes. Where Reggie idolizes Joanna and sees her in the best possible light, Louise sees Joanna in light of her own cynicism and anger at the world, so she assumes that Joanna would make the same choices she would, including vengeful ones. In the end, Reggie's loyal watchfulness is what leads to Joanna's rescue, because she knows Joanna's routine so intimately that she can sense when something isn't right. By contrast, Louise, assuming that Joanna's competence and desire to take revenge into her own hands, doesn't move as quickly to intervene when Joanna disappears. What Louise gets right, though—and what Reggie's loyalty makes her unwilling to see—is that Joanna, like Louise, is a practiced liar, which is what ultimately protects her (at least by the end of the book) from being prosecuted for the deaths of her captors. This quote is a good example of the ways that some of Atkinson's characters view one another through the lens of their own weaknesses, supporting Atkinson's theme of the underlying fragility of human relationships, especially when people fail to tell each other the truth.

## Road Trip Quotes

“So your whole identity, basically. What if Decker’s using it? You get the driving license of a Category A prisoner with a warrant out against him, and he gets you — upstanding citizen (so-called) — credit cards, money, keys, a phone. The last person who phoned Joanna Hunter on Wednesday called on your phone, your BlackBerry, so perhaps it was Decker. He phones Joanna Hunter and then she disappears. Neil Hunter says she left at seven but we only have his word for it. Maybe she left later, after the phone call. And if she did drive away— somehow or other, not in her car, not in a rental — and she wasn’t driving down to see the aunt, then where was she going? To meet someone else? Decker? Did he catch the train to Edinburgh because they had arranged a meeting? He gets derailed, literally, he phones her afterwards, and she goes off to meet him.”

**Related Characters:** Louise Monroe (speaker), Andrew Decker, Neil Hunter, Joanna Mason Hunter (Dr. Hunter), Jackson Brodie

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 325

### Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Louise outlines the central questions surrounding Joanna’s disappearance as she drives Jackson and Reggie back to Edinburgh, following the wild goose chase to track down Joanna’s aunt (long dead and estranged from her, as it turns out). Several of the questions Louise poses here are never fully resolved. In particular, it’s never made clear how Andrew Decker’s identity is swapped with Jackson Brodie’s, except that it occurred at the scene of the Musselburgh train crash. This misleads the characters into assuming that Joanna must have gone in pursuit of Andrew Decker, or else that Decker had gone after Joanna. This, of course, turns out to be a huge misdirection, since Joanna is taken captive by her husband’s business associates, and the disappearance has no obvious connection to Decker, or the timing of his release from prison, whatsoever. This is an example of Atkinson’s fondness for coincidences in her storytelling—surprising connections between characters and events that are left mysterious instead of being tidily wrapped up at the end of the novel. Her bigger goal in the novel is to place her characters in crisis situations, revealing their various ways of dealing with their traumatic pasts, instead of taking a more conventional mystery-solving approach.

## High Noon Quotes

“She had been found once, she would be found again. She wasn’t Joanna Hunter anymore. She wasn’t a GP or a wife, she wasn’t Reggie’s employer (“and friend”), she wasn’t the woman that Louise was concerned about. She was a little girl out in the dark, dirty and stained with her mother’s blood. She was a little girl who was fast asleep in the middle of a field of wheat as men and dogs streamed unknowingly towards her, lighting their way with torches and moonlight.”

**Related Characters:** Regina “Reggie” Chase, Louise Monroe, Joanna Mason Hunter (Dr. Hunter), Jackson Brodie

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 337

### Explanation and Analysis

Jackson Brodie’s troubled past quietly haunts the novel, even though he never narrates his struggles in detail, such as the murder of his beloved sister when Jackson himself was only a teenager. One thing that’s made clear is that Jackson’s “shepherd” instinct—to gather up and guard his “flock” of victims to ensure they’re safe—originates with this tragedy in his youth. This quote is a prime example of that instinct. At first, Jackson had reluctantly agreed to help Reggie search for Joanna because he was desperate to escape the hospital. Now, however, he is fully invested in finding her. But it’s not just because of his drive to protect vulnerable women, but because of his link to this specific woman 30 years ago. It turns out that Jackson, recently bereaved of his sister, had been on the search team that hunted for Joanna when she was a little girl. Here, he thinks of her not as Reggie’s beloved Dr. Hunter, or as Louise’s obsession, but as the little girl lost in the field. Jackson’s ability to place Joanna in that situation again, and himself in the position of rescuer, shows both his compassion and also the degree to which he’s still affected by the tragic events of his teen years. Finding Joanna the first time was a kind of catharsis for him, a tribute to his dead sister. Because of that, he can’t fail Joanna this time.

## La Règle du Jeu Quotes

☝☝ Margaret, are you grieving Over Goldengrove unleaving, summer is icumin in, loude sing cuckoo, there was an old lady who swallowed a fly, Adam lay ybounden bounden in a bond and miles to go before I sleep, five little bluebirds hopping by the door. Run, run Joanna run. But she couldn't run because she was tethered by the rope, like an animal. She thought of animals gnawing off a leg to escape from a trap and she had tried tearing at the rope with her teeth, but it was made from polypropylene and she couldn't make any inroad on it.

She knew that this was the dark place she had always been destined to find again. Just because a terrible thing happened to you once didn't mean it couldn't happen again.

**Related Characters:** Joanna Mason Hunter (Dr. Hunter)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 343

### Explanation and Analysis

Throughout the novel, Joanna constantly sings nursery rhymes and recites scraps of poetry to the baby to comfort him. On one hand, this quote's stream of consciousness shows the distress Joanna is under while she's being held captive. On the other hand, it also suggests that Joanna's reflexive tendency to resort to nursery rhymes isn't just meant to comfort the baby—perhaps it's a cover for her own anxiety, too, and a way of clinging to the few memories she retains of her own mother. This possibility is reinforced by the presence of her mother's cry, "Run, Joanna, run," concluding the string of random lines. The line "Margaret, are you grieving / Over Goldengrove unleaving" is from Gerard Manley Hopkins's poem "Spring and Fall: To a Young Child." "Summer is icumin-in" is a medieval English song on summer's arrival, and "miles to go before I sleep" is from Robert Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening." While there isn't an obvious link among these lines and the interspersed nursery rhymes, many of them speak of the natural world, appealing to a kind of childish innocence while also evoking the melancholy of Joanna's own early loss of innocence and the lasting trauma she deals with in adulthood as a result.

☝☝ She became a doctor because she wanted to help people.

It was a terrible cliché but it was true [...] If she couldn't heal herself then she could at least heal someone else. That was why she had been attracted to Neil— he hadn't needed healing, he was whole in himself, he didn't suffer the pain and sadness of the world, he just got on with his life. She was a bowl, holding everything inside, he was Mars throwing his spear into the world. She didn't have to tend to him, didn't have to worry about him. Necessarily, that meant there were drawbacks to living with him, but who was perfect? Only the baby.

She had spent the thirty years since the murders creating a life. It wasn't a real life, it was the simulacrum of one, but it worked. Her real life had been left behind in that other, golden field. And then she had the baby and her love for him breathed life into the simulacrum and it became genuine. Her love for the baby was immense, bigger than the entire universe. Fierce.

**Related Characters:** Gabriel Joseph Hunter ("the baby"), Neil Hunter, Joanna Mason Hunter (Dr. Hunter)

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 346

### Explanation and Analysis

Joanna continues to reflect on her history while being held captive. Her career choice, like that of other characters including Jackson, Louise, and Patrick, has been an attempt to fix others, in some measure making up for the impossibility of fixing their own pasts. Her other choices—such as her marriage to Neil and having the baby—also reflect Joanna's attempts to come to terms with her past. She married Neil because he didn't need her, giving Joanna a break from her constant need to fix and protect others. Of course, the self-sufficient Neil repays Joanna by objectifying her in his own way, allowing her to be used as collateral in his seedy business ventures. And, despite the baby's ability to awaken real, "fierce" love in Joanna, there's a way in which he, too, is an abstraction more than a person. For example, Joanna only calls him "the baby," not Gabriel Joseph; and she maintains that he's "perfect" and goes to obsessive lengths to keep him unstained by the surrounding world. Even though Joanna has worked hard to create a "real" life, it's clear that her past continues to hamper her ability to achieve that. This suggests that it's very difficult for people to fully escape the ramifications of early tragedy, especially when they're bereft of a support system to help them do so.

## A Puppy Is Just for Christmas Quotes

“You know how to shoot a gun,” Louise said, holding the stepladder steady.

“I do. But I didn’t pull the trigger.” And Louise thought, No, but somehow or other you persuaded him to do it.

“I went to see him because I wanted him to understand what he had done,” Joanna Hunter said as she reached to fix the angel on the top of the tree. “To know that he had robbed people of their lives for no reason. Maybe seeing me, grown up, and with the baby, brought it home to him, made him think how Jessica and Joseph would have been.” Good explanation, Louise thought. Very rational. Worthy of a doctor. But who was to say what else she had murmured to him across the visitors’ table.

**Related Characters:** Joanna Mason Hunter (Dr. Hunter), Louise Monroe (speaker), Joseph Mason, Jessica Mason, Andrew Decker

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 375

### Explanation and Analysis

After Joanna’s ordeal, before Christmas, Louise goes to visit Joanna at home, wanting to understand what happened in

the Penicuik farmhouse. There’s a striking contrast between the cozily domestic scene—Louise holding the ladder while Joanna places an angel atop the Christmas tree—and the dark realities they’re discussing. Louise still suspects that Joanna had something to do with Andrew Decker’s death, but, as Joanna’s carefully-chosen words suggest (“I didn’t pull the trigger”), it will never be proven. Joanna explains that before Decker was released from prison, she’d gone to try to understand Decker’s motivations. Louise suspects that this cleanly rational explanation doesn’t tell the whole story. The novel doesn’t answer whether Joanna threatened Decker or warned him that she’d have him killed if he didn’t do it himself. It merely hints at this possibility when (unbeknownst to Louise) Billy later reveals that he’d sold his Russian handgun to Joanna, the same type that was found by Decker’s body. This exchange suggests that the quest to understand people’s rational motivations—whether Joanna trying to understand Decker, or Louise trying to understand Joanna—will only take a person so far; people’s deepest drives defy reasonable categorization. This seems to be Atkinson’s approach in the novel as a whole, too—she leaves some of the more pressing questions unanswered, suggesting that people are ultimately mysteries to themselves and each other.



## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

## HARVEST

A family is walking down a country lane together—a mother and three children. Jessica is eight, Joanna is six, and Joseph is a baby. Jessica is leading their **dog**, which she spends a lot of time training. Jessica is usually in charge because Joanna prefers not to think for herself.

The family has just gotten off a bus after shopping in town. They don't have a car. The father, a writer named Howard Mason, has driven away in it. It was his idea to move to rural Devon, because he needed “space to write.” Joanna misses her old home and school and dislikes the long trek to town (a long walk and two bus rides).

The family's country life has not been successful. A fox ate their hens, and the bees in their beehive froze. Their father just says he'll put it all in his novel. Their mother, Gabrielle, a painter, no longer paints in the country. She is clever, funny, and quite unlike their friends' mothers. She and Howard fight sometimes. During the fights, Jessica gathers her siblings in their bed, and they all fall asleep. After their first winter in the country, Howard moves back to London and lives with Martina, his “other woman,” a poet. Gabrielle still doesn't paint.

As they walk along the country road, laden with shopping, Gabrielle promises the children that they will move back into town in time for school. Joanna admires her mother's strength as she pushes the baby's buggy uphill. Jessica is “fierce” like their mother, but Joanna thinks she has only inherited their mother's allergies. Most of Joanna's things are hand-me-downs from Jessica. “Joanna filled the spaces Jessica left behind as she moved on.”

They walk along a huge wheat field. Joanna got lost in it once, and the **dog** found her. They stop for a snack in the shade. In London, they used to have “proper picnics” using their grandmother's picnic basket. They don't have any of their wealthy grandmother's money because, Gabrielle explains, Gabrielle and Howard eloped.

*The novel begins with a picture of a relatively intact family—setting a tone that will be quickly disturbed. Jessica's and Joanna's personalities create the impression (also soon to be overturned) that Jessica will play a more prominent role than her younger sister. Dogs, from the first, will play a big role in the story, as well.*



*Howard Mason's abandonment shows that this is actually a broken household. The family is isolated in an unfamiliar, remote place, and they have to make strenuous trips to get basic necessities. Their country life isn't idyllic, no matter what their lovely surroundings suggest.*



*Howard seems not to care what his family endures for the sake of his dream, both materially and emotionally. Again, their seemingly idyllic life is a false front. Howard can leave it behind; his family is left to struggle in his absence. The fact that Gabrielle no longer paints suggests that she is persistently unhappy.*



*Joanna perceives herself as a follower in the shadow of her determined older sister and her strong mother. Her early years don't give the impression that she will develop into a strong character, once again setting up a reversal of expectations.*



*Joanna's memory of being lost in the wheat field foreshadows what's to come. Dogs are already established as a symbol of faithful companionship in the story. Although Gabrielle and Howard seem to have been in love, their romance quickly led to estrangement within the family, suggesting the fragility of family relationships that will be a major theme in the story.*



As they continue making their way toward home, a man suddenly appears, seemingly out of nowhere. Their **dog** growls. The man is walking quickly toward them, huffing and puffing. Gabrielle starts walking faster and urges the girls to hurry, leaving the dropped groceries behind. The man is now walking in the same direction they are. Their dog tries to block his path. The man kicks the dog, hard, into the wheat. It makes a “terrible squealing noise.” Jessica screams at the man and runs after the dog.

Joanna realizes that her mother is fighting the man. He has a knife he keeps raising in the air. Soon Gabrielle is covered with blood. Joanna realizes that her mother is screaming at her to run. Her mother is finally cut down where she stood, stabbed through the heart. Jessica, too, is stabbed and dies curled up with the dead **dog**. The baby dies in the buggy. Joanna, meanwhile, obeys her mother’s scream—“Run, Joanna, run.” She runs into the wheat and gets lost.

Later, after dark, Joanna is found by other **dogs**. A stranger picks her up, saying, “Not a scratch on her.” Even then, Joanna thinks that she should have rescued the baby—Jessica would have. But she just did as she was told. Thirty years later, “the thing that drove her to distraction was that she couldn’t remember what the dog was called. And there was no one left to ask.”

*Although there have been hints that the family’s life is not idyllic, it’s now disrupted in a shockingly unexpected way, by a sudden, unprovoked attack from outside. The dog, the family’s protector, is cruelly dispatched, hinting at worse to come.*



*Joanna turns out to be the only survivor of this horrifying event. After the family members have been introduced and their backstory established, the sudden deaths of nearly all of them is all the more shocking. Joanna, who “didn’t like to think for herself,” survives because of her inclination to be obedient.*



*The stranger’s remark—that Joanna is outwardly unharmed—belies the fact that she’ll prove to have been irreparably scarred by this tragedy. She even blames herself for not saving her helpless baby brother. While the dog’s name is not a critical detail, the point is that no one is left to help Joanna come to terms with her past. She’s completely alone.*



## FLESH AND BLOOD

Jackson Brodie is visiting a small village in Yorkshire. Though he’s from Yorkshire himself, the Dales are foreign to him. It’s a quiet Wednesday in early December. He hides behind a newspaper, figuring that the villagers have “a well-developed radar for the wrong kind of stranger.” He has driven here in an inconspicuous rental and is disguised in a North Face jacket and hiking boots.

After a slow ten minutes, a crowd of children pours out of the primary school adjacent to the village green. Jackson is looking for the playschool children. Sure enough, Nathan, one of the tiniest children, comes out wearing a snowsuit. Jackson knows that Nathan’s mother, Julia, is visiting her sister who has breast cancer, and “The False Dad,” “Mr. Arty-Farty,” isn’t around. Figuring he’s safe, Jackson gets out of the car and casually ambles toward the children.

*The story jumps 30 years into the future and introduces a main character, detective Jackson Brodie. He seems to be traveling incognito on some kind of investigative assignment. He feels as though he sticks out in a small-town setting.*



*It becomes clear that Jackson is here not on a professional assignment, but a personal one. Jackson’s evident disdain for Nathan’s “false” father suggests that he believes he’s the rightful father, and thus that he and Julia have a not-too-distant past. Given the tragic horror of the previous chapter, Jackson’s uninvited approach is somewhat unsettling.*



On the green, Nathan's football rolls toward Jackson, and he picks it up, luring Nathan closer. When Nathan approaches, Jackson ruffles his hair, startling the boy. A nearby mother, with a fake smile, asks if she can help. Jackson turns on his charm and asks directions to the nearby waterfall.

*Jackson's intentions toward the boy are not harmful, but the watching mother doesn't know that, and her vigilance anticipates the attitudes that other female characters will show in the story—a fierce protectiveness.*



Jackson walks to the waterfall, uncomfortable to find himself alone with his thoughts. He withdraws a plastic bag from his pocket and drops a thin black hair into it, his job done. Then he walks back to his car, ready to get on a train to London and go home.

*Jackson seems unaccustomed to dwelling too much on his thoughts, suggesting they're often dark ones. It becomes clearer what his intentions have been—he wants DNA evidence of his paternity.*



## THE LIFE AND ADVENTURES OF REGGIE CHASE

Reggie Chase is spoon-feeding home-cooked organic food to a baby, Gabriel Hunter. She has been working as “mother’s help” for Dr. Hunter for six months. Reggie is 16 but looks 12. No one ever takes notice of her; she sometimes wonders if she’s invisible. It’s easy for someone so small to slip through the cracks. Reggie thinks it’s stupid that she has to constantly persuade people that she’s 16—she feels 100 inside.

*From the start, it's obvious that Gabriel Hunter is a doted-on child. There are some connections between Reggie Chase's self-perception and the young Joanna's, too—she thinks of herself as unnoticed and hidden in the background, much as little Joanna did. Like Joanna, too, Reggie seems to have experienced more than most her age.*



Reggie's brother, Billy, made her an ID so she can get into pubs, but Reggie doesn't see the point of alcohol or drugs. She thinks of her mother and the Man-Who-Came-Before-Gary getting drunk and having loud sex. At least Gary, unlike his predecessor, wasn't married and didn't leer at Reggie all the time. Reggie avoids most of Billy's offers. Billy, after all, used to steal sweets from Mr. Hussain's shop, and now he's “pretty much a career criminal.”

*Reggie hasn't grown up in the most stable or pleasant home environment—her mother's serial relationships have been unsettling for Reggie, and her older brother hasn't been a positive influence, either.*



When Reggie was interviewed for the mother's help job, she lied about her experience with children. She figures there isn't much to know about infants, and she was recently a child herself, after all—though she's told she has an “old soul.”

*Reggie figures that her young age and relative helplessness allow her to identify with a needy infant. Even though she's young and inconspicuous herself, she feels much older than she looks, because of having to fend for herself. This is in keeping with the book's theme of appearances masking underlying realities.*



Dr. Hunter is English, but she studied at the medical school in Edinburgh and never returned to England. Reggie watches the baby while Dr. Hunter works part time as a general practitioner. Reggie's favorite part of the day is after Dr. Hunter gets home, so she can spend time with her. The Hunters live in an affluent neighborhood of Edinburgh, "quite a distance in every way" from the "third-floor shoe box" in which Reggie lives. She doesn't mind the two bus journeys back and forth, because she can sit on the top deck and look into people's houses. She can also get schoolwork done. She's left school, but she's still following the curriculum in English literature, ancient history, Latin, and Greek.

Ms. MacDonald, Reggie's former classics teacher at the "horrible posh school" she'd attended, is helping her prepare for her A-levels. Ms. MacDonald is a fan of "reading round the subject," which Reggie finds to be a distraction from her prescribed texts, [Great Expectations](#), [Mrs. Dalloway](#), and [Twelfth Night](#). Reggie likes the "plucky abandoned orphans" in Dickens. Ms. MacDonald's "criminally untidy house" includes every Loeb Classic that has ever been published. In exchange for the tutoring, Reggie runs errands for Ms. MacDonald.

Reggie had won a scholarship to the "horrible posh school" when she was 12, but she never fit in, having never "understood the secret language and hierarchies of the school." The army pays for part of Reggie's tuition (her father was killed in the Gulf War before Reggie was born), but she can't afford the extra accessories and good haircuts that would allow her to fit in.

Reggie and her mother always held multiple jobs. Reggie works in Mr. Hussain's shop on Sunday mornings and had always held paper routes and other jobs even while in school. She budgets meticulously. Reggie eventually forged a letter to her school explaining that the family was moving to Australia and Reggie couldn't return after summer vacation.

Ms. MacDonald also left the school, because she has a fast-growing brain tumor. She is a somewhat bitter person, but she is good to Reggie and loves her little **dog**, Banjo. Reggie thinks Ms. MacDonald is lucky to have time to adjust to her terminal diagnosis. Reggie "didn't like the idea that you could be walking along as blithe as could be and the next moment you simply didn't exist."

*Dr. Hunter has become a surrogate mother figure for Reggie. Their intact family and affluent lifestyle contrast strongly with Reggie's economic and familial insecurities. Even in the midst of her difficult circumstances, Reggie remains an imaginative and observant person who is strongly self-motivated. Her literary study gives her a sense of continuity with her earlier life, as well as something to achieve and goals to strive for. It's also not what one would expect from a school dropout in a poor neighborhood.*



*Reggie reads ambitiously and cobbles together a support system, in the absence of family, to help her achieve her goals. Ms. MacDonald will prove to be another character who's more complicated than her outward appearances suggest—perhaps one reason that Reggie is drawn to her, even though they only have the classics in common. Like the Hunters' baby, Ms. MacDonald is someone that Reggie is able to help.*



*Reggie has a history of feeling like an outcast and misfit. Even though she belonged at the "horrible posh school" academically, she was a mismatch socially and didn't have the means to become acceptable in the school's social world.*



*Reggie is enterprising and responsible, in contrast to her brother Billy, and she carries burdens that most kids her age don't have to face. The circumstances of her dropping out of school are not explained yet; however, Reggie was willing to break the law in order to cut ties with her school, suggesting a desperate situation. She's willing to deceive in order to survive.*



*Ms. MacDonald has been through traumatic hardships herself. Reggie's thoughts about being here one moment and ceasing to exist the next moment suggest that she's had to deal with sudden death and bereavement.*



Dr. Hunter would rather not work outside the home, but her husband Neil owns a business that has “hit a sticky patch.” Dr. Hunter calls home all the time to chat with the baby and recite “scraps of poems and nursery rhymes” that sound very English and foreign to Reggie. She also talks to her **dog**, Sadie, a huge German Shepherd, whom she trusts with her life and the baby’s life. Dr. Hunter always asks people to call her Jo, but people seldom do. Reggie calls her Dr. H.

Dr. Hunter tells Reggie that her father, now dead, had been a fashionable writer in his day, but his books haven’t “stood the test of time.” She keeps his novels in a “junk repository” on the top floor. The rest of the house is Victorian and tasteful; Reggie’s whole flat could fit in its kitchen. Ms. MacDonald, by contrast, has a whole house full of junk. She uses the Second Coming as an excuse, but she’s actually just a messy person. She “got religion” after her cancer diagnosis.

Yesterday afternoon, a woman rang the doorbell just after Dr. Hunter arrived home. Dr. Hunter and the woman stepped aside to talk privately, with Dr. Hunter uncharacteristically ignoring the baby and Sadie. Reggie hopes the visitor has nothing to do with Billy, whom she’s never mentioned to Dr. Hunter. After the woman leaves, Dr. Hunter has “a funny, tight look on her face” and pins the woman’s card to the kitchen’s notice board. The card says “Detective Chief Inspector Louise Monroe.”

The kitchen is cozy on a cold December day. Reggie hopes she might be allowed to spend Christmas with the Hunters, since Dr. Hunter and the baby are her family. Reggie washes the baby’s old-fashioned china dishes. His toys are tasteful wooden ones, and his clothes are new and fashionable. The baby’s most precious possession, his “talisman,” is a square cut from a pale green blanket. The baby just turned one a week ago, and Reggie and Dr. Hunter celebrated with an afternoon tea in Peebles.

There’s little evidence of Mr. Hunter’s business troubles, since the Hunters have two cars and only the nicest new things for the baby. Mr. Hunter usually roars away from the house in his big Land Rover, or else he stands outside, smoking and making endless phone calls related to “business.” He’s from Glasgow and does “something in the leisure industry.” He and Dr. Hunter seem to get along okay, but Reggie doesn’t know good relationships with which to compare them. The baby likes Mr. Hunter but adores Dr. Hunter.

*Dr. Hunter is almost obsessively devoted to her baby and her dog. She clings to them especially fiercely after having lost her family when she was a little girl.*



*Dr. Hunter never seems to have fully reconciled with her father after her mother’s and siblings’ deaths. Her tidy, affluent life contrasts with Reggie’s poverty, and Ms. MacDonald’s untidiness contrasts with both of them. Ms. MacDonald’s embracing of a fringe Christian sect also defies expectations for a former classics teacher at a “posh” school.*



*Reggie observes that something uncharacteristically secretive is going on with Dr. Hunter. Her first assumption is that it’s something to do with her troublemaking brother. The intrusion of a police detective into the Hunters’ warm and tidy home environment signals that things aren’t all as they seem.*



*Reggie already thinks of the Hunters as a surrogate family for her, and Dr. Hunter’s inclusion of Reggie in family events suggests that she thinks similarly. Dr. Hunter takes meticulous care to provide only the finest things for the baby, in contrast to her own somewhat deprived childhood in the country, and the fact that her baby brother didn’t have the opportunity to enjoy life for very long.*



*Mr. Hunter begins to appear to be a somewhat shady character—at least, it’s unclear what he’s up to. Reggie has never seen a good marriage up close, so she doesn’t have a way to evaluate the Hunters’ marriage or the health of a family. This suggests that Reggie’s perceptions of the Hunters’ family life aren’t entirely trustworthy.*



Dr. Hunter is very mindful of any potential hazards to the baby, even going so far as to cut grapes in half. Reggie gets Dr. Hunter to teach her first aid, including mouth-to-mouth resuscitation and how to stop arterial bleeding. Mr. Hunter is much more easygoing with the baby. He says that Dr. Hunter's worries make sense "given her history." Reggie doesn't know what he means. One day Reggie asks Dr. Hunter how long it takes to drown. Dr. Hunter says it takes five to ten minutes, "not long." Reggie thinks that's long enough.

Reggie thinks that Dr. Hunter seems too prone to sadness already—"how sad," she's forever saying—so Reggie never tells Dr. Hunter about her mother's death. Reggie makes up a mother instead who works at a supermarket checkout counter, who's always planning her next diet, who's 36 (the same age as Dr. Hunter), who had Reggie and was widowed by the time she was 20. "It's a funny old world," was her favorite saying. All these things are actually true, except that Jackie Chase isn't alive.

Reggie has been staying longer and longer at the Hunters' lately, especially since Mr. Hunter is often out working on his "new venture." Dr. Hunter doesn't mind. Reggie hopes that someday Dr. Hunter might suggest that Reggie just move in—then she, Dr. Hunter, the baby, and Sadie could be "a proper family."

One evening, as Dr. Hunter and Reggie are giving the baby a bath, Dr. Hunter abruptly tells Reggie, "You know there are no rules [...] There isn't a template, a pattern that we're supposed to follow." She goes on to say, "What you have to remember, Reggie, is that the only important thing is love." Reggie agrees. But privately she thinks that love doesn't do you any good in the long run.

## AD AUGUSTA PER ANGUSTA

Jackson Brodie is trying to navigate his way through the bleak Yorkshire Dales back to the train station. His GPS stopped working outside of the village, and he has no phone reception or radio signal. There are no other cars or houses in sight, only sheep. He thinks about his 12-year-old daughter Marlee, whom he had with his ex-wife, Josie. His ex-girlfriend, Julia, claims that Nathan isn't his son, but Julia "was born to lie." Jackson longs for a son. He felt a "surge of emotion" when he touched Nathan earlier—a feeling "that made a strong man weak for life."

*Dr. Hunter is an extreme worrier when it comes to the baby, trying to eliminate anything dangerous from his life. Reggie, too, has her own preoccupation with safety, as suggested by her interest in lifesaving techniques and the technicalities of drowning. Both she and Dr. Hunter clearly have "a history" that shapes their anxieties in the present, though they don't talk to one another about their pasts.*



*Reggie doesn't want Dr. Hunter to know about the tragedy in her past, so she lies about her own mother, Jackie. She gives Dr. Hunter an accurate picture of her mother's personality, but she leaves out the most important fact that she's dead. Both Dr. Hunter and Reggie conceal the truth about their backgrounds. It's also significant that Dr. Hunter is the same age as Reggie's mother was when she died, reinforcing the sense that Dr. Hunter is a mother substitute for Reggie.*



*Reggie longs to be fully included in the Hunter family circle. Not only does she miss her mother, but she's never been part of a fully intact, healthy household before.*



*Dr. Hunter, despite her outwardly conventional lifestyle and her obsession with protecting the baby from harm, claims there aren't rules governing life—a surprising claim. On the other hand, given her past, it makes sense that her love for the baby would overpower all other concerns in her life. The "rules" she makes up are all driven toward that end.*



*Jackson Brodie's bleak surroundings suggest a similar sense of dislocation and misdirection in his personal life. He's cut off from access to the boy he believes is his son, and he's had a string of unsuccessful relationships. His struggle to find his way back to civilization suggests that he's struggling to navigate his personal crises, as well.*



Jackson comes upon a raggedy sheep blocking his path. He waits the sheep out for a while, then gets out of the car and tries to pull the sheep off the road. It resists, even knocking him over. Finally he gets back in the car and naps until his passage is free of sheep. As he drives on, he thinks about shepherding. Jackson himself “was a shepherd, he couldn’t rest until the flock was [...] all gathered safely in. It was his calling and his curse.”

The bleak landscape reminds Jackson of a poem he’d had to memorize for school as a child, the “Lyke Wake Dirge.” He remembers his sister, Niamh, coaching him, slapping him with a ruler when he made mistakes. In retrospect, he’s shocked by his family’s “vocabulary of violence [...] the nearest they could get to expressing love for one another.”

Suddenly Jackson sees someone ahead, walking on foot. It’s a strolling woman in a cardigan and scarf, around forty, with a librarian’s air. Jackson offers a lift. She laughs pleasantly and declines, telling Jackson, “You’re going the wrong way,” with a Yorkshire accent. Then she saunters on. Jackson watches as she disappears in the distance, never looking back.

As darkness falls, Jackson wonders if there was some hidden message in the woman’s words—“the wrong way for what?” Just as he begins to worry that he’s on a road to nowhere, he sees the lights of the A1, “a great gray artery of logic,” down below.

## SHE WOULD GET THE FLOWERS HERSELF

Louise is thinking about buying flowers. She also thinks about her new husband, Patrick, an orthopedic surgeon. They met at a horrible car accident two years ago. Now Louise’s 16-year-old son, Archie, wants driving lessons, and Louise wishes she could find a way to interfere with his getting a license—“being police was just the obverse of being criminal, after all.”

Patrick is Irish, wise, amiable, and poetic. His previous wife, Samantha, was killed in a car crash 10 years ago. Louise likes his sense of authority and his confidence, as a surgeon, that things can be fixed. Louise is sure that flaws like hers can never be fixed—“sooner or later the crack would show.” In marrying Patrick, she relinquished control for the first time in her life, and now she feels off balance. Louise has a fancy dinner planned for Patrick’s sister and brother-in-law, but she’s exhausted.

*This comical scene between Jackson and a stubborn sheep makes a serious point about his personality—Jackson is compulsively driven to look after people and ensure their safety, much as a sheepdog instinctively herds wandering, helpless sheep. This compulsion, rooted in his history, defines Jackson and also adds pain and complication to his life.*



*The “Lyke Wake Dirge” is a traditional English folk song that recounts a soul’s hazardous journey from earth to purgatory. Its bleak themes and imagery both reflect Jackson’s surroundings and anticipate his own journey in the novel. Jackson, too, grew up in a fraught home environment in which love wasn’t easily expressed.*



*The identity of the strolling woman is never identified in the novel. Her improbable appearance and prophetic statement make her seem rather like a ghost. Her memory, and her message, haunts Jackson in the days ahead.*



*Jackson’s uncanny journey through the rural countryside has shaken his sense of normalcy. His sight of the highway allows him to suppose that he’s on his way back to the comfortingly familiar, though this expectation is soon to be overturned.*



*Police detective Louise is not accustomed to domestic pursuits like flowers or, for that matter, husbands. As it is for Dr. Hunter, fear is a major aspect of Louise’s approach to motherhood. She is also aware that her position as police gives her power that ordinary people don’t have, if she chose to do something dishonest.*



*Louise’s husband has his own traumatic past. Louise thinks of herself as fundamentally broken and beyond even Patrick’s ability to fix—it’s just that her “crack” has been safely concealed so far. Being married, rather than providing stability and identity in her life, is unsettling for her. She struggles to care about things like dinner arrangements.*



A couple of years ago, when Archie's behavior was worrying, Louise had gone for therapy and been coached to put her negative thoughts aside—visualizing them being locked inside a chest at the bottom of the sea. Once she'd mastered this, she felt that she had no positive thoughts left over. Not long after, she married Patrick. Archie goes to a fancy prep school now and has happily found a geek crowd. Louise hates the privileged school atmosphere but “the greater good wasn't an argument she was going to deploy when it came to her own flesh and blood.”

Patrick has been reminding her that it's not too late to have a baby, but the thought terrifies Louise; Archie is already “wrapped around her heart.” She's perplexed enough to find herself at 40 with an expensive flat, two cars, and a big engagement ring. It feels as though she took a wrong turn at some point.

Louise is on her way back from a meeting and stops by the station. Her cheerful young Detective Constable, Marcus McLellen, has a forensics report for her. She's taken Marcus under her wing in a maternal way. He tells her that an arcade fire they've been investigating was the result of arson. It turns out that the arcade owner is Neil Hunter, Joanna Hunter's husband. According to Joanna, Neil does “this and that”—which seems to include amusement arcades, seedy health clubs, private-hire vehicles, and dodgy beauty salons.

Louise looks at some pictures of Neil Hunter having drinks with Michael Anderson, a suspected drug dealer in Glasgow. Hunter is clean so far, but the fraud officers suspect that Anderson is looking for ways to launder his money in Edinburgh. In her conversation with Joanna yesterday, Joanna explained that she met Neil in the ER after he'd “been set upon by some thugs.” She can't imagine why Joanna agreed to go out with him.

Louise and Marcus can't find a conclusive link between Neil Hunter and the Glasgow drug dealers. Marcus suspects that Hunter is about to go under and is trying to keep himself afloat by going into business with Anderson. Louise offers to go and talk to him. It's below her pay grade, but she lives nearby. Privately, too, she's obsessed with Joanna Hunter. (“She's the other side of me, the woman I never became—the good survivor, the good wife, the good mother”). She tells Marcus to get a warrant for Hunter's documentation.

*Louise struggles to think positively about anything, so her perceptions of the world, like Reggie's more hopeful ones, aren't necessarily to be completely trusted. She brings all her negative baggage into her marriage to Patrick. Louise's determination to put Archie in a good environment, despite her disdain for its privileges, is reminiscent of Joanna Hunter's argument that “there are no rules” when it comes to the people one loves.*



*Louise finds the emotional drains of motherhood too wearying to contemplate having another child. The thought of a conventional family is also alarming to her at this stage in her life; she feels that such a life's outward trappings—a nice apartment, a fancy ring—contrast with the life she's known.*



*Despite her discomfort with conventional domesticity, Louise isn't lacking in maternal feelings; she seems to be more comfortable expressing such feelings in her professional world as a police officer. It turns out that Neil Hunter is under investigation. His seedy business pursuits contrast with his tidy middle-class home life.*



*Neil Hunter has attracted some unsavory people in his life, and there's more going on with him, and perhaps with the Hunters' life in general, than meets the eye. Joanna's casual description of her unlikely meeting with Neil also underlines the sense that Joanna has cobbled together the appearance of a “normal” life, but perhaps not the reality of one.*



*Louise has a tendency to become obsessed with her cases, further suggesting that she identifies herself more strongly with her work than with her home life. Her complicated past is further hinted at by her thoughts about Joanna—that Joanna is a kind of mirror image of Louise, who is a “bad survivor,” a “bad wife,” and a “bad mother.”*



Louise's pregnant coworker, Karen, drops some files on Louise's desk and, noticing the Hunter files, references the old Mason murders. Young Marcus isn't familiar with the case, so Louise and Karen fill him in about the random killing of Joanna's mother and siblings in rural Devon 30 years ago. The convicted man, Andrew Decker, is getting out. That's why Louise went to the Hunters' yesterday—to warn Joanna before the news hit the press.

Louise finally leaves the station and starts driving home. Her phone rings, and her "police sixth sense" warns her that if she answers, the evening's plans will be ruined. She can't resist, though. She picks up.

## SANCTUARY

Dr. Hunter gets home that evening and warmly cuddles the baby. Reggie feels a "convulsion" of sadness and isn't sure why. She wishes she could be a baby again and be wrapped in someone's arms—her mother's, or even Dr. Hunter's. She remembers cuddling with her mother in front of the TV before her mother died. "You would hope two lives entwined would add up to more," she thinks, imagining that Dr. Hunter and the baby will have a lifetime of exciting memories together.

Dr. Hunter has plans to go to a Christmas shopping night. She invites Reggie, but Reggie is due at Ms. MacDonald's that evening. As Dr. Hunter and the baby wave goodbye from the porch, Reggie recalls her last goodbye to her mother. It had involved heaving her mother's suitcase into a taxicab. It's a murky memory, one that felt like "the first half of something that had never been completed." Reggie thinks that people should always pay attention during goodbyes, just in case they turn out to be the last one. She takes a good look at Dr. Hunter and the baby.

As Reggie is standing at the bus stop, reading [Great Expectations](#), her brother Billy appears. Reggie still remembers when Billy was her "hero and defender." Reggie doesn't really know what Billy's into these days, but she remembers his childhood love of weapons—he'd stolen a "souvenir" Russian handgun, a Makarov, that their father had smuggled home from the Gulf War.

*Marcus's ignorance of Joanna's history gives Louise a chance to go over the story of what happened to the Masons and it also explains why she showed up at the Hunters' yesterday—the killer is free, which means that Joanna's carefully curated sense of normalcy has been suddenly disrupted. Her past is coming back to haunt her.*



*Louise's inability to cut herself off completely from her work shows that she's not completely comfortable with her home life.*



*Reggie isn't much more than a child herself, and despite the relatively adult role she occupies in fending for herself, she longs to be cared for like a child. Dr. Hunter's warmth toward the baby reminds her of her own bond with her mother and how abruptly it was cut off.*



*The story of Reggie's mother's death is revealed in bits and pieces. Here it's revealed that her mother's death happened while she was away, contributing to a sense of unreality and lack of closure for Reggie. She doesn't want the same thing to happen again with her new "family" and is therefore painfully conscious of goodbyes. This scene also has a sense of foreboding, as if something bad is going to happen to the Hunters, too.*



*Billy only pops up in Reggie's life unexpectedly and inconsistently; he isn't a stable presence there, or a particularly welcome one. His link with the Russian handgun will prove to be significant later on in the story.*



Reggie feels uncomfortable with Billy being in close proximity to the Hunters. He occasionally turns up at Ms. MacDonald's, where he's asked to do odd jobs. Billy is actually good with his hands, but instead of pursuing a career as a joiner, he's gone "all wrong." Reggie was embarrassed by the way Billy fingered the dusty books at Ms. MacDonald's house and dreads the thought of how he'd react to the Hunters. Billy sees Reggie onto the bus and leaves.

*Reggie doesn't want her cozy, familial life with the Hunters to overlap with Billy's unsavory connections; she doesn't even want the Hunters to know he exists. Billy does have valuable skills, but he hasn't cultivated them toward useful ends. Billy also has a tie to Ms. MacDonald.*



## TO BRIG O' DREAD THOU COM'ST AT LAST

Jackson finds his way onto a "late-running and oversubscribed cattle track of a train," cold and exhausted. He sees a couple of soldiers on the train and is reminded of his younger self. At that age, he'd sworn he wouldn't go into security after leaving the army. Instead he'd become a warrant officer in the military police. After he left the police, he'd again sworn that he wouldn't go into security, so he'd set up a one-man detective agency instead. An elderly client has left him a legacy, so he doesn't have to worry about his retirement. His business card now says "Jackson Brodie—Security Consultant." It's not exactly a "righteous cause" (Jackson thinks of himself deep down as "a crusader, not a pilgrim"), but it's better than idleness. The inheritance money feels like an unearned burden.

*Jackson's observations about his fellow train passengers open a window onto his own past, from his early days as a soldier to his current work as a "security consultant." It also gives a clue to Jackson's personality—at heart, he's driven to fix things and rescue people. He also prefers to earn what he has, so the inheritance he received sits uneasily with him.*



Jackson is crammed into an uncomfortable seat at a table for four. There's a coughing businessman typing on a laptop, an elderly woman reading a novel, and a buxom woman of about 40. Jackson idly wonders if they'd help one another in an emergency. Jackson helped at the scene of a train crash as a young policeman, and it gave him nightmares for months. The memory of a child who'd been trapped in the crash reminds Jackson of his own children. He fingers the lock of hair he's snagged from Nathan and thinks, "Love was ferocious, love knew how to play dirty."

*Jackson's memories of past traumatic events provide foreshadowing of what's to come. Like Joanna Hunter, he is motivated by love, but it's not a soft, decorous love, as his long journey to snag a single lock of hair from his son suggests. He will "play dirty" to protect those he loves.*



Jackson remembers visiting newborn Nathan in the hospital, even though Julia, from whom he'd long since broken up, maintained that the baby wasn't his. Jackson remembers that seeing the baby was like "a blow to the heart" and that he'd wanted to beat the intruding Mr. Arty-Farty to a pulp on the spot, but had left when Nathan started to cry. Thinking that Nathan now lives in his own native Yorkshire, he realizes that traces of his sister Niamh's DNA are in the hair he's now holding.

*Jackson has fierce paternal emotions, even intruding in Julia's hospital room because he so strongly believed that Nathan was his. His fight for access to Nathan is also linked in his mind to his sister, whom he lost under tragic circumstances—a tragedy that shapes his restless, protective "sheepdog" personality today.*



Jackson finds himself thinking about Louise. They'd had a professional relationship in Edinburgh two years ago, but Jackson never stopped thinking about her, and they've texted occasionally. He was shocked to hear that Louise had gotten married a couple of months ago; he felt he'd been "drop-kicked into her past."

Jackson is shaken out of his thoughts of Julia and her dying sister (the sister has breast cancer, which Jackson's mother also died from) when the old woman passenger suddenly asks if they've passed the Angel of the North. Jackson realizes she thinks they're headed north and doesn't know how to break the bad news to her that it's a southbound train. Finally he does, but the woman corrects him, saying, "Where do you think we're going?" Jackson doesn't believe her, but the other woman confirms that they're headed to Waverley Station, Edinburgh.

A sudden jolt in the carriage startles everyone, but Jackson is more concerned about the fact that he's accidentally caught the train *from* King's Cross, not *to* King's Cross. He realizes that the strolling woman he'd encountered in the Yorkshire Dales was right—he is going the wrong way.

*Jackson and Louise have a shared history, and Jackson clearly still has feelings for Louise.*



*The Angel of the North is a large contemporary sculpture located in the North of England, a landmark for travelers. When Jackson tries to correct the old woman as to their destination, he learns that he is actually headed the wrong way, which hearkens back to the mysterious strolling woman's comment ("You're going the wrong way") in Yorkshire earlier.*



*The train's jolt is ominous, but Jackson's realization is uppermost in his mind and confirms the sense of misdirection in his life overall.*



## SATIS HOUSE

Reggie arrives at Ms. MacDonald's "bleak bungalow" in Musselburgh. Ms. McDonald looks unwell, and Reggie wonders "if it wasn't better just to dive down into the blue and check out early." Ms. MacDonald always makes dinner for them before going to her Wednesday night prayer meeting, then Reggie does homework and keeps an eye on the little **dog**, Banjo, while she's gone. Ms. MacDonald is in her fifties, but even when she was a younger teacher, she'd looked starchy and relentlessly rational to Reggie. Now she's "embraced a crazy religion" and lives in a squalid house while preparing for the end of the world.

Ms. MacDonald happily talks about the Rapture while Reggie eats the unappetizing spaghetti dinner. Ms. MacDonald always attributes worldly disasters to "God's work" and seems indifferent to human suffering; only Banjo seems to draw "soppy, maternal love" out of Ms. MacDonald. Ms. MacDonald fears that Banjo will die alone, so Reggie keeps an eye on him in exchange for a hot meal, access to books, and the prayers of Ms. MacDonald's church. "The awful thing was that Ms. MacDonald was the nearest thing that Reggie had to a family."

*Reggie's remark "dive down into the blue" is a hint as to the circumstances of her own mother's death. The contrast between Ms. MacDonald's "rational" past and her "crazy" apocalyptically obsessed present is another example of there being more to a person than meets the eye.*



*Ms. MacDonald's apparent indifference to human suffering contrasts with her affection for Banjo. Although there is much about Ms. MacDonald's life that Reggie doesn't like, she's attentive to Ms. MacDonald's needs—aware that her former teacher doesn't have anyone else in her life, showing Reggie's deep empathy—and she includes Ms. MacDonald in her attempt to patch together a sense of family for herself.*



Reggie cleans up Ms. MacDonald's kitchen and thinks about her own family. It had been her and her mother for a long time, until Mum had gotten involved with the Man-Who-Came-Before-Gary ("a total arse") and then Gary ("the real deal"). Gary was fine, just lazy and cheap. Finally Gary took Mum on a two-week trip to Spain; Reggie received a postcard.

*Piecemeal bits of Reggie's past continue to be revealed as she reflects on her present. Reggie's mother has had a history of unstable relationships, but appears to have been on the verge of a more stable one.*



Reggie is currently working on a translation for Ms. MacDonald, from Book Six of the *Iliad*. She decides to check her translation against Ms. MacDonald's Loeb edition, but it's missing from its proper place on the shelf. Reggie thinks about all the dying in Homer, and her thoughts return to her mother in Spain. Her mother had drowned in the hotel pool. She'd gotten up early and gone to the pool before anyone else was there. The police speculated that she'd lost her locket in the water, dove down to retrieve it, and got her hair caught in a drain. A waiter had tried to revive her, but it was too late. Gary slept through everything. Later, Reggie received her mother's postcard at about the same time her mother would have been dying.

*The missing Loeb edition is significant, since the Loeb's are one of the only things in Ms. MacDonald's life that are normally in good order. However, thoughts of the tragic scenes in the *Iliad* draw Reggie's memories to her mother's tragic drowning death. Reggie's loss of her mother has been all the more difficult because it occurred so far away, and the last tangible link Reggie had was a postcard from her mother. While a hotel pool drowning is a far cry from the kinds of deaths that occur in Homer, its importance is just as epic in Reggie's life.*



Ms. MacDonald lives almost right against the East Coast railroad line and hardly notices the way each passing train shakes the house. Reggie is startled every time, though. Banjo shows no interest in taking a walk in the cold, gusty night, so they stay in front of the gas fire. The banging of the door knocker in the wind sounds like "an unseen visitor desperate to get in."

*Reggie's awareness of the rattling trains foreshadows what's to come. The ghostly knocking at the door gives the evening an air of ominous anticipation.*



## RAPTURE READY

Jackson Brodie bends down to check on a drunk guy who has collapsed on the floor of the train. As he does this, the train goes through a series of rapid jolts and speeds up. He smells burnt rubber and chemicals and hears grating metal as the train continues to sway. The carriage tips one way and then the other, flipping onto its side. It continues traveling on its side, the carriage filled with terrifying noise and pitch blackness. Jackson thinks of the older woman saying, "This train terminates at Waverley." Finally it stops, and after a moment of silence, people start crying and calling for help. Jackson has a "Pavlovian response" to such pleas, but it's impossible to figure out what direction the voices are coming from.

*Disaster hits abruptly, following on the sense of lonely ominousness in Ms. Macdonald's house in the previous chapter. Jackson is programmed to want to help, but the crash is completely disorienting.*



As Jackson looks for a way to exit the train car, he heaves and drags an injured soldier along with him, figuring he'll come back for others. Suddenly, they fall out of the train and roll down a steep incline, Jackson hitting his head hard at the bottom. After falling briefly unconscious, he realizes that the roof of the train had been peeled back in the accident, and they've just fallen through. He sees houses along the track and first responders beginning to arrive. The soldier he brought with him isn't moving and looks dead. Jackson tries to claw his way up the embankment to rescue more people, but he realizes he's badly injured. He slips back down, and his consciousness begins to fade from blood loss. The mysterious strolling woman he'd seen walking in the Yorkshire Dales haunts his mind. He puts Marlee's face in her place instead.

*Jackson instinctively helps an injured person nearby, but as soon as they escape the crashed train carriage, Jackson finds himself in a worse predicament—he's badly injured himself. This is as disorienting for him as the experience of the crash itself; he's used to being in a position to shepherd and save people. Now he can't even save himself. His mind returns to the strange, prophetic woman he'd seen before he boarded the wrong train, but he tries to think about his daughter instead.*



## THE DISCREET CHARM OF THE BOURGEOISIE

Instead of buying flowers and getting ready for her in-laws' visit, Louise finds herself parked outside Alison Needler's house. The phone call she'd gotten was from a hysterical Alison, thinking her husband had returned to finish them off, but it had been a false alarm. It isn't the first time this has happened. Louise wishes she could introduce Alison Needler to Joanna Hunter, so that she could see it's possible to survive trauma with grace.

*Louise is both obsessed with her cases and determined to avoid her family. Alison Needler lives in a safe house to hide from her violent husband, who'd killed some guests at his daughter's birthday party and has threatened to return and kill the family. Now Alison lives a fearful, secluded life. Louise keeps an eye on her; she has a shepherding instinct similar to Jackson's.*



Louise thinks back to yesterday, when she told Joanna that Andrew Decker has been released from prison. Joanna had held herself together. Louise explained that Decker is living with his mother in Doncaster and will be monitored. She warns Joanna that the press will probably make a big deal of Decker's release and possibly hunt down Joanna as well.

*Joanna displayed poise when presented with news of the murderer's release. Louise sees a contrast between Joanna's outward display of courage and Alison's shrinking terror.*



Louise had been vaguely aware of the Mason case as being in the category of "guys who attacked women and children." These are different from men who attack women alone or children alone. The Needler case is one of these, too. David Needler had shot his mother-in-law and sister-in-law at his seven-year-old daughter's birthday party, killing a neighbor as well before fleeing. The difference with Andrew Decker was that he didn't destroy his own family, he destroyed somebody else's: "Men like Decker were inadequates [...] maybe they just couldn't stand to see people enjoying the lives they never had."

*Louise is preoccupied with the stories of women who've been threatened by men. She sees Andrew Decker as an anomaly, though, because there was no clear motive for him to kill the Masons. Louise's categorization of Decker as an "inadequate" misfit echoes her feelings about her own life and inability to maintain or enjoy a "normal" life. In the novel, many characters are "misfits" in this way; the difference between them seems to lie in their survival strategies.*



Louise hopes that if she ever finds herself in a situation like this, she won't run or hide, but will stand and fight. That's not possible if you're trying to protect children, as Gabrielle Mason had found out. Louise wishes for some utopia where women can walk without fear.

*Louise avoids ties with others partly because she wants to be able to fight if she's cornered, not flee. If she has to protect helpless loved ones, then she's effectively defenseless herself. She sees family as a barrier to survival, pointing to her reluctance about her marriage.*



Sitting in Joanna Hunter’s tasteful living room, listening to her talk about her home-grown winter flowers, Louise feigns interest and thinks about Patrick. He had shared the gardening with his first wife, Samantha—“the first Mrs. deWinter.” Louise marvels at the loveliness in Joanna’s life. “You can’t get over something like that,” she later tells Patrick. “No, but you can try,” he replies.

Joanna had shown Louise a photo of her mother, her siblings, and herself thirty years ago. Her father, Howard Mason, had remarried four times after the murder, eventually becoming more famous for his dead wives than for his writing. Louise wonders how the later wives had felt about the first. After talking with Joanna, Louise tracks down a secondhand copy of Howard’s first book, *The Shopkeeper*, and reads it late into the night. The book is an attack on his provincial upbringing and sounds “spiteful” to Louise.

The Mason case keeps bringing up questions for Louise; Joanna in particular “had got under [her] skin. She had stood on the edge of the unknowable [...] It gave her a mysterious power that Louise envied.” Andrew Decker had turned out to be a model prisoner and had gotten his university degree in philosophy. He’s only fifty now. Joanna decides to “escape for a bit” until the fuss surrounding his release dies down.

Alison Needler, meanwhile, stays inside her house all day, only emerging to walk her children to school. She has multiple locks on all the doors and windows, a panic button, and an elaborate security system. She’s in a “safe house, but Alison would never be safe.” Louise thinks that Alison should get a big **dog** and hopes that David Needler comes back during the Christmas season so that the police can finally “shoot the bastard dead.”

Patrick calls, and Louise is shocked to realize it’s six o’clock, and her elaborate dinner plans are foiled. Patrick tells her she’s obsessed with the Needler case. Louise apologizes and promises to be home soon. Louise thinks about Jackson Brodie, who cares about missing girls and wants them all to be found. Louise “didn’t want them to get lost in the first place. There were a lot of ways of getting lost, not all of them involved being missing.” Louise feels a twinge of guilt for thinking about Jackson.

*Louise thinks back to her meeting with Joanna Hunter, whose life is so carefully, tastefully put together. It reminds her of Daphne duMaurier’s novel [Rebecca](#), in which Mr. DeWinter’s dead wife figuratively haunts his second wife. Louise feels that way about Samantha. Patrick has been through trauma himself, but unlike Louise, he believes it’s possible to move past it—at least to a certain extent.*



*Howard Mason tried to move on by remarrying, but apparently was never wholly successful. Louise is so obsessed with Joanna’s past that she unearths one of Howard Mason’s books for clues about her family life. Louise seems determined to uncover some clue as to how Joanna moved on and rebuilt her life.*



*For Louise, Joanna symbolizes someone who has managed to pull together her life despite unthinkable tragedy. The reemergence of Decker into society threatens to unsettle Joanna’s position on that pedestal, however,*



*Louise has a heavy sense of investment in the Needler tragedy; she wants to be there to finish things off, and perhaps to find closure for herself as much as for the Needlers. She also touches on the fact that “safety” has as much to do with a person’s mindset as with their external surroundings.*



*There are a lot of “lost girls” in both Louise’s and Jackson’s lives: Alison Needler, Jackson’s murdered sister, and Joanna’s mom, Gabrielle Mason, all being examples of women who are not literally “missing,” but whose disappearances nevertheless haunt the lives of those left behind. Louise is so focused on what’s missing that she has trouble meeting obligations to her very present family.*



When Louise gets home, she finds that Jackson has ordered Chinese food for her sister-in-law, Bridget, and brother-in-law, Tim. Louise thinks the Chinese food looks particularly sad on Patrick's dead wife's wedding china. Next to Samantha's things, Louise's things look like they belong to "a refugee who spent a lot of time in IKEA." As Patrick pours Louise's wine, she thinks he's too good for her, and it makes her want to see how far she can push him.

After dinner, Louise goes upstairs and takes her engagement ring out of its safe. She only wears it when they go out somewhere. She thinks of Jackson again, someone she could have imagined being a "comrade in arms," but "they had been as chaste as protagonists in an Austen novel." By the time she reluctantly rejoins the family downstairs, Patrick has just gotten a phone call. He cheerfully tells her that there's been a train crash, and it'll be "all hands on deck tonight."

*Louise's sense of unease and lack of belonging among her family is stark. She can't provide a great meal for the guests; she eats off of Patrick's dead wife's dishes; she's even uncomfortable with Patrick's kindness to her, wanting to distance herself from it because she doesn't believe she deserves it*



*Louise doesn't feel comfortable wearing her engagement ring, either—ostensibly because of the expense, but implicitly because she doesn't feel worthy of it or of Patrick. Just as Jackson still thinks about her, Louise still thinks about him and wonders if they might not have made a better couple. Then the train crash happens, and even that doesn't shake Patrick's cheery exterior. The event erupts suddenly in their lives, suggesting that more things are going to be unsettled.*



## FUNNY OLD WORLD

Reggie is sitting at Ms. MacDonald's, eating violet creams she found in the kitchen while watching *Coronation Street* with *The Iliad* open in her lap. Reggie hears a train approaching, but its rumbling sounds unusual, almost as if it's going to crash through the house, followed by a bang. She instinctively jumps to her feet. She hears people running out of their houses, and when she looks outside, a neighbor tells her a train has crashed. Reggie dials 999, not wanting to be "that person who presumed" that someone else would do it. She grabs a flashlight and tells Banjo she'll be back soon. "The world wasn't going to end this night [...] if Reggie had anything to do with it."

*Despite being emotionally older than her years, Reggie is very much a teenager as well, distracted by a soap opera even as she works on her classical Greek translation. The train crash disrupts this cozy scene, and Reggie immediately snaps into action. She, like Jackson and Louise, has an instinctive drive to help people. She takes initiative to get help and also heads out to do what she can for the victims herself. Reggie's experiences of survival have inclined her to want to help others instead of withdrawing or running.*



## THE CELESTIAL CITY

Jackson is seeing a brightly lit corridor. He is sitting on a plastic bench along the corridor, expecting his sister or brother to appear and invite him into the light. He feels at ease and curious about what will happen next. Then, Niamh does appear and smiles at him. They don't say anything to each other, but Jackson feels euphoric for the first time in his life. Then his sister breathes into his mouth. Her breath tastes like violet creams, which were her favorite chocolates as a girl. He feels himself being pulled out of the white tunnel and resists, wanting to follow his sister. Jackson feels as though he's been punched in the chest incredibly hard. He desperately wants to follow Niamh and feels furious at whoever's stopping him.

*Jackson seems to be on the verge of death. He believes he's been reunited with his dead sister and is ready to follow her into the afterlife. Then he tastes violet creams, which are the chocolates that Reggie had just been eating. Reggie has just resuscitated Jackson, as will be confirmed later. Characters' lives are starting to come together in surprising and unexpected ways.*



## THE DOGS THEY LEFT BEHIND

Mr. Hunter phones Reggie at 6:30 the next morning and tells her that she's not needed at the Hunters' today—Joanna has gone suddenly "to see an elderly aunt who's been taken ill." Reggie is perplexed and keeps questioning Mr. Hunter, who impatiently explains that Joanna has gone to Hawes, Yorkshire, for a few days. Reggie can't figure out why Dr. Hunter wouldn't have phoned her. She always has her mobile phone, her "lifeline."

Mr. Hunter tells Reggie to enjoy a "wee holiday," but Reggie doesn't want one. She longs to tell Dr. Hunter about what happened last night. She'd spent all night tossing and turning, going over the night's events in her mind. And Dr. Hunter is the only person in her life who'd care to hear about it. She would have insisted that Reggie tell her the full story over coffee and chocolate biscuits, but now she's gone because of some aunt Reggie has never heard of before.

Reggie makes toast and instant coffee and launders her "disgusting" clothes from last night. She watches the news headlines—15 people dead and many injured in the Musselburgh train crash. Reggie sees heavy machinery moving along the track on the news and can hear its noises from the living room. She's reminded of her mother's death, when a reporter and photographer had come to her flat asking for a comment. Reggie had shocked herself by telling them to "fuck off."

The TV reporter says that the cause of the train crash is unconfirmed, but it's reported that a vehicle was seen on the track. He doesn't say that the vehicle had belonged to Ms. MacDonald. The news hasn't been made public, but the police came and told Reggie last night. They'd asked her lots of questions and thought that Reggie was Ms. MacDonald's daughter. Reggie was confused and disoriented at the time, having just changed out of her blood-sodden clothes. "The man" had just been taken away in a helicopter, a paramedic told her, "You gave him a chance."

Reggie tried to convince the policemen that she's 16, not a child. The police told her that Ms. MacDonald seemed to have driven off the road and onto the track somehow, and they ask her if she had seemed depressed lately. Reggie knows that Ms. MacDonald would have never left Banjo behind. She adds that Ms. MacDonald was "just a rubbish driver." She tries not to think about what Ms. MacDonald might have gone through in that moment, and she promises to come and identify her body tomorrow.

*The story jumps to the following morning, without yet revealing all that happened following last night's train crash. Unexpectedly, Dr. Hunter has left town. It's out of character for Dr. Hunter not to have contacted Reggie directly.*



*Reggie's thoughts reveal, again, that she's very much a kid. She has the maturity to look out for herself and even to save others' lives, but she also longs for Dr. Hunter's motherly attention and approval and feels hurt by Dr. Hunter's abrupt disappearance.*



*The tragedy unfolding within yards of the house reminds Reggie of her mother's death, particularly the storm of emotions that came in its aftermath and the pain of others' intrusions into her loss.*



*It's now revealed that Ms. MacDonald, known to have been an erratic driver, drove onto the train track, causing the crash. Not only did Reggie's teacher cause the crash, but Reggie—unaware of this at the time—also saved the life of one of its victims, who turns out to have been Jackson Brodie.*



*Reggie has fresh tragedy in her life; even though Ms. MacDonald isn't her family, Reggie occupies a big role in her teacher's life and vice versa, and now another piece of her makeshift family has been torn away from her. Ms. MacDonald doesn't really have anyone else, and Reggie, ever sensitive to that fact, takes responsibility for identifying her remains.*



Reggie turns off the TV and looks at Banjo. She realizes he's dead. Reggie feels "a great bubble of something like laughter but that she knew was grief" and she is reminded of learning of her mother's death from a woman who her mother had befriended while on holiday. She wishes she had someone who'd loved her mother and could share memories with her. She hopes to have a dozen children someday so that none of them will ever feel they've been left alone in the world.

Though she knows it's wrong, Reggie feels sadder about Banjo's death than Ms. MacDonald's. It feels like everyone is dead—"it was like being cursed." She wonders if the man she thought she'd saved last night is dead after all—maybe she'd given him "not the breath of life but the kiss of death." When she'd found him, he was bleeding from an artery. Reggie had used her jacket to put pressure on the wound the way Dr. Hunter had shown her. A moment later, she couldn't find a pulse. The situation became "a nightmare game of Twister" as Reggie figured out how to keep pressure on his artery while beginning mouth-to-mouth breathing. She begged the man to hang on "for my sake if not for yours."

Reggie buries Banjo in Ms. MacDonald's muddy backyard. It reminds her of her mother's rainy funeral. Reggie takes the bus home to her own flat, drawing looks because of the clothes she's scavenged from Ms. MacDonald's closet—garments of synthetic fibers that are much too big for Reggie. She'd had to throw her own blood-saturated clothes in the trash. She held onto a postcard she'd found in the man's pocket last night, signed by Marlee. She carries it in her pocket now along with the postcard from her mother. She hopes she can return it to him somehow, but when she called the Royal Infirmary that morning, they'd told her that they had no record of a Jackson Brodie.

## ADAM LAY YBOUNDEN

Jackson feels he's somewhere in between life and death. He feels as if he's being consumed by purifying flames, and his brain is filled with static. People come to visit him—his parents, his brother, and random figures like old teachers and neighbors. It exhausts him. He only wants to see Niamh, but she doesn't return. He finally has enough and wants to get out of the "madhouse." He opens his eyes and is greeted by a nurse. He tells her he feels "fuzzy."

*Ms. MacDonald's dog abruptly dies, too. It reinforces the feeling of being left totally alone in the world. A stranger had told Reggie about her mother's death, and she doesn't have anyone to grieve or remember with. Reggie doesn't want anyone else to have to endure that kind of abandonment.*



*Reggie interprets her proximity to death as being cursed. She doesn't think about the fact that, if she hadn't insisted on receiving first aid training, then she wouldn't have been able to try to help the bleeding man at all. She is a caring rescuer like Jackson Brodie, but she's also a wounded survivor like him, Joanna, and Louise. She's still struggling to come to terms with the death and loss she's experienced, and it colors everything she sees.*



*Reggie understands the importance of communications from loved ones, so she instinctively saves Marlee's postcard. Her memories of past tragedy continue to haunt her as she struggles to make her way through daily life. The postcard is the first decisive statement to the reader that the man Reggie saved was, in fact, Jackson Brodie.*



*In his injured, near-death, state, Jackson is overwhelmed by vivid thoughts and memories of loved ones. The chapter title, "Adam Lay Ybounden," refers to a late medieval poem about the fall of man and its accompanying curse of death. Jackson finally has enough of the mental confusion and returns to consciousness.*



## OUTLAW

Louise wonders what they're all doing up at such an unearthly hour. Even after operating through the night, chipper Patrick has made fancy French toast for Bridget and Tim. Louise is in a "mutinous" mood and criticizes the expensive imported raspberries. Patrick, she thinks, got to spend the night in a sterile operating theatre, while she spent the night in the rain, finding severed limbs and comforting victims on the scene. Patrick is taking the guests sightseeing, but Louise can't bear it and she returns to work.

Louise drives to the Hunters' today to see Neil instead of Joanna. She thinks of Jackson Brodie saying, "A coincidence is just an explanation waiting to happen," but she can't see any connection between Neil Hunter's brushes with the law and Andrew Decker's release from prison. The Hunters' house is quiet; only Neil is there. He seems unsurprised about the alleged arson, and he tells her about Joanna's sudden trip to see her sick aunt, whom he identifies as Agnes Barker. Louise thinks that Joanna has "a very handy aunt."

Louise questions Neil about any enemies he might have and tells him there will be a warrant for his documentation. When Neil leaves the room for a phone call, Louise studies Joanna Hunter's notice board. It's covered with pictures of her life, seeming to broadcast the message that she's "no longer a victim." Louise notices that one of Joanna's activities in university had been the Rifle Club. She muses, "[Joanna] could run, she could shoot. She was all ready for next time." Neil comes back looking rattled and asks if Louise would like a dram of whiskey.

## THE FAMOUS REGGIE

Reggie stops by Mr. Hussain's shop on the corner of her street. She's still thinking about Joanna, wishing Joanna had taken Reggie along to look after the baby on her trip. Reggie buys a newspaper (headline: "CARNAGE!") and a candy bar and chats with Mr. Hussain. Then she heads to her flat and finds a note affixed to the door with chewing gum. It says, "Reggie Chase: you cant hide from us." The front door is also unlocked. She wonders if Billy has been here. When she goes inside, it takes a moment for her to realize that the entire flat has been trashed. All her school papers and books are heaped in the middle of the living room, and everything else has been smashed or otherwise destroyed. In the bathroom she finds a spray-painted message, "Your dead." Reggie figures it must be Billy's friends; "Billy knew a lot of ungrammatical people." Her home feels desecrated.

*The morning after the train crash, Patrick carries on as if everything's normal, and this makes Louise furious. She feels he can't relate to the raw horror she experienced caring for victims at the crash scene. She'd rather distance herself from the family than deal with the emotions—her typical survival mechanism—and she goes to work instead, where she feels relatively safe.*



*Jackson's saying about coincidences is his catchphrase as a detective, and it seems especially applicable to this book, as characters' lives draw together in surprising ways. Right now, though, Joanna's disappearance—just as Neil Hunter is being suspected of arson and Andrew Decker has been released—doesn't make much sense.*



*Joanna has taken care to show her best face to the world—the one that has moved on from tragedy and knows how fend for herself. Louise, always thinking about survival, figures that Joanna is making sure she won't be caught helpless again. Neil, meanwhile, appears to be caught up in something he wasn't prepared for.*



*Mr. Hussain, Reggie's supervisor during her occasional store shifts, is another kind figure in the support system she's pulled together for herself. No sooner does she get home, however, than she's confronted with yet another traumatic event—her apartment has been violated, apparently by people with whom Billy has gotten tangled up. Even her beloved books and school things have been ruined—suggesting that, given her vulnerable position as orphaned and impoverished, the safe world Reggie has carved out for herself is inherently fragile.*



Suddenly a hand shoves Reggie, and she hits her head in the shower as she falls. She sees two young, “thuggish” men, one ginger and one blond. The latter is holding a knife. Terrified, Reggie tries to reason with the men, telling them she hasn’t seen Billy in ages. They look confused and insist that they’re looking for a “guy called Reggie.” Surprisingly, they leave, but one of them tosses her one of Ms. MacDonald’s Loeb editions as a message for her brother. It’s the first volume of the *Iliad*. When Reggie opens it, she finds that it’s been hollowed out with a knife.

One of the thugs pops his head back in to warn Reggie not to go to the police, or they’ll kill her. After he leaves again, Reggie vomits. She hurries to the bus stop, unable to reach either Billy or Dr. Hunter. The threatening message feels applicable—“your dead.” Reggie has enough dead people in her life. She thinks about her earlier call with Neil Hunter; she’d heard Sadie barking in the background. Dr. Hunter wouldn’t have gone somewhere without Sadie.

## MISSING IN ACTION

A cheerful Australian doctor tells Jackson Brodie how much blood they’d had to transfuse into him to save his life. A registrar who looks like Harry Potter explains that he’s also had “a bit of a dunt to the head.” Later, a nurse informs him that his name is Andrew Decker, according to the wallet that had been found in his pocket. Jackson is skeptical, but he can’t remember anything else about himself or the accident, so he accepts it. A policewoman questions him about the license, apparently expired, but Jackson can’t tell her anything. He sleeps and wakes repeatedly, feeling like “a blank sheet of paper, a clock without hands.”

## REGGIE CHASE, GIRL DETECTIVE

Reggie arrives at the Hunters’ and asks to take Sadie for a walk. Mr. Hunter is unshaven, hoarse, and smells of cigarettes. When Reggie asks, he claims he’s been talking to Dr. Hunter on her phone, whereas Reggie hasn’t been able to reach her at all. He tells Reggie that Joanna doesn’t want to be bothered.

After fleeing her destroyed flat, Reggie had bought a whole new set of clothes at Topshop. Then she’d gone to the hospital, as the police had requested, and looked at Ms. MacDonald’s bruised and swollen face through a window, confirming her identity. She leaves her number so that they can inform her when “the body is released.” Reggie feels like a child and wonders if she can really be responsible for a dead body, but she doesn’t object.

*Terrorized by the two strangers, Reggie now finds out what became of the mysteriously missing Loeb volume. Its hollowed state suggests that Billy, known to be good with his hands, has worked on it. Again, her world, the things she loves, has been trespassed upon once again, this time by a family member who’s supposed to have her back. Reggie, in other words, is truly alone.*



*Reggie is further traumatized by this encounter, on top of the dramatic events of last night and the events she’s lately encountered. Yet she’s still mindful of the people she loves most, namely Dr. Hunter. Observant as ever, Reggie suspects that all isn’t as it should be with her beloved employer.*



*Jackson’s situation is even more vulnerable than he realizes—he’s not only been misidentified, but somehow, implausibly, Andrew Decker’s wallet had been placed in his pocket. This is one of several mysteries that remains unresolved in the story, one with potentially alarming consequences for Jackson. And because Jackson relies on his investigative smarts both for a living and for making sense of his world, his head injury puts him in a particularly shaky spot—symbolic of the upheaval in his life overall.*



*As soon as she arrives at her second home—after the destruction of her flat, her only home—Reggie finds things off kilter. Mr. Hunter appears to be hiding something, and Dr. Hunter, the most stable person in Reggie’s life, is nowhere to be found.*



*Reggie has no stable place to land at this moment. Her belongings have been trashed, and another of the only trustworthy adults in her life is now dead. Because Ms. MacDonald doesn’t have anyone else, Reggie is forced to deal with the aftermath. She doesn’t feel up to the task, but she also knows what it’s like to be alone in the world, so she can’t refuse.*



Mr. Hunter reluctantly allows Reggie to leave her heavy Topshop bag, pays her wages (he gives her half of what Dr. Hunter pays), and lets her take Sadie. When Reggie goes into the garage in search of Sadie's ball, she sees that Dr. Hunter's Prius is sitting there. Mr. Hunter had specified that Joanna drove to Hawes the day before. So what was her car doing there?

When Reggie gets back to the house, she finds a note from Mr. Hunter, saying that "Jo" had suggested that Reggie take Sadie home with her for a few days. Before leaving, Reggie goes upstairs and peeks in Dr. Hunter's room. Reggie is surprised to see that, out of character, Dr. Hunter's usual work suit isn't hanging in the closet, suggesting that she hadn't changed before her trip. She tries dialing Dr. Hunter again and is sure she hears her mobile's ringtone—it's ringing downstairs. Before she can investigate this, Mr. Hunter bursts back into the house, surprised to find her still there. She nonchalantly leaves the house with Sadie in tow, then is shocked to notice what Sadie is carrying—the baby's beloved scrap of blanket. It has an unmistakable bloodstain on it.

Reggie starts walking toward Dr. Hunter's surgery with Sadie. Tired from the bags she's carrying, she eventually coaxes Sadie onto a bus. When they reach the surgery, she leaves Sadie outside and inquires at reception. The receptionist refuses to give her any information about Dr. Hunter. On the way out, though, she bumps into Dr. Hunter's friend, Sheila, a midwife. Sheila remembers Reggie and asks if everything is okay with her. She hasn't been able to reach Dr. Hunter, either, but figures that the sick aunt explains everything. Reggie takes out the scrap of blanket and thinks, "It belonged with the baby. The baby belonged with Dr. Hunter [...] Reggie belonged with Dr. Hunter. It was all wrong."

## PILGRIM'S PROGRESS

Jackson wakes up from a dream, finding a nurse who's brought him a cup of tea. He still can't remember the train crash, but he remembers who he is. "My name's Jackson Brodie," he tells the nurse. He asks her where he is. She explains that he's in the Royal Infirmary in Edinburgh. Jackson can't figure out what he's doing in Edinburgh. "You must have gone the wrong way," laughs the nurse. Jackson realizes, panicked, that apparently no one has looked for him. Was Tessa with him on the train? He grabs the nurse's arm and asks, "Where's my wife?"

*Even if Mr. Hunter means no ill toward Reggie, he clearly isn't as attentive and generous toward her as Dr. Hunter always was. Meanwhile, Reggie continues to pick up clues that there's more to Dr. Hunter's sudden departure than Mr. Hunter had let on.*



*Reggie knows Dr. Hunter's routine so well that she observes what's missing in the closet, knows Dr. Hunter's ringtone, and recognizes the baby's beloved blanket—the latter detail being the most alarming. Just as she's protective of the little scraps of her own life—like Ms. MacDonald's Loeb Classics collection—Reggie recognizes the rhythms of her loved ones' lives and the things they cherish. So when those things aren't as they should be, she knows all isn't well.*



*Reggie finally finds a sympathetic ear in Dr. Hunter's friend, Sheila, but she, too, accepts the situation at face value. Reggie, though, knows that the abandoned scrap of blanket symbolizes something worse. She also sees herself as "belonging" with Dr. Hunter much as the baby's blanket belonged with him. She feels a visceral bond with the two of them, and their absence shakes up her world even more than the train crash and the break-in at her flat have done.*



*After more rest, Jackson remembers his identity—and not only that, he remembers his wife, who hasn't been mentioned in the story at all until this point. Even apart from the temporary amnesia, this suggests that Jackson's heart isn't entirely with his wife—he's thought about his exes, and Louise, a great deal more than Tessa. Also, the nurse's flippant remark echoes the mysterious woman Jackson had seen in the Yorkshire Dales.*



## “AN ELDERLY AUNT”

Even though Louise can drink most guys under the table, she refuses Neil Hunter’s offer of whiskey. Instead she buys an espresso and goes to her office to study all the reported sightings of David Needler. She fears that the case is going cold. Marcus comes in with news about Neil Hunter. The manager of one of his arcades was attacked, another arcade was smashed up, and one of his drivers was beaten up. Meanwhile, Louise gets the news that Andrew Decker has disappeared. She figures that he’s trying to get away from the press, much like Joanna.

On her way back from a meeting later, Louise gets an unusual craving for chocolate, so she buys a large candy bar, devours it, and then promptly throws up the whole thing. Just as she’s coming out of the bathroom, she gets a frantic phone call from Reggie Chase, whom she’d briefly met at the Hunters’ the other evening. She drives back into the city and meets Reggie at a Starbucks.

Reggie shows Louise the piece of the baby’s blanket. It makes Louise think about Archie as a baby. Reggie also tells her about Dr. Hunter’s car, the phone left behind, and her uncharacteristic lack of communication. She concludes that she thinks someone has taken Joanna, or she’s been murdered. Louise sighs, thinking, “The girl was one of those.” She’s met overexcitable types like this before. She tells Reggie it’s all just a coincidence. Reggie urges Louise to track down the supposed elderly aunt. Louise insists on driving Reggie home.

Louise also dismisses Reggie’s claims about saving a man’s life as fantasy. She shouldn’t have wasted her time talking to the girl, but she can’t shake her obsession with Joanna Hunter. She figures Joanna’s marriage is shaky, Neil Hunter’s finances are a mess, and Andrew Decker is out of prison, so why wouldn’t Joanna disappear? Plus, Reggie doesn’t know about Joanna’s past. Louise doesn’t want to break that confidence.

On the drive to Musselburgh, Louise asks Reggie what she knows about Dr. Hunter. Reggie rattles off everything she knows about Joanna’s likes and dislikes. She also gives Louise the postcard she’d taken from Jackson Brodie’s pocket last night. Louise peers at the muck-splattered postcard and sees it’s addressed to “Jackson Brodie.” Reggie asks if Louise might have “a week look” for Brodie. Louise says she’s too busy, but after she drops Reggie off, she makes a beeline for the hospital—“as obedient as a **dog** to a shepherd calling her home.”

*Louise continues to be fixated on the Needler case, but meanwhile, there’s more news about Neil Hunter’s shady dealings—and the killer of Joanna’s family has disappeared. Louise doesn’t attribute much importance to this, however—she seems to worry less about Joanna than about other women, assuming she can fend for herself.*



*Louise has had an awful lot of unusual cravings lately, but she doesn’t think much of this at the moment, figuring it’s just stress. Reggie, meanwhile, remembers Louise’s surprising visit to the Hunters’ the other night and tracks her down, panicked about the Hunters.*



*Reggie lays out her observations to Louise, figuring Louise is the only person she knows who’s likely to take her seriously. But Louise, cynical from years of police work and also not familiar with Reggie, figures the girl is just getting worked up over nothing, making up stories based on a coincidence. She reads Reggie’s affectionate loyalty as an appetite for drama and dismisses her concerns.*



*Louise also doesn’t believe Reggie about her involvement at the crash site last night. She is thinking about Joanna as a consummate survivor—she survived by running before, so why wouldn’t she do the same thing under these circumstances? She buys Joanna’s projected image and is disinclined to believe that anything else bad could happen to her.*



*Although Reggie’s description of Dr. Hunter is relatively superficial, it still demonstrates her deep affection for Dr. Hunter. When Reggie shows Louise the postcard from last night, Louise finally believes there’s some truth to Reggie’s stories. Whereas she’s been avoiding her own husband and family as much as possible, now she can’t get to Jackson—the self-proclaimed “shepherd” and gatherer of the outcast—fast enough.*



## NADA Y PUES NADA

Reggie refuses to go back to her flat, so it's a good thing she has keys to Ms. MacDonald's house. As a bonus, there are still lots of police around the site of the train crash, and Reggie can't imagine the thugs will look for her here. Reggie lets Louise Monroe believe that it's her house, though, and that her mother isn't home. It's a relief to have told Louise about the train crash, and when Louise sees that she really was right next to the train crash, Reggie hopes she might actually believe that Reggie saved a man's life. She doesn't know if Louise will search for Dr. Hunter, though. She and Sadie curl up together in Ms. MacDonald's living room for the night.

*Reggie has no place else to go, so she and Sadie camp out at Ms. MacDonald's for the time being, hoping that Louise will take Reggie's information seriously. She's homeless, scared, and abandoned, but she still doesn't give up hope, showing her remarkable resilience.*



## AD LUCEM

Jackson is lonely and disoriented. Finally he's awakened from a nap by a kiss on the cheek. In a moment of clarity, he thinks, "He had been going the wrong way. This was the right way. The right woman." Everything seems to fall into place. "I love you," he tells her.

*Though Jackson doesn't say it outright, the woman who visits him is Louise. In the midst of his blariness, he thinks that the events of the past few days have brought him here because of her—she's the one he loves.*



## FIAT LUX

When Louise gets home, she finds a note from Patrick on the dining-room table, inviting her to join them for dinner. Louise isn't hungry, having just taken Happy Meals to the Needler family. She also realizes she's left Decker's driver's license at the hospital—it was evidence for something; she's not sure what. It's not surprising; she'd forgotten herself altogether. She had sat and watched over Jackson for a while, but had been interrupted by a nurse before she could think how to respond to his declaration of love. She fears she's married the wrong man. "No," she corrects herself, "She had married the right man, it was just that she was the wrong woman."

*Louise continues to be obsessed with the Needlers, their needs overriding her commitments to her own family. Her encounter with Jackson left her shaken and forgetful. She also continues to think of herself as "the wrong woman," unsuited to marriage to someone as good as Patrick, and perhaps unsuited to marriage altogether. At least, this is the narrative of her situation that she chooses to believe.*



Louise goes in to the station. She thinks the appearance of Decker's license means he must be in the area. Is he after Joanna Hunter? Louise thinks Reggie's paranoia has gotten under her skin. She thinks about Jackson and the nurse's query about his wife. "Not only had Jackson managed to get his identity muddled with a psycho killer, the bastard had got married as well." When Louise gets home, she opens a bottle of wine and a tub of ice cream and watches a CSI rerun while talking to herself about the Neil Hunter case. Is Neil capable of disposing of his wife for the insurance money? She falls asleep on the couch. Later, awakened by Patrick's and the relatives' return, Louise blarily thinks that she should have told Jackson, "I love you too."

*Louise doubts that Decker's disappearance and the strange appearance of his license are anything to be too concerned about—she's more preoccupied with Jackson, for whom she clearly still harbors feelings. In fact, she's isolating herself as much as possible from her husband and extended family. But Reggie's concerns have rubbed off on her a little bit, at least—she wonders if Neil could be mixed up in Joanna's disappearance after all.*



## GRAVE DANGER

The first thing Joanna remembers happening after her family's murder is waking up in a strange bed and thinking that everyone in the world had died. Then Martina came into the room and told her that it had snowed. She coaxes Joanna to come downstairs for breakfast. "So Joanna climbed obediently out of bed and allowed the rest of her life to begin."

Martina was half Swedish, and she "carried a northern gloom in her blood." She longed for a child of her own, but Howard Mason talked her into two abortions. So she basically had nothing in her life but unsuccessful poetry. Later, Joanna realized that Martina's one published volume, *Blood Sacrifice*, was written about her murdered family. Eventually, Martina had killed herself, too.

Within a month of the murders, Andrew Decker had been caught. He wasn't even 20 years old. He pleaded guilty and was sentenced to life in prison. He said he "didn't know 'what had come over him.'" Martina had called him "the bad man" and would comfort Joanna whenever she had one of her occasional "hysterical fits." Now Decker is 50 and free.

Joanna sometimes "felt like a spy, a sleeper who had been left in a foreign country and forgotten about." The baby awakens, and Joanna shushes him, wondering what will happen if she can no longer protect him. She thinks about Decker's freedom and feels as if "the bad men were all out, roaming the streets." In her mind she hears, "Run, Joanna, run."

## JACKSON RISEN

Jackson wakes up, unsure if Louise was really there or if he just dreamed of her. He feels unsettled by the dream because Tessa hadn't been there. He feels as if the "train crash had caused a rift in his world." He now remembers that Tessa had flown to America for a conference. He remembers the morning last week when they parted. They were standing in their tiny Covent Garden kitchen. He wants Tessa to be there, but he can't quite remember her face. He doubts she would have heard about the train crash in Washington, D.C. Anyway, she'd had no idea that he was heading north to see his son in Yorkshire. That's because she didn't know he had a son.

*The story switches from the main three viewpoint characters to the memories of Joanna Hunter, at an unclear time and place. Joanna remembers the aftermath of the murders, when she was living with her father and his poet girlfriend. At that time in her life, she was still driven by obedience, following the directions of others.*



*In keeping with his behavior toward his first wife and children, Howard Mason seems to be primarily concerned about what suits him and makes his life easier. And others are haunted by the fallout from his own tragedies; the title of her poetry volume suggests that perhaps Martina felt that if Howard hadn't abandoned his family to be with her, his family wouldn't have been murdered.*



*There is no clear explanatory narrative as to why Decker committed these horrible crimes. In contrast to her strong persona as an adult, Joanna suffered breakdowns as a child. The question is left unanswered as to whether Joanna still suffers in this way or just masks her trauma exceptionally well.*



*Joanna's traumatic experience leaves her feeling isolated, cut off from those around her, no matter the confidence she projects. Wherever she currently is, she appears to be in hiding with the baby. She is once again fearful of "the bad men" like Decker, and she hears her mother's words in her mind. She's internalized her mother's command to "run," and now it's the guiding instinct of her life.*



*Already feeling disoriented, Jackson has been further shaken up by the train crash. Seeing Louise—and not seeing his wife, Tessa—makes him feel as though his whole life is being overturned. But he's beginning to remember details about Tessa. The fact that Tessa didn't know about Nathan shows that, with Jackson deliberately hiding key details from her, their relationship seems not to be on the best footing.*



Tessa, much younger than Jackson at 34, worked at the British Museum as a curator of the Assyrian collection. She was beautiful, but “chronically camera-shy,” rarely letting him take photos. Her parents had been killed in a car crash, and she had no souvenirs from her past. They’d met at a party at the home of his old commanding officer, Bernie, whom Jackson hadn’t seen for over 20 years. Jackson was surprised by Bernie’s posh flat and hip guests. They didn’t seem like natural friends for a guy who was ex-military police. Jackson “skulked” around the party, hating small talk, until Tessa approached him. After a few minutes, he’d boldly asked her out. Jackson “couldn’t have designed a better woman.” She was good-natured, funny, smart, and competent, “how God intended women to be.”

The next time Jackson wakes up, a girl is sitting there. She looks about Marlee’s age. She tells him that her dad was in the Royal Scots, and Jackson finds himself becoming unexpectedly conversational. Jackson can’t figure out who the girl is. As she eats his breakfast, she matter-of-factly tells him that she saved his life. When Jackson catches on, he grins, pleased to know that he was “saved by a giggling child and not some burly paramedic.”

Reggie delightedly tells Jackson that he’s in her thrall and can only be released if he reciprocates by saving her life. Until he does, she’s responsible for him. Jackson wonders if he’s “mortgaged his soul [...] not to the devil but to this funny little Scottish girl!” Jackson finally feels grateful to be alive and hopeful about his future.

## DR. FOSTER WENT TO GLOUCESTER

Now that Reggie has found Jackson, she’s keeping vigil by his bedside, “Greyfriars Reggie.” Reggie convinces the attending doctor that she’s Jackson’s daughter. She and Jackson chat and get to know one another a bit. While she’s in the hospital, she leaves a note attached to Sadie’s collar outside so that nobody mistakes her for a stray. She decides that Jackson seems like “an okay sort of person.”

When Reggie comes out of the hospital, Sadie wags a greeting, and Reggie feels “something very like happiness.” She’d told Jackson that she’ll come back. “Reggie was never going to be a person who didn’t come back.” On the bus, though, she gets the call that Ms. MacDonald’s remains are still “unavailable.” Reggie feels empty and panicky again. She wonders where Dr. Hunter is.

*Various details about Tessa suggest that she isn’t quite what she seems, although Jackson does not pick up on them now. For example, not wanting photographic evidence of herself, giving no details of her past, and being Jackson’s “designer” woman all suggest that she doesn’t want Jackson digging too closely into her past. Because Jackson is otherwise a skilled investigator, these oversights are particularly striking, suggesting that Jackson sees what he wants to see, especially when his heart is involved.*



*Jackson and Reggie finally meet. Spurred by the postcard she’d recovered from him, Reggie took the initiative to track Jackson down—not having anyone left herself, she once again gravitates to someone else who’s in need and probably lonely. Jackson is old enough to be a father to Reggie—something she’s never had.*



*Reggie’s good cheer draws Jackson out of his morbid preoccupations and helps him focus on getting well. This suggests that Reggie isn’t an “angel of death” as she has feared about herself, but someone whose kindness and humor helps strengthen others.*



*“Greyfriars Reggie” is a reference to the story of a dog in 19th-century Edinburgh, Greyfriars Bobby, who is said to have spent 14 years guarding the grave of his owner in Greyfriars Kirkyard. Reggie embodies that kind of tenacity and faithfulness, too. She’s driven to watch over those she cares about, much like Jackson and Louise.*



*Sadie and Jackson seem to constitute a makeshift, substitute family for Reggie—it’s the first time in the story that she feels something akin to happiness. When she’s reminded of her obligation to Ms. MacDonald, however, she feels very much like an abandoned child once again.*



## A GOOD MAN IS HARD TO FIND

Louise wakes up feeling as though she can't breathe. She feels hungover and regrets last night's red wine. She watches Patrick sleep and thinks about their docile lovemaking, wondering what it would be like with Jackson. She feels like a "very bad wife" for thinking this.

Louise gets up and drives to the Hunters', rousing Neil Hunter at ten to seven with overbearing cheerfulness. When he lets her in, she asks for Joanna's aunt's contact information, since she hasn't been able to reach Joanna. When Neil goes to look for it, Joanna hears a mobile ringing in a drawer. She can't resist answering it. A cracked male voice asks, "Jo?" When Louise says "no," the caller hangs up immediately. She puts it back and, when Neil returns, asks if she can have Joanna's phone. Neil appears shocked—albeit unconvincingly, in Louise's eyes—when Louise shows him the phone in the drawer.

Later, Louise is parked outside Alison Needler's house, thinking about the elderly aunt. Some basic online research had revealed that Agnes Mason Barker had been an actress in her youth and married a BBC radio producer. But when Louise compares Joanna's call history to the number of the aunt, there've been no calls between the two. When Joanna tries the number herself, she learns that Agnes Barker's number was disconnected last week.

Louise watches Alison Needler walk her children to school, then drives to Dr. Hunter's surgery, feeling unable to stop moving. The surgery's receptionist tells her that she hasn't actually spoken to Joanna; Neil called to tell her about the sick aunt. In the maternity clinic, Sheila Hayes can't tell her anything, either. But Sheila has seen the story about Joanna and the Mason murders in the paper.

Back at the office, Louise redoubles her efforts to track down Joanna. Later, she returns to the Hunters' and starts up Joanna's Prius, which Neil claimed had been broken down. He jokes, "Do I need a lawyer?" Louise says, "I don't know. Do you?"

*Louise is still hung up on memories of the previous day's reunion with Jackson, even while she's in bed next to a husband she knows is good for her. She again feels the strain of being a "bad wife" in a good marriage.*



*As Louise typically does when she's feeling insecure about her own life, she falls back on her obsessive cases. She finds Joanna's abandoned mobile phone in the house, though it's never clear who the mysterious male caller is—Andrew Decker? Neil, apparently pretending, claims he was unaware of the phone's whereabouts.*



*Louise thinks about Joanna while watching over the Needlers. She's been won over to the idea, first planted by Reggie, that something may have happened to Joanna. In fact, the sick aunt—the excuse Neil gave for Joanna's abrupt disappearance—doesn't seem to have contacted Joanna recently.*



*Louise compulsively attends to her cases, perhaps afraid with being left alone with her thoughts. She asks around Joanna's workplace and can't find any additional clues.*



*It's becoming ever clearer that there is some sort of dishonesty at work in the Hunter household. If Joanna didn't drive her own car to her aunt's in Yorkshire, then it's not clear how she would have gotten there.*



## ABIDE WITH ME

Joanna was nine years old when Martina died. She came home from school as Martina's body was being carried out on a stretcher. In Martina's room she found empty bottles and "something sickly in the air." Martina had left a suicide note saying, "Too much" and something untranslated in Swedish. When Joanna found her father and showed him the note, he threw his bottle of whiskey at her.

Joanna had lived with her father for a while. Howard's next wife, an artist from Hong Kong, had suggested that Joanna be sent to a boarding school in the Cotswolds. After her father moved to Los Angeles, she spent holidays with her "dreadful" Aunt Agnes and Uncle Oliver, whom she could never forgive "for not wrapping her in love." She eventually saw an obituary in the newspaper telling her that her father had died in Brazil. However, Joanna thrived at boarding school, loving the order and structure of life there.

Joanna and the baby are sharing a lumpy mattress. As she nurses him early in the morning, she reflects on her belief that she carries the souls of her dead family within her. She's an atheist, but that doesn't mean a person "didn't have to get through every day the best way you could. There were no rules." The baby is the same age as Joseph when he died. She can't imagine what her brother would have been like as an adult, but she sometimes imagines what Jessica and Gabrielle would be like now. They all "possess a reality that was stronger than anything alive, apart from the baby, of course."

Joanna's whole life is "an act of bereavement, longing for something she could no longer remember." She sometimes dreams of a **dog** barking, and it awakens such a raw grief that she wants to kill both the baby and herself so that nothing bad can ever happen to him. She thinks about contingency plans in case she reaches a point where she can no longer run. But as long as she can, she'll keep running. Just then she hears footsteps on the stairs—"the bad man was coming."

*The story picks up with Joanna's reflections again. Next in the string of losses Joanna endured, her father's girlfriend, Martina, who'd otherwise shown kindness to Joanna, committed suicide. Her father had a capacity for violence, so her childhood home never seems to have been a safe harbor for her.*



*Joanna never finds the love and security she craves among her extended family, which shows why she works so hard to provide a perfectly safe and loving environment for her baby. The closest she ever got was a boarding school environment that suited her well. Because she resented her aunt so much, it seems unlikely that Joanna would have dropped everything at the last minute to tend to her "sick aunt."*



*Joanna and the baby seem to be in hiding or captivity somewhere. Joanna's "no rules" mantra shapes the way she copes with grief—even though it doesn't fit her overall value system, she believes that their souls live on inside her. This further underscores Joanna's determination to protect herself and her son at all costs. "The baby"—whom Joanna never calls by name—seems to embody her loved ones' continued life, which is not surprising, as he's probably the only living person with whom Joanna has shared a fully mutual love.*



*Even though she projects such a strong sense of survival, Joanna is still grieving, often in a deeply painful, primal way. She's so afraid of something terrible happening to the baby that she would sooner kill them both than let that happen. Until that time, she continues to obey her mother's instinct to "run." While the phrase "the bad man" suggests that Decker has returned, it's not yet clear if it's really him or not. However, someone is apparently holding the two of them captive.*



## REGGIE CHASE, WARRIOR VIRGIN

Reggie keeps phoning Louise but not getting an answer. She feels that “the slender thread that still connected [her] to Dr. Hunter was broken.” She knows that Dr. Hunter’s phone is still in her house, so she decides to find the phone so that she can find the elderly aunt’s phone number and call Dr. Hunter there; then “all would be right with the world.”

Mr. Hunter isn’t at home. Reggie uses her house key to let herself and Sadie in. Sadie races around in search of Dr. Hunter, but it’s obvious to Reggie that the house is “quiet as the grave.” Reggie searches everywhere for Dr. Hunter’s mobile, but she can’t find it. Then she hears Mr. Hunter’s Range Rover approaching, followed by “another equally aggressive-sounding car.” She races upstairs and hides with Sadie in the bedroom. When she hears three voices moving upstairs, she grabs Sadie and pulls her into the walk-in closet.

Reggie peers through the slats and hears a man with a Glaswegian accent threatening Neil. He says, “Sweet little wife, pretty little baby. Do you want to see them again?” Reggie is sure they can all hear the pounding of her heart. Neil pulls open his side of the closet, removes something, and then leaves with the men. Reggie runs to the window and memorizes the license plate number of the departing car. Reggie is both comforted by the implication that Dr. Hunter is still alive and terrified by the likelihood that she’s been kidnapped. As she and Sadie scramble out of the closet, she finds Dr. Hunter’s purse. She takes it with her.

Reggie catches a series of buses back to her flat in Gorgie to find her phone charger. She looks through Dr. Hunter’s purse, knowing it’s theft, but figuring the normal rules no longer apply. The purse contains a brush, baby wipes, Dr. Hunter’s inhaler, her driving glasses, and her Filofax—which contains an address for Agnes Barker in Hawes.

When Reggie gets to her apartment, she finds a crowd of emergency vehicles outside the building. All the windows are broken, and the outside is streaked with soot. No one seems to have been hurt, which is a relief—“Reggie’s life was like the Ilian plain, littered with the dead.” She asks a loitering boy what happened, and he confirms that petrol had been poured through the letterbox of flat number eight—Reggie’s. She thinks of all her books and schoolwork and her mother’s things. Mr. Hussain comes by and offers Reggie a cup of tea. Reggie declines, hunches into her jacket, and walks away from the scene.

*Reggie is painfully aware that her carefully cultivated family ties are fragile, and she feels that the tie with the Hunters is now broken. If only she could find a way to reach Dr. Hunter, the tie could be repaired. Once again, Reggie’s strength and her vulnerability are tightly bound together.*



*When Reggie goes to look for Dr. Hunter, she quickly finds herself in a terrifying position, and only her quick thinking—and Sadie’s obedience—keep her from being discovered snooping around the Hunter home.*



*It’s now unambiguously certain that Joanna and the baby have been kidnapped, and they are apparently still alive. Again, Reggie’s quick thinking comes to the rescue as she gets the license number and grabs Dr. Hunter’s purse.*



*Reggie’s investigation of the contents of Joanna’s purse yields further proof that Joanna left in a hurry. It also yields a way of contacting the aunt. Reggie, too, is willing to cross lines to make sure that the people she loves are safe.*



*Reggie has been victimized again, her ransacked apartment now burned. Her comparison of her life to “the Ilian plain” is another reference to her beloved Iliad, showing the inner congruence of two outwardly different worlds. Reggie grieves the loss of the last material links to her old life and her mother’s memory.*



Moments later, Reggie notices that she's being followed by a creepy white van. The thugs, Blondie and Ginger, get out and swagger towards her. They demand to know if she's "Reggie Chase's sister, Billy." Sadie growls at the man's tone of voice. Reggie delays. Ginger threatens Reggie that her brother will die if he doesn't "come up with the goods." Sadie barks alarmingly at them as they get back into their van. Ginger throws another Loeb classic out the window, this time the *Aeneid*. When Reggie looks inside, there's a hollow carved into it. Reggie knows it's Billy's handiwork. She finally cries, wondering where "a person [went] when they had no one to turn to and nowhere left to run."

*Reggie's brother, Billy, appears to have identified himself as Reggie to the thugs, showing his reckless disregard for his sister. Sadie, meanwhile, shows her protective side. When Reggie sees the destroyed copy of the Aeneid, she breaks down at last, feeling that all the places and people dear to her have been heartlessly taken away one by one—her very identity stolen, in an even more permanent way than Billy's use of her name.*



## JACKSON LEAVES THE BUILDING

Jackson looks a bit like Frankenstein's monster, and he's groggy and sore, but he's determined to get out of the hospital and get home. Or at least to the Covent Garden flat, where Tessa will be. His real home is "the dark and sooty chamber in his heart that contained his sister and his brother." The Australian doctor agrees that he can discharge himself, but Jackson realizes he doesn't have any money or clothes.

*Jackson is on the mend and determined to get home—although he acknowledges to himself that his "real home" is the grief he harbors deep in his heart. There's a part of Jackson that he holds back and never fully reveals to anyone else.*



Reggie has bought Jackson clothes. She got the sizes from Jackson's old, ruined clothes, which the hospital gave her because she claimed to be Jackson's daughter. Jackson wonders why Reggie is helping him. Reggie admits that she wants something from him: she wants to hire him. Jackson says he doesn't do detective work anymore. People who want his help, he thinks, always get him in trouble. Reggie begs, and he finally relents.

*Wondering where to turn, Reggie decides that Jackson is the one she can run to. And though Jackson makes a pretext of not helping at first, in the end he can't resist a cry for help. Even in extreme grief, Reggie is resourceful, and even at one of the lowest points of his life, Jackson instinctively cares about and wants to protect others.*



## THE PRODIGAL WIFE

Louise is getting ready to drive to Hawes with Marcus. She thinks about how innocent he looks. In her own youth, most of the men she'd been with had been older and, she now realizes, probably "pervy." When she and Patrick were getting to know each other, Louise lied and said she'd only been with a few guys and had lost her virginity at 18. She reflects that she would have made a good con woman. She should have told the truth—that she has no idea how to love another person. Louise and Patrick had a small fight when Louise had told him she was taking a trip to England. She told him not to tell her how to do her job, and he told her that the "Scottish chip on [her] shoulder" was getting in the way of her better self.

*Louise has finally decided to pursue the lead to find Joanna's aunt, and she takes her young protege, Marcus, with her. Thinking about Marcus's youth makes Louise think about her own, which she'd deliberately misrepresented to Patrick, showing that she both mistrusts him and doesn't respect herself. She believes herself incapable of both loving and being loved for who she is, hence constantly burying herself in her work and refusing to open up to Patrick.*



During the trip, Louise makes fun of Marcus's CD collection, telling him, "You're too young to die yet." When they see a newspaper headline about Andrew Decker ("Freed Killer Flees"), Marcus muses that Decker has paid his dues; "should he pay forever?" Louise says yes and promises Marcus that he, too, will be "hard and unfeeling" someday.

Louise gets several agitated messages from Reggie, including a license plate number and the contents of Joanna Hunter's purse. Louise is beginning to suspect that Reggie might be right. Louise has the license number run, and the station reports back that it's registered to a Glasgow chauffeur company. She also tells Marcus that the "Andrew Decker" in the hospital was an "ordinary guy." Privately, she'd checked on Jackson's whereabouts and was annoyed that "the bastard" had discharged himself without even saying goodbye to her. They reach Hawes, "a small market town with a big cheese thing going on." Louise isn't fond of it—she prefers the city. "[T]he countryside unsettled her because she didn't know who the enemy was." Meanwhile, being in Yorkshire keeps reminding Louise of Jackson.

Louise and Marcus knock at the address of Agnes Barker. The big, unattractive renter who answers the door has never heard of her, but gives Louise a phone number. The girl at the rental agency directs them to a nursing home. Meanwhile, the station has been unable to locate a car rental for Joanna Hunter. They did find one for Andrew Decker, with his "daughter."

The nursing home is "everything Louise feared for herself." It's a "place to send people whom nobody wanted." Louise decides she will kill herself before winding up helpless and set aside. The girl at the reception desk informs them that Agnes Barker can't meet with them—she died a couple of weeks ago of a massive stroke, leaving only estranged family behind her. Louise doesn't know what to do next. Did Joanna lie to everyone about the sick aunt, or did Neil lie about Joanna's whereabouts? Louise suspects that Joanna can "dissemble with the best of them." She can imagine Joanna pursuing vengeance on Decker 30 years later, because Louise would do the same herself.

*Louise's playful comment to Marcus turns out to be foreshadowing. Marcus wonders whether the prolonged hounding of Decker is just, but Louise attributes this attitude to his lack of cynicism.*



*From Louise's investigation, it appears certain that Neil's business associates are connected with Joanna's disappearance. The identity swap between Jackson and Decker is still a mystery, however. Louise feels out of place in the country because she can't identify the dangers in advance—similar to the way she feels in a secure, conventional marriage.*



*Their investigation proves that the claim that Joanna went to her aunt's house is false; it appears that someone has taken her somewhere else. Meanwhile, Jackson has apparently absconded with Reggie, naively using Decker's ID.*



*Louise is fearful of winding up unloved and alone like everyone at the nursing home. It turns out that everything concerning the sickly aunt was a big lie—but whose lie? Louise recognizes that Joanna is not as innocent as she appears, so Louise wouldn't put such a lie past her—even an attempt to track down and kill Decker. She assumes that Joanna would think and act much as Louise herself would.*



Louise feels adrift. She and Marcus go to a café for afternoon tea. Reggie calls Louise, and she ignores the call, then reconsiders and calls her back. Jackson answers. Louise thinks, “Didn’t it make sense that two of the most provoking people she could think of would somehow be together.” The reception is lost before Louise can get an explanation. Then she gets a call from the station—Andrew Decker was stopped and taken to the hospital after some sort of accident. Louise also learns that Joanna Hunter had visited Decker a month before his release from prison. Louise wonders why Joanna had never mentioned this. A final call from the station tells Louise that Joanna’s calls have been traced, and that several of the received calls are registered to Jackson Brodie’s mobile.

*Louise calls Reggie and can’t understand how in the world Jackson answers instead, but isn’t surprised that two such doggedly stubborn personalities would gravitate to one another. She also learns that Joanna hasn’t been completely forthcoming about her relationship with Decker—and now she appears to have some sort of a connection with Jackson Brodie as well. Louise begins to piece together that there’s been some sort of identity mix-up between Brodie and Decker.*



## ARMA VIRUMQUE CANO

Reggie wakes Jackson with breakfast. Jackson was baffled last night when a taxi brought them to a house that’s mere yards from the train crash. Reggie, with her “overheated imagination,” has convinced Jackson to check out the whereabouts of Joanna’s mysterious aunt before going home to London. Jackson feels like “a tired old **dog**” and isn’t sure how he will manage. But he figures he has “enough women on his conscience without adding another one to the tally.” Reggie has withdrawn her life savings, and Jackson tells her that he’s rich and will pay her back.

*The story backtracks to the day before, when Jackson was released from the hospital. He’s agreed to help Reggie with her investigation, in part because he’s known so many women whom he believes he’s failed to protect, and, true to his sheepdog instinct, he doesn’t want that to happen again in this case.*



A cranky woman at the car rental agency has to be talked into renting them the only vehicle that Jackson can drive one-handed, his other arm being in a sling. Reggie has dabbed makeup on Jackson’s many bruises, but Jackson still looks like a criminal on the run. They had considered taking the train instead, but as soon as they got to Waverley Station, Jackson had a panic attack. He’s beginning to remember bits and pieces from the crash. Reggie coaches him through it, telling him, “We’re all survivors, Mr. B.”

*Reggie, so familiar with survival, touchingly helps Jackson through a panic attack when the memories of the crash come back to him. The two make a decidedly unlikely pairing as they negotiate an alternative way to England using Decker’s ID.*



Jackson and Reggie finally talk the rental agent into renting them the car, despite their lack of a credit card. Reggie helps him shift gears. He feels nervous with her there, “half child, half unstoppable force of nature.” Sadie curls up on the backseat. Reggie delights in navigating, but Jackson, hopped up on painkillers, is barely hanging on. When they reach the junction at Scots Corner, Jackson remembers passing this place on his way to Hawes the previous Wednesday. He’s back where he started. At that moment, he overcompensates on the turn, clips two cars, and winds up on the verge, facing the wrong direction.

*Jackson, still scarcely recovered from the train crash just a couple of days before, makes it most of the way before causing an accident near the turnoff where he’d headed in search of his son just the week before. The memory of the previous week seems to jar him just enough to cause him to momentarily lose his bearings.*



A short time later, Jackson is taking a breathalyzer test while all the dazed but uninjured passengers sit by the road. Reggie gloomily concludes that she attracts bad things. The police officer inspects Jackson's license and looks suspiciously at Reggie. Moments later, two officers flatten him to the ground. Reggie jumps up and down and yells, like "a Jack Russell fending off a pack of Dobermans," but pretty soon Jackson is under arrest. "He couldn't think why, but somehow it didn't surprise him."

Jackson sits between two officers in the emergency room at Darlington. An officer explains that he's under arrest for failure to comply with the conditions of his release from prison. Jackson feebly tries to explain that he's not Andrew Decker. Suddenly his phone rings, and it's Louise, but the officer takes it away from him before they can speak. Half an hour later, she appears in person and convinces the police to let her have him. Reggie appears and greets her. "We *all* know each other? How's that for a coincidence?" Jackson says, "A coincidence is just an explanation waiting to happen." Louise says, "Shut it, sunshine."

## ROAD TRIP

Marcus buys fish and chips for everyone. Jackson and Reggie are sitting in the back of Louise's car with Sadie between them. Jackson tells Louise to just drop him somewhere so that he can get home, but Louise refuses, reminding him he's committed several crimes—driving without a license and driving while unfit. (Although "he's not a prisoner," she had told the English officers. "Just an idiot.") He and Louise snipe at one another while she drives.

Louise explains to Reggie about the aunt who's been dead for weeks. Reggie goes through the contents of Joanna's purse again. She insists that something bad has happened to Joanna, and both Jackson and Louise agree. They can't figure out if there is any connection between Joanna's disappearance and Decker. Jackson somehow lost his BlackBerry and keys in the train crash, and it had been replaced with Decker's driving license. How had their identities gotten swapped? Louise finally fills Reggie in on Joanna's past. Jackson finally remembers who Decker is—he'd been among the search party looking for Joanna while on army maneuvers in Dartmoor. Now he's searching for her again.

*Jackson's use of Decker's ID finally catches up with him when the police stop him. Reggie feels like she must have caused the accident, but that doesn't stop her from aspired attempt to disrupt Jackson's arrest.*



*The threads of the story catch up with one another as Jackson fields Louise's phone call, and Louise shows up soon thereafter. Jackson deploys his favorite saying about coincidences, although in this particular case, the explanations—particularly of how Jackson got mixed up with Decker—are far from clear.*



*The improbable group's journey back to Edinburgh has a sense of comic relief about it. Jackson's and Louise's affection for each other is masked by humorous albeit irritable insults.*



*As Reggie is filled in on the "sick aunt" wild goose chase, as well as the true story of Joanna's childhood, certain big questions remain unanswered—and another improbable wrinkle in the story emerges, as it's revealed that Jackson, then a young soldier, was the man who found Joanna the last time she ran, as a little girl. Jackson's own life was saved because Dr. Hunter, whose life he helped save, taught Reggie lifesaving techniques.*



Later, while Reggie and Marcus are buying snacks in a service station, Louise feels strong desire for Jackson and wishes she could “let her bones melt,” even momentarily, as she never does with Patrick. But she talks about Neil Hunter’s criminal associations instead. She wonders if Hunter’s friends are holding Joanna and the baby hostage. Jackson approves of her theories, but just takes her hand and says that he’s missed her. Before she can respond, Reggie and Marcus return from the shop.

They arrive back in Scotland after dark. Louise drops Reggie and Jackson in Musselburgh. Jackson promises Louise he won’t go back to London without saying goodbye. Louise daydreams about taking Jackson home and introducing him as the man she should’ve married, or at least run away with—“marriage was for fools.” She drops Marcus off, even though he’s miles out of her way, and contemplates where else she could go—“how far could she get before anyone noticed she was gone?”

## TRIBULATION

Reggie wishes she had warned Jackson about her criminal brother. Then he wouldn’t have been so shocked when they entered Ms. MacDonald’s house and were greeted by a knife-wielding Billy. Billy pushes Jackson to the floor and half-strangles Reggie, looking wild-eyed. She can feel his knife against her skin. Ms. MacDonald’s books have been trashed. Jackson gets up, angrily telling Billy, “It’s your job to *look after* your sister.” Reggie tells Billy that his friends have been terrorizing her. She figures that if she can keep him talking, he’ll get bored and leave.

Suddenly, they hear a savage growling. Sadie leaps and digs her teeth into Billy’s forearm. He starts screaming. Sadie won’t let go until Jackson punches her in the side of the head. Then he kneels on Billy’s back, pinning him to the ground. While Reggie comforts Sadie, Jackson asks if she wants him to call the police. She says no. They can both see that Billy is “hurtling at breakneck speed towards a bed end” no matter what they do.

## HIGH NOON

That night, Jackson can’t sleep. He comes downstairs and finds Reggie and Sadie sleeping in the living room. Sadie watches him warily. He can’t find anything to read that isn’t in Latin, so he leafs through Joanna’s Filofax. “She had been found once,” he thinks, “she would be found again.” In his mind, Joanna is a little girl lost in the dark.

*Jackson and Louise still have strong feelings for one another, but they don’t indulge them, as Louise tries desperately to keep their interactions focused on the business at hand, and Reggie’s and Marcus’s presence keep their feelings muffled.*



*Louise is convinced that she’s made a big mistake in marrying Patrick and wishes she could run away with Jackson. Short of that, she wishes she could run away like Joanna, to escape the strain of pretending to be something she isn’t.*



*Reggie and Jackson have a shocking encounter with Billy, who seems to be half-seriously thinking about harming his sister. Predictably, this angers Jackson, who lost his own sister to violence. This is also another example of an environment Reggie had believed to be safe haven—Ms. MacDonald’s house—undergoing a hostile invasion.*



*Showing herself a faithful watchdog and vindicating Dr. Hunter’s trust in her, Sadie leaps to Reggie’s defense. They decide to let Billy go, though, believing there’s nothing to be gained by having him arrested.*



*Jackson can’t let go of his sheepdog instinct. He thinks of Joanna as the little girl he found in the wheat field thirty years ago.*



Jackson covers Reggie with a blanket and starts out the door. But Reggie pipes up, “I hope you’re not thinking of going anywhere without me.” Soon they’re sitting outside of the Hunters’ house, having taken a cab from Musselburgh. A Nissan Pathfinder is parked there, the one whose license plate Reggie had memorized. Reggie suggests they should follow when the men leave. They can take Dr. Hunter’s car. Jackson wonders if a Prius can be hot-wired, but Reggie knows where there’s a spare key hidden in the garage.

Jackson hasn’t tailed anyone in a car for a while. Reggie warns him not to crash Joanna’s Prius. Sadie climbs into the back. It’s only five o’clock in the morning. Jackson follows the Nissan at a distance until they turn off onto a farm road. He parks at the edge of a field and makes Reggie and the **dog** solemnly promise to stay where they are. He gets out to follow the Nissan on foot.

Jackson sees the Nissan parked in front of a house, next to a Toyota. The men in the Nissan get out and let themselves into the house. Immediately he hears yelling. Jackson only has time to dive into a ditch before the men run out and roar off in the Nissan. He moves toward the house, spotting a movement in the bushes. A person, a woman, emerges, illuminated by Reggie’s flashlight (she’d predictably disobeyed his orders). The woman is holding a baby and is covered with blood. She’s holding a knife. Sadie barks joyfully in greeting. “Can you help me?” Dr. Hunter asks Jackson.

## LA RÈGLE DU JEU

Joanna has various poems and nursery rhymes running through her mind, along with, “Run, Joanna, run.” But she can’t run because she’s tethered by a rope. She had always expected to find herself in a dark place like this again.

When the men come, they rarely speak to her and don’t seem to care if Joanna sees their faces. She talks to them, anyway, calling them Peter and John, addressing them as such whenever possible. She figures they’re going to kill her, but she decides she’ll make it as difficult as possible for them. They bring her and the baby food, diapers, and toys. She and the baby were both groggy for the first day because the men had injected a sedative into both of them. Joanna had prepared the vein for them after they held a knife to the baby’s throat. They’d walked into the bedroom while Joanna was changing after work.

*Jackson doesn’t even try to dissuade Reggie, tacitly recognizing her invaluable insights into Dr. Hunter. Indeed, at the Hunters’, Reggie’s knowledge of Dr. Hunter’s habits saves the day again, enabling them to pursue the apparent kidnappers Reggie had spotted earlier.*



*The apparent kidnappers lead Jackson, Reggie, and Sadie outside of Edinburgh.*



*The shocking appearance of Dr. Hunter, covered in blood and wielding a knife, harkens back to Gabrielle Mason’s appearance at the beginning of the novel, except this time, Joanna is the one holding the knife—she clearly didn’t run this time.*



*This chapter, whose French title is “the rules of the game,” brings full circle Joanna’s “no rules” philosophy. The only rule for her is love—protection of those she loves—at any cost, and her behavior in captivity shows what that love looks like in action. It’s a position she’s been expecting for a long time.*



*The men who are holding Joanna captive seem to expect that they’re going to kill her, and Joanna knows it, so she tries to humanize both them and herself as much as possible. Finally the circumstances of the kidnapping become clearer—it happened right after Reggie said a fateful goodbye to Joanna and the baby on the Hunters’ porch a few days ago, proving her foreboding correct.*



The house is unheated and cold, and Joanna can see nothing but barren fields all around. On the second day, Peter gives Joanna a piece of paper and tells her to write a note to Neil, saying that she and the baby will die if Neil doesn't do as he's told. She wonders what Neil did to cause this and what he's doing to end it.

Joanna had become a doctor because she wanted to help and heal people. She'd been attracted to Neil because he seemed whole, not needing any healing. He was part of the fake life she'd spent thirty years working to create, but after the baby was born, her life became real.

Peter explains to Joanna that "the guy we're working for" wants Neil to sign over his business, and Joanna and the baby are the price of not doing so. Joanna objects that this is coercion, which will never stand up in court. Peter just laughs and says, "You're not in your world now, Doctor." So she writes the note as he says.

Early on Saturday, John wakes Joanna and tells her to write another note. She writes, "Please help us. We don't want to die." Later, when John returns, Joanna jams the pen into his eye as far as it will go. He's dead. When Peter comes in, he finds Joanna cradling John's body. Joanna tells him that something is wrong with John, and as he crouches down to look, she slams her hand into Peter's windpipe. She grabs the knife from his ankle sheath and cuts through the rope that's tethering her. Then she sticks the knife into both of his carotid arteries. The baby wakes up, and she recites a nursery rhyme for him.

## A CLEAN, WELL-LIGHTED PLACE

At six o'clock that morning, Louise taps on the window of the Hunters' house. Neil, asleep on the couch, jerks in terror, then calms and lets her in. Louise tells him they've figured out that Aunt Agnes is dead. She asks him if Joanna has been kidnapped, and he doesn't respond. She then gives him an official warning that he's being taken in for questioning. He bursts into tears.

*Joanna doesn't seem to have had direct connections with Neil's shady business associates, and her disappearance apparently didn't have to do with Andrew Decker after all. It's not clear how well she knows Neil after all; they seem to have lived rather separate lives.*



*Joanna feels driven to heal the broken, and Neil hadn't seemed to need her help. With him Joanna tried to recreate the family she'd lost, and the baby had finally made that possible. At the same time, her love for the baby made Joanna more vulnerable.*



*Neil has gotten in over his head, at the risk of Joanna's and the baby's lives. Joanna gives the appearance here of being the obedient girl who hid in the wheat field 30 years ago—an appearance that's about to be overturned.*



*The next day, Joanna stabs both her captors brutally to death. It's apparent that she's been thinking about and planning this for a while. The contrast between Joanna's carefully written ransom note and the grisly deaths of the two men is the climactic demonstration of the contrast between outward appearances and inner reality in Joanna's life. The contrast is heightened still more when she sings a soothing song to the baby, apparently not hesitating at all as she switches gears between brutality and maternal softness. Joanna has abided by the "rules of the game" by doing what she believed she had to do to save the baby's life.*



*Louise appears at the Hunters' around the same time that Joanna is being found in the farmhouse, not yet aware of what's happened. Neil appears to be nearing the end of his rope.*



Later that morning, the Hunters' neighborhood is swarmed with police. Louise feels certain that Joanna and the baby are dead. Neil has claimed that she was gone when he got home on Wednesday, and he'd received a phone call warning him that if he told the police, he'd never see her again. He'd been told to find the money to pay Anderson or sign over everything. That was four days ago. Louise is dumbstruck that Neil was "trying to find the money" to pay off Anderson and didn't sign over everything on the spot.

*Neil had the chance to sign over his businesses in exchange for the release of his family and didn't do it—suggesting that he operates according to his own set of questionable ethics.*



A cop comes out with a grin on his face. He tells Louise that Joanna, the baby, and a girl are back in the house. Louise comes in and finds Joanna on the couch, looking freshly scrubbed and neatly dressed. Reggie is sitting next to her. Joanna claims she has suffered some kind of temporary amnesia, perhaps brought on by previous trauma. Louise wonders how in the world to question a "consummate liar." Just then Karen comes in with a grim expression on her face. Louise instantly guesses it has something to do with the Needlers and that someone is dead. "It's Marcus," Karen tells her.

*It's obvious to Louise that Joanna is lying about whatever has just happened, but by now, she knows she can't get anything out of Joanna that she's not willing to reveal. No sooner has Joanna reappeared than Louise's world is upended again with awful news.*



Marcus is in surgery. Louise sits in the waiting room and tries to understand what happened. Marcus had been on his way to work and responded to a call from the Needlers. David Needler had returned and held his family at gunpoint all night. One of the kids had pressed the panic button, and the first responding officer—Marcus—had rung the doorbell and promptly been shot in the chest by David. Then David walked out the door and shot himself.

*As Louise had long expected and watched for, David Needler did return to kill his family, but Marcus got killed instead.*



Marcus is on life support in the intensive care unit. His mother, widowed and with no other children, holds his hand. Louise feels she's losing her "sweet boy," too. Marcus's girlfriend, Ellie, comes in. They all comment that Marcus looks as though he's sleeping, but Louise knows he's already left.

*Marcus doesn't make it. Louise feels responsible that Marcus, for whom she's always had a maternal affection, was killed on what she felt to be her watch.*



## SWEET LITTLE WIFE, PRETTY LITTLE BABY

Reggie nearly fainted when she first recognized Dr. Hunter back at the house. She's overwhelmed by relief and horror. Dr. Hunter is barefoot and still wearing her work suit, walking "like a heroine, a warrior queen." Sadie capers around, puppy-like with happiness, and the baby laughs at the sight. Reggie hugs the baby.

*The story jumps back to Dr. Hunter's emergence from the farmhouse. The scene is a shocking study in contrasts—Dr. Hunter's bloodstained suit, the baby's and dog's carefree joy. Nothing about the situation fits into Reggie's categories for her beloved Dr. Hunter.*



Jackson checks out the inside of the house and emerges looking sick. He siphons petrol out of the Toyota that was sitting outside the house (John and Peter's) and sets the house aflame, at Dr. Hunter's insistence. She doesn't want this in the baby's life. Then they all walk down the road to the parked Prius. Jackson drops them all off within walking distance of the Hunters' house, Reggie giving him a goodbye kiss on the cheek.

When they reach the house, Joanna, Reggie, and the baby cut through the hedge and sneak up the back stairs, avoiding the police. Reggie gives the baby a bath while Joanna showers. Joanna asks Reggie to deal with the bloodstained clothes, which Reggie is getting pretty good at by now. When they all emerge downstairs, clean and dressed, the police are stupefied. Joanna asks Reggie to put the kettle on. While they all have tea, Joanna keeps saying that she doesn't remember what's happened. Reggie heads off with her backpack full of bloodstained clothes.

## GREAT EXPECTATIONS

Jackson is waiting outside the hospital for Louise. She ignores him, but he catches up with her, saying, "I'm sorry about your boy Marcus." In her car, Jackson holds Louise while she cries. Then they talk about Joanna Hunter. Jackson already knows she's found, of course, but he can't tell Louise that he was there and that he personally destroyed the crime scene. There's "a chasm between them now that could never be bridged because he could never tell her the truth."

Jackson takes an overnight express coach to Heathrow to meet Tessa. He waits until the entire flight from Washington has emptied into the arrivals concourse and tries to make sense of his wife's failure to appear. She could be tracking down lost luggage or have gotten held up at customs, or even missed the flight. Jackson checks with an airline official and learns that Tessa was never even booked on the flight; in fact, her name's not in the database at all. Jackson waits for several more Washington flights to arrive, then aimlessly heads home. He talks himself into the idea that he'd gotten the day wrong and that Tessa is already at home, waiting for him. He finds the spare key he keeps above the lintel of a neighbor's door, and it makes him think fleetingly of Joanna Hunter's "inscrutable" life.

When Jackson enters his apartment, he's greeted not by Tessa, but by the smell of death. A guy, dead for at least a day, is on the floor of his apartment, a Russian gun at his feet. There's blood everywhere. Jackson carefully removes the guy's wallet from his pocket and finds his own driver's license. He almost dials Louise to tell her that he's found Andrew Decker, but instead he calls 999.

*Dr. Hunter has spent her life being haunted by the fallout from a terrible tragedy; she will do anything, even covering up a crime scene, to ensure that her baby doesn't suffer the same fate. Again, there are "no rules" except "love."*



*Joanna's unstained appearance among the police is itself a deception. Taking advantage of Reggie's steadfast trust, she makes Reggie complicit in it. Reggie takes advantage of her inconspicuous, readily overlooked appearance to sneak off and obscure the evidence. The whole scene makes clear that Joanna is practiced at deceit.*



*Jackson knows Louise well enough to sense her grief, and he is the only person she trusts enough to show it. Ironically, at the same time, they're separated from each other, because Jackson covered up a crime scene and can never reveal that to the police, even one he knows and loves like Louise. This shows how deception is costly even to the best relationships.*



*At last, Jackson makes it home. However, Tessa doesn't appear when Jackson expects her to. Jackson's striking gullibility, however, allows him to talk himself into believing that his wife will be waiting for him at home. It's especially striking given that Jackson appears so cynical in other scenarios, yet readily trusts those he loves—evidently, even trusts too much.*



*Inexplicably, Andrew Decker is dead on the floor of Jackson's apartment. There is never any explanation for how this could have happened, except that somehow Jackson's ID and keys were swapped with Decker's at the train crash site.*



A couple of days later, Jackson goes to the British Museum. No one there has ever heard of Tessa Webb. He calls in a favor from a detective friend, who reports that there'd never been a Tessa Webb at Oxford; there's no driver's license for her. The pathology report confirms that Decker killed himself. After 30 years in prison, he wouldn't have had much trouble getting the gun.

When Jackson is allowed back into his crime-scene flat and retrieves his passport, he tries to withdraw money from his accounts and discovers that he doesn't have any. Tessa had taken it all and moved it into untraceable accounts. Everything had been a setup—she and Jackson's old boss Bernie had designed Tessa's whole personality to appeal to Jackson, and he had fallen for it. Jackson doesn't have the heart to be angry about it. He figures the money had "simply moved on to someone else who had never earned it."

## A PUPPY IS JUST FOR CHRISTMAS

On her doorstep on Christmas Eve, Louise discovers a Border Collie puppy in a wicker basket. The gift tag reads, "A Faithful Friend." Louise doesn't know if that refers to the puppy or to the sender. Someone had rung the doorbell and left by the time the door opened. Louise is sure it was Jackson.

On Christmas Day, Louise visits the Needlers. She refuses to drink vodka with Alison Needler. Alison hints that Louise is pregnant, which Louise laughingly denies, but she is. She'd even made an appointment for an abortion but couldn't go through with it—"the door in her heart had been wedged open and she couldn't shut it, no matter how hard she pushed against it."

Louise plans to leave Patrick at Hogmanay (the Scots new year celebration). She figures it would be too cruel at Christmas; he'd already lost one wife then. He's a good man, so she figures he'll have no trouble finding another wife; it's a shame she's "such a bad woman."

Louise hasn't made any headway interviewing Joanna. She supposes she could find some forensic evidence somewhere if she wanted to. Even Neil has recanted his whole story about extortion. The only evidence is two bodies in the burned-out house in Penicuik; the burning of the evidence looked professional. Meanwhile, Marcus had been taken off life support after a week and had a hero's funeral. His mother had jumped off a bridge the next day.

*Jackson finds out that "Tessa" had apparently been deceiving him all along. It's unclear why Decker would have killed himself in Jackson's flat, or even how he would have known that Jackson was the man who found Joanna so many years ago.*



*Tessa and Bernie had set up Jackson from the beginning, no doubt knowing about his inherited fortune and deciding to take advantage of a fundamentally trusting nature. Jackson's sense of "going the wrong way," recurrent throughout the story, had been more profound than he even realized; his marriage was a total sham.*



*The appearance of a Border Collie puppy, a breed known for its herding abilities, clearly seems to be a message from Jackson, who's always thought of himself as a sheepdog, and Louise as responsive to his herding instincts.*



*There have been hints at Louise's pregnancy throughout the story, as well as evidence of her fear at the idea of having another child. Ultimately, she discovers that she does love her child—that perhaps she isn't as coldhearted and nonmaternal as she's believed herself to be.*



*Despite Louise's newfound love for her unborn child, she hasn't fundamentally revised her view of herself as a "bad woman" who's incapable of being a good wife for a man like Patrick.*



*Louise still has many questions about Joanna's situation; yet, perhaps because of Marcus's untimely death, or perhaps because of Joanna's stubbornness under questioning, Louise no longer has the heart to press the issue.*



Louise wants to know why Joanna visited Decker in prison. Louise points out that Joanna knows how to shoot a gun. Joanna denies having pulled the trigger, but Louise thinks that, somehow, she persuaded Decker to do it himself. Joanna suggests that perhaps seeing her and the baby brought the gravity of his crime home to him. Louise thinks this rational explanation befits a doctor, but she suspects there's more to it. She thinks that if she were ever in trouble, she'd certainly want Joanna on her side.

Louise tells the Needler children she'll bring her new puppy to visit them when he's a bit bigger. When they ask what she's named the puppy, she says, "Jackson."

*Louise realizes she's never going to fully understand what happened between Joanna and Decker. She knows there's more to Joanna's rational, professional exterior than meets the eye, but she also admires Joanna's sense of mystery, and after all this, she can't bring herself to push beyond it. She just knows that Joanna is a force to be reckoned with.*



*Louise named her own sheepdog after the implied giver, suggesting that Jackson will always be a part of her life.*



## THE RISING OF THE SUN, THE RUNNING OF THE DEER

Reggie spends Christmas at the Hunters'. Dr. Hunter gives Reggie a brand-new PowerBook. (Billy had gifted her one before, but then he'd stolen it back.) Jackson Brodie had given Reggie a check for a lot more than she'd lent him, but when she tried to deposit it in her account, the check bounced. Reggie thinks that Jackson "still belonged to her, but she wasn't sure she wanted him anymore."

Dr. Hunter is letting Reggie stay there for now, until she finds someplace else, but she says that perhaps she'd like to stay for good. They never talk about what happened at the house in Penicuik. Reggie doesn't know what happened inside the house or whose blood Dr. Hunter was covered with. She just reads about the mystery of the burned-out house in the newspaper and wonders. No matter how many times the police question her, Dr. Hunter just claims that she went for a walk and "suffered some kind of amnesia."

It's the best Christmas Reggie has ever had. Ms. MacDonald's funeral had been just before Christmas. Nobody mentioned that she'd caused the Musselburgh train crash. After the funeral, Reggie has a moment alone by the coffin and tucks the little plastic bags of heroin she'd found in the Loeb Classics into the coffin. It had come out to more than a kilo, which would have added up to a lot of money. Ginger and Blondie had never figured out that there was literally a library of drugs hidden in Ms. MacDonald's house. In Ms. MacDonald's will, she leaves half the proceeds from the sale of her house to Reggie, so Reggie now has a college fund.

*Reggie finally gets her wish and is welcomed into the Hunter household. She doesn't know the full story behind Jackson's travails, so when his promised check bounces, she figures he wasn't as honest as she'd believed him to be.*



*Though Reggie has realized her dream of getting to be part of the Hunter family, there's an ambivalence about it, too—she must suspect that there's more to Dr. Hunter's story than Joanna reveals, yet hearing the story could potentially damage Dr. Hunter in Reggie's eyes. There's an implied distance between them now, too, much as there is between Louise and Jackson.*



*It turns out that Ms. MacDonald's Loeb classics had been stuffed with drugs, so Reggie makes sure they're disposed of. Meanwhile, Ms. MacDonald has made it possible for Reggie to fulfill her dream of college—showing that she really cared about Reggie, and that Reggie's care for her was appreciated, too.*



Dr. Hunter asks Reggie what Billy is doing for Christmas. Reggie wonders how Dr. Hunter knows about Billy. It's just one more puzzle.

*Reggie had always taken care to conceal Billy's existence from Dr. Hunter. This apparent slip on Dr. Hunter's part just deepens the mystery, and it's another detail that is never resolved in the book.*



Neil has been charged with arson and is staying at a B&B while Dr. Hunter decides whether she'll take him back, though it's pretty clear she's already decided. Dr. Hunter says fiercely that if her husband had been kidnapped, she would have done anything to get him back. Reggie knows that she, too, is now one of the family circle for whom Dr. Hunter would do anything.

*Dr. Hunter and Neil are estranged, apparently for good. Reggie has now taken the place in the Hunter household that she's coveted and that Neil has left behind. She'll finally have a peaceful, stable family life.*



## GOD BLESS US, EVERY ONE

Billy thinks that he's going to kill his sister. He'd thought his heroin stash was safe; he'd been stashing the drugs whenever he did odd jobs around Ms. MacDonald's house ("such an enterprising boy," she'd called him). He figures that at least he's got the money that "Reggie's precious doctor" gave him for the Makarov gun. "He couldn't imagine what she wanted it for. Funny old world."

*Given Billy's recent reckless behavior and violence toward Reggie, it's difficult to say whether his threat to kill her is serious, but it's ominous, recalling Reggie's and Jackson's decision to let him go instead of having him arrested—was it a terrible mistake? Adding to the mystery, Dr. Hunter apparently bought a gun from Billy—the Makarov gun that had belonged to Reggie's and Billy's dad. A Makarov gun was found with Andrew Decker's body. This is another tantalizing hint in the story that is never finally resolved—Dr. Hunter was clearly involved somehow in Decker's death, but how?*



## SAFELY GATHERED IN

At dawn on Christmas Day, Jackson is on Westminster Bridge, staring into the Thames. He's holding the plastic bag containing Nathan's hair, which Reggie had salvaged from his jacket for him. He misses Reggie. He wonders about the strolling woman, too. "Everywhere you looked, there was unfinished business and unanswered questions." He'd thought everything would come clear when he briefly died after the train crash, but it didn't. It occurs to him that it's up to us to solve the mysteries while we're still alive. So he should "be a crusader."

*In light of his near death, Jackson makes peace with the fact that all of life's mysteries (like the mysterious woman in the Dales) and heartaches aren't going to be magically resolved, and rather than lamenting this, he just has to keep trying.*



Jackson thinks about throwing the hair into the river, but he's lost almost everything else, so he holds onto it. He wonders if he's too old to make a fresh start. Then he remembers finding Joanna, and he's instantly cheered. Not finding her at the house outside of Edinburgh, but the first time, when she was a girl. He was only 19 and fresh from the losses of his mother and siblings. When he'd found the little girl alive, he'd lifted her up as though she were a miracle, and the police constable had said, "Look at that, not a scratch on her."

*Though depressed, Jackson is encouraged by the memory of finding the lost Joanna as a little girl. Not only was he among the search party, but he was the one who initially discovered her, unharmed, among the wheat. Of course, in time it proved that while there may not have been an outward scratch on Joanna, the deeper damage had nevertheless been done.*



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## AND SCOUT

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Dr. Hunter remembers the name of Jessica's **dog**. It was Scout. "He was *such* a good dog," she remembers to Reggie. She and Reggie recite a nursery rhyme, "The Little Cock Sparrow," to the baby. It ends, "Says the little cock sparrow, / 'I'll be shot if I stay,' / So he clapped his wings / And then flew away." They clap their hands, and the baby laughs.

*In the aftermath of Andrew Decker's death, Dr. Hunter seems to have found a degree of closure with her past, as she finally remembers the family dog's name after all these years. The nursery rhyme echoes the theme of flight and escape that has characterized Joanna's own life. As Reggie joins in Dr. Hunter's habit of reciting such innocent rhymes to the baby, it remains an open question whether Reggie herself will remain innocent, or if she (and the baby) will nevertheless be haunted by the violence and deceptions that have marked Joanna's life.*





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