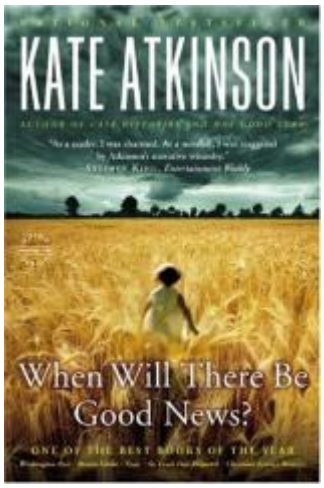
When Will There Be Good News?

by Kate Atkinson



About the Book

Kate Atkinson's third novel to feature ex-cop turned PI Jackson Brodie (after **One Good Turn**), unrelated characters and plot lines collide with momentous results. On a country road, six-year-old Joanna Mason is the only survivor of a knife attack that leaves her mother and two siblings dead. Nearly 30 years later, after boarding the wrong train in Yorkshire, Brodie is almost killed when the train crashes. He's saved by 16-year-old Regina Reggie Chase, the nanny of Dr. Joanna Hunter, née Mason. In the chaos following the crash, Brodie ends up with the wallet of Andrew Decker, the recently released man convicted of murdering the Mason family. Enter DCI Louise Monroe, Brodie's former love interest, who's tracking Decker because of a recent case involving a similar family and crime. When Dr. Hunter disappears, Reggie is convinced she's been kidnapped and enlists the reluctant Brodie to track her down.

Discussion Guide

1. Many of the characters in **When Will There Be Good News?** have lost family members: Joanna loses her mother, sister and baby brother in the novel's opening pages; Reggie's mother has recently drowned; and Jackson lost his mother, brother and sister in the course of a year when he was 12. In view of these tragedies, compare Joanna's, Reggie's and Jackson's respective outlooks on life with those of the other characters in the novel.

2. The question of Nathan's paternity haunts Jackson Brodie. Why? How might Jackson's life change if he discovered he was Nathan's father? Is Jackson a good father to Marlee?

3. With **When Will There Be Good News?** --- and previously also in **Case Histories** and **One Good Turn** --- Kate Atkinson introduced elements of the traditional crime novel into her fiction. Other than the "crime," what elements make up a crime novel? What crime-fiction conventions can you discern in this book?

4. When Will There Be Good News? has three central female characters: Joanna, Louise and Reggie. Discuss the ways in which these three central characters are similar. Which ofthe three would you most like to encounter again in a subsequent novel by Kate Atkinson?

5. Of Jackson Brodie, Atkinson writes, "How ironic that both Julia and Louise, the two women he'd felt closest to in his recent past, had both unexpectedly got married, and neither of them to him" (page 90). What are the chances that Jackson will ever have a successful romantic relationship? Why do you think he has been unlucky so far, even though he is such an appealing character?

6. Discuss the idea of "good" characters and "evil" characters in **When Will There Be Good News?** Do you think the novel's central characters are either essentially "good" or essentially "evil," or are they a combination

of both? How do Louise, Reggie, and Jackson --- each of whom breaks the law to achieve the “right” result --- figure into your viewpoint? What is the moral code at work in the novel?

7. Death, violence, and hardship seem to stalk Reggie, yet she remains remarkably resilient. What do you think sustains her?

8. Discuss the institution of marriage as it is portrayed in the novel. Consider Louise’s marriage, Joanna’s marriage, Jackson’s marriage and Julia’s marriage. Are there any characters in the novel who are happily married?

9. Jackson Brodie believes that “a coincidence is just an explanation waiting to happen” (page 319). Discuss some of the coincidences in **When Will There Be Good News?** Do they make the story seem more real? Or less real?

10. Despite the novel’s title and the early statement that “everything was bad. There was no question about it” (page 10), there are many instances of humor in the story. Do you think **When Will There Be Good News?** is essentially a humorous novel with tragic events or a tragic novel with moments of levity?

Author Bio

Kate Atkinson was born in York and now lives in Edinburgh.

She won the Whitbread (now Costa) Book of the Year prize with her first novel, BEHIND THE SCENES AT THE MUSEUM. Her four bestselling novels featuring former detective Jackson Brodie became the BBC television series "Case Histories," starring Jason Isaacs. Her last novel, LIFE AFTER LIFE, was the winner of the Costa Novel Award and the South Bank Sky Arts Literature Prize, and was shortlisted for the Women’s Prize. It was also voted Book of the Year for the independent booksellers associations on both sides of the Atlantic. Her new novel, A GOD IN RUINS, is a companion to LIFE AFTER LIFE, although the two novels can be read independently.

She was appointed MBE in the 2011 Queen’s Birthday Honours List, and was voted Waterstones UK Author of the Year at the 2013 Specsavers National Book Awards.

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