

When Will There Be Good News?
By Kate Atkinson

Since I have enjoyed earlier novels by Kate Atkinson, I am surprised that I didn't get around to reading this novel until it came out in paperback.. One of the interesting things that I have read about Atkinson's novels is that no one seems to know exactly how to classify them. Sometimes her books are shelved in stores as mysteries and in others in general fiction which is what we have done. In some respects, there are elements of mystery in all good stories.

This novel contains so many twists and turns that I was initially at a loss to figure out where it was all headed. The central characters of her other stories, Jackson Brodie and Louise Monroe, now a Detective Chief Inspector, return although Jackson is now very rich, retired and married again and Louise, too, has married if not very contentedly to Patrick who is, by her own admission, a loving, attentive husband. Louise senses that she is the problem rather than Patrick, but she doesn't know how to make things right.

The story is peopled with many interesting characters. Dr. Joanna Hunter was the lone survivor many years earlier of a vicious attack which killed her mother and siblings. As the story begins, the perpetrator has served thirty years in prison and is going to be released. Then Joanna Hunter disappears without a trace. The only person who appears to think that something terribly wrong is happening and is tenacious in trying to find Dr. Hunter is Reggie, a sixteen-year-old mother's helper who adores the Hunter family. Her parents are dead (her mother only a year earlier) and brother, Billy, is sort of a second-

rate criminal who appears periodically in her life. Reggie feels safe and cared for when she is with the Hunters.

There are cases of mistaken identity, a hint of attraction between Louise and Jackson who had been involved romantically in an earlier book, a horrible train wreck, a rescue that almost doesn't happen and several incidences of "going the wrong way" including Jackson's journey on the train that derails on the way to Edinburgh when he thought he was heading to London. There are many surprising intersections of lives that initially had no reason to come together and yet they do. I find that as gratifying in fiction as I do in life, at least when those intersections are positive ones. Obviously, in a mystery, those intersections are not necessarily positive. There are also some wryly humorous moments such as Louise describing her sister-in-law's outfit as an "aggressive three-piece outfit that was probably very expensive but had the kind of pattern you would get if you cut up the flags of several obscure countries and then gave them to a blind pigeon to stick back together again." Doesn't that paint a wonderful picture?

When will there be good news? At least by the end of the story, you will find that there is.

The novel is available in paperback published by Back Bay Books and retails for \$13.99. Earlier novels featuring Jackson Brodie are *One Good Turn* and *Case Histories* which are also available in paperback editions.