

An Explanation Waiting To Happen

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/599210) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/599210>.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	Choose Not To Use Archive Warnings
Category:	Gen
Fandom:	Case Histories
Character:	Jackson Brodie , Louise Munroe , Original Characters , Deborah Arnold
Language:	English
Collections:	Yuletide 2012
Stats:	Published: 2012-12-19 Words: 7229

An Explanation Waiting To Happen

by [tamarind \(rogue\)](#)

Summary

Jackson is visited by a young woman hoping to re-open the investigation of her mother's murder.

Notes

This work concerns the murder of a young mother and may be disturbing for some readers.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

1994

Angie Tucker drew the short straw and was on duty the night they discovered the murdered mum. Even better, she got to interview the kid. Not that they literally drew straws; even in a case like this, with every detective in the force trying to emotionally detach from the scenario, they wouldn't be that callous. Angie was sitting with the kid because she was good with kids, usually. She had three of her own, although they were little shites of teenagers now, but the kids liked her as much as they liked anybody.

“I know how hard this must be, Kyla,” she said gently. Kyla Martin. Six years old, nothing but a shock of red curls staring down at the table, wrapped in a blanket and still in her house shoes. The bloodstained pyjamas had been taken away for evidence, replaced by an unseasonable dress with short sleeves and a small pink floral pattern. They'd brought her tea and biscuits, papers and pencils to colour, a battered old Beatrix Potter book from somewhere. None of it had seemed to do any good.

“Can you talk to us about your mum, love?” Jeremy Croft asked anyway. DC Croft had been first

on the scene, and Kyla had followed him around since. Dumbly, yes, but with more attachment than she'd shown any of the other police, sticking close by his leg and grabbing hold of his hand at one point. Angie could see why; Croft was a big man, but soft, with two kids of his own at home and an unusually calming voice.

Kyla shrugged her shoulders, not looking up. "She was in her bed," she whispered, the first words Angie had heard her speak, although of course the little girl had placed the call to 999 after crawling into her mother's bed. "I didn't move her or anything like that."

"We know, love. You did the right thing calling the police," Croft praised. "We just want to know if there's anything you can tell us about the last time you saw your mummy, and if there was anyone else in the house with you."

Kyla shook her head, pulling the standard blanket closer around her body. It could have wrapped around her small body several times; it flowed down over the chair and onto the floor.

"You don't remember having any visitors last night, Kyla? Did your mum go out?" Angie pressed. Kyla was ignoring the pencils, but Angie thought the motion of her hands might help, and she took a pencil and a leaf of paper herself to use. She was never much of an artist, but soon she was covering the paper in tiny, interlocking circles, and after a moment Kyla took another pencil and held it tightly in her hands.

"I thought Daddy was home, but he wasn't," she said finally.

Daddy. Always the first suspect, of course, even when it was made to look like a home invasion gone wrong, as this was. But there was something that didn't sit well about the general nature of the crime. The burgled home, for instance. The fact that the mother was killed in her bed, but not assaulted, and the daughter left sleeping.

"Your daddy's Ben Martin?" she asked, just to be clear. They weren't sure yet that Ben Martin was Kyla's biological father - he seemed to have been in prison when Kyla was born and conceived, and hadn't married Theresa Martin until after - but they shared a home and a surname.

Kyla nodded. "I thought I heard him on the stairs," she said, her voice dropping again. "I thought I was going to get up and see him."

But that wasn't what little Kyla Martin had seen in her mother's bedroom that morning.

Kyla turned the pencil over and over between her hands, but she didn't move to the paper, or even seem to see what she was looking at.

"Mummy's not going to wake up again, is she?" she asked, pulling her blanket even tighter around her body.

We're going to make this bastard suffer, Angie decided then and there. From the look in Croft's eyes, he was thinking the same thing.

2012

Josie's email was short and to the point; Jackson would have to fax her the necessary legal forms by the end of the month, he was a right bastard for putting it off this long, and she had half a mind to demand he pay the fees incurred, as they would be his fault anyway. Jackson personally didn't see how that was possible - after all, Josie was the one who had decided that moving to New

Zealand and finding a surfer named Stewart was her life path - but was struggling to find a polite way to tell her to sod off, he would send the forms when he was bloody well ready and not before.

“Hi, can I help you?” Deborah’s voice would have carried even in an office with thicker walls than Jackson’s; as it was he stopped composing the email and sat up a little straighter in his chair. There was no use trying to focus now, and he imagined it would be a good idea to answer her when he was in a better temper anyway.

“I’m looking for Mr Jackson Brodie, please,” a girl’s voice sounded, high and insecure. Even with his name on the door, she was afraid of rejection. Interesting.

“You’ve found him,” Deborah said, brightly enough. “‘Jackson Brodie, Private Detective.’ Did you have an appointment?” Deborah knew well enough the girl didn’t, but Jackson supposed her question was to keep up the appearance of professionalism.

“No,” the girl admitted, “but if he’s in and could meet...” she trailed off, and Jackson put a hand to his temples. He hoped Deborah would press the girl for more information, but after the telling-off she had given him that morning about the need to find paying clients, he suspected she would have shown Binky Rain through the door.

“He doesn’t have anyone in his schedule till half noon,” Deborah said cheerfully. “Let me just make sure he’s not in the middle of something. Can I give him your name, please?”

“Kyla Harper,” the girl said, “but I used to be called Kyla Martin. I’m Theresa Martin’s daughter.”

Theresa Martin. Jackson closed his eyes and looked back. He knew the name, although it took him a moment to place it. And when he did, he wasn’t sure he could help the girl after all.

By that point, Deborah was poking her head through his door.

“A woman here to see you,” she said lightly, although she was giving him a hard glare. “By the name of Kyla Harper. Shall I show her in?”

“Deborah, I’m not sure that’s a good idea,” Jackson said helplessly, in a low voice, but Deborah simply pursed her lips, then gave him a poisonous smile.

“Wonderful. So glad you have the morning free.”

With that, she was opening the door wider, and Kyla Harper stepped into the office before Deborah shut the door again emphatically.

She was young. Of course she seemed impossibly young, but at the same time Jackson could hardly believe the ginger six-year-old with the blank expression was old enough to be standing before him in pumps and a skirt suit.

“You’re the Jackson Brodie who used to work for the police?” she asked, crossing to his desk and extending her hand.

Jackson shook it reluctantly. His heart ached for her, it did, but he didn’t know what to tell her. “Ms Harper,” he greeted. “I’m truly sorry for your loss.”

“Call me Kyla, please,” the girl said, and she took a seat even as Jackson remained awkwardly standing.

He sank back into his chair, waiting for her to speak.

“I’m here about my mum’s murder,” Kyla said. “I know my stepfather murdered her, and I’d like you to prove it.”

“I don’t know that I’m the person to help you,” Jackson said honestly. “Have you tried the police? Asked them to commence a review of the case?”

“May I tell you my story, Mr Brodie?” Kyla asked. “Please.”

Jackson shook his head, resigned. “Just call me Jackson, Kyla,” he said. “And I’ll listen, but I’m not making any promises.”

“I understand perfectly,” Kyla said. “But the police haven’t been of any help to me and I think you might.”

She looked at Jackson for some sort of affirmation before continuing; he gave her a brief nod.

“When I was six years old, I got up early one morning, and crawled into bed beside my mother,” Kyla said. It was clear that her story had been rehearsed, told over and over again in her head and maybe out loud too, but that didn’t make it any less powerful. Jackson knew all too well that the delivery of certain facts never changed the content.

“It was still dark, so I didn’t see her at first, but the mattress was warm and wet,” Kyla said. “When I reached out to her, she wouldn’t wake up, and she was covered in blood. Still warm. Her heart could have still been beating for all I know. I called Emergency Services and spent the next thirteen years of my life with grandparents who had no business raising a kid. And everyone told me my mum died in a burglary gone wrong. But that’s not true.”

It was painful to listen, although the story was no more horrifying than dozens of others Jackson had personally dealt with, most of them during his police days. Marlee asked him why he listened to sad music, but the truth was that nothing else seemed right. It wasn’t that he sought out the sadness, so much as the sadness sought him out. Misery loves company, and one misery after another seemed destined to arrive at Jackson’s door, seeking safe harbor.

“I know my mum wasn’t murdered in a burglary gone wrong, Mr Brodie,” Kyla said earnestly, her voice pitched even higher than it had been to that point. Jackson wondered if she was making an appeal of some sort to his protective streak. “It couldn’t be the case. When my stepfather was away, or even when he wasn’t, she always, always locked the dead lock. It would have to have been jemmied. But there was no report of that in the records, and I didn’t hear anything like that.”

It seemed a response was expected. “So you think it was unlocked, is that right?” he asked. The police files would be a good place to start looking; reports on the condition of the door and the house. And of course, Theresa Martin could just have easily have overlooked the dead bolt herself, habitually, or on one unlucky night.

“I know it was,” Kyla said. “And it was unlocked from the outside, with a key, before the small lock was pried open.” She looked straight into Jackson’s eyes as she said it, and her certainty sent chills rushing up his arms for a moment. She believed her own story, absolutely.

“I know it was my stepfather,” Kyla continued. “When I woke up, I had heard the car park and the lock turn. I was sure he had come home early in the night, and I was going to see him when I found my mum.”

“I appreciate how difficult this is for you, and I apologise in advance,” Jackson said heavily. “But I do have to ask. Have you considered that the sounds might have been in your imagination?”

Something you dreamed, maybe?"

"When I was young, I used to dream I jumped from the top stair in the building and flew down to the next level without falling," Kyla said. "Sometimes I would wonder during the day whether it was just a dream, or a memory. But I've never wondered about this, Mr Brodie. Jackson. Please, you have to help me."

"What is it that you want me to do?" Jackson asked bluntly. "I'm not police anymore, not an advocate either. I don't have access to the case files or anything of that nature."

Kyla leaned forward in her chair, blue eyes focused intently on Jackson. "I want you to find compelling evidence to persuade police to reopen the case against my stepfather," she said. "The case went to trial in 1995, and he was acquitted on all counts due to insufficient evidence and his alibi. But that's not right, because he's the only person who would have had a reason to do it. He forged a train ticket or something. He had to have done. I know he was responsible and now that the Double Jeopardy Act has passed in Scotland, we have another chance at proving it."

"That's easier said than done," Jackson said carefully. "There's a lot of publicity surrounding things like that, but reality isn't a crime show, you know. The odds of turning anything up - "

"That's why I want you, Mr Brodie," Kyla said. "I can't do it by myself. The police aren't interested in an eighteen-year-old case with no new suspects and an old acquittal. It's not something high-profile, 'junkie found dead in home' only makes headlines for a week or two, tops. But it's my life, it's my mum, and eighteen years later it looks like the police are going to do nothing."

"Double jeopardy in England and Wales hasn't been applied nearly as often as you might think," Jackson said. "I can't think of a case that relied on anything other than DNA analysis or a confession, in all honesty, and I'm not sure DNA could help you in this case. Even if you could get police to test samples against your stepfather, the fact that he lived in the home where the murder took place makes it weak to begin with. Add in eighteen years of possible evidence contamination and police mishaps, and you're looking at an uphill climb."

"So you're saying I need a confession?" Kyla asked.

"Not necessarily to the police, though," Jackson added hastily. "If you turn up a witness who says your stepfather admitted to the murder, and have some strong corroborating circumstantial evidence, that could go a long way in revitalising the investigation. But then so could any DNA we might have previously overlooked. Evidence from your mother's case has never been tested?"

"No," Kyla said. "It's gone completely cold. I'm the only one still looking."

Jackson understood that, too. A shadow flickered unbidden across his memory. A bright Yorkshire morning, running through the woods, calling his sister's name. A girl being pulled from the water.

"So you will help me, then?" Kyla asked, calling him back to the present. "Only I've really given up hope on ever getting anywhere with the police."

"I'll look into it," Jackson said, against all his better judgment. "Contact a friend of mine, a DI. See if there's anything I can do, or if she thinks it's unreasonable."

"Thank you for that," Kyla said earnestly, rising to her feet. "I'll look forward to hearing from you. Please do keep me informed."

"I'll do that," Jackson agreed. "If you can leave your mobile number with Deborah, I'll be sure to

be in touch.”

He waited until Kyla Harper had left the premises, then poked his head out of the door himself.

“Deborah? When you get a chance, can you come up with any information about detectives working the Theresa Martin case in 1994? Anyone at the scene that night as well? Thanks.”

He shouldn't have done this. Shouldn't have gotten himself involved. Already he could feel Theresa Martin joining the list of names he repeated to himself sometimes, unconsciously. Jean Cairns. Olivia Land. Joanna Mason. And Niamh. Always Niamh.

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“Tosser,” someone muttered, just loud enough for Louise to overhear, and she raised her head to see Jackson Brodie walking toward her. Of course, because she simply couldn't make it through to Friday night without incurring a migraine of one sort or another.

“And what did you want from me today, Jackson?” she asked, folding her arms across her chest as he approached.

Jackson gave his best impression of innocence, not that it would do him any good on Louise. She liked to think she knew him too well for that. “And what makes you think I want something? Can't I just stop by to see a friend?”

“You? Just stop by? Let alone while I'm working?” Louise asked skeptically. “Really, Jackson, when's the last time you just stopped by for a chat?” It had been Christmas Day, of course - she wasn't likely to forget that any time soon - but she wasn't sure she wanted to discuss that with Jackson either.

“Alright, then,” he said. He glanced around, then took a seat on the corner of her desk rather than walking to get a chair. Louise closed her eyes and wished for patience. “I'm looking into the murder of Theresa Martin, in 1994. Her husband was charged and acquitted. Ben Martin.”

“Theresa Martin?” Louise frowned, trying to recall the details. She'd been so young then. It was hard to imagine that much time had passed, but then it had. That was before Archie, even before Jellybean. “She was the woman found knifed...”

“In her bed, yes,” Jackson supplied. “With her six-year-old daughter in the house. The daughter's 24 now, Kyla Harper, and she wants the case against her stepfather reopened under the Double Jeopardy Act.”

The details were coming back now, all right. It has been made to look like a burglary gone wrong, but every detective in Edinburgh had been convinced that Ben Martin was guilty. Police just hadn't had enough to stick to him, and so Ben Martin had walked - very nearly run - out of the courtroom.

“I'm sure she does want it reopened, but she needs some compelling new evidence for that,” Louise pointed out, not sounding nearly as exasperated with Jackson as she could have done.

“That's right,” Jackson acknowledged. “She thinks DNA evidence could prove her stepfather was the killer. Or at least eliminate him once and for all. It wasn't common procedure in 1994; you know that. A cold case review couldn't hurt anything.”

“And so what do you want me to do?” Louise asked, looking at the man sitting in front of her, running his thumb over the stack of papers on her desk. She made a mental note to make sure he didn't pocket anything. “I'm no analyst, Jackson, and I don't work cold cases.”

“I know that, but hear me out,” Jackson persisted. “We can’t get the DNA without police involvement, both as concerning anything you might still have in evidence, and DNA from Martin himself. He’s not going to consent to giving a sample to a private detective if he’s guilty.”

“Or if he has any reasonable expectation of privacy,” Louise pointed out, but Jackson chose to ignore her.

“Bottom line is we need an ongoing criminal investigation to test his DNA,” he said. “Someone should go about doing that.”

In this case, ‘someone’ clearly meant her. “It’s not my case,” she protested, even though she knew Jackson was likely to keep beating her down until she agreed to help him in whatever way she could. When he got on one of his obsessions, there was nothing she could do or say that would make him come out of it.

“It’s not anyone’s case anymore,” he countered. “Yours for the taking.”

“Look, I have my own caseload, thank you very much,” Louise pointed out. “I don’t have time to go chasing after evidence that may or may not exist from twenty years ago. You get me something solid, and I’ll see what I can do. That’s the best I can do for you.”

“The night her mother was murdered,” Jackson said, fixing her with steady eyes, “she heard someone parking a car, unlocking the door, walking up the stairs. She thought her stepfather had come home early from his business trip, which was why she got out of her bed and went to her mother’s room and crawled up beside her corpse.”

“Oh, Jackson, she was six years old,” Louise said, even as her thoughts went to the unthinkable. That poor wee girl. “I feel for you, and for her. I do. But you’re going to need something a bit more substantial than that if you want to convince anyone to go looking into a man who was acquitted.”

“She hasn’t seen her stepfather since,” Jackson continued. “She’d taken his name and everything, and he just dropped out of her life. She went to live with her maternal grandparents, and then an aunt, and she’s been on her own for the last few years.”

“Christ, Jackson, you and your lost girls,” Louise muttered, but she couldn’t pretend she didn’t care about little Kyla Martin, all grown up now. “I’ll try to help you - I will - but you’ve got to understand there’s a limit to what I can do. If you want to organise your own investigation, come back to the force.”

“You know that’s not an option,” Jackson said, and Louise wondered for the first time in months whether he was really happy working all on his own. She would have asked him if she had known how to do it. But these days she was walking on eggshells around Jackson. It was easier to keep things light-hearted, act as though there was nothing between them but a history of friendly competition and gibing.

“Then bring me something I can work with,” she said instead. “Something to get the case hot again. I’ll give it a look if you can give me something.”

“You know, most cold cases are eventually solved with the names of suspects entered into the investigation in the first thirty days,” Jackson said, but Louise shook her head.

“No, Jackson, if you think I’m going to let you have a look at files for an open murder, you’re mistaken. Not unless you give me a damn good reason, and right now I haven’t heard any reasons but your own sentimentality. And for the record, it’ll be no use sneaking around here at night

again. I've changed my password."

"Have you now?" Jackson asked, giving her a small smirk. She would wager he would try it anyway, just to be sure.

"I have indeed. You're on your own on this one until you bring me some hard evidence." Louise wasn't sure why she was even giving Jackson Brodie that much of her time and attention, instead of dismissing him outright. Because knowing Jackson, he would be just stubborn enough and just creative enough with Ben Martin's rights to bring her something she couldn't ignore in good conscience.

"All right then. Can I ask for just one favour?" Jackson pressed, and Louise sighed.

"You can ask, but there's no guarantee you'll be getting it."

"The investigation into the murder. DI Angie Tucker was in charge of it. Where is she now?"

"Oh, so you want to go pester someone else for access to open case files," Louise observed, then relented. "Yes, alright, so I know Angie Tucker. She's left the force now, retired. But don't think you can use my name to get your foot in the door. She'll make time for you, or she won't."

"I understand." Jackson slid off Louise's desk then, giving her a smile that didn't make it all the way to his eyes. "I'll keep you posted on the case, shall I?"

And before Louise could point out that it was nothing to do with her, that he had simply waltzed in and started talking about Kyla Martin, and tried to guilt her into releasing information he had no business accessing, Jackson was walking back out of the bullpen.

He really was the most frustrating man Louise had ever met in her life.

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"Thank you for agreeing to meet me on such short notice, Superintendent," Jackson Brodie said again, accepting the cup of tea Angie extended. "I'm sorry to intrude, but I promise you I'll be out of here soon enough."

"Really, it's no trouble," Angie answered, watching as Brodie held his tea between his hands without sipping it. He was a tall man, well-built, but the deep circles under his eyes belie his otherwise healthy appearance. He was troubled by something. Ennui, maybe. His life. Or maybe just one particular case. She'd seen that look before. "You mentioned an interest in the Theresa Martin case?" she asked. And wasn't that a surprise. She hadn't thought there was anyone left who remembered the Theresa Martin case, save for maybe Jeremy Croft. And little Kyla Martin, of course.

"That's right," Brodie answered. "Like I said over the phone, I'm a private detective, former policeman. Mrs. Martin's daughter has contracted me to investigate the case, and in particular any evidence against Ben Martin. She's interested in pursuing possible prosecution under the Double Jeopardy Act." He spoke candidly enough, something Angie appreciated. She didn't have time for beating around the bush and feigned politeness. She'd wasted enough time in her career with diplomacy, and she wasn't about to let it take over her retirement too.

"Evidence against Ben Martin is going to be near impossible to find," she answered him with equal honesty. "Don't think we didn't turn over every available piece of evidence at the time. And mark my words, he was behind his wife's murder. But the burden of proof was on us, and we just didn't have it. His alibi was fairly solid, too. And he sat on it till trial and made us look like damn fools,

with nothing but our circumstantial evidence from his own home.”

“His alibi?” Brodie prompted. He set his tea aside and leaned in closer, eyes fixed on Angie’s in a way that was so focused as to be unnerving.

“Yes, his alibi.” Angie had done a little looking through old newspaper clippings the night before, after receiving Brodie’s call, but she hadn’t really needed a reminder; the case was never too far from her mind. “He was in Leeds on the night of his wife’s murder. A charity auction through his former bail hostel. Half a dozen people placing him there that night, including his probation officer. He simply didn’t have time to get to Edinburgh and back, not unless he has a twin somewhere, or a private helicopter. It’s why he was acquitted. Well, that and the furor over the Guildford Four and Maguire Seven. Mr Justice Bryant was anxious to avoid any chance of a wrongful conviction.”

“But you still think he was guilty,” Brodie pressed, and Angie smiled wryly.

“Of course he was guilty, Mr Brodie. No one else had any motivation to kill Theresa Martin, by all accounts. And it simply doesn’t make sense for her home to be burgled. They lived in a tenement house. Hadn’t two sticks to rub together. If that isn’t enough for you, none of the neighbours saw or heard anything out of the ordinary. We interviewed everyone for a block in either direction. Nothing ever came of it.”

“That’s Kyla’s view of it as well,” Brodie offered, and Angie smiled wistfully.

“Little Kyla Martin. How is she these days?” Angie’s heart clenched a little just thinking about the tiny girl in her house shoes, her face streaked with tears, clinging to Croft’s shoulder. She should never have had to go through that, never.

“She’s all right, I suppose,” Brodie answered, giving her a half shrug. “Hasn’t had the greatest life, but she’s made the best of it. She still wants to know who killed her mum.”

“If you want my opinion, Martin hired someone else to take care of it,” Angie said. “He had the contacts from his past, and he had to have known his alibi would hold up in court. But if you plan on convicting him of a crime, Mr Brodie, it’ll be conspiracy to commit murder you’re after.”

Brodie sighed heavily, closing his eyes for a moment before snapping them open. They were an intense blue. “So imagine you were still on the force,” he suggested, “and you wanted to go about re-opening the Theresa Martin case. Where would you look for Martin’s accomplice? What knowledge might you take advantage of from the initial investigation?”

“His former associates,” Angie said promptly. “Alliances shift, Mr Brodie, and there’s no honour among the incarcerated. Whatever loyalty or reluctance he might have had at the time, the killer knows Ben Martin, and chances are, they’ve been linked in the past. If he thinks he stands a chance of being arrested himself, or if he’s already in jail, of earning himself a sentence reduction, he’ll be quicker to cooperate than you might give him credit for.”

“So, find a suspect - or someone who might know more than they’ve said - caution them to their rights, try to find direct testimony?” Brodie summed up.

“That’s right,” Angie agreed. “Of course, with the advent of DNA testing, that might be quite the useful tool for you. Take the Stephen Lawrence case. One tiny bit of blood could lead you straight to the killer. Then it’s only a matter of getting him to talk.”

“But first it’s a matter of getting the DNA tested,” Brodie qualified.

“It’s a powerful bluff in any scenario,” Angie responded. That wasn’t like her, not at all, but she

supposed that in her golden years she had earned the right to skirt the rules just a little in the interest of the greater good.

“I’ll keep that in mind, thanks,” Brodie said. He furrowed his brow.

“You should start with Ben Martin’s probation officer to find names,” Angie said. “Jonathan Jennings. He’d likely be able to help you, if you can find him. He won’t have retired; he was quite young at the time.”

“I appreciate the assistance,” Brodie said. Then, “Is there anything else you could think to tell me that could be of some use?”

“Just one thing,” Angie answered. “Kyla Martin knew even at six years old what had happened. She woke up thinking her father had come home in the night, and she was going to surprise him when she found her mother’s body. That’s not the sort of thing a child forgets, nor invents.”

“I know that,” Brodie answered, and his eyes darkened.

“Ben Martin ought to be locked up for the murder,” Angie said. “I’d like to see you carry it off, and I’ll be happy to assist you in any way that I can.”

Brodie nodded once and rose to his feet. His tea was untouched. “I’ll leave you to your weekend,” he said graciously enough. “And I’ll be in touch if I need your name.”

“Please let me know if you need anything else,” Angie asked, and Brodie nodded again, already halfway to the door.

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“I brought you lunch,” Jackson said, holding up the pizza as a peace offering when Louise opened the door. “I hope you like sweet corn.”

“And what is this exactly, Jackson?” Louise asked, narrowing her eyes. Christ, she looked beautiful. She hardly seemed to age at all next to him.

“It’s called pizza,” Jackson said. “I thought you might be interested in helping me to go through old associates of Ben Martin’s. Angie Turner thinks there’s a good chance one of them actually committed the murder.”

“It’s Saturday afternoon, you didn’t think you might be interrupting something?” Louise asked.

“I’m always interrupting something, aren’t I?” Jackson asked, giving her a small smile. He knew she didn’t want to talk about Christmas. Knew he had caught her off guard, might have made her uncomfortable. That was alright. Really it just mattered to him that she knew. Because you didn’t always get a chance to tell people you loved them, and then one day you woke up and you’d lost the opportunity for good.

“Oh, well. Two unannounced visits from Jackson Brodie within twenty-four hours. This must be my lucky day,” Louise said, but she stepped back from the door and allowed him to enter.

“Archie’s over at Hamish’s so you might actually get a piece of the pizza yourself,” she said.

“Sounds perfect,” Jackson said, allowing himself to take a seat at Louise’s kitchen table as she produced plates.

“So let me get this straight,” Louise said, smirking as she pushed the pizza box in front of him.

"You think a pizza will convince me to give you access to old criminal files of someone who's not currently under investigation for any crime?"

"That's about it, yeah," Jackson allowed, chancing a brief grin. "I'm pretty sure I owed you dinner for some reason anyway."

"You're lucky I'm a soft touch," Louise warned, and Jackson had to smile outright at that. Those certainly weren't words he would have chosen to describe her.

"And for the record, this is the last time I help you out with access to police files, I swear it," she added. Jackson said nothing, just helped himself to a slice of the pizza.

"Admit it, your life would be horribly boring without me," he said finally, giving Louise another smile.

"I don't know what I'd do with a weekend of relaxation," she agreed dryly. She wiped her fingers on a napkin, then opened up her laptop. "So what exactly are we looking for?" she asked.

"Ben Martin has some skeletons in his closet," Jackson said. "Drug convictions, according to Angie Tucker. They probably date back about 25 years, maybe longer. With any luck we can turn up some simultaneous arrests and sentencing. I've got a call in to a probation officer who might be able to help, but I can't say when he'll get back to me. I thought we might as well try to accelerate the process."

"So we're looking for any information we can find about his arrests or known associates," Louise repeated, fingers tapping briskly across the keyboard.

"That's right," Jackson said, and he leaned back to watch her, resolving to keep his mouth shut. It was hard, but not as hard as he might have expected. Jackson was good at ruminating, at turning pieces over in his head during the quiet moments. And as much as he hoped this lead would pan out, something was still missing. Ben Martin seemed like too cautious a man to entrust the keys to his home and the murder of his wife to another man, former drug associate or no. Then there was the trouble of Kyla, the same problem of why a burglar would kill a sleeping woman but not her daughter. Had Martin wanted Kyla dead? Had he wanted to make sure she stayed alive? How would he ensure either outcome? There was another piece to the puzzle, if Jackson could figure it out.

In the end, it took less time than he expected before Louise sat up in her seat.

"I think we may have someone," she said, sounding almost disbelieving. "Don't get your hopes up, Jackson, but there could be something here. Jason Walker, 45 years old. Convictions for battery and possession, arrested on the same night by the same constable as Ben Martin, and he's been sued for child support and unpaid debts. He's been in prison for the past two years on assault charges."

"Out of prison in 1994, though?" Jackson asked, jumping up to look over Louise's shoulder.

"I think so," she said. "Jackson, you bloody bastard, this might actually be worth looking into."

Jackson put his hands on the back of Louise's chair and clenched his fists. "I've got to see him," he said aloud. "Thanks for the help, Louise. I appreciate it. Keep the rest of the pizza, it's yours."

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Jason Walker was a gaunt man with a shaved head and the edge of a tattoo just visible above his

shirt collar. His skin was thin and pale, marked by the occasional scar.

“I’ve never seen you before in my life,” he told Jackson, eyeing him shrewdly. “What brings you out here, anyway?”

“My name is Jackson Brodie, and I’m a private investigator,” Jackson said. He’d learned early on that first impressions weren’t an accurate way to judge someone, particularly as they pertained to strength or intelligence, but he was finding himself predisposed to dislike Walker, even disregarding the circumstances of their meeting. “I’m looking into the murder of a woman named Theresa Martin in 1994. Did you know her?”

“Theresa? Yeah, I knew her,” Walker said. His expression didn’t change. “Why? Someone think I killed her?”

“Did you?” Jackson asked.

“Violence isn’t really my cup of tea,” Walker said.

“And yet you’re here for attacking a man with a tyre lever, nearly killing him,” Jackson said.

“A man, sure. But why would I kill a girl?” Walker returned. He smirked. “Lots of easier ways to deal with a woman than killing her, if you know what I mean.”

Jackson chose to ignore that, but it took some willpower before he was able to proceed. “What about her husband, Ben Martin? Do you know him?”

“I grew up with Ben,” Walker said. His mouth twitched as he looked at Jackson. “Is Ben going around saying I killed Theresa?”

He was a cold fish, and that particular line of questioning was getting Jackson nowhere. Walker showed no surprise. It was more like playing a game of chicken than cornering an unsuspecting criminal. Walker was going to push it right to the edge. He was daring Jackson to make an accusation.

“Assault and attempted murder,” Jackson said, changing tactics. “How much time is that good for these days? You’ll be eligible for parole in, what, thirteen years?”

“If you have something to say to me, you might as well spit it out and stop wasting time for both of our sakes,” Walker said.

“All right, then,” Jackson said. “I think your mate Ben Martin asked you to kill his wife. And I think you agreed. I’m still not sure why you did it, because I doubt he had the money to make it worth a mandatory life sentence, but whatever he did offer you was enough to make you come to his home in the middle of the night, make it look like a burglary gone wrong - you like tyre levers and crowbars; we’ve established that - and then slit his wife’s throat as she slept and make off with a television and some costume jewelry you probably dumped the next block over. Does that sound about right to you?”

“Do they pay you to come up with this shit?” Walker asked. His face gave nothing away. “I hear there’s pretty good money in it. A man by the name of Alex Blake came and gave a reading here not too long ago. Some shit about a stolen diamond bracelet. Mind, I say man, but he was a bit of a poof.”

“I’ve some colleagues at the Lothian and Borders Police looking into the evidence from Theresa Martin’s flat,” Jackson said, not rising to the bait. “They’ve got your DNA on file for the assault on

Travis Haneef, haven't they? That could prove useful."

"You've got nothing," Walker said, but the hint of a smile was gone from his face. "We're done here. What a waste of a perfectly good morning."

"I'll show myself out," Jackson said, nodding at the guard. There was nothing solid, not yet, and he was sure a piece of the puzzle was still missing. But he was getting closer.

Back inside his Alfa Romeo, Jackson pulled out his mobile and pressed the number 3 in his speed dial. It might not be the concrete proof Louise was looking for - she was likely to tell him his theories and feelings were all rubbish, anyway - but he thought she might be willing to push for the forensic sweep of evidence from the Martin murder. She would deny it, of course, but she was beginning to get drawn into the case too.

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"Have you turned up anything new?" Kyla asked. She had ordered a salad before Jackson arrived, some sort of caprese that looked sickeningly healthy. Jackson, for his part, would have been happy with a plate of chips, although he was beginning to feel his age and wonder whether he shouldn't change a few of those habits.

"I think we have," he told her, watching as she sipped a glass of water nervously. She squeezed her fingers a little too tightly, and he knew she was waiting for some sort of closure.

He hoped she could find it, whether or not Jason Walker came through, whether or not Ben Martin was put away for the rest of his life. Whether or not she ever got an apology. Nothing would bring her mother back to life. Nothing would repair her childhood or her family. The only advice he could give her was learning to live with that knowledge, although he didn't always do a brilliant job of it himself.

"Nothing is set in stone yet," Jackson began, feeling the need to warn her of that. "So don't get your hopes up. It could be nothing. Or it could be something."

Kyla nodded, and promptly took another sip of water.

"There's a man in Glasgow who used to run drugs with your stepfather before you were born," he told her. "He's currently in prison for assault. There's no corroboration yet, but we believe Ben Martin may have contracted him to kill your mother."

Kyla nodded her head in understanding. "Glasgow," she said, an odd look crossing over her face. Her fingers played nervously across the tabletop.

"The Lothian and Borders Police are planning to test for any DNA evidence to support the theory," Jackson continued. "It's likely that additional charges would persuade him to testify against your stepfather, in exchange for leniency. He's due a mandatory life sentence either way, but eligibility for parole, and the conditions of the life sentence, could be entirely up to him."

"This man they suspect of killing my mother..." Kyla began, but then she stopped herself and took another large sip of her water.

"What about him?" Jackson asked. Something was wrong; he was sure of it. There was still a piece missing.

"It's just... his name isn't Jason Walker, is it?"

“Do you know him?” Jackson asked.

“He’s my biological father,” Kyla said. “Been in and out of jail my whole life.” She pushed her chair back from the table and stood up. “I have to go, Jackson. I’m sorry. I’ll give you a call.” With that she was walking across the cafe floor, pulling her coat over her shoulders as she went.

Jackson wasn’t sure whether or not he would hear from Kyla any time soon. He wasn’t sure how they had missed that. It was all so clear in hindsight: how Ben Martin could ask another man to kill his wife. How Kyla Harper, formerly Kyla Martin, possibly known once as Kyla Walker, had managed to escape without a scratch. Why the neighbours saw nothing.

Jackson thought about calling Louise and decided against it. He thought about calling Marlee, just to hear her voice, but this wasn’t the time. He felt old, and tired. He was beginning to suspect there was no such thing as closure.

End Notes

Dear Alchemine,

when I got my assignment for a Case Histories fic and had such wonderful free reign, I immediately entertained ideas of a convoluted, involved case history that would be magnificent and epic and channel everything I loved about the show.

Sadly, I’m not the quickest plotter or writer, and I’m afraid the end result is a little rushed in places and not nearly as multi-layered as I dreamed, but I hope you enjoyed reading it as much as I enjoyed writing it. Happy Yuletide!

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!