

FROM: Maria Gavila <maria@mgassociates.com>

TO: Client, Media, Contacts

SUBJECT: URGENT, MISSING CHILD, PLEASE SHARE

DATE: 31 August 2004

ATT: Coco.jpg, bracelet.jpg

Dear all –

Apologies for the general email, but I desperately need your help.

My goddaughter, Coco Jackson, disappeared from her family's holiday home in Bournemouth on the night of Sunday/Monday August 29th/30th, the bank holiday weekend just gone. Coco is three years old.

All police experience suggests that the first forty-eight hours are crucial in cases of child abduction, so time is of the essence. If you would please, please forward this email to everyone you think might respond and pass it on, we can raise awareness of Coco's plight and increase the chances of her being brought safely home.

Coco is three years old, is three feet tall and has blonde hair cut just above shoulder length with a fringe. She has pale colouring, though after the summer she has a light tan and a marked line of freckles across her nose. She has blue eyes and darker, clearly defined eyebrows. She was wearing SpongeBob pyjamas when she disappeared.

Vitaly, she was also wearing a christening bracelet which Robert and I gave her, which was designed to be hard to get off, so her abductor might not yet have done so. It's made in 22-carat gold, hallmarked, and has a pattern of hearts etched around the outer surface and her name and date of birth (11.07.01) etched on the inside.

I attach a photo of Coco taken this weekend on her family holiday, and of the matching bracelet worn by her twin sister.

Please, please forward this to as many people as you can. I cannot stress how important this is, or how grateful we will be. Coco's parents are distraught and we are all desperately worried.

If you read this email and think you may have seen her, even if it's only a suspicion, please call Sgt Nathalie Morrow of the Bournemouth CID on 555-6724, or

contact me directly. We are all desperate. Please help us.

Love, namaste

Maria

P1 WITNESS STATEMENT

Emilia Pereira

Family nanny

17 September 2004

I want to start by saying that Mrs Jackson fired me the Wednesday before they went away and I wasn't even there. She fired me because she was mad about her husband. She thought every woman who came near him was going to try to take him, but I was not. I thought he was creepy. Always standing too near, asking things like did I have a boyfriend, looking for reasons to touch me. I am not surprised she was suspicious, but it should not have been me she was suspicious of.

I went to stay with my friend Lisa Mendes in Stevenage after she sacked me, because she didn't give me any notice, just my wages in cash and an order to pack my bags, and I had nowhere to go. I was sleeping on Lisa's floor and waiting for a flight back to Lisbon, when Coco disappeared and you arrested me as though I was a criminal. I have not been near the Sandbanks house in the six months since Mr Jackson bought it. I think they did spend one weekend there, before the builders moved in, but they came back early, in very bad moods, so I was surprised when he chose to have his birthday there. I would have expected Dubai or somewhere like that, if you understand what I mean.

What I know is that Mr Jackson's fiftieth birthday was happening that weekend and he had been planning a big party down at the beach house for months. Then he changed his mind about a month before – I think maybe he realised people did not want to come all that way – and planned the big party for London and a smaller one on the weekend itself. In a way it was a relief when Mrs Jackson sacked me, as I know what their parties are like and I would have been working twenty-four-hour days over the long weekend. They had their friends coming, and these are not people who like

their children to interfere with their fun. In fact, if she had not sacked me, I had been planning to leave anyway as these are not good people.

I have worked for them for three years, since soon after the twins were born, but, as I said, they are not good people. I stayed because they paid well, but I never liked Mrs Jackson. She is lazy and vain and unfriendly. After three years she still did not know when my birthday was, or anything about me, really. She never talked to me, or asked questions, just criticised and gave orders. She didn't do anything all day with the time she had free because of me apart from go to salons and shops and get ready to go out with him in the evening. They were always out, when he was in London. They lived in restaurants, but she never seemed grateful for everything she had because of him. And when he was away she was always in a temper, constantly texting him and shutting herself away in her room. I think she did love the little girls, but in the end she always chose to do whatever he wanted to do, and never spent much time with them. I don't know. Maybe that's how rich people are, but I don't understand why you would have children and not want to be with them.

I would not have stayed as long as I did, but I was very fond of the little girls.

That anybody would even think that I did Coco any harm makes me red with anger. I did not even get a chance to say goodbye to them when she sacked me, and now I feel terrible as it was the last time I would ever see Coco.

I went to Stevenage on Wednesday afternoon and stayed there until Tuesday when the police turned up on my friend's doorstep. I was in the company of other people most of the time – I have some friends in the area and I wanted to spend time with them before I went back to Portugal – and was never alone for long enough that I could have gone to Bournemouth and back without someone noticing. I have no idea what took place at the Jackson house over the weekend, and have no idea what has happened to Coco Jackson.

P1 WITNESS STATEMENT

Janusz Bieda

Builder

Taken by Krakow police

15 September 2004

I did not know the Jackson family. I only met Mr Jackson three times. I was working, with Karol Niemiec, Tomasz Zdanowicz and my brother Gabriel Bieda, installing a swimming pool at Seawings, the house next door to Harbour View. We had been working there for a week and the project was running over as the pool was custom made with a portrait of the owner as a merman and had to be installed in one piece by crane and digging the hole to fit it had turned out to be more difficult than had been thought as it went below the water table. We had had to source and hire pumping equipment, and the job was spilling over into the weekend.

Mr Jackson and his friends arrived on Thursday afternoon, and by Friday he was already around complaining about the noise. We thought it was funny, as we know that he had builders in all summer at Harbour View and did not care about the neighbours one bit. On Saturday morning he came again and asked how long we would be working and, when we told him that the work would probably run into the evening, he explained that he was having a party for his birthday and offered us a significant sum of money to suspend work until the following afternoon. As the crane could not be returned until Tuesday once work ran over on Friday, because of the bank holiday, we agreed, and split the money between us. My brother and I were due to return to Poland for a month with our families as soon as the job was finished, and Karol and Tomasz were happy to stay the extra couple of days to finish off the sealing and paving and oversee the return of the crane equipment before they followed us. We spent Saturday shopping for presents for our families and came back before lunch on Sunday. The Jacksons' house was quiet, but this did not surprise us as Mr Jackson had indicated that they intended to stay up late at his party.

He came back on Sunday afternoon, soon after we started work, and gave me a bottle of whisky to thank me for delaying the works. He had Coco with him. Her sister had been sick in the night and was not with them. They both looked happy and relaxed, and he was much friendlier than he had been before. She was a lovely little girl, dressed in pink, and, though she was a little shy, she warmed up and seemed happy.

The work went smoothly, and Gabriel and I made the 11.30 ferry from Portsmouth on Sunday night, leaving Bournemouth around 8 p.m. We have the tickets still, and I am sure CCTV will confirm that we were on board. It was not until the following evening that Karol telephoned and told us what had happened. They were putting the pointing between the paving stones around the pool on Monday morning when the commotion began next door, and, as they had started work around 6 a.m. in order to catch up, he estimated that this will have been some time around 10.30 a.m. I am sorry that I cannot be of more help, but, as you see, I had left the country when the child went missing. We are all shocked that you would even think that we might be involved.

The last time I saw Coco Jackson was on Sunday afternoon. From a distance, the girls looked well cared-for and healthy, though I only actually spoke to Coco. But I saw the other one and she too seemed fine. Mr Jackson was clearly a devoted father, and held Coco constantly by the hand as he talked to us.

P3 WITNESS STATEMENT

Charles Clutterbuck

Guest

Taken by Metropolitan Police

3 September 2004

. . . Imogen and I went to bed some time around three, and when we got up again at eleven on the Sunday we found that there had been another altercation between Claire and Sean and she had departed for London. Neither of us was particularly concerned. The marriage has always been a fiery one and this is hardly the first time she has swept off in high dudgeon. The truth is that, strictly entre nous, we felt that he had made a mistake in divorcing his first wife, who was at least not offensive, and marrying her. She's not an educated woman, if you get my drift, and has a terrific talent for taking offence. I know my wife is godmother to Ruby, but Imogen and I have for some time been thinking that we might be wise to back off a bit from them. I know it sounds harsh, but one's political career can be damaged by the people whose

company one keeps, and I have a responsibility to my party not to bring it into disrepute.

Sean was clearly chastened when the twins and the Orizio children got up, and we all spent the day quietly. In the afternoon we packed the children off to the Neptune's Kingdom water park with the mothers who had seen fit to stay around, my wife, Imogen, and the Gavilas' teenage daughter, and parked Ruby, who was a little under the weather, in front of the DVD player with a box set of something: Dora the Explorer, I think. It never occurred to any of us that there was anything odd about the fact that the twins' mother hadn't bothered to take them to London with her: frankly it seemed par for the course. As I said, she's a flouncer, and probably believed she was teaching him some kind of lesson. And I suppose we were all more or less hung over and not thinking particularly clearly. We spent most of the afternoon in the drawing room, eating leftovers and reading the weekend papers. There had been a threat that some scandal might erupt in the party, and I was relieved to see no sign of it.

The other children returned around five o'clock. They were somewhat fractious, not surprisingly, as it had been a long weekend, and we barely survived tea, bath and bedtime. They were all in bed by eight, and, clearly tired out, slept right through, all of them. The Orizio children were sleeping on air mattresses in their parents' bedroom, and the Gavilas' had been out in the annexe over the weekend, though they left to return to London by boat that evening. Coco and Ruby were sharing the single bed in the maid's room on the ground floor. They have both taken up night wandering recently, and we all felt it was safer to keep them away from the open stairs, which are really not designed with toddlers in mind. Sean had a wireless baby alarm in the room with him, but he heard nothing in the night and, when the fact that Coco was missing was discovered, it transpired that it had been switched off at some point over the weekend without his noticing.

My driver came and collected Imogen and me at 8.30 on Bank Holiday Monday, and we were back at the London house by 10.30. We got up and breakfasted and left before anyone else was up. It never occurred to us to look in the twins' room; we were busy and running late as it was. I was in my Westminster office catching up on

preparation for the new parliamentary term when you called, soon before the first bulletins made the early evening news . . .

P3 WITNESS STATEMENT

Maria Gavila

Guest

12 September 2004

. . . it was a lovely weekend. Glorious weather and great company, the children getting on like a house on fire and enjoying themselves hugely on the beach and at Neptune's Kingdom on Sunday afternoon. I can't believe that such a beautiful weekend has ended so badly; I think I'm still in shock. My husband, Robert, has been friends with Sean Jackson for decades, since they met at university, and Charles Clutterbuck is a friend of a similar vintage. Linda Innes is a more recent friend; she has been acting as an interior designer for Jackson Enterprises for a couple of years and a firm friendship has grown up between them. This weekend was the first time I'd met her partner, Dr James Orizio, but I gather he is well-known and well-respected and has a practice in Harley Street that a number of my clients recommend highly. (I work as a media advisor and my husband is a lawyer, and we have considerable contact with the world of showbusiness.)

We left on the Sunday evening, after we got back from taking all the children apart from Ruby to the water park. Robert had stayed home in order to be fit to pilot our boat, the Gin O'Clock, up to Brighton. We keep her at St Katharine Docks in London and it's too long a trip for a single day. We had our son, Joaquin, and Robert's daughter, Simone, with us, and spent the night at the marina in Brighton, having a late dinner at the restaurant there, and set off for London in the morning. Sean called us at three o'clock on Monday, as we were entering the Thames Estuary. When we docked I went straight to my office in Soho by cab and Robert took our luggage and the children home and joined me later.

The Find Coco campaign started as quickly as I could get it up and running. I am well practised at getting media campaigns afoot at extremely short notice, be it

helping clients capitalise on a fortunate turn of events or having to put my hand to rapid damage limitation, and I am aware of the speed at which one needs to act in cases of child abduction. I had composed an email to send to my entire address book by the Monday night, but held off from sending it until first thing on Tuesday, so that it would be at the top of people's inboxes when they logged in . . .

P4 WITNESS STATEMENT

Camilla Jackson

Half-sister to Coco Jackson

2 September 2004

I don't know what I can say that's any help. Me and my sister India were down at Harbour View on Thursday, but we left on Friday and went back to London. We don't get on with my stepmother. It's no big deal, not, you know, abusive or anything, but she's never made much effort to get on with us so we don't see much point in trying to get on with her. We were pissed off because Dad had forgotten we were coming even though it was his birthday and had been in the diary forever, so when we realised that Claire had got into some sort of snit with the nanny and we were going to be unpaid babysitters all weekend we left again.

Yes, I said, we don't get on with our stepmother. Why are you asking? You don't seriously think that would make us kidnap our own sister, do you? Look, Claire's a cow. She stole our dad off our mum and broke up our family. D'you think it would be normal for me to like her? It's not like she's ever made any effort to get us to. But I honestly don't have any strong feelings either way about Coco and Ruby – well, didn't until this happened. It's awful. This is the worst thing that's ever happened to our family. I keep waking up in the night because I've been dreaming she's dead.

We caught the train to Waterloo and went home. Our mother was in Scotland because she thought we were gone for the weekend, so we asked some friends for a sleepover. They were there until Monday. We were mostly playing computer games and watching DVDs. So yes, if you want the names of people who can give us an alibi .

Chapter One

2004 | Sunday | 4.45 a.m. | Sean

He waits while she pulls up her dress, then helps with the zip. In the grey dawn light she looks washed out, her blonde hair brassy rather than rich, her forehead shiny from too many preservative treatments. But still: better than the woman almost ten years her junior who's stormed off across the lawns ahead of them. Sean suddenly feels every year of his five decades. I'm going to have the hangover from hell in a few hours, he thinks. And I bet Claire won't give me a hall pass just because it's my birthday.

'Shit,' says Linda. 'Shit, shit, shit, shit, shit.'

Absently, he reaches out and kneads the muscles at the back of her neck.

They're tense, like granite. He's sure they weren't like that when he had his hand there ten minutes ago. Claire spoils everything.

'It'll be okay,' he says.

She rounds on him, her eyes narrowed, but still not a line to be seen on the shiny, shiny skin above. 'How will it be okay, Sean? Go on. Tell me. What, you think she's going to keep this to herself? Think she's going to just meekly ignore this? She'll be on to her lawyers before they've even opened. You'd better check out your pre-nup, because you're going to need it to be watertight.'

Sean sits down on the nearest sun-lounger. 'Maybe it's for the best,' he says ruminatively.

'Best for who?' she snaps.

'For . . . well, it's not as if we stood a hope in hell. I can't even remember why I married her. I'm just sorry about the kids, that's all. They deserve better than this.

And, you know, if it all comes out, you and I . . . '

She starts back, her mouth open in surprise. 'You and I what?'

He gapes back. 'I thought . . . '

'What? That this was some sort of . . . middle-aged Romeo and Juliet thing? You didn't think that, did you?'

'Well, no.' He lets out a short, nasty laugh, salving his dignity. 'Hardly Romeo

and Juliet, but . . .’

‘Oh, Christ,’ she says. ‘I’m married, Sean.’

‘Not exactly,’ he says, and tries his naughty-little-boy smile on her. ‘And so am I.’

The disgust in the look she gives back is more eloquent than any words.

‘Okay,’ he says. ‘Well, at least I know where I stand.’

‘Oh, don’t come the wounded soldier with me. It won’t work. Come on. We’d better get back. I need to get to my common-law husband and father of my children before she does.’

She bends to retrieve her strappy gold sandal, lost in the heat of the moment and lying on its side beneath a stone urn that weeps lobelia. It’s an exact colour match for the lace from which her dress is made. Sean is constantly amazed by the time and concentration the women he lives among put into these things, trawling from shop to shop, twisting and turning themselves in full-length mirrors and frowning as though on their decision rests the very secret of the universe. Some part of him admires it – he wouldn’t be drawn to these high-maintenance women if he didn’t – but as he ages he is beginning to long for simplicity; for an artless creature who holds these fol-de-rols in lower regard and him as a man in higher. ‘Shit, it’s broken,’ she says, and stares mournfully at a piece of gilt leather that flaps uselessly in the damp air. ‘Five hundred quid, for God’s sake.’

‘Happy birthday, Seanie,’ he says, contemplatively.

‘Oh, lord,’ she says. ‘Honestly, you men.’

She pulls off her other shoe and sets off ahead of him across the lawn, stepping where Claire has stepped only minutes before. Sean sighs and falls into step behind her. ‘Don’t just follow me,’ she hisses over her shoulder. ‘Go for a walk or something. We don’t want to be walking back in together. Maybe I can head her off, if it’s just me.’

I very much doubt that, he thinks. ‘D’you think there’s any point?’

‘Yes! Look, your marriage might be fucked, but that doesn’t mean mine has to go down with it. Go on!’

She gestures to her right, to the slope down to the front gate and the ferry road.

Sean shrugs and peels off.

It probably is a good thing, in the end, he thinks as he trudges in his dew-damp shirt, a lock of the thick sandy hair of which he is so proud broken loose from its gel coating and flopping into one eye. It's not something I'm proud of, but I'd rather be the bad guy than drop her because she's nasty. And she is. I can't think how I didn't see it before it was too late.

'Got to stop thinking with your todger, Seanie, old boy,' he says out loud into the silent air. It's not as though it's ever a rewarding way to go. Women like that can only keep up the performance for so long. Once they've got the legal papers, the blow-jobs dry up and the headaches begin. My God, he thinks, I didn't even get a birthday treat this year, and it's a Big Birthday. You'd have thought at the very least she could have put in a bit of effort today. No wonder I'm forced to look elsewhere. The gazebo is filled with party detritus. Discarded champagne glasses lie on their sides on the table and three empty bottles of Bolly sit in a row down the side of the sofa. There's a half-smoked Cohiba in the ashtray from earlier and he picks it up and lights it as he passes, to keep him company as he walks. It makes him feel a bit sleazy, doing that, but sleazy suits his current mood quite well.

He decides to go and investigate the works in progress at Seawings. Even when he finds himself in a Situation, Sean can never resist a good building site, and his dealings with the Poles who are working this one haven't been cordial enough so far to allow him a good poke around. He slips out through the gates of Harbour View and hurries into the shadow of the digger parked on the shared driveway. Though he's not doing anything much wrong, just a little light trespassing, he doesn't really want to be seen doing it at five in the morning, for there will be little he can say to explain it away.

A small crane sits on the house side of the digger, the long chain with its spider arms already unwound and draped up the slope ready to be attached to the holes in the lip of the pool liner. The liner has been inverted like a dome to keep out the rain that hasn't come. He clambers up in his formal shoes, leather soles slippy in the sandy mud, and inspects it. It's a good solid thing, though the blue Perspex it's made of is far thicker and heavier than is really necessary to get the job done. Typical amateur developer, he thinks, in the spirit of self-congratulation that makes

inspecting other people's works such a pleasure. The liner to the pool at Harbour View is half the thickness and cost half as much, and didn't need all this costly equipment to manoeuvre it into place, just eight burly builders and a lot of swearing. He pats it as he passes and it lets out a pleasing hollow boom.

The chaos up above is of a familiar sort. Builders' bits: ladders and buckets and slabs piled high ready for laying, a concrete mixer standing by to prepare for sealing the pool's rim once it's in place, a pile of roughcast and assorted rubble awaiting disposal from where a patio of 1970s crazy paving was broken up to make room for the hole. Spades and pickaxes and smoothing tools lie in a pile by the front door, an invitation to passing thieves – something that would earn his own contractors an educational fine if he saw it on one of his own developments. A new diving board lies on its side on the lawn, its back jutting into a flowerbed and crushing the hydrangeas. He drags it out as he passes, tutting that anyone would treat something so beautiful, so delicate, with such careless contempt. Some stems have snapped almost clean off. The garden, inside the fence, is bordered with Leylandii. Troublesome weeds, in a general context, but the poor soil here is keeping them in check, at least for the time being, and it will be some time before they get big enough to blight Harbour View's garden, which by then will be long-sold. Beech trees. He loves a stately beech, himself. In a few weeks their green will turn to gold and light up the landscape like beacons while these things remain blackish green all year round. It all passes so quickly, he thinks. These last ten years: it only seems like yesterday that I turned forty, and I haven't done half the things I swore I'd do that year alone. Still haven't drunk an icy cocktail at the foot of Ayer's Rock, still haven't flown my own helicopter, still haven't swum with sharks, other than the ones in the business world. I thought it was Heather holding me back, squashing my dreams, but then it was Claire doing the same thing, and I'm as much on the hamster wheel as I ever was. Maybe I need to face the fact that it's me, not them, at all. I'm not the buccaneer I always fantasised, just a middle-aged man who's hoping he won't lose his life savings in his next divorce. Thank God I did get a pre-nup this time.

He reaches the edge of the hole they've dug for the pool. It's disconcertingly deep, but then so is the liner, at its deep end. But he doubts the liner will reach the

bottom. Perhaps they're planning to fill it up to the water line with the piles of rubble. It would certainly be the thrifty way of disposing of it, rather than paying for the dump.

The builders have been true to their word and have even switched off the pumping equipment during their absence. The bottom of the hole has filled with water: black, brackish, with saline scum floating on the top. If the average homeowner only knew, he thinks, how many of their smooth, expensive walls were just wire cages filled with rubble and covered with plasterboard, they wouldn't be throwing their money about as though they would stand forever.

Out on the drive, he hears the beep and clunk of a car door, and, seconds later, an engine revs and a vehicle starts to back out. Hopefully that's Claire, he thinks, running off again the way she does. Good. It's too late and I'm too tired to go into Round Two tonight.

He starts to cheer up and heads back to the house. He often finds that, once decisions have been made for him as they were tonight, his first feeling is actually one of rushing relief. It's not been easy, keeping up a mistress and a nag. If the mistress has really dispensed with him, it's a clean sweep. No one harbouring any illusions about him, no more dreams to shatter. I'll miss the kids, he thinks. But, once I'm done with her, there's no question that she'll have full custody. If there's one thing a pet lawyer like Robert can do, it's find another lawyer to do one a good divorce. And then I'm free. No more sulking, no more accusations, no more we-can't because-of-the-kids, no more going to restaurants to give us something to distract us from our enmity. She can have the London house. I don't need more than a mansion flat myself anyway. I can start slowing down. Buy a big house in the countryside, have a few house parties, start working my way through my wine cellar. I've done well for myself. Even after paying Claire off, I've still got enough to live well for a long, long time.

As he nears the house, he begins to pick up the sound of raised voices. His house-guests: Robert and Maria, Linda, Charlie and Imogen: all awake, all calling out, shouting, the women hysterical. Oh, Christ, it's kicked off already, he thinks, and slows down. You'd've thought she'd have the dignity not to involve the rest of them.

Bloody Claire. Never content with a crisis when she can make a drama out of it.

Maybe I'll just . . .

And then the words begin to separate themselves from the hubbub. 'Christ, Jimmy! Oh, my God, do something! Jimmy!'

Sean begins to run.