

# **Mr. Mercedes Study Guide**

## **Mr. Mercedes by Stephen King**

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# Plot Summary

NOTE: All citations in this Study Guide refer to the Kindle version of *Mr. Mercedes*, published June 3, 2014.

A retired police detective, a teenage black boy, and a neurotic woman team up to form an unlikely group of heroes who stop a killer known as Mr. Mercedes from detonating a bomb during a sold out pop concert in this novel by Stephen King. *Mr. Mercedes* is the first installment in the Bill Hodges trilogy. This novel follows the escapades of Hodges, a retired police officer who is not yet ready to give up on solving the City Center Massacre, a case he handled while on active duty.

Not long after retiring from his job as a detective, Bill Hodges gets a letter from a man claiming to be the Mercedes Killer. The caller, whom the reader knows is Brady Hartsfield, goaded Olivia Trelawney, a woman from whom he stole a car he used to kill eight people at a job fair, into committing suicide. He is setting his sights on Hodges, hoping to push him into suicide as well because Hodges was the lead detective on the case of the City Center Massacre. Instead of becoming suicidal, Hodges takes a new interest in catching Mr. Mercedes. He first questions Janelle “Janey” Patterson about Olivia’s death and learns that Olivia received a letter from Mr. Mercedes as well. Janey believes the man toyed with her sister until she committed suicide. She joins Hodges in his search for Mr. Mercedes.

Meanwhile, Brady Hartsfield has begun communicating with Hodges through an internet website. Through his messages, Hodges gets Brady riled up with taunts that Brady is not the real Mercedes Killer. Brady decides to retaliate by killing the dog of one of Hodges’ friends with poisoned hamburger meat. Before he can get the meat to the dog, however, Brady’s mother makes lunch with the hamburger and dies. In retaliation Brady sends Hodges a message saying he will kill him.

Brady plants a bomb in Hodges’ car which would have killed him if Hodges had been driving the car when the bomb was detonated. Instead, Janey is killed in the blast. Her death makes Hodges even more determined to track down the man he still knows only as the Mercedes Killer. Meanwhile, Hodges teams up with Jerome, a computer whiz teen, and Holly, Janey’s cousin who suffers from mental illness but is also a computer genius, to help him uncover Mr. Mercedes’ identity.

Things move fast once Hodges, Jerome, and Holly learn that the killer is Brady, the same man who works as the ice cream man in Hodges’ and Jerome’s neighborhood. They are able to hack into Brady’s computers and learn he plans to detonate a bomb during that evening’s pop concert at the city’s arts complex. Nearly 4,000 people will be in attendance, including Jerome’s sister and mother.

Hodges, Jerome, and Holly arrive at the concert hall just as the music starts. Hodges recognizes the shoulder pain he has been experiencing is the sign of a heart attack and sends Holly and Jerome to subdue Brady. It is the neurotic and insecure Holly who

stops Brady's plan by hitting him in the head with Hodges' Happy Slapper, a homemade weapon consisting of ball bearings in a sock.



# “Gray Mercedes”

## Summary

In the section “Gray Mercedes,” just before midnight August “Augie” Odenkirk joined the line of job seekers standing in line at the City Center waiting for a job fair to open the following morning. Janice Cray, the woman in line ahead of her, had her baby, Patti, with her. The baby began to cry at about 3 a.m. and Augie directed Janice to use his sleeping bag so she could have some privacy to feed the baby and change her diaper.

The sky began to lighten at about 5 a.m. The line of people saw a janitor walk through the City Center and a small cheer was heard. People began to talk. Augie decided that when Janice woke up he would suggest they say they were a couple so she would not seem as irresponsible for having the baby with her. He watched the cars entering the parking lot and noticed a Mercedes-Benz that did not leave the parking lot or head for a parking space.

The car’s driver blasted his horn and flashed his lights then sped toward the line of people waiting in front of the City Center. The crowd was packed so tightly most of them were not able to escape. As the car approached Augie was knocked to the ground next to the sleeping bag. He tried to shield Janice and the baby from the car. When he looked up, hoping the car had veered in a different direction, all he could see was a tire. He hoped the baby was still asleep.

## Analysis

Mr. Mercedes is the first installment of the three-part Bill Hodges Trilogy written by Stephen King.

A dateline at the beginning of this first section indicates the action takes place on the night of April 9 and early morning of April 10, 2009. The story is told by a third-person narrator. This particular opening section is focused on the perspective of August “Augie” Odenkirk. However, it is indicated at the end of this section that the point of view will not continue to focus on Augie, as it appears he was directly hit by a gray Mercedes that plowed into a line of people waiting for a job fair.

Notice the foreshadowing in this section that indicates other people will soon be injured or killed. “This was Keith Frias, whose left arm would shortly be torn from his body” (10). In another reference to the tragedy that is about to take place King writes, “An elderly fellow in line ahead of Augie (Wayne Welland, now in the last moments of his earthly existence)” (11) to indicate Wayne will not live much longer. Along with these direct clues that people will soon be killed and injured there are also more discreet wordings and descriptions that give the scene of the waiting job applicants a creepy atmosphere. First there is a mist that turns into a thick heavy fog as the dawn approaches. When the



sun does begin to come up, the light it gives off is described as being “damp and as pale as the cheek of a day-old corpse” (9).

Even the job fair is portrayed as a failure before it even starts. For instance, it is described that the people waited in line “As if they all knew this mission was a failure, and they were only waiting to get the official word” (9). Augie questions the banner displayed on the front of the City Center that makes the claim “1000 JOBS GUARANTEED!” (8) and considers other obvious lies he has heard like taking vitamin C could keep a person from catching AIDS. Both of these references indicate that the people have little hope of getting a job but have still shown up in order to try.

Although this book is a work of fiction, the characters in the novel deal with the financial landscape that existed in 2009. A recession caused many people to be laid off or downsized from work. In this particular story, people are so desperate for jobs that they are lining up for a job fair the day before it is even scheduled to begin. As Janice notes, there was also trouble in the housing market at the time with many people owing more money on their homes than those houses were worth, hence the term “underwater” (4).

Through this first section, King uses Augie’s kindness to contrast with the driver’s cruelty. Although Augie initially has a poor opinion of Janice for bringing her baby to stand in line overnight for a job fair, he feels more sympathetic once he learns her story. By the time morning has come, he has let her have use of his sleeping bag to keep her baby warm and dry. He is even considering that they approach job booths as a couple so potential employers will not make jump decisions about Janice and her abilities as a mother and employee. Augie’s kindness contrasts with the pure evil nature of the driver of the Mercedes Benz who plows into the crowd of people waiting for the job fair.

A significant symbol in this section of the novel is the gray Mercedes-Benz that was used as a murder weapon by careening it down a hill into a crowd of people waiting to apply for jobs. Even with the thick fog, Augie recognizes the car as a Mercedes because of the light given off by the car’s high definition headlights.

## Discussion Question 1

What is the tone of the novel at this point? How does the author use words and phrases to sculpt the tone?

## Discussion Question 2

Why is Augie kind to the woman who brings her baby to the job fair? What does this say about his personality?



## Discussion Question 3

How do the actual events of the year in which the novel is set add to the feeling of depression in this opening section?

## Vocabulary

emerged, switchback, deity, lackadaisical, absurdity, satiric



# “Det.-Ret.,” 1-11

## Summary

In Section 1, Bill Hodges, a retired police officer, drinks beer as he watches a television talk show. Next to him on the table is a .38 Smith and Wesson M and P revolver which he pats occasionally. This has become his daily habit since his retirement. He considers using the gun to kill himself and thinks if he could drink he might put off his eventual death for a year or two. He is distracted from his thoughts by the sound of his mail being delivered.

In Section 2, among Hodges' pieces of mail is a letter with a smiley face emoticon where the return address should be. He recognizes the symbol. It brings back bad memories.

In Section 3, as Hodges reads the letter that first congratulates him on his retirement, he thinks the writer's description of a cop's retirement party is not bad. The man writing the letter tells Hodges he is the Mercedes Killer, one of the criminals whom Hodges did not catch during his prestigious career. The man describes in his letter how he had a “hard-on” (23) when he drove Olivia Trelawney's car into the crowd at the job fair, killing eight and injuring many more. He describes how he enjoyed the bumps as the car hit the people and was delighted to learn he had killed a baby (Patricia Cray) and her mother. He writes he was able to kill the people as he did because he has no conscience. He tells Hodges that he has no intention of attempting to perpetrate a crime like this one again, so there is no chance of him getting caught. The man closes his letter by pointing out to Hodges that his life must seem empty without his gun and badge. He fakes concern that Hodges might kill himself the way some retired police officers do.

In a P.S., the Mercedes Killer tells Hodges he only attended Olivia Trelawney's funeral in his imagination. A P.P.S. tells Hodges that he can try to communicate with the killer using the website Under Debbie's Blue Umbrella. The killer even provides him with a username.

In Section 4, Hodges puts down the letter and looks out his window, realizing that the Mercedes Killer has sparked paranoia as he tries to decide who might be spying on him. He knows he should turn the letter over to his old partner, but he is afraid if he does the presence of a letter will be leaked to the press. Hodges thinks this is what the killer wants to happen so he will get more attention. He also doubts the man's claim that he does not want to perpetrate another crime. Sitting back down in his chair, Hodges puts his gun in the drawer of the table and decides he needs to think about the letter before making a move.

In Section 5, Hodges goes out for dinner and wonders if the killer was somehow spying on his retirement party in order to get such a perfect description of it. Back at home, he puts the letter in the drawer with his father's gun. He checks out Under Debbie's Blue





Umbrella on the Internet but goes no further than the description of the first page. He goes to bed knowing he will sleep for a change. He wonders if the killer, who has indicated he wants Hodges to kill himself, realizes he has given Hodges a new reason to live. Hodges is startled when he hears himself singing the next morning as he cooks breakfast.

In Section 6, Hodges goes back over the letter, considering that it contains things that were not publicized. He knows that the killer did wear a hair net and use bleach on the mask he was wearing during the assault—two details that were never given to the press. The mention of these facts along with the assured tone of the letter makes Hodges believe the man who wrote it is really the Mercedes Killer.

In Section 7, Hodges makes a list of characteristics about the killer's letter and begins to put together a profile. He decides the killer is intelligent and that if he were caught and asked to give a writing sample that he would not use any of the devices that stand out in the letter. Hodges feels that the killer's act of using numerals instead of spelling out numbers is a "fingerprint" (36) that can be used to identify the killer. Another clue is the man's use of the word "perk" (36) to refer to a criminal instead of the word "perp" (36).

In Section 8, Hodges visits with Mrs. Melbourne during a walk around the block. She asks about Jerome, a highly intelligent black boy who mows Hodges' yard.

In Section 9, Hodges searches the Internet for a newspaper photo of the steering wheel of the car used in the City Center killings. It had a smiley face, like the one from Hodges' letter, stuck over the Mercedes emblem. He calls his old partner and arranges a lunch meeting with him the following day.

In Section 10, after watching the news that night Hodges unloads his father's gun and puts it in the safe next to his duty Glock. He continues to think about the identity of the Mercedes Killer. They do not even know his race, though Hodges doubts he is anything but white. He has also decided the man is not a slob and that he does not talk much.

Because the restaurant where Hodges will be meeting Pete is close to a bad part of town, Hodges considers taking a gun but instead decides to take a weapon he refers to as the "Happy Slapper." As he slips into sleep, he thinks about how the Mercedes killer has shown his need to talk to someone about what he has done. Hodges thinks the killer has messed up by deciding to talk to the former lead investigator on the case.

In Section 11, Brady listens to Freddi Linklatter rage about a discussion she had with a man about homosexuality but Brady is really thinking about what Hodges thought about the letter Brady sent him.

It is at this point that the reader learns that Brady is the Mercedes Killer. Hodges does not yet know that Brady is the Mercedes Killer so Brady will be referred to by both names in coming sections depending on whose perspective is the focus in each section.

Brady thought the letter would pep Hodges up at first. He had seen him sitting and watching television with the gun in his lap. Brady hopes to goad Hodges into committing



suicide just like he did to Olivia Trelawney. Freddi asks if Brady is listening and he wonders how she would react if he told her he was the Mercedes Killer or that he had nine pounds of explosives in his closet. When the boss of the store discovers Freddi and Brady talking on the loading dock he puts Brady to work putting discount stickers on DVDs. Management has insisted that the Discount Electronix stores get out of the DVD business by January of 2011. Soon all they will sell is cheap computers and televisions. As she leaves for her computer job, Freddi tells Brady this was not what she thought her life would be like. Brady agrees but does not consider telling Freddi about his childhood and his mother's plan for him to kill his little brother and then cover it up.

## Analysis

Notice the change in tense from the first part of this novel "Gray Mercedes" to the second "Det.-Ret." The first part is told in the past tense while the second is related in the present tense. The story continues to be told from the point of view of a third person narrator. In Sections 1-10 of this part of novel, the story focuses on Hodges' point of view while Section 11 is focused on the perspective of Brady, who identifies himself as the Mercedes Killer. Hodges does not yet know that Brady is the Mercedes Killer; for this reason, the killer will be referred to as the Mercedes Killer in the sections focusing on Hodges' perspective. The reader should note that "Brady" and "The Mercedes Killer" are the same character.

Even though Bill Hodges, the former lead detective on the Mercedes Killer case, is retired, his cop instincts kick in when he receives a letter from the killer. He reads the letter through several times and considers carefully what he should do with it before deciding to not turn it in to the police right away. He believes there will be no forensic evidence found on it anyway. Instead, he uses the letter to try to get a picture of the kind of person with whom he is dealing based on information he can glean from the letter.

When the reader compares the assumptions that Hodges makes about Brady with Brady's real personality, the reader can see that Hodges is not far off base with his profile. Just as Hodges suspects, Brady has indeed used a false style of writing for the letter. He is also very intelligent, just as Hodges suspects that he is. In fact, Brady admits that he enjoys a challenging crime more than an easy one. For Brady, Olivia Trelawney's death was more satisfying because it took more cunning than the City Center incident, even though he killed more people at the City Center.

The smiley-face emoticon introduced in this section of the novel is an important image. When Brady first sees the emoticon in Brady's letter it, "stirs a memory, and not a good one" (20). When he looks back in press from the City Center Massacre, Hodges refreshes his memory about the emoticon. A sticker with this same smiley-face was stuck on the steering wheel of Olivia's car after the car was abandoned.

Although the reader does not know Brady well at this point in the novel, there are already signs that he suffers from a mental illness. First, he killed eight people using a stolen car. He is proud of himself for goading a woman into killing herself and thinks he



will be even more fulfilled if he can get Hodges to kill himself as well. He fantasizes about telling his coworker that he has homemade explosives in his closet. He hates his boss but keeps his dislike to himself. The reader also learns Brady had a record of violence, even as a kid. "That was when he killed his brother. And his mother covered it up" (48). These are the great memories of his childhood.

## Discussion Question 1

At one point Brady says of his crime: "I think a great many people would enjoy doing what I did, and that is why they enjoy books and movies (and even TV shows these days) that feature Torture and Dismemberment, etc., etc., etc." (24). Do you think this is true? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 2

What do you think Brady means when he says "I am the abyss" (45)?

## Discussion Question 3

Does Hodges react as Brady thought he would when he receives the letter? Why does Hodges decide not to take the letter to the police?

## Vocabulary

transient, benignly, inciteful, incompetent, venal, curettage, convene, extortion, paltry, pundits, missive, incremental, fawningly, conduit



## “Det.-Ret.,” 12-22

### Summary

In Section 12, Pete and Hodges have caught up at the restaurant by the time their food comes. Halfway through their meals, Pete puts a folded up piece of paper on the table. He knows Hodges wants to talk about the progress on cases and has listed the cases he thinks Hodges wants information about on the paper. After Hodges lists the four cases he wants information about, Pete shows him the same list on his piece of paper. These cases include those involving Davis, the park rapist, pawnshops, and the Mercedes Killer. The case in which Hodges is really interested is the Mercedes Killer. Pete says although his partner, Isabelle “Izzy” Jaynes, is talking to people in Olivia’s neighborhood, they are dead in the water on the Mercedes Killer case.

Pete tells Hodges he has been on the outs with his daughter because he refused to let her attend a cheerleading competition at the City Center. He admits he is afraid that the Mercedes Killer will strike again. Hodges asks if Pete has ever thought anything about Olivia, like if she was telling the truth about the key. Hodges had not liked Olivia and was not surprised when she killed herself. As they are talking, Pete gets a phone call that excites him. He tells Hodges they may have found the victim in the Davis murder case.

In Section 13, Hodges orders another cup of coffee and thinks about Olivia. The Mercedes Killer had stolen her car and detectives believed Olivia had unknowingly aided him. Olivia had overdosed on her mother’s pain medication.

In Section 14, Hodges continues to remember the day of the City Center Massacre. The Mercedes had been found an hour after the killings. A shirt sleeve belonging to August Odenkirk was found in the grille. A wedding ring belonging to one of the victims was also found stuck in the car’s grille. There was a clown mask on the front seat of the car. The police knew the car was registered to Olivia but did not think she fit the profile for the killer.

In Section 15, continuing with Hodges’ memories, there had been no tampering with the car’s locking system and the police were told that the locks of a Mercedes could not be jimmied. The mechanic from the Mercedes dealership said that it was obvious that Olivia had left her key in the ignition when she got out of the car. The killer had seen the key in the car and taken it. He had locked the car when he abandoned it after the murders.

Section 16 switches back to the present as Hodges waits for his credit card to be brought back at the restaurant. Hodges thinks back to his interrogation of Olivia Trelawney. She refused to admit she had left her key in the ignition.



In Section 17, Hodges remembers how Olivia had shown them the smart key from her car during their initial interview. She asked when she would get the car back and then noted that she would have to sell it because she would not want to drive it. She told detectives she spent the night with her mother every Thursday night. That Thursday she had brought dinner from a vegan restaurant and parked in a street spot.

Olivia insisted that even though she had three boxes of takeout food with her, that she took the key out of the ignition and put it in her purse. They asked when Olivia had taken her key out of her purse again to lock her car and believed they saw a flash of uncertainty. Suddenly there was a surety about her as she told the police she did not put her key in her purse until after she locked her car. Before they detectives left her house they asked if they could have her spare key as well. She claimed to have no spare key.

In Section 18, Hodges had believed at the time of the original interview that Olivia was lying about the key. If she was not lying, Hodges wonders what did happen.

In Section 19, Hodges continues to reminisce as he thinks about how he and Pete drove to the dealership with the key to Olivia's Mercedes. Hodges asked for verification that all Mercedes cars were sold with two keys. Hodges' suspicion was verified. They believed Olivia had both keys in her purse and was using them interchangeably. Because Olivia was so uppity and never asked either of the detectives about any of the victims, Hodges and Pete thought nothing of putting some of the blame on her.

In Section 20, back in the present, Elaine, the hostess at the restaurant, shakes Hodges to wake him. She helps him out of the restaurant.

In Section 21, as Hodges looks at his own car key he thinks about how Olivia never went back on her testimony that she had not left her key in the car's ignition and that she had only had one key. Pete believed, however, that her suicide was an admission of her guilt.

As his gaze moves to the turnpike overpass, Hodges sees three big men bullying one little one. The little one tries to run but the bigger ones grab him. Hodges walks toward the four. He tells the three bigger kids he wants them to leave the smaller one alone. He takes the Happy Slapper out of his pocket. It is an argyle sock filled with ball bearings. Using the Happy Slapper, Hodges runs the three bigger boys off. Hodges hands the smaller boy his backpack and asks why he is not at school. He knows the boy is skipping school and suggests he skip school someplace safer. Before he leaves, Hodges tells the boy he wants him to pass on a favor to someone else before the end of the day.

In Section 22, Brady prepares for his second job as the ice cream salesman. He drives to the west side, which allows him to be in Hodges' neighborhood for an honest reason. Brady drives past Hodges' house and sees Jerome mowing the lawn. Jerome waves and Brady waves back.



## Analysis

King uses situational irony in this section of the novel referring back to Hodges' original reaction to Brady's letter. Hodges thinks he is suffering from paranoia as a result of the letter when he looks out his window trying to determine who it is who is spying on him. One of the suspects he names to himself is the ice cream man but he dismisses the idea that he is really being spied upon. Despite Hodges' belief that his suspicion of the ice cream man is the paranoia talking, it turns out that the killer really is spying on him under the cover of being the ice cream man.

Since at this point the reader knows that the name of the Mercedes Killer is Brady, he will be referred to as Brady from this point forward in those sections that focus on Brady as previously noted. In Hodges' sections he will still be the Mercedes Killer, since Hodges does not yet know his identity.

Background information about the Mercedes Killer case is given to the reader as Hodges sits at the restaurant after having talked to his old partner, Pete, about the case. This information is given in the form of flashbacks as Hodges goes over the details of the case in his mind. The keys to the Mercedes are an important part of the investigation and also an important symbol in the novel. Because there are no signs that the Mercedes Killer forcefully entered the car, the police assumed that he had to have had a key. They also assumed that Olivia unintentionally left her key in the car and left it unlocked, making it easier for it to be stolen and used in the crime. Olivia denied having two keys to the car and insisted she had locked the car. Her suicide had made the cops think she had realized she had been wrong about the key but had not wanted to admit it.

Sadly, the police, including Hodges himself, felt no sympathy for Olivia. Hodges notes that one of the reasons the police felt no sympathy for her was because she never asked about any of the people hurt or injured by her car. Her interests were purely selfish. They also believed she was lying to them when she told them that she did not have a second key to the car.

Despite the police's certainty that Olivia had a second key to the car and their lack of sympathy for her, Hodges still has some doubt that their assumptions were correct. The letter sent to him by the Mercedes Killer seems to strengthen these doubts since the killer indicates it was he who drove Olivia to suicide. Hodges thinks to himself "Suppose, though — just for the sake of argument — that she was telling the truth" (70). Hodges remembers that at the time his partner had provided him with the common sense evidence that led to no other conclusion than Olivia having forgotten her key in her car: the car was not hotwired or jimmed, and Olivia did have only one key after the crime because the killer had probably disposed of the other one.

King makes allusions to his own works in this section of the novel. Hodges describes the scene when he first arrives at the warehouse behind which the car was found. He says two cars were pulled up, blocking the Mercedes in, "as if the cops expected the big gray sedan to start up by itself, like that old Plymouth in the horror movie" (60). This



idea of a car coming to life is an allusion to a movie based on the novel *Christine*, one of King's earlier works. Later when the detectives look at the clown mask that the killer left behind in the car, they comment that the mask reminds them of the "TV movie about the clown in the sewer" (62). This reference is an allusion to the character Pennywise from the Stephen King book *It*, which was made into a television miniseries.

The reader learns for sure in this section of the novel that Augie, from the first part of the novel, was killed by the car. Hodges indicates a blood soaked shirt sleeve, later found to belong to Augie, was caught in the grille of the car. King refers to Augie as "one of the victims" (60), indicating that man did not survive.

Notice the use of slang language as well as sensory description in the novel. Slang words include the term "five-o" (77) in reference to the police, "pretty kitties" (51) referring to the women a married man would date on the side, and "up the old wazoo" (49) to refer to the number of gang tags in a particular overpass in a rough area of the city. King also uses descriptions in the novel that involve all of the senses. Consider the following description: ". . . he would smell the sour reek of cheap wine and whiskey. His feet would grate on the shards of broken bottles. In the gutters, more bottles. The little brown kind" (49). King tells his reader what Hodges would smell if he walked under a particular overpass, what he would hear and feel as he walked on the broken bottles, and what he would see, more little brown bottles.

Hodges proves to himself, his partner, and the reader that he cannot give up his cop instinct even though he is retired. The first big clue that Hodges cannot separate himself from his police work is that he arranges to meet Pete and talk about old cases to begin with. Another clue that Hodges cannot give up his cop instinct happens before he goes into the restaurant. He looks at the over pass and thinks about the crimes that occur there. Going in, he reminds himself that area is "No longer his problem" (49). After he comes out of the restaurant, he cannot help but intervene when he sees three older boys picking on a younger kid. He uses his Happy Slapper, which turns out to be a sock with ball bearings in the toe, to run the older kids off.

## Discussion Question 1

How is it ironic that it turns out that the ice cream man really is the person who has been spying on Hodges?

## Discussion Question 2

What would it mean for the police investigation if Olivia really did not leave her key in her car's ignition?



## Discussion Question 3

Discuss the details of the City Center Massacre. Does there appear to be any motive in the killings? What does this say about the killer?

## Vocabulary

denizens, requisite, emporium, sanctimonious, inadvertent, monoliths, askew, rending, recanted, stridently, audacious, recourse





# “Under Debbie’s Blue Umbrella,” 1-8

## Summary

In Section 1, as Brady sells ice cream he sometimes wonders how hard it would be to poison all the ice cream in his truck. He’s decided that it is not worth the effort since he wants to concentrate on Hodges.

In Section 2, Brady drives past Jerome’s house. The handsome black boy bothers Brady because he sometimes dates white girls. Brady suspects they have sex with Jerome willingly. Brady admits he has never had sex. Brady smiles as he serves Jerome and his little sister ice cream. It is the same smile he smiled during the Mercedes Massacre. He keeps a close eye on Jerome because the boy seems to be Hodges’ friend. He notes that Olivia did not have any friends, which made it easy for Brady to manipulate her.

In Section 3, Hodges finds himself parked in front of Olivia’s house after leaving the restaurant. He wonders if her mother is still alive and remembers that she had a sister but cannot recall her name. As Hodges thinks about the letter the Mercedes Killer wrote to him, he wonders if Olivia might have gotten a similar letter. A car pulls up behind Hodges’ car and a man gets out. When the man questions Hodges about his reason for sitting in front of the house, Hodges asks for ID from the man, whom he believes is a private security officer. When the man, Radney Peeples, learns Hodges is a retired police detective who worked the Mercedes case, Peeples becomes friendlier. He says he does not think it was right the way Olivia was blamed after her car was used in the killings but dodges Hodges’ question when he asks if Peeples had liked her. Peeples is able to tell Hodges that her sister’s name is Janelle “Janey” Patterson. She had taken over caring for her mother, whom Peeples says Janey moved to a nursing home. Janey is living in her mother’s condo.

As Hodges’ drives home, he wonders if Janelle still has her sister’s personal papers and if those papers include a letter from the Mercedes Killer. Even though he knows he does not mean it, Hodges tells himself that if he makes any progress on the case he will turn it over to Pete.

In Section 4, Hodges considers signing up for the website Under Debbie’s Blue Umbrella but remembers what Jerome told him about other people being able to see his personal information through his computer. He decides instead to call Jerome. After he makes arrangements for the boy to come help him with his computer, he calls directory assistance and is surprised when he gets a number for Janelle.

In Section 5, Brady goes home to his house at 49 Elm Street where he lives with his mother, Deborah Ann Hartsfield. She is watching Survivor on television and wearing a white silk robe he got her for Christmas. He can see her underwear and gets turned on by the shadows of her nipples visible under her robe. He tells her he is going downstairs



to eat while working on a project. She asks for a kiss first. He tries to kiss her on the cheek but she turns at the last minute and the kiss winds up on her mouth. She calls him “my honeyboy” (101) before he heads for the basement.

When Brady speaks the word “control,” the lights in the basement turn on. He thinks about Frankie when he reaches the foot of the stairs, the place where Frankie died. Because he has been so turned on by his mother, Brady has to masturbate before he can eat or concentrate on work.

In Section 6, Brady’s seven laptop computers turn on when he says the word “chaos.” The word “darkness” stops a suicide countdown. He thinks about the ideas he has come up with and realizes that the best ones are illegal. Thing One had helped him with the massacre at the City Center. It was basically a remote control he could use to change the stop lights. Brady had been infuriated that all the stop lights between the City Center and the place he planned to dump the car were green and he had not gotten a chance to use his invention. He considers Thing Two to be his moneymaker and thinks to himself that “without Thing Two there would have been no Mercedes” (105).

In a closet there are nine pounds of plastic explosives packed into nine shoeboxes. He also has five disposable cell phones that he hopes to program to all ring when the same number is dialed so he can use them to detonate the explosives. Also in the closet is a suicide vest he has made that includes plastic explosives and ball bearings.

In Section 7, Hodges goes to visit Janey. As she serves him coffee, she tells Hodges that she wants to find out why her sister killed herself. She believes Hodges can help her with that. She mentions a letter that was written to her sister and brings it to Hodges. She points out the smiley-face on the letter like the one that was on the steering wheel. Janey had not shown the letter to the police because she did not trust them. As she admits that to Hodges, she begins to cry.

In Section 8, while Janey pulls herself together Hodges reads the letter. The writer mentions sexual and physical abuse he suffered as a child. He mentions he was often too nervous to eat and was picked on because he often pulled at his clothes and hair. Hodges remembers Olivia had the habits of pulling at her clothes and hair. Hodges continues reading. The man asked Olivia in the letter why she left the key in the ignition and blamed her for giving him a way to kill the people. He asked her to get in touch with him via Under Debbie’s Blue Umbrella, indicating that he would kill himself if he was not able to talk with her.

After Hodges finishes reading the letter, Janey tells him that her elderly mother told her that Olivia had been talking to a disturbed man under an umbrella. They discuss the possibility that Olivia’s mother might remember something about what Olivia and the killer talked about. Janey asks if Hodges will take the job and offers him \$5,000 a week. He explains to Janey that he is taking a risk by helping her because he could be charged with withholding evidence if it were found he had the letter. After voicing his concerns and agreeing to take the job, he asks Janey to tell him about Olivia.



## Analysis

In this section, the reader gets a better picture of how disturbed Brady is as well as his capability and desire to hurt people. He believes he is superior to other people. He calls the children to whom he sells ice cream “brats” and “little animals” (83). He describes the adults who buy ice cream from him as: “people of little vision, as stupid as ants crawling around their hill. A mass killer is serving them ice cream, and they have no idea” (84).

Brady is very intelligent but he uses his intelligence to make things that will hurt people. In his closet he has homemade plastic explosives and a homemade suicide vest. He has created an invention he calls “Thing One” to allow him to change the traffic lights so he would not get caught by stop lights after the City Center Massacre. Another invention of which he is proud is called “Thing Two.” Brady credits this invention with giving him the Mercedes but gives no details as to what that invention did for him.

Brady’s goals for himself show how demented he is. His main goal is to persuade Hodges to kill himself. He has already demonstrated through his relationship with Olivia that he knows how to manipulate people into a place where they harm themselves. “He lied a lot in that letter, each lie calculated to wind Hodges up a little more” (102). In the same way that Brady is manipulating Hodges, he also manipulated Olivia through lies to make her feel like they had a connection and that she was responsible for his pain and unhappiness.

Brady has many hangups that show he is racist and also that he thinks highly of himself. He is bothered by the fact that Hodges retired with honors even though he was unable to catch Brady. This concern shows how highly Brady thinks of himself and his abilities. Brady believes he is such a brilliant criminal that Hodges should not have earned honors at his retirement because he was not able to catch him. Brady shows he is racist by the way he is bothered by Jerome, the intelligent black boy who often buys ice cream from Brady and is Hodges’ friend. He is critical because Jerome and his sister both have what Brady considers “white” (85) names. Brady also does not like Jerome because he sometimes dates white girls. “That’s wrong. It’s against nature” (84), he says.

Another thing that the reader learns about Brady is that he lives at home with his alcoholic mother. The two seem to have planned together the death of someone named Frankie. Brady does not give any details but indicates that Frankie died at the foot of the basement steps. Brady does not have friends and believes friends are weaknesses. Brady has never been with a girl before but he does get sexually aroused by his mother. The two seem to have some strange sexual relationship.

King uses this book to share the reality of computer crimes with his readers. Because Hodges does not have much experience with computers he is able to share the way his computer got hacked and he was embarrassed because his friends got requests to send him money. Knowing how dangerous the computer can be, Hodges decides to refer to Jerome, a computer savvy teen, before he proceeds with logging onto the website Under Debbie’s Blue Umbrella. “Maybe Mr. Mercedes wants to talk. On the



other hand, maybe what he really wants is to look through that window Jerome was talking about” (97).

The reader continues to learn about Hodges’ capacity as a police officer. He notes that one of his special abilities was his ability to find an aspect that would bond him with the person he wanted to question. “You could call that luck, but there’s always something that will get you on the same side as the person you want to question, something, and part of Hodges’s success on the cops came from being able to recognize it” (91). Pete, Hodges’ partner, does not have this ability. When Hodges is approached by the private security officer while he is parked in front of Olivia’s house, Hodges uses this ability to connect with that officer and befriend him instead of the allowing the situation to become confrontational.

Another interrogation technique that Hodges uses when he talks to Peeples is his ability to read a person’s body language. When he is talking to Peeples about Olivia and asks him if he liked her Hodges notices that Peeples’ “eyes shift up and to the left, an involuntary movement Hodges has seen in a great many interrogation rooms over the years” (91). Hodges recognizes this eye flicker as meaning that a person is either going to try to dodge answering a question or is going to tell a lie. Although he does not realize it, Hodges makes the same involuntary eye movement when he thinks to himself that he will turn over any progress he makes in the Mercedes case to the police. The reader should interpret this as foreshadowing that indicates Hodges does not plan to turn anything over to the police.

Even though he is technically not a police officer and could get into trouble for working on the case in private, Hodges agrees to help Janey find out why her sister killed herself. Hodges explains to Janey that by not turning in the letter that Olivia received from the Mercedes Killer to the police he is withholding evidence, a felony offense. Even though he could spend time in jail for assisting Janey, he agrees to do so because he wants to know as much as she does how Mr. Mercedes convinced Olivia to kill herself.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Why is it significant that Brady is racist? What does this say about him?

## **Discussion Question 2**

Discuss Hodges intuitive read of Peeples. How does Hodges use his investigative skills to help him interpret Peeples’ behavior? What does this say about Hodges’ abilities as a detective and people person?

## **Discussion Question 3**

Discuss the letter that the Mercedes Killer wrote to Olivia. How is it similar to the one that Hodges received? How is it different? How are these differences significant?

## Vocabulary

vital, averse, notorious, surreal, orifice, atrocity, anonymity, phishing, pedagogical, flummoxed, rancor, obsolete, beneficiary, philandering, pensive, marcelled



# “Under Debbie’s Blue Umbrella,” 9-20

## Summary

In Section 9, Janey explains to Hodges how Olivia kept her family at a high level of stress because she was highly anxious, easily stressed, and a hypochondriac. When she originally read the letter from the killer, she noticed he tried to connect with Olivia through her nervous habits. Janey tells Hodges that Olivia got better at handling her nervous habits when she got married. Her husband, Kent, managed to get her to go to a therapist and get on medication. After he died, Janey noticed that her sister began to return to her old nervous habits. When Hodges asks Janey if her sister would have left her key in the ignition, Janey says she believes her sister was so obsessive-compulsive that she would not have done so.

In Section 10, Hodges asks Janey to call him the next time her mother is having a good day so he can visit her. He also asks if she thinks her lawyer can find a criminal lawyer who can take over the case so they will not get charged if they find something through their investigations. Before he leaves, Janey kisses Hodges on the cheek.

In Section 11, Hodges shows Jerome the website through which the Mercedes Killer wants to communicate with him. Jerome says that it might be an innocent site or might unleash a virus onto his computer. When Jerome starts to open the site on Hodges’ computer, Hodges asks Jerome to open the site on Jerome’s computer instead. Before he leaves, Hodges asks Jerome to listen to a story. He suggests they talk as they walk to an ice cream parlor. Jerome mentions they might even find the Mr. Tasty truck.

In Section 12, Hodges gives Jerome a fictionalized version of Olivia’s story as they walk. At the ice cream parlor Hodges hands Jerome money to go in and buy their treats so he can think about the story. Hodges sits outside with Odell, the dog. When Hodges refers to Jerome as Sherlock Holmes, Jerome’s alter ego Tyrone Feelgood Delight comes out: “Only you is Sherlock! I is Doctah Watson!” (133) Jerome says in Ebonics.

In Section 13, while they are eating their ice cream, Jerome calls Hodges’ bluff and tells him that he knows Hodges is talking about the Mercedes Killer. Jerome tells about a new car that his mother got. She drove it for a year before his father found the spare key in the glove box. It was still in the packet that included the owner’s manual. She had never opened it. Hodges considers what this information might mean in Olivia’s case but thinks that because she was obsessive-compulsive she would not have left the spare key in the glove box and would not have forgotten to lock her car.

Jerome is excited about what Hodges has told him and wants to know how the Under Debbie’s Blue Umbrella site figures into the murders. Hodges explains that his interest in the case is not really legal and that he does not want to involve Jerome. He asks Jerome not to mention anything about his investigation. Jerome agrees to do so. They see the ice cream truck as they walk home.



In Section 14, after Brady sees Hodges and Jerome walking together he wonders what they were discussing.

In Section 15, Hodges sits down that night and compares the letter he got from Brady and the letter Brady sent to Olivia. He continues to work on putting together a profile of the killer. He believes he is between the ages of 20-35. He also feels the killer has been watching him and was watching Olivia.

In Section 16, Jerome calls Hodges to tell him he is on the Blue Umbrella website. He begins his discussion by telling Hodges that the most precious commodity on the internet is privacy. Jerome explains that sites like the Blue Umbrella site are among the most secure. He says the website servers are encrypted and the conversations cannot even be printed out. When Hodges says he already has a username for the site Jerome guesses that he got it from the Mercedes Killer. Hodges does not verify Jerome's suspicions.

In Section 17, Brady comes home to find his mother passed out on the couch. He thinks that he will come home to find her dead one day and considers that he could speed her death by putting a pillow over her face. It would not be the first murder in his house. When he goes downstairs and sees he still does not have a message from Hodges he is angry.

Brady feels as if he is getting a migraine. Even though he wishes he could get a prescription medicine for these headaches, he is afraid of doctors. Even though Brady knows he is mentally ill, he does not want anyone else to know. He picks up Thing Two. Even though he has not used it since Olivia's Mercedes, he thinks it might be time to use it again.

In Section 18, Hodges has not written to the Mercedes Killer yet because he wants to make sure he sends just the right message, one that will wind Brady up.

In Section 19, Hodges wakes up a little after 2 a.m. and goes to his computer. He sends a message to the Mercedes Killer.

In Section 20, Brady thinks about how his little brother should have died when he choked on the apple slice. He also thinks about Hodges. When he goes downstairs to check his computer, he finally has a message from Hodges. The message accuses Brady of sending a false confession which infuriates Brady. He decides to hurt Hodges for his disbelief by poisoning Jerome's dog.

## Analysis

King develops Olivia's personality as a neurotic through Janey's description of her sister. She was a hypochondriac and got anxious about even nonthreatening situations. Janey remembers instances in her childhood where she did not get to participate in activities she wanted to or was even punished because she fell prey to one of Olivia's anxiety attacks. Janey finds it ironic that it was Olivia who wound up marrying a man





who became rich. The man was apparently good for Olivia because he got her to attend therapy and take medication, allowing her to have a mostly normal life. After her husband died, however, Olivia stopped taking her medicine, an omission that left her open to the Mercedes Killer's manipulation. Janey, like Hodges, finds it disquieting that the Mercedes Killer picked up on Olivia's character flaws and was able to use them against her so cleverly.

While the Brady may be good at manipulation, Hodges appears to have his own gift of being able to handle people when he angers Brady with the first message he sends on the website Under Debbie's Blue Umbrella. Hodges angers Brady to a fury when he suggests that he is not the killer. Hodges is playing on his belief that the killer is proud of what he has done and wants to brag. By accusing him of being a liar, Hodges hits the killer in the spot that hurts the most.

Additionally, Hodges compares the letter he received from the Mercedes Killer and the one that Olivia got from him to see if he can find any parallels useful in fleshing out his profile of the killer. One of the first things he notices about the letter Olivia received is that it is "in many ways a negative image of the one he received" (121). These differences in the styles of the two letters indicate that the killer knows enough about Olivia and Hodges that he knows how to approach them and be the most manipulative.

The reader continues to encounter phrases that indicate Brady's disgust with other people. He describes his own mind as being "a Mac loaded with gigs to the googolplex" (139), indicating he believes he has superior mental capacity. Instead of using his brilliance to do anything positive, however, Brady uses his intelligence to come up with ways he can hurt people. For instance, when he thinks of Hodges and Jerome he gets the desire to do something to hurt Jerome's dog. "Such thoughts are always flitting through Brady's mind; they are the bats in his belfry" (140). This phrase "bats in the belfry" is a play off of the idea that Brady is crazy because the phrase often refers to insanity.

The reader can tell how critical Brady is of other people because of the continued derogatory language he uses to describe them. He describes Hodges and Jerome as "the Odd Couple" (139), as if they were having a sexual relationship. Brady also characterizes people by the goals he believes they have for themselves. For instance, he refers to Hodges as "Kermit William 'I wish I was young' Hodges" (139), and Jerome as "Jerome 'I wish I was white' Robinson" (139).

King continues to explore the ways that technology, and particularly the internet, have changed life. Even though Jerome accuses Hodges of being old school because he is not very computer savvy, Hodges does not really take the accusation seriously until he notices how technologically advanced Janey, who is only 20 years younger than him, is. Based on this new information, Hodges considers that the Mercedes Killer might be older than he originally thought but then changes his mind. It is significant to note about cyberspace in this section how secure the website through which the Mercedes Killer has chosen to communicate with Hodges is. Jerome indicates that it is not possible even to print copies of discussions posted on the site and that the site's server is





located overseas with security nearly impossible to crack. Jerome explains the idea of internet security to Hodges through an analogy, comparing the Umbrella's servers to financial institutions. "They are to internet chat what Switzerland is to bank accounts" (144). Jerome has tested out the site by making friends with a girl named Bernice. Through this friendship, he makes another point about the people one meets through these sites: They have the ability to be anything they want to be. "She sounds cute as hell, and I won't say I'm not tempted, but she's probably a cross-dressing shoe salesman from Boston who lives with his mother. The internet, dude — it's a wonderbox" (143-144).

Jerome's alter ego, a gangster named Tyrone Feelgood Delight, makes his appearance in this section of the novel. "Sometimes dat boy jus' show up!" (133) Jerome tells Brady when Brady reminds his young friend he asked him to leave Tyrone at home. King includes Tyrone as comic relief, almost like the function served by the jester in Shakespeare plays.

## Discussion Question 1

When Brady decides to get revenge on Hodges why do you think he chooses Odell as the vehicle for this revenge?

## Discussion Question 2

Discuss Olivia's personality as described by her sister Janey. How was she easy prey for Brady?

## Discussion Question 3

What is the role of Tyrone, Jerome's alter ego? Why is he included in the novel?

## Vocabulary

gregarious, competent, contemplation, nostalgic, deductive, salient, solicited, vilification, simpering, unarticulated, harbinger, scenarios



# “Poison Bait” 1-13

## Summary

In Section 1, Brady uses his false identity as Ralph Jones to buy a pound of Gopher-Go that has strychnine as the main ingredient. Symptoms include muscle spasms and convulsions. He decides he will give the dog the poison in a ball of hamburger meat and that Hodges, whom Brady calls “the fat ex-cop” (156), will understand the dog’s death is his fault for tormenting Brady. As Brady thinks his plan through more fully, he considers that Hodges knowing he has poisoned the dog is not a good idea since he might involve the police. Brady’s head is hurting again so he lies down in his bedroom but knows the pain will not be relieved unless he goes to his mother. In her bed, the headache begins to ease almost immediately. She asks if he needs her to take care of him and apparently gives him either oral sex or manipulates him manually to the point of ejaculation. The text does not specify exactly what she does.

In the morning, Brady has made up his mind to go ahead with his plan to kill Odell and goad Hodges into killing himself. He also decides to come up with a crime that will help him go out with a blaze of glory and give credibility to his story.

In Section 2, even though Brady is not supposed to go to work at Discount Electronix until 10 a.m., his boss calls and begs him to do a service call. It is in Sugar Heights, the same place Olivia lived. Brady thinks about how he had even done service calls for Olivia twice while she was still alive after they had begun talking on the Blue Umbrella site. He had enjoyed seeing the progression of her downfall.

In Section 3, once he is in Paula Rollins house Brady immediately sees what is wrong with the computer. Mrs. Rollins wails that she did nothing to her computer but that it will not come on. He promises to try to fix her computer while she visits a neighbor across the street. Once she is gone, he plugs the computer back in. To waste time until she returns he checks his Blue Umbrella messages. He does not have anything from Hodges but decides to send him a message. In the message he calls Hodges stupid for not recognizing that Brady wrote about withheld evidence. He ends with a dare to Hodges to tell him what withheld evidence he’s talking about. When Mrs. Rollins returns Brady lies to her about what was wrong with her computer. As she thanks him, he imagines himself killing her with a butcher knife.

In Section 4, Hodges gets a message from the Mercedes Killer and is pleased with the content. He believes they have cemented their relationship, with Hodges being the fisherman while the killer is the fish. Through the killer’s comment that all the television Hodges watches has rotted his brain he learns that the killer does have some way he is spying on Hodges at his house. Hodges comes up with the perfect message to send to the Mercedes Killer but decides to give it some time before he sends it.



In Section 5, Hodges canvasses his neighborhood pretending to look for information about some recent burglaries. One neighbor, Mrs. Melbourne, suggests that Hodges check out the ice cream man in addition to other strange vehicles she has seen. Across the street, Hodges and another neighbor laugh about the idea that Mrs. Melbourne believes the ice cream man is a suspect.

In Section 6, Hodges has a message from Pete when he returns home asking Hodges to call him. He has the sudden thought that Pete has caught the Mercedes Killer and is filled with sudden anger. Pete does not answer his phone when Hodges returns his call. When the phone does ring it is Janey telling Hodges that her mother is having a good day. The next call he gets is Pete telling him they have nailed Donald Davis, a suspect in another of Hodges' open cases. In addition to the murder of his wife, Davis has admitted to being Turnpike Joe, a serial rapist. Hodges calls Janey back and agrees to meet her at the nursing home.

In Section 7, Edith Wharton recognizes Hodges as one of the cops who thought Olivia had left her keys in her car. Hodges admits to her they might have been wrong about their accusation. Mrs. Wharton tells Hodges it was Olivia's pen-pal Frankie that made her stop taking her pills. Janey recognizes that her mother is tired and suggests to Hodges that they go. Just before they leave the room, Mrs. Wharton tells Hodges that Olivia would not have killed herself if it had not been for the ghosts. She tells Hodges that Olivia would hear the baby that she believed she had caused to be killed crying in the night and the mother accusing her.

In Section 8, as Brady makes his rounds he notices that Hodges' drapes are pulled and his car is gone. He wonders what Hodges is doing.

In Section 9, in the car at Janey's building, Janey invites Hodges up. He says that they have a lot to talk about and surprises himself by kissing her. Afterward, Janey tells him she had wanted to do that all afternoon.

In Section 10, Hodges and Janey kiss again in the elevator and then hurry to a bedroom in the apartment where they have sex.

In Section 11, Brady begins a trip to relive the City Center Massacre, something he does when he needs to cheer himself up. He brakes suddenly when he sees Hodges' car parked outside the condo where Olivia's mother once lived. He is angry when he realizes that Hodges is searching for information and heads home frustrated and scared because he thinks things are getting out of his control.

In Section 12, Janey and Hodges discuss their attraction to one another.

In Section 13, when discussion between Hodges and Janey turns to the Mercedes Killer, she pours them glasses of wine. She tells him that he will be staying with her that night and asks him to give her a profile of the suspect. He thinks the guy is young and probably sexually confused. Hodges also believes when the killer is caught that people will be surprised because he was always so nice. Hodges also thinks that the suspect still lives at home with a single parent. He tells Janey it is good that the killer is fixated



on him because it will make him easier to catch and will keep him thinking small instead of coming up with another mass murder.

## Analysis

King builds on irony with Hodges being so close to the Mercedes Killer but never really suspecting him. This irony continues as repeated people comment to Hodges that the ice cream man is one of the people they see in the neighborhood regularly. "I'd check on that ice cream man, too. This spring it seems like he's always around. Do you suppose Loeb's Ice Cream checks out the people they hire to drive those little trucks? I hope so, because that one looks suspicious. He might be a peedaroast" (169). Not only is Mrs. Melbourne's reference to the Mercedes Killer as a "peedaroast" instead of a pedophile just amusing it is also intended to lower the woman's credibility. It seems ludicrous that the man who drives the ice cream truck would be a mass murderer. Even Brady is certain that his cover is flawless. "Everybody likes the ice cream man" (156). Note this is also incremental repetition, a use of repeated phrases like the ones that Hodges notes the killer uses in his letter. Brady has pointed out several times how much people like and trust the man who drives the ice cream truck.

Brady gives the reader another view of the way criminals can use the Internet to take advantage of people. In fact, Brady uses the computer to his advantage to help him commit crimes. He has set up an alias, complete with a credit card that he uses to make internet purchases. "Most people don't realize how easy it is to whomp up an internet-friendly false identity" (155) Brady says. Because he buys the Gopher-Go that he plans to use to kill Jerome's dog using this fake name, the purchase of the poison cannot be traced back to him.

Brady also reveals in this section that he used his computer knowledge to his advantage when tormenting Olivia. "All I had to do to give her the final push was add one little program to her Mac" (161) Brady says. He does not tell what program he put on Olivia's computer was or what it did. The reader also learns that Brady got to know Olivia through his job as a computer repairman with Discount Electronix. He had been to her house twice to work on her computer since he began talking with her through the Internet site Under Debbie's Blue Umbrella. Brady admits that he enjoyed watching Olivia's destruction.

Just as Hodges believes he could identify the Mercedes Killer if he could get a handwriting sample from the criminal, Brady believes he could fool Hodges if he were asked to provide a writing sample. Brady is intelligent enough that he has developed a writing profile that he believes Hodges has picked up on and has identified aspects of his writing as markers. Because he has intentionally doctored his writing style, Brady is just as sure that if he were asked for a writing sample that he could disguise himself so that Hodges would not recognize his writing. Brady compares his writing style to the mask he wore when he drove into the crowd at the City Center. "He wore a mask when he drove into the crowd, and he wears another when he writes as the Mercedes Killer" (165).



Characters begin pursuing sexual relations in this section of the novel. Janey and Hodges sleep together after they visit Janey's mother at the nursing home. The reader also learns for certain that Brady has a strange sexual relationship with his mother. In this section it is assumed that Brady's mother gives him oral sex in order to relieve his headache. By the time that Hodges gives Janey a profile of the killer the reader knows for sure that Brady is having a sexual relationship with his mother, just as Hodges suggests.

Because Hodges has antagonized the Mercedes Killer he knows that he, Jerome, and Janey need to be careful. He is right in this assessment because the killer has put together a plan to kill Jerome's dog. Although Hodges thinks that while the killer is concentrating on getting Hodges to kill himself he will not be thinking about committing any large crimes, he is incorrect. Hodges is wrong in this assumption about the killer because the message Hodges sent on the Blue Umbrella site has given the killer the feeling he needs to do something to prove his credibility. Regardless of his desire to strike out on new targets, Brady still believes the highlight of his career would be his act of getting Hodges to kill himself. "To get the chief investigator in the case to kill himself — what a triumph that would be!" (157).

When Hodges leaves his house to visit Janey's mother, it is mentioned that "He leaves his house with no premonition that he won't be back" (175). In this context, the reader may assume that something bad will happen to Hodges to keep him from going back home. In reality, Hodges does not go back home because he spends the night at Janey's condo. This is an example of a "red herring," or false clue used in mystery and thriller novels to throw the reader off-track.

There are a couple of important things to notice and remember from this section of the novel. The first is Brady's description of what happens to a person if they are poisoned with cyanide. The second is the mention of the ghosts that Olivia's mother says that Olivia heard and that prodded her into killing herself. Notice also that the name that Brady used when he talked to Olivia under the Umbrella was Frankie, the name of Brady's little brother that he has mentioned he and his mother killed.

## Discussion Question 1

How is it ironic that Hodges comes so close to the Mercedes Killer but never recognizes him?

## Discussion Question 2

Why is Brady so upset that Hodges is talking to Janey?



## Discussion Question 3

What does Hodges learn from Olivia's mother? How does he think this information is significant?

## Vocabulary

deducing, transitive, goad, credibility, repertoire, incantation, faux, bemused, eccentric, articulate, amiability, transcribing, nimbus, aliases, weal, solidarity, obligatory, cynical, debutante, enticing, celibate, hybrid, emphatically, impotent, surrogate, fixated, vicinity,



## “Poison Bait,” 14-30

### Summary

In Section 14, Hodges and Janey hear about Davis’s confession to the Turnpike Joe killings on the nightly news. Before they go to sleep, Hodges leaves the Mercedes Killer a message on the Blue Umbrella website.

In Section 15, Brady gets home to find a burning lasagna in the oven. His mother is asleep on the couch as he opens windows and sets up fans to clear the house of smoke. He walks downstairs and opens his Blue Umbrella account even though he is not sure he wants to read Hodges’ message with so many things already going wrong. He does read Hodges’ message and feels himself getting infuriated again as Hodges indicates that anyone could have guessed about the Clorox used to clean the clown mask and says that if Brady is the real killer he would have mentioned the valet key. Hodges additionally suggests Brady watch the news to see what a real confession looks like. Brady knows nothing about a valet key and is infuriated that Hodges uses a smiley-face in his message, a trademark that Brady considers to be his.

Brady checks a news site and sees that Davis has confessed to his wife’s murder as well as the Turnpike Joe rapes. Brady wonders if the man intends to also confess to the City Center killings. In his anger Brady sends back a message to Hodges that he does not proofread, saying that he used the key in Olivia’s glove box, not a valet key, and telling Hodges he should figure out how he unlocked the car. He admits there was no key in the car’s ignition but stresses that Davis was not responsible for the City Center murders.

In Section 16, when Hodges and Janey read the message the Mercedes Killer has sent, Hodges realizes how much he has stirred Brady up. Janey suggests he should send another message to get him stirred up even more.

In Section 17, when Hodges returns to his car and checks his cell phone he discovers he has three messages from Jerome. One message indicates Jerome thinks he knows how the Mercedes Killer stole the car.

In Section 18, Hodges’ return message angers Brady because Hodges continues to insist the car was unlocked using the valet key and that Davis did plan to admit he was the one responsible for the City Center Massacre. Hodges ends his message by telling Brady to “Go away” (204). Brady reads the message at work and is glad when his boss gives him the opportunity to go out on a call. Brady plans to run an errand while he is out.

In Section 19, Hodges visits Jerome at his house to ask what the boy found out about Olivia’s car. Jerome tells him that some boys who go to his school know how to build gadgets using television remotes to capture codes sent by passive entry keys so they





can unlock a car without having the key. When Jerome asks if Hodges did not check with car theft investigators, Hodges feels incompetent. They had been so sure in their assumption that Olivia had left her key in the ignition. Hodges decides the time has come to tell Jerome everything about the case.

In Section 20, Brady fixes the computer on his call quickly so he can get on with his errand.

In Section 21, even though he is expecting to get his Gopher-Go in the mail, Brady goes to a store and buys more along with other gardening supplies. He worries that he will catch the attention of the salesclerk who rings up his purchase and is relieved when he gets out of the store with the poison without being noticed. He thinks to himself after he kills Odell he will kill Hodges himself if he has not already committed suicide. He thinks he should do something big as a follow-up and realizes what he should do when he hears on the radio that the boy band 'Round Here will be playing at the MAC. Brady thinks it would be an awesome place to make something happen. He estimates the seating capacity is probably near 3,000.

In Section 22, Hodges goes home for a nap and has slept nearly three hours before the ringing phone wakes him. It is Janey. She is crying and says that her mother had a stroke. Her aunt and uncle are coming even though they did not come for Olivia's funeral. They will also bring her cousin Holly whom Janey says is weird. When he arrives at the hospital, Hodges knows that Janey's mother has died.

In Section 23, after his ice cream truck shift on Saturday, Brady arranges for two afternoons in a row off. He plans to use that time to kill Odell. At home, Brady eats the dinner his mother has fixed and then mixes the Gopher-Go in hamburger meat and stows it in his private refrigerator.

In Section 24, Janey and Hodges split up the duty of alerting people about Mrs. Wharton's death. When Aunt Charlotte arrives she demands to see Mrs. Wharton. Janey explains that the body has already been taken to the funeral home.

In Section 25, Janey tells Aunt Charlotte and Uncle Henry they can stay in Olivia's old house while they are in town. Hodges asks if she can keep them away from the computer in Olivia's office by locking that room. He wants Jerome to look at the computer but wants to wait until after the company is gone. Even though Janey suggests the Blue Umbrella stuff will be gone, Hodges says it is the ghosts in which he is interested.

Section 26 begins in the elevator, as Hodges asks Janey if she thinks their questions about Olivia's death might have brought on her mother's stroke. Janey suspects it might have but tells Hodges she would not have done anything differently.

In Section 27, Brady is surprised when he arrives at home and sees that his mother has cooked hamburgers for lunch. A strange gurgling cry is coming from the living room. He looks in the kitchen refrigerator and sees the baggie of poisoned meat is only half full. He runs to the living room where his mother is vomiting blood and her stomach is





protruding. She asks him to call 911 but he knows he cannot do that. Brady decides to go downstairs to see if he can find a way to save his mother on the internet.

In Section 28, downstairs where Brady can no longer hear his mother dying, he realizes there is no way he can save her. When he hears a thump upstairs he turns on some music on his iPod. He also checks the Blue Umbrella website.

In Section 29, Brady's mother is dead when he finally goes back upstairs at twilight. He blames Hodges for her death. He knows no one will miss his mother because she did not have any friends. He drags his mother up the stairs to her room and lays her out on the bed. After he covers her up with the comforter he knows there is something he needs to do before he cleans up the mess in the living room.

In Section 30, Brady sends a message to Hodges indicating he is going to kill him.

## Analysis

A shift in intensity occurs in this section of the novel. Up until this point Brady wanted to taunt Hodges into killing himself as part of his game. Not only has Hodges frustrated Brady by taunting him in return by telling him he does not know what he is talking about and that he is not the Mercedes Killer, Brady also believes that Hodges is responsible for the death of his mother. In Brady's mind, he reasons that had Hodges not upset him and made him want to get revenge by killing Odell that his mother would still be alive. Brady's desire to kill Hodges steps up from just a game he wants to play with the cop to a desire for revenge.

King continues to build suspense by withholding information from the reader. For instance, when Hodges sends Brady a reply message to Brady's disjointed message, the reader is only told that Hodges has sent a message. The reader is given no idea what the content of the message is, only that Hodges sleeps well after he sends it. The reader can assume the good sleep could come from relief that he finally had a message for the killer off his mind, or that he was just relaxed and worn out from the sex. The reader does not learn what Hodges had to say to Brady until Brady opens the message and reacts to it. When Janey and Hodges read this message and Janey sees how wound up the killer gets from Hodges' first message she encourages him to send another. Again, King writes that Hodges sends a message but does not reveal the content of that message to the reader either.

Hodges uses police intuition to get Brady riled up. Because Brady has sent him a message he assumes that Brady wants kudos and attention for what he has done. From his long experience with criminals Hodges knows that the best way to frustrate Brady's intentions is to refuse to acknowledge Brady was in any way responsible for the crime he says he has committed. He frustrates Brady further by suggesting that another person may be about to take credit for the City Center Massacre, which is an outright lie but one intended to anger Brady and make him feel threatened that someone else will take glory for the crime he committed.



Brady verifies Olivia's story when he tells Hodges that the key to the ignition was not in her car when he stole it. Hodges had suspected that perhaps Olivia was telling the truth about not having left her key in the ignition or having left her car unlocked. Hodges now has confirmation from the Mercedes Killer that Olivia was telling the truth.

As Brady gets more frustrated by the messages Hodges is sending him he begins to make mistakes. First, he accidentally hurts one of the boys who tries to play a joke on him while he is driving his ice cream truck. Brady thumps one of the boys under the chin hard enough to bring tears to the boy's eye. Brady worries about that mistake because he knows the boys will remember him. Brady strives to keep a low profile and not do anything that will draw unnecessary attention to him. Brady also believes his mother's death was a mistake that Hodges caused him to make. In reality it was a case of his mother eating food out of the wrong refrigerator at the wrong time. Remember the symptoms of strychnine poisoning that Brady included in an earlier section of the novel. He sees his mother suffering these symptoms and knows there is nothing he can do to help her even though she begs him to call 911.

Notice King's use of hyperbole, or exaggeration, when Brady comes home to find a lasagna burnt in the oven. The mess is described as a "nuclear meltdown" (197) and Brady thinks it will be best to throw the pan out because: "Washing will not clean that pan; an hour of scouring and a whole box of Brillo pads will not clean that pan; an industrial laser probably wouldn't clean that pan. That pan is a gone goose" (197). King's description of the convulsions that Brady's mother suffers as she dies are described so that they are humorous in a grotesque sort of way. Brady says of his mother's actions that she is "simultaneously marching and signaling that the field goal is good" (226).

King continues to share with his reader information that can keep them safe on the internet. For instance, when Hodges learns that the password to Janey's computer is her first name he advises her to change it. King also includes a description of how a car thief can use a homemade device to pick up the code to unlock a car with keyless entry and use that code to unlock the car and steal things.

The reader is already learning not to judge people too quickly, but in this section both Janey and Hodges prejudge Holly Gibney. Janey describes her cousin as being "just weird" (214) while Hodges notices right away that Holly seems to have trouble making eye contact and doesn't speak above a mutter.

## Discussion Question 1

If you were Hodges how would you feel learning for certain from the man who stole Olivia's car that it was not because her keys were in the ignition?



## Discussion Question 2

Why does Brady leave his mother alone while she is dying? Would you have tried to do something to ease her suffering? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 3

Do you think Hodges' questioning of Mrs. Wharton brought on her death? Why or why not?

## Vocabulary

averts, anal, assiduously, hectoring, exuberant, banish, consensus, spinster, rancorous, gluttony, minatory, vehemence, protrudes, recommences



# “Call for the Dead,” 1-13

## Summary

In Section 1, Hodges, Janey, and Jerome have dinner together at DeMasio's. Janey has bought Hodges a brown fedora because she says every private investigator needs one. Hodges is pleased because Jerome and Janey take to each other quickly. Janey lets off steam by telling them how many times Aunt Charlotte has called her and the things she's complained about. On the lighter side, Holly has taken to Hodges.

Hodges gives both Janey and Jerome copies of all of his notes but lies when Janey asks what the Mercedes Killer has said to him on the website. He mentions that he sees a “path of investigation” (237) that might take him to the killer and Janey asks for more information. He suggests that perhaps Olivia really was hearing ghosts.

In Section 2, as they say their goodbyes after dinner Jerome tells Hodges he has been avoiding his mother because she is grouchy because his sister and her friends want to go to the 'Round Here concert Thursday at the MAC. The mothers drew straws to see who would chaperone the concert and Jerome's mother lost. After Jerome has left, Janey suggests they go to his house where they have sex.

In Section 3, after they are finished and Janey has explored Hodges' house she asks him if he will attend her mother's memorial service. He agrees to do so and says he will be at visitation on Tuesday as well. There will also be a lunch after the memorial service that Hodges agrees to attend as well. Janey admits she is afraid that if her Aunt Charlotte gets upset that Holly will have a meltdown.

In Section 4, Brady sits at his worktable and fights the “snapshots from hell” (243) that keep coming to his mind. He thinks perhaps he should just kill himself and make them stop once and for all. He cannot bring himself to sleep in his room so he's been sleeping in the basement even though it has its own bad memories because that was where Frankie died. He had used his brother's name when he talked to Olivia under the Umbrella and it seemed like he was alive again for a while.

In Section 5, Brady thinks about the money his mother had inherited when his father was killed on his job as a lineman for the electrical company. After his death Brady's little brother, who was already mentally slow, choked on a piece of apple. Neither Brady nor his mother could get the apple out. Frankie stopped breathing when the ambulance people got there. Brady stayed home with the sitter while his mother went to the hospital. After the babysitter left, Deborah began crying and told Brady that Frankie was in a coma and might have brain damage if he woke up. Sure enough when Frankie woke up he was brain damaged and Deborah's savings began to shrink as she tried to take care of him. For the next year, Brady and his mother lived with the stress of trying to take care of Frankie.



Frankie died one night when Brady left the basement door open because he was stocking the bathrooms with toilet paper. He and his mother left the door open even though Frankie was playing close to it with his toy fire truck. Deborah surprised Brady by kicking Frankie's truck to the bottom of the stairs. When he saw his mother nod at him Brady kicked his brother down the stairs. Brady could tell that Frankie's neck was broken but he was still breathing. His mother asked for a pillow off the couch which she used to smother the boy. They planned their story before they called 911. After Frankie's funeral Brady had his first bad headache.

In Section 6, when Brady comes out of his daze and looks at the paper he notices the article stating that Mrs. Wharton has died. He suspects that Hodges will attend the funeral, visitation, and luncheon. Even though he knows his mother is not there, he can see her and hear her telling him to make sure Hodges does not hear him coming when he attempts to kill him.

In Section 7, before the viewing, Hodges calls his friend Marlo to check on car thefts in Olivia's neighborhood. He and Janey hurry to her condo so she can change clothes and put on makeup.

In Section 8, Janey and Hodges are too happy and distracted to see Brady's car parked at the strip mall where he can see when Hodges leaves his house to go to the viewing. Brady is shocked when he sees that Janey is with Hodges. He has a feeling they are headed to Janey's condo. He pulls out Thing Two, although he doesn't plan to use it at the funeral. Brady calls the Electronix store and tells them he won't be in to work today and probably not all week.

In Section 9, Marlo calls Hodges back and tells him about a string of car burglaries downtown. After Hodges gets off the phone he tells Janey he believes the burglaries are connected to the Mercedes Killer. At Janey's apartment, he uses his key fob to lock his car before following Janey inside.

In Section 10, Brady finds a parking spot on the third level of the parking garage across the street from Janey's building. He waits there with Thing Two and researches the MAC while he waits. He learns the auditorium can seat 4,500 people. The concert is sold out. He waits until Hodges and Janey leave the building again and catches the signal from Hodges' car on Thing Two. As he thinks about the other cars he had broken into over the years, he remembers finding Olivia's spare key in the glove compartment with her owner's manual. With his plan in mind for Hodges and what he plans to do at the MAC, Brady begins to whistle.

In Section 11, Hodges feels out of place at the visitation so he goes outside where he finds Holly. Holly talks to Hodges, making him promise not to tell her mother that she has been smoking again. She also tells him that her mother does not like Janey. When he asks why she has not gone inside, Holly says she will not go inside because she is afraid seeing a dead person will give her nightmares. Hodges puts his arm around her to comfort her and promises that the coffin will be closed the following day. He even manages to get Holly to take her medicine for her depression.



In Section 12, Brady pays a visit to the MAC. He is approached by a guard who tells him he is not even allowed to be near the auditorium for security reasons. Instead he goes to the lobby to check out security there. He notes there are no metal detectors yet. If he wears his suicide vest and does not have a teenage girl with him he realizes he will be quickly singled out by security. He buys some 'Round Here souvenirs from the gift shop and notices part of the corridor to the auditorium is sectioned off with velvet ropes.

In Section 13, back at Janey's apartment after the memorial service, Janey tells Hodges she plans to split her part of the money she inherited from Olivia with her relatives. She believes it will be amusing to see how they split it amongst themselves. Before he leaves, Janey gives Hodges the code to the gates and the burglar alarm at Olivia's house. She wants him and Jerome to start working on the computer while she is taking her relatives to the airport. Janey also shares with Hodges that Holly thinks he is wonderful. Holly reminds Hodges of Olivia and believes she gives him a second chance to do the right thing.

## Analysis

An important symbol is introduced in this section when Janey gives Hodges the gift of a brown fedora. The hat is similar to those worn by private detectives in old movies and Janey tells Hodges he has earned it since he is now working for her as a private investigator. This hat is a symbol of Hodges and will play an important role later on.

Foreshadowing, as well as important information about relationships between characters is included in this section of the novel. First, Hodges gives both Jerome and Janey copies of his notes. Even though he has not told them about the Mercedes Killer's threat on his life, this act makes the reader believe that Brady thinks the killer has it in him to make good on his threat. Notice also that when Jerome offers Janey sympathy for her sister's death he mentions how close he is to his own sister. "If I lost mine, I'd be the saddest guy on earth. Barb's a pain, but I love her to death" (236). This attachment between Jerome and his sister will be important later in the novel, especially since Barb and her mother are planning to attend the concert which Brady is hoping to blow up with a bomb. Notice also that Holly has taken a liking to Hodges. This, too, will play an important role later on.

Hodges tells Janey and Jerome that he has found a path of investigation to follow, an important step in leading them to the Mercedes Killer. This path is connected to the ghosts that Mrs. Wharton said her daughter was hearing before she killed herself. Again, King stops with Hodges' suggestion that Olivia was hearing ghosts and picks up the narration again after the conversation is complete and Hodges is reminding Jerome to check some things out on his computer in preparation for checking Olivia's.

This section gives the reader a closer look at the snapshots in his head that Brady is so haunted by. One of these, the most recent, is the one of this mother as she is dying. Another is the way that he and his mother killed his little brother, Frankie, after Frankie suffered brain damage from choking on an apple. Brady explains that he used his little



brother's name when he contacted Olivia on the Umbrella website because it seemed to him that while he used Frankie's name his brother was alive again for a short while.

Brady also has several characteristics of a psychopath. He is a charmer with a quick wit and thinks he is smarter than other people. For instance, Brady does not show any remorse about not having gone to college. He thinks of these people, "College was for people who didn't know they were smart" (255). On the other hand, Brady has no doubt about his level of intelligence. Brady also shows evidence of having skewed emotions when he lies to his employer at the ice cream shop and tells her he got the flu from his mother. When he tells his boss that "I had to put her to bed," (264) Brady is hit by the irony of his statement and almost starts to laugh while talking to his boss.

Not only does Brady sometimes not feel the proper emotion to go along with the situation he is facing, he also accuses others of feeling inappropriate as well. For instance, when Brady's mother comes home to tell him that Frankie is in a coma and that he might be brain damaged, Brady believes the babysitter shows fake concern. "The reason Brady knew it was fake was because he wasn't concerned, so why would the fat babysitter care?" (247) he thinks to himself. In this quote he is mirroring his own emotions onto the babysitter. He does not care if his little brother is hurt, so why should she?

When Stephen King is writing, very few characters die a peaceful death. Norm Hartsfield, Brady's father, is killed in an accident when repairing an electrical line. His last minutes are described: "twenty thousand volts of coal-fired CSP electricity pouring into Norm Hartsfield's body. The partner looked up just in time to see Norm tumble out of the cherry-picker basket and plunge forty feet to the ground with his left hand melted and the sleeve of his uniform shirt on fire" (245). Frankie's death was also tragic, and premeditated. Brady's mother pushed the boy's fire truck down the stairs so that Frankie would go after it. She probably hoped he would fall. When he did not move to go down the stairs she gave Brady a nod that indicated she wanted Brady to push the child. Frankie's mother finished him off with a pillow over his face.

Even Brady's story about his little brother's death is filled with references to Oedipal feelings that Brady holds for his mother. First, he was angry when his mother began dating. He, as have other little boys whose fathers have died, believes that he is rightfully in charge of the family and resents any other man who tries to take over his spot. When his mother tells Brady that it might be better if Frankie did die, Brady seems to focus more on the fact that her blouse shows the tops of her breasts. He notes that he gets an erection when she hugs him and he can feel her breasts against his chest. Again, Brady thinks of his mother when he sees Janey and Hodges together. "Then he thinks of how his mother relieved his worst headaches, and realizes — reluctantly — that when it comes to sex, no pairing is beyond belief" (260).

To Hodges, his opportunity to meet Holly is to him a chance to try to redo the relationship he had with Olivia and come out better. Holly reminds Hodges of Olivia because of her emotional problems and her unwillingness to take her medicine. Since he has learned from the Mercedes Killer that Olivia did not leave her keys in the ignition,





he is feeling guilty that he made such a rash decision about Olivia. He is hoping not to do the same with Holly.

## Discussion Question 1

Discuss the way Frankie's brain damage and murder by he and his mother must have affected Brady. Do you think Brady was prone to violence before this time or do you think his successful role in helping to kill his brother tipped the scales?

## Discussion Question 2

How did Hodges' and Pete's rash judgement of Olivia lead to her suicide? How did it make her easy prey for Brady? If the police had not assumed she was lying about leaving her key in the car, might the investigation have turned out differently?

## Discussion Question 3

Discuss the ghosts that Mrs. Wharton says her daughter was hearing. Do you think these ghosts really existed? Why or why not?

## Vocabulary

virtuous, affluent, provocative, peripherally, euphemism, doted, nocturnal, surcharge, pagan, intercept, formidable, feral, sequestered, shamus, paltry, conquest





# “Call for the Dead,” 14-31

## Summary

In Section 14, Brady makes some purchases. The reader is told only that one of the items is almost too large to fit in his mother's hatchback. At home in his control room, he fixes up a box of explosives with a cell phone as a detonator. He plans to put it in Hodges' car while it is parked at the funeral home the following morning.

In Section 15, as Hodges is mapping out the locations where the car thefts happened, Brady is putting his blocks of explosives into a seat cushion and a urine bag. Meanwhile, Jerome is listening to audio clips on the internet and finds one titled “crying baby.” His sister Barbara is modeling for her mother the outfit she plans to wear to the concert. Holly is wishing she did not have to go to the memorial service and feeling relief that Hodges will be there. As Janey prepares for the memorial service, she thinks how she has already fallen in love with Hodges.

In Section 16, the funeral is uneventful. Hodges does not even notice Brady's car.

In Section 17, as Brady walks past the funeral home with the bomb and Thing Two, his heart is hammering but he hears his mother tell him, “No risk, no reward, honeyboy” (281). He is able to put the bomb in Hodges' car without any problems.

In Section 18, Hodges catches Holly when she faints at the end of Mrs. Wharton's memorial service. Aunt Charlotte criticizes Holly and accuses her of seeking attention. As they are leaving the chapel, Holly runs to Hodges and Janey begging Hodges to let her ride with them. Charlotte begins crying because Holly does not know Hodges. Janey diffuses the situation by offering to drive Hodges' car and letting Hodges ride with Holly. Janey flirtatiously takes Hodges' hat before she gets into his car.

In Section 19, Brady watches as the mourners leave the funeral home. Since the sun is shining on the cars as they pull out of the drive, Brady does not get a good look at Hodges' car. He sees only one figure, wearing a fedora, and assumes Janey is riding with her family. As Brady pushes send on his phone he reminds Hodges that he had told him he would not see him coming.

In Section 20, when Janey hears the cell phone ring she thinks Hodges has left his phone in the glove box again.

In Section 21, as Hodges runs after Holly to the car, he remembers Brady's threats. He almost runs into Holly, who has stopped when she saw Hodges' car blown off its axles. If he had used the gun on himself two weeks ago, Hodges thinks, she might still be alive. His mind clears and he knows it is not his fault. He knows the same man who committed the City Center Massacre killed Janey.



Hodges turns Holly around. She is looking through him and he slaps at her cheeks to get her attention. Once he thinks she is more focused he tells her that he loved Janey but that she is not to tell anyone yet. He tells her that when her aunt and uncle go to the police station that afternoon, she is to tell them that she can stay by herself. While she is at the house he or a boy named Jerome will call her. Trying to make her understand what he is trying to communicate to her, Hodges tells Holly that he wants to catch the man who killed Janey and make him pay but he needs her help and her phone number. He watches as she takes her glasses out of her purse and puts them on. When Aunt Charlotte runs up, she pushes Holly's head into her breast and tells her not to look. Hodges notices that one of Holly's hands is behind her, holding something out. Hodges takes it. It is her glasses case with her cell phone number written on it.

In Section 22, Jerome tells Hodges he thinks they heard an explosion when Brady first called him on his cell phone. Hodges orders Jerome to listen. He tells him that Janey was killed when his car exploded. Jerome wants Hodges to go to the police but Hodges refuses to give up yet. After verifying that Jerome is willing to help, Hodges asks him to send the killer a message on the Blue Umbrella. The reader does not learn what message Hodges sends the killer. After he finishes talking to Jerome, Hodges takes his coat and covers Janey's arm in the gutter. When the two young cops arrive he shows them his identification and asks them to call Pete.

In Section 23, when Brady arrives home he goes to his mother's room and tells her that he killed Hodges. When he turns on the news he hopes at least one station will be broadcasting from the scene but none are. To soothe himself, Brady goes downstairs and begins filling zippered plastic bags with the ball bearings that were once in his suicide vest. The sound of a steamboat whistle alerts him he has a message on the Blue Umbrella site. The message is from Hodges saying that he is not dead but that he has decided not to catch Brady and turn him in to the police. He is going to kill Brady himself. Brady decides his house is no longer safe, and that Hodges knows too much about him. Upstairs in his mother's room, he finds her razor and begins working.

In Section 24, Hodges is being interrogated by Pete and Izzy about his car being blown up. When Pete asks if Hodges thinks the crime had anything to do with the Mercedes Killer, Hodges lies and says he doubts it was. Izzy questions how he knew Janey at all and specifically if he was investigating the City Center Massacre by himself. He explains by saying that he wanted to see if they had really given Olivia a fair shake when they interviewed her because of her personality. He also shares with them the information he and Jerome found about using a remote to catch the signal to open another person's car except he does not mention Jerome's involvement.

Hodges tells how he had met Janey and how she had let him talk to her mother. After her mother had a stroke and then died, Janey had not known anyone in town so Hodges had helped her out. Pete asks if Hodges is holding anything back. Izzy says she thinks he is and asks Hodges if he was sleeping with Janey. Hodges is shocked she gets so close to the truth. He tells them he wants to go home. Pete allows him to leave after asking twice more if he is holding anything back.



In Section 25, Hodges stops and talks to Uncle Henry and Aunt Charlotte, who are sitting in the hallway of the police department. Aunt Charlotte says she worries that Holly believes she is responsible for what happened to Janey. She asks Hodges to talk to her. When Hodges finally gets away from the aunt and uncle he finally cries. Aunt Charlotte shows no sympathy for Janey and Hodges believes she is worried only about the money that Janey inherited.

In Section 26, Jerome calls Holly. He tells her he will be coming to her house to help Hodges. When she ascertains that he is no danger to her, Holly asks Jerome to tell Hodges that she is sad about Janey's death too, and that she is taking her medicine.

In Section 27, Brady checks into a hotel with a single change of clothes and his suitcase packed with his explosives and bags of ball bearings. He also brings in the large item, mentioned before, and leans it against the wall. When he lays down on the bed his shaved head against the pillow feels strange.

In Section 28, when Jerome finally gets in the house Holly collapses in a chair when the burglar alarm is deactivated. She tells Jerome this day has been the worst day of her life. She admits she is relieved only because no one can blame Janey's death on her. After Holly comments innocently that Jerome is black and then tells him to "put it there" (305) as an invitation to shake her hand Jerome decides that he likes her.

In Section 29, while Jerome is looking for audio files on Olivia's computer he is surprised when Holly moves close and gives him options to try. She helps him find a sound file "spooks" neither of them had ever seen on a Mac computer before. When Jerome plays the sound they hear a baby crying and then the sound of a woman crying: "Why did you let him murder my baby?" (307). The shrieking scares both Jerome and Holly. Holly searches and discovers the sound byte was installed in July. When Jerome asks why the computer stopped playing the byte after Olivia was dead, Holly finds a slave program that could be used to control the computer from another location. They realize the program had to have been installed by her IT guy. They try to find something with the contact information of the IT person on it but are unable to locate anything.

In Section 30, when Jerome calls Hodges to tell him what he found on Olivia's computer. Hodges has an idea and asks if there is an address book on Olivia's computer. They are not able to find one. When Holly asks Hodges if he thinks the man with whom they are dealing is a master criminal, Hodges responds that he thinks the man is just crazy.

In Section 31, Hodges tries to not think about anything, hoping it will allow a good idea to find its way into his brain. He tries to figure out what happened to the business card of Olivia's IT man. As he thinks, he remembers the neighbor who told him: "She thinks they walk among us" (312) about another neighbor. That night he cries himself to sleep when he thinks about Janey.

When he wakes up early Thursday morning, Hodges has a breakthrough. He realizes that Olivia would not have had a card for her IT guy if he worked for a company. If this



were the case, he would have driven a company car. He continues to wonder how much more explosives Brady might have.

## Analysis

Once Brady decides to commit his second mass murder at the MAC, he has a drastic change in thinking as he becomes more focused and calm. He realizes he is no longer safe in his home because Hodges might track him to his house. Brady also changes his appearance by shaving his head. Once he is settled in at the hotel, Brady moves his car to the parking lot at the airport to keep Hodges from identifying his car and finding him that way.

King continues to build suspense by allowing his readers to know that Brady bought some large object in connection with his plan to set a bomb at the upcoming 'Round Here concert, but he does not tell the reader what that object is. In several places the narration mentions this large object in indication that it is essential to Brady's plan, but the reader is given no hints as to what the object is. This large object is mentioned in Section 14 when Brady purchases it and again when Brady goes to stay in a hotel room in Section 27.

Meanwhile, the reader sees a different side of Holly after the death of her cousin. Before her cousin's death, Holly allowed her mother to escort her around as if she were an object instead of a person. "To Hodges, Auntie C looks like a matron escorting a prisoner — probably a drug addict — into county lockup," (280). After Mrs. Wharton's funeral is over, Holly faints from the stress. This is no surprise since even Hodges knew how distressed Holly was prior to the funeral. Instead of trying to console her daughter, Aunt Charlotte scolds her for showing out and looking for attention.

After Janey's death, Holly changes her mindset and decides to help Hodges even though she is still afraid of getting in trouble with her mother. The first sign that Holly is willing to help Hodges is her act of slipping her glasses case to him. This is significant because the case has her phone number written inside it. Her act of giving it to him in a way that her mother does not see what she is doing demonstrates her knowledge that she does not need to involve her mother.

Even though it appears that Holly's demeanor toward them is changing, Hodges and Jerome still have their doubts. Hodges wonders if the phone number inside the glasses case that Holly gave him is her cell number so he will actually be able to get in touch with her. When Jerome contacts Holly and then goes to Olivia's house to investigate her computer, he worries that Holly will freak out on him and get him into trouble. When he first drives up to the house he sees that "Holly is at the front door, peering at him through one of the side windows like a prisoner in a high-security visitation area" (304). Again Holly is described as being a prisoner, just as she was at the funeral.

Once Jerome gets to know Holly, he likes her. Not only does he realize that she has a sense of humor under her protective armor of neurosis, but she is also very intelligent.



In fact, she is better at getting information out of Olivia's computer than Jerome is. "Jerome is good with computers, but Holly plays the keyboard like a Steinway" (308). This simile compares Holly's computer ability to the talent it takes to play a musical instrument—in this case not just any musical instrument, but a Steinway, one of the most expensive brands of pianos.

Hodges is given a fresh and even more motivating reason to catch Brady when Janey is killed. "Hodges sees a single black high-heeled shoe lying in a pool of blood, he sees a severed arm in a smoldering sleeve lying in the gutter like someone's cast-off garbage, and his mind clicks into gear" (287). The car bomb was meant for Hodges and Hodges knows right away who set it. He wants Brady for himself badly enough that when he is interviewed by his old partner about the bomb he not only withholds evidence, he lies. He tells Pete and Izzy that he and Janey were just friends, and that they had begun talking because Hodges was worried he had somehow initiated Olivia's suicide. When Izzy, Pete's partner, asks Hodges if he and Janey were sleeping together, Hodges uses his characteristic of being overweight as a reason that Janey would not sleep with him.

The reader gets more educated in this section on the ways a criminal can use a person's computer to terrorize them. Jerome and Holly discover that while Olivia's IT person was working on her computer, he had downloaded a file on it that played the sounds of the crying baby and shrieking mother that Olivia was hearing. He had covered his tracks by also putting a program on the computer that allowed him to access it from another computer. In this way he was able to remotely turn off the sound loop after Olivia died.

## Discussion Question 1

Why would it be significant to the car bomb investigation if Hodges and Janey were having a sexual relationship?

## Discussion Question 2

Discuss the idea that Brady thinks his mother assisted him in successfully killing Hodges (before he realizes it was not Hodges in the car). What does this mean? Why does Brady tell his mother he is sorry she is dead?

## Discussion Question 3

Discuss Brady's reaction when he discovers Hodges was not killed in the car bomb. Was it the reaction you might expect from a "normal" person? Why or why not?



## Vocabulary

plastique, coif, bodacious, vaguely, stipulate, jocose, jovial, insouciant, psychotropic, collegial, deference, appropriating, destabilize, dour, brandishes, notorious, query, fetish, affect, crux, elude



# “Kisses on the Midway,” 1-21

## Summary

In Section 1, Hodges decides on Thursday morning that if he cannot catch the Mercedes Killer that day he will turn the investigation over to Pete and Izzy. He gets a call from Pete. Pete tells him that Aunt Charlotte also believed that Hodges and Janey were a couple. Hodges stresses again that he and Janey were not a couple and does not give in even when Pete tries to wait him out. Pete wants to interview him again and warns Hodges he may have to arrest him.

Jerome calls and offers Hodges his services as a chauffeur. Hodges accepts and tells Jerome to brush up on his skills pretending to be a paralegal. After talking to Jerome, Hodges returns a call to Aunt Charlotte and tries to give her advice on how to best deal with Janey's remains. He is offended by her lack of feeling for Janey. When Aunt Charlotte asks if Janey left a will, Hodges hangs up on her.

In Section 2, as Brady showers he thinks that surely he will not be held responsible for the things he did in his life, the things he believes other people forced him to do.

In Section 3, Brady makes some purchases and then leaves his car in long term parking at the airport. He is worried that if Hodges learns his name he will be able to track him by finding his car.

In Section 4, Jerome is surprised that Hodges is carrying his gun when Jerome arrives at Hodges' house. Hodges tells Jerome about his plan to turn the case over to the police if he has not cracked it by the end of the day. He has Jerome pretend to be a paralegal calling on behalf of the lawyer who is in charge of Olivia's estate. Jerome is to find out the name of the man who worked as Olivia's IT person. As they settle in to wait for a return phone call, Hodges' mind returns to the comment his neighbor made about Mrs. Melbourne that she thought "they walk among us" (327). He cannot understand why that phrase bothers him so badly.

When Peeples returns Jerome's call, Jerome learns that it was a person from the Cyber Patrol who worked on Olivia's computer. Jerome and Hodges check the internet and find pictures of the three people who work as techs with Cyber Patrol. Before they leave to investigate further, Hodges gets an old ID badge out of his safe that is not marked "retired," even though he knows using it is a felony.

In Section 5, Brady uses the wheelchair he bought to make a rolling bomb. Beside his bed at the hotel is a framed picture of Frankie holding his fire truck.

In Section 6, Holly is sitting on the curb at Discount Electronix when Jerome and Hodges arrive. She tells them she thought they would figure it out but if not she was going to call them by 11:30 a.m. Holly tells them she found emails in Olivia's junk folder from Discount Electronix. Even though the IT guy had emptied her regular emails, he





had forgotten that one. Hodges goes into the store alone. He hopes the murderer will give himself away by being shocked when he walks into the store.

In Section 7, after Hodges goes into the store, Jerome asks Holly how she got to Discount Electronix. She points into the parking lot where a grey Mercedes is parked. Jerome stares at it. Meanwhile Holly talks about wanting ice cream. The words make Jerome realize why the faces of one of the Cyber Patrol men looked so familiar. Holly notices Jerome's distress and begs to know what is wrong.

In Section 8, neither of the two Cyber Patrol workers on duty have any guilty or surprised reaction when they see Hodges. Freddi Linklatter tells Hodges that Brady is out sick. She gives him Brady's home address.

In Section 9, as soon as Hodges is outside the store Jerome tells him his realization that the ice cream man is Brady Hartsfield. That is how he has been spying on Hodges. Hodges thinks about Mrs. Melbourne's warning about the ice cream man and wonders if he had taken her more seriously if Janey would still be alive. Hodges looks into the parking lot and sees the Mercedes. Jerome tells him Holly drove it there. Hodges suggests they drive the car to Brady's house in hopes he will recognize it.

In Section 10, Officers Lavery and Rosario ride together on their beat through Lowtown. They see a man coming out of a store, known to be a pawnshop, with a flower box. As the man searches for his keys, the box tilts and what Lavery recognizes as an RPG launcher begins to slide out. Lavery and Rosario pull their guns and run to the man but are ordered by an officer who identifies himself as ATF to put down their guns. Suddenly an army of ATF agents are storming the pawnshop.

In Section 11, about the time the ATF begins to inventory the weapons stored in the fake pawn shop, Hodges, Holly, and Jerome arrive at Brady's house. A neighbor tells them Brady is not at home and that he has not seen Mrs. Hartsfield in a while. Hodges instructs Holly and Jerome to stay in the car.

In Section 12, no one answers when Hodges knocks on the front door. Around back he uses his father's lock picking kit to pick the lock on the back door.

In Section 13, Hodges notices the smell of decay right away and follows the odor upstairs where he finds Deborah Hartsfield's body. He suspects she died of alcohol poisoning. He explores the rest of the house and sees but does not take into account the hair in the bathroom sink. Downstairs, he finds Brady's computer room and realizes it has been cleared out. He asks Jerome and Holly to come inside.

In Section 14, Holly begins to scream when Jerome turns on one of Brady's computers and a reverse number countdown starts. She suspects it is a suicide program where all the data is lost if the countdown gets to zero.

In Section 15 Hodges debates if he should call the police into his investigation. He voices his worry that Brady has more explosives he could use on a crowd even though Holly tells Brady he is the only one who can catch Brady. Even though he knows the





police might not be able to do anything, Hodges feels he is at a dead end and that he has to call for help.

In Section 16, there is excited noise on Pete's end of the line when Hodges calls him. Pete tells him they have made a big armament bust. Pete tells Hodges that Alonzo Moretti owns the pawnshop where the explosives and guns were found. Every detective is working the case and Hodges knows there are none left for the Mercedes Killer. Pete believes it was Moretti who is responsible for blowing up Hodges' car. Hodges can picture the scene and knows it is not a good time to bring up the Mercedes Killer.

In Section 17, Hodges hears Holly telling her mother on the phone that she, Hodges, and Jerome have eaten lunch together and are out seeing the sights. He is surprised by how determined she sounds.

Hodges suggests they go back to his house to think things over and Holly insists on bringing Mrs. Hartsfield's computer with her. She also tells them she wants to smoke a cigarette first. Hodges asks Holly when she got so assertive. She replies that it was "when I saw pieces of my cousin burning in the street" (359).

In Section 18, Brady eats his last meal at the Chicken Coop and thinks about all the things he will not miss once he is dead. Back at his hotel room he sends a last message for Hodges through the Blue Umbrella site and then gets his car from airport parking.

In Section 19, at Hodges' house, Hodges lets Holly smoke while she tries to determine the password for Deborah Hartsfield's computer. Hodges and Jerome hear her cuss when she realizes no password hint was programmed into the computer.

In Section 20, Jerome points out that Brady has left another message on the Blue Umbrella website. They both believe it is a goodbye letter from Brady but it is not specific about his intentions. Jerome also mentions to Hodges the 'Round Here concert taking place that night when Hodges asks for a list of public gatherings.

Hodges calls the MAC and asks for Larry Windom, a friend of his who is head of security there. Brady tells Larry there may be a child molester attending the concert. He tells Larry the man's name is Brady Hartsfield and that he will send a picture. Larry promises to keep his detail of security officers on alert. Meanwhile, Holly is looking through Deborah Hartsfield's purse, which Hodges did not know she took for information about her password. So far she has not been successful but has not given up hope.

In Section 21, Hodges thinks over the relationships he has let slip away in his life and remembers his daughter's love of pop music. When he thinks that he would not have let her go to the concert that night if he suspected something was wrong he decides to tell Jerome to call his mom and tell her not to let the girls go to the concert. His line of thinking is interrupted when Jerome calls telling them he thinks he has found something.



## Analysis

In this section in particular and in the book in general, there are a variety of references to ghosts and hauntings. For instance, when Hodges is preparing for the day on Thursday it is noted he has an experience that he describes as being “like a haunting” (317) as Hodges continues to wonder how much explosives Brady has on hand. The next reference to ghosts occurs when Hodges spots Olivia’s car in the parking lot at Discount Electronix. “He sees a ghost. A gray one.” (339) In this metaphor, the car itself is a ghost, a machine that has risen from the dead after having killed eight people and injured more. As Jerome looks at the car for the first time and remembers its role in the City Center Massacre, he thinks to himself that if there were spooks (a play off the name of the computer program Brady installed on Olivia’s computer), “they’d be in there. Probably screaming” (334).

A sense of pressure and feeling that time is running out is given to the task of finding Brady (Mr. Mercedes) when Hodges tells himself this day is the last one he will dedicate to his investigation before he turns over what he has found to the police. The reader not only feels a need for Hodges to be able to confront the killer, as he has set out to do, but also wants the odd group of detectives to be successful in their investigation for Holly’s sake. Even though she did not know either of her cousins well, she has dedicated herself to helping put the killer behind bars. King has presented Holly in such a way that the reader knows she is intelligent, has a sense of humor, and needs to be able to prove to herself she is capable of more than living at home with her mother. When she drives Olivia’s Mercedes to Discount Electronix knowing Brady and Jerome will eventually be there, the reader begins to root for this emotional underdog and hope that she will be able to prove to herself she can be a success.

Hodges’ detective work is made more difficult since his picture has been on the news after his car was blown up and Janey killed. He can no longer count on people not knowing who is or how he is connected to the City Center Massacre. In order to continue to investigate, Hodges has to turn to different means. He gets Jerome to help him with phone calls, particularly the one to Radney Peeples to find out what IT person might have worked on Olivia’s computer, and he also carries a badge that does not carry the “retired” designation. This decision to carry an expired badge is perhaps the most dangerous one he makes since it is a felony to impersonate a full duty police officer, which Hodges is doing. Notice also in this section that Pete tries to get Hodges to break using a technique that Hodges taught him. “Silence from the other end. Pete is waiting for Hodges to grow uncomfortable and break it, for the moment forgetting who taught him that trick” (319).

Hodges continues to be bothered by the comment made by a neighbor to him during a recent canvassing of his neighborhood. Hodges and the man had joked about their common neighbor, Mrs. Melbourne, thinking that child molesters and other undesirables “walk among us” (327). The statement has significance for Hodges but he cannot pin down why it is significant. Jerome helps Brady make the connection when Holly mentions ice cream. He realizes that Brady and the man who drives the ice cream truck



in their neighborhood are the same person. Hodges realizes that just as he made a rash judgment about Olivia being unfeeling about her car being used in the killings, he also read Mrs. Melbourne wrong. Instead of taking her suspicions seriously, he passed her off as being crazy and missed an important clue in the case. “If he had paid attention to Mrs. Melbourne instead of dismissing her as a harmless crank (the way he and Pete dismissed Olivia Trelawney), would Janey still be alive?” (339).

Brady continues to show signs of being a psychopath. As he contemplates the plan he has put together to blow up a bomb at the MAC, he believes it is not his fault he is acting the way he is. “Can he be blamed for striking out at the world that has made him what he is?” (323), as he thinks of all of the bad luck that life has dealt him—his father’s death, his brother’s choking and resulting mental retardation, his mother’s endless worry that they would be homeless because of Frankie’s medical bills, and finally his mother’s death because she got into his refrigerator and ate the poisoned hamburger. One of the characteristics of a psychopath is not only a lack of guilt, for his mother’s death and for his brother’s death, but also a refusal to take responsibility for his actions: he should not have had poisoned hamburger meat in the house to start with. Even Hodges suspects that Brady is a psychopath and tries to approach him as one when he goes into Brady’s workplace. “The young man in the picture may have a cauldron of crazy boiling away behind his bland face, but Hodges has met his share of psychopaths and knows that when they’re taken by surprise, most collapse like puffballs” (339).

A few important symbols make appearances in this section of the novel. The reader finally learns the identity of the large object that Brady purchased. It is a wheelchair with which he plans to make a rolling bomb. Thing Two, the gadget he used to unlock Olivia’s car, will be reworked as the detonator for the bomb. Of course the car, Olivia’s Mercedes, is also an important object in the novel. Hodges drives the car to Brady’s house hoping the man will be at home and will recognize the vehicle in his driveway. It is interesting to note that while both Hodges and Jerome are disturbed by seeing the car because they remember the pain and grief it caused, Holly, who said she would not attend her aunt’s funeral if the casket was open, has no problem driving the car.

It is also ironic that it is Holly, along with some help from fate, who pushes Hodges to continue alone on the Mercedes Killer case. When the trio finds they cannot hack into Brady’s computers, Hodges believes he has no choice but to give up. It is Holly who keeps trying to break into Deborah’s computer in hopes she will be able to find information about Brady’s passwords. Hodges goes so far as to call his old partner but when he learns all the detectives are tied up in a huge armaments bust, he knows that the police will not be able to take the case on that day.

Although this section of the novel is very serious, King still infuses humor into it. As Hodges is talking to Aunt Charlotte on the phone about Janey’s remains he finds himself pulling his hair in frustration. The idea is that Aunt Charlotte is so difficult that she could make even a sane person develop nervous habits, thus it is no wonder Holly acts the way she does. Again humor is infused when Jerome picks Hodges up from his house and realizes Hodges is carrying a gun. When Jerome asks if the gun is loaded Hodges answers in this way: “Of course it is. What did you think I was going to do if I did have to



use it? Throw it?" (325), indicating a gun is not much good if it does not have bullets in it. Also when Holly is waiting for Brady and Jerome to show up at Discount Electronix, Hodges thinks to himself "it's humbling to find he's been scooped by a Lexapro-dependent neurotic" (332).

## Discussion Question 1

What role does Olivia's car serve in this section of the novel? Would you have trouble driving it, as Brady and Jerome think they would have? Why do you think Holly is able to drive the car without problems?

## Discussion Question 2

How does Holly prove herself to Hodges in this section of the novel? What changes do you see in her personality as she gets more focused on helping Hodges and Jerome solve the case?

## Discussion Question 3

Discuss Brady's reasoning that leads him to the conclusion that he is not a fault for what he is about to do at the MAC. Is his thought process at all reasonable? Why or why not?

## Vocabulary

maimed, constrained, perpetrator, protocol, alacrity, expedite, tyrant, platonic, satirical, quell, disconsolate, purloined, inscrutable, enunciated, atrocity, jurisdiction, ephemeral, taunt, vapid



## “Kisses on the Midway,” 22-43

### Summary

In Section 22, Jerome shows Holly and Hodges a press release about a career day planned on Saturday. Hodges thinks that is Brady's most likely target. He tries to get Holly to stop working on Deborah's computer but she refuses to give in yet. Hodges makes a bargain and gives her until 4:45 p.m. to find something.

In Section 23, during a drive to get Holly a fresh pack of cigarettes, Hodges tells Jerome that he plans to return Deborah's stuff to the Hartsfield house and then stake it out.

In Section 24, Jerome looks at the photos in Deborah's wallet and notices her nickname “honeyboy” for Brady. Holly tries that as the password and it works. Searching deep into her hard drive they find a file labeled “basement.” Deborah has noted the passwords but states they do not work for her. Neither Hodges nor Jerome understands the note but Holly seems to find some connection.

In Section 25, Brady arrives at the MAC more than an hour before the concert is to start. He parks behind a trailer to make his final preparations. He pulls out the wheelchair, unfolds it and braids together all the wires from his explosives. He gets the framed picture of Frankie from the car and sits in the chair connecting the one exposed master wire to Thing Two. Believing he is ready to go and hoping no one will search his wheelchair, Brady begins to wheel himself toward the MAC.

In Section 26, back at the Hartsfield house, Holly tells Jerome that he has to be the one to impersonate Brady's voice. She is pleased, laughing and clapping her hands, when he speaks the password and the lights come on.

In Section 27, Tanya Robinson is surprised at how much she is enjoying herself as the four girls sing and squeal in the back seat of her car. They see Brady in his wheelchair and Barbara suggests they help him. By the time they have parked the man in the wheelchair has already made it to the handicapped line. Tanya says a prayer for him.

In Section 28, at Brady's house, Jerome is able to stop the computer suicide countdown. Holly starts working on one computer and Jerome on another. Hodges sits on the basement steps and nurses a pain below his collarbone.

In Section 29, Brady is worried because the handicapped people are being let into the auditorium first. Some of the security guards are even checking pockets on some of the wheelchairs. Just before Brady goes through security, the main doors are opened and the other concert goers stampede in. Only one security guard is left to check the handicapped and she is barely looking at them.

In Section 30, in their seats, Barbara spots the handicapped man she saw in the parking lot and points him out to her mother.



In Section 31, Holly comments as she looks at Brady's computer that she is pleased when she sometimes runs across someone who is more screwed up than she is. She has found sexy pictures of Brady's mother on his computer. On the third laptop they find a file of articles Brady kept about the City Center Massacre. As Holly and Jerome look through the computer, including a file called "explosives," Hodges sits back down on the steps and tries to breathe slowly. He is afraid he is having a heart attack.

When he belches the pain is relieved and Hodges notices a ball bearing under the stairs. Looking closer he notices a garbage bag that holds the remains of Brady's suicide vest. As he tries to think why Brady would have unloaded the vest he hears both Holly and Jerome shouting and begging no. They have found a receipt from where Brady purchased a ticket to the 'Round Here concert.

Hodges gets Jerome's attention by grabbing his shoulder. He tells the boy to call his mother and get her and the girls out of the auditorium. Jerome tries to call but gets only voicemail and leaves a message. He tries calling his sister and does not get an answer at her phone either but leaves a message as well. Holly tells him she believes he cannot get through because there are so many young girls there using cell phones that the circuits are overloaded. She tells Jerome to keep trying to call. Hodges directs them to the car where he plans to call Larry on their way to the MAC.

In Section 32, even though Hodges does not trust his friend, he tries to call him anyway. Holly tries to call Barbara. Meanwhile Hodges' shoulder is aching.

In Section 33, the girls ask Tanya why the show has not started yet when it is ten minutes past seven. As the show finally starts, Barbara's cell phone vibrates but she ignores it.

In Section 34, the back way to the MAC is blocked with a rolling gate. Jerome pushes the call button and says he is the police, prompting the woman to open the gate. Hodges can hear music and knows Brady has not been caught. When they reach the building they talk to Jamie Gallison, the head custodian. Hodges begins asking for security but Holly discourages him. It is at this point Gallison realizes the man they are looking for might have a bomb.

Hodges continues to feel pain and heaviness in his chest. He realizes that Holly is right and that it is too late to involve MAC security so he tells Gallison not to try to go after anyone. Hodges sits down and calls Holly and Jerome to him. As Hodges gives instructions he is having more and more trouble talking. He tells Holly she has to be the one to stop Brady because she is the only one he will not recognize. Holly says she might be able to do it if Hodges were to come with her but he tells her that he is having a heart attack. She has to go alone.

In Section 35, Brady decides it will be when the fancy backdrops are put on stage that he will detonate his bomb. He looks around and recognizes Barbara.

In Section 36, Holly and Jerome go off with Gallison. Jerome has the .38 to protect Holly. Hodges knows the only thing he can do is sit and wait.





In Section 37, it is described that Holly has had two breakdowns in her life where she had to be institutionalized. The second was because of her boss, the first was caused by a boy in high school who made fun of Holly and her uncontrollable habit of hugging herself and muttering. He tagged her as Jibba-Jibba and the nickname stuck. She thinks about the high school boy who was mean to her as she looks for Brady. Gallison is hesitant about helping them but Jerome begs him and he relents, showing them the door that will lead them into the auditorium.

In Section 38, Brady realizes the black girl he has been looking at is Barbara. As he makes the connection, Cam begins to build the audience up for the props that Brady saw before the concert. As the set descends Cam begins singing "Kisses on the Midway." Brady's finger settles on the trigger of Thing Two and he looks up at Barbara hoping that she will look at him and he will be the last thing that she sees.

In Section 39, Barbara does look at the crippled man to see if he is having fun. She is surprised to see he is smiling at her and flipping her off. Barbara also sees a woman running up to him. Behind her is a boy who looks like Jerome. Barbara gets her mother's attention. It is at that point everything happens.

In Section 40, Holly notices the man in the wheelchair is flipping someone off as she approaches him. When she gets close she asks if he is Mike Sturdivant. As Brady turns to look at her she hits him with the Happy Slapper and sees part of his skull cave in. Holly hits him again, this time drawing blood. Jerome has to make Holly stop. The band continues to play.

In Section 41, Barbara and her mother are tugging at Jerome. He knows the danger is not over and tells them to leave. He instructs her to get the attention of the usher who is moving toward them and tell him her daughter is sick and needs to be escorted out. Tanya motions for the other girls to come with them.

Holly orders Jerome to hold Brady's hands, which are flapping around uselessly, and looks at the detonation device. She prays what she is about to do will work as she opens the battery compartment of the device. She hesitates and one of Brady's hands gets loose and smacks her in the head setting her off balance and making her finger pull a battery out. The light on the detonator goes out.

In Section 42, Hodges feels like there is an elephant sitting on his chest. Even though one of the roadies tells Hodges his lips are turning blue, Hodges continues to refuse an ambulance. He thinks he sees Janey walking toward him. The roadies try to soften his fall as he slips to the ground. One of the roadies starts CPR even though he is stoned and is not sure he will do it correctly.

In Section 43, Hodges wakes in the hospital. Pete is sitting next to Hodges. He assures Hodges that Holly and Jerome stopped the explosion. Brady is in a coma with minimal brain function. When Pete asks Hodges what he thought he was doing, Hodges replies he was doing "The best I could" (422).



## Analysis

The tone and speed of the novel intensify as Hodges, Jerome, and Holly rush to try to keep Brady from detonating his bomb. Even though there are a variety of chances for Brady to get caught, he is able to slip by each one. He gets lucky when the regular concert goers are let into the auditorium just as he is about to go through security. Because he has shaved his head he also gets past the head security man who is checking attendees against the photo that Hodges sent him.

The feeling of panic intensifies in this section of the novel because Jerome, Holly and Hodges know for sure that Brady's target is the 'Round Here concert. The attack is personal because Jerome's little sister and mother are among those in the crowd. The attack is even more personal when Brady recognizes Barbara in the crowd and tries to get her attention, hoping he will be the last thing she sees before she dies.

The action of the novel intensifies as Hodges, Holly, and Jerome break driving laws to make it to the MAC before Brady detonates the bomb. Just as they are hurrying to keep Brady's bomb from exploding, Hodges feels the bomb he feels in his chest as it becomes more and more obvious to him that he is having a heart attack. With him unable to confront Brady, Holly and Jerome must find Brady and defuse the bomb on their own. This revelation compounds the stress that Brady will succeed in his plan since Holly, who has improved her image in the reader's mind but is still disturbed by the idea she will have to injure another person, is the one chosen to confront Brady.

Holly's act of drawing on the memories of bullies who have hurt her in the past in order to hit Brady with Hodges' Happy Slapper works well since Brady is basically a bully. Holly pretends Brady is a high school boy who made fun of her and caused her to have her first breakdown. Even though Holly hits Brady twice and probably harder than she needed to the reader really has no pity for Brady after the way he provoked Olivia into killing herself, murdered to people at the City Center, and then killed Janey, not to mention his own mother.

Despite the worst of situations, Hodges survives his heart attack. Not only did he not go to the hospital when he began to feel pain, but he also refused to allow the people at the MAC to call an ambulance for him. He did not want to take the chance that he would startle Brady and have him set off the bomb early because he heard the sound of the ambulance approaching. When Hodges does finally pass out from his heart, one of the roadies starts CPR on him. It is doubtful that this procedure will be helpful to Hodges since the roadie indicates to his friends that he is high, an indication he might not be able to perform the procedure correctly.

Technology is again explored thematically in this section of the novel. The aspect of technology that is focused on is the way technology can fail. Notice that when Tanya locks her van she hears the "satisfying thump of the locks engaging — a sound that means safety and security" (381). The reader has already learned that just because the car is locked, it does not mean no one can get into it. Both Olivia and Hodges locked their cars and still Brady was able to access them and use them to commit crimes.





Another aspect of the failure of technology that is discussed in this section of the novel is that of cell phones. Even though we believe we can be reached at any time for any reason, that is not necessarily the case. At the concert, Barbara and her mother are not able to receive Jerome's calls that they need to get out of the concert hall because the circuits are overloaded.

Just as King used Augie's character in the opening part of this novel to contrast his goodness with Brady's evilness, King again uses Barbara's innocence to contrast with Brady's evil nature. When Barbara sees Brady struggling in his wheelchair she wants to help him. Later, she hopes he is enjoying the concert. She does not realize that Brady's wheelchair holds enough explosives to kill and hurt the majority of the people who will be attending the concert that night. She does not even realize how close she came to dying that night.

## Discussion Question 1

Discuss Hodges' heart attack. Why do you think he waited so late to tell anyone he was having a heart attack? Why did he refuse help? Do you think he hoped the heart attack would kill him? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 2

Compare and contrast Barbara and Brady. How is the comparison between them similar to the comparison between Augie and Brady at the beginning of the book?

## Discussion Question 3

How is it poetic justice that it is Holly who is the one to subdue Brady?

## Vocabulary

improvisation, reconnaissance, unification, ostentatiously, fervent, discordant, pallid, coalescence, milquetoast, pestiferous, lobotomy, jubilantly, freshet



# “The Proclamation” and “Blue Mercedes”

## Summary

In “The Proclamation,” Holly and Jerome are awarded Medals of Service by the mayor. As part of their reward, they get to take advantage of free city services for ten years.

In “Blue Mercedes,” Section 1, Holly pulls up beside a Prius in Olivia’s Mercedes, now painted baby blue. Jerome is with her. He helps her pull a picnic basket out of the back of the car. Hodges walks to meet them. He has been outfitted with a pacemaker and has lost thirty-five pounds.

When Jerome asks, Hodges tells him that the district attorney has decided not to prosecute him. Holly hugs him. She has had her hair cut and Hodges can see that she resembles Janey. The judge gave Hodges a lecture for putting lives at risk and told him he was to blame for Janey’s death. Hodges thinks he might be right but believes it was Janey’s life in exchange for the four thousand who might have been hurt by Brady.

Hodges asks Holly how she’s settling into the Lake Avenue condo. She says she is getting better and that her mother is calling her only twice a day. Janey had left Holly money in her will that allowed her to move into Janey’s condo, owned jointly by Aunt Charlotte and Uncle Henry. Holly’s mother did not approve of the move when Holly asked if she could live there but she told her mother that she would get an apartment in the worst part of Lowtown if she refused. Holly not only has support from her psychiatrist but also from Jerome’s family and Hodges.

Hodges says he plans to work with a bail bondsman to track people who have skipped their bonds. Holly offers to do computer work for him. Jerome asks Holly if she plans to continue driving the car. She replies that there were ghosts at first but she had it painted blue, the color of forgetting. She notices Hodges is crying and asks him if it is about Janey. He says he is crying “because we’re here” (435). They toast each other with champagne.

In Section 2, just more than a year after Holly, Jerome, and Hodges’ picnic, a nurse hurries to get the clinic’s chief neurologist at the Lakes Region Traumatic Brain Injury Clinic. The nurse tells the neurologist that Brady is awake, saying he has a headache and asking for his mother.

## Analysis

The final two parts of this novel draw to a conclusion the action of the narrative, allow the author to update the reader on the conditions of the main characters, and give him a lead into the next installment in this series. “The Proclamation” is the shortest part of the



novel and contains only the text of the mayor's proclamation honoring Holly and Jerome. It is written in the style and language of a typical proclamation.

Even though their encounter with Brady is over, there are many reminders included in this section of the novel of what Holly, Jerome, and Hodges went through to stop him from killing more people. It is noted that the three have their picnic at the park where Brady had once sold ice cream to children. The statement reminds the reader that Brady was a danger to children. Olivia's Mercedes has been painted blue and the scratch that got put in it when Jerome pulled through the gate at the MAC has been removed. King reminds the reader of the pressure Jerome and the others were to get to the MAC in time to stop the explosion by reminding the reader that the car got its scratch because Jerome drove it through the gate before it was even open all the way. When Hodges thinks of the pacemaker that has been installed in his heart, he compares it to the gadget that Brady had made to detonate the bomb. This is a reminder of how humans can create things to kill as well as things to save lives.

Although Hodges has lost thirty-five pounds, it is Holly who has made the most drastic changes in her life. She has insisted her mother allow her to move out on her own and has begun trying to break her nicotine habit. She has an air of self confidence and is receiving support from a variety of sources including Jerome and his family. Jerome's mother has even helped her with a makeover that makes Holly look younger.

Stephen King leads into his next installment of this series by having Hodges tell his young friends that he intends to begin working for a bail bond company, since one of the stipulations of being allowed to do no jail time for the crimes Hodges committed during his solo investigation was that he could not get bonded to work as an officer in his retirement. Holly suggests she could do computer work for him. The most important lead-in occurs in the final section of the book. Even though he suffered severe brain damage when Holly hit him in the head with the Happy Slapper, Brady regains consciousness after he has been in a coma for nearly seventeen months. He obviously has no memory of his attempt to blow up the MAC or his mother's death since he asks the nurse for her upon waking. Nonetheless, Brady's recovery foreshadows his role in the next book of the Bill Hodges series.

## Discussion Question 1

Discuss the changes in Holly's personality and demeanor since she and Hodges first met. What has prompted these changes?

## Discussion Question 2

Why do you think that Hodges is not included with Holly and Jerome on the proclamation? Do you think he is slighted for his part in the investigation?



## Discussion Question 3

Consider the judge's comments to Hodges that he is responsible for Janey's death. Do you think this is true? Even if Hodges had turned over investigation to the police right away is there still a chance that Janey might have been hurt?

## Vocabulary

juvenile, indignant, partition, premonitions, tantamount, precarious, adamantly, ostentatiously, infamy



# Characters

## Brady Hartsfield

Brady Hartsfield is a psychopath who drives a stolen car into a group of job seekers killing eight and injuring many more. He enjoys tormenting Olivia, the woman from whom he had stolen the car, about her part in the crime and is proud of himself when he pushes the woman into taking her own life. After he is finished with Olivia, Brady starts in on Hodges, the retired cop who was the lead detective on the City Center Massacre case. Brady wants to see if he can push Hodges to suicide as well.

For a good portion of the novel, Brady is referred to as the Mercedes Killer. The novel switches back and forth between a focus on Brady and a focus on Hodges. In the sections that focus on Hodges, Brady is referred to as the Mercedes Killer because Hodges does not yet know the killer's identity. The reader, however, knows that Brady is the Mercedes Killer beginning in the second part of the novel.

When Hodges begins communicating with Brady through the website Under Debbie's Blue Umbrella, Brady is easily upset when Hodges accuses him not really being the Mercedes Killer. When Brady gets upset, he begins making mistakes. First, he errs by leaving the poisoned hamburger he intends for Jerome's dog in his refrigerator. Although he thought she did not look in his fridge, Brady's mother found the meat and ate it. She dies as a result of the poison. Brady blames her death on Hodges and threatens to kill the retired officer. Brady attempts to kill Hodges by blowing up his car. He is not successful, however, because Janey is driving Hodges' car when it explodes.

Brady decides to commit one more mass murder. He hopes this attack will kill more people than the City Center Massacre. After he learns the pop group 'Round Here will be performing a concert at the city's arts complex, he decides to sneak a bomb into the concert hall and detonate it. He plans for the explosion to kill him as well as a good many of the concert goers.

Instead of detonating his bomb as he had intended, Brady is subdued by Holly and Jerome before he has a chance to hurt anyone. Holly hits Brady in the head with Hodges' Happy Slapper, putting him in a coma. Seventeen months after Brady suffers the brain damage, he wakes from his coma.

## Kermit William "Bill" Hodges

Kermit William "Bill" Hodges is a 62-year-old retired cop. He is one of the main characters in the novel. Because he failed to solve the City Center Massacre before he retired, Brady, the man responsible for the massacre, reaches out to Hodges in an attempt to torment him into killing himself.



When Hodges gets Brady's letter he quickly returns to his cop instincts. Even though he knows he should turn the letter over to the police, he does not because he does not believe they would be able to get any evidence from the letter. He also wants to catch Brady himself. Just as Brady thinks Hodges was not a success in his job because he did not catch him, Hodges still wants to be the one to crack the case of the City Center Massacre.

Because the case is technological in nature, Hodges turns to his friend Jerome, a teenage computer whiz, to help him understand how Brady could have unlocked Olivia's car without having a key. He has new doubts that Olivia was lying when she told officers she did not leave her keys in her car. Brady has also begun a friendship with Janey, Olivia's sister, who believes her sister was goaded into killing herself. Janey hires Brady to investigate her sister's death but the two soon also begin having a sexual relationship.

Hodges becomes more determined than ever to solve the City Center Massacre case when Janey is killed by a bomb that Brady planted in his car. He teams up not only with Jerome but also Holly, Janey's cousin. The three of them discover the identity of the Mercedes Killer and uncover his plan to detonate a bomb at a pop concert.

Hodges suffers a heart attack at the concert hall where Brady plans his attack but he instructs Jerome and Holly how to subdue the killer. Brady survives his heart attack and has a pacemaker installed. He is not charged with any crimes for his investigation of the City Center case even though he both withheld evidence from the police and also acted as an active duty police officer even though he is retired.

## Holly Gibney

Holly Gibney is the adult daughter of Aunt Charlotte and the cousin of Olivia and Janey. Because of her emotional disabilities, she reminds Hodges of Olivia. He believes that by being good to Holly he can redeem himself for the way he treated Olivia.

Although Hodges did not see Holly's potential when he first met her, she becomes a crucial member of his team of investigators. When Jerome is working on Olivia's computer, he quickly realizes that Holly is better with computers than even he is. Working together they find the program that Brady used to make the "ghost" sounds that tormented Olivia.

Because Brady was responsible for the deaths of two of her cousins, Holly becomes more fixated on catching Brady than Hodges. She insists to Hodges that he does not need to turn the case over to the police and that they need to be the ones to solve it. When Holly, Hodges and Jerome discover Brady's location and learn what he has planned, it is Holly who is chosen to subdue Brady because he would recognize both Jerome and Hodges. Holly pulls on the frustration she felt for a boy who picked on her in high school in order to hit Brady with Hodges' Happy Slapper.



At the end of the novel, Holly is living on her own and has gained a good deal of self-confidence. She offers to help Hodges in his career as a bounty hunter by doing computer work for him.

## Janelle “Janey” Patterson

Janelle “Janey” Patterson is the sister of Olivia and daughter of Elizabeth Wharton. She comes to live in her sister’s Lake Avenue condo after her sister’s death to take care of her mother who suffers severe scoliosis. Hodges contacts Janey to see if she has read through her sister’s papers and if Olivia also got a letter from the Mercedes Killer. Janey not only gives Hodges a copy of the letter, she also hires him to work for her as a private investigator. She wants his help in finding out why her sister killed herself.

As the two work together, Hodges and Janey develop a sexual relationship and become quite close. Janey even gives Hodges the gift of a hat, a brown fedora that she says every private detective must have. Because they have gotten so close, Janey asks Hodges to attend her mother’s funeral with her for moral support. After the funeral Holly begs Hodges, who has been so nice to her, to ride with her on the way to Olivia’s house where a luncheon will be served. Janey offers to drive Hodges’ car. Brady had planted a bomb in Hodges’ car hoping to kill Hodges. The bomb instead kills Janey.

## Deborah Ann Hartsfield

Deborah Ann Hartsfield is mother to Frankie and Brady. Deborah is a heavy drinker and stays passed out much of the time. Even though she does not work, she also does not do housework or successfully cook often. Brady sometimes thinks it would be better if she were dead. His wish comes true when he comes home one evening to find that his mother had made her lunch of the hamburger meat he poisoned, intending to kill Jerome’s dog. He does not report her death, but only puts her in her bed upstairs, turns the air conditioning on high, and covers her with a blanket.

Brady and his mother seem to have a strange sexual relationship. Brady often gets erections when he thinks about his mother or sees her underwear. When Holly and Jerome break into Brady’s computers they discover that Brady had sexy pictures of his mother stored in his files, pictures for which she appeared to have posed. Whenever Brady has a headache he goes to his mother’s room and she relieves him. The author does not indicate if this relief is oral or by hand manipulation, but it appears that his mother is the one to do the work.

## Pete Huntley

Pete Huntley is Hodges’ old partner at the police department. Although they made a good team when they worked together, Hodges realizes that Pete is not as good a detective as he is.



During their work on the case, Pete despised Olivia, the owner of the Mercedes that the killer used to kill the people at the City Center, because of her anti-social personality. He decided Olivia had left her key in the car's ignition allowing the killer to steal her car easily and tormented her for her mistake. Although Hodges is later able to consider the idea they made a mistake about Olivia, Pete will not consider the possibility he was wrong about her.

Pete suspects that Hodges is doing an independent investigation of the City Center Massacre but cannot get Hodges to tell him what he is doing. Pete and his new partner, Izzy, are the ones who investigate the car bomb that destroyed Hodges car and killed Janey.

## **Olivia “Ollie” Trelawney**

Olivia “Ollie” Trelawney was the sister of Janey Patterson and daughter of Elizabeth Wharton. She is the woman from whom Brady stole the car that he used to kill eight people at the City Center Massacre. The police who questioned Olivia at the time assumed she had left her key in the ignition and the door unlocked, making it easy for the Mercedes Killer to steal the car.

Olivia eventually took an overdose of her mother's pain medicine because the Mercedes Killer tormented her into believing she was responsible for the deaths. After Olivia's death, Hodges learns how the Mercedes Killer had tormented her with letters, communication on an internet website, and even sounds of a crying baby and accusing mother that came from her computer. Hodges also learns from the Mercedes Killer that Olivia had indeed locked her car and taken the key the day the car was stolen. The Mercedes Killer had opened the car using a remote control gadget he had made to capture the code from her remote entry system.

## **Jerome Robinson**

Jerome Robinson is a black teenager who lives in Hodges' neighborhood. He mows Hodges' lawn and helps him with his computer. Because of Jerome's computer skills, Hodges calls upon the young man to help him with the technological aspects of the City Center Massacre. Much of the warnings and dangers that King shares with his readers about technology are presented through Jerome.

Jerome is still in high school but is intellectually advanced for his age. He is considering attending Harvard when he graduates from high school. Hodges describes him as having an “old head on top of a young body” (235).

Jerome is the first to recognize and appreciate Holly's talents on the computer. He is patient with the older woman and encourages her not to hurt herself or put herself down.





Jerome has a personal reason to stop Brady from detonating the bomb inside the MAC because his little sister and mother are among the 4,000 spectators inside the concert hall.

## Frankie Hartsfield

Frankie Hartsfield was Brady's younger brother. Brady is haunted by images of his little brother because Brady and his mother murdered the boy but made his death look like an accident. The mother and son killed Frankie because he suffered severe brain damage after he choked on an apple and was deprived of oxygen. The high costs of caring for Frankie were quickly eating away the Hartsfields' savings and his mother often told Brady they would soon be out on the streets.

When Brady decides to detonate a bomb in the MAC, he carries Frankie's picture with him and tells the security guard that his little boy loved 'Round Here but was killed in the same accident that put Brady in a wheelchair. He uses his little brother to make it appear he has a reason to be at the concert.

## Radney Peeples

Radney Peeples is a security guard with Vigilant Guard Services, the group that patrols the neighborhood of Sugar Heights. Hodges meets Peeples when Peeples finds Hodges parked outside Olivia's house. Peeples at first seems suspicious of Hodges but Hodges is able to use his interrogation techniques to befriend the man.

Hodges later has Jerome get in touch with Peeples to find out who was responsible for the IT work on Olivia's computer. Peeples tells Jerome that it was the Cyber Patrol that was often seen at her home.

## August "Augie" Odenkirk

August "Augie" Odenkirk is a character in the first part of this novel. Augie is one of the victims of Mr. Mercedes. He is one of the people who arrived extra early for the job fair at the City Center. While in line he befriended Janice Cray, a young mother who had her infant daughter with her. Augie is a symbol of human kindness as he helped Janice care for the child and even offered his sleeping bag to keep the child warm and dry during the long night as they waited for the job fair to begin.

## Janice Cray

Janice Cray is a character from the first part of the novel. She was a young mother desperate for work. Because she could not afford an overnight babysitter she brought her infant daughter, Patti, with her when she arrived before midnight to stand in line in an attempt to get work at a job fair at the City Center. Both Janice and her baby were



killed by Mr. Mercedes when he drove a Mercedes-Benz into the crowd of people waiting to apply for jobs.

## **Donald Davis**

Donald Davis is the man who is believed to have killed his wife. When his wife's remains are found, Davis is arrested. During interrogation Davis also admits to the Turnpike Joe rapes and murders. When writing to the Mercedes Killer, Hodges indicates that Davis is a real murderer and may soon admit he perpetrated the City Center Massacre as well, in order to get Brady riled up.

## **Uncle Henry Sirois**

Uncle Henry Sirois is Elizabeth Wharton's brother. Janey tells Hodges that her Uncle Henry is actually a worse gossip than her aunt. Henry's biggest issue when he comes to attend Mrs. Wharton's funeral is that she has requested to be cremated. Henry considers this a barbaric act and tries to talk Janey out of having the cremation done even though Mrs. Wharton requested it.

## **Larry Windom**

Larry Windom is a retired police officer who serves as the head of security at the MAC. Hodges calls Larry and warns him that Brady may be attending the concert but says that he is a child molester, not a mass murderer. Hodges does not entirely trust his friend, who earned the name Romper Stomper because he tends to proceed like a bull when he deals with people.

## **Barbara Robinson**

Barbara Robinson is Jerome's little sister. She is one of the thousands of young girls in the MAC when Brady tries to detonate a bomb during a pop concert. Barbara is a symbol of innocence in the novel because she notices Brady moving across the MAC parking lot in his wheelchair and suggests to her mother that they should help him.

## **Isabelle "Izzy" Jaynes**

Isabelle "Izzy" Jaynes is Pete Huntley's new partner at the police department. While questioning Hodges about Janey's death when Hodges' car was blown up, Izzy suspects that Hodges and Janey were more than just friends.



## **Freddi Linklatter**

Freddi Linklatter is the lesbian who works with Brady on the Cyber Patrol at Discount Electronix. She is the one who gives Hodges Brady's home address.

## **Aunt Charlotte Gibney**

Aunt Charlotte Gibney is Elizabeth Wharton's sister and Holly's mother. Hodges is struck by how selfish and demanding Aunt Charlotte is. It is indicated that a good deal of Holly's problems are caused by the way her mother treats her.

## **Tanya Robinson**

Tanya Robinson is Barbara and Jerome's mother. She is the one who draws the short straw among the mothers and gets to be the one to take Barbara and her friends to the 'Round Here concert.

## **Jamie Gallison**

Jamie Gallison is the head custodian at the MAC. Although he is hesitant, he is the one who directs Holly and Jerome on how to get to the audience section of the MAC where Brady is sitting.

## **Mike Sturdivant**

Mike Sturdivant is the boy from Holly's high school days who caused her first breakdown. In order to be able to hit Brady with the Happy Slapper, she pretends that he is Mike Sturdivant.

## **Elizabeth Wharton**

Elizabeth Wharton is the mother of both Janey and Olivia. The day before her death she tells Hodges that Olivia killed herself because she was hearing ghosts.

## **Marlo Everett**

Marlo Everett is the records clerk at the police department who gives Hodges the information about car burglaries in the downtown area between 2007 and 2009.



# Symbols and Symbolism

## Mercedes-Benz

This car, owned by Olivia, is a symbol of the City Center Massacre. Brady stole this car and drove it into the crowd of people waiting to apply for jobs at the City Center. Eight people died and more were maimed because of Brady's actions. Later, despite its use as a murder weapon, Holly drives the car and even has it painted baby blue. Holly says she chose blue because that is the color of forgiveness.

## A .38 Smith and Wesson M and P Revolver

The revolver that belonged to Bill Hodges' father is a symbol of Hodges' depression when he is first retired. When Brady spies on Hodges during his rounds as the ice cream man, he recognizes that Brady is contemplating suicide. When Brady contacts Hodges in a letter and gives Hodges hope he might be able catch the Mercedes Killer after all, Hodges locks his father's revolver in his safe, a symbolic gesture that indicates he is locking away his thoughts of suicide.

## A Smiley Face Emoticon

This Smiley Face Emoticon is a symbol of Mr. Mercedes, the man who committed the City Center Massacre. This emoticon wears dark sunglasses and shows its teeth. This symbol is included in the letter that the still unidentified Mr. Mercedes sent to Hodges and the one that he sent to Olivia. A smiley face sticker was also stuck to the center of the steering wheel of the car Mr. Mercedes used as a weapon.

## The Happy Slapper

The Happy Slapper is a sock with the toe filled with ball bearings. It symbolizes the way that even a homemade weapon can be effective if used properly. Holly uses the Happy Slapper to hit Brady in the head before he can detonate the explosives he has packed in his wheelchair. Holly not only knocks Brady unconscious, she puts him in a coma from which he does not wake for seventeen months.

## Thing Two

Thing Two symbolizes Brady's intelligence. He made this gadget that allows him to capture the unlock codes for cars with keyless remote entry. He uses Thing Two to unlock Olivia's car so that he can steal it. Brady again uses Thing Two when he unlocks Brady's car to put the explosives inside.



## Letter from Mr. Mercedes

The letter that Hodges receives from Brady, whom Hodges knows at that point only as Mr. Mercedes, symbolizes Brady's need to brag about the crime he has committed.

## Keys to the Mercedes

The keys to the Mercedes symbolize a mistake that Hodges and Pete made in their investigation of the City Center Massacre. Even though Olivia swore she had not done so, both detectives believe she had left her keys in the ignition of her Mercedes, allowing the killer to easily steal her car. Because neither detective was technologically proficient, they took the word of the man at the Mercedes dealership as truth, that there was no way to break into the car unless there was a key. It was Jerome who told Hodges there were devices that could be used to record the unlock code from cars with keyless remote entry. This recorded code could unlock the doors even with no key present.

## A Brown Fedora

This brown fedora is an object that is a symbol of Hodges. Janey gives this old-fashioned hat to Hodges because it is the kind that private detectives wore in the movies. Even though Brady cannot see inside Hodges' car very well when he blows it up, he assumes the driver is Brady because the figure is wearing this fedora.

## A Wheelchair

This wheelchair is a symbol of Brady's determination to get into the 'Round Here concert at the MAC. He pretends to have been disabled and his son killed in a car wreck in order to get his explosives and shrapnel into the concert hall.

## Gopher-Go

Gopher-Go, a rodent killer with strychnine, symbolizes Brady's desire to get revenge on Hodges for not believing he is the Mercedes Killer. Instead of poisoning Jerome's dog, as Brady had planned, Brady's mother fixes lunch with the tainted meat Brady mixed up for the dog. She dies from eating the poison.



# Settings

## City Center

The City Center is the place where a job fair was held in the midst of the 2009 recession. Brady drove a gray Mercedes-Benz into the crowd of people waiting for the job fair to open. He killed eight people and wounded many more.

## 63 Harper Road

63 Harper Road is the address of Hodges' home. It is while Hodges is sitting in his living room at home that Brady, working as the ice cream man for the area, is able to spy on him and learn his routine.

## Brady's Basement

Brady uses the basement of his mother's home as his control room and the place where he builds his bombs and technological gadgets.

## Midwest Culture and Arts Complex

The Midwest Culture and Arts Complex, also known as the MAC, is the place where the 'Round Here concert is held. The auditorium of the MAC holds 4,000 people. Brady hopes to commit a mass murder by sneaking explosives into the concert and then detonating them.

## Road Outside the Soames Funeral Home

It is on the road just outside the Soames Funeral Home that Janey is killed when Brady blows up Hodges' car.

## Lake Avenue Condo

Hodges first visits this Lake Avenue condo when he interviews Olivia after the City Center Massacre. She is staying there to help her mother, who owned the condo at that time. The next time he visits the condo, he talks to Janey about Olivia and the circumstances of her suicide. In the end of the novel, Holly has moved into her cousin's condo. Hodges' visits her there.



# Themes and Motifs

## The Danger of Making Rash Judgements

The repercussions of making rash judgments about people can range from surprise about that person's real personality to instances that can be life threatening. In this novel, Olivia, Holly, and Mrs. Melbourne are all people who are judged rashly by Hodges. In the case of Olivia and Mrs. Melbourne, it was only after he learns the consequences of not believing these women that he realizes what a mistake he had made. With Holly, even though he decides to be kinder to her than he was to her cousin Olivia, Hodges is still surprised when he discovers how different Holly really is from his initial opinion of her.

In the case of Olivia, both Hodges and Pete decided she was lying when she told them she did not leave her keys in the ignition of her car the night it was stolen by the Mercedes Killer. Only after Hodges retires from the police force does he begin to question how readily he and Pete took the word of the mechanic at the Mercedes dealership that a key had to have been used to open the car. Just as readily, they discounted Olivia's claim that she had removed the key and locked the car. They also doubted that she did not know there was a second key to her car in the glove compartment.

It is only after Hodges begins corresponding with the Mercedes Killer that he learns that the killer got the key out of the glove box. Jerome tells Hodges how car thieves can rework a television remote to unlock a car that has keyless remote entry. Had the police taken Olivia's word as truth, she perhaps would not have killed herself. Although knowing how the car was stolen might not have led them to the killer, it would have given them more information about the type of person with whom they were dealing.

Mrs. Melbourne, Hodges' neighbor, is another woman whose important information is glossed over because Hodges judges her rashly. When Mrs. Melbourne begins pointing out several "suspicious" vehicles she has seen in the area and even includes the ice cream man in her list of suspects, Hodges thinks she is more than a little crazy. Even though she comments that: "This spring it seems like he's always around" (169), Hodges does not connect the ice cream man with a possible suspect. This is especially ironic since when Hodges first got the letter from Mr. Mercedes and began considering the possibilities of who might be spying on him, one of the people he thought of was the ice cream man. Even though it may not have made a difference if Hodges had taken Mrs. Melbourne's suggestion about the ice cream man, it might have drawn Hodges attention to Brady more quickly and might have even saved Janey from her tragic death if he had identified Brady as the suspect in the Mercedes killings in a timelier manner.

A third character in the novel that surprises Hodges when she turns out to be different from Hodges' initial opinion of her is Holly. Hodges believes Holly is too emotionally damaged to ever be a functioning person but he is kind to her because he believes he



may redeem himself for not believing Olivia in doing so. Hodges is surprised when he learns how smart and strong Holly can be under her timid demeanor.

Once she is away from her overbearing mother, Holly develops a confident belief that she, Hodges, and Jerome have to be the ones to catch the Mercedes Killer. Holly is so determined to keep the man from hurting others that she is the one who subdues him with a hit from the Happy Slapper. After she is hailed as a heroine, Holly surprises everyone by standing up to her mother and demanding that she be allowed to move to an apartment on her own. With her friends and psychiatrist to support her, Holly works toward becoming a functioning adult.

## The Faces of Mental Illness

In the course of the novel a variety of faces of mental illness are introduced. Brady is mentally ill to the point that he wants to hurt and kill other people. He seems to be at the most severe end of the mental illness spectrum. Holly and Olivia seem to be on the other end of the spectrum because their lives are disrupted by the symptoms of their mental illnesses but they can lead fairly normal lives if they take medication.

It appears that Brady is a psychopath. A psychopath is a person who engages in reckless or illegal behavior and has no empathy for the people he hurts. Brady fits many of the characteristics of a psychopath as defined by the Hare Psychopathy Checklist. He has superficial charm but is callous and believes himself to be better than other people. He is manipulative, impulsive, and does not take responsibility for his own actions. In his letter to Hodges, Brady goes so far as to tell the police detective that he has no conscience.

Interesting to note is that Brady knows he is mentally ill. It is one reason he will not go to see a doctor about his migraines. He does not want the doctor to recognize his mental illness or diagnose him with something far worse than the disorder Brady thinks he has. "Normal people don't drive into crowds of people or consider taking out the President of the United States in a suicide attack" (148) Brady says of himself.

Holly is another character who is mentally ill. Even though Holly causes some of her own problems because she refuses to take her medication, it appears her mother also amplifies her problems. As Holly tells Jerome and Hodges "It's like she [Holly's mother] puts interference in my head" (332). Even though Holly, like Brady, is mentally ill, she does not want to hurt anyone. Her desire seems to be to prove herself to people and convince them she is not as crazy or unstable as she may first appear. In fact, when Hodges tells her that Brady would not want people to know he was mentally ill, Holly understands and is agitated as she responds "'I know that,' Holly says. 'Of course I do. Because I'm mentally ill, and I try to hide it'" (358).

Another character suffering with mental illness was Olivia. She did not hurt anyone but herself. Janey notes that while her sister took medication and attended therapy sessions, she could live without her illness interrupting her life to a point it was





unbearable. When Olivia stopped taking her medicine, however, Brady was able to take advantage of Olivia's decreased ability to handle stress and easily manipulate her.

## **The Versatility of Using Technology to Commit Crimes**

Through the course of this novel the reader learns that even though technology can be helpful, it can also be manipulated and used to hurt people. Jerome tells Hodges "Any system created by the mind of man can be hacked by the mind of man. You feel me?" (207). Even though computers, cell phones, and keyless locks have been created to help people, these systems can be manipulated to hurt people.

Although they are more convenient, keyless automatic locks on cars can be dangerous. Criminals, like Brady, can capture codes using homemade devices that they can use to later unlock the car without the keys. Brady not only took advantage of this technology when he stole Olivia's car and used it in the City Center Massacre, but he also uses it when he puts the bomb in Hodges' car. A reminder that not everything is safe and sound because we hear our cars lock when we push the magic button is given in the "Kisses on the Midway" section, where Tanya thinks to herself that her car is secure because she has used her keyless remote to lock it.

Computers have opened up the world to a whole new breed of crimes and criminals. Brady, who worked as Olivia's IT man, used his computer knowledge to torment Olivia and then cover up his footsteps once she was dead. Jerome also describes to Hodges how criminals can get viruses onto a computer to which they do not even have access. When Hodges receives the invitation to join the website Under Debbie's Blue Umbrella, Jerome checks it out carefully before Hodges accepts the invitation to make sure the website will not download programs onto Hodges computer that can be used to spy on him or steal his personal information.

The increased use of aliases is another fact of life that computers have instigated. When Brady orders the Gopher-Go online he makes the purchase using an alias. He not only has a fake profile set up but he also has a credit card issued to him bearing this fake name. By using this alias and having his purchases delivered to a safe mail-drop, the police will not be able to trace the purchase of the poison back to him.

## **Hodges' Return to Detective Work**

Brady's letter to Hodges prompts Hodges to return to detective work, a skill that Hodges has not yet allowed to grow rusty. The letter acts both as a catalyst to the novel's plot, and also as a setting-off point for the transformation of Hodges' character. When the reader first meets Hodges, he is suicidal and struggles for meaning and self worth. However, as he begins to investigate again these feelings of worth return to the protagonist. Throughout the novel, Hodges uses the interrogation and people skills he learned as a detective to aid him in discovering the identity of the Mercedes Killer.



When Hodges gets his letter from Mr. Mercedes, he first sits down and studies it. He looks for common phrases and markers that identify Brady's writing. One of the most obvious "points of identification" (142) that he finds is Brady's use of the word "perk" instead of "perp." He also discovers that among other markers, Brady uses one sentence paragraphs, fancy words and lots of exclamation points in his writing. He also notes the killer is computer savvy.

After Hodges gets a copy of the letter that Mr. Mercedes sent to Olivia, he compares it to the content of the one he received. He notes that the intent of the letter the man sent Olivia is almost opposite that of the one he sent Hodges. From the writing Hodges can tell the killer intended his letter to Hodges to be gloating while the letter to Olivia is intended to elicit Olivia's feelings of remorse.

When Hodges begins his active investigation into the identity of the Mercedes Killer, his ability to read people as well as the interrogation techniques he learned while on duty become useful to him. One of the most significant instances where Hodges uses his people skills to get himself out of a tight spot is when he is approached by Radney Peeples, the security guard for the Sugar Heights community. Hodges is not only able to befriend Peeples because he is a police officer but turns their encounter into a friendly one when he comments on Peeples' unusual name. When he is talking to Peeples, Hodges can additionally tell when the man is trying to dodge his question or make up a lie by the way he looks up to the left before answering Hodges' questions.

When Pete questions Hodges about his relationship with Janey, Hodges is able to dodge Pete's interrogation tricks because many of them were taught to him by Hodges. For instance, when Pete calls Hodges the day after his initial interrogation of Hodges about his relationship with Janey Pete tries to get Hodges to say something in order to break a silence instigated by Pete. Remembering that he was the one who taught Pete that trick Hodges does not fall for the trick and give away information.

## Horrorific Deaths

One characteristic of King's writing is that his characters generally die horrific deaths. The only character in this novel that dies relatively peacefully is Mrs. Wharton who has a stroke after Hodges and Janey talked to her about Olivia's killer. The other characters who meet their end meet them in violent, gory and tragic ways. King speaks to the idea that people enjoy reading about tragic deaths through Brady when Brady writes to Hodges in his letter: "I think a great many people would enjoy doing what I did, and that is why they enjoy books and movies (and even TV shows these days) that feature Torture and Dismemberment, etc., etc., etc." (24).

All of the members of Brady's immediate family suffer tragic deaths. His father, Norm, died when he accidentally put his hand on a live electrical wire while working as a lineman for Central States Power. Norm was not only electrocuted with enough power to melt his hand, he also fell forty feet from the cherry-picker in which he had been working. Next to go is Brady's little brother, Frankie. Because Frankie was mentally



retarded after he choked on an apple slice and was deprived of oxygen, his mother kicked his favorite toy down the stairs hoping Frankie would fall down the stairs in an attempt to get it. When Frankie did not try to go down the stairs on his own, Brady followed his mother's lead and pushed his little brother. Frankie did not die immediately. It is noted that he broke his neck in the fall but was still breathing when Brady and his mother got to the bottom of the stairs. Brady's mother smothered Frankie with a pillow, finishing the boy off.

Deborah Hartsfield, the mother of Brady and Frankie, dies perhaps the most grotesque and drawn out death of all of the members of her family. She is poisoned with strychnine when she eats hamburger meat she found in Brady's refrigerator that had been laced with rodent killer. Brady comes home to find his mother having convulsions and asking him to call 911. She had probably been suffering for several hours already since she ate the poisoned meat for lunch. Instead of calling for help or even staying with her while she dies, Brady goes downstairs to his computers until he feels certain that she is dead.

The victims of the Mercedes Killer also suffered tragic gory deaths. The novel describes how people were dismembered when they were hit by the car. Janice Cray and her daughter as well as Augie were hit directly by the car. Augie's arm was caught in the grille of the car when it was discovered by the police. Another character who is dismembered when she dies is Janey. Janey is blown to bits when Brady detonates a bomb in the car she is driving. The only part of her that seems to be recognizable is the arm that Hodges sees in the gutter and covers with his coat.



# Styles

## Point of View

This novel is told from the third-person point of view of an omniscient narrator but the focus centers on different characters in different parts of the novel. The entire first part of the novel, for instance, is told with a focus on Augie, one of the people who are killed by Mr. Mercedes at the job fair. The majority of the remainder of the novel is told with a focus on either Brady or Hodges. The author switches back and forth between these two focuses as he tells the stories of Brady and Hodges as they try to outsmart and outfrustrate each other. There are also short pieces of the story where Jerome and Holly serve as the focus of the story. An area of focus for Jerome takes place when he goes to Olivia's house to investigate what might have been put her computer. An area of focus for Holly is found when she is sneaking up on Brady intending to hit him with the Happy Slapper.

One significant feature of King's narration is that he chooses to build a story up to a point and then put off giving the reader a key piece of information. For instance, there are several points where Hodges sends messages to Brady through the Umbrella site but the reader does not learn the text of the message until Brady reads them in a later section of the novel. King also teases his reader by not telling him that Brady has purchased a wheelchair to help him get into the MAC for the 'Round Here concert. The narrator only notes that Brady bought a large object but waits until just before the concert to share with the reader what that object is.

## Language and Meaning

One of the significant aspects of the language in this novel is the way that characters are given distinguishing features in their language and the way they speak. For instance, Aunt Charlotte and Uncle Henry are always making what seem like announcements instead of statements or conversation. Aunt Charlotte is often sniveling and whining when she talks. Although Holly is described at first as mumbling in a way few people can understand her, she comes to a point where she gains self-confidence and speaks to her mother in a way that is described as a revival preacher. Tyrone, Jerome's alter ego, speaks in heavy jive talk.

There are many instances in which characters, and Brady in particular, will play with words. For instance: "Out with a bang, and fuck you, Detective Hodges. Fuck you very much" (330). In this quote Brady plays on the rhyming qualities of the words "thank you" and "fuck you," giving his statement a different meaning from the traditional words of gratitude. In another instance, Brady plays on the similarity of "ret."—an abbreviation for retired—and "rest." "The Det is definitely Ret. Ret in peace, Detective Hodges" (292).

## Structure

This novel is divided into eight large parts, each of which has a title. The first part of the novel, “Gray Mercedes,” establishes important exposition by describing the morning that Brady drove the car into the crowd at the job fair. The second, “Det.-Ret.,” sets up the rising action of the narrative when Hodges receives his first letter from the Mercedes Killer. This catalytic event sets the plot in motion. The third part, “Under Debbie’s Blue Umbrella,” develops further tension in describing the way Hodges infuriates Brady with messages sent through a computer chat site.

In “Poison Bait,” the action and suspense build as Brady decides to poison Jerome’s dog with Gopher-Go; when his mother instead eats the poisoned meat and dies, Brady’s anger and desire for revenge accelerate and he sends Hodges a threat that he will kill him. In “Call for the Dead,” Janey, Hodges’ girlfriend, is killed when Brady plants a bomb in Hodges’ car. Hodges ends the section by trying to put together the clues he has about the Mercedes Killer so he can identify the man who killed Janey. The climax of the novel occurs in the section titled “Kisses on the Midway,” when Hodges, Holly, and Jerome identify Brady, uncover his mass murder plot and put an end to it.

“Proclamation” is the shortest part of the book including only the text of the mayor’s proclamation for Holly and Jerome. This section represents the falling action of the narrative. The final part, “Blue Mercedes,” comprises the plot’s denouement and updates the reader on the lives of each of the four main characters since Brady’s capture. The author also gives a lead-in to the next installment of this three-part series of books by having Brady wake from his coma at the end of the novel. Each of these eight parts is divided into smaller sections notated only with a number.

The novel is told in a basically linear format. The author goes back in time in the first part of the story to describe the circumstances of the City Center Massacre. This part of the novel is told in the past tense. In the second part of the novel the tense switches to present tense. Background information is given to the reader either through flashbacks or conversations between two or more characters.

## Quotes

Augie was familiar with these from movie theaters and the bank where he was currently overdrawn, and understood the purpose: to cram as many people as possible into as small a space as possible.”

-- Narrator (Gray Mercedes)

**Importance:** This quote not only makes reference to the bad financial shape in which Augie finds himself, it also describes the way the people are crammed into a small space, making it easy for the Mercedes Killer to ram a car into the crowd.

I imagine if there was ever a ‘perk’ you wanted to catch, Detective Hodges, it was the man who deliberately drove into the Job Fair crowd at City Center last year, killing eight and wounding so many more. (I must say I exceeded my own wildest expectations.)”

-- The Mercedes Killer (written in a letter) (Det.-Ret., Section 3)

**Importance:** The Mercedes Killer uses the fact that he has not yet been caught by the police to goad Hodges. Brady believes Hodges failed in his career because he did not catch him. He hopes that Hodges feels the same.

Unless he gets caught fooling with this shit, that is, and then he’s apt to be on the wrong side of the metal table.”

-- Narrator (Det.-Ret., Section 7)

**Importance:** Hodges realizes that if he is caught investigating the City Center Massacre on his own, he could be prosecuted for not turning evidence in the case over to the police department.

From behind the wheel of his little Mr. Tasty truck, which is covered with happy kid decals and jingles with happy recorded bells, Brady waves. The niggerkid waves back and smiles. Sure he does. Everybody likes the ice cream man.”

-- Narrator (Det.-Ret., Section 22)

**Importance:** Brady believes that he has the ultimate innocuous job as the ice cream man. He has a cover he can use to spy on Hodges and the other residents of the neighborhood. The idea that everyone likes the ice cream man is repeated several different times in the course of the novel.

They are people of little vision, as stupid as ants crawling around their hill. A mass killer is serving them ice cream, and they have no idea.”

-- Narrator (Under Debbie’s Blue Umbrella, Section 1)

**Importance:** Brady claims his superiority over the people of the neighborhood as he thinks how he has gotten away with a mass murder and is serving them ice cream.



He lied a lot in that letter, each lie calculated to wind Hodges up a little more, and his bogus sex-fantasies weren't the greatest of them."

-- Narrator (Under Debbie's Blue Umbrella, Section 5)

**Importance:** Brady admits he included many lies in the letter that he wrote to Hodges but that the main reason he wrote the letter to Hodges was to get him riled up about not having caught the City Center killer.

I want to know who meddled with her, who toyed with her until she killed herself, and nobody in the police department cares. They'd like to catch the man who used her car to kill those people, oh yes, but about my sister— may I be vulgar?— they don't give a shit."

-- Janey (Under Debbie's Blue Umbrella, Section 7)

**Importance:** When Janey employs Hodges to help her find who tormented her sister to the point she killed herself she indicates to Hodges that the police did not care about what happened to her sister. Even though Hodges is beginning to realize at this point that he might not have been entirely fair to Olivia he is still protective of his fellow officers.

Both Jerome and Janey are probably safe, but probably isn't good enough. Mr. Mercedes is a random bundle of homicide, and Hodges has set out on a course of deliberate provocation."

-- Narrator (Poisoned Bait, Section 13)

**Importance:** Hodges realizes that because Jerome and Janey are his friends they are in danger of being hurt by Mr. Mercedes if he decides to retaliate against Hodges. Even though Hodges warns both Jerome and Janey to be extra careful, Janey is still killed by the Mercedes Killer.

At least Holly's just weird."

-- Janey (Poisoned Bait, Section 22)

**Importance:** As Janey describes the personalities of her relatives to Hodges she says that Uncle Henry and Aunt Charlotte are gossips. She understates Holly's problems by describing her cousin as being just weird when Holly really has a good deal of neurosis and depression with which she is dealing.

It is, though. He throws open the kitchen refrigerator and there, on the top shelf, is the Baggie of poisoned meat. Only now half of it is gone."

-- Narrator (Poisoned Bait, Section 27)

**Importance:** Brady had bought rodent poisoning and hamburger meat with the intention of poisoning Jerome's dog as retaliation against Hodges. Before he had a chance to feed the meat to the dog Brady's mother found the hamburger and fixed herself a meal. She died from strychnine poisoning.





Maybe, he thinks drearily, I just ought to kill myself now and be done with it. Get rid of these awful thoughts. These snapshots from hell.”

-- Narrator (Call For the Dead, Section 4)

**Importance:** At one point, just after his mother has died after eating the poisoned hamburger meat, Brady wonders if he should just commit suicide. He knows that it would be one way to stop seeing the images of his dead little brother and his dead mother.

Don't you ever let me hear you call them the vics, Sledge told him. That shit's strictly for assholes and burnouts. Remember their names. Call them by their names.”

-- Frank Sledge (Call For the Dead, Section 13)

**Importance:** The detective who trained Hodges told him not to ever call the people in cases vics but instead to call them by their names. He challenged Hodges to treat them as people and not just dead bodies. It is while getting to know Janey and Holly that Hodges realizes how far he has wandered from Sledge's advice.

The chance of someone dialing this disposable's number by mistake and blowing his control room sky-high is small, but why risk it? The chances of his mother finding that poisoned meat and cooking it for her lunch were also small, and look how that turned out.”

-- Narrator (Call For the Dead, Section 14)

**Importance:** After his mother found and ate the poisoned hamburger meat Brady had prepared for Odell, Jerome's dog, in Brady's personal refrigerator, he decides he cannot be too careful. For this reason he turns off the cellphone he has connected to the plastic explosives in his basement control room.

Something else keeps coming into his mind, something that has nothing to do with anything: She thinks they walk among us.”

-- Narrator (Call For the Dead, Section 31)

**Importance:** Although Hodges did not at first take seriously Mrs. Melbourne's suggestion that he check out the ice cream man when he canvassed his neighborhood looking for anyone who might be behaving suspiciously he cannot get the comment that another neighbor made to him about Mrs. Melbourne out of his mind.

No, not that (probably not that), but beating the shit out of him would be excellent. For Olivia. For Janey. For Janice and Patricia Cray. For all the other people Mr. Mercedes killed and maimed at City Center the year before. People so desperate for jobs they got up in the middle of the night and stood waiting in a dank fog for the doors to open. Lost lives. Lost hopes. Lost souls.”

-- Narrator (Kisses on the Midway, Section 1)

**Importance:** Hodges thinks how satisfying that it would be to be able to punish the Mercedes Killer for all of the innocent deaths he has caused.



He really has no idea if he'll be able to get this rolling bomb into the Mingo Auditorium . . . but he had no idea if he'd be able to escape from City Center after the deed was done, either."

-- Narrator (Kisses on the Midway, Section 5)

**Importance:** When Brady actually arrives at the MAC and hooks up all of the explosives he has stowed in his wheelchair he doubts if he will be successful but remembers that he doubted he would be able to pull off his plans at the City Center either but had better luck than he had thought.

It's obvious to him that Jerome is delighted with her, and he feels the same (more or less in spite of himself), but it's humbling to find he's been scooped by a Lexapro-dependent neurotic."

-- Narrator (Kisses on the Midway, Section 6)

**Importance:** Although Jerome has already worked with Holly at Olivia's house Hodges has not yet experienced how intelligent the emotionally stunted girl is. He recognizes how much Jerome like her but cannot help but feel humiliated that Holly, with all her problems, discovered where Brady worked before he did.

Brady Hartsfield is the ice cream man!"

-- Jerome (Kisses on the Midway, Section 9)

**Importance:** After Jerome sees Brady's photograph he recognizes that the man they are looking for is the same man who drives the ice cream truck in their neighborhood. It is this job that gave Brady the opportunity to spy on Hodges.

Hodges realizes that if catching Mr. Mercedes is more important to anyone on earth than it is to him, that person is Holly Gibney. Maybe for the first time in her life she's doing something that matters. And doing it with others who like and respect her."

-- Narrator (Kisses on the Midway, Section 17)

**Importance:** Because Holly's aunt and her cousin were killed by the Brady Hodges realizes that she has even more motive to catch him than Hodges does. Hodges also knows the if they are successful in catching the murderer, it will give Holly a chance to prove herself.

These girls will remember this night for the rest of their lives. The music. The excitement. The beachballs flying above the swaying, dancing crowd. They will read about the explosion that didn't happen in the newspapers, but to the young, tragedies that don't happen are only dreams."

-- Narrator (Kisses on the Midway, Section 42)

**Importance:** After Hodges loses consciousness as a result of his heart attack, the narrator tells the reader how the girls who had attended the 'Round Here concert would never fully appreciate how close they came to being killed or maimed.



You may want to come, Dr. Babineau,' she says. 'It's Mr. Hartsfield. He's awake.'"  
-- The Nurse (Blue Mercedes, Section 2)

**Importance:** At the very end of the novel about seventeen months after Holly hit him with the Happy Slapper, Brady wakes from the coma caused by his brain damage. It had been doubtful that Brady would wake from his coma.