

"Dark, unsettling, and full of surprises...  
a fast-paced, spine-tingling read."

—**MEGAN MIRANDA**, *New York Times*  
bestselling author of *The Perfect Stranger*



# MISTER TENDER'S GIRL

USA TODAY Bestselling Author  
**CARTER WILSON**

# READING GROUP GUIDE

1. *Mister Tender's Girl* is inspired by the real case of two teenagers and the iconic internet monster Slender Man. After reading the book, what comparisons can you make? How do they differ, and how are they similar?
2. How does it make you feel to know there is something close to nonfiction in *Mister Tender's Girl*?
3. Is there a character in *Mister Tender's Girl* that resonates more strongly with you than others? If so, why?
4. What similarities did you see between Alice's mother and Jack?
5. Alice feels a connection to her father whenever she remembers Chancellor's Kingdom, the childhood story he used to tell her and Thomas. Do you have any special books or stories from your childhood that remind you of a special person, and how do they still influence you today?
6. Did you guess the identity of Mister Tender before the end of the book, and if so, what are the clues that led you to your conclusion? If you did not, who did you think was stalking Alice?

7. The Glassin twins were very young when they committed their crime and were heavily influenced by a dark, persuasive figure. Do you still hold them accountable for Alice's attack? If not, who do you think is ultimately responsible, and why?
8. What did you make of Richard's involvement in Alice's situation? Why do you think he went out of his way to save her from Mister Tender?
9. The internet has a lot of shadows that can endanger privacy, shield abuse, and allow anonymity. Has this book made you think differently about online life? In what ways has it made you more curious or cautious to explore?
10. Without the medication, how do you feel Thomas will cope? In what ways has he shown he can thrive (or not) throughout the book?
11. How do you think Alice fares after the story ends? Did you interpret her triumph as strength, or something more fragile or sinister? Do you think it's even possible to let go of something so formative—and do you think she would even want to?

# A CONVERSATION WITH THE AUTHOR

*Mister Tender's Girl* pulls from a real true crime story. When did you first hear about it, and in what way did it plant the seeds for your book?

I remember first reading about the Slender Man case online, soon after the crime took place. I was both horrified and drawn to the story. About three paragraphs in, I stopped reading because I knew that idea was going to form the basis for my next book. I didn't want to read any more because I didn't want to be too tainted by the actual series of events. To this day, I still haven't read very much about the Slender Man crime or the girls involved.

How did you come up with the character of Mister Tender and his chilling means of persuasion?

He took a few different incarnations, but I knew his name was going to be Mister Tender—that name just popped in my head and felt right. And after a while, it occurred to me that Tender could mean he was a bartender. And what are bartenders good at? Listening and

giving advice. So then I thought about those characteristics being attributed to someone evil, and Mister Tender eventually took shape.

**What research did you do to further understand the effects of posttraumatic stress disorder and panic attacks, both of which play a large part of Alice's development?**

Fairly extensive online research, and in particular, I remember an article where sufferers of PTSD were asked to write down what a panic attack felt like to them in just a sentence or two. It was harrowing, powerful stuff and really painted a dark picture more effectively than any clinical analysis. I thought back to those images quite a bit when writing about Alice.

**What draws you to the thriller genre?**

A few things. I enjoy tension, because without it, stories wouldn't be all that interesting. And I love personal stakes. The idea of an everyday person in an extraordinary situation. I want the reader to be able to put themselves in the protagonist's place and think, "What would I do? How would I get out of this?" And, more than anything, I love writing paranoia. That sense of *all is not right here*. Taken together, all the things I love to write point very directly to the thriller/suspense genre.

**Are you an outliner or a "panster"? (warning—spoilers ahead!)**

I'm the very definition of a pantser. I never outline—I just start with an opening scene that intrigues me and take it from there. I have no idea what the story is about for about the first one hundred pages, and certainly no clue of how it will end. It's all a huge puzzle that I try to figure out as I go along. A great example in this book is Brenda's

involvement with everything. She was a character I had written in as a friend to Alice, and I had no idea she was going to be a part of the sinister side of things until the chapter where that is actually revealed. It just happened, and I was surprised as anyone by it.

**Your book is full of fantastic twists! Do you have any advice for aspiring writers hoping to keep readers on their toes?**

Well, again, I ascribe that ability to my pantsner nature. If I don't know what's going to happen next, usually the reader won't know either. That makes for terrific twists (and often a lot of editing). But my advice for aspiring writers is not to lean toward too much structure. If a good idea for a twist suddenly pops in your head, pursue it, even if it takes you on a different course from what you were planning. It won't always work, but when it does, the results may be better than you'd ever hoped.

**What does your writing space look like?**

Mostly like a Starbucks. Sometimes I write at home, but I do 90 percent of my writing in the mornings in my hometown coffee shop—I like having the energy of people around me, even if I pop on my headphones and dive into work.

I order a double espresso every day, and they even have a special little cup for me. I'm quite fancy.

**What author inspires you, and why?**

If I had to choose one, I'd be hard-pressed not to say Stephen King. He's masterful both in his scope of work and his ability to capture nuances of characters with an efficiency of words. I've always

been impressed with his ability to create tension and fear with just a few choice phrases. His books are long, but they're not overwritten. They always feel edited to just the point they need to be, which is a really difficult thing to do.

**Besides writing, what else are you passionate about?**

Family, exercise, and travel. The hard part is trying to balance everything.

**If there's one thing you'd like readers to take away from *Mister Tender's Girl*, what would it be?**

I suppose more than anything I want the readers to feel that they got their money's worth from my story. That they read something different, something a bit out of the ordinary, and with characters who stick with them even after they've finished the book. The best compliment I've ever received is when readers tell me about a character they keep coming back to in their mind. That's pretty satisfying.