

No Mercy (EXCERPT)

By Carl Alan Smith

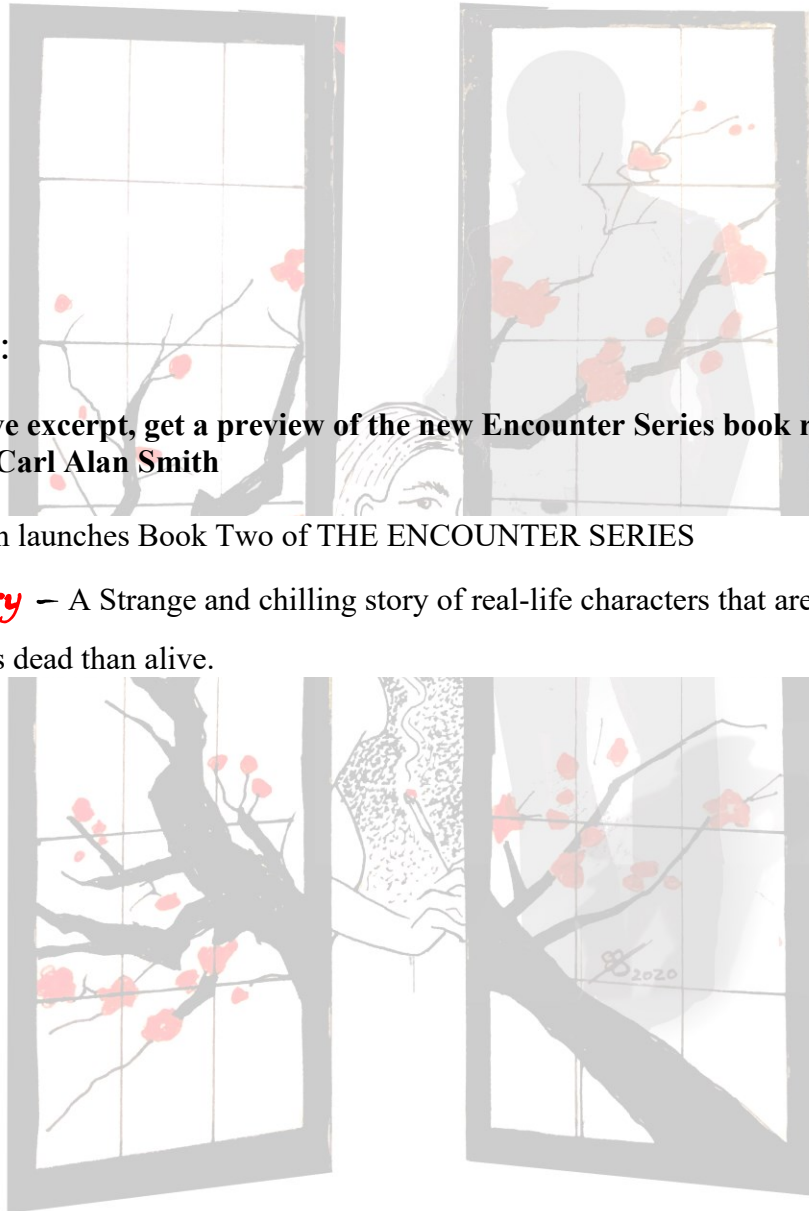
Mystery /Thriller

Description:

In this exclusive excerpt, get a preview of the new Encounter Series book release – from: Author Carl Alan Smith

Carl Alan Smith launches Book Two of THE ENCOUNTER SERIES

with *No Mercy* – A Strange and chilling story of real-life characters that are more dangerous dead than alive.



Chapter 2

The Way It Is

The house was a tan stucco villa, a prominent residence located in upscale Paradise Valley, Arizona. The front yard was neatly landscaped, oleander trees were beginning to flower and bougainvillea hedges in stunning colors of red and purple and pink were perfectly shaped and groomed to perfection. From the back, a private golf course extended throughout the neighborhood with perfectly manicured greens accented by hedges that were neatly squared.

Since her voluntary separation from the United States Army, Stella Vaughn quickly found employment at a Center Manager at major call center that handled defense contracts. There wasn't any doubt in anyone's mind that Stella and Tyrone Street would enter into a romantic relationship. As the days and nights sped past, there wasn't anywhere in town where you wouldn't see the two of them together.

They were...inseparable.

And, for good reason.

Stella was the epitome of angelic goodness.

She was madly in love with Tyrone Street from the moment they met in the Nevada desert. They shared the same feelings but there was one problem. Although Stella was willing to express and share her feelings publicly or privately about how she felt about him, Tyrone, on the other hand, was reluctant to do the same.

And there was something, else.

Tyrone had a tendency to put his job ahead of their relationship. At every opportunity when there was an important function, dinner party, social outing in town that Stella wanted him to escort her to, something always came up pertaining to his job and he'd leave her wanting. All wasn't lost as far as Tyrone was concerned. To make things right, in his mind, as a replacement, he'd have two members from his CREW, Johnny Thompson or Nathan James fill in for him. At his request they were willing to take Stella to different locations just to make sure she was able to have a good time and not be stuck at home while he was out and about taking his job seriously.

Questions about home and family and being wanted were beginning to dominate Stella's thinking until one day she'd finally had enough. She was starting to have second thoughts about why she was even in an absentee relationship with Tyrone. She was starting to wonder...if she

even felt any love for him. The time for making sacrifices was over as far as Stella Vaughn was concerned.

It was an early Saturday morning, and once again Stella Vaughn found herself waking up trying to come to grips with how she felt about being neglected by Tyrone. How she felt about him choosing his job over their relationship. After a hard look in the mirror, she vowed to keep her distance from Tyrone.

She'd had all she could take and could take no more.

That lazy side grin of his that always melted her heart would not change what she had already made up her mind to do regarding their relationship. She quickly packed her bags, called Johnny and Nathan. They arrived shortly after receiving her call.

Stella stormed out of the house, got in the car.

As she pushed her way past him, Nathan could see that her crystal blue eyes had the look of anger.

“Wha-what’s going o-o-on, Stella, Nathan asked interested?”

“Just take me to the fucking airport?”

She was sweating and her skin color was starting to turn blue...a result of what happens when she’s really upset.

“You want to talk about this?” Johnny asked concerned.

“There’s nothing to discuss! Your boy is an idiot! He cares more about his fucking job than he cares about me!”

Tyrone pulled up in his car during her tirade.

“Stella...” He said then smiled. “You’re upset. What’s going on?”

“That’s just like you, Tyrone...!” She barked. “Leave it to you to show up all nonchalant like ain’t nothing happening, like everything’s cool then you got the nerve to ask that dumb ass question!”

“I can’t address your concerns if you won’t let me. Tell me what’s got you so upset. You’re blue all over. So, you must be really pissed about something?”

“Yes, I’m blue! I was born that way. When I get mad or upset that what happens! Which means, I’m really fuckin’ pissed off at you!”

“Why...?”

“I got all these nice things to wear and nowhere to go because you’re always gone somewhere. Off somewhere fuckin’ around with that goddamn Stephanie Taylor!”

“C’mon, Stella...you know about Director Taylor.”

“Yeah, I know about her. And I think there’s more going on with y’all two.”

“I work for her. You know this.”

“She calls and you drop everything and split no questions asked. I ask you to take me out on a date, spend some time, just, the two of us and you, Tyrone Street, always have a job to do.”

Tyrone grinned and reached out to touch Stella. She backed away.

“C’mon, Stella...you knew when we met what I did for a living.” He took a deep breath and let it out slowly. “I have a commitment to keep and must go when I’m called to do so.”

“I’m sick of waiting around for you.”

“You know when I can’t make it, Johnny and Nathan don’t mind filling in for me. They love taking you anywhere you want to go. You know what I mean?”

“Yeah, right...I know what you mean.” Stella narrowed her eyes.

Johnny Thompson...that brute and Nathan James...Mr. Two-Times. If Johnny ain’t always looking for a good fuck or a fight, then Nathan is struggling just to finish a complete sentence.

“They’re loyal to you, Tyrone and they’re both nice guys but I don’t want to be with them all the time. I want to spend time with you. Can’t you see that?”

“I gotta do what I gotta do...”

“I told you Frankie Beverly and Maze was in town this weekend and I bought this really nice outfit that you like. I was expecting you to take me so I could wear it. But, once again, you’re standing me up.”

“Listen, Stella...I told you that something important came up and I have to be in Las Vegas for a few days. I’d like to take you to the concert, but I can’t.”

“You can’t...!” Stella screamed.

“I’m sorry, Stella but that’s the nature of my job.”

“The nature of the job my ass, Tyrone! Stephanie Taylor tells you to jump and you say... ‘How High.’”

“I’m sorry, Stella. I have a job to do. And that’s the way it is.”

Irritably, Stella Vaughn made her way to the car where Johnny and Nathan were waiting to take her to Phoenix Sky Harbor Airport. Before getting into the car to leave, she looked at Tyrone narrowly. "I'm sick of Phoenix and I'm sick of putting up with you, Tyrone!"

And, just like that...Stella left Phoenix.

Her destination...the ATL, Atlanta, Georgia.

Sitting in the back seat of the car with Johnny and Nathan up front, she laid her head against the window with tears in her eyes. She stared into the distance for a long time until finally directing her attention to the rearview mirror.

Johnny was looking right at her. His eyes smiled. "Don't chu worry, Ms Stella." He said still smiling. "Everything is going to be alright."

She was going to Atlanta to clear her mind and to see if she could actually forget that Tyrone Street existed. She continued to look at Johnny in the rearview mirror that is until Nathan half-turned threw his arm across the top of the passenger seat.

"You know...we-we-we gon' have to be in the ATL as long as you're in town." He said then smiled.

"What...?"

"Yep...Tyrone told us to-to keep our eye on you 'till he gets back."

"Ain't that a bitch..." She grinned inwardly. "You two mutts are actually gonna try and keep an eye on me."

Johnny looked at Nathan. They both grinned and shook their heads.

"We-we gon' be in coach on-on the plane. You in-in First Class, so-so we can keep you in-in in sight."

"Just stay out my way, guys. And, when we get to the ATL, y'all can forget about even thinking about putting me up in one of Tyrone's places. I'll take care of my own living arrangements."

Johnny and Nathan wasted little time finding their way on to the Delta Airlines Flight. They made their way to their seats in coach while Stella made her way to First Class. As she walked down the aisle to her seat, a tall solitary figure dressed impeccably well was exiting the restroom from the rear of the plane. He was a handsome, white man and he was coming her way.

She cocked her head to one side, studying him carefully as his tall, lean frame got closer and closer to her. His face was welcoming and alive as he inched closer to where she was standing in the aisle, all the while, hoping that his seat was in First Class and that he'd be sitting next to her.

Suddenly, he pulled his ticket from his inside coat pocket.

“Pardon me, pretty lady.” He said looking right at her. “Looks like...I’m sitting next to the window.”

“Wait a minute...” Stella raised an eyebrow and grinned. “Looks like I’m sitting next to you.”

She took a step out of the aisle intending to sit in her seat.

When she smiled sheepishly and stepped out of the way. He reached for and grabbed the top of the seat and sat down.

Stella eased into her seat.

I don't know this man but he sure is good looking. I'm kinda funny about sitting next to people on planes. Especially people I don't know. He smells so good. I hope he falls asleep so I can sneak a peek at him.

I'm so mad at Tyrone right now that I'm finding myself eager to get to know this handsome fellow. I hope I'm not moving too fast.

Throughout the four-hour flight, out of the corner of her eye, at every opportunity, she took a quick look at him as he appeared to be asleep. Well, she thought he was asleep that is until the Stewardess came rambling down the aisle banging against the seat and he perked up. He turned his head toward her and smiled casually. He didn't speak, just...smiled.

Inwardly Stella froze.

She imagined everything she would say to this hunk when the time came. The time was now and she froze...clammed up.

I be damn! What's wrong with me? My moment is now and I'm blowing it. This man has something, and he's got me speechless.

As bad as things appeared for Stella Vaughn, she didn't have to wait for too long for her luck to change because he looked right at her and said, “looks like we're gonna be on the plane for a while sitting right next to each other.”

“That's right...”

“So, I may as well introduce myself. The name is Reggie...” He smiled. “Reggie Payne. My friends call me, Duce.”

Her crystal blue eyes studied Reggie for a long moment. Any concern, feelings, attraction she may have had for Tyrone Street was very quickly starting to fade.

Meanwhile, Johnny and Nathan took turns finding a way to come forward to ask the Stewardess for extra cookies blaming it on having diabetes just so they could check on Stella. They both saw Reggie sitting next to Stella and came to the conclusion that she was not just interested in him, but she had every intention of leaving Tyrone. After the second visit and Stella making eye contact with Johnny and Nathan, they figured to avoid a serious *blue tirade*, and much to Stella's relief, both men figured it would be best to stay in their assigned seats.

And, not too soon for Reggie Payne.

He went right to work on Stella. It was almost like he had planned it all in advance. The First Class seat right next to her. Stella was beginning to perspire, making her skin clammy. He knew the effect his presence was having on her and he wasted little time taking his game to the next level.

Before she knew what was happening, they were holding hands. Looking deeply into each other's eyes while smiling and making small talk. All the while, it was like Tyrone never existed.

Once the Delta Airlines flight landed, Johnny and Nathan kept a close eye on Stella's every move. They watched them out on the town enjoying the ATL's night life. Going to dinner, concerts, plays...whatever she wanted Reggie Payne made sure she had it ALL. While she was making herself available at his request, what she didn't know about Reggie Payne is that he was filthy rich and well known throughout the ATL.

Then...everything changed for Stella Vaughn.

Just when Stella thought she had someone that was much more caring and loving and would be there for her...something that in her mind she thought Tyrone failed at miserably. She got an unexpected wake up call.

They were having dinner at one of the ATL's elite restaurants when Johnny and Nathan walked in. At first they didn't see Stella and Reggie sitting at her and Tyrone's favorite table in the corner by the bar.

Stella saw them.

"Johnny – Nathan..." She said smiling. "Come over and join us."

"They both turned and saw that Stella was sitting with Reggie Payne and to her Johnny said. "Ahhh, we don't want to intrude on y'all."

Minding their own business, Johnny and Nathan went to their table. When they got there, each man pulled a chair back and sat down. Before they could get comfortable and order food, once again, Stella said to them, “guys c’mon over here and sit with us.”

Almost immediately, Reggie looked right at both men as they made their way to the table. “How y’all doing,” said Johnny. Reggie gave them a hard stare and to them he said. “We’ll be doing much better if you two would go back to your own table. We wanted to be alone. We don’t need you over here getting in the fucking way.”

Shocked, Stella looked at Reggie.

“Why are you talking to them this way, Reggie?” She said, “they won’t be any trouble.”

Johnny and Nathan picked up what Reggie was trying to do. Instead of hanging around and allowing things to get even more out of hand, Johnny grinned and said, “Nathan and I...we don’t want no trouble, Stella. We’ll just go back to our table. Y’all two have a good night, enjoy your dinner.”

When Johnny and Nathan left the table, Stella lit into Reggie.

“What is wrong with you Reggie?” She asked wonderingly. “I’ve known those two guys a lot longer than I’ve known you.”

“You’re my girl, now Stella. And I ain’t sharing you with nobody but me.”

Still stunned by Reggie’s behavior, Stella stared at him in silence. Not knowing whether to increase her anger or just leave the restaurant. She took a deep breath and let it out slowly.

“Just take me home, Reggie.” Stella said glancing back over her shoulder at Johnny and Nathan.”

Reggie sprung to his feet. “Take you home...!”

Stella stood up. “I’m not hungry anymore.”

She started walking away from the table when Reggie reached for and grabbed her arm as she attempted to leave.

“I told you, Reggie, I’m not hungry. I’m ready to leave.”

His grip was tighter than she expected, and Stella’s fear came back full force. Her arm ached under his tight grip, and his manhandling was more than she had ever taken from anyone.

She narrowed her eyes.

For all the things that Tyrone was or was not, he was never this disrespectful...ever! Am I gonna have to go in to flip mode on this sucka or what?

Her own orneriness came to her defense.

“Mutherfucka...!” She shrieked, both hands clinched in a tight fist. “Take your hands off me! You got no right to lay a finger on me!”

Hotly irate, Stella snatched her arm away.

Immediately Johnny and Nathan sprang into action coming to her defense!

Reggie released his grip.

She moved away from him and stood next to Johnny and Nathan.

Embarrassed by his behavior. “I apologize.” Reggie said collecting himself, trying to calm down. “I’m not myself. I acted out of line.” Choosing his words carefully, he looked at Johnny and Nathan sharply. “Forgive me, it was something that should not have happened.”

Feeling better, now Stella gave Johnny and Nathan the nod. She followed them back to their table.

Reggie watched them walk away.

While this was happening, Stella had a look of surprise disgust on her face. Reggie missed her expression of disgust as he was still focusing all of his attention and rage on Johnny and Nathan. Ready to put the unfortunate incident behind her, she gathered herself and began walking toward the entrance followed by Reggie.

“I want you to know,” Stella said without looking at him. “You hurt my arm.”

“I apologize, again for my mistake. Your boyz seemed really eager to jump into our little disagreement.”

“They know the drill.”

As they were leaving the restaurant, Stella was considering how well she might have enjoyed watching Johnny and Nathan ruff Reggie up. But after thinking things through, she realized that she really liked Reggie up until the moment he had his little flare up. So, she left the restaurant, not with Johnny and Nathan but with Reggie Payne mainly because she wanted to make sure that he got out of the place without injury. If nothing else, Johnny and Nathan are Tyrone Street’s dedicated bushwhacking hit squad who’ll do anything for Tyrone, even if it included an extended hospital stay for Reggie Payne.

Before the night was over, both Stella and Reggie had time to put the whole incident to rest. Word was already circulating around town about their troubles at the restaurant. It must have made it all the way to Las Vegas because Tyrone cut his trip short. He took the first available flight to

Atlanta. He wasn't off the Delta Airlines Flight and walking out of the tunnel to make his way to baggage claim before Johnny and Nathan were all over him like two lap dogs fighting over the same bone.

"Welcome back Tyrone." Johnny said smiling.

"How wa-was th-things in Las Vegas?" Nathan said cutting his eyes at Johnny.

"Pretty good..." Tyrone said then turned and faced them. "So..." He raised an eyebrow. "Y'all been keeping an eye out for Stella?"

"Of course," Johnny replied.

"She feeling better, now? When I left, she had her back in a hump. How's she getting along, now?"

"Well..." Johnny said looking at Nathan. "We wanted to tell you about Stella, but we figured since things kinda worked themselves out..."

"Yeah, yeah..." Nathan cut in. "We-we-we didn't think it was something you needed to-to worry a-a-a-a-'bout."

"Wait a minute!" Tyrone barked, his rage mounting. But he quickly checked himself and chilled.

I heard about what happened but couldn't understand why Stella would allow herself to get involved in such a situation with of all people, fuckin' Reggie "Duce" Payne."

Iratly Tyrone looked at Johnny and Nathan and to them he said, "Let's get out of here. We can revisit this conversation, later."

It had been raining all day in Atlanta. The ride home was wet and cold. The tension between Tyrone and his boyz had somewhat settled down...at least for the moment. Tyrone sat in the back seat of the car for a long time not saying a word.

Instead of going straight home, Johnny and Nathan convinced Tyrone to go somewhere quite...somewhere like Club Sync, one the ATL's hot spots for great food, music and the best social experience of a lifetime. Their intent was to take his mind off of the stress around Stella's endeavor with Reggie Payne.

By the time they arrived at Club Sync, the place was a frenzy of activity. Kareem Abdul Ali, one of Tyrone's strike team members and a colleague of Johnny and Nathan, had stationed himself by the entrance and had directed the Matre d' to another location inside the club. Ali figured Tyrone would not be in the mood for any of the Matre d's skinning and grinning.

Casually Tyrone entered Club Sync followed by Johnny and Nathan. Ali trailed them as they followed Tyrone to the dining area where his favored table was ready. He sat down expecting to eat the meal that was prepared for him. Moments later, Stella Vaughn entered the dining area and sat at his table.

Within minutes, Reggie Payne appeared. Johnny and Nathan looked at Ali who threw his hands in the air.

Why the fuck y'all looking at me? How did Reggie's punk ass make it pass all of us to get this close to Tyrone? The only way this could have happened is that Reggie must have already been in the Club, standing back in the shadows of the dining room waiting for an opportunity to corner Stella. But how'd he know she would be at Club Sync on this night of all nights? She don't want nothing else to do with 'em. Someone had to tip him off. And, if that's the case...that someone had to be within our inner circle. If this is true...if this is actually a fact, then we have problems we don't need right now. Especially with General Benson and Smalls and Stone still out there looking to get even.

Stella glanced around anxiously over her shoulder. Her heart thudded as she suddenly realized he was coming after her.

She realized something else, too.

All of Tyrone's CREW were at Club Sync. Positioned strategically in different areas of the dining room. Fred was standing just to her left next to the exit door that led to the hallway. Ali had taken a position at the entrance. He was locked in ready for things to go sideways while Johnny and Nathan were in close proximity to Tyrone's private table.

Stella was so intent upon keeping things calm and handling her own business before Tyrone could intervene, that she failed to see Reggie standing in the aisle next to their table until it was too late.

After a long moment, Tyrone was ready to eat his meal, but Reggie's appearance got his immediate attention.

Tyrone raised his head slowly.

His eyes narrowed.

He lowered his fork to the plate as Reggie continued standing in the aisle glaring down at him. Expecting the unexpected and wondering what was going on with Reggie, Tyrone looked from Stella to Reggie before scanning the club for Johnny, Nathan and Ali.

“So, you’re Tyrone Street...” Reggie said taking deep breaths his chest heaving.

“Can I help you with something...?” Tyrone asked and watched as Stella adjusted her weight in the chair.

“What’d I tell you, Stella...?” Reggie cried angrily moving toward her. Before Johnny and Nathan could step in, Stella sprung to her feet! In the next instant Reggie reached and grabbed her with both hands shaking her violently!

“I’m the only man for you! You’re my woman, now! If I can’t have you then I’ll kill anyone that gets in the way...that includes, Tyrone and his two goons!”

Stella was furious with Reggie. So much so, her complexion was completely blue now! Her right hand met his jaw with enough force to send him stumbling backwards.

“You don’t know me well enough to put your hands on me, mutherfucka!” She warned.

Dazed, Reggie gathered himself and lunged at Stella. It was then that Tyrone came to her aid throwing Reggie violently against one of the tables. His face slammed against the edge of the table. Before he could gather himself and stand up, Tyrone punched him in the face and abdomen and watched Johnny and Nathan grab then remove him forcefully from Club Sync.

Things were calm, now.

And, as Tyrone followed Johnny and Nathan out of the dining area, Ali wandered over to the table.

“Blue Lady...” Ali grinned. “That Tyrone Street, he sure is the right man to have around when shit really counts. Ain’t he...?”

“Amen...” Stella said then sat back down in the chair. Closing her eyes as she tried to slow her pounding heart, she watched her color return to normal.

How much I mean to Tyrone and my feelings for him have been slammed home with brute force. Whatever it is about me that caught Reggie’s eye and that Tyrone ignored, obviously whetted Reggie’s curiosity so much so that he was willing to physically abuse me if he couldn’t have me all to himself.

You never know what you have until it’s gone or you try something different.

In the future, if Tyrone and I can’t be together, can’t make our thing work...I’m gonna have to be a bit more careful when it comes to the type of man, I’m willing to be with...willing to trust.

How could I have let Reggie's charm blind me so that I forgot what I already had in Tyrone. Maybe it was the fact that they are as different as day and night. I am so pissed at myself right now for having trusted Reggie Payne.

Tyrone has his ways. He's career first, and everything else second. I knew what I was getting into when I first encountered him and the CREW in the Nevada desert. I thought I could change him.

I'm finding out that he's not going to change regardless of how much he knows I love him or how much he loves me and of course I wouldn't be so attracted to him if he did change. I can't believe how fuckin' dumb...how much of a fool I was.

I let my blue emotions control my sense of reason. 'Tyrone is right, our life, our relationship...That's just the way it is.'

