

THE SUNDAY TIMES BESTSELLER

CHRIS
CARTER



CROSS YOUR HEART
AND HOPE TO DIE.
QUICKLY.

THE
CRUCIFIX
KILLER

THE NEW ROBERT HUNTER THRILLER

The Crucifix Killer

The Crucifix Killer

Chris Carter



London · New York · Sydney · Toronto

A CBS COMPANY

First published in Great Britain by Simon & Schuster UK Ltd, 2009
A CBS COMPANY

Copyright © Chris Carter, 2009

This book is copyright under the Berne Convention.

No reproduction without permission.

® and © 1997 Simon & Schuster Inc. All rights reserved.

The right of Chris Carter to be identified as author of this work has been asserted in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988.

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Simon & Schuster UK Ltd
1st Floor
222 Gray's Inn Road
London WC1X 8HB

www.simonandschuster.co.uk

Simon & Schuster Australia
Sydney

A CIP catalogue record for this book
is available from the British Library

Trade Paperback ISBN 978-1-84737-538-4

Hardback ISBN 978-1-84737-622-0

eBook ISBN 9781847376220

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are either a product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual people living or dead, events or locales is entirely coincidental.

Typeset by M Rules

Printed in the UK by CPI Mackays, Chatham ME5 8TD

To Samantha Johnson, for simply being everything.

Acknowledgements

Writing is always regarded as a solitary occupation, but I owe a great debt to several people who have generously given me their time and input, in so many areas.

My love and thanks to Samantha Johnson, the most giving and understanding person I know, and who tirelessly read and re-read the initial manuscript so many times, even I lost count.

Thank you also to Coral Chambers for the encouragement and for pointing me in the right direction and to Andrea McPhillips for the corrections and the chats.

My sincere thanks also goes to all the incredible people at Simon & Schuster UK who have done an outstanding job and to my phenomenal editors, Kate Lyall Grant in the UK and Pia Götz and Sybille Uplegger in Germany, whose great input and valuable suggestions made the story and the characters in this thriller come alive.

Words can't express how thankful I am to the most passionate, dedicated, thoughtful, determined and extraordinary agents any author could ever hope for – Darley Anderson and Camilla Bolton. I'm the lucky one.

To the fantastic team of extremely hard-working people at the Darley Anderson Literary Agency, my eternal gratitude.

One

Friday, August 3rd, 10:25 a.m.

‘Hello . . . Detective Hunter speaking.’

‘Hello, Robert, I have a surprise for you.’

Hunter froze, almost dropping his coffee cup. He knew that metallic voice very well. He knew when that voice called it meant only one thing – a new, mutilated dead body.

‘Have you heard from your partner lately?’

Hunter’s eyes quickly searched the room in vain for Carlos Garcia.

‘Has anyone heard from Garcia this morning?’ he shouted across the office after pressing the mute button on his cell phone.

The other detectives exchanged silent, puzzled looks and Hunter knew the answer even before it came.

‘Not since yesterday,’ Detective Maurice said shaking his head.

Hunter pressed the mute button once again.

‘What have you done to him?’

‘Do I have your attention now?’

‘What have you done to him?’ Hunter demanded in a firm voice.

‘As I’ve said, it’s a surprise, Robert,’ the metallic voice said laughing. ‘But I’ll give you another chance to make a difference. Maybe this time you’ll put more effort into it. Be at the laundry room down in the basement of the old number 122 Pacific Alley in South Pasadena within the hour. If you bring back-up, he dies. If you don’t make it within the hour, he dies. And trust me, Robert, it’ll be a very slow and painful death.’ The line went dead.

Two

Hunter raced down the stairs of the old building in east LA in giant leaps. The deeper he went, the darker and hotter it got. His shirt was covered in sweat, his tight shoes crushing his feet.

‘Where the hell is this laundry room?’ he whispered as he reached the basement.

A glimmer of light was coming from underneath a closed door at the end of a dark corridor. He ran towards it calling his partner’s name.

No answer.

Hunter pulled out his Wildey Survivor double-action pistol and positioned his back against the wall to the right of the door.

‘Garcia . . .’

Silence.

‘Rookie, are you in there?’

A muffled thud came from inside the room. Hunter cocked his gun and took a deep breath.

‘Fuck it!’

With his back still against the outside wall, he pushed the door open with his right hand and in a well-rehearsed move rotated his body into the room, his gun searching for a target. An unbearable smell of urine and vomit forced him to take a step back coughing violently.

‘Garcia . . .’ he called again from the door.

Silence.

From outside Hunter couldn’t see much. The light bulb that hung from the ceiling above a small wooden table in the center of the room was too weak to illuminate it properly. He drew another deep breath and took a step forward.

What he saw made his stomach churn. Garcia had been nailed to a life-size cross inside a Perspex cage. The heavy bleeding from his wounds had created a pool of blood at the base of the cross. He was wearing nothing but his underwear and a barbed-wire crown around his head, the thick metal spikes clearly piercing his flesh. Blood streaking down his face. Garcia looked lifeless.

I'm too late, Hunter thought.

Approaching the cage he was surprised to see a heart monitor inside it. Its line peaking slightly and at steady intervals. Garcia was still alive – just.

'Carlos!'

No movement.

'Rookie!' he shouted.

With great effort Garcia managed to half open his eyes.

'Hang in there, buddy.'

Hunter surveyed the dimly lit room. It was large, fifty-five feet by forty-five he guessed. The floor was littered with dirty rags, used syringes, crack pipes and broken glass. In the corner, to the right of the entrance door he could see an old and rusty wheelchair. On the wooden table in the center of the room sat a small, portable cassette tape recorder and a single note that read *play me first* in large red letters. He pressed the play button and the now familiar metallic voice came blasting out of the tiny speaker.

'Hello Robert, I guess you've made it in time.' Pause.

'You have no doubt realized that your friend needs your help, but for you to be able to help him you have to play by certain rules . . . my rules. This is a simple game, Robert. Your friend is locked inside a bullet-proof cage, so shooting it won't help you. On its door you'll find four colored buttons. One of them opens the cage, the other three – don't. Your task is quite simple – pick a button. If you press the correct one the door will open, you'll be able to free your partner and walk out of the room.'

One chance in four to save Garcia – definitely not great odds, Hunter thought.

‘Now here comes the fun part,’ the tape recorder played on. ‘If you press any of the other three buttons an uninterrupted high-voltage current will be sent directly to the wire crown on your friend’s head. Have you ever seen what happens to a human being while he’s being electrocuted?’ the voice said with a chilling laugh. ‘His eyes burst, his skin crinkles like bacon, his tongue recoils into his mouth ready to choke him to death, his blood boils, bursting vessels and arteries open. It’s quite an exquisite scene, Robert.’

Garcia’s heartbeat went into overdrive. Hunter could see the line on the heart monitor screen peaking faster.

‘And now for the really fun part . . .’

Somehow Hunter knew that the electric current trick wouldn’t be the only twist in that room.

‘Behind the cage I’ve placed enough explosives to obliterate the room you’re in. The explosives are attached to the heart monitor and if it gets to read a flatline . . .’ a longer pause this time. Hunter knew what the metallic voice was about to say next.

‘Boom . . . the room blows. So you see Robert, if you press the wrong button, not only will you watch your friend die knowing that you’ve killed him, but you’ll get to die soon after.’

Hunter’s heart was now beating viciously against his chest, sweat dripping from his forehead and stinging his eyes, his hands shaky and clammy.

‘But you have a choice Robert. You don’t have to save your partner, you can just save yourself. Walk away now and leave him to die alone. No one will know except you. Can you live with that? Will you gamble your life for his? Pick a color, you’ve got sixty seconds.’ A loud beep came from the tape recorder before it went silent.

Hunter saw a red digital display above Garcia’s head light up 59, 58, 57 . . .

Three

Five weeks earlier.

Jenny rubbed her eyes as she got up from the busy table at the Vanguard Club in Hollywood, hoping she didn't look as tired as she felt.

'Where're you going?' D-King asked, sipping his champagne.

Bobby Preston was the best known dealer in northwest Los Angeles, but no one ever called him by his real name, everyone knew him as D-King. The 'D' stood for 'Dealer' as he would deal in just about anything: drugs, girls, cars, guns – for the right price he'd supply you with whatever you wanted.

Jenny was by far his most stunning girl. Her body was flawlessly toned and tanned and her perfect face and smile could charm any men on this earth, D-King was sure of it.

'I just need to retouch my make-up. I'll be right back babe.' She blew him a little kiss and left the exclusive VIP area still holding her champagne glass.

Jenny couldn't handle any more alcohol, not because she was feeling drunk, but because this was her fifth successive night out partying and she'd had enough. She didn't think her life would turn out this way. She never thought she'd become a hooker. D-King had always assured her that she wasn't a working girl. She was a high-class entertainer for gentlemen with extremely good taste and obviously a lot of money, but at the end of the day she was having sex for cash. To her that made her a hooker.

Most of Jenny's clients were perverted old millionaires looking for something they couldn't get at home. Sex was never your normal run-of-the-mill missionary position. They all wanted their money's worth. Bondage, BDSM, spanking, watersports, strap-on sex, it didn't matter. Whatever they

were into, she had to provide, but tonight was no working night. She wasn't being paid by the hour. She wasn't out with one of her deadbeat clients. She was out with the boss and she had to party until he said it was over.

Jenny had been to the Vanguard Club plenty of times. It was one of D-King's favorite hangouts. There was no denying that the club was a magnificent luxurious extravaganza. From its enormous dance floor to its laser-light show and great stage. The Vanguard could hold up to two thousand people, and tonight the club was packed to capacity.

Jenny made her way towards the bar closest to the ladies' room where two barmen seemed rushed off their feet. The entire club was a tremendous buzz of beautiful people, the great majority of them in their twenties and early thirties. Jenny was oblivious to the pair of eyes that followed her from the VIP area to the bar. Eyes that had been on her all night. In fact, they'd been following her for the past four weeks, from nightclub to nightclub and hotel to hotel. Watching her as she pretended to have a good time, as she pleased each and every one of her clients.

'Hi, Jen, are you OK? You look a bit tired,' Pietro, the longhaired barman, asked as Jenny approached the bar. He still spoke with a slight Spanish accent.

'I'm OK, hun, just too much partying I guess,' she said unenthusiastically after catching a glimpse of herself in one of the bar mirrors. Her hypnotic blue eyes seemed to have lost some of their sparkle tonight.

'No rest for the wicked, huh?' Pietro's comment came with a shy smile.

'Not tonight,' Jenny smiled back.

'Can I get you anything?'

'No, I'm OK. I'm still struggling with this one.' She raised her champagne glass giving him a sexy wink. 'I just needed to get away from the party for a little while.'

Pietro and Jenny had flirted a few times but he'd never made a move on her. He knew she belonged to D-King.

'Well, if you need anything just give me a shout.' Pietro went back to preparing cocktails and flipping bottles. A dark-haired woman who had been

standing on the other side of the bar dying to get his attention gave Jenny an evil look that said 'Back off, bitch, I saw him first.'

Jenny swept a hand through her long, wheat-blond hair, placed her champagne glass on the bar counter and turned around to face the dance floor. She enjoyed the club's atmosphere. All those people having fun, dancing, drinking and finding love. OK, maybe not love, she thought, but at least they'd be having sex for pleasure, not money. She wanted to be just like them. This was definitely not the beautiful Hollywood life she'd dreamed of when she left Idaho six years ago.

Jenny Farnborough's fascination with Hollywood started at the age of twelve. The movie theater became her shelter from the never-ending rows between her submissive mother and her overly aggressive stepfather. Films became her escape route, the vehicle that could take her places she'd never been before and she wanted to be a part of it.

Jenny knew that the Hollywood dream was nothing more than a fantasy. Something that existed only in clichéd romantic books and films, and she'd read and watched plenty of those. She had to admit she was a dreamer, but maybe that wasn't such a bad thing. Maybe she'd be the lucky one. She had nothing to lose.

At the age of fourteen she started her first job as a popcorn girl. Jenny saved every dime she earned and by her sixteenth birthday she had enough saved up to leave that godforsaken town behind. She swore she'd never go back to Idaho. Jenny never found out about her mother overdosing on sleeping pills only a week after she'd left.

Hollywood was everything she'd expected it to be. A magical place full of beautiful people, lights and fantasies, but the harsh reality of life in the City of Angels was a far cry from the illusion she'd created. Her savings didn't last long and with no professional training the rejections started piling up like dirty laundry. Her beautiful dream slowly began to turn into a nightmare.

Jenny was introduced to D-King by Wendy Loutrop, another struggling wannabe actress. At first she'd rejected every proposition he'd made her.

She'd heard all the stories about beautiful women coming to Hollywood dreaming of becoming a star only to end up working the streets or for the porn-movie industry. Jenny was determined not to give in. She didn't want to become just another failure story, but her pride had to play second fiddle to her survival instinct, and after several months of phone calls and expensive gifts D-King had himself a new girl.

Jenny never noticed the hand pouring a colorless liquid into her champagne glass. Her eyes were still set on the dancing crowd.

'Hi there, babe, can I buy you a drink?' a tall, blond man standing to her right asked with a bright smile.

'I already have a drink, but thank you for the offer anyway,' she replied politely without locking eyes with the stranger.

'Are you sure? I can order us a bottle of Cristal. What do you say, babe?'

Jenny turned and faced the tall blond man. He was smartly dressed wearing a dark-grey Versace suit, a crisp white shirt with a stiff collar and a blue silk tie. His green eyes were his most striking feature. Jenny had to admit he was an attractive man.

'What's your name?' she said forcing a smile.

'I'm Carl and it's a pleasure to meet you,' he said offering his hand.

Instead of shaking it Jenny had a sip of her champagne. 'Look Carl, you're quite a handsome guy, I'll give you that' – her voice now taking a very sweet tone – 'but trying to pick up a girl by flashing your money around is not a great idea, especially in a place like this. It makes us feel cheap, unless you are looking for a bimbo – is that what you are looking for? A pro?'

'Oh . . . No!' Carl fumbled with his tie nervously. 'Sorry, that's not how I meant it, babe.'

'So you ain't looking for a party girl to show you a *really* good time?' she asked having another sip of her champagne, her eyes now fixed on his.

'No, of course not, hun. Just trying to have a friendly drink, and if there's any chemistry between us . . .' He left the sentence hanging in the air with a shrug of his shoulders.

Very gently, she ran her fingers down his tie before pulling him closer. 'It's a pity you're not looking for a party girl,' she whispered into his left ear.

Carl's smile evaporated into a confused look.

'I could've given you my pimp's number, he's right over there.' She pointed to the VIP area with a sarcastic smile on her lips.

Carl half opened his mouth as if about to say something but no words came out.

Jenny drank the rest of her champagne and gave him a sexy wink before moving away from the bar and into the ladies' room.

The eyes still followed her.

It won't be long now. The drug will soon show its effect.

Jenny was re-applying her lipstick when she started to feel faint. She knew something was wrong. All of a sudden she felt hot and feverish. The walls seemed to be closing in on her. She found it hard to breathe and moved towards the door as quickly as she could. She needed to get out of there.

As she stumbled out of the ladies' room the entire place spun around her. She wanted to go back to D-King's table but her legs weren't responding. Jenny was about to collapse on the floor when a pair of hands grabbed her.

'Are you OK, babe? You don't look so good.'

'I don't feel too well. I think I need . . .'

'You need some air. It's too stuffy in here. Come with me, I'll help you. Let's step outside for a while.'

'But I . . .' Jenny had started to slur her words. 'I need to tell D . . . I have to go back to . . .'

'Later, babe, now you just need to come with me.'

No one noticed Jenny and the stranger walking towards the club exit.

Four

‘Yes, Detective Hunter speaking.’ Hunter finally answered his cell phone after the sixth ring. His voice was deep and the words came out slowly, giving away how few hours sleep he’d had.

‘Robert, where the hell have you been? The captain’s been after you for two hours.’

‘Rookie, is that you? What time is it?’ Hunter’s new sidekick, Carlos Garcia, had been assigned to him only a week ago after the death of his long-term partner.

‘Three in the morning.’

‘What day?’

‘Shit man . . . Monday. Look, you’d better come and have a look at this, we’ve got a really screwed up homicide on our hands.’

‘We’re Homicide Special Section 1, Carlos. Screwed up homicides is all we do.’

‘Well, this one’s a real mess and you’d better get here quick. The captain wants us to run this show.’

‘Uh-huh,’ Hunter replied indifferently. ‘Gimme the address?’

He put his cell phone down and looked around the small, dark, unfamiliar room. ‘Where the hell am I?’ he whispered.

The thumping headache and the terrible taste in his mouth reminded him of how much he’d had to drink the night before and he sunk his head deep into the pillow hoping that would soothe the pain. Suddenly there was movement next to him on the bed.

‘Hi, does that phone call mean you have to go?’ The woman’s voice was soft and sexy with a hint of an Italian accent. Hunter’s surprised eyes fell

over the half-covered body lying next to him. Through the little light coming into the room from the lamp posts outside the window he could just about make out her outline. Quick memories of last night flashed through his mind. The bar, the drinks, the flirting, the cab ride to a stranger's apartment and the long dark-haired woman whose name he couldn't remember. This was the third woman he'd woken up next to in the past five weeks.

'Yeah, I do have to go. I'm sorry,' he sounded casual.

Hunter got up and started looking for his trousers; his headache was more prominent now. His eyes quickly got used to the dimly lit room allowing him to see the woman's face better. She looked to be thirty or thirty-one years old. Her silky, dark hair hung about four inches past her shoulders framing a heart-shaped face with delicate sculpted nose and lips. She was attractive, but not in a Hollywood-movie-star way. Her uneven fringe suited her perfectly and her dark-green eyes carried an unusual and captivating sparkle.

By the bedroom door Hunter found his trousers and underwear – the pair with blue teddy-bear prints.

Too late to feel embarrassed now, he thought. 'Can I use your bathroom?' he asked zipping up his trousers.

'Sure, it's the first door on the right as you come out of the room,' she said sitting up and resting her back against the headboard.

Hunter entered the bathroom and closed the door behind him. After splashing a handful of cold water onto his face, he stared at his reflection in the mirror. His blue eyes looked bloodshot. His skin paler than normal. His face unshaven.

'That's great, Robert,' he said to himself, splashing some more water onto his tired-looking face. 'Another woman who you barely remember meeting, never mind coming back to her apartment. Casual sex is great. It's even better when you can recall having some. I have to cut down on this drinking business.'

After squirting a little toothpaste on his finger he tried to finger-brush his teeth. Suddenly, a new thought entered his mind. What if she's a hooker?

What if I owe her money for something I don't even remember doing? He quickly checked his wallet. The little money he had was still there.

He hand-combed his short blond hair and returned to the bedroom where she was still sitting against the headboard.

'Were you talking to yourself in there?' she asked with a shy smile.

'What? Oh yeah, I do that sometimes, it keeps me sane. Look . . .' He finally managed to find his shirt on the floor next to the bed. 'Do I owe you any money?' he asked sounding breezy.

'What? You think I'm a prostitute?' she replied clearly offended.

Oh shit! He knew he'd blown it. 'No, look . . . It's not like that, it's just . . . It's happened to me before. Sometimes I drink too much and . . . I didn't mean it as an offence.'

'Do I look like a hooker to you?' she asked in an annoyed voice.

'Definitely not,' he replied firmly. 'It was stupid of me thinking such a thing. I'm sorry. I'm probably still half drunk,' he back-paddled as fast as he could.

She regarded him for a moment. 'Look, I'm not the kind of woman you clearly think I am. My job carries a lot of pressure and it's been tough the last few months. I just wanted to let out some steam and have a few drinks. We got talking. You were funny, nice, quite charming even. You could actually hold a decent conversation. Unlike most of the other jerks I meet when I go out. One drink led to another and we ended up in bed. Obviously a mistake on my part.'

'No . . . Look . . .' Hunter tried to find the right words, ' . . . sometimes I say stuff without thinking. And the truth is . . . I don't remember much of last night. I'm really sorry. And I feel like an asshole now.'

'So you should.'

'Believe me, I do.'

Her eyes were fixed on Hunter. He sounded sincere.

'Anyway, if I were a hooker, judging by your underwear and clothes I don't think you'd be able to afford me.'

‘Ooh. That was low punch. I was already embarrassed enough without you mentioning it.’

She smiled.

Hunter was glad his back-paddling had worked. ‘Do you mind if I make myself a quick cup of coffee before I go?’

‘I don’t have any coffee, only tea, but you are more than welcome to it if you like. The kitchen is just down the hall.’

‘Tea? I think I’ll pass. I need something stronger to wake me up.’ He finished buttoning up his shirt.

‘You sure you can’t stay?’ She pulled the covers back revealing her naked form. Great curves, nicely formed breasts and there was no hair anywhere on her body. ‘Maybe you could show me how really sorry you are for calling me a hooker.’

Hunter stood there for a moment as if debating what to do. He bit his bottom lip and shook the thought from his head. His headache reminded him not to do that again.

‘I promise you, if I could stay, I would.’ He was now fully dressed and ready to go.

‘I understand. Was that your wife on the phone?’

‘What? No, I’m not married. That was work, trust me.’ The last thing Hunter wanted was for her to think he was a cheating husband.

‘OK,’ she said matter-of-factly.

Hunter’s eyes ran the length of her body once again and he felt an exciting tingle. ‘If you give me your number, maybe we could meet up again sometime.’

She studied him for a long moment.

‘You’re thinking I won’t bother to call right?’ Hunter said sensing her reluctance.

‘Oh, you read minds as well? That’s a neat party trick.’

‘You should see what I can do with a deck of cards.’

They both smiled.

‘Plus, there’s nothing I like more than proving people wrong.’