

# Another Arbor

Catching the killer of a career  
criminal could be murder



**Bryn Petersen**

# **ANOTHER ARBOR**

**By Bryn Petersen**

# **JUMPER!**

With the wind whipping up and a storm brewing, Chris Hunter mounted the last of the fire escape steps to face his first ‘incident’.

Feeling a little like Wyatt Earp approaching the Okay Corral, he studied the open expanse of the multi storey’s top floor. As the new sergeant in CID, Chris felt under pressure to get this right.

On the opposing side, he spied a figure, hair swirling his head. Rough gusts rasped at his clothing. He turned his head as Chris called over to begin negotiations.

As he inched further, reflecting as he went on the last hour of his working day.

In the last minutes, there was the usual scramble for relief before everyone disappeared to their various residences.

Chris recalled he would have left by a side exit if he hadn't forgotten the last-minute gift purchased at lunchtime. He was last out of the building - again.

He'd earn another rebuke from the Station Sergeant responsible for locking up for the night.

He made his way back for the forgotten gift to find the phone trilling to no-one. He considered ignoring it, then raised the receiver:

“I’ve caught you! There’s a report in - possible jumper at the multi-storey next to the Beech Croft Shopping Centre. Can I show you attending?”

Chris scribbled the details on a handy sheet of paper. Turning it over, he noticed it was part of a colleague’s report. He would come clean later. For now, this was more important.

He collected the gift, stuffed the directions in his coat pocket and called his wife to explain he’d be late (again).

On the freezing parapet, Malcolm Horner gripped the railing, the last hour replaying on an endless loop.

He'd watched Sebastian Cook (his last client) close the counsellor's office door. Malcolm sat staring, his face pinched and deathly white. He imagined Sebastian's cold satisfaction at opening up and dumping years of emotional baggage. On the other side of the door, a cruel smile played hide and seek around Sebastian's mouth, his eyes glinting with icy detachment.

Malcolm Horner sat squarely behind the desk. He was a qualified Counsellor specialising in addictions, but it gave him no comfort.

He sat staring into space, frozen in the moment. Tears splashed his cheeks. They soaked his collar,

turning his shirt transparent as the torrent streamed from his eyes.

The strike of the mantel clock halted his tears. He stared at the clock face, unable to correlate time with the number of chimes.

In a fair imitation of a demented hen, he scurried around, picking and setting down items, galvanised into action.

He caught his unkempt, distressed reflection. He flew into the private bathroom, feverishly scrubbing his face before selecting a shirt and pullover.

Duly cleansed, Malcolm headed for his car.

Malcolm's head replayed the session. He tried imagining the end of previous days, the old-fashioned

gangster films he preferred, anything to replace the last hour's session.

Malcolm swallowed hard. He couldn't remember parking in the multi-storey, or mounting the fire escape to the roof. He didn't even recall striding each leg outside the railing to perch on the parapet.

It was two teenage girls who brought him back to the now. They were heading home later than usual from the hairdressing salon. They tripped slowly chattering over each other as they walked, as young girls do.

They obliviously bumped their way around seats, bins, even a lamp-post. As they chatted, one glanced across and up the road, prepared to cross.

She recognised the scene above and what it meant. She screamed, clutching her friend.



The other girl's eyes roved feverishly to see what caused her friend to scream, alighting on the man above perched on the ledge running outside of the bridge.

He was preparing to jump. She shouted for help, and comforted her friend.

At the multi-storey, Chris could see there was a man stood at the edge of the roof parapet. He was labouring for breath and very twitchy. Chris knew if there was any way to talk him down, he had to try.

He took the pedestrian walk-way snaking back and forth. It was a safety measure. Out of the car, the path prevented pedestrians using it competing with those parking cars. It gave a bird's eye view of the landscape. It was not for the faint hearted, thus not especially popular.

Chris had no difficulty ascending to the top storey. It was open to the elements with a stunted wall for a barrier. As he reached the roof, he could see the jumper staring at the drop.

Chris felt a surge of sympathy for the terrified wreck of a man. Chris noted the white strained face. Strong winds whipped at his overcoat and Chris realised the poor man must be chilled to the bone.

Chris discreetly radioed uniformed officers on the floor below to request a car blanket and if there were any more details about the jumper.

Chris began to slowly edge towards the jumper. Despite taking care to move quietly, the wind raged around him, causing his coat to flap loudly. The last thing he wanted was to startle the guy!

The jumper appeared to feel the cold.

Precariously balanced, he flapped each arm in turn, attempting to warm himself. He glanced back across the rooftop and spied Chris Hunter slowly inching his way.

Chris felt a pang of sympathy. The man looked frozen, and emotionally strained. Chris longed to rush over to comfort him but he knew any sudden movement could spook him to jump.

Chris straightened up and fixed his gaze solely on the jumper. He had to connect with this poor soul and help him back to safety:

“Good evening sir! I’m here to help you.  
What I can do to help?”

The jumper returned a long, wistful look:

“You can’t ‘not know’ something, can you? I mean, once you know - it’s too late, isn’t it?”

“I’m really sorry. I don’t know what you mean? Please explain it to me? I want to understand?”

“But that’s just the point! I can’t explain, because then you will know! Then we’ll both be stood here, contemplating death on the hard ground!”

One of the uniformed officers hissed in Chris’ direction:

“Here sir! The car blanket you requested! Sorry, sir; we don’t have anything on him.”

Chris turned and took the offered blanket.

“Can’t you at least give me a hint of what is the matter? Maybe I can help? Maybe I can help you see it’s not as bad as you might think?”

“Not as bad! Not so bad! Man, it’s worse than you could ever know! It’s vile! Inhuman! It’s evil!”

Chris took a deep breath and tried to think about how to respond to the jumper:

“Why don’t you tell me your name? What is it that you do for a living? Is it something to do with your job?”

“Malcolm; I’m Malcolm Horner. I live just around the corner. That’s how I knew this place was suitable. I’m a counsellor. I counsel at a drug rehab facility. It’s a few streets from here.”

Chris could see by getting Malcolm to focus on himself, he was less desperate than he had been five minutes before.

“That’s a very worthwhile profession, Malcolm. I expect you’ve helped a lot of people. Your family must be very proud!”

As soon as the words were out, Chris realised he’d made a mistake somewhere.

Malcolm’s face instantly clouded and etched with renewed pain. Chris watched as Malcolm’s hands clawed his own arms as if to wrest the pain from himself.

“They’ve never said, but they don’t know the things I have to listen to! I tried to tell them, you can’t ever go back! Once you know something, you can’t get away from it!”

Chris paused to formulate an appropriate reply. Malcolm stood and steadied himself. Chris saw his expression was firm resolute. Chris' eyes widened. Appreciation of what it meant washed down him, paralysing his legs.

He tried to make his legs run faster, but he arrived too late. Malcolm Horner pitched himself forward onto the tarmac below.

The following day, Chris apologised to his colleague over the ruined report and wrote up a suicide report on Malcolm Horner.

# POWDER KEG

*[Five years later]*

The Georgian style house on Lansdowne Square consisted of four floors. It included a fully appointed cellar for keeping fine wines. Every bedroom boasted a private bathroom; the master a separate dressing room.

The dining room featured an antique chandelier and a circular drinks cabinet with elaborate veneered inlay and elegantly scrolled feet.

The lone TV set held pride of place in a dedicated entertainments room, just off the home office.



Alistair Lysander had purchased the property at the start of his theatrical career, when the house was a mere shell in need of serious renovation.

He was justifiably proud of his home and all he had done to restore it to its former glory.

The house had taken much of his spare time and a large chunk of money to return it to its former opulence, but it had most definitely been worth it!

Almost twenty years of hard graft had turned the nearly derelict interior into a quietly plush home with all the amenities anyone could wish for.

The décor was tastefully muted, the furnishings understated and elegant. The furniture was in keeping with the style of the house. It was very much a man's house, with few feminine touches, but that did not detract from the overall sophisticated ambience.

He had started as a mere actor, doing freelance accounting on the side to supplement his income.

However, he was skilled in theatre direction, with superior organizational abilities. His talents promoted and propelled him up the theatrical ladder.

Many times, he was fortunate to be in the right place at the right time to take advantage of some chance or opportunity, or to meet someone who could influence and advance his career.

Alistair always took the view that a person should step through if a door (or opportunity) opened. He lived by the mantra that opportunity may only knock once, so you should take full advantage if it knocked for you.

One of his early career decisions had been to form the Westminster Players Group. It was a professional theatre company.

The Company quickly developed a reputation for innovation and radically bold productions. Soon, the Westminster Player Group was the toast of the theatrical world.

The Group (renaming itself the Spotlight Theatre Players Group from the early 1970s) had taken the West End by storm. They were riding high and the sponsorship money poured in.

Alistair was close to completion of another very successful (and lucrative) theatrical run in the West End.

His illustrious career brought him powerful friends, who put him forward for several prestigious awards. There were whispers in some quarters of a mention in the Honours List, but he just smiled deprecatingly and waved the sycophants in the direction of (in his words) the wonderfully talented cast.

It was the perfect place for private relaxation. There was no better place for respite from the daily toil than the sanctity of your private haven.

A fire burned invitingly in the large ornate fire grate. Alistair had insisted on restoring the original Georgian fireplace.

The chandelier glittered unlit over the dining table. The soft muted glimmer from candles placed at intervals created a much more intimate atmosphere.

Everything, from the candlesticks to the cutlery was original Georgian period. The whole image was of old money. From the depths of the living room, ‘Masters of Swing’ provided a background of musical accompaniment.

Alistair absentmindedly swirled the liquid of his drink and chanced a glance towards his companion, Sebastian Cook.

They were (allegedly) distant cousins. They separated their private residence equally. Sebastian occupied the top two floors, while Alistair used the two lower floors.

On this occasion, they had enjoyed a very pleasant celebratory meal and were exchanging pleasantries over the after-dinner port.

Feeling Alistair's brief furtive glance, Sebastian raised his head, squared his shoulders and said:

“Do you think it matters?”

“That we're not actually related? No! What made you ask?”

“Well, I just wondered (some time ago) if there was a catch at all.”

“Whatever do you mean?”

“Well, you've never seemed to want anything in return. I know I work within the Theatre Group, and I do pay my way, but it doesn't seem adequate somehow?”

“I just wanted to keep you safe.”

It was almost a whisper. In his head, Alistair continued with “I just wanted to keep you all safe.”

He did not give voice to this last thought. He worried it might trigger something of the trauma of the past. Sebastian had seemed to improve over the last few years, and his new role as Artistic Stage Manager had given him new confidence and poise.

Sebastian threw his head back:

“I thought I saw him you know!”

“Who – you need to be a bit more specific Sebastian?”

Alistair was immediately on his guard, watching Sebastian closely.

“Paul Hart. Did you think I didn’t know his name? I didn’t forget; it’s with me all the time. Just most of the time, I can store it inside. I can contain it and keep it from intruding. Sometimes he escapes, and then I find myself sobbing at the most ridiculous things! I’ll see some TV show that’s supposed to be funny or walk past a random shop front window. When it happens, it gets me down and I feel weak. Strange thing is, when I saw him, I didn’t feel weak. I just wanted to hurl the biggest boulder SMACK into his face!”

The emotions contorting Sebastian’s face fascinated Alistair, even as he was deeply concerned for his wellbeing.

“What did you do?”

“I didn’t do anything! Then - I felt weak! I did nothing! What a wimp!”



Then in a calmer, more measured tone (as if he was reading from the text of a play), he went on:

“He got up to leave the bus, and I just watched him walk onto Camden High Street. I watched him go into a downstairs flat. I thought he might live there, but I saw him a week later, in Oxford Street. I followed him. He went to Upper Ellwood, 11 Rosebud Crescent. It must be where he lives.”

Alistair was more than a little alarmed by the quiet determination Sebastian had just shown.

“Promise me you won’t do anything? No, Sebastian, look at me! Just promise me. Please? PLEASE!”

Sebastian had dropped his head down as he had described following Paul Hart. Now he slowly raised his eyes to meet Alistair’s gaze:

“I promise.”

Childishly, behind his back, Sebastian crossed his fingers and when Alistair was not looking, a faint smirk reached his lips.