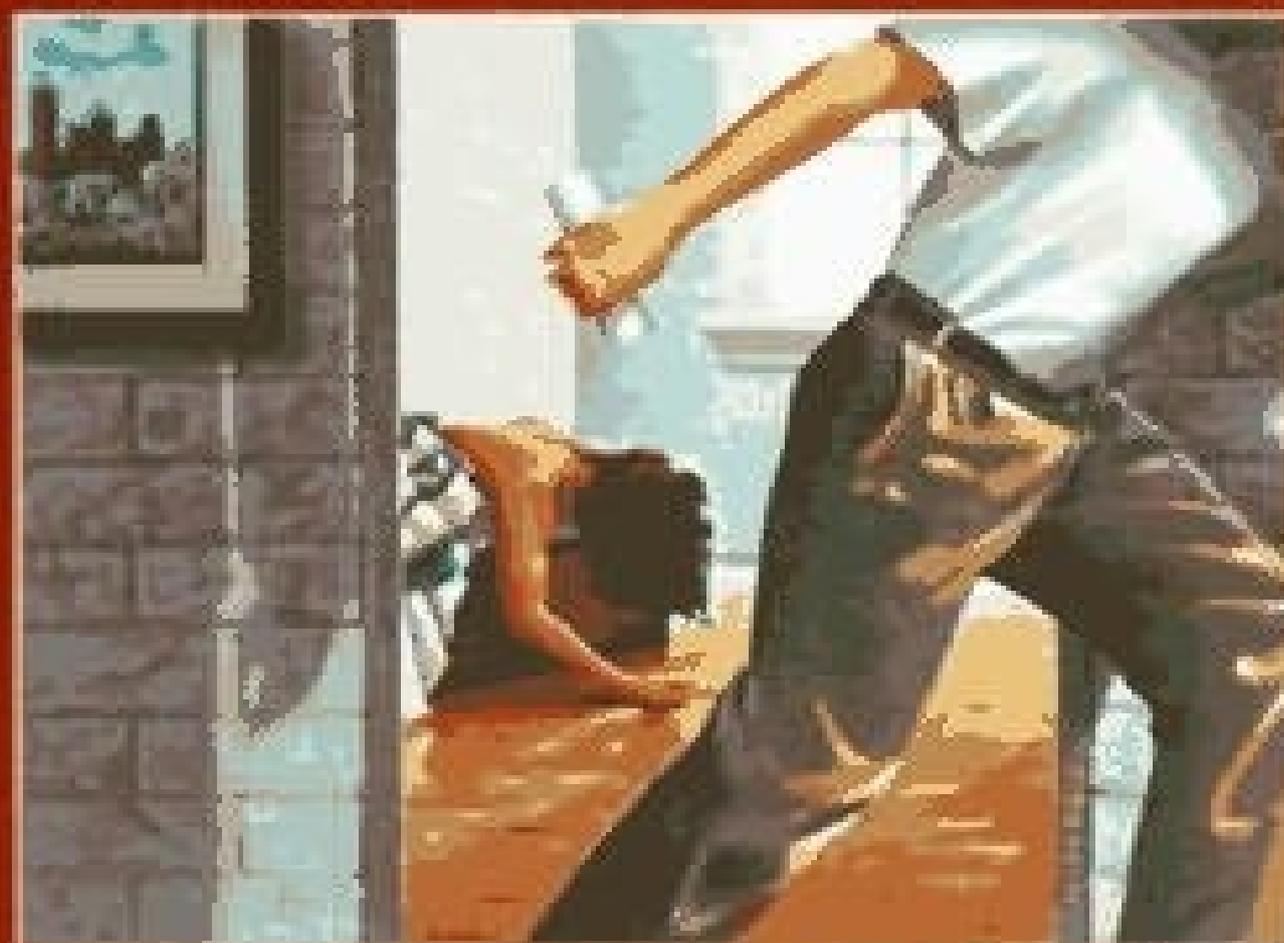


Passion can be deadly in a  
game of kiss-and-kill

# LAWRENCE BLOCK

A Chip Harrison Mystery



MAKE OUT  
WITH MURDER



DOUBT

## *Make Out with Murder*

Block, Lawrence

Penguin Group USA, Inc (1997)

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### SUMMARY:

A previously published mystery follows New York City sleuth-for-hire Chip Harrison as he confronts his first case, in which five beautiful sisters--one of them a former flame--are hunted down by their wicked

The third book in a four-novel, humorous mystery series written in the 1970's by Lawrence Block and featuring Chip Harrison, a teenaged, one-man anti-chastity movement training to be an Archie Goodwin to NYC private detective Leo Haig.

. Original.

**Make Out with Murder**  
**The Third Chip Harrison Novel**  
Lawrence Block

This is for REX STOUT, whoever he may be. ...

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## One

The man was about forty or forty-five. I guessed his height at five-seven, which made him about four inches too short for his weight. He was wearing a brown suit, one of those double-knit deals that are not supposed to wrinkle. His was sort of rumpled. He was wearing gleaming brown wing-tip shoes and chocolate brown socks. He wore a ring on his left pinky with what looked like a sapphire in it. Anyway, it was a blue stone, and I figure any blue stone is either a sapphire or trying to look like one.

I don't know all this because I have some kind of terrific memory or anything. I know it because I wrote it all down. Leo Haig says that ultimately I won't have to write things down in my notebook. He says I can train my memory to report all conversations verbatim and remember photographically what people are wearing and things like that. He says if Archie Goodwin can do it, so can I. It's a matter of training, he says.

Maybe he's right. I don't know. If so, I need all the training I can get. I figure it's going to be a good day if I remember in the morning where I put my wristwatch the night before.

Anyway, there's something we'd better get straight right in front. In the course of writing all this up for you, some of the facts will be as I've jotted them down in my notebook, and some will be as I happen to remember them, and things like conversations are as close as my memory can make them to how they happened originally. I don't have a tape recorder in my head, but I do tend to listen to people and remember not only what they said but how they said it. I suppose that's as close to the truth as you can generally come.

The guy in the brown suit was very boring to follow. I picked him up outside of the Gaily Gaily Theater on Eighth Avenue between 45th and 46th. That was 1:37 in the afternoon, and the particular afternoon was the third Wednesday in August. He emerged from the theater (*All-Male Cast! XXX-rated! Adults Only Positively!*) making those hesitant eye movements that you would expect anybody to make under those circumstances, as if he wanted to make sure that nobody he knew was watching him, but without making it obvious that he was looking around.

I picked him up because I liked the idea that he was already behaving with suspicion. It seemed likely that he would be more of a challenge.

See, I had no real reason to follow this man in particular. This was what Leo Haig calls a training exercise. We didn't have a case at the time, and while he enjoyed having me hang around and listen to him talk while he played with his tropical fish, we both eventually felt guilty if I wasn't doing something to earn the salary he paid me. So he sent me out to follow people. I would do this for as many hours as I could stand, and then I would go back and type up a report on my activities as a shadow. He would then read the report very critically. (I'm surprised he managed to read these reports at all, to tell you the truth. When all you do is follow a woman from her apartment building to Gristede's and back again, there is not a hell of a lot of excitement in a detailed report of what you have seen.)

But all of this would develop my powers of observation, he said, plus my skills in following people, in case we got a case that demanded that sort of thing. And it would also point up my journalistic talents. Leo Haig is very firm on I this last subject,

incidentally. It's not enough to be a great detective, he says, unless somebody writes about it well enough to let the world know about you.

Well, the guy in the brown suit certainly moved around I enough. From the theater he went to a cafeteria on Broadway and had a cup of coffee and a prune Danish. I sat half a dozen tables away and pretended to drink my iced tea. He left the cafeteria and walked around the corner onto 42nd Street, where he entered First Amendment Books, a hole-in-the-wall that specializes in reading matter that abuses the amendment it's named after. I don't know what he bought there because I didn't want to go in there after him. I loitered outside, trying not to look like a male hustler. By concentrating on Melanie Trelawney, I figured it might be easier to project a determinedly heterosexual image.

Thinking about Melanie Trelawney may not have made me *look* more heterosexual, but it certainly made me *feel* heterosexual as all hell. And thinking about Melanie came fairly easily to me because I had been thinking of very little else for the past month. In a sense, thinking about Melanie was more rewarding than spending time with her, because I allowed myself to play a more active role in thought than I did in life itself.

In the little plays I acted out in my head, for example, Melanie did not deliver lines like, "I think we should wait until we know each other better, Chip." Or, "I'm just not sure I'm stable enough for an active sexual relationship." Or, "Stop!"

My mental Melanie, my liberated, receptive Melanie was purring like a kitten while I stroked the soft skin of her upper thigh, when the man in the brown suit picked that moment to emerge from First Amendment with a parcel under his arm. Magazines, by the size and shape of the parcel. I had a fair idea what kind of magazines they were.

He headed west and walked briskly to Eighth Avenue. Just before he reached the corner he stopped in a doorway and talked to a tall slender young man wearing faded jeans and brand-new cowboy boots. They talked for a few moments and evidently failed to come to an agreement. My target heaved his shoulders and lurched away, and the kid with the boots gave him the finger.

On the other side of Eighth he had better luck. He stopped again in a doorway, and I loitered as unobtrusively as possible while they got it together. Then they walked side by side over to Ninth Avenue and two blocks north to something that was supposed to be a hotel. That's what the sign said, anyhow. From the looks of it I got the feeling that if you ever needed a cockroach in a hurry, that was the place to look for one.

There was a liquor store next to the hotel, and they stopped there first, with the hustler waiting outside while Brown Suit bought a bottle. He came out with a pint of something and they went into the hotel together.

I was going to leave him there and say the hell with it, and either follow somebody else or call it a day, but Haig had told me just a couple of days ago that the attribute a successful surveillance man most needed to develop was patience. "You must cultivate *sitzfleisch*, Chip. Sitting flesh. A mark of professionalism is the ability to do absolutely nothing when to do otherwise would be an improper course of action."

I went into a coffee shop across the street and settled my *sitzfleisch* on a wobbly

counter stool. The special of the day was meat loaf, which suggested that the activity of the night before had been sweeping the floor. I had a glazed doughnut and a lot of weak coffee, and concentrated on developing the ability to do absolutely nothing.

While I worked on this I did a little more thinking about Melanie Trelawney.

I had met her about a month ago. I was in Tompkins Square Park trying to decide whether or not I wanted a Good Humor. The Special Flavor of the Month was Chocolate Pastrami and I wasn't sure I could handle it, but it did sound off the beaten track. Somebody came by that I knew, and then someone else materialized with a guitar, and eventually a batch of us were sitting around singing songs of social significance. After a while somebody started passing out home-made cigarettes with an organic and non-carcinogenic tobacco substitute in them, but I just passed them up, because by this time I had seen Melanie and I was high already.

We got to talking. Nine times out of ten when I meet a really sensational girl it takes an exchange of perhaps fourteen sentences before one or both of us realizes we could easily bore each other to death. Sometimes, say one time in ten, it doesn't happen that way. In which case I tend to flip out a little.

I'll tell you something. Sometimes when two people meet each other, the best thing that can happen is that they go directly to the nearest bed. Other times the best thing can happen is that they take their time and really get to know each other first. Either way is cool. The problem comes when the two people perceive the situation differently.

Not that she was precisely driving me up a wall. There were times when it felt that way, I'll admit, but basically it was a question of Melanie's feeling it was very necessary for us to take our time, while I felt that all the time we had to take was whatever time it took to get out of our clothes. Since Melanie always wore jeans and a tie-dyed top and sandals, and nothing under any of those three articles of clothing but her own sweet self, and since I was sufficiently motivated to take off my shirt without unbuttoning it, this process would not have taken much time.

It probably wasn't as bad as I'm making it sound. I mean, I'm not Stanley Stud who has to have a woman every night or his thing will turn green. I *want* a woman every night, but I've learned to live with failure. We were getting to know each other, Melanie and I, and we were getting to know each other slightly in a physical way, and eventually things were going to work out. Until then I wasn't sleeping very well, but I had decided I could put up with that.

I sat at the counter and stirred my coffee, trying to convince myself that I wanted to drink it. Every few seconds I would glance out through the window to see if the man in the brown suit was finished and ready to lead me off to still more exciting places. Every once in a while someone with the same general orientation as Brown Suit would give me a sidelong glance. Which made me think defensively again of Melanie.

One thing had been bothering me lately. I couldn't escape the feeling that Melanie might be a little bit out of touch with reality.

For maybe the past ten days she had been behaving strangely. She would laugh suddenly at nothing at all, and then a few minutes later she would start crying and not say what it was about. And then a couple of days earlier she explained what it was. She was convinced she was going to die.

“Two of my sisters are already gone,” she said. “First Robin was killed in a car accident. Then Jessica threw herself out the window. There’s just three of us left, Caitlin and Kim and me, and then we’ll all be gone.”

“In seventy years, maybe. But not like tomorrow, Melanie.”

“Maybe tomorrow, Chip.”

“I think maybe you do drugs a little too much.”

“It’s not drugs. Anyway, I’m straight now.”

“Then I don’t get it.”

Her eyes, which range from blue to green and back again, were a very vivid blue now. “I am going to be killed,” she said. “I can sense it.”

“What do you mean?”

“Just what I said. Robin and Jessica were killed—”

“Well, Jessica killed herself, didn’t she?”

“Did she?”

“Jesus, Melanie, that’s what you just said, isn’t it? You said she threw herself out a window.”

“Maybe she did. Maybe she ... she was pushed.”

“Oh, wow!”

She lowered her head, closed her eyes. “Oh, I don’t know what I’m talking about. I don’t know anything, Chip. All I know is the feelings I’ve had lately. That all of the Trelawney girls are going to die and that I’m going to be next. Maybe Robin’s accident really was an accident. Maybe Jessica did kill herself. She wasn’t terribly stable, she had a weird life style. And maybe Robin’s accident really was an accident. I know it must have been. But—I’m *afraid*, Chip.”

I saw her a couple of times after that, and she was never that hysterical again. She did mention the subject, though. She tried to be cool about it.

“Well, like it’s a good thing you’re working for a private detective, Chip. That way you can investigate the case when I’m murdered.”

I would tell her to cut the shit, that she was not going to be murdered, and she would say she was just making a joke out of it. Except it was only partly a joke.

I guess that coffee shop wasn’t the best place to pick for a stake-out. Not just because the coffee was rotten, but because the clientele was largely gay.

Which is all right as far as I’m concerned. I don’t get uncomfortable in homosexual company. I have a couple of gay friends, as far as that goes. But the thing is this: if you sit in a place like that, just killing time over a cup of coffee, and if you’re young and tallish and thinnish, which is to say the general physical type which is likely to hang out in such a place for a particular purpose, well, people come to an obvious conclusion.

It was getting a little heavy, so I paid for my coffee and I went out to wait outside. I guess that turned out to be worse. I wasn’t outside for five minutes before a heavy-set man with a slim attaché case and a neatly trimmed white moustache asked me if he could buy me a drink.

I took my wallet out and flipped it open briefly. “Police,” I said. “Surveillance,” I said. “Scram,” I said.

“Oh, dear,” the man said.

“Just go away,” I said.

“I didn’t actually do anything,” the man said. “Just an offer of a drink, all in good faith—”

“Jesus, go away,” I said.

“I’m not under arrest?”

Across the street, the man in the brown suit emerged from the hotel. He still had his package of magazines with him. I told the idiot with the moustache that he was not under arrest, but that he would be if he didn’t pissed off.

“You’re not Vice Squad?”

“Narcotics,” I said, trying to get past him.

“But you should be on the Vice Squad,” he insisted. “You’d fool anyone.”

I’ve decided since that he must have intended this as a compliment. At the time I couldn’t pay that much attention to what he was saying because Brown Suit was on his way into a subway kiosk and I had to hurry if I didn’t want to lose him. It occurred to me that perhaps I did want to lose him, but I wanted to get away from the creep with the moustache in any case, so I charged down to the subway entrance and caught sight of the man in brown just as I dropped my own token into the turnstile. Actually, it was his turn to follow me for the next little bit, because he had to buy a token. I always have a pocket full of them.

Leo Haig believes his right-hand man should be prepared for any contingency.

I bought a paper to give myself something to hide behind and to kill time so that he could let me know which train we were going to ride. It turned out to be the downtown A train and we rode it to Washington Square. Then we went up and around and caught the E train as far as Long Island City. This puzzled me a little because he could have caught that same E train at 42nd Street and saved going out of the way a couple of miles, but I figured maybe he changed his mind and had some particular last-minute reason to go out to Queens.

At Long Island City he got out of the train just as the doors were closing, and if I hadn’t been standing right next to the door at the time I would have gone on riding to Flushing or someplace weird like that. But I got out, and I immediately began walking off in the opposite direction from him. After I had gone about twenty yards I turned and looked over my shoulder and there he was. I started to turn again, but he was making motions with his hands.

I just stood there. I didn’t really know what else to do.

“Look,” he said. “This is beginning to get on my nerves.”

“Huh?”

“You’ve been following me all afternoon, son. Would you like to tell me why?”

Leo Haig always tells me to use my instinct, guided by my experience. He stole this bit of advice from Nero Wolfe. My problem is, I haven’t had too much experience and my instincts aren’t always that razor-sharp.

But what I said was, “I have to say something to you.”

“Well, you could have said it back on Ninth Avenue, son. You didn’t have to wait until we both rode back and forth underneath Manhattan Island.”

“The thing is, I don’t know if you’re the right man.”

“What right man?”

“The married man who’s been running around with my sister, and if you are—”

Well, he damned well wasn’t, and that was a load off both our minds. He laughed

a lot, and he did everything but explain to me precisely why he was extremely unlikely to be running around with anybody's sister, or to be married, and we went our separate ways to our mutual relief. I got another E train heading back in the direction I'd come from and he went somewhere else.

At least he hadn't made me until I'd tailed him to Ninth Avenue. I suppose that was something.

There's probably a good way to connect from the E train to something that goes somewhere near the Lower East Side, but I'm still not brilliant about the subway system and the maps they have there are impossible to figure out, especially when the train is (a) moving and (b) crowded, which this one certainly was. So I rode down to Washington Square again, feeling a little foolish about the whole thing, and then I got out and walked cross town. I called Melanie a couple of times en route, but the line was busy.

Melanie's place was on Fifth Street between Avenue C and Avenue D. I could never figure out why. I mean, I could figure out why the building was there. It had no choice. Buildings tend to stay where you put them, and nobody would have allowed this building in a decent, neighborhood anyway. But Melanie did have a choice. She wasn't wildly rich, and I don't suppose she could have stayed at the Sherry-Netherland, but she could have had a better apartment in a safer neighborhood with the income she got from her father's estate. Instead she lived on one of the most squalid and unsafe blocks in the city.

"You know," I'd told her a day or two ago, "if you really insist on having this irrational fear of being murdered, you ought to move out of this rathole. Because when you live here, being murdered isn't an irrational fear. It's a damned rational one."

"I feel secure here," she said.

"The streets are wall-to-wall junkies and perverts," I said. "The muggers have their own assigned territories so they don't mug each other by mistake. What makes you feel secure?"

"It's a settled neighborhood, Chip."

I walked through it now. It was at its very worst in the afternoon because the light was bright enough to see how grungy it was. It was also bright in the morning, but there was no one around. Starting a little after noon, the rats would begin to peep out of their holes.

I got to her building. They still hadn't replaced the front door. No one knew who had taken it, or why. I walked up four very steep flights of stairs and knocked on her door.

There was no answer.

I knocked a couple more times, called her name a lot, and then tried the door. It was locked, and that worried me.

See, Melanie would only lock her door when she was home. I know most people do it the other way around, or else lock it all the time, but she had a theory on the subject. If a junkie burglar knew she wasn't home, and found the door locked, he would simply kick it in. This would mean she would have to pay for a new lock. If, however, she left it unlocked, he would come in, discover there was nothing around to take, and finally settle for ripping off her radio. Since the radio had cost fifteen dollars and the big cylinder lock had cost forty, it was clear where the priorities lay.

I knocked again, a lot louder. She would not be asleep at this hour. And her telephone had been busy just a few minutes ago. Of course telephones in New York are capable of being busy just for the hell of it, but—

I got this sudden flash and didn't like it at all. So I did something I've wanted to do for years. I think it's something everybody secretly wants to do.

I kicked the door in.

You'd be surprised how easy that is. Or maybe you wouldn't when you stop to think that some of the most decrepit drug addicts in the world do it a couple of times a day. I hauled back and kicked with my heel, hitting the door right on the lock. On the third try the door flew open and the forty-dollar lock went flying, and I lost my balance and sat down without having planned to. I suppose a few tenants heard me do all these things, but they evidently knew better than to get involved.

The apartment was a rabbit warren, a big living room and a long hallway that kept leading to other rooms, some of them containing Salvation Army reject furniture, some of them papered with posters of Che and stuff like that. Actually I think Melanie paid as much rent for the place as I paid for a room in a decent neighborhood. She said she liked having plenty of space. Personally, considering the condition of the rooms, I would think that a person would pay more for less space. One room in that building would have been bad enough. Five rooms was ridiculous.

The telephone was in the living room. It was off the hook. I worked my way through the apartment, calling out her name, picking up more and more negative vibrations and getting less and less happy about the whole thing. I found her in the back room. She was spread out stark naked on her air mattress, which is just how I had always hoped to find her.

But she was also absolutely dead, and that was not what I had had in mind at all.

## Two

She wasn't the first corpse I had ever seen. One summer I picked apples for a while in upstate New York, a job which consisted largely of falling off ladders. The other pickers would go out drinking when they were done, and sometimes I would tag along. There was usually at least one fight an evening. Sometimes somebody would pull a knife, and one time when this happened it wound up that one guy, a wiry man with a harelip, caught a knifeblade in his heart and died. I saw him when they carried him out.

The first book I wrote, I covered my experiences apple-picking, but never put that part in. God knows why.

So she wasn't the first corpse I ever looked at, but she might as well have been. I kept thinking how horrible it was that she looked so beautiful, even in death. Her pale white skin had a blue tint to it, especially in her face. Her eyes were wide open and I could swear they were staring at me.

I knew she was dead. No living eyes ever looked like that. But I had to reach down and touch her. I put one hand on her shoulder. She'd been dead long enough to grow cool, however long that takes. I don't know much about things like that. I'd never had to.

I almost didn't see the hypodermic needle. She was on her back, legs stretched out in front of her, one arm at her side, the other placed so that her hand was on her little bowl of a stomach. That hand almost covered the hypodermic needle. After I saw it, I picked up her other arm and found a needle mark. Just one, and it looked fresh.

I put her arm back the way I had found it. I went to the bathroom and threw up and came back and looked at her some more. I must have stood there staring at her for five minutes. Then I paced around the whole apartment for another five minutes and came back and stared at her some more.

This wasn't shock. I was in shock, of course, but I was being very methodical about this. I wanted to notice everything and I wanted to make sure I remembered whatever I noticed.

I left her apartment, closed the door, walked down the stairs and out. I walked all the way over to First Avenue before I caught a cab. The cab dropped me at 14th Street and Seventh. I walked quickly from there to my rooming house on 18th Street, a few doors west of Eighth.

When I was in my own room on the third floor, the first thing I did was lock the door. The second thing was to go into the bathroom and remove the towel bar from the wall. It's a hollow stainless steel bar, and there was a little plastic vial in it that contained several dollars' worth of reasonably good grass. I poured the grass in the toilet and flushed, rinsed out the vial, and tossed it out the window. Then I went through the medicine cabinet. I couldn't find anything to worry about except for a few codeine pills that my doctor had prescribed for a sinus headache. I thought about it and decided to hell with them, and I flushed them away, too. That left nothing but aspirin and Dristan, and I didn't think the cops would hassle me much for either of those. I put the towel bar back and washed my hands.

I looked in the mirror and decided I didn't like the way I was dressed. I put on a fresh shirt and a pair of slacks that didn't need pressing too badly. I traded in my

loafers for my black dress shoes.

Then I went downstairs to the pay phone in the hall. I dropped a dime in the slot and dialed the number I know best.

Haig answered the telephone himself for a change. We talked for a few minutes. Mostly I talked and he listened, and then he made a couple of suggestions, and I hung up the phone and went off to discover the body.

I guess I'll have to tell you something about Leo Haig.

The place to start, I suppose, is how I happen to be working for him. I had been looking for a job for a while, and things had not been going particularly well. I got work from time to time, washing dishes or bussing tables or delivering messages and parcels, but none of these positions amounted to what you might call A Job With A Future, which is what I have always been seeking, though in a sort of inept way.

My problem, really, was that I wasn't qualified for anything too dynamic. My education stopped a couple of months before graduation from Upper Valley Preparatory Academy, which is to say that I haven't even got a high school diploma, for Pete's sake. And my previous work experience—well, when you tell a prospective employer that you have been an assistant to Gregor the Pavement Photographer, a termite salesman, a fruit picker, and a deputy sheriff in a whorehouse in South Carolina, well, what usually happens is his eyes glaze and he points at the door a lot.

(I don't want to go into all this ancient history now, really, but if you're interested you could read about it. My first two books, *No Score* and *Chip Harrison Scores Again*, pretty well cover the territory. I don't know that they're much good, but you could read them for background information or something. Assuming you care.)

Anyway, I was living in New York and doing the hand-to-mouth number and reading the want ads in *The Times*, and there were loads of opportunities to earn \$40 a week if you had a doctorate in chemical engineering or something like that, but not much if you didn't. Then I ran into an ad that went something like this:

RESOURCEFUL YOUTH wanted to assist detective. Low pay, long hours, hard work, demanding employer. Journalistic experience will be given special consideration. Familiarity with tropical fish helpful but not absolutely necessary. An excellent opportunity for one man in a million. ...

I didn't know if I was one man in a million, but it was certainly one advertisement in a million, and nothing could have kept me from answering it. I called the number listed in the ad and answered a few questions over the phone. He gave me an address and I went to it, and at first I thought the whole thing was someone's idea of a joke, because the building was obviously a whorehouse. But it turned out that only the lower two floors were a whorehouse. The upper two floors were the offices and living quarters of Leo Haig.

He wasn't what I expected. I don't know exactly what I expected, but whatever it might have been, he wasn't it. He's about five-two and very round. It's not that he's terribly heavy, just that the combination of his height and girth makes him look something like a basketball. He has a head of wiry black hair and a pointed goatee with a few gray hairs in it. That beard is very important to him. I've never seen it when it was not trimmed and groomed to perfection. He touches it a lot, smoothing and shaping it. He says it's an aid to thought.

I spent three hours with him that first day, and at the end of the three hours I had a

job. He spent the first hour pumping me, the second showing off his tropical fish, and the final hour talking about everything in the world, himself included. I went out of there with a lot more knowledge than I had brought with me, *A Job With A Future*, and a whole lot of uncertainty about the man I was working for. He was either a genius or a lunatic and I couldn't make up my mind which.

I still haven't got it all worked out. I mean, maybe the two are not mutually exclusive. Maybe he's a genius *and* a lunatic.

The thing is, the main reason I got the job was that I had had two books published. You may wonder what this has to do with being the assistant of a private detective. It's very simple, really. Leo Haig isn't content with being the world's greatest detective. He wants the world to know it.

"There are a handful of detectives whose names are household words," he told me. "Sherlock Holmes. Nero Wolfe. Their brilliance alone would not have guaranteed them fame. It took the efforts of other men to bring their deeds to public attention. Holmes had his Watson. Wolfe has his Archie Goodwin. If a detective is to make the big time, a trustworthy associate with literary talent is as much a prerequisite as a personality quirk and an eccentric hobby."

Here's something I have to explain to you if you are going to understand Leo Haig at all.

He believes Nero Wolfe exists.

He really believes this. He believes Wolfe exists in the brownstone, with the orchids and Theodore and Fritz and all the rest of it, and Archie Goodwin assists him and writes up the cases and publishes them under the pen name of Rex Stout.

"The most telling piece of evidence, Chip. Consider that *nom de plume*, if you will. And of course it's just that; no one was ever born with so contrived a name as Rex Stout. But let us examine it. Rex is the Latin for king, of course. As in *Oedipus Rex*. And Stout means, well, fat. Thus we have what? A fat king—and could one ask for a more perfect appellation to hang upon such an extraordinary example of corpulence and majesty as Nero Wolfe?"

Haig hasn't always been a detective. Actually he's only been a detective about a year longer than I've been an assistant detective. Until that time he lived in a two-room apartment in the Bronx and raised tropical fish to sell to local pet shops. This may strike you as a hard way to make a living. You'd be right. Most tropical fish are pretty inexpensive when you buy them from the pet shop, and even that price has to be three or four times what the shopkeeper pays for them, because he has to worry about a certain percentage of them dying before he can get them sold. Haig had developed a particularly good strain of velvet swordtails—the color was deeper than usual, or something—and he had a ready market for most of the other fish he raised as well, but he was not getting rich this way.

The way he got rich took relatively little effort on his part. His uncle died and left him \$128,000.

As you can probably imagine, that made quite a difference in his life. Because all of a sudden he didn't have to run around New York with plastic bags full of little fishes for sale. He could do what he had always dreamed of doing. He could become the World's Greatest Detective.

Raising fish had been Leo Haig's only way to make a living, but it had not been

his only interest. He has what is probably the largest library of mystery and detective fiction in the world. I think he has just about everything ever written on the subject. The Nero Wolfe novels, from *Fer-De-Lance* to the latest one, are all in hard cover; after he received his inheritance he had them all rebound in hand-tooled leather. He's been reading all of these things since he was a kid, and he remembers what he reads. I mean, he can tell you not only the plot, but the names of all the characters in some Ngaio Marsh mystery that he read fifteen years ago. It's pretty impressive, let me tell you.

The house is pretty impressive, too, and he has emphasized that he wants me to write about the house, but I'll wait until I come to the part about going there and then I'll describe it for you. I'll just say now that he picked it when he had collected his inheritance and started to set up shop as a detective. He moved in with his books and fish tanks, he managed to get a license as a private investigator, he listed himself in the Yellow Pages, and he sat back and waited for the world to discover him. The trouble is that he's too rich and he's not rich enough. If he had more money, like a couple of million, it wouldn't matter if he ever worked or not. If he had less money, like nothing substantial in the checking account, it would mean that he'd have to take the few cases that come his way. But he's got just enough money to let him maintain high standards. He won't touch divorce work, for example. He won't do any sort of snooping that requires electronic gear, which he regards as the handtools of the devil. And he won't accept anything routine. What he wants, really, is to handle nothing but baffling murder cases that he can solve through the exercise of his incredible brain, with the faithful Chip Harrison doing the legwork and writing up everything afterwards.

I know his secret hope. Someday, if he makes enough of a name for himself, if he keeps his standards high, develops just the right sort of eccentricities and idiosyncrasies, possibly someday Nero Wolfe will invite him over to the louse on 35th Street for dinner.

That's really what he lives for.

I suppose my civic duty called on me to phone the police as soon as I discovered Melanie's body. I'm glad I didn't let my civic duty interfere with my instinct for self preservation, because it turned out that Detective Gregorio took my towel bar off the wall and checked it out to see if I had drugs stashed in it. That was just about the first place he looked. I'm never keeping anything incriminating in there again, believe me. Pick a place that you figure is the last place the police would think of looking, and that's the *first* place they think of looking. It's the damndest thing.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. What happened was, I went back to Melanie's place, figuring it was possible that the police had already found her without my help, but they hadn't. I had left a book on the floor so that it would be moved if anybody pushed the door more than a third of the way open, and it was still in its original position, so it seemed unlikely anybody had been in the apartment since I'd left it.

I went on inside, and I had an irrational hope that I had been somehow mistaken and Melanie would turn out to be alive after all, which is pretty stupid to write down and all, but impossible to avoid wishing at the time. Of course she was still there, and of course she was dead, and of course I felt sick all over again, but instead of throwing up any more I went into the living room and called 911. The person who picked up the phone put me on HOLD before I had a chance to say anything, which would have!

been aggravating if I'd been bleeding to death or some; thing, but then a couple of seconds later a cop came on the line and I gave him the story. They were fast enough after that. It was 5:18 when I placed the call and the first two patrolmen arrived at 5:31. You would have thought it would take them almost that long to climb the stairs. They spent most of their time walking around and opening drawers and telling me not to touch anything. They were basically waiting for the detectives but they didn't want to look as though they were waiting for the detectives, so they asked me a lot of boring questions and sneaked a lot of peeks at Melanie's body. This seemed very disrespectful to me, but I didn't think they would care to hear my feelings on the matter so I kept them to myself.

The detectives got there before very long and took over. There was Detective Gregorio, whom I mentioned before, and his partner Detective Seidenwall. Gregorio is tall and dark and handsome, and he has one of those twenty-dollar haircuts, and he didn't like me much. Seidenwall is older, say fifty, and his name is easy to remember because he looks like the side of a wall, and he didn't like me at all.

They both seemed to despise me, to tell you the truth.

The trouble started with my name. They said they wanted a full name, not a nickname, and I explained that Chip was my legal first name, and eventually I had to show identification to prove it. They wanted to know what I was doing in Melanie's apartment and I said she was a friend and had invited me to stop in after work.

"Oh, you work, huh?" said Seidenwall.

"I work for Leo Haig. The detective."

"You mean some kind of a private cop? You on some kind of a case?"

"No. Melanie was my friend."

"Uh-huh. You a junkie too?"

"Of course not."

"Roll up your sleeves, punk."

This struck me as silly, since I was wearing a short-sleeved shirt, but I rolled up what little sleeves I had. Gregorio got a little suspicious over a mosquito bite, but turned his attention to other things. He and Seidenwall asked me approximately seven million questions, many of them consisting of the same ones over again. How long had Melanie been a junkie? How long had I been sleeping with her? Had she died right away, or was it gradual?

This last question was a trap, of course. There were a lot of questions like this, designed to trick me into admitting I had been with her when she died. There were other trick questions, geared to establish that I had sold the heroin to her. They seemed to take it for granted that it was heroin, and she had died of an overdose of it.

The questions went on for a while. They probably would have asked me fewer questions if they hadn't hated me on sight, and they would have gone on hassling me longer except they were bored with the whole thing. It was all pretty obvious to them. Melanie had overdosed herself with heroin and that was why she was dead. When I pointed out that she had never to my knowledge been a drug addict, had never used a needle, they nodded without much enthusiasm and said that made an OD that much more likely. She wouldn't know about the proper dose, for one thing. And she would have had no time to build up a gradual tolerance to the drug. Finally, some people go into something called anaphylactic shock the first time they try certain substances.

Penicillin, for some people. Or a bee sting, or heroin.

Anyway, she was dead, and as far as they were concerned it was an accidental drug-related homicide, and they got too many of them to be terribly interested in each; new one that came along. So they asked me all their questions and took a short statement from me, and then they asked me for permission to accompany me to my own residence and search the premises, and of course I could have refused because they didn't have a warrant. But they already hated me enough for one day, I figured, and besides I had thrown away not only the illegal marijuana but the legal codeine tablets, so in a way I was almost glad they wanted to search my room. I mean, I'd have felt a little foolish if I had gone through all of that for nothing.

Gregorio and Seidenwall seemed unhappy when they didn't find anything. They held a whispered conversation by the bathroom door, and I caught enough of it to get an idea what it was about. Seidenwall wanted to plant some drugs so they would have an excuse to arrest me. Gregorio talked him out of it, not out of fondness for me, but because he felt I wasn't worth the trouble.

"I'll tell you, Harrison," he said on his way out. "You're the only thing in this that doesn't make sense. Everything else is pretty open and shut. But you don't figure."

"Why?"

"You swear it's not a business thing with the girl. That she's a friend. And then you tell us you've known her for a month and you weren't balling her."

"I wasn't."

"You a faggot?"

"No."

"Everybody knows those hippie chicks go like rabbits. It's what you call common knowledge. But you knew her for a month without getting in her pants. It don't add up."

I didn't say anything.

"Number two. You go to her apartment and find her dead with a needle in her arm." The needle was not in her arm, but I let it pass. "And what do you do? You call the cops."

"Isn't that what a person is supposed to do?"

"Of course it's what a person is supposed to do. Nobody in this fucking city does what he's supposed to do. Nobody wants to get involved. Nobody wants to call himself to the attention of the police, especially in a drug-related homicide, especially when the person in question is a hippie punk that probably uses drugs himself."

"I don't."

"Yeah, you don't. And you're not a hippie punk either, are you? You're some kind of a cop."

"I work—"

"Yeah, I know. You work for this Haig, who's some kind of private cop that I never heard of. You're his assistant. What do you assist him with?"

"Cases."

"Uh-huh. I'll tell you one thing, Harrison. I hope this Haig character looks more like a cop than you do. Because you just don't fit the image of a cop, Harrison. Private or otherwise, you're not my idea of a cop."

I pictured Leo Haig and tried to decide which of the two of us looked more like a

cop. I gave up thinking about it because it made me feel like giggling and I didn't want to giggle. I had the feeling that one giggle from me was all Seidenwall would need.

I wasn't sleeping with Melanie, I had done my civic duty and called the police, and I didn't look like any kind of a cop. Those were the three things about me that made Gregorio and Seidenwall suspicious. I couldn't quite follow their reasoning on this, but then again I didn't have to.

Suspicious or not, they walked out my door and down the stairs without even telling me not to leave town. So: their suspicion was evidently just on general principles, coupled with instinctive dislike.

I suppose they would have given me a much worse time if they'd had the brains to realize Melanie had been: murdered.

## Three

"It was definitely murder," I said. "First of all, Melanie would never give herself a shot of heroin. She told me she tried heroin once, she snorted it, and it made her nauseous without giving her any kind of a high at all."

"She might try it a second time."

"She might, but there were too many other things she liked better. And if she did try it again, it wouldn't be with a needle. She's terrified of needles. Some nurse had to give her an injection once and botched it, kept stabbing around trying to find the vein, and she still has nightmares about it. Still *had* nightmares about it. Oh, shit."

"Settle yourself, Chip."

I nodded across the desk at him. It's what they call a partners' desk, with drawers and stuff on both sides so two people can use it. I was on my side of the desk. I was very flattered to have a whole side of a desk to myself, but I really didn't have much of anything to keep in the drawers.

Haig took a pipe out of a little wooden rack on his side of the desk. This was during his pipe period. He had trouble keeping them lit, and they kept burning his mouth. He was convinced that he would sooner or later break a pipe in, and sooner or later find a mild enough tobacco, but in the meantime he was doing his best. He thought pipe-smoking might be good for the image. He took the pipe apart and cleaned it while I settled myself. He never did get around to smoking it that night.

I said, "Another thing. Melanie was extremely careful about that air mattress. You had to take your shoes off before you sat on it, and she would make me check to see if I had anything sharp in my pockets. She was very nervous, about puncturing the thing."

Haig nodded. "The syringe."

"Right. Even assuming she decides to take heroin, and even assuming she's going to shoot it, the last place in that apartment she'd pick to use a hypodermic needle is the air mattress."

"You didn't point this out to the police."

"No. I didn't point out anything to them, like telling them how she was afraid she was going to die."

"Perfectly within your rights." He touched his beard, stroked it with love and affection. "A citizen is under no compulsion to volunteer unrequested information to the police. He is merely obliged to answer their questions honestly and completely, and make no false statements."

"Well, I fell down there."

"The lock."

"Right. They asked how I got in and I told them the lock was wrecked a couple of weeks ago in a burglary and she hadn't got around to replacing it yet."

"And of course you didn't tell them you had been there once before."

"No. I, uh, more or less gave them the impression I spent the past four hours with you."

"I think that was wise," he said. "They should have noticed the syringe and the air mattress. That should have been as obvious as a third nostril." He closed his eyes for a moment and his hand worked on his beard. "You should have told me of Miss