'Preppy' allegedly kills date in drag

By JASON S. JOHNSON and DAVID TALBOT

A "preppy" Watertown computer worker searching for sex in the Combat Zone strangled his one-night stand after discovering a man's body underneath a woman's tight jeans and lacy purple top, police said last night.

The slaying ended a five-hour romance between accused killer William C. Palmer, 34, and transsexual Ramon Pickett, 23, of Chelsea — who had been planning to have a sex change operation, officials said.

After strangling Pickett with his bare hands, Palmer

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slept in the same room as the body for several hours, police said.

Palmer, described as polite and clean-cut by neighbors, set out alone Sunday night for company and ended up around midnight at the Playland Cafe on Essex Street, where he met Pickett at the dimly lit bar.

PALMER

People at the Combat Zone, who referred to Pickett as "she," said Pickett was known to hang out at the neon-lit bar and in the area. Police said Pickett was not a prostitute.

The pair left the bar for Pickett's apartment in Chelsea. Finally, they proceeded to Palmer's Watertown apartment at [redacted] — which he shares with three men and a woman. With the roommates asleep elsewhere in the house, the two lovers crept upstairs to Palmer's bedroom and began having sex — but at 5 a.m. Palmer made the fatal discovery, said Assistant Middlesex District Attorney Martin Murphy.

"In the bedroom, the suspect discovered that the victim was a man, not a woman. There was an argument, there was a struggle. During the struggling, he kills him by strangling him," Murphy said.

Eight hours passed before police broke down the door and found the body around 1 p.m. Monday, fully clothed, with a long black wig lying on the floor nearby.

Murphy said Palmer and his roommates presented themselves to a local attorney to report the dead body and the attorney in turn notified police.

Palmer will be arraigned on murder charges today in Waltham District Court.

Palmer, who works for Unisys in Somerville, was described as polite and clean-cut, wears khaki pants and sportcoats, drives a blue sport-utility vehicle and was often seen by neighbors walking his German shepherd, Max, around the well-kept neighborhood. He and his roommates would also have barbecues.

Across-the-street neighbor David Huntley said Palmer was "a very outgoing and polite and nice, warning us if there would be parties, or inviting us for cookouts." He said Palmer dressed "on the preppy side."

"He is the nicest guy you'd ever want to know. I just can't believe this happened. He must've gone totally berserk. It's the only way I could imagine him doing something like this," said neighbor Rita MacLeavey.