

JIM ANTHONY SUPER-DETECTIVE

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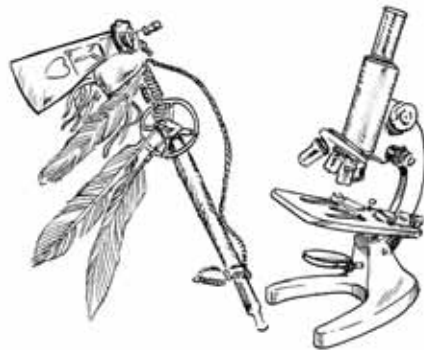
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PART ONE
DEATH IN YELLOW
by Joshua Reynolds

1931.

New York at night looked like an ocean of stars from Edgar Phipps' penthouse balcony. Foam capped waves in the form of snow-encrusted roof tops rose from the sea of light, the crystals of ice glittering like a thousand jewels. But the heir to the Phipps Pharmaceuticals fortune had eyes only for night sky, and the actual stars glittering in its dark embrace.

Phipps was short and pleasantly round, plump rather than obese, and seemingly small for all his weight. Thinning, mussed hair decorated his avocado shaped head and his bubble-cheeks threatened to puff out even further as he smiled at his guest.

"Jimmy, champagne?" Phipps extended the bottle, cork long since popped, and shook it slightly, slopping clear liquid onto the balcony.

"And what exactly are we celebrating, Eddie?" Jim Anthony said, smiling, as he lounged in the doorway. His appearance was in stark contrast to that of his host. He was dark of mien, with thick hair and a broad shouldered, thin waisted build. A loose silk shirt covered his torso and muscular arms and rough-woven cloth trousers the color of pampas grass hid his long legs. His feet were bare, despite the chill of the evening. "They name a new star after you?"

"Even better," Phipps said, pouring himself a flute of champagne. He drained it and smacked his lips. "A comet."

“A comet? Well, that’s quite an achievement.” Jim stepped onto the balcony and hopped up onto the stone railing with the grace of a savage, sitting comfortably on the edge despite the snow crusted there, his legs dangling off and over the never-sleeping city. He accepted a glass from Phipps and took a sip. “Quality,” he said, raising the glass in salute. Phipps nodded.

“Only the best. I can afford it. And, I needed to thank you.”

“All I did was help you build the thing,” Jim said, pointing at the telescope standing at one corner of the balcony. It was of unique design, with specially crafted lenses and a one-of-a-kind magnification system. Jim knew this because he had been the one to help Phipps design it, over crullers and a pot of rapidly cooling, bourbon laced coffee. “You came up with it in the first place.”

“True, very true. But I have all of the practical application skills of a jellyfish.” Phipps raised his own glass and threw it back, draining it in moments.

“You’re not that bad.”

“You weren’t singing that tune when I soldered my cufflink to the housing.”

Jim laughed and took another sip of the champagne. It was light and the bubbles popped pleasingly on his tongue. He held up the glass and then looked at Phipps. “So where’d you get this?”

“A speakeasy, where else?”

“The one on third?”

“Where else?”

“Good vintage.”

“As long as it tickles my tongue, I’m happy.”

“Yeah,” Jim finished his glass and shook his head when Phipps shook the bottle. “Moderation, my friend. All things in moderation.”

“Except fame and fortune,” Phipps said.

“Ha,” Jim said, noncommittally. He looked up, past the edge of the roof of the penthouse and into the sky. Snowflakes circled down in an endless dance and Jim felt a momentary flush of pleasant vertigo. His grandfather, the wily old Comanche, said that the stars were holes that the sun had burned into Moon’s blanket to find Coyote.

Unconsciously, his eyes found the distant spire of his own penthouse at the top of the Waldorf-Anthony on Fifth Avenue and he wondered whether Mephito was sitting on the roof, as he often did, communing with the night sky. A chill flashed through him, and an image of Mephito’s frown-

ing face. He shifted on his perch.

“You were out west a while this time,” Eddie said. “Come up with any new philosophical treatises on the psychology of the modern criminal?”

“Not this time,” Jim said. “It was more like recovery. I just needed some time away.” He thought of the Pueblo, his home away from home, far from the urban sprawl. A place where he could more fully be himself. A place where he could commune with his heritage. Both of them.

“Recovery? The great Jim Anthony, murderist extraordinaire, needed some relaxation?”

“Coming to the next meeting of the Gun Club, Eddie?” Jim asked, changing the subject.

“Hmmm? Oh, probably.” Phipps, bottle still in hand, was bending down to peer through the telescope. He paused and looked at Jim. “Why do we call it the Baltimore Gun Club anyway? We’re in New York, after all.”

“Tradition,” Jim said. He shielded his eyes. The wind was picking up, and the snow with it.

“Tradition should be geographically correct.”

“I’m sure you could put forth a motion-”

“I’ll stick to finding comets, thanks. One impossible thing a lifetime, I always say. I-” Phipps voice died in his throat, his words stuttering off into silence. Jim said,

“Eddie? What’s wrong?”

“There’s something-” Phipps stopped again, stepping back from the telescope, the bottle of champagne falling from his hand to shatter on the balcony.

Jim turned on his perch even as a shadow fell over him. Finely honed instincts pulsed to the surface of his mind and he reacted without thought, flipping up and off of the balcony rail to land in a crouch near the door. Something landed heavily on the space he had vacated, and a hot animal stink washed over him, carried by the rising wind. Claws scraped the brick as something white glared at them through mad eyes, jaws gaping, brutal fangs glistening.

Phipps screamed and the tableau was shattered. The white thing leapt from its perch with a grunt and shot long arms-impossibly long-towards Jim. Claws dug into his shirt, tearing the skin beneath as it hoisted him easily, swiftly.

Jim’s mind whirled—it was fast, too fast—and he reacted with savage desperation, his legs shooting up, catching the thing in its taut belly. It gave a whuff of surprise and released him. Jim dropped to all fours and

shot to his feet, one big fist popping out to catch the thing in its jaw.

“Eddie! Get out of here!”

The thing-the creature-howled and brought both of its own bludgeoning fists down, hammering Jim to his knees. Bleary-eyed, he looked up into its inhuman face even as it grabbed him and hauled him up over its peaked head like a sack of concrete.

“Oh hell,” Jim said.

Then, with a growl, the white thing hurled him from the balcony!

* * *

Jim fell for what seemed like an eternity, plummeting into the spiraling whiteness of the New York night, his arms and legs flailing helplessly.

However, regardless of how long it seemed it was actually only a few, brief moments and Jim possessed enough lucidity to grab his belt.

It was composed of an almost infinitely stretchy fiber grown only in the Amazon and known only to a single tribe of natives. Well, and Jim Anthony of course.

With a burst of speed that had its origins in desperation, Jim whipped the belt from around his middle and cracked it with a single, superhuman snap of his wrist. The loop of the belt flapped out and snagged the head of a gargoyle as Jim passed it.

A yank and a wrench and Jim Anthony hung above the streets by one arm, his shoulder dislocated and his fingers threatening to loosen their grip. Muscles screaming in agony, Jim swung himself up, his uninjured arm slapping against the gargoyle. His tough fingers scrabbled at the porous stone even as his other hand spasmed and released the belt. Panting, Jim strained against gravity and his own weight, hauling himself onto the snow-encrusted gargoyle.

Eyes closed, Jim fought down the pain and marshaled his thoughts. His toes dug into the cracks in the gargoyle's hide and he was suddenly glad he had decided to forgo shoes, despite the snow.

Beneath him, New York moved, the streets interconnecting webs of light and sound, whistling, whispering siren fingers seeking to pull him down into their embrace. He closed his eyes, opened them, and took a moment to catch his breath.

Freeing his belt, he gingerly lashed his pain-inflamed arm as tightly to his body as he could, to counteract the potential balance problems, and

stood in a half-crouch. Scanning the side of the building, he grinned, despite the agony seeping from his shoulder and into his chest.

There. A window.

Straightening slightly, he knew he would have only one chance. Sinking back down, his powerful legs bunched beneath him, he bent his arm, long fingers hooked and ready. Then, with a soft grunt, he leapt, a flurry of dislodged snow following him.

Hand outstretched, he reached for the ledge beneath the window. His fingers slapped the brickwork, slid, then found purchase. The soles of his feet smacked into the building and in one distinctly less than graceful movement, he scrambled up onto the narrow ledge and tapped against the window with his knuckles.

The window slid up and a concerned face peered out.

“Little late for washing windows, son,” the old man said, his bald pate gleaming red. A walrus mustache twitched from side to side as he made a noise half-way between a harrumph and a huff. Jim’s smile was strained.

“I agree completely. Mind if I come in?”

“I don’t-”

“I really must insist.”

“How did-”

“The sooner the better,” Jim pressed.

“How can I refuse?” the old man popped the window wide and Jim slid gratefully off the ledge. The old man was broad and wrapped up in a dressing gown, slippers on his feet.

“Sir, I need you to call the police. Ask for Healy, in Homicide. Tell him Jim Anthony said there’s been trouble at the Suydam Tower.” Jim’s voice was calm, but urgent, as he undid his belt and freed his arm to dangle grotesquely.

“J-Jim Anthony? THE Jim Anthony?”

“I’m the only one I know.”

In front of the old man’s wide, horrified eyes, Jim grabbed his arm and wrenched it back into its socket with a sickening pop. Looking at the old man, Jim said, “Now, please.”

The old man moved haltingly, stumbling out of what Jim realized was his bedroom. The covers were turned down and he’d obviously been preparing for bed.

Rubbing his shoulder, Jim turned back to the window. A hateful demon face glared at him, clawed fingers clutching the edge of the window frame.

Blood smeared the white thing's muzzle and its black-blue lips peeled back from inch-long fangs, revealing pinkish stains on its yellowing teeth.

Jim acted without thought, snapping his belt out, the curved buckle smashing into the creature's almost nonexistent nose. With a screech fit to shatter glass, it reeled back, swinging away from the window, one spade-like paw brushing furiously at its snout.

As it swung back towards him, Jim tensed, ready to lash it again. Before he could move, however, the rumbling crash of a pistol filled the room.

The white thing shrieked and vanished. Jim turned, took in the whey-faced, shaking apartment owner and the smoking .45 in his hands, and then darted towards the window.

The creature was gone. Bloody prints marred the window sill and Jim felt a sickening lurch in his stomach.

Eddie.

He turned. "Did you call the police?"

"I-I-"

"I need you take a breath. Breathe." Jim's voice was soothing as he reached out and easily pried the gun from the old man's clutching fingers. "Did you call the police?"

"Th-they're on their way," the old man whispered. "What-what-"

"I don't know. But I'm going to find out," Jim said, his voice as hard as stone.

* * *

The door was locked. Jim grasped the knob and gave it a vicious twist, snapping the bolt in two with a prodigious display of strength.

He entered the apartment warily, his desert-trained senses straining to their limit. The pungent animal stink hung over everything. The living room was completely ruined. Blood was splashed carelessly on the walls and vicious claw-swipes decorated every surface.

Phipps was on the balcony.

Jim sank to his haunches beside the remains of his friend, his face a frozen mask. His hand hovered over the body, but did not touch it. Jim closed his eyes and pulled his hand back. Grief could wait.

"I'm sorry, Eddie."

Rising to his feet, he took stock of his surroundings, letting his eyes

wander and his amazing brain calculate. The events occurring immediately after his fall were recreated in his head according to what he saw. Footsteps in the champagne. The balcony doors shattered. The couch overturned. The telescope loosed from its tripod, and broken in half. He looked down at Phipps.

There were white hairs clutched in his hand.

Jim frowned. Running a hand through his thick hair, he turned around. More hairs were scattered around. Caught in the glass and left behind in its bloodstained tracks. Jim had been a hunter since he could walk. Animals, then men. He plucked a strand of hair from the balcony door and examined it.

Was the creature shedding?

Before he could consider it any further, the front door to the apartment slammed open, propelled by a standard issue police shoe. Uniformed officers piled into the room, service weapons ready.

“Freeze!” one yelled, pistol flashing up in Anthony’s direction. A nearly shapeless fedora flashed up and down, swatting the officer on the back of the head.

“Put your gun down, Lewis, before he feeds it to you!” Detective Turkish Healy barked, thin, sallow features coiled in exasperation. “Better yet, I’ll do it.”

“Hello, Detective Healy,” Jim said, stepping into the apartment. Healy took in his ripped and blood-stained shirt and nodded, as if replying to some inner question.

“You look like three shades of shit,” Healy said.

“I feel worse,” Jim said. “You got here quickly.”

“Fancy building. Rich folks. And you. All kinds of priority there,” Healy sounded bored. He slapped his thigh with his fedora. “You want to give me your version?”

“We were attacked.”

“By?”

“Something unpleasant,” Jim said, holding up the strand of hair. Healy peered at it, bottom lip almost disappearing as he gnawed it.

“Animal hair?”

“It depends on what you mean by animal,” Jim said. “I need to analyze this, to find out what it is-”

“Chief thinks it’s a lion or a leopard got loose from the zoo.”

Jim looked at Healy. “What?”

“Figured you wouldn’t have heard, you being out west and all.” Healy

looked slightly smug. “Three other murders. Three fat cats, on their balconies, slaughtered. Like your pal there-”

“His name was Edgar Phipps,” Jim said, quietly. Healy paused. He nodded.

“Same kind of hairs. I got tossed the case, on account of that thing last year with that Yogami fellow-”

“Yes. The so-called Werewolf of Red Hook,” Jim said. He absently stroked a scar on his arm. “Did his body ever turn up?”

“Not so far. The sewers were dumping into the East River though, what with the flooding. He’s probably at the bottom of the Atlantic.” Healy waved a hand. “Actually, at first, I thought it was him come back, cause of the hairs. But they ain’t nothing like the samples we got from Yogami’s murders...”

“Wrong color for one,” Jim said, thinking that the white thing bore little resemblance to Yogami, even at his most...unpleasant. He looked at the detective. “They think it’s a leopard?”

“Or one of them white tigers. The Russian ones,” Healy said. Jim looked back at Phipps’ body, frowning.

“What were the names of the other victims?”

Healy shook his head. “Sorry, Anthony, but-”

“I’ve seen your killer, Healy. I was almost killed by it.” Jim held the hair up to Healy’s face. Healy sucked on a thumbnail.

“Yeah?”

“Yeah.”

“I could get a court order”-

“Or you could just tell me. I helped you with the Yogami case, after all.”

Healy hesitated, his face twisting. Then,

“Felton. Hammersmith. Wooster. Those were their names. You recognize them?”

“Yes, unfortunately. Russell Felton, Eugene Hammersmith and Guster Wooster?”

“Yeah. Yeah, how’d you-”

“They’re all members of the Baltimore Gun Club. Just like Eddie.” Jim clenched his fist, crushing the hair. “Just like me.”

* * *

“So poor old Eddie Phipps is dead, hunh?” Tom Gentry said from the driver’s seat of the car carrying Jim towards home. The street was nearly deserted, but not quite, despite the hour.

“Yes,” Jim said, shortly.

“And you’re taking it personal, aren’t ya?”

“I can’t exactly NOT take it personally, Tom,” Jim said. Gentry snorted and squeezed the Ford’s horn.

“Go back ta Jersey!” Tom snarled, then looked up at the rearview mirror. “I didn’t mean it that way, Jimmy. I just meant-”

“I know what you meant, old friend.” Jim held up his arm, examining the cuts that decorated it. “But he was murdered right under my nose, by something that I-” Jim stopped, eyes closed. Thinking.

What had it been? Anthropoid, certainly. A costume? No, no not a costume, or if it was, it was an exceptionally good one. Some form of ape then. If so, it had crawled right out of Poe.

“Dupin,” Jim said, aloud.

“Hunh?”

“Murders in the Rue Morgue. Poe. A trained ape-”

“A trained what?” Tom sounded incredulous. He squeezed the horn again and stuck an arm out the window, shaking it. “I swear to the Blessed Virgin, I’m gonna-”

“It wasn’t a conventional murderer. It was some form of primate. I’m sure that once I analyze these hairs, it’ll yield the species of-” Jim began. But whatever else he’d been about to say was lost in the sudden shriek of tortured metal and shattering glass as a black car hurtled out of a side-street and slammed into the side of Anthony’s own vehicle!

Horns bellowed as the two cars hurtled on, pressed tight together in an embrace of grinding steel. Tom cursed. “What in the-hang on Jimmy!”

Jim didn’t answer, instead focusing his keen attention on the other car and its occupants. The windows were tinted, but even as he watched, horror coiling within him, they descended, revealing the muzzles of several Thompson sub-machine guns.

“Tom! Swerve!” Jim bellowed throwing himself flat in the back seat, his hands scrabbling beneath the cushion, fingers searching for a latch-THERE! The cushion lifted, revealing a unique-looking heavy caliber pistol with a curling, rams horn ammunition clip. Jim scooped it up even as Tom twisted the wheel with a Gaelic howl and sent their vehicle scraping into the other.

One of the Thompsons sputtered and Jim's keen ears heard rubber pop and thanked whatever muse of foresight had inspired him to install bulletproof panels in all of his automobiles.

"We've lost a wheel!" Tom said.

"We've still got three!" Jim said, rising back into a sitting position and taking aim. The gun in his hand bucked once, twice, a trio of thunderous booms and the passenger side window of the back of the other vehicle split like a spider-web caught by the errant finger of a child.

Though Jim's weapon was loaded only with mercy bullets, their effects were similar to the garden variety slug and one of the Thompsons vanished as its wielder was struck and sent sprawling across the seat.

The black car seemed to writhe across the space between the two vehicles and its front end sent them slewing around awkwardly. Jim cursed and fired again, but the lurching movement of the car threw his aim off.

"Tom, hold her steady!"

"Why?"

"I'm going to be a good neighbor and pay a visit," Jim said, sliding back and kicking his damaged door open. The black car swerved away as the door flew open and snapped off of its hinges, spiraling into the street. Cars honked and people screamed, but Jim ignored the cacophony and stepped out onto the running board.

"Jim! You can't!" Tom said, throwing panicked glances over his shoulder. "Are you crazy?"

Jim didn't reply. Instead, taking a breath, he leapt across the gap that separated both cars and lashed out with one bronzed arm, hooking it around the passenger window of the other vehicle. Even as his toes found the running board of the black car, he thrust his pistol through the open window and fired.

The car swerved wildly, and Jim lost his weapon. Swinging haphazardly, his shoulder screamed in remembered pain and Jim gritted his teeth and hung on grimly.

Jim reached out and grabbed the door handle and yanked it open, revealing the terrified countenance of a waxy skinned man, who swung a Tommy gun towards him. Jim grabbed the barrel of the Thompson and yanked it out of the gunslinger's grip, hurling it away into their wake. Quick as lightning, his free hand shot forward again, grabbing a fistful of the man's shirt.

"Sorry friend, but this is where you get off!" Jim said, dragging the man out and tossing him one-handed into the street!

“You sonnuva- the driver roared, red beard bristling as he clawed for the roscoe holstered under his arm. Jim swung easily into the car and grabbed the wheel with one hand, even as his other curled into a battering ram fist and smashed across red-beard’s jaw. As the big man slumped, Jim jammed his foot on the brake and guided the car up onto the sidewalk and to a complete stop.

Turning the key, Jim allowed himself to take a deep breath. Some crises were easier than others—

The sound of a pistol being cocked caused Jim to freeze. The cool steel of the barrel was pressed to the back of his head, and a rough voice said, “Learn ta count, wild man.”

* * *

“I did,” Jim said, his voice calm. Carefully, he raised his hands.
“Yeah?”
“Quite. Hello, Tom.”

“Hiya Jimmy,” Tom said, aiming a Winchester through the window at the fourth gunman. “You. Put the peashooter down or I’ll put a part in that greased back hair of yours.”

“Maybe you should put yours down, hunh paddy?” The gun dug into Jim’s skull a little harder. “Think you can cap me before I paint the window with his fancy brains?”

“Oh, I think so,” Tom said softly. “I got it down to a science, me.”

“And I got luck.”

“Lucky for us all, I have both,” Jim said. He turned with a beast’s quickness, sweeping his arm across and down, trapping the pistol against the seat, and his fist snapped out like a piston, driving the gunman’s head back and his lights out.

Tom let out a breath and raised the Winchester. “Hoo. Warn me next time, hunh?”

“I’ll try,” Jim said, smiling. He stepped out of the car, rubbing awkwardly at his shoulder. “I’m going to hurt in the morning.”

“Welcome to the human race.” Tom prodded the unconscious man with his rifle. “Who the heck do you think they are?”

“Well, that would be the first in a long series of questions I was planning on asking them.” Jim deftly began removing weapons from the car, tossing them to Tom. “But first, let’s remove temptation, shall we?”

“Sounds good-” Tom began, but was cut off as a machine gun rattled.

Tom threw himself flat, his rifle spinning away. Jim jumped over the hood of the black car as bullets chased him, chewing through the body of the car and the unconscious gunmen. Tom scrambled to join him, bleeding from a graze on his cheek.

The last hood, the one Jim had tossed from the car, stumbled towards them, weaving through traffic, a battered Thompson cradled in his hands. A car screeched to a halt and the driver pounded the horn, causing the gunsel to whirl and let a burst rip through the windshield, killing the hapless driver.

“No!” Jim roared, shooting to his feet. He vaulted over the hood of the car and pounded towards the gunman, arms spread, fingers hooked like claws. Meanwhile, Tom scrambled for his Winchester.

“You! You’re dead!” the gunman snarled through a busted jaw. He turned, raising the Thompson as Jim charged towards him. Jim jumped, hurling himself forward like a bullet. Even as the Thompson spat, Jim was forcing the barrel upwards, his other hand clawing for the gunman’s throat. A red rage suffused Jim’s being as he grabbed the man’s throat and tore the gun from his grasp. The muscles in his arm bulged as he forced the struggling gunman up into the air and slowly, slowly, throttled him.

“Jim,” Tom said, softly, reaching out to put his hand on Jim’s arm. “Jimmy, enough.”

Jim glanced at his friend, his face twisted into an expression of rage that chilled Tom to his very marrow. Swallowing, the doughty Irishman said, “Jimmy, we need at least one of these guys alive.”

Closing his eyes, Jim fought to control himself, control the animal hatred that flooded him. With a sound half-way between a groan and a sigh, he dropped the gunman.

Sirens sounded, not far away. The police were on their way. Jim looked down at the red-faced gunman, who lay still, either unconscious or doing an admirable job at pretending.

Traffic had come to a dead stop on the street. People were milling about, looking around. Not many, but enough night owls and early birds to cause a scene. Jim, leaving Tom to look after the unconscious gunman, strode back towards the car. Two of the other gunmen were dead, killed by their own fellow. But the red-bearded driver still lived, miraculously having avoided being hit by a stray bullet. As Jim approached, he stirred.

Bleary-eyed, he groped for his pistol. But, finding it missing, gave a sigh and laid his head across the steering wheel. Jim approached cautiously, and leaned down.

“Who are you? Why did you try to kill me?”

“Because you have to die. Why else?” red-beard grunted. He looked at Jim. “He said-said-” He clutched his chest, coughing. “I-” With a bone-breaking shudder, red-beard jerked back in his seat, clawing at his chest and throat. Jim took a step back as a yellowish vapor exploded from the man’s nostrils and lips, followed by a nicotine-colored spittle.

Mouth covered, Jim backed away. Poison. It had to be. Whoever had hired them, hadn’t planned on paying them. Jim spun, reaching out towards Tom.

“Tom, get away from him!”

“What?” Tom turned, even as the man on the ground began to jerk and strangle slowly. The same yellow vapor boiled out of his open mouth. Tom jumped back with a curse. “What in the name of-”

“Poison. Don’t touch him. Don’t get close. Officers,” Jim shouted, even as several police cars screeched to a halt and several officers got out. “Keep these people back.” He gestured at the growing crowd of rubbernecks. While several of the cops looked to want to argue, one or two recognized Anthony and leaped to obey his orders as if they had been given by their own sergeants.

Jim tore a strip from his shirt and wrapped it around his face as he squatted beside the body on the ground. The gunman had expired seconds earlier, as had red-beard. Cautiously, Jim tilted the dead man’s head one way, then the other, observing the discharge that was rapidly drying on the man’s nose and lips.

“First the monkey, now this?” Tom said. “What is this?”

“Connected,” Jim said, simply. “It has to be.” He stood. “There are only a few poisons that leave a discharge like this.”

“Yeah, and I bet you know all of ‘em,” Detective Healy said, walking towards them, slapping his hip with his hat. He looked at Tom. “Gentry.”

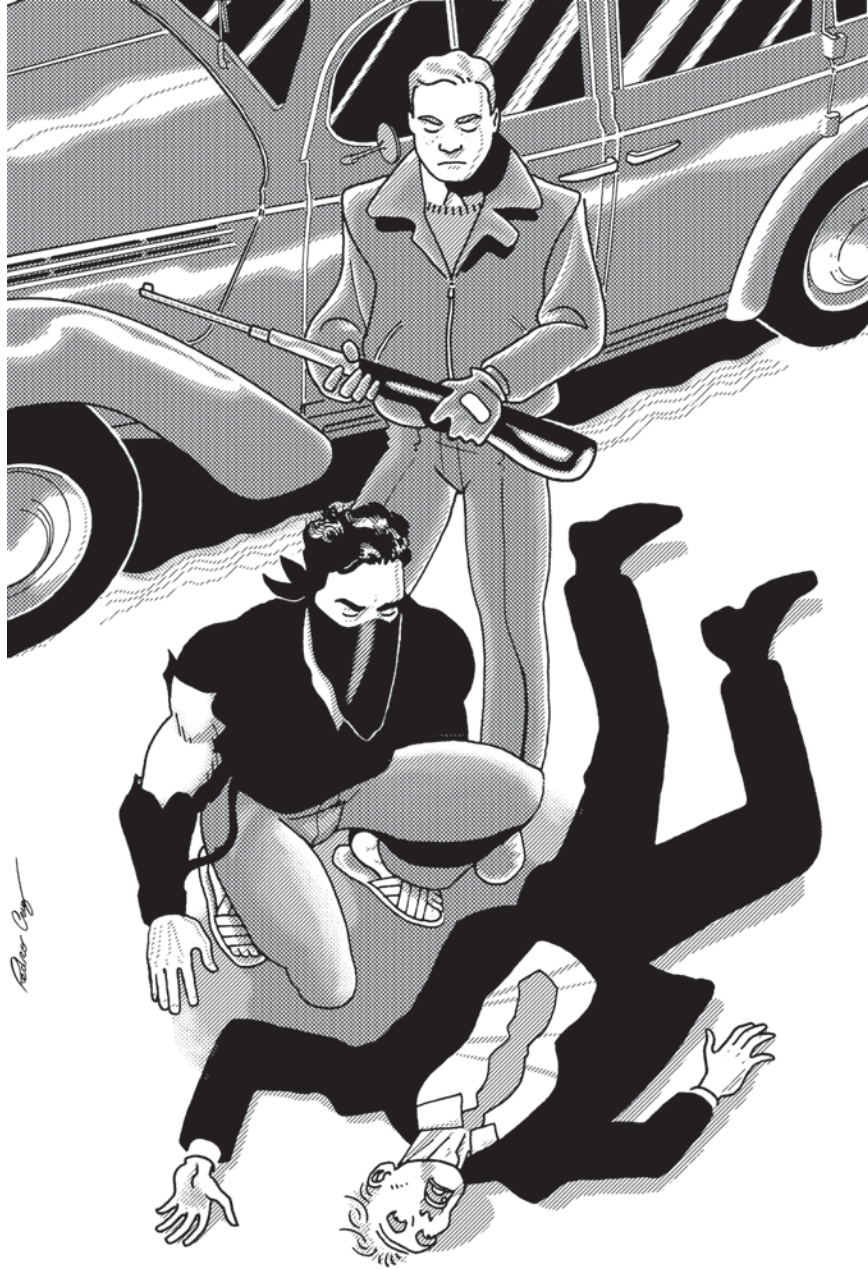
“Healy.”

“I do have a working knowledge of poisons, yes. And I have a few guesses, but-” Jim turned to Healy. “But, I’d need a sample. Offhand I’d guess it’s the distillation of the Mariphasa Lupinum-”

“The wha-hunh?”

“Tibetan Moon Blossom. Extremely toxic to humans,” Jim said. “As I said though, I’d need a sample-”

“And you expect me to just turn it over to you?” Healy said, his tone implying that he knew Jim meant exactly that. “What next, you want a



Jim tore a strip from his shirt and wrapped it around his face as he squatted beside the body on the ground.