

Dan Fowlz
G-Man

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Dan Fowler: G-Man

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Dan Fowler
G-Man

in

*"The Dungeon
of Death"*

by

Gregory Bastianelli

Prologue

The first thing he realized when he opened his eyes was that he could not move, as if he were paralyzed from the neck down. His head pounded like the turbine engines of the Navy destroyer he had just spent the last six months at sea on before docking at the New York City port.

His head was groggy from too many pints of draught beer and boilermaker chasers. That's what made his head pound. But something else made him groggy and his vision blurry. His lungs felt scorched, as if he had inhaled a flame, and his throat ached.

And something was preventing him from moving.

As his vision cleared, he managed to lift his head just slightly, and he rolled his eyes around the room before him. The room was dimly lit by one lone gas lamp.

What happened? he wondered.

He remembered being out with a few of his shipmates, carousing during liberty, making up for the lost time at sea. That's what liberty was for, wasn't it? Tossing down a bit of the devil's spit.

Had he left the saloon on his own? He tried to remember. Didn't he want to go looking for some ladies of the evening? Yeah, that was it. He recalled staggering down some dark alley. And then...

It was all foggy.

But why couldn't he move his body? He was lying prone, on his gut. He could feel his toes, even wiggle them, but he couldn't move his legs. He could only move his head, just a bit, to the left and right, up and down. There was something constricted around his neck, so he couldn't lift his

head too high.

Off to the left he could see some form of a table.

Dried dull streaks of red pooled beneath it. His eyes followed up to the pendulum blade hanging still over the center of the table.

What kind of place was this?

He tried to squirm. His hands felt bound behind his back, something—rope?—cutting into the flesh on his wrists.

“Hullo!” he yelled, his throat muscles pressing against the firm object surrounding his neck. “Help me!”

Suddenly, he heard movement.

A pair of legs in brown tweed trousers appeared before him.

He couldn’t raise his head high enough to see above the waist.

“Where am I?” he frantically called out. “Who are you? What’s going on here?”

“Who I am matters not,” came a deep voice. “Where you are has little significance also. But I can tell you what is going on.”

“Let me up.” Fear crawled along his skin, raising the hairs on his arm and the nape of his restricted neck. “Please.” His last word came out softly, with desperation.

“It’s not you that needs help,” the deep voice said. “It’s me.”

“I don’t understand.” He wished he could see the voice’s face. “Why can’t I move?”

“You are lying on a very special kind of table, with your head and body immobilized.”

“What’s going on here?” His voice rose with anger, but also fear as he could feel his heart thumping wildly in his chest.

“If you look down, you may be able to figure out what kind of contraption you are confined in.”

He hung his head down and saw a small, wicker basket resting on the floor beneath him. He was still confused.

Then the trousers moved to one side and he heard a scraping noise above him. The man appeared to be pulling on something.

“You’re starting to scare me,” he yelled to the man with the deep voice. “I’m afraid.”

“Don’t be afraid,” the voice answered. “It’ll all be over soon.”

He saw the trouser legs make some jerking motion and then he heard a loud scream of steel.

Suddenly he was falling.

He came crashing to the floor, face first, his head banging hard, but not as hard as he expected.

Just as suddenly, he felt himself jerked up and a voice whispered loudly into his left ear.

“What do you see?”

When he did open his eyes, there was a craggy goateed face before him, coal dark eyes burning intently into his own, the brow furrowed above them.

He felt a gushing sensation from his throat and he opened his mouth, gulping for air, but he couldn't seem to get it into his lungs. He was rapidly feeling light-headed, as if he were going to faint.

The bearded man seemed to be holding him up, two hands on each side of his head, staring into his eyes.

“What do you see?” the man repeated.

But then he noticed he could not wiggle his toes anymore. In fact, he could no longer feel anything below his neck.

That was when he realized the significance of the wicker basket and shockingly understood the contraption he was in was a guillotine.

Everything went bright, and he quickly could no longer see anything at all.



Special agent Dan Fowler sat across the big oak desk in the office of the director of the Department of Justice in Washington, D.C. The chief stood staring out the window, arms crossed.

Fowler sat quietly, hands folded in his lap, but inside his still body, his pulse raced like a locomotive. The G-man was anxious to get onto another case, and he hoped that was why the chief summoned him to his office. Fowler was tired of peddling paperwork and was itching for action. He hadn't had an assignment since the armored car caper a few months back.

One didn't interrupt the chief's thoughts, so Fowler kept quiet while the other man stared out the window, almost oblivious to Fowler's presence in the room. On the desk before him lay a manila file. He was anxious to know what was in it, almost straining to see through the manila folder into its contents. It had to be a case. Please, he thought, let it be a case, and not more paperwork.

Suddenly the chief spun on his heels, almost as if he just realized Fowler was in the room.

“Morning,” the chief muttered, nearly under his breath, and sat down behind the big desk. “I have an assignment for you.”

Dan Fowler propped up, excited and alert.

The chief pulled the file toward him and opened it.

Fowler's eyes tried to peer across the table and decipher the upside-down contents.

“There’s been a string of men disappearing from the Bowery and dock areas of New York City,” the chief began. “Mostly vagrants and hobos. Drunks living along skid row. The city police chief says it’s been going on for several months apparently. He’s not really sure how long, cause nobody’s missing these people. But some concerned member of a local soup kitchen report the disappearances.”

Dan Fowler cleared his throat. He was a little disappointed and even more confused.

“Sounds like a local matter to me, sir. Why would we get involved?”

The chief grunted, then tossed the file across the desk.

“You’re right about that. We wouldn’t be concerned at all about a bunch of hobos. But the latest person to go missing is a U.S. sailor. That makes it a federal case.”

Fowler opened the file. Inside was a picture of a smiling young man in a sailor suit. The paperwork listed his name as Eugene Brice, from Ohio, stationed on the destroyer *U.S.W. Dempsey*.

“His vessel is docked in New York City. He and a couple of shipmates went out on liberty, hitting some of the saloons near where the disappearances of the hobos have occurred. He never made it back to the ship.”

“What about his shipmates?”

“They said he left one saloon alone, place called The Old Salt, went out looking for some female companionship, if you know what I mean.” The director grunted. “They had stayed behind. He told them he’d meet them back at port. Never showed.”

Fowler read through the description of the sailor, height, weight, distinguishing marks, specifically a tattoo of a mermaid and anchor on his right upper arm.

“I know it doesn’t seem like that exciting of a case for you, but this man is in service to our country, just like yourself. Besides, it’ll be good to get you out of the office, before you get rusty.”

Fowler grinned. It sounded to him like a big waste of time and of his talents. But what could he do? Argue with the chief? One doesn’t question orders. And he didn’t get the idea the chief was asking him if he wanted this assignment.

Besides, he hadn’t been to New York City in a while.

“You’d like to take some help with you, I’m sure,” the chief said, as if reading his mind.

“Yes, Kendal and Miss Vane, if that’s okay.”

“Both?” The chief studied his eyes. “Well, why not. Take a car from the motor pool. Make contact with the NYPD police chief. Name’s in the file. He’ll fill you in on their investigation.”

Fowler stood up.

“If it turns out to be nothing but dead ends, let me know. I don’t want

you wasting a lot of time on this. For all I know, this guy just got drunk and fell off a pier.”

“I’ll do my best, sir.”



In the early morning in a red brick building on a busy street in lower Manhattan, Dan Fowler sat in the office of Police Chief Gibbons. It was a large office, bigger than the director’s office in the Justice Department building. Even the police chief’s desk was bigger. Fowler sat opposite Chief Gibbons, with Kendal and Miss Vane on either side of him. Off against the right wall on which hung a large map of the city leaned two detectives, Shields and Blue.

Detective Shields was the older of the two, about Fowler’s age. He was tall and rugged, square jaw, military haircut. He looked like he might have been a Marine before becoming a cop. Detective Blue was younger, with a rounder, baby face plastered with a big grin. He probably had recently been promoted to detective. The two detectives were the lead investigators into the disappearances of the hobos.

“I didn’t think the feds would send three of you down for one missing Navy boy,” the chief said. “Things must be slow in Washington.”

“We were available,” Fowler said, then added, “for the moment. We could get called back if something more important comes up.” He wanted to make sure Chief Gibbons knew the Justice Department was doing them a favor.

“Don’t know why the feds had to be called in,” Detective Shields said, eyeing Fowler and the others. Fowler suspected the detective wasn’t too happy about having his toes stepped on. But heck, it seemed they had plenty of time to solve the case on their own and hadn’t gotten anywhere. You’d think they’d appreciate a little help.

“Well, this case was pretty quiet till this latest development,” Chief Gibbons said. “Hadn’t even gotten much play in the press.”

“Nobody really cares about bums going missing,” Detective Shields piped in.

“Well,” Chief Gibbons said, “who knows if they were really missing to begin with. I mean, nobody keeps track of hobos. They drift around, they come and go. How can you really tell if one’s missing?”

“Nobody misses them,” Detective Blue added.

“Well, nobody reports them missing,” Chief Gibbons corrected.

“But someone finally did,” Kendal said.

“Yes. Guy who runs a local soup kitchen. Said a few of his regulars

stopped coming in, Then there was some grumbling amongst the hobos. But still, you never know with these types. They stay drunk all the time, wander around. But then..."

"We started finding bodies." It was Detective Shields who said this.

"Where?" Fowler asked.

"Fished a couple out of the East River. One just yesterday."

"Have they been identified?"

"No one knows who these people are," Chief Gibbons said, his voice raised slightly.

"Nobody cares," Detective Shields added.

"Where do these men live?" Sally Vane asked?

"They don't live anywhere," Detective Shields said.

"Mostly they sleep in alleys, subway tunnels and abandoned warehouses," Chief Gibbons added.

"Whereabouts?" Fowler asked.

"Show them on the map," Chief Gibbons ordered the detectives.

Detective Shields turned to face the wall map. Fowler and Kendal both got up and joined him.

"According to the soup kitchen guy," Detective Shields said, running his finger along the map, "most of the bums hung out throughout this area in the lower east side, near the Bowery, the fish houses, the piers. Lots of abandoned buildings in that whole area since the Depression hit. About the only thing left open are bars and saloons."

"And where was the saloon the sailor disappeared from?" Fowler asked.

"Here." Detective Shields stuck a finger on the map. "Same general area."

"Which is why we began to suspect it was linked to the hobos case," Chief Gibbons said.

"Why would anyone want to murder hobos?" Fowler asked.

"Who knows?" the chief said. "Maybe it's one of their own, being a little territorial."

"Or maybe it's some good Samaritan who wants to clean up the streets," Detective Blue said, grinning.

"Then why suddenly the sailor?" Sally Vane asked.

"Just what I was thinking," Fowler responded.

"Maybe he got bored with bums," Detective Shields said.

"Or maybe he wasn't satisfied with them."

The office became quiet as everyone became immersed in his or her own silent thoughts. Then the chief's phone rang loudly, making nearly everyone jump.

"Gibbons," the chief barked into the phone. Everyone else listened intently. "When?" The chief listened. "Where?" The chief paused.

“Okay.”

He slammed the phone down.

“Another body, just pulled out of the river near pier 17.”

“Any identification?” Fowler asked.

“No. The body’s got no head.”



Pier 17 jutted into the East River just below a maze of narrow streets and alleys, surrounded by dilapidated brick warehouses and tenement buildings. Dan Fowler looked at the buildings as he stepped out of the car. They looked mostly abandoned. The bricks were faded and chipped, blackened in spots, windows shattered, some boarded up. Faded signs were barely legible. A couple were partially burned ruins. One lot was just a rubble of bricks.

Fowler just shook his head. He didn’t see things like this in Washington.

He glanced toward the pier. A pair of police squad cars were parked nearby, lights flashing. A group of people stood around a blanketed figure on the middle of the pier. Beside the dock was a fire rescue boat with a few men standing on its deck. They must have been the ones who fished the body out of the river. A light mist rose up from the river.

Fowler turned to Sally Vane who had just stepped out of the car.

“Stay here, Sally,” he said.

She bundled the neck of her coat and nodded.

He didn’t want her seeing this.

“Come on, Larry,” he said and the two of them followed Detectives Shields and Blue out onto the pier.

The group of officers parted as they approached and the four of them stopped before the blanketed body. A man in a white coat was kneeling by it. The coroner, Fowler assumed.

“Let’s see it,” Detective Shields said.

The coroner pulled the sheet back.

“Jeez,” Kendal exclaimed.

The corpse was naked except for a pair of gray boxer briefs. The man looked to be in fit shape, well-defined musculature, fairly flat and tight abdomen. It certainly didn’t look like the body of a hobo.

Fowler was amazed at how hard it is to tell someone’s age when you couldn’t see their face. Just above the Adams apple, the neck was neatly cut, leaving a hole of red muscle surrounding the white stump of the spinal cord.

He walked around to the right side and bent down to look at the bicep. Tattooed on the flesh was an anchor, with a busty, curvaceous mermaid wrapped around it, smiling, naked from the waist up except for a pair of seashells that covered her ample bosom.

It looked like they had found Ensign Eugene Brice.

"It's him," Fowler said as he stood up. "Tattoo nails it."

"Looks like our killer has upped his level of victim," Detective Shields said.

"Any idea on type of weapon used?" Fowler asked the coroner.

"Not yet. I'll need to get the body back to the lab for further examination."

"I'd like to come along," Fowler said. "Like to see the body you found yesterday, too."

"Sure," the coroner answered.

"I think we'll canvass the area," Detective Shields said. "See if anybody saw anything." He motioned to Detective Blue and a couple of uniformed officers and they marched off toward the labyrinth of buildings surrounding the pier.

Fowler and Kendal went back to their car.

"We'll drop you off at the hotel, Sally," he told her. "You don't want to be going where we're going."



At the coroner's lab, the headless corpse, now completely naked, lay on a gray metal table in the middle of the room, beneath a bright suspended light. The room was cool. Fowler and Kendal stood on one side of the table opposite the coroner.

"Look," the coroner said, pointing with a pencil at the neckline. "See how smooth the edge of the skin is? Even the bone of the spine," he waved the pencil tip around the white circle of bone in the middle of the red opening, "nice and flat."

Fowler nodded.

"Something very sharp cut through here. And it looks like an even clean cut, done in one quick stroke."

"An axe?" Kendal asked.

"No. Something bigger and much sharper. This is similar to a razor type cut."

"That'd be some big razor," Kendal responded.

The coroner just grunted.

“The body that came in yesterday,” Fowler said, “similar wound?”

“No,” the coroner said, shaking his head. “Oh, no, that one was a bit different.”

He walked over to the drawers against the wall and pulled one open.

The sheet covered something small. Was this a child, Fowler wondered?

The coroner pulled back the sheet.

“This is all they found of this one,” he said, revealing the lower half of a man from about the abdomen down. Through the open end of the waist, they could see the ropelike intestines and other organs.

“Oh my God,” Kendal exclaimed, bringing his fist to his mouth and biting down on a knuckle. His face became pale.

Fowler had seen plenty of dead bodies in his time as a G-man, but most of them were bullet-ridden, which can still leave a pretty nasty corpse. But he’d never seen anything like this.

“Different type of weapon, you said?” Fowler asked, trying to stay focused.

“Yes,” the coroner answered. Once again he used his pencil to point out markings on the corpse. “There are multiple levels of cuts here. Still pretty smooth, so something razor-like also, but these cuts were made gradually, and repeatedly, till the body was completely cut through.”

There was a gurgling sound in Kendal’s throat.

“There’s a bucket in the corner if you’re going to be sick,” the coroner said, pointing with his pencil without even looking.

Kendal bolted for the corner of the room and dropped to his knees before the bucket as the coroner continued: “This person would have to have been immobilized for someone to do something like this to him.”

“Yes, maybe drugged or tied down, or both.”

There was a retching sound followed by a splash as Kendal vomited into the bucket. Fowler ignored it.

“Shields said there was more than one body found before the one today?”

“Yes, couple days ago.”

“And the wounds?”

“There weren’t any. At least, nothing obvious. I’m still trying to figure a cause of death on that one.”

Fowler rubbed his chin, thinking.

“So if we’re talking about one killer here, he’s strangely using multiple weapons to kill. That’s not normal for a psychopath.”

A phone rang in the office outside the examination room.

“Excuse me,” the coroner said, and then left the room.

Fowler looked over at Kendal.

“You okay, Larry?”



"There's bucket in the corner if you're going to be sick."

There was a muffled grunt from the corner.

The door opened and the coroner stood there.

“Chief Gibbons wants you back at the precinct. Says they’ve got a witness.”

“Come on Larry,” Fowler said. “Let’s pick up Sally and get down there.”



In interrogation room No. 3, the two detectives and three federal agents were on the opposite side of a table from a man who looked like he had crawled up out of a gutter. And most likely, he probably had. His hair was long and stringy, a gray beard extending down to his chest. He wore a dingy coat over layers of tattered rags, remnants of what long ago passed as clothing. A foul odor exuded from his body. His eyes were narrow and bloodshot, his nose racked with red veins.

But he sat still and polite, hands folded together on the table in front of him, staring at the lawmen (and woman) before him. Sally Vane, Dan Fowler and Detective Shields sat across from him. Larry Kendal and Detective Blue leaned against the back wall.

Detective Shields produced a small tumbler and a brown bag, which he placed in front of him.

“Now listen,” he said to the man. “We want you to tell these nice federal agents, who came here all the way from Washington, D.C., what you were telling us earlier. And we want you to tell us the truth. No stories. No fantasies.” He slowly removed a bottle of whiskey from the bag, poured a couple fingers into the tumbler, then set the bottle beside it. “If you cooperate with us, you will be rewarded.”

The grimy man’s eyeballs became fixated on the glass, his fat tongue licking slowly across chafed lips.

“Sure thing,” he said, not taking his eyes off the glass.

When he spoke, the stench of stale alcohol floated across the table. Fowler noticed Miss Vane wince and lean back in her chair.

“Tell us where you live,” Detective Shields commanded.

“In an alley, down by Delancy street. Usually sleeping in stairwells and such.” He leaned forward toward the table.

“And you said you saw something a few nights ago.”

The man nodded, still staring at the glass.

“What did you see?”

“The beast. The great beast that’s been killing my friends.” His voice

was hoarse and dry.

“What do you mean by a beast?” Fowler asked, leaning forward.

“A big ape. Huge. Like a gorilla. All hairy. Big arms. Big shoulders.”

Fowler looked skeptically at Detective Shields, who nodded, then back at the man.

“An ape?” he questioned. “Like in a zoo.”

“Oh no, not like in a zoo. This ape was dressed. In a black suit and tie.”

The man leaned forward more. “And he wasn’t alone.”

“Who was with him?”

“A Chinaman. I think he was his keeper. But he didn’t have no leash or nothing. But he was driving the ape around in a gray car. It was a big, long car, with an angled windshield.”

“Sounds like a DeSoto,” Kendal said.

“And what did you say you saw the ape man do?” Detective Shields asked.

The man leaned even further forward.

“I saw him coming down the alley, with a body slung over his shoulder.”

The man winked at Fowler.

“And what did you tell me about what the body was wearing?” Detective Shields continued.

“A sailor suit.”

Fowler sat upright in his chair. He had been thinking this whole story was nothing more than a drunken lark, but nothing had been leaked about the missing sailor. There was no way this man could know that. Not unless he actually did see something.

Detective Shields pushed the glass forward. “Go ahead,” he said and the man grabbed the glass quickly, the whiskey sloshing all around inside the rim but not a drop spilled on the table. He downed the glass with one gulp and smiled.

Fowler looked at Detective Shields, who met his gaze and nodded.

“Have you seen this ape-man around before?” Fowler asked the man.

“Once, lurking around the alley.”

Detective Shields splashed some more whiskey into the man’s glass, which he quickly swallowed.

“Let’s confer with Chief Gibbons,” Fowler said to Detective Shields, then stood up.

“You just wait here,” the detective said to the man, who sat there grinning.

As they filed out of the room, Detective Blue grabbed the bottle off the table and took it with him, smiling at the man who now frowned.

In Chief Gibbons’ office, they contemplated the man’s story.

“An ape-man?” Gibbons questioned. “Sounds ridiculous. What do you think, Fowler?”

Dan Fowler rubbed his chin, thinking. He mentioned an Edgar Allen Poe story in which a killer in Paris turned out to be a trained gorilla. But that was just a story.

“He definitely saw something,” Detective Shields said. “No one knew a sailor was missing. Whatever he saw was blurred by booze, but he did see something.”

“Where’s that alley,” Fowler asked.

They went to the wall map. Detective Shields pointed out the alley.

“And where’s The Old Salt saloon the sailor came from?”

Detective Shields moved his finger a short distance on the map.

“Wow! That’s right near there,” Kendal exclaimed.

Fowler studied the man.

“Well, ape-man or no ape-man,” Chief Gibbons uttered. “We’ve got to find out who’s behind this. If this madman has moved on from hobos to regular people, the press will latch on to this soon, and we’ll have a panic in the city. People will be afraid to go out at night. And that won’t be good for the saloons and bars. They’re about the only businesses doing all right in these tough times.”

“So what’s our next move?” Kendal asked.

Everyone was silent. They all seemed to be waiting for Dan Fowler to say something. They were looking to him for expertise.

“First,” Fowler said. “I am going to need you Larry, and Sally to accompany our friend waiting down in the interrogation room.”

“And where are we taking him?” Sally asked, a little excitement in her voice at finally getting to do something.

Fowler turned and looked at her.

“You’re taking him shopping.”

“What?”

“Get him cleaned up and get him a new set of clothes.”

“What on earth for?” Sally asked.

“Because,” Fowler said. “I’m going to need his old clothes. It’s time for me to go undercover.”



In the few years since Prohibition had been repealed, saloons and taverns sprung up all over New York City. While the textile mills, canneries and factories closed down during the Depression, people still managed to find money to spend on booze.

The derelict with the scraggly beard in the tattered brown jacket

wandered into the saloon, scanned the crowd, and then quietly took a stool at the end of the bar. A haze of smoke hung just below the ceiling. A happy piano player banged joyfully on the keys of the out-of-tune instrument, flanked on both sides by fans of both sexes. The din of the crowd rose to compete with the ivory decibels.

The bartender looked warily at the derelict, till the man produced a few coins and tossed them on the bar in front of him. Then the bartender approached, took his order, and placed a mug of draught beer in front of him.

The bartender had no way of knowing this rumped-looking man was none other than special agent Dan Fowler, G-Man. This was the fourth night in a row he had been canvassing the area late at night in this disguise.

The fake beard, wig and dirtied face obscured the usually clean-cut appearance of the federal agent. Fowler eyed the bar, looking over the patrons. There were businessmen, accompanied by their wives or girlfriends—or maybe mistresses—and dockworkers and other assorted laborers. Whether these men were gainfully employed, Fowler could only guess. Times were tough these days. The only people who kept really busy were the criminals, and the lawmen like himself who were needed to bring them to justice.

There were also several sailors in the bar and Fowler eyed them carefully. Were they from the *U.S.S. Dempsey*, he wondered? Maybe. He spied a trio of them in a nearby booth and stared at them, trying to read their lips, see if they were talking about their missing shipmate Eugene Brice.

But they only seemed to be discussing where to pick up some ladies of the evening. Not much help there.

This was the third bar he had been in tonight, making sure his presence was seen around the general area where the disappearances had been taking place. He figured someone must be following these men out of a bar, waiting for the right moment to spring. Now he hoped to spring his own trap. Out in the streets, Larry Kendal and Sally Vane sat in the government car, keeping tabs on his movements and watching for anything suspicious. Likewise, Detectives Shields and Blue sat in an unmarked patrol car, watching the streets and alleys, but keeping a low profile.

Detective Blue thought it was a wild goose chase, a waste of time, but he was young and inexperienced. Fowler just hoped Blue paid attention. His own life might depend on it. Even though he carried concealed weapons, he had made himself the bait, an easy target. One slip-up from the two pairs of lawmen watching over him and he could end up in the East River. Or at least parts of him.

He finished his drink, making sure to stagger drunkenly toward the door and out into the chilly night air. He wanted to make sure he was seen. By who, he wasn't sure. But someone could be watching his movements;

the movements of a helpless drunk he hoped.

Fowler stumbled up Delancy Street. He could hear the roar of the El as it screamed along the elevated tracks toward the Williamsburg bridge and over the East River. Out of the corner of his eye, he could see the government car that he knew Kendal and Miss Vane were in. It slowly pulled out of its parking spot, moved down the road past him, then parked just ahead.

Fowler stopped and leaned up against the cold concrete of a building. A handful of people passed by on the sidewalk, none paying attention to him.

Or did they?

Was there someone here on the street now watching his movements so carefully that he didn't even know it?

He pushed off from the building and sauntered slowly down the sidewalk, weaving back and forth.

Then he turned and entered a dark alley.

The only light came from a flickering flame in the middle of the alley. He could make out two dark figures near it. He slowly walked down the middle of the alley, keeping his eyes peeled to either side of him where dark shadows and nooks could conceal any threatening figure.

As he approached the source of the flame, he saw that it came from a metal garbage barrel. Two bums stood over it, warming their hands. They eyed him suspiciously as he walked by. Did they fear him? Had these disappearances made all the hobos jumpy? Scared of anyone unfamiliar to them?

Fowler passed them with barely a glance and continued halfway down the alley where he stopped beside the brick rear façade of a building. There were a pair of garbage cans beside it and he sat down, his back to the wall and leaned against one of the cans, pretending to go to sleep.

But special agent Dan Fowler certainly was not sleeping. This whole route had been carefully choreographed beforehand. Kendal and Vane's car and the detectives' vehicle would both be flanking either ends of the alley. Fowler, head tilted to the right, scanned up and down the alley, wrapped his arms around himself, and pretended to sleep it off.



Across from the east end of the alley, Detectives Shields and Blue sat in an unmarked patrol car watching the opening into the alley. Detective Blue sat in the driver's seat. Beside him, Detective

Shields smoked a cigarette, blowing the smoke through his nostrils and watching it drift out the small opening in the window.

"This is a waste of time," Detective Blue exclaimed with a deep sigh, his fingers drumming restlessly on the steering wheel.

"Well, the feds think this might work," Detective Shields responded. "It's their call."

"And that's another thing. This was our case. Who the hell are they to come in here and take over like this? All because of some drunken sailor?"

"I don't like it either," Detective Shields said, stubbing the cigarette out in the ashtray. "But they pull rank on us. Nothing we can do about it. Let's just hope they accomplish nothing and head back to Washington with their tails between their legs."

"Yeah," Detective Blue laughed. "That will show them. Then when they're gone, we crack the case wide open!"

"Well, we weren't exactly making a lot of progress with it," Detective Shields reminded him, lighting another cigarette and taking a drag.

"We just weren't pushing it hard enough. I mean, it was just a bunch of missing bums. Wasn't really high on our priorities."



Parked on the street on the west end of the entrance to the alley was the government car. Inside Larry Kendal and Sally Vane, the latter wearing a navy blue dress, sat watching the dark opening to the alley. Both knew Dan Fowler, in disguise, was down there somewhere.

"I can't see him," Sally exclaimed, nervous. "I don't like not being able to see him."

"Don't worry, Sal," Kendal said. "We've got both ends of the alley covered. Nothing goes in or out without us spotting it. Ape-man or no ape-man."

She looked at him, her brows furrowed with worry.

"You don't really think there's an ape-man, do you?"

He patted her shoulder.

"Of course not. We're taking the word of a drunk. Who knows if he really saw anything?"

She glanced down the dark alley. "Well, Dan sure thinks he saw something."

As she looked out the passenger side window, she saw a long gray DeSoto glide slowly down the street, past the alley, and turn right down