

## **“The Only Thing We Have...”**

by – Bob Elinskas

It was one of those early fall nights in New York City, when the air seemed as crisp and clear as it was cold. This was not the same air that warmly embraced the love-struck couples that had wandered happily among the paths of Central Park just months ago. This was an air that couldn't hold any love. It was as rude as an unwelcome houseguest, making its presence known immediately and leaving a rich, stinging sensation on your cheeks – as if you had just been slapped by a spurned lover.

For him, there was little time to think about the cold. Actually, if you had asked him if he had felt cold, he would have told you he hadn't felt anything. And he wouldn't have been lying. He hadn't felt anything for years. Though even that wasn't entirely true. He had felt the pull of loyalty and the sense of dedication that comes from serving your country. They were the precious few feelings he still allowed himself to hold. He didn't require feeling. Not when he had a mission - a job - that needed doing and he alone had the ability to do it.

He had been careful to cover his tracks upon entering the country. Security had been tighter than before the war began, but he had still managed to elude detection. His skills still served him well, though it was a minor source of satisfaction considering the scope of his mission.

It had been on all the radio broadcasts and, before that, on any number of military transmissions. The American heroes had inadvertently stumbled across some of the motherland's most carefully placed spies. Three had been apprehended in a sweeping daylight raid. The three were especially well-trained and knowledgeable soldiers. The Americans' intelligence agency had been overly optimistic in bragging that they expected the spies would be able to provide them with valuable information on German efforts.

That had stirred up another emotion in him. An emotion that he hadn't felt for some time – anger. The soldiers could provide valuable information, but they would never do so willingly or of their own accord. Of that, he was sure. For the Americans to think otherwise was sheer folly. However, he knew, as well as his superiors, that despite the resolve of the soldiers, they were only human, too, and over time, their bodies will break and their will would bend. His job was to get to them before they broke and ensure that they would never tell their secrets.

It was not a task he took any pride in. He would much rather steal the life from a hundred of the enemy before having to snuff out a fellow soldier. But, they knew the dangers going in, even as he did now, and they know there can be no greater honor than to fall in battle for the country. He would merely be allowing them to achieve that greater glory. And that thought pressed him to walk with even more speed towards the chained fence surrounding the holding house that was beginning to come into view.

His name is Der Vapor. Of course, that wasn't his real name. But, that hadn't been uttered in years and he was unsure if anyone would remember it now anyway. The war had been long and it had wiped away many people in many places. Perhaps he was just another casualty. It wasn't a thought that he lingered on often. In fact, he preferred his codename – as it helped to allow him to forget his past life.

Before he had had a name, a job, a family, and a place in the world. That had all changed in a heartbeat. He still had a job, but it was for a new family. He had a name, but a different place in the world. There was no finer assassin in the entire country. He had completed hundreds of successful assassinations in the service of his country and its leader. By his hand, hundreds had met their end – each one bringing elusive victory ever closer to Germany's grasp.

The streets were mostly deserted now, especially in this section of the city. He kept to his normal pace, but quietly turned into the darkened alley across from the five-story brownstone that served as the government's strong house. The steel fencing and low security lighting were more than enough to dissuade most curious tourists from thinking twice about the building. In fairness, it was a solid, well-designed construct. But, no building had been designed yet that could stop him and he felt no challenge from this one as he turned to study it.

Slowly, he started to remove his overcoat. Placing it neatly on the top of a nearby garbage can. Beneath the coat he had his special, polymer, skin-tight body suit. The clothing had been designed to react to his own body's molecules, so that it would travel with him. The black color allowed him to better blend in during nighttime raids, such as this.

Quickly, he turned to begin eyeing the building for its flaw – the weakness he would exploit for entry. It took just a moment to see the open window on the second floor. It hadn't been open much, just a few inches. Probably some guard had wanted to get a taste of that crisp night air or perhaps the building's boiler had been especially effective – either way, he had seen his opening and now the plan would spring into action.

Slowly, the outline of his body became hazy. It was as if someone had not focused the lens on one of the newsreels properly. The haze gave way to the image falling apart into vapor and then a thin, gray smoke that lost all form, but still grouped itself together, as if it were a cloud. Then, silently, it set out on its determined path across the street, through the fence, over the lawn. Unnoticed, it carried up over the first floor landing – drawing ever closer to the open window, Inside the window, the three captured spies sat, shackled and under close watch. The guards were in the process of moving one of the spies out of the room as the other two watched silently, perhaps wondering what torture lay ahead for their fellow captive. All three displayed a steely resolve and an underlying anger at their captors. They had each cursed themselves a hundred times for allowing themselves to be captured. Silently, each had resolved to suffer whatever the Americans could throw at them to atone for their earlier missteps. The Americans had caught them, but they would not break them.