

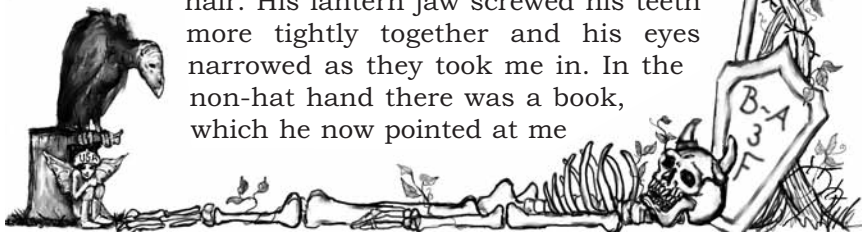
THE NATURAL-BORN SPY

JAMES DANIEL ROSS

SOME THINGS ARE TOO CLOSE FOR A NORMAL MAN TO focus on at the time. Only decades after November, 1944, can I look back and realize the small stones in the road that diverted our lives so immensely. I could never know that when I walked into the professor's office at Boston College I was to begin a journey that would lead me to places I never imagined existed.

I was sitting at the desk, pads of paper thrown out across the surface like machinegun fire, books opened to select pages and marked with new pads, pens, and other books. There was a quick rap on the door, and then it opened with a swing that spoke of impatient authority.

The man who entered was tall and straight, or maybe pressed. Yes, that was it: The man gave out an impression that if he were rolled over Niagara Falls inside a wooden barrel he would come out with every bone broken—but every crease of his suit intact. The man practically had starch in his walk and his shoes were shined to blinding brightness. The instant he entered the room, his free hand snatched the hat from his head, exposing only a furtive bristle of hair. His lantern jaw screwed his teeth more tightly together and his eyes narrowed as they took me in. In the non-hat hand there was a book, which he now pointed at me



in accusation. "You're not Professor Levi Stein."

I blinked at him twice, swallowing hard as his disapproval smacked me across the face. "Um, no. I'm sorry. I noticed the appointment in the book for you, Mr. Smith. There was no telephone number so I decided to wait here to explain why the professor—"

Smith ducked his head out into the hallway, scanning both ways quickly before retreating back into the office and shutting the door. Then he spun on me, his eyes as hard and cold as nails. "Where is the professor?"

I cleared my throat, fighting the tears trying to well up, "The professor is indisposed."

"How indisposed?"

Then I had to grab a kerchief from my pack and dab at my eyes. "Permanently, sir."

Smith glanced at the door darkly, but it was a moment or two before I heard a pair of shoes walk innocently by. He then turned back to me. "Who are you?"

"My name is Bruce Andrew."

He tossed his Stetson on the desk and leaned on the free hand, looming over me and—now I am convinced—reading everything exposed in an instant. "You're the professor's star pupil."

Maybe it was how quickly he dismissed the news of the professor's death, or maybe how successful he was at intimidating me in a place I had come to regard as a home. Whatever it was, it gave me a little steel of my own, which I threw into my voice, waving my paring knife in front of his broadsword. "That's right."

He tossed the book, thick, heavy, and at least two centuries old, down in front of me. "Can you translate Occitan?"

"Of course."

The grin on his face was not friendly or encouraging. "The pages are marked."

"And why should I?"

He glared at me as if I were a toy poodle barking at him from the safety of a rich woman's arms. Then he took out his billfold and pulled out five large bills as crisp as his pants. They fluttered to the desk carelessly, but when they landed they sounded like gold bars to me.

I only let them breathe there for a minute before snatching them up and stowing them in my front pocket. I opened the heavy tome, and saw page after page of pen-work easily dating back to the sixteenth century. Still his demeanor and the heavy bills in my pocket brooked no questions. I could only manage,