

SHADOWS WE CARRY

A NOVEL



MERYL AIN



CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE



BRONKA GOT OFF THE UPTOWN subway at 116th Street and found that it was only a short walk until she reached the large, imposing gates of the Columbia University campus. She walked along the path, admiring the snow-covered grass and shrubbery framing the august brick buildings that surrounded the commons. At the Journalism School, she took the elevator up to the administrative offices to see the dean.

A tall, slender, man with brown hair and black horn-rimmed glasses in his 50s came out to greet her. He smiled and extended his hand to her.

“Nice to meet you, Miss Lubinski. Let’s go into my office and we’ll chat.”

“So, Miss Lubinski, you want to be a journalist?” he asked after they sat down.

“Yes, very much, Dean Atkins.”

“Well, I have to say you would make a very attractive journalist. Do you have any clips?”

While always pleased with a compliment, Bronka wondered what her physical appearance had to do with her skills as a journalist.

She took out the red faux-leather scrapbook where she had lovingly scotch-taped all her articles—beginning with her piece on President Kennedy’s assassination in the high school newspaper and the one on the space program that landed in the *Long Island Press*. The dean looked through pages of her work, including all her contributions to the Queens College newspaper and literary magazine.

“Well, you certainly are a prolific writer. But do you think you have what it takes to be a journalist? Do you think you’re assertive enough—actually aggressive enough—to do what it takes to chase down a story?”

“Yes, I do,” Bronka answered, mustering every bit of confidence she had. “I’ve done it numerous times on my assignments for the school newspaper. And I’m also very competitive; I want to be the first one with the breaking news.”

She knew—deep in her heart—that she absolutely would be able to get over her shyness when pursuing a lead. Even in school, when she was on an assignment for the paper, it enabled her to do and ask things she couldn’t do in real life. Sitting in the dean’s office at the Journalism School made her forget Ned and all her troubles. When she was running after a story and writing it, nothing else mattered.

“Well, you are a very impressive young woman, Miss Lubinski. And your credentials are top notch—stellar grades and a track record of performance in the field. And I did mention earlier that you’re easy on the eyes. I do have to tell you, though, we only admit one hundred graduate students a year—that’s from the whole country—actually the entire world; you know, we have foreign students too. Out of the one hundred, we have a quota for women—it’s about 20 percent. So, we will only be admitting 20 women this year. So, here’s my last question, I ask every woman this question—and I must ask it of you too.

“Do you plan on getting married and having a family? You see, because our enrollment is so limited, we want the women we admit to stay in the field. It’s been our experience that women don’t have the

same staying power as men in the profession once they have a family. It's a fact."

"But things are changing," Bronka retorted.

"Maybe so, dear, but change is always slow. And right now, that's what the statistics tell us. We make a serious investment in all of our students and we want to see the results. So, please answer the question. "Do you plan on getting married and having a family?"

Bronka's face turned red and she scowled. *This is patently unfair*, she thought to herself.

"I certainly have no immediate plans to get married or have a child."

"So, you don't have a boyfriend? No steady fellow? Surprising for a girl as pretty as you."

"No, I don't. And what I want—more than anything—is to come to the Journalism School and learn from the best. I want to make my mark as a journalist and bring honor to this institution."

"Good answer," said the dean as he winked at her.

Afterwards, she thought she should have smiled more during the interview, but her mouth naturally turned down, making her look at best contemplative, at worst sad. But that wasn't the real reason for the sinking feeling she had. She knew that there was a different standard for men and women.