



## **In the Shadow of a Hero**

*Anna Mayle*

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A cop dies in the city, life goes on. For one little boy, though, it changed everything. Haunted by his past, Maxwell Thomas has grown up homeless and friendless, trapped by his guilt. Prowling the city, the small man guards the Church District like a vigilante, trying to make up for his crime. When he rescues the wrong rent boy, he is pulled back into the madness that destroyed him as a child. And now, another cop's life is on the line...

Nick Kenna is a beat cop with dreams of being a detective. When he stumbles across a murder and the very unusual suspect, he finds himself caught, not only by the mystery of the vagrant he's apprehended, but something deeper that sparks between them.

Will Nick be able to save Maxwell, from his past and himself? Or will love be lost as the broken man fades into the shadow of his hero?

## **In the Shadow of a Hero Details**

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Author : Anna Mayle

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# From Reader Review In the Shadow of a Hero for online ebook

## Plainbrownwrapper says

This is one of those very rare mm books that I think ought to have a HIGHER average rating. This is a very good book, even if it ain't perfect.

To start with, Mayle has a very strong narrative voice. I became enamored of her writing style as soon as I started *Bedtime Story for a Stolen Child* (another book that I think should be rated more highly); and that voice, though put to different uses here, is still very much in evidence. She has a very definite gift for descriptive prose. At times that prose may become a little too self-admiring and threaten to overshadow the story a bit, but for the most part it does an admirable job of creating atmosphere and giving substance to the internal lives of the characters. Mayle has built a very effective grimy, downtrodden, very-near-future, dystopic City (never named) for her tale.

Some good points:

1. Great characters. MC Maxwell is another one of those wonderful feral cat characters that I love so much. Independent, burned in the past, unwilling to trust, ready to run. Yes, I'm a sucker for them. And MC Nick is also a great guy, incredibly open and giving and honest. Both of them turn out to be heroes in their own ways, and they both deserve it for the most part (but see my complaints listed below). There's also very nice growth in both characters over the course of the book.
2. Nice slow buildup of the romance. There's a bit of insta-attraction here, but there's also a nice gradual increase in that attraction and a lot of resistance before we're subjected to any talk about love, and before the characters jump into bed.
3. I love the dynamic between the characters. (view spoiler)
3. Good story line. It makes sense for the most part, and even when you come upon something that feels like a plot hole, Mayle mostly plugs that hole before the end of the book. And it's gripping, keeping the reader focused on what's going to happen next.

Of course, there are also problems. For instance:

1. This is a GFY story. The MC Nick has never been attracted to men before Maxwell, but then falls head over heels. IMHO his conversion was much too easy, with very little soul searching or redefinition of self involved.
2. Much too much time elapses between the deaths of Maxwell's adoptive parents and the main story -- 14 years. This seemed entirely unreasonable to me. There's no reason why it couldn't have been something like 7 or 8 years instead. In addition, a shorter elapsed time would help to explain things like (view spoiler).
3. Maxwell is much too naive about sex for a guy who has spent 14 years living on the streets. (view spoiler)
4. Nick has been an incredibly open, trusting guy for the entire story, right up until the Big Misunderstanding. Then (view spoiler) It was out of character for Nick to instantly jump to the wrong conclusion here.

5. Nick never even apologizes after the Big Misunderstanding. (view spoiler)
6. One eye-rolling coincidence that drew me out of the story just at the climax, (view spoiler)
7. Maxwell's appearance. He is of mixed race, supposedly with "sienna" colored skin -- but with long, flowing, BRIGHT RED hair. Sorry, but I don't think genetics really works that way. Additionally, his older scars are described as being flat silver lines -- but with that kind of heritage and skin color, IMHO those scars would more likely be dark and raised.
8. Minor complaint: there's too much use of descriptors like "the little man", "the vagrant", "the cop", "the bigger man", and so on. It distracts from the story at times. Just use their names, for heaven's sake.
9. Minor complaint: editing issues. There's too many times where incorrect words, especially homophones, are used -- like "fission" instead of "frisson", "plains" instead of "planes", and so on. Spell checkers wouldn't catch the errors, but a good proof reading would.

Over all -- yup, there's some problems. Nonetheless, I really **\*\*felt\*\*** this book in a big way. And since that's an incredibly important element of my reading experience, this is getting a full 4 stars from me.

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### **jules0623 says**

So wordy it was exhausting reading it.

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### **Feliz says**

This was really good. Beautiful writing; you could call it prose at times. It suffered a bit from repetition. There were lengthy parts who could've profited from trimming, but those were balanced by breathtakingly fast action sequences and beautiful, deeply emotional love scenes, so nothing to complain about too loudly. I'd classify this as a definite GFY, as Nick was never attracted to men before. But I liked his consequence once he had accepted the fact that he'd fallen for a man, and I didn't find it too far-fetched - he and Maxwell completed each other so perfectly. Two very likeable heroes, a mean villain, a gripping plot and interesting supportive characters made this book a really enjoyable read. Recommended.

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### **Charly says**

I liked this quite a bit, but it has some issues

Warning: This review might contain what some people consider SPOILERS.

Rating: 6/10

**PROS:**

- The dynamic between Maxwell and Nick is odd and intriguing. They don't understand each other very well, and they often have trouble communicating, but they're drawn to each other nonetheless. This is a pair of characters I will not easily forget, even with as many m/m romances as I read.
- Maxwell's thoughts are quite funny sometimes. When he's being interrogated by the police at one point, for example, he offers one of the cops some advice about quitting smoking. And then there's this: "Rude Cope was turning red. Tactical error, peaceful approach has failed. Got it."
- Once Nick realizes that he's fallen in love with Maxwell, he doesn't try to deny it or hide it. He's simplistic and frank about his feelings, and that--paired with his basic goodness--was hard for me to resist.
- This author is very good at descriptive language. When she paints a scene, it is detailed and vivid: sights, sounds, smells, impressions, etc.

**CONS:**

- The writing is hard to follow sometimes because it's disjointed. Part of the problem is that the characters' direct thoughts are not set off in any way; they're not italicized, nor do they always appear in their own paragraphs--or even their own sentences. The result is that throughout the book, the writing switches from third person to first person, and from past tense to present, with no warning. Example: "only took one hit for the big guy to realize that the monkey on his back is smaller than he is...actually, I might be smaller than the rent boy...why was this a good idea again?" (Those ellipses are in the story; I didn't insert them.)
- I didn't believe in the speed at which the men become so emotionally indispensable to each other. Especially in Nick's case: he's attracted to another man for the first time ever, and he reaches a point where Maxwell is "the center of his existence" very quickly.
- The ending didn't feel rushed to me so much as it felt...abrupt. The climactic battle scene is dramatic and detailed and contains a good amount of suspense. But then the book ends rather suddenly as soon as the conflict is resolved, and there are several questions/issues raised earlier in the book that are left unresolved.
- Mayle often refers to her characters using descriptors rather than their names. Maxwell, for instance, is "the dirt-coated man," "the redhead," "the watcher," "the smaller man," "the vagrant," "the would-be hero," etc. Writing just seems simpler to me when authors use the characters' names to describe the action.

Overall comments: Despite the cons I listed, I actually really enjoyed this. It's an unusual story in a lot of ways: the setting is near-future, so it's familiar-but-foreign; the plot is engaging; and the characters are different from the usual m/m characters. Most of the book's issues could have been resolved with some tighter editing, but overall I think this is still a pretty decent story.

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**Tj says**

I really enjoyed the story. Maxwell was such a tough character, complex and interesting. Nick was a simpler character. He is just a good guy who likes to protect. The plot was well written and smooth. I enjoyed the setting and the ideas involved. I so wanted this to be a five star read since I enjoyed the story so much but the changes of perspective were not easy to tell apart. They would run into one another and I would have to back up to realize that it was no longer the same character. I really will be looking forward to more books by this author. The style was so well done I can't wait to see what else may be written.

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## Kelly H. (Maybedog) says

What follows is my review, but if you want a perfect review that I agree with virtually 100%, read Plainbrownwrapper's. I read it after I read the book and was pleasantly surprised at how much we noticed the same things.

First off, I really liked this book. The story was excellent, the plot complicated and the suspense and action excellent. The characters were very interesting and not black and white. Some good characters did bad stuff and some bad characters did good things. One key character turns out to be both horrible and wonderful which is challenging to absorb. The romance is intense in a good way. Maxwell's reactions given his past are believable throughout.

I really love Maxwell and his complex view of right and wrong. His guilt and PTSD were very well handled. I really liked that he was the top and aggressor in sex. It was wonderful and the fact that he was tiny and Nicky huge never even came up.

There was of course peril and near death moments, which I gobble up like a junkie eats candy. (If you don't know the metaphor, heroin addicts crave and eat tons of sugar when they're not high.) The oh-my-god-please-don't-die-you-mean-everything kind of moments were the perfect length and intensity for me even if they weren't all believable. (At one point a guy is choking to the point of things starting to go black and he says who he is. He wouldn't be able to say his name if he couldn't breathe.)

The main thing I disliked in this book was the narration and changing POVs from personal to omniscient and back. In the beginning the action was all omniscient narrator, "the man did this" and "the red head" thought that but then internal dialog would appear. At this point we didn't even know that character's name. That was disconcerting alone but the words weren't italicized, either which was even more jarring:

Not one to let an opportunity to go to waste, the slender man kicked as he vaulted to freedom. His booted foot connected hard with a strong, square jaw. Then he hit the ground rolling, and colors burst along his vision as his injured head protested the quick motions. I'm pretty sure I just heard a crunch. If he's still moving when I look up...oh! Hands on my neck! Big hands! He searched blindly around himself, slapping the filth strewn cement, looking for something, anything.

No, no paragraph breaks, it was just like I've written it above.

Also, when in one person's head, there were descriptions like, "Fingers still half-numb with cold reached up..." People don't think of their body parts separate like that when talking about movement. Another time we're in Maxwell's POV when the narrative says this (this isn't a spoiler but it's graphic violence):

(view spoiler)

Much of the text is a bit overwrought--a little too wordy and descriptive. The first part, especially, was much longer than it needed to be. There were inconsistencies--like when a cop is wearing a uniform and someone grabs him by the necktie; someone waking up in the middle of the night but all the day cops already at work--and improbabilities: I find it extremely hard to believe someone of African American mixed race with dark skin has red hair naturally. It doesn't make sense. I also understand isolation and distancing oneself through self hatred, but for someone to live on the streets for fifteen years wouldn't be a complete virgin (of any kind,

not just intercourse). Even if that made sense, his knowledge is absurd. He never had access to video porn so how does he know exactly what to do? Then there's the fact that the GFY is not handled at all. One day he's straight, the next he's in love with a man and that's it. There are some comments but he only thinks about it a couple times during his early infatuation. Don't even get me started about the money and the apartment.

Despite my frustrations, this book was really good and with a good content editor to catch the POV issues and inconsistencies would have been a five. However, I have to say that although I felt this book was excellent, I didn't necessarily enjoy it. There were parts that were exactly what I like, but the overarching feel was morose, bleak, and depressing. I can't put into words why that is, but it left me desperately needing to read a light and superficial shifter romance before I could go to bed. (I do have to admit that this was exacerbated by stress I am under right now.)

For those reasons, this is only a four star read for me.

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## **Candice says**

Hot damn, this was gearing up to be a 5 star read from me. Everything was going great. I loved the story, the gritty darkness (which I wasn't expecting), it was wordy-but beautifully put, it had the right amount of action, and it kept me turning the pages on the edge of my seat. What went wrong? In my opinion...the ending. What happened? Okay, I am getting ahead of myself. Let's go back to the beginning.

Maxwell is a vagrant who has lived most of his life on the streets. He knows his way around and how to keep out of sight. He's also a homeless vigilante. He trusts 1 person and in my opinion incredibly loyal. My heart broke for Maxwell. One night he's asleep on his fire escape and he hears a scuffle. He would normally let it go, but he sees the rent boy and he's young, too young. He decides to help. Little does he know that saving this rent boy was going to change the way he views his life. When he wakes up again he looks down and sees a dead body. He didn't put it there, but didn't know who. He reacts without thinking and realizes someone saw him on the fire escape. He's now a suspect.

Nick is a cop who lives in the building next to the alley the dead guy was found and saw the suspect on the fire escape. He does what he has to do and goes after the suspect. When he brings into the station Nick doesn't like the way Maxwell is treated and keeps an eye on him. Nick is thrown on the case, even though he's a beat cop. Nick has no idea that taking in Maxwell meant having his life on the line as well.

Nick and Maxwell realize that the dead guy in the alley is related to a bigger operation that Maxwell is all too familiar with. Maxwell won't have another dead cop on his hands, but can't seem to pull away from Nick because he knows he has to keep him safe. Nick only wants to keep Maxwell safe, but doesn't know who he can trust. There is too much corruption in the police force.

The ending: (view spoiler)

Overall, I thought this was great. Minus the descriptors used as names "the small man", "the vagrant", "the redhead", "the dirt-coated man", "the cop", "the watcher", "the bigger man", etc. Definitely not flowery and it's a GFY which I thought happened too fast.

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## Chris says

Excellent m/m romantic suspense about a guy who's been on the street for a long time, as something of a vigilante, and a cop who starts to see the depth of the man behind the grime and bruises. This was complex and involving and will stay in my head for quite a while...

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## J.P. Bowie says

Usually I don't care for stories that involve straight guys suddenly finding true love with another man, but Nick and Maxwell are both such great characters that I went with the disparities and enjoyed the story very much - particularly because of the strong and evocative narrative. Beautifully written.

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## Simsala says

I had a few issues with the MC's in this book.

Nick's childlike naivety as a good cop in a dirty, corrupted city and his sudden change from straight to gay and accepting it as "his destiny" was hard to believe. Maxwell's - described as a character with incredible inner strength -

constant reveling in his guilt and his inner musings of "not being worth it" were repetitive and increasingly tiresome.

Other than that *In The Shadow Of A Hero* is a suspenseful if a bit gloomy story with an unusual GFY/opposites-attract romance.

The cover is spot on!

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## Emma Sea says

I think the book shows an author with a *lot* of potential, rather than being a really good book. The prose in the opening pages was a bit purple (maybe even ultra-violet) and there are a couple of instances where the author uses a metaphor and then spells it out e.g. an overgrown garden represents one MC: something truly beautiful that has been left untended and unloved: on seeing it, the other MC thinks "hey, Maxwell is just like that garden!". Incredibly annoying: trust your readers to get it. However the characters were lovely, the plot was good, and I appreciated the reversal of the usual seme/uke stereotypes. I would have liked a final sex scene; I know the relationship was about more than sex, but I need my MCs to reunite and make up with some physical closeness.

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## Emilie says

Well, I wasn't expecting that! Don't judge a book by the cover and the synopsis! I had a hard time with the writing at first, but after two chapters, I found it brilliant. And the characters... Maxwell is beautifully broken and Nicky is so sweet and kind. Really, perfect combination. The plot was great, a little predictable maybe but it's hard these days to find a book without clichés. I'm complaining here but I would have been



disappointed with a different ending...

So, I give 5 stars to this book but it doesn't go to my "favorite" shelf for one reason : Maxwell. I couldn't picture him in my head until 75% in the book. He is 29 yo, but that didn't work for me either. I think I would have liked him a little younger. But that's my problem so I don't see why I should blame the author for it.

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### **SueM says**

I liked this futuristic M/M romantic suspense novel. Maxwell, a man scarred - emotionally, physically and mentally - by his past and present, is suddenly thrust into Nick's life after being mistakenly suspected of murder. Nick, a local beat cop, can't understand the very strong need to protect Maxwell, but knows he's hopeless to resist it. Thus begins a relationship between the two men. Admittedly, it's definitely one-sided at first, but as Maxwell slowly begins to trust Nick, so does the relationship gain balance. The original death that led to Maxwell's arrest, soon draws both men into a tangled web of corruption and betrayal. As they struggle to stay alive, Nick's protection and care begins to heal Maxwell, while Nick gains more awareness of both the people around him and himself.

I really like Maxwell's character; the scars, inner strength and smart-mouth dialogue make him a multi-layered character with a good deal of depth. Nick's character seems more simplistic in contrast, but his layers are merely more subtle and slower to be revealed. The background characters were patchier in regards to depth. Some were nicely fleshed out, but others remained a little too shallow for me, particularly as those characters provide major turning points. Overall though, the characterization was solid, as was the pacing and storyline. The angst levels were balanced nicely by some loving sex scenes as well as the suspense/action. Yep, a pretty solid read. :D

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### **Samantha says**

3.75ish.

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### **Jo \* Smut-Dicked \* says**

Mayle has such a distinctive writing style that I remembered what was the last book I'd read from her within 10 minutes of starting this one. It's that unique and strong. Lyrical and kind of lush prose.

One of the things she does so well is write experiencing the story with your five senses particularly potently. Here that's a bit of a downfall. Maxwell is homeless. By all accounts he wears the same clothes he's been wearing for years. Yes folks that would include underwear to me. Socks. So my idea of what Maxwell smells like is pretty strong. In fact it's so strong that when Maxwell and Nick get together all I can do is smell Maxwell. The thought of sucking anything that had been in the same underwear for years just is a complete turn off for me. I thought there would be a point at which all the smells would be gone but Maxwell often

puts the same clothes back on. I cannot reconcile it. It's not sexy. At all.

Then how Maxwell is described had me picturing him as a really short guy who had many child like qualities. I know I know..he's not. But all the talk of little man and him being as short as me when he was picked up and described he just didn't sound attractive. I truly don't have a height fetish but I could not get a bead on what Maxwell looked like. Bright red hair, sienna skin, tiny. Speaking of - his hair. As someone who has a mixed kid I could not understand how his hair could be afro like as a child and now it almost seemed thick and straight and braid-able. Those are two completely different types of hair. It didn't help me when trying to picture him in my minds eye.

The story and plot were great - it was all the descriptions here (including smell) that brought this one down for me.

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