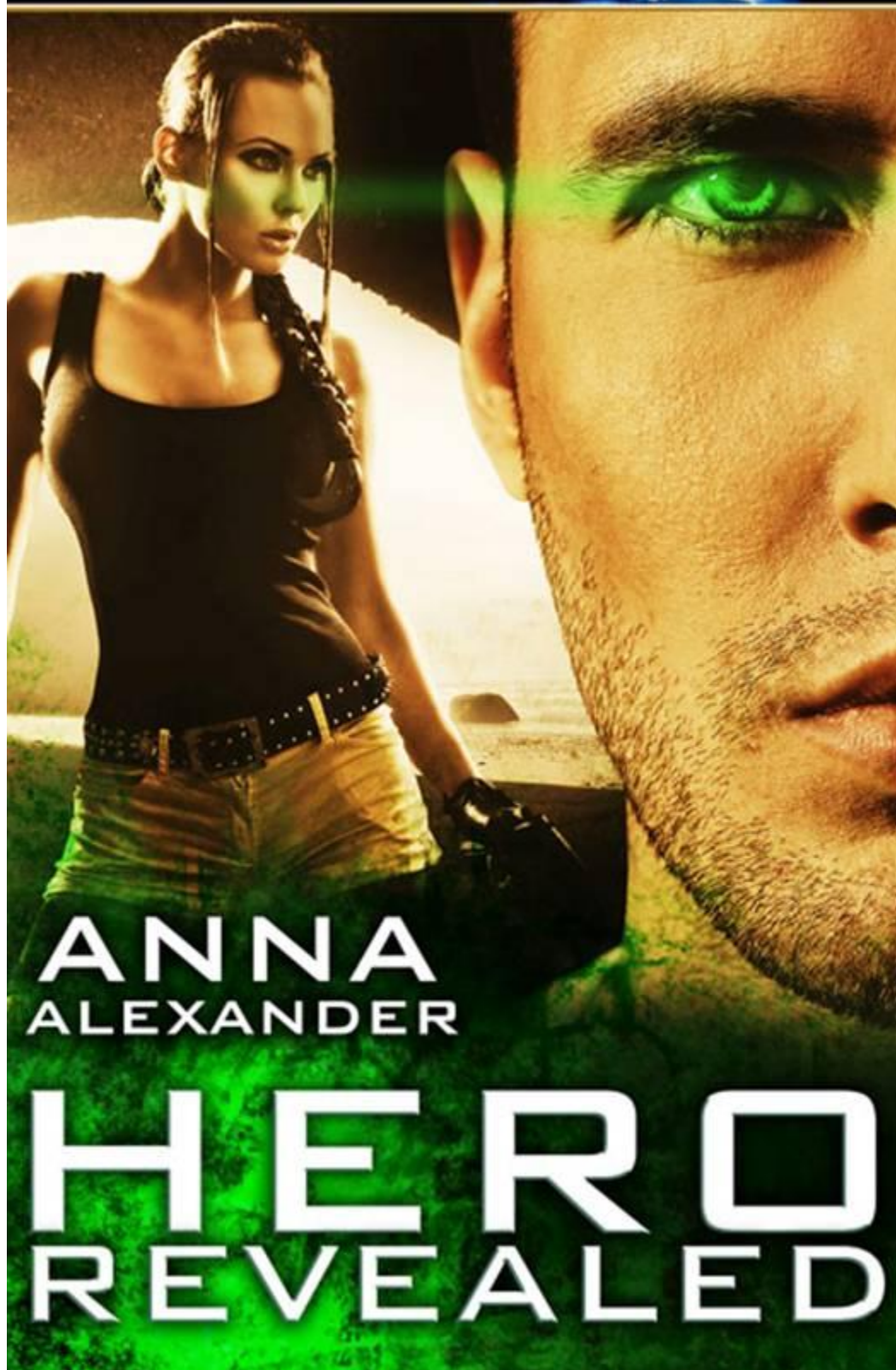


ELLORA'S CAVE TWILIGHT



ANNA
ALEXANDER

HERO
REVEALED

Hero Revealed

Anna Alexander

As a female sheriff in a small town, Brett Briggs faces enough obstacles turning complacent good ol' boys into a top-notch police force without the added insult of a vigilante apprehending her criminals. Her prime suspect? Kristos Kilsgaard, the sexy river guide who has been open in his desire to move her away from her badge and into his bed.

In his former position as royal guard, Kristos once failed a woman he cared for and as punishment was banned from his home on one of Saturn's moons. He vows not to make the same mistake with Brett and uses his superpowers to protect her, no matter the foe. Or the cost.

But Brett didn't become sheriff by letting a man take care of her, and although the hot-as-hell Kristos is persuasive, she's not going to start now – even after burning it up between the sheets with him. When her town is threatened, they cry out for a hero and she sets out to prove to everyone, Kristos included, that she's the woman for the job.

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Hero Revealed

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HERO REVEALED

Anna Alexander

Dedication

For my Chicklets. I love you to Saturn and beyond.

Acknowledgments

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Chapter One

“Son of a bitch,” Sheriff Brett Briggs cursed and struck her clenched fists on the wood desk. She sucked in a deep breath, biting back the rest of the expletives blistering her tongue. When her heartbeat slowed and the red in her vision cleared, she turned to the deputy seated to her right. “Play it again. Please.”

Deputy Mick Collins arched a blond brow but said nothing as he typed the order on the keyboard.

Brett locked her knees and leaned in close until the electric hum from the monitor buzzed against her skin. From the corner of her eye she noted the time on the footage as 12:35 a.m. At 12:36 the suspect entered the scene, triggering the silent alarm that had notified the police of the break-in.

The picture was grainy and the light poor, but she was able to make out the tall, thin, jittery shape of Trevor Conkle maneuvering through the construction zone that was the Anderson’s kitchen remodel. He picked up a hammer that lay in the open tool box on the floor then attacked the drywall as if he were auditioning for Jack Nicholson’s role in *The Shining*.

With the price of minerals at a premium, the copper pipes running in the walls were like buried treasure. A one-foot pipe scored enough cash to keep a junkie high for a week. It was one of the many reasons Mr. Anderson installed the security system and video cameras during the renovation.

In Trevor’s clumsy grip it took several strikes for the pipe to snap loose and fall to the floor. At 12:41 he danced a little jig as he snatched it up and cradled it to his chest. The metal never had time to warm in his palm before a shadow stole across the camera, whirling around Conkle like a specter. Blurs of black and gray pulled at his arms and lifted him off the ground.

Brett squinted, hoping this time she’d be able to make out something, anything that made sense. From its size and shape it had to be a man, but he moved like nothing she had ever heard of or seen before. In less than five seconds, Conkle was hog-tied and laid out on the tile floor. The film’s resolution turned his skin a sickly green as the color leached from his cheeks. He looked like a bass out of water as he thrashed on the floor with his mouth opening and closing in silent screams.

One second the stranger was there, and the next, nothing but empty space. At 12:42 Brett entered the scene, gun drawn. Studying the tape, she felt her brow crinkle with the same confusion and frustration she saw on her video image. After three viewings she was still as baffled now as she had been when she found Conkle on the floor.

“Are you sure that man’s not one of ours?” she asked Collins. Of all the deputies in her department, he was the one she trusted most not to jerk her chain.

"You were the first on the scene." His blue eyes rang crystal clear with sincerity. His lips pinched tight together, but in his eyes she saw the words she didn't want to hear.

Mother fucker, he struck again.

In through the nose, out through the mouth. Breathe. "Where's Conkle now?"

"He's in the right one."

Brett snorted. When she was a cop with the city police, she had an entire floor of interrogation rooms at her disposal. Here in little Cedar, Washington there were two – the left one and the right one.

"Has he lawyered up yet?"

"A public prosecutor will be here first thing in the morning."

Perfect. "I need a moment with the kid, alone."

"Yes ma'am."

With each step down the corridor, her blood bubbled like the lava under Mt. Etna. This was the fourth time since she joined the department when she was the first to appear on the scene to find the perp trussed up like a Thanksgiving turkey without any clue as to how. No one in her department confessed to collaring her criminals and it hadn't happened to anyone else. But now she had video footage. Her ghost had a physical body, and a body could be traced. The only question was who was playing her, and why.

Brett stopped in her tiny office on her way to the interrogation room and retrieved a slim black case from her desk before stealing into the even tinier attached bathroom.

A brush of powder under her eyes covered the dark circles caused by working an endless string of eighteen-hour days, and a splash of blush across her cheeks gave her a healthy glow. Cinnamon oil in the lip gloss stung her lips and shot the scent up her nose like a jolt of caffeine to awaken the senses. The carefully applied makeup was a mask, as much an important part of her uniform as the latte-colored shirt and brown pants she had tailored to fit her curves. Every crisp detail emphasized she belonged.

She was the sheriff and one of the only women in the department. Appearance and attitude was everything when dealing with men who got a hard-on intimidating those they felt were weaker. One crack in her armor and her belly was exposed. All these months of hard work would not be wasted because she allowed some jack-off vigilante to jeopardize her credibility.

Outside the interrogation room she paused to look through the glass in the door. Conkle was slumped over in the metal folding chair, shoulders and legs twitching with the remnants of meth coursing through his veins. She opened the door and let the metal slam shut. His arms flailed wildly with his surprise.

"Hello, Trevor," she said in a low, congenial tone.

"Sheriff." He wiped at the drool on his chin with the sleeve of his flannel. "So when am I getting outta here?"

"The public defender will be here in the morning." She slid into the seat on the opposite side of the table and laid open the file folder she brought with her. "How about you and I have a chat?"

"Uh-uh." He shook his head so hard she couldn't tell if it was denial or meth shakes. "I'm not talking without a lawyer present. I've seen *The Shield*."

"If that's what you'd like." She closed the file and folded her hands on top. "Then I'll take you down to holding, but I have to warn you, it's a little crowded tonight. We busted up a bar brawl between a couple of 69ers and Demon Messengers. They weren't too pleased to have their trip to Sturgis postponed. I'm sure you can help them pass the time." She allowed a hint of a smile to play on her lips.

His skin paled, the veins popping out on his forehead. "Were they those biker dudes I heard shouting?"

Her smile widened. The animosity between the two biker gangs was legendary, but even more so were the stories of how they would band together for the simple pleasure of fucking with an outsider.

"Fuck." He dug both hands in his hair and rested his head on the table. "What? Just...what?"

The click of her pen echoed against the cinder block walls. "Why were you at the Anderson's this evening?"

He lifted his head to peek at her through his stringy bangs. "Uh, Mr. Anderson said he wanted me to help with his remodel?"

"He asked you in person?"

"Yeah."

"When?"

"This afternoon."

"Was this before or after his daughter's wedding?"

His forehead puckered. "What?"

"The Anderson's daughter was married today in California and they've been out of town." She narrowed her glare. "Cut the shit, Trevor. We have video footage of you tearing down the wall to get to the copper pipes."

"You do?" he asked, clearly confused.

"Yep."

He looked to the door then to the two-way mirror. "Then what's with all the questions?"

She leaned forward, eager to get to the heart of the matter. "Who tied you up?"

"Ah, geez." He looked up to the ceiling, as if searching for divine intervention and his cheeks turned a deep pink. "Some crazy psycho."

Her nostrils flared and she restrained the urge to slap him. "Be more specific, please. Think. You're in the kitchen. It's dark and the pipe is in your hand and then..."

“I don’t know. It was like this – thing – came out of nowhere and started grabbing at me. Everything was a blur and crazy and these big hands were pulling me in different directions, then I was just on the floor.”

“Was it a man? How tall?”

“Yeah, I’m pretty sure it was a dude, and he was big.”

“Did he say anything?” Her pen scratched across the paper as she took down his every word.

He snorted. “Yeah, he said, ‘Let this be a lesson to you,’” Trevor repeated in a deep register.

“Did you recognize his voice? Did he have an accent?”

“Not really. I don’t know. It didn’t sound like he did.”

“What did he look like?”

“I don’t know.” He threw up his hands. “It was dark and I was being assaulted, plus he had a mask on. I could only see his eyes.”

Brett grunted in frustration. “What color were they?”

“Weird.”

She looked up. “Weird?”

“Yeah, they were this freaky, glowy green color.”

Her heart slammed to a stop while her hand reached for the clear twine around her neck. Necklaces were prohibited while in uniform, which was why she wore the elegant circle low under her blouse where no one could see it. The cool jade laying between her breasts was a forbidden thrill, and only the wild, impetuous woman who lived in her darkest, secret inner self knew why she broke the rule. Not even under pain of death would she admit out loud to why she paid a week’s worth of wages for the necklace.

The amulet spun in a slow circle as she held it up to the light. “Were they this color?”

“Yeah, just like that.”

Green eyes that matched her necklace? Green like *his* eyes?

The papers rustled in her trembling hands as she gathered her things and wobbled to a stand. “Thank you, Trevor,” she murmured and walked to the door. Excitement, dread and forbidden arousal stirred in her belly.

She had her suspect.