

An Excerpt from Envy

Two houses down from Detective Thomas DelVecchio's, Internal Affairs Officer Sophia Reilly was behind the wheel of her unmarked and partially blinded.

"By all that is holy..." She rubbed her eyes. "Do you not believe in curtains?"

As she prayed for the image of a spectacularly naked colleague to fade from her retinas, she seriously rethought her decision to do the stakeout herself. She was exhausted, for one thing—or had been before she'd seen just about everything Veck had to offer.

Take out the *just*.

One bene was that she was really frickin' awake now, thank you very much—she might as well have licked two fingers and shoved them into a socket: a full-frontal like that was enough to give her the perm she'd wanted back when she was thirteen.

Muttering to herself, she dropped her hands into her lap again. And gee whiz, as she stared at the dash, all she saw... was everything she'd seen.

Yeah, wow, on some men, no clothes was so much more than just *naked*.

And to think she'd almost missed the show. She'd parked her unmarked and just called in her position when the upstairs lights had gone on and she had gotten a gander at the vista of a bedroom. Easing back into her seat, it hadn't dawned on her exactly where the unobstructed view was going to take them both—she'd just been interested that it appeared to be nothing but a bald lightbulb on the ceiling of what had to be the master suite.

Then again, bachelor pad decorating tended to be either storage-unit crammed or Death Valley–barren.

Veck's was obviously the Death Valley variety.

Except suddenly she hadn't been thinking about interior decorating, because her suspect had stepped into the bathroom and flipped the switch.

Hellllllllo, big boy.

In too many ways to count.

"Stop thinking about it... stop thinking about—"

Closing her eyes again didn't help: If she'd reluctantly noticed before how well he filled out his clothes, now she knew exactly why. He was heavily muscled, and given that he didn't have any hair on his chest, there was nothing to obscure those hard pecs and that six-pack and the carved ridges that went over his hips.

Matter of fact, when it came to manscaping, all he had was a dark stripe that ran between his belly button and his...

You know, maybe size did matter, she thought.

“Oh, for chrissakes.”

In an attempt to get her brain focused on something, anything more appropriate, she leaned forward and looked out the opposite window. As far as she could tell, the house directly across from him had privacy shades across every available view. Good move, assuming he paraded around like that every night.

Then again, maybe the husband had strung those puppies up so that his wife didn't get a case of the swoons.

Bracing herself, she glanced back at Veck's place. The lights were off upstairs and she had to hope now that he was dressed and on the first floor, he stayed that way.

God, what a night.

Was it possible Veck had torn apart that suspect? She didn't think so.

But he did—even though he couldn't remember a thing.

Whatever, she was still waiting for any evidence that came from the scene, and there were coyotes in those woods. Bears. Cats of the non-Meow Mix variety. Chances were good that the suspect had come walking through there with the scent of dried blood on his clothes and something with four paws had viewed him as a Happy Meal. Veck could well have tried to step in and been shoved to the side. After all, he'd been rubbing his temples like he'd had pain there, and God knew head trauma had been known to cause short-term memory loss.

The lack of physical evidence on him supported the theory; that was for sure.

And yet...

God, that father of his. It was impossible not to factor him in even a little.

Like every criminal justice major, she'd studied Thomas DeVecchio Sr. as part of her courses—but she'd also spent considerable time on him in her deviant-psych classes. Veck's dad was your classic serial killer: smart, cunning, committed to his “craft,” utterly remorseless. And yet, having watched videos of his interviews with police, he came across as handsome, compelling, and affable. Classy. Very non-monster.

But then again, like a lot of psychopaths, he'd cultivated an image and sustained it with care. He'd been very successful as a dealer of antiquities, although his establishment in that haughty, lofty world of money and privilege had been a complete self-invention. He'd come from absolutely nothing, but had had a knack for charming rich people—as well as a talent for going overseas and coming back with ancient artifacts and statues that were extremely marketable. It wasn't until the killings had started to surface that his business practices came under scrutiny, and to this day, no one had any idea where he'd found the stuff he had—it was almost as if he'd had a treasure trove somewhere in the Middle East. He certainly hadn't helped authorities sort things out, but what were they going to do to him? He was already on

death row.

Not for much longer, though, evidently.

What had Veck's mother been like—

The knock on the window next to her head was like a shot ringing out, and she had her weapon palmed and pointed to the sound less than a heartbeat afterward.

Veck was standing in the street next to her car, his hands up, his wet hair glossy in the streetlights.

Lowering her weapon, she put her window down with a curse.

“Quick reflexes, Officer,” he murmured.

“Do you want to get shot, Detective?”

“I said your name. Twice. You were deep in thought.”

Thanks to what she'd seen in that bathroom, the flannel shirt and academy sweats he had on seemed eminently removable, the kind of duds that wouldn't resist a shove up or a pull down. But come on, like she hadn't seen every aisle in his grocery store already?

“You want my clothes now?” he said as he held up a trash bag.

“Yes, thank you.” She accepted the load through her window and put the things down on the floor. “Boots, too?”

As he nodded, he said, “Can I bring you some coffee? I don't have much in my kitchen, but I think I can find a clean mug and I got instant.”

“Thanks. I'm okay.”

There was a pause. “There a reason you're not looking me in the eye, Officer?”

I just saw you buck naked, Detective. “Not at all.” She pegged him right in the peepers. “You should get inside. It's chilly.”

“The cold doesn't bother me. You going to be here all night?”

“Depends.”

“On whether I am, right.”

“Yup.”

He nodded, and then glanced around casually like they were nothing but neighbors chatting about the weather. So calm. So confident. Just like his father.

“Can I be honest with you?” he said abruptly.

“You’d better be, Detective.”

“I’m still surprised you let me go.”

She ran her hands around the steering wheel. “May I be honest with you?”

“Yeah.”

“I let you go because I really don’t think you did it.”

“I was at the scene and I had blood on me.”

“You called nine-one-one, you didn’t leave, and that kind of death is very messy to perpetrate.”

“Maybe I cleaned up.”

“There wasn’t a shower in those woods as far as I saw.”

Do. Not. Think. Of. Him. Naked.

When he started to shake his head like he was going to argue, Reilly cut him off. “Why are you trying to convince me I’m wrong?”

That shut him up. At least for a moment. Then he said in a low voice, “Are you going to feel safe tailing me.”

“Why wouldn’t I?”

For the first time, emotion bled through his cool expression, and her heart stopped: There was fear in his eyes, as if he didn’t trust himself.

“Veck,” she said softly, “is there anything I don’t know.”

He crossed his arms over that big chest of his and his weight went back and forth on his hips as if he were thinking. Then he hissed, and started rubbing his temple.

“I’ve got nothing,” he muttered. “Listen, just do us both a favor, Officer. Keep that gun close by.”

He didn’t look back as he turned and walked across the street.

He wasn’t wearing any shoes, she realized.

Putting up the window, she watched him go into the house and shut the door. Then the lights in the house went out, except for the hallway on the second floor.

Settling in, she eased down in her seat and stared at all those windows. Shortly thereafter, a

massive shadow walked into the living room—or rather, appeared to be dragging something?
Like a couch?

Then Veck sat down and his head disappeared as if he were stretching out on something.

It was almost like they were sleeping side by side. Well, except for the walls of the house, the stretch of scruffy spring lawn, the sidewalk, the asphalt, and the steel cage of her Crown Victoria.

Reilly's lids drifted down, but that was a function of the angle of her head. She wasn't tired and she wasn't worried about falling asleep. She was wide-awake in the dark interior of the car.

And yet she reached over and hit the door-lock button.

Just in case.