

All the Sobbing Cops

It wasn't the stiff and desiccated bodies stacked standing behind the closed closet door and it wasn't the rigor-mortified corpses hanging from the rafters by clotheslines and panty hose, engaging in the gentle sway and rotation characteristic of such bodies in such an array, that got to the cops. It wasn't even the soggy body in the laundry room, stuck on spin in the high-capacity washer, that reduced them to tears and wipings on their uniforms.

It was the body on the hardwood floor, the floor shiny and clean, light coming in from the window on the far wall and reflecting off the floor and backlighting the body, sidelighting all the sobbing cops: the rookie on his butt in the mess by the body, prematurely peeling off his protective gloves; the old sergeant being decked out by Internal Affairs, pulling black satin up to his elbows; the good cop staring out the window, his back to the body, weeping quietly, bitterly, softly; the bad cop burying her face in her forearms where she leaned on a chest of drawers along the wall; the other cops, an easy half-dozen wandering from room to room, their hard-bitten lips trembling as they struggled to keep it all in, only to fail and fall one by one to their knees in grief.

Once the old sergeant—who had seen it all before and one too many times—had been made over and taken out, Internal Affairs, barefoot and clad as always in white cotton summer dress with nothing underneath, returned to the room, moving gracefully and quietly, one could even say lovingly, to each officer in turn. First to the woman at the chest, then to the rookie on his butt, then to the man at the sill, finally to those remaining, each taken in turn by Internal Affairs, gently by the latex-gloved hand or the uniformed sleeve or the edge of the bullet-proof vest, and led to the body on the floor. There some words were murmured before Internal Affairs, silhouetted against the window on the far wall, her dress a pale gauzy halo, put an arm around the shoulders of the cop being comforted and walked the officer out of the room.