

(from Chapter 1)

... JJ now sat on the deck of the small cedar-sided home he'd largely built himself. Overlooking the postcard mountain vista, he pondered a future whose boring certainty could only be matched by its likely loneliness. After nearly twenty years as a small-town cop, he wasn't sure his life had made much sense, but he knew for sure it had had little impact. Married and divorced early on, inertia had taken its toll. And though he'd lived much of the past half-decade with a woman who'd died six months back, he couldn't say for certain they'd even liked each other.

JJ Van der Horst should have been cruising toward middle age, but knew all too well he was rolling inevitably into a dark night. He wasn't sure he believed in God and, judging from most of the people he'd come to know, he wasn't interested in heaven if they were going to be there. Despite his name, the last thing he felt was Dutch, yet for lack of a more compelling alternative or on grounds of general orneriness, he figured that was the direction he'd head.

Holland, though, and Europe in general, held little appeal. Bright brochure photos of tulips and windmills aside, he'd read enough to know the term 'lowlands' had nothing to do with altitude and that the climate of the Netherlands was best summed up in words like 'miserable' and 'damp.' He'd had enough of cold weather. Having never sported a tan below his neck or above his elbows, he'd decided the Caribbean island of Curaçao was Dutch enough for him. He wasn't looking for a past and was uncertain about his future. What JJ Van der Horst wanted most was to get away from the present.

So he sat on the deck that was larger than the house – an indicator of his priorities – and stared plaintively over the mountains until

a rising cloud of dust and the tink of small stones ricocheting off the underside of a car announced an arrival up his long dirt drive.

The blue police cruiser made an arcing turn, slowed long enough for a passenger to climb out, then left – the driver offering a wave to JJ, who nodded in return. The passenger ambled casually across the faded lawn and up the four steps onto the deck, where he and JJ acknowledged each other with a simple exchange.

"Buck."

"JJ."

They both looked at the view as if it were the first time for either, then JJ indicated the bottle centered on the table between them and the empty glass keeping it company.

"Can't take it with me."

Buck responded. "On duty."

"You'll always be on duty. Still need a drink from time to time. This is time."

A willing slump of the shoulders made it clear Buck found it easy to defer to his friend and had likely done so many times before. He poured himself a generous dollop and let his eyes linger on the Bushmills label until it became the focus of his next comment.

"Ireland. That I could see. But Coracow..."

"Cure-a-sow, not core-a-cow," JJ corrected. "Think bacon not milk, vet not butcher. For God's sake, you grew up on a farm...it shouldn't be that hard."

Buck shrugged a 'whatever' and continued. "Yup. I could see you in a tweed jacket and cap closing down some God-forsaken, thatched-roof Irish pub in Ballyfuckup six nights a week...but the Caribbean?"

He paused to savor and swallow the whiskey.

"You know it's damn hot down there, don't you? Damn hot. Even then, you're gonna feel naked without your long johns."