

Wanderer

by Michael Gillan Maxwell

I stare at the threesome on the curb until the bus turns the corner and they're out of sight. The German tourist next to me launches into another verbal onslaught. I try to tune out her incessant jabbering, close my eyes and pretend to sleep. The visage of the rough looking, shirtless man and the black woman holding her baby is branded into my brain.

Suddenly I'm in my mother's arms back in Oakland. My father stands beside us and my mother's laughing at something he's just said. He's a gangbanger with the South-side Locos 13 and one day he just disappears from our lives. He dropped off the face of the planet, never to be seen again.

My mother and I lived in a succession of apartments. Different towns up and down the west coast. Men came and went. I dropped out of high school and joined the Marines. Seemed like the fastest way to escape that life. I've been around the world and done a lot of things I should feel sorry about, but all I really feel is numb.

I left The Corps after one tour and took a job with a private security firm in south Florida. There's no shortage of opportunities there in that line of work. One thing led to another and free lance work gradually became a full time gig. It gets sketchy, but keeps me busy and it's never boring. It also keeps me from thinking too much. I never stay in one place too long, work the shadowy fringes and never put down roots. I'm always careful, but one job put me smack in the crosshairs of the Sinaloa cartel. They're into everything, and it's hard to stay out of their way if you're a free agent. My only move was to disappear. I became a ghost. Traveling by bus is the safest way to stay off the radar screen. There's an unending parade of drifters, outlaws and crazies and I always have to watch my back, but that's nothing new.

I'm trying to track down my mother. I'm following a series of leads to her last known address in the DC area. Attempts to contact her go unanswered. For all I know, she's living on the streets by now, or even worse. I don't know why, but I know in my gut, if I find her, I'll find myself again.

Mercifully, the German woman has stopped talking and is snoring softly. I listen to the sounds of the bus as we roll on in the Virginia night.

