

Blurred Identity

By Rocio Guenther

Raindrops hit the pavement, making the dust from the streets levitate. Umbrellas up. In New York, people are prepared for anything, something I have yet to learn. Unfortunately for me, the only protection against the rain was my freshly bought book, *Blurred Identity*. "Great," I muttered. Rain hitting heavily on me, I jogged across the wet street and stood under a breakfast joint whose entrance shielded me from the storm: "Joe's coffee & pastries." *How cliché*, I thought.

Before I could put my book back into my purse, pieces of scattered paper slapped my face and my book thumped to the floor. "Oh crap," said someone in front of me. I gathered the crumpled sheets from the floor, and gave them back. "Thank you," said the stranger. He had tousled black hair, and wore a fedora. His coat was light brown and his crooked smile was engaging. His facial features were very pronounced thanks to a strong bone structure. "Your book..." he sighed, as he picked it up. Its cover was decorated with droplets of rain, its pages soggy, making the book full of lumps.

"That's fine, books with no bent edges or coffee stains have no personality," I said, grabbing it from him. He was taken aback from my answer and pointed at my book.

"You like when objects bring back a memory?" he asked. I stared at his dated brown loafers.

"That too."

"You're still missing that coffee stain. What do you say we go inside and have some warm coffee?" he challenged. I smiled, and answered by gesturing toward the breakfast joint.

By now, the rain was falling lightly, just a drizzle. I breathed in that faint smell of rain, and entered, ringing the little bell attached to the door.

"Name's Ernst by the way," he added. "Ernst Bucklevaugh." A jaded waitress led us to our table.

"Interesting name." *I feel as though I've heard it before*, I puzzled. "I'm Eve. Just Eve." I placed my book on the table and he opened a menu.

"So I don't get the privilege of knowing your last name," he stated.

"No, not yet," I intoned. The waitress came back, and Ernst ordered a coffee and a Danish roll. I just ordered coffee.

"So, do you go to college here?" he asked.

"Yeah, it's my first year. I'm a New York newbie. But I'm getting around." The waitress came back with our drinks, and I noticed that her nametag read "Shirley." I decided to cordially acknowledge her. "Thanks Shirley." Her face changed, and she smiled warmly.

"So, Ernst, what do you do for a living?" I asked, as I took a sip from my cup. For a minute he struggled with the weight of the answer.

"I travel," he confessed.

"So, you're a man of the world," I guessed.

"You could say that." He sipped his coffee and took out a polished pocket watch. "I hope to see you soon Eve, I would really like your help sometime." He seemed uncomfortable now, unsure of his words.

"With what?" I furrowed my eyebrows together.

"I can tell you like to read Eve, you are inquisitive. I can tell you assimilate into your surroundings well. You are prepared." Now he was confusing me even more, starting to scare me even.

"What do you mean, Ernst?" I managed to say as I accidentally slapped my cup of coffee, and tipped it over. But when I looked back up Ernst was gone. I grabbed a few napkins to soak up the coffee, but for my book it was too late. A huge coffee stain had seeped into the edges of its pages. I decided to open it and analyze the damage. Right there in the very first paragraph was my answer, which just posed more questions:

"Ernst Bucklevaugh was no ordinary man. Every day of his life included risky escapades. Ernst traveled around the world, and even through time to find the perfect helpers; it was his specialty. He was gathering up a group of individuals to help him with..."

As I closed the book, a quick shiver invaded my shoulders. Shirley came back with the bill. "Well, hon, I sure hope those two cups of coffee were sufficient." Two cups? I just drank one, but Ernst...

"Excuse me but, did you happen to see anyone come in here with me?"

Shirley bit her lower lip as she tried to remember. "Not that I recall hon, I take note of every customer who comes through that door." *I need to read less and get some more sleep*, I thought. "Thanks for stopping by, hope you come again!" she continued. As I walked out into the bustling streets, breathing in the recent smell of rain, I took out my copy of *Blurred Identity* and couldn't help but think: *I have a feeling this is going to be a very good book.*