

Bittersweet

By Lydia L. Brown

BITTERSWEET

TRANSCRIPT, DAY ONE: ROSS HURON

and this is how the world ends

ROSS HURON: My name is Ross Huron. And I suppose this story is mine. Olivia -- she's the journalist who's writing this, for future generations, I guess, says I should tell the story in my own words. So. My name is Ross Huron, and um...Olivia, do I really have to do this? Liv?

transcript pauses, continues

ROSS HURON: Shut up. Okay. Apparently I do. So where does this start? I guess...erm...My name is Ross Huron. And this story is mine. And...ehm...yay?

transcript breaks -- unintelligible voices in the background

ROSS HURON: 'Liv says I have to tell about the world. So. The world was ruled by a couple of idiots who rose to power awhile ago and built up this really gigantic army so no one really dared to defy them. They called themselves 'the Gods'. Bit odd, because they were as mortal as anyone else, but, yeah sure whatever. Oi, and they were evil. And cruel. And heartless. And all that fun stuff. And they tended to eat cheese --

transcript breaks -- unintelligible voices in background

ROSS HURON: Fine. So they didn't tend to eat cheese. Had to make sure you were really listening, though. Anyhow. So, I have these sweetly awesome mental mind power stuff, y'know, I'm an empath, so I can tell other people's feelings, and I can read strong thoughts and if I really concentrate, move things. Handy, mind you, if I don't feel like getting up. And I have 'second sight', so if I ever, y'know, went blind or something, or if my sight's blocked or something, I can see stuff through my second sight. I guess.

transcript pauses, continues

ROSS HURON: So. Ehm. When I was thirteen, the Gods learned of my awesome amazing mental mind powers, and so they called my parents and told them they'd have to give me up. And my parents hid me; it was this tiny broom closet/cupboard thing in this hidden place, which was apparently used to hide other people during one of the first two World Wars. Yeah, I know, old house, built way before the Crusades and the New Age. No, my parents aren't *that* old, they bought it a couple years before Chris -- he's my older brother -- was born.

ROSS HURON: And I think first they took my dad, but my mom still hid me, and my brother didn't give anything away, so I guess that's all good. I don't know. I was stuck in a broom closet, can you really blame me?

transcript pauses for a full three minutes, then continues

ROSS HURON: Then -- they took my brother. For the Game. They called it the Gods' Game, and we used to play it in the schoolyards before they outlawed it, or before we really knew what it was. It's all about strategy and stuff, and it was always really hard to win. But in the Gods' version, whoever lost died, and whoever won got enlisted in their army. Bad stuff, y'know. And they usually made it so you knew your opponent beforehand, so that when you won or lost the betrayal was all the more deep.

transcript pauses, continues

ROSS HURON: So it was just me and my mom for months and months, and then I ventured upstairs in the middle of the night one night, and -- there were Gods in our house, torturing my mother, trying to figure out where I was. And I tried to give myself up.

transcript pauses, unintelligible, calm, female voice in the background

ROSS HURON: "Ross, go!" my mom cried.

I knew they would advance on me. But she yelled at me, so I ran for it. With my backpack and all my stuff in it. They chased after me, but after awhile they stopped, and I couldn't figure out why. And I didn't really want to know, I think.

I found out later that my mother had told them a few hiding spots where I definitely wouldn't be, and they killed her immediately thereafter.

So I'm a coward. I was the one who ran for it.

But they didn't find me for a good six months.

ROSS HURON: I'm sorry. Olivia? Can I stop?

unintelligible voice, transcript ends

TRANSCRIPT, DAY TWO: ROSS HURON

ROSS HURON: Hi. It's me again. Ross, y'know?

ROSS HURON: Yeah. So, I guess I'll start where I left off, then. So. I broke into a Gods' building. I was sent to steal something. Something important. I shouldn't have listened to them, but I did anyway. I was fourteen at the time, all right? It would have been okay, except then I cut myself accidentally on a piece of glass, and it kind of bled a lot, and ... I don't really like blood.

transcript pauses, continues

ROSS HURON: So I fainted. Yeah. 'Liv?

unintelligible voice, transcript continues

ROSS HURON: Lunch?

unintelligible sounds, transcript ends

TRANSCRIPT, DAY TWO (continued): ROSS HURON

ROSS HURON: I remember waking up in a lot of pain. I knew I was lying down, and there were things attached to my arm -- an IV that was feeding blood into my shoulder, bandages all along my arm, and another IV on my wrist. I remember using my second sight to tell who else was in the room -- a girl. Twenty, maybe twenty-one years old, shy and quick. Using that, though, cost me a lot, and I

think I blacked out for a couple more seconds. Then she said, "You awake?" I didn't answer. "The painkiller will kick in in a couple of minutes." It did, thank the Gods, so I knew she was telling the truth.

When I opened my eyes and saw her, as she said, rather stupidly "You're awake." She blinked. And I asked her her name, but then regretting it.

"Aragonia Feli. People call me Ari. What's yours?" Gods, she sounds like a talking doll.

"You already know my name."

"You're Ross Huron." I remember thinking that she must have been a popular idiot in high school.

"No, it's actually Henry Greene, and this has all been a horrible mistake."

"Aren't you too young for sarcasm?" What a stupid question.

So I answer with a bitter smile. "You're never too young if you're on the run."

I know she's probably been told that I killed dozens of people, but that wasn't really my fault. For some reason she blushes and turns her back on me. I raise myself up onto my elbows to look at her. I know my face is contorted with pain and I close my eyes briefly. I test my second sight and I catch her staring at me. "Staring is impolite," I say reflexively.

"Oh -- I --" Definitely a high school cheerleader. Idiot. Can't even string a sentence together.

"Yeah? You forget why the Gods hate me already? I dunno, maybe because of my amazing mental abilities that no one else can comprehend?" My eyes are open, but narrowed, challenging.

"Erm, well, I --" Insert high school cheerleader comment.

"Well, just quit staring, and remember my amazing mental abilities. On certain days I can read your mind, and I don't like sandwiches." Her expression is that of those suffering from total shock. Satisfied she'll fall for my lies, I let my elbows collapse under me, and fall slowly asleep.

transcript ends

TRANSCRIPT, DAY THREE: ROSS HURON

ROSS HURON: When I wake up for the second time, I examine the IV attached to my wrist, realizing that it's feeding nutrition into my bloodstream. And the IV in a vein in my shoulder is probably feeding blood into my bloodstream. Suddenly repulsed by the sight, I turn away from it to see Ari sitting on a three-legged stool by my bed.

Suddenly, I comment, "You know, I always pictured a lot more people around my death bed."

Ari's head snaps up. "Why did you ever think that?"

I shrug my right shoulder -- I doubt I can move my left one at all. "I dunno. I guess I always thought

that a few people liked me in the world. Instead, all Fate ends up giving me is a girl who's been assigned to make sure I don't kill myself, by the Gods themselves. I suppose that should be a tribute to my memory, that I was prominent enough to be hunted by the Gods."

"The fact that you got caught in the end erases any redeeming quality that might give you with fellow rebels. Who'd be stupid enough to break into a Gods' building?"

"Maybe I wanted to be caught," I whisper, and I doubt she can hear me.

But she laughs. "Who'd believe that? That's a death sentence."

I raise a single eyebrow. "Yeah. Whatever you say."

"Yeah. Whatever I say. So don't kill yourself, Ross Huron."

When I look up again, her long black hair hides her face, and she's hunched over her book. So I turn over, favoring my left arm slightly, and go back to sleep.

transcript ends

TRANSCRIPT, DAY FOUR: ROSS HURON

ROSS HURON: I know I'm being weak. I know it shouldn't affect me like this. I'm choking on my own blood and my head is in my hands, trying to block out the pain. I know it shouldn't affect me like this. I know I shouldn't let my tears show. I know I'm weak. But it *hurts*, dammit.

unintelligible voice, transcript continues

ROSS HURON: Shut up, 'Liv.

Ari looks up, sees me. "Ross?" she asks, and I can hear the concern in her voice even if I can't sense it.

"That's my name, don't wear it out," I say through my tears, spitting blood.

"Ross?" she says again, rather stupidly. "Ross, is anything wrong?"

That's a really stupid question, you know. "Well, of course not." I say, still through tears. "It's not like I'm bleeding to death, mortally injured, prisoner of the Gods or anything like that. It's not like I've got amazing mental powers or anything. It's not like I'm an empath or anything. And it's not like I believe your pity is real." I know that the last sentence is laced with bitterness.

"Ross," she whispers, and she touches my shoulder. And I break.

"NO!" I yell it, and I see her shocked face in that instant I turn around. "NO! Don't touch me!" I turn away again, and I know that I am still crying, but I hope she can't hear the tears that lace my voice when I speak next. "I can't block his thoughts -- they're too strong. I don't know his name. His

thoughts -- they're all so horrible. I mean, they're not horrible thoughts, but memories -- memories -- Ari --" I shouldn't have used her name, shouldn't have told her anything. It *hurts*, dammit. "I can't feel memories." My shoulders shake and I can feel the tears dribble down my nose. I shouldn't be this weak. I shouldn't have broken.

"Ross? Ross?" I can't say anything, knowing I won't be able to. When she puts her arm around my shoulders, I let her. I let her wipe away my tears; listen to her murmur nonsensical sentences. I want to tell her that I shouldn't be this weak, but I cannot speak. I think I eventually fall asleep in her arms.

transcript ends

TRANSCRIPT, DAY FIVE: ROSS HURON

ROSS HURON: Okay, okay, so I had nightmares. Horrible, awful ones. I don't want to talk about them. Can I go now?

unintelligible voices, transcript ends

TRANSCRIPT, DAY SIX: ROSS HURON

ROSS HURON: I woke up screaming. "I'M NOT INSANE!"

"I never said you were," replies Ari mildly, looking up from her handheld computer.

My head aches, memories bounce in my consciousness, and my face is streaked with tears and sweat.

"Are you feeling better?" she asks, her voice dripping condescension.

"Why wouldn't I be feeling perfectly alright?" I ask her, hoping she gets the hint and drops the subject.

"Last night, you said something about memories --"

I cut her off. She didn't get the hint. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"The memories?" she says again rather stupidly. "You said something about how the memories were too strong --" Do you ever take a hint?

"I never said anything like that. Shut up."

"But --"

And I break. Again. "SHUT UP!"

And I know I'm crying again, know my shoulders are shaking, but I turn away from her as though I can hide my tears. Flashes of pain -- *fear -- dark blood running from a deep cut -- fear -- pain -- fear...* She touches my shoulder, and instinctively I jerk away and scream "Don't touch me!" A woman's *high voice*

-- laughter -- and then a woman's scream -- dark tears -- dark blood -- where's the light switch? -- fear...
She stumbles back a few paces, and her hands snap away from my shoulder as though she's burnt it.
As though she's been scalded by the terrified expression crossing my features. "I --"

"I said -- don't touch me!"

"Ross --?"

"Damn you!" Shoulders shaking, sweat and tears running down my face. *shattered glass -- get away from me -- the sharp taste of my own blood, bitter and sweet at the same time -- something breaks -- blood dripping..*

"Ross!" Anger breaks.

"Shut up! You don't deserve my true name! You're just a bloody spawn of the Gods, and you're going to a report after I'm dissected, maybe on the different wavelengths of my brain -- maybe that's what causes me to be so insane, whacked-out -- the word you're searching for is *abnormal*, isn't it?" I smile brutally, know that I'm hurting her, don't care. "Don't you remember? I can read your mind. I know your every thought. You used to have a cat name Oscar, his fur was green and black, but he was different from all the other cats so you went and put him to sleep. You never loved him! You never thought about maybe who he was. Maybe they did a genetic experiment on him after you were done with him. And you didn't care, did you? You never loved him!" I know that I'm making things up, know she doesn't believe them, don't care. I lash out at her, reaching her arm, dig my fingernails into her soft flesh until blood shows, staining my own already bloodstained palms. And then -- *dead silence.*

transcript ends

not with a bang

TRANSCRIPT, DAY SEVEN: ROSS HURON

ROSS HURON: "I'm sorry -- I'm sorry, I'm so sorry..." My voice. Whispering. "I'm sorry..." Tears are still running down my face. "You're afraid of me, aren't you?" I whisper. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm so sorry..." But my words are empty, and my sobs are hollow and choked as I gasp them out. No...what have I become? What am I doing? -- *the sharp taste of my own blood, bitter and sweet at the same time* -- ... I try to get up, ripping the IV from my wrist, ignoring the pain, only knowing that I have to get out of here, have to leave...And that's all I know. "No," I gasp, the word dragged out of me like a scream. "NO!" I slump against the door, sinking to my knees, looking away from the blood, trying to ignore it. I

don't protest as Ari drags me back to bed, don't protest as she whispers those nonsensical words in my ear and I know that she lies when she tells me it's going to be alright, but I don't protest. I fall asleep again, in her arms.

transcript ends

TRANSCRIPT, DAY EIGHT: ROSS HURON

ROSS HURON: Sorry, 'Liv, I don't want to do this anymore.

transcript pauses for a good ten minutes

ROSS HURON: Don't care. Don't want to.

wishing for water, broken glass -- half-drowned screams -- love -- all I wanted -- fear -- pain -- dark blood pooling -- the sharp, tangy, metallic taste of my own blood, somehow sweet and bitter at the same time...

transcript ends

**project ROSS HURON has been terminated
experiment ROSS HURON was not cooperative**

*and this is how the world ends
not with a bang but a whimper*

