

# Victoria

By C. Elliot Ritter

I walked down the hill trying to get away from Father's farm. I didn't know where to go. Father said if Human found any of use they'd torture us to death. He would know, he *was* a human. Now he wasn't, he was one of us. Not in appearance but in spirit. Humans hated anything that wasn't Human and we were Anthros. We looked like both a loathsome Human and the animals that lived in the forests. I was made from a fox so he called me: Vixtoria RedFox. I had a hard time saying, Vixtoria so I usually said Victoria, but my name with Father's tongue was Vixtoria. Father loved us like His children because we were His children. He bought us new clothes every year, let us grow and keep our own food, and punished us when we were Sinful.

That's why I left, Father's punishments were getting harsher. My favorite brother, Michael, found that his food kept disappearing and by the end of the week he'd be hungry. When he asked Father where it went He said that one of Nature's Children was taking it so they could eat too. Michael was angry, and eventually found and killed the rat that was eating his food. Father declared that Michael had committed the Sin of murder and had to be put to death. He made us carry out the punishment. He said the Book required those with claws to tear him apart. His screams and plead for help haunted me for days. I couldn't sleep, my food tasted bad, my work in the field was no longer enjoyable. I knew if I left I'd be killed by a Human, but if I stayed I might give in to my instinct and kill. For days I suffered with this thought until I decided to take the chance, however slim, that I might find another Human like Father so I put some food into a pack and hid it near the well. That night it was my turn to get water for the other children. I went out to the well and kept going.

I was terrified that a Human would see me and turn me in. I crept though the forest until I came to a long strip of asphalt, a road I think. I sat at the edge, in the open, for a while. Father said when the other Humans came for us that was how they were going to come. I took my chances that one would be Good, like Him so I sat waiting for one to come by. I didn't wait long, two lights started coming toward me and I was thrilled. Father had a machine he called a truck. He would take it from His farm into the other Human's town to get things. Sometimes He would bring us candy and other nice things, but usually it was just more bales of hay, bags of seeds, or some of the very few Good Humans to be with us. I hoped that those lights were a truck like His. It came and passed and wasn't a truck at all, too small and it didn't have a place to carry things. More passed and didn't stop. I didn't think they saw me, so I walked into the road hoping they could see me then. One came around and screeched and swerved and almost hit me. The Human inside yelled, "What are you doing you crazy bitch? Get off the fucking road!" as he passed and I ran back into the forest to hide.

From my hiding place behind a tree I could smell my fear scent, but I couldn't do anything to stop it. After a while, when I was sure he was gone, I went to the road again and looked along it. Several metal signs said things I couldn't understand and one of the green ones had white arrows. After looking at it for a while I figure out it meant to that if I went along the road I'd go to whatever it said. I wasn't keen on going to a Human city, but I didn't really have a choice so I started walking. Some trucks and not-trucks and even one huge truck that was big enough to carry ten of father's trucks passed me but didn't stop. I began wondering why they didn't stop. My tail, as long as my legs and bushy like a real fox's, was obvious since I couldn't hide it, so why weren't they stopping? Why was I worried? If they stopped they probably would do it so they could torture and kill me.

After a while one of the not-trucks came up behind me, flashed some flickering red and blue lights and then stopped beside me. I kept walking. The not-truck kept up with me and one of the windows came down by itself. A Human male's voice said, "Miss?" I didn't turn, I wasn't "miss" and I didn't want to talk to him anyway. The Human spoke again saying louder, "Miss can I have a word with you?" I stopped long enough to look at the Human driving the not-truck. He was younger than Father, but still had age lines on

his face and wore dark clothes with lots of little shiny metal and plastic things on it. He didn't look mad. He looked like Father when he would talk to us about serious things. I didn't want to talk so I kept walking. He said sternly, "Stop, Miss, I want to have a talk with you."

I panicked and ran. The Human stopped the not-truck and got out to catch me. My feet hurt so bad from the day's work and walking through the gravel road that I couldn't run as fast as I can and the Human caught me. I shouted, "No! Stop! don't kill me! Please!" He took one of my arms behind my back and raised it until it hurt. I knew I was going to be dead soon and screamed for help. The Human asked, in a very stern voice, "Stop it!" But I didn't I kept fighting and screaming until my voice hurt. Another Human ran up and together they put something metal on my wrist and made it tight and then did it again to my other wrist. What ever they used it held my arms together and I screamed and fought him as he took me back to the not-truck. Another one was sitting behind the first and they put me in the back of the first not-truck and the Humans talked outside it.

I sat in the back of the not-truck but I didn't try to get out. I really didn't know how to get out and what was the point? They'd catch me again. My fear scent started filling the inside of the not-truck until I couldn't stand it. I was going to be tortured soon and then I was going to have to tell them where Father was. "I don't know where Father is," I would say and they'd do something horrible. I laid against the back of the seat in the not-truck and whimpered in fear. After a long time the Human came back to the not-truck and opened his door. "Ohmigod, what did she do in here?" He said to the other Human. The other Human, another male but even younger with a bald head, sniffed and said, "It smells like she crapped or ... I dunno, with them you never know until you their work-ups." The first one said, from behind a metal grate that separated the back of the not-truck from the front, "Miss why did you run from me?"

"Because you're going to kill me," I said and my voice shook.

"I'm not going to *kill* you," he said and said something to the other Human before returning to me, "Are you in trouble, miss?" he asked in a stern but polite voice. I began to wonder if he was a Good Human.

"No," I said.

"What's your name?" he asked.

"Victoria RedFox," I mumbled and the Human wrote it down on a pad. He walked away and talked into a plastic box on his shirt then to the other Human for a while. I could hear him say to the other Human, "I don't know what she thought I said, but she took off screaming 'don't kill me, don't kill me'." The other Human said something but I couldn't hear it. After a moment he talked back into the box again and turned back to the not-truck and kicked at something on the ground and looked at me for a second. I could barely hear him say, "She has no priors, but there's something wrong with her." He walked back to the not-truck and leaned inside and made a face when he smelled my fear-scent, then asked, "Ma'am would you like me to take you back to the station. Get you some help."

"No," I said knowing what would really happen.

He shook his head and walked away far enough that even my fox-ears could barely hear the box on his chest chatter. The other Human walked up to him and asked, "What do you think?"

"I think she's in trouble," the first Human said kicking again, "but I can't take her in, since she's really hasn't done anything wrong."

The other Human asked, "Did she hit you?"

"She bit me right there," the first Human said showing the other Human his hand, "and kicked the shit out of my legs."

"Take her in for that," the other Human said, "we'll try and find out more when we get there."

"Shit," the first Human said kicking something again he looked at me again, "I didn't want to have to arrest her."

"It's all we have," the other Human said.

The first Human looked at me for a while then walked up to the not-truck slowly and sat in the seat in front of me and said, "Okay ma'am, you beat me up some, so I'm going to have to arrest you for that, you understand?" I gasped that I did. He told me of all these rights I had about staying quiet and getting an 'attorney'. Then asked, "You understand these rights as I just told you?"

"I think," I said.

"What don't you understand?" the first Human asked.

"What's an 'attorney'?" I asked.

"A lawyer," the first Human said and must have known I didn't know what that was either, "it's someone who'll argue on your side if you go to court. If you want one we can get one for you even if you can't afford to pay for one. D'you understand now?"

"I guess," I said. He walked away and talked to the other Human again then came back and sat in the not-truck and closed the door.

"You have to say yes or no." He said in an even more serious voice.

"Yes," I mumbled.

"Do you mind if I open the windows?" he asked while he started the not-truck moving down the road. I didn't say anything because he said he would use it against me. After a minute he said, "Well, if you're not going to say anything I'm going to roll them down." The windows in the front went down a few inches and fresh air came in. I was glad because it was beginning to stink really bad. He looked back at me with the corner of his eye and said in a voice people used when they're telling a secret, "Miss, between you and me, if you don't do anything else I'm not going to press charges." I didn't know what he meant but I think it was something nice. Maybe he was one of the Good Humans.

I sat silently trying to figure out if he was Good when he asked, "Would like me to turn on the radio?" I shrugged and he touched something and an amazing sound filled the not-truck. It was like a Human male talking, but not really talking because they would make his voice sound higher or lower and make some words longer or shorter. I turned my head and ears so I could hear the different things better. There was also these other sounds that I didn't know could exist. It was wonderful. I shut my eyes and listened to the sounds. After I don't know how long of listening, the Human laughed and asked, "You act like you've never heard music before."

"This is called 'mu-sic'?" I asked.

"Yeah," the Human said but it sounded like he asked. He laughed to himself and said, "It's really old stuff, nineteen-seventies, but I think it sounds better than most of the crap that comes out today."

"I like it," I said, "it's ... beautiful."

"I never heard it called that before," the Human said and turned the not-truck toward a large building with lots of other not-truck like it around it. He put it next to another not-truck like it and turned it off. He turned to me and said, "Okay, Miss Victoria, I'm going to have to take you inside and put you in jail."

My fear-scent rose quickly when he said jail. Father was always worried about jail and sometimes He'd even be sent there and leave us for a long time. When He came back He would tell us stories about how mean the Humans were to him and how they tortured and killed Anthros there. But this Human said if I didn't do anything else he would not "press charges" so I hoped that meant if I was nice they wouldn't do whatever that was. I decided to be nice and when he opened the door I didn't fight him. He took me toward the building with the jail inside my legs felt weak. I started to panic and pull away from him, but he held onto me and said, "C'mon, I don't want to have to do drag you."

"No," I shouted, "they're going to kill me in jail."

"Miss," he said sternly, "Miss, please cooperate."

"No," I shouted, "I don't want to die!"

He said sternly but nice, "No one's going to hurt in there."

I tried to sit so he couldn't make me walk and two other Humans — no, wait one was an Anthro! I let the cat take me inside even though he was rough. Inside the building was a big room and there were more Anthros and Humans than I'd ever seen ever. There were an Anthros helping the Humans, and the Humans were helping the Anthros! I could barely walk now because I was so shocked. The Humans weren't trying to kill the Anthros! How? Father said that's all Humans, except Good Humans, killed Anthros. Were all these Humans, Good Humans? No, some looked mean and looked at the Anthros mean, but it wasn't killing mean.

They took me to a small room with a table and some chairs and a big mirror on the wall and no windows and only one door. They sat me down and left for a minute. I saw myself for the first time that night. My fur was dirty and shaggy and my head hair was messy. I didn't look like the other foxes I saw when they took me through the big room. They were thicker and had curves where I had a lot of bumps and dips. I hated how I looked compared to them. They looked nicer and didn't look as tired as I always did. After a minute the door opened and a female cat walked in and asked nicely if I could talk to her. I said, "Yes," and she sat down. She wasn't dressed like the Human who brought me here and lots of the other Humans and Anthros in the other room and wore a nice gray skirt and jacket. She sat across the table they sat me at and said in a nice voice, "My name is Laura Anthony, what's your's?"

"Victoria," I said a little less scared.

"Okay Victoria, I want to ask you some questions, okay?" She asked. I nodded. Laura was pretty even though she was big. She looked kind of like my brother, David who Father said looked like a "tiger", but a female. She was curvy like some of the Good Human females Father would bring to the farm sometimes and unlike me. "First," she said nicely and leaned toward me, "you look hungry. Would you like something to eat?"

"Yes," I said. I was starving! It was Friday and I had so little food left I didn't today so I could have some tomorrow.

"Alright," she said, "What do you want? I'll get it for you."

"Food," I said.

"I knew that silly," she said, "what kind?" I never had a choice before I always ate what Father gave me to eat. We each would get a bag or box of food on Sunday and we ate from it until He gave us another one the next Sunday. That's why Michael killed the rat, if it ate it all of his food he wouldn't be able to eat later. I took so long thinking what I liked that she said, "How about I get you a hamburger?" I didn't know what it was, but I agreed and she left to get it.

I looked at myself again. Maybe if I could eat more I'd get curvy like Laura. I was old enough that I should look like that, but my teats were small and rump flat because I didn't get enough food to make them bigger. After a few minutes Laura came back and had some things in her hands, "Here's the hamburger and," she put a can in front of me, "a Coke. I didn't know what kind you'd like." I picked up the hot food and couldn't get to it. It looked great, bread, cheese and something else that I couldn't see too well. "Let me open it," she said and put a finger into the thin plastic top and tore it open. The smell made me sick.

"What is that!" I screamed and jumped away from it and into the corner.

"It's a hamburger," she said.

"It's a dead animal," I said terrified, "that been cut up and *cooked!*" They were trying make me Sin so they'd have a reason to kill me!

"I guess," Laura said looking at the monstrous thing.

"Get it out of here!" I shouted.

She put it outside the door. Maybe I just passed a test to see if I would Sin.

I sat against the wall and looked at the door and the spot where that thing had been. How could they do that? Kill and chop up a poor animal and then expect me to *eat* it? I couldn't help my fear-scent or my shaking. Laura stood inside the room and watched me for a moment then walked to me. She squatted next to me and asked nicely, "Victoria, what' wrong?"

"Father said this would happen," I whispered, "that Humans would torture and kill me."

"No one's hurt you here," she said and put her arm around my shoulders.

"You're trying to make me Sin," I whispered.

"If that's what you think then I'm sorry," Laura said, "If you want me to, I'll get you something that doesn't have any meat."

I looked at her and felt like I was talking to David or Michael or Lori or any of my brothers or sisters. She was nice and wanted me to feel safe. I didn't know if she was trying to make me feel safe so they could hurt me or if I was really safe. I was still very hungry so I said, "Yeah."

"Is it a, um, Sin," she stopped and looked at me for a moment, "to eat cheese or eggs?"

"No," I said. Father said we can take things from animals as long as we don't hurt them.

"Okay, I'll be right back," Laura said. She got up and left again for a much longer time. I just sat in the corner trying to understand what was going on. The Humans were being nice to me and the Anthro was trying to make me Sin. Where there more Good Humans than Father thought? Laura didn't seem to know that killing animals was a Sin, but she did seem sorry that she wanted me to eat one. I hoped she would me a something good to eat. My stomach felt like it was trying to eat itself I was so hungry. I wondered what happened to my pack. The Humans didn't give it to me if they had it or maybe they didn't have it and all that food is gone. I hoped not, because if it was lost I'd be hungry if they wouldn't give me food that wasn't Sinful. The door opened and Laura came back in.

"I got you something you'll probably like better," Laura said putting a black plastic bowl on the table, "It's a salad, they didn't have anything else like that. Do you want to come up here?" She patted the back of the chair. I slowly got up because I didn't know if it was safe. She backed away from the chair some to let me sit and I ran over and sat quickly. I looked at the food carefully. It was lettuce and radishes and carrots and had two half eggs and two plastic bags with something orange in them and a fork and napkin in a plastic bag. I took the plastic top off of it and tore the bag with the fork open and start eating quickly.

Laura sat across from me and asked, "Can I ask you how old you are?" I shrugged because I didn't know. She asked nicely, "You don't know how old you are?"

"Father never told me," I said.

"Who is Father?" She asked.

"He's a Good Human who made us and loves us and keeps us safe and feeds us," I said.

Laura thought for a moment and asked, "If he's so nice why did you leave him?"

I felt sick suddenly. I didn't want to remember having to kill Michael. I stopped eating even though there was a lot left and I said, "I don't want to talk about it."

"Did something bad happen?" Laura asked. I nodded. She asked, "What happened?" I felt really bad and began to cry. Laura came over to me and held me and asked, "Did something really bad happen?"

"Yes," I said.

"What?" Laura asked nicely.

"Michael committed a Sin," I said, "and we had to kill him."

"Who's Michael?" She asked.

"My brother," I said. Laura patted my shoulder and I felt like I should tell her more. "He killed a rat that was eating his food and that's a Sin and we had to kill him for it."

Laura didn't say anything for a minute then asked, "Did you help?"

I said while crying, "I didn't want to but I knew if I didn't I would have Sinned too."

"And they would have killed you too?" Laura asked. I nodded. She asked, "Did Father tell you that Humans killed people like us?" I nodded again. She asked, "Do you still think that?"

"I don't know," I said crying and hugged Laura. I said, "Maybe there's more Good Humans than Father thought."

Laura let me go and said to me, "I think there's a lot more good people than you think. I'm going to go for a minute, okay?" I nodded. She said, "I'll be back." She left the room and I sat at the table. I was still hungry so I finished the salad and played with the plastic bags with orange stuff in them. One of them broke open when I was twisting it and the orange stuff sprayed on my shirt. It smelled good so I tasted it and it tasted good too. I wiped off the rest of it and licked it off my fingers and open the other one with my teeth and ate it too. I sat again and felt lonely. I was around my brother and sisters all the time and wasn't away from them for more than a few minutes. I wondered why Laura was gone for so long. I was pretty sure she was talking to Humans, and probably Anthros too, when she would leave for a long time. I began to play with the fork and bowl so I wouldn't be so bored. I hit the fork on the bowl and made a sound like I heard in the music. I tried to make the same pattern of thumps I heard but I couldn't do it right.

A sound came from the door and I looked up and saw Laura and a Human in clothes like one of the Good Humans Father would have come over and look at us and stick us with needles or give us pills sometimes. I wasn't scared of him because they were always nice to us even if the needles hurt. Laura said, "Victoria, this is Raoul, he's a nurse," she showed me he was friendly by putting her hands on his shoulders, "he would like to take a look at you, okay?"

"Okay," I asked, "are you going to give me a shot?"

"What'd she say?" Raoul asked Laura quietly. My ears pricked up so I could listen better.

Laura told him quietly, "She asked if you're going to give her a shot."

"Okay," he said to Laura. He said to me, "Hello, Victoria, I'm Raoul Gonzalez, I'm a forensic nurse, and I'm going to examine you." He had a deep voice that had a slight accent, but no worse than most Humans. He asked Laura but let me hear, "If we can I'd like find a more private place to do this."

"Actually, we have an exam room," Laura said.

"That's right," Raoul said, "we're in Precinct Seven aren't we? Great!" he looked at me happy and held out his hand, "Why don't you come along?"

I didn't know whether I should. He seemed nice, but he could be playing. The Good Humans who came to see us at Father's farm were all called a "doctor" and Raoul was a "forensic nurse". I think I knew what a nurse was, usually one would come with the doctor, but they were all just "nurse" and they were all female Humans. What did "forensic nurse" mean and why was it a male Human? I didn't want to go. I remembered Father teaching about Human treachery. They would act nice, but then ... I can't remember all of the horrible tortures He described. I smelled my fear-scent again. I wanted to run back to Father, but knew He'd probably call me a Sinner for leaving. I could still smell Michael's blood on my hands and I didn't want any of my brother or sisters to have to smell mine. Laura came to me and whispered, "I'll be in the room with you, sweetheart." I looked at Laura and she could see how afraid I was. "You don't have to be afraid."

"But Father said that ..." I said, "He said ..." I couldn't remember His teachings. The Humans were doing something to make me forget! I knew they were, but I didn't know how, but they were! The room changed and turned gray and then it changed to black.