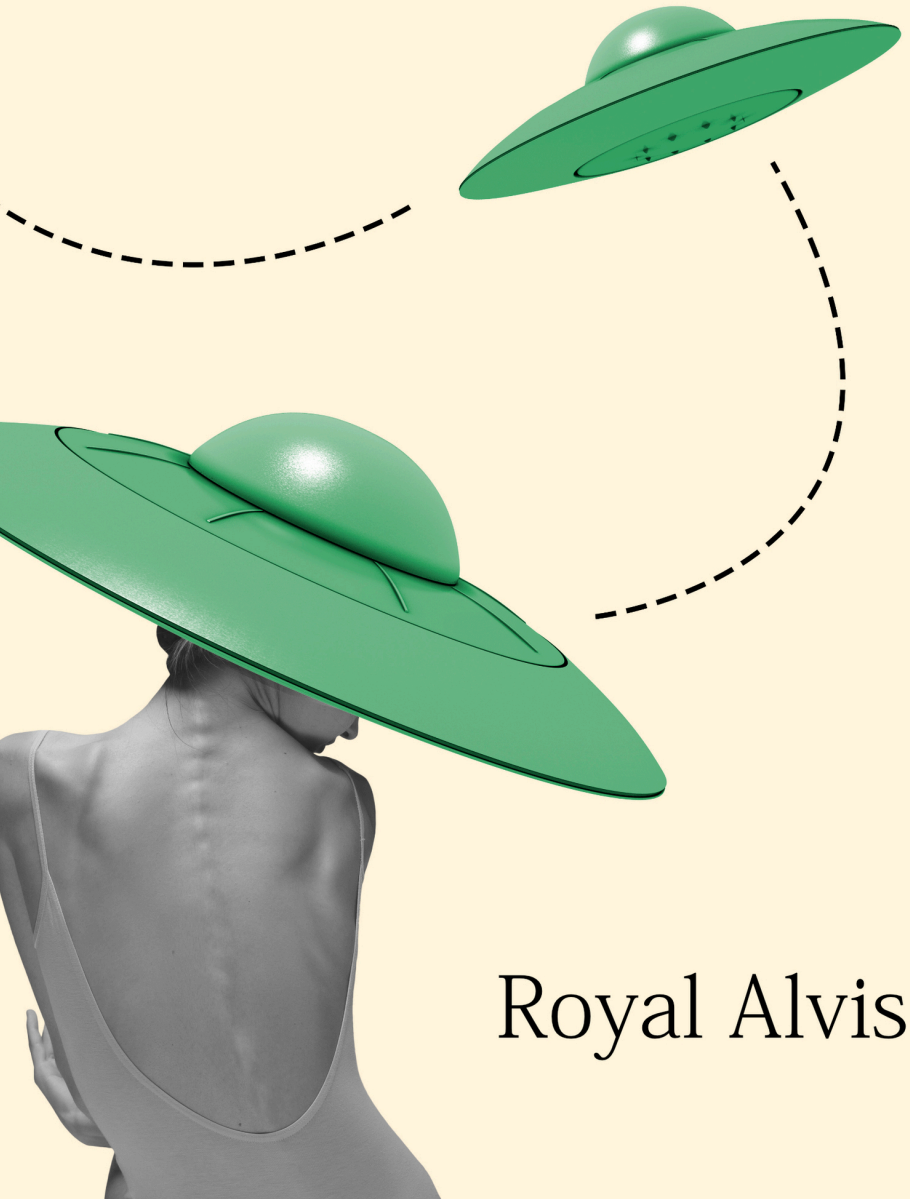


# The Magic Townhouse

A Short Story



Royal Alvis



ROYAL ALVIS

The Magic Townhouse

Copyright © 2023 by Royal Alvis

*All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise without written permission from the publisher. It is illegal to copy this book, post it to a website, or distribute it by any other means without permission.*

*This novel is entirely a work of fiction. The names, characters and incidents portrayed in it are the work of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events or localities is entirely coincidental.*

*Royal Alvis asserts the moral right to be identified as the author of this work.*

*First edition*

*This book was professionally typeset on Reedsy.*

*Find out more at [reedsy.com](https://reedsy.com)*

# Contents

The Magic Townhouse	1
<i>About the Author</i>	19
<i>Also by Royal Alvis</i>	21



# The Magic Townhouse

Folks used to look me over and ask if I was looking for trouble, or if I was a drug addict, but these guesses were far from the mark. Back then I was too shy to cause trouble, and I still don't know much about drugs, but I assume you have to have friends who know where to get drugs if you want to take them, and at that age, I didn't have any friends. All I had was the uncle who raised me, and besides him, I had an obsession for a comic book series called *The Wanderer*.

Most people are probably not familiar with *The Wanderer*, so here's the basic gist: one day a lone traveler wakes up on a roadside to discover that she has been mysteriously marked with tattoos. Could be that aliens are responsible, but eventually the traveler learns that each tattoo has a voice and a persona, which gives her supernatural powers. That's what the comic books were about, and I didn't just read them, I spent most of my time imagining that I was *The Wanderer*.

After my second year of high school, I worked for a landscaper and used my first paycheck to get my first tattoo, a griffin-like creature identical to the tattoo inked on the *Wanderer's* shoulder.

My uncle, being a man of tattoos himself, approved of the design. Come September, I had teardrops drawn below the corner of my left eye, a cobweb drawn on my neck, and a dragon twisting around my wrist and forearm. I was sixteen, and rather than return to school in the fall, I decided to embark on a hitchhiking adventure, much like my comic book heroine.

“Go ahead,” my uncle said. “A man needs to see the world,” and before leaving, I outfitted myself with a long black coat and black engineer boots, clothes that the Wanderer would wear. This fashion statement reflected my poor judgment at the time, because the clothes ate up half of my travel fund, and after ten days on the road, my savings were again halved by bus tickets.

I had planned to hitchhike, because that’s how you-know-who got around, but little did I know that few motorists would offer rides to a tattooed boy dressed in black, so I took buses, and when I was down to my last dollars, I turned north and tried to hop a freight train from Durham to Newark. I didn’t realize that trains these days are wired with sensors. The conductor knew from the get-go when I climbed aboard, but he was a kind man who came to my hiding place and offered me coffee and a sandwich before the train left the depot. I should have thanked him but I was too shy, so I only stared, and the conductor winked and clasped my shoulder, and overall my passage went smoothly. But soon after we arrived, I was beaten and robbed while crossing the rail yard. The crooks took my backpack and stripped off my boots and coat, so the next day I was penniless, barefoot and hungry, and more than ready to go home. I made a collect call to my uncle, hoping he would send money, but when his phone rang, no one answered. Next, I called a neighbor, who told me Thurman, my uncle, had been jailed again for public drunkenness, and this time he had assaulted a police officer. I



wasn't surprised. His priors included shoplifting and urinating in a schoolyard, but this latest arrest frightened me more than usual. I had no one else who might help me. Before hanging up, I asked my neighbor for a loan, but this godly woman had never liked me or my uncle to begin with, and not knowing what else to do, I made my way into Midtown Manhattan and sat on a sidewalk with a begging sign that read: "Money needed for food and to go home."

I no longer looked or felt like the Wanderer. I began to question the wisdom of choosing a comic book heroine as a role model, and I wondered how long it would take to raise bus fare by begging, if I even had a home to return to, because the trailer would likely be lost due to my uncle's jail time. Such worries sank my spirit to a new depth of gloom. My cracked ribs did not help matters. My head was bruised and aching, my nose dripping from of a lingering cold, and I had just sneezed so forcefully that I saw spots and floaters, and through this mirage, a shadowy figure stepped from the throng of Manhattanites to squat before me on the sidewalk.

When my eyes adjusted, I found myself staring at a grown woman with a narrow face and the type of sharp, high cheekbones found on fashion models and country inbreds. She was both attractive and eerie, around thirty-five years old, with a touch of early gray coloring her mousey brown hair, which draped past her shoulders and ended at her midriff. It was a straggly witchlike hairstyle, though seemingly well washed and nice smelling. Her thin pale body was clad in clean but unusual clothes: purple baggy pants, a black kimono with a red sash, and a black knit hat pulled down past her ears. She had two big shopping bags stuffed with smaller parcels wrapped in grimy plastic. Green, heart-shaped sunglasses hid her eyes, and when

she took them off, I could see her staring at me, sympathetic and woeful.

“How come you’re wearing such a nasty dog collar?” she asked, because I was indeed wearing a dog collar, a spiked leather band clasped around my neck. At the time, lots of young people wore them for fashion. I wore one because the Wanderer was drawn with a spiked dog collar, but being shy, I didn’t explain any of that. I just shrugged.

“You’re cute,” she said. “I bet you could be a good dog, if you tried.”

Dozens of people were walking by as she stroked the side of my face and scratched behind my ear, and even though her voice sounded gentle, I wondered if she was making fun of me.

“Would you like to come home with me?” she asked.

“You can have a wash and some food if you like. My name is Sally.”

As with most adults, I had trouble answering or even looking at her, so I just nodded, because this lady’s offer was the first kindness I had received since meeting the train conductor. I could have been a thief or axe murderer for all she knew, but that didn’t seem to worry her. She was nearly a foot taller than me, twenty years older, and as we walked side by side I finally thought of something I could say to her.

“I’m Paul. That’s my name.”

I admit, it wasn’t a very profound statement, and probably I mumbled when I said it, because she didn’t seem to hear me. She looked up at the dark thunderclouds that had begun to roll in over the city, and when she finally looked at me, she smiled a big, warm-hearted smile.

“That’s it, you’re doing fine. Just stay beside me and relax because there’s nothing to worry about. So good looking you

are. I bet the others are gonna be jealous, but don't worry. We'll find a way to get along. We always do."

She spoke as if she were addressing a toddler, and I was going to ask what she meant by 'us' and 'others,' but I didn't have a chance, because this sweet-sounding lady suddenly stepped behind me and pulled on my dog collar like she was trying to break my windpipe.

"Stay," she said. "Don't hurt them."

"What the hell?" I thought. I coughed and gasped, and she held me tight against her, and the choking might have been worth it, because now her arms were wrapped around me, and I could feel the soft pressing of her breasts.

"Look," she said with a magic-like whisper, and she pointed to a flock of house sparrows pecking at a dirty hamburger bun.

"This is how we watch nature, without hurting. Maybe it's in your instincts to hunt and kill things, but if you're coming to the Oasis, the first thing you have to learn is to respect all of God's furry creatures—or feathered creatures, as the case now happens to be."

"Why would I hurt the birds?" I said, but she didn't answer. She just held me tighter and when the flock flew off, she kissed the side of my face.

"That's a good boy," she said.

It was a quick kiss, but the warmth of her lips stayed on my cheek, and I wondered why she had done it, because as far as I could remember, no one had ever kissed or hugged me before. Certainly not my uncle. Maybe my mother before she ran off, but I didn't have any memories of that, and I stared at this pretty bag lady expecting some sort of explanation, but for her the kiss was no big deal. She just smiled and ruffled my mohawk (the Wanderer also had a mohawk), and she took up her things and

strolled off towards the east side of Manhattan.

“Come,” she said.

She slapped her leg as if calling a Labrador, and of course it felt strange to follow under these terms, but then again, all of New York seemed strange, and I wondered if Sally’s manners were ordinary for city people, if maybe it was a “thing” to treat homeless kids like dogs—I came up with a few more theories while Sally stared up at the clouds. The sky was even darker now, and she began mumbling to herself like a crazy person would.

“They always say the same thing, and I know what they would say this time. They’d say don’t do it, Sally. They’d say you have too many already, and it doesn’t even count because it’s just an animal. It’s not the same thing as helping a person. And I would say, bah! If you really knew the way of God, you would know that animals are more like angels, because not everybody can be Mother Teresa and help thousands of people—lots of people can’t even help themselves—but almost anybody can find salvation by helping a dog, and what better angels are there?”

She kept talking, but I had trouble hearing and keeping up with those long legs, and soon she turned a corner and brought us to a street lined with rich townhouses. Until now, I didn’t realize that Manhattan had a quieter side. A single taxi passed by, a deliveryman on a bicycle, and halfway down the block, Sally stopped muttering to herself and spoke to me loud and clear.

“Well, this is it,” she said, “this is your new home.”

Again her voice was warm and caring, as if doing her best to comfort me, and in truth, I was comforted. She swung her shopping bags and took the steps two at a time, and unlike the neighboring staircases, this one led to a house that was covered by wisteria. It looked like something from a fairytale. The vines

grew over the entire façade and draped over the doorway, so that we had to stoop beneath the green to enter, and when we did enter, the door creaked, and six dogs came charging. I was startled at first, but these were friendly dogs. Sally squatted low to kiss and coo at them, and the dogs barked and wiggled for joy. Some licked her face, others spun in circles and rolled to show their bellies, and meanwhile, I peered into the dimness of her home to see the floor was crowded with birdcages and brightly lit aquariums.

I was not expecting anything like this. I thought we would wind up in a condemned building or a dank basement, but apparently Sally had access to this whole house, and she had turned this first floor into a little zoo. One tank held a king snake, another had fish, another had turtles, and among her flock were street pigeons, starlings, and a cockatoo.

I wanted to ask a dozen questions. Which is your favorite? How come? What do you feed them? Well, isn't this just gosh-darn terrific? But all these thoughts got caught in my throat, and I didn't say anything.

Back home, there's a rumor about me. They say my parents sold me to pornographers before running off and that's why I'm so quiet. Others in town say that story isn't true, but whatever the reason, I just stood there like a mute, though Sally didn't seem to care.

She just smiled and winked at me. She fed a twisty treat to her cockatoo then sprinkled some flakes into a fish tank, and again she talked to herself while squatting down to stare at her guppies.

"Yup, this is how my spirit is going to be when I decide to let it go—swimming around with all the fish, and dolphins, and whales, and me like a mermaid. They say the Rum Runner sank,

and mom and dad are at the bottom of the ocean, but I don't like to think of them as drowned. I like to see them as underwater sea people sporting with all the great mysteries of the ocean. And I know what they would say. They'd say, Sally that's crazy, and I would say, yeah right, like playing a harp in the clouds isn't crazy. And they would say, Sally if you know so much, why are you always talking to yourself, and I would say, because if you don't talk to yourself, you forget how, and that's not crazy, that's practical."

From what she said, I figured the house must have once belonged to her parents. The furniture looked like the choice of older people. Probably it was plush and costly stuff at one time, but now the upholstery was stained, torn, and covered with animal hair. Dust coated almost everything, but it was especially thick on the liquor cabinet and on the chandelier, and I found myself staring at a collection of dusty framed photographs. Mostly photos of Sally, a younger Sally, what I guessed to be a baby Sally, but there were dingy pictures of a mother and a father, and in one picture, all three of them are posed on the deck of a sailboat, *The Rum Runner* written on the bow.

"Mom and Dad loved dogs," Sally said, coming closer to straighten the photo I was staring at. "They would hate what I'm doing now, having so many, but if they didn't want me to build the Oasis, they shouldn't have sailed through a Nor'easter."

Again, she ruffled my mohawk. She slipped two fingers beneath my dog collar and led me into the kitchen where she made me a bowl of oatmeal with bits of meat, which wasn't half bad, but besides these offerings, there wasn't much in her refrigerator. Unwashed dishes were stacked high in the sink, some with thick smears of tomato sauce that had turned moldy. I was going to wash a few plates to show my appreciation, but

after eating, she again took hold of my collar and towed me into the bathroom.

“Don’t look so frightened,” she said, as she turned on the taps. “It’s only soap and water and nothing to worry about, and once it’s over, you’re gonna be so happy and playful, because all dogs are. It never fails.”

By now I should have understood what was going on, but I tend to overthink things, and for some reason I thought Sally was playing a game, that some prank with hidden cameras might be involved. Though once the tub was filled, Sally unbuttoned my shirt and undid my pants, and my heart beat so fast, I couldn’t think of anything. This was another first. As far as I could remember, I had never been hugged or kissed, and no one had ever undressed me before.

I was embarrassed. Trembling, thrilled, frightened, blushing so hard I thought my cheeks would crack. I hoped that Sally would also undress, so I wouldn’t be alone in this nakedness, or that she would at least go on and wash me, but Sally seemed to change once I was nude. She glanced down at my excitement, and her smile slowly faded as she stepped back to look at herself in the mirror. The foggy glass only gave back a blurred image, but still she stared. She drew a circle through the condensation, drew an X, a wavy line, and when she looked at me again, she frowned as if I were a stranger, which I was.

“Can you speak?” she said.

Of course I can speak, I thought, but I only nodded.

“Then say something!”

“I can’t think of anything.”

I was going to put my clothes back on because Sally looked angry now.

“Get into the tub,” she said, “and put your hands on your head.

Do it!”

She snarled and pointed at me with authority. I sat in the water and Sally sat on the toilet burying her face in her hands. For a while neither of us spoke. Outside I could hear the wind gusting and the old beams of the townhouse moaned, and I wondered if she always had a cross-eyed quality as she looked upward and talked to herself, because until now, I hadn't noticed.

“Once upon a time,” she said, “there was a little girl who kissed a frog that turned into a prince, but I always thought that story was all wrong. When I was a little girl I had to go to a special school, but one boy there was more special than the rest of us, because he was French, and he couldn't speak English very well, but I liked him a lot. What did you do Sally? Well, one day I kissed Henri, but I didn't want him to be a prince. I wanted to turn him into a frog. And why? Because then it would be so much easier to like him, and in a way it worked, in my mind he's still a little frog.”

She tapped her forehead to show me the place where she kept her memories, and when she smiled, I felt relieved. She used a plastic cup to pour water over my head, and after I wiped my eyes, she kissed me for real. A full and deep kiss, and for a moment I saw purple flowers. At least that's what I remember seeing, as if the glory of bright flowers had always been inside me, and all I had to do was close my eyes and awaken to the beauty.

“There you go,” she said, again speaking with her cute cheerful voice. “You're just like before, even better.”

I raised my chin, hoping she would kiss me again, but she poured another cup of water over my head, and having rolled up her sleeves, she scrubbed my chest and arms. She ran a washcloth right between my legs and twisted a corner of the cloth into my ear, then turned my face and did the other ear,



then pushed down on my head to wash the back of my neck. I was doubled over, my nose only inches from the water, when I heard her whisper:

“Even if you’re not my dog—even if you’re not, you can pretend. Can’t you?”

“Uh-huh,” I said.

And I didn’t even have to think about it, because just like that, a light burned bright above me, because I suddenly understood why she was acting so crazy—because she was crazy!

I should have realized this from the get-go. I wasn’t the brightest kid, but to be fair, I was just a kid, sixteen, and most adults I knew had sound reasons for acting the way they did. I figured Sally had a reason for treating me like a dog, some motive or game, but she was simply off her rocker, and maybe I should have been weirded out, but if anything, her odd nature took the edge off our age difference. Suddenly she seemed less like an adult and more like a misfit, and as for her request, it didn’t sound like the strangest of things, not so different from the way children pretend, not so different from believing you’re a heroine from a comic book series.

She rinsed the suds from my mohawk, and I shook my wet head the way a poodle might, and Sally looked at me with love in her eyes.

“What a good boy,” she said.

She dried me with a towel. She said “poobs” as she poked my belly, and I was going to dress, but Sally gathered up my clothes and dumped them into a washing machine, everything except for my dog collar, which she refastened and tugged on to lead me upstairs.

“Come on, we always have a party when we adopt someone new.”

She didn't care that I was still naked, but I cared, so I grabbed a towel to wrap around my waist, and Sally stole a dusty bottle of peach schnapps from the liquor cabinet and poured the hooch into two glasses.

"Well, here's mud in your eye," she said.

She threw back her drink, and this time she spoke while looking upward, as if addressing the chandelier.

"I know what Dad would say if he were here right now. He'd say Sally get away from my liquor; he'd say, Sally you're never gonna get better if you keep living with all these dogs. Lose this new one. Go out and make some friends. Rent the bedrooms upstairs so you've got some more money coming in. But I'm not going to do any of those things. I hate people, and I would hate having tenants. Instead, I'm gonna get a monkey and a peacock, and maybe I'll train one of my animals to help me take care of the whole shebang."

She turned her attention to me and touched the tip of my nose.

"Maybe I'll even train you," she said, and to my ears it sounded like another offer to keep me.

Each time she mentioned adoption, I thought it was just part of the game, and even if she were serious, I couldn't stay because I had a life in Bohemia--but now, I sipped my schnapps and a happy warmth went down my throat, because I realized that, no, I didn't have a life. There was nothing in Bohemia, except my uncle who was in jail, so I didn't even have that, while Sally, on the other hand, was nice and liked touching me. It was almost like having a girlfriend, except she thought I was a dog. She had a big house and probably some money, and the more I thought about it, the more it seemed like a rare and lucky break, like fate was trying to make up for my drunken uncle, the pornographer, and my missing parents.

She poured us another belt of peach schnapps and moved towards the parlor, where she placed a big band record on an old-fashioned turntable. When the music started, she began to dance the Charleston, and let me tell you, she was good at it, just like a dancer on the Grammys, and the dogs went crazy to see her kick and shimmy. They barked and ran in circles. Sally shrieked when they nipped at her legs, but still she danced. Her face looked flush from the liquor. Dust billowed from all the commotion, and I felt I should do something to join the fun, and since I was a little tipsy, I did kung-fu kicks and push-ups, and Sally laughed at my monkey business. We didn't talk much, but we played and giggled, and spent the rest of the hour wrestling with the dogs.

A grandfather clock soon chimed the eight o'clock hour, and Sally seemed to regard this as a command to change into her nightclothes—because just like Cinderella, she dashed to her bedroom, and when she came back, she was wearing a pink robe and a pair of blue fuzzy slippers. She was happy and silly. She drank some more schnapps and stumbled down the corridor to throw a tennis ball for the dogs, and I took a sip from the bottle, then ran with the pack trying to get the ball first. The booze had really gone to my head, because I wiggled my behind like the rest of the dogs, and Sally burst out laughing.

“What a card you are!”

She changed the record. She danced with her dogs, and danced with me, but I didn't know how, so we just pushed and bumped each other. Soon our motions turned into play fighting, and at one point, I thought I was in trouble, because I pulled down her robe and exposed her boob. Suddenly it was just out there, and I thought she would be mad, but she only laughed with a hearty heehaw.

“You’re not gonna see any more of my titties,” she said.

To strike back, she pulled off my towel. She could move fast when she wanted to, and before I knew it, she tripped me down to the floor, and sat on my belly while pinching my nipples.

I screamed with loud laughter, and I think it was this happy yelling that drew a weighty look from Sally. She was still tittering, but her eyes looked sharp as she pinned my arms above my head—and I never thought something like this would be sexy— but she pursed her lips and let a long strand of spit slide from her lips onto my forehead, and I’ll be damned if it wasn’t sexy.

Again the grandfather clock chimed. We stared silently at each other. Three of the dogs were lying beside us with their chins on the floor, and Sally’s eyes were closed as she kissed me and kissed me again, and still straddling my belly, she moved down until her warmth was covering the most naked part of me, and just like that, neither of us were virgins anymore.

It’s strange that I can recall so much about that day, but when it comes to the sex we did, I can hardly remember anything. It was so fast and too exciting. I didn’t think it would ever happen to me, so I didn’t know what to expect, but I wasn’t expecting blood, and blood was only part of it. I’ve never repeated the act. I’m not sure if it’s normal to feel sad afterward, but once I came, those were my feelings, and this same gloom seemed to worry Sally. We lay together on the floor for a long time, but then she sat up looking lost and confused. The music was over; the record player hissed static, and one of the dogs whimpered as Sally wiped some of the blood from her thigh to examine it on her fingers.

“What?” I said. “Sally, what?”

But she didn’t answer. The rain was falling now in thick

splatters against the windows, and again she looked up and spoke to the chandelier.

“I know what they’re gonna say. They’re gonna say, Sally you’re getting worse. You did a really bad thing, and now you have to go back to Brookdale, because you had sex with an animal. And even if I say, no, I knew he wasn’t a dog. I was just pretending so I could help him, because he was homeless and I wanted to be nice. Even if I say that, they’ll say, well Sally that’s worse, because look how young he is, and now you have to go back to Brookdale.”

She turned her attention to me. I could tell she had stopped seeing me for a dog, and when she spoke, she sounded hateful.

“And that’s why you can’t tell anybody! Do you hear? They’ll think I’m crazy. They’ll take me away, and they’ll take away all my animals!”

I promised not to tell. I wanted to say something else that would be comforting, but I couldn’t think of anything, and Sally clutched the collar of her robe to draw it tightly around her. She stood up and paced between the window and the chandelier. She glanced at me, but then ducked her head and nudged her dogs towards her bedroom.

“To sleep, to sleep,” she said, and she seemed to be on the verge of crying.

Two of the dogs jumped onto her bed, and from her room, Sally looked back at me. I was hoping she would also call me to bed, that she would change me back into her pet with another magic kiss, but she slammed her door shut, and suddenly I was alone and naked in the parlor.

Downstairs my clothes were still damp in the dryer, because the lint had been thick over the lint guard, but I dressed anyway. I didn’t know what I should do now because staying felt awkward,

but so did leaving, and besides, I had nowhere else to go.

I climbed the stairs to the top floor of the house. This level was almost empty. One room had a chair, lots of dust, and a scattering of newspapers with dried dog droppings, but the other room had a bed with a bare mattress and I lay there while watching the rain falling past a street lamp. I was hoping things might be better in the morning, that after a good night's rest we would both forget about the sex, and she would start treating me like a dog again. I imagined us searching for a peacock together, that she would train me as her helper--and in truth, such hopes were the closest I ever came to having a career plan. I would have liked rescuing and caring for animals. I think I would have liked living in a house with a monkey, but when I awoke the next morning, Sally was gone.

She had taken all the dogs and all the leashes that had hung from hooks by the door, and I stared at the motes of dust drifting through the morning light until I noticed a hundred-dollar bill on the dining room table. Next to the money was a pink sheet of paper with a boarder of red butterflies, and on this stationary she had written a note:

To the boy sleeping upstairs,

You were the first real person that's come to the house since Ma and Dad died. You did a good job of being my dog. That was sweet of you, and I wish we didn't do what we did, because now I feel so awful, and I don't think I can see you as anything but a boy. There's nothing that makes me feel worse than real people. They say I'll get better if I try and keep taking my medication, but I'm through with pills and I'm through with trying, and I wish you would just go away. I'm sorry, but I'm not a good person. You can take this money, but please don't take anything

else. Please, please don't hurt my animals, and please, please don't come back here."

When I consider that note now, I have a better understanding of it, but at the time, I was so disappointed and so hurt that I couldn't think straight. What happened to the idea of keeping me? What about all that affection and sweet talk? Now, it all felt like a trick, like the flirting girls in school who were just making fun of me, and I was so mad, I wanted to kill at least one bird, but I didn't have the heart, so I just smashed a window before leaving.

Once I found the Port Authority, I bought a ticket back to Bohemia. The trip was supposed to take twelve hours, but I didn't care because the one thing I learned in school was how to pass the time with stuff I imagined, adventures about my comic book heroine that were so real, I could easily squander hours with just my thinking. Though now, I stared out the bus window, and I wondered if Sally had hexed me, because all I could think about was her. I cooled off some by the time we reached the Delaware Valley. I wished that I had never broken her window. I wished that we never did what we did, because then she might have gone on talking and touching me, and neither of these things was likely to happen when I was back home. Once again, I would be the strange kid with the tattoos who never spoke—and in fact, that's how all this ended.

Eventually my uncle came back from jail. Eventually I graduated from high school and found a job at a gas station, but I never again heard from Sally. Now and then, I still have the same dream about her. In the dream she's bathing me, but sometimes the same dream occurs and there's a different woman kneeling beside the tub, a woman who I don't recognize, but I have a

feeling that this dream stranger might be my mother. It would make sense that she bathed me at least once before leaving, and if this figment really is my mom, it's the closest thing I have to a memory of her, though most of the time, the dream plays out with Sally.





## About the Author

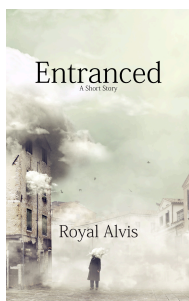
Several of Royal Alvis's stories have appeared in literary Magazines and on-line journals. Although he has said this before, his novel is nearly finished and will be available soon; it's a mix of yoga, travel and the supernatural. A bunch of short stories are also on the way, most of which share a surreal and fabulist vibe. When he's not writing, Royal likes to practice meditation and Tai chi. He has not been in trouble or done anything excessively stupid for a very long time. Instead, he volunteers at a New York senior center where he delivers meals and teaches creative writing. He is very much in love with his girlfriend, and both of them are very much in love with their dog, Ember. He would mention his degree from the MFA Writing Program at Bennington College, but he doesn't think anyone will care.

**You can connect with me on:**

 <http://www.royalalvis.com>

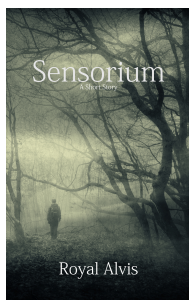
 <http://facebook.com/royalalvis>

## Also by Royal Alvis



### **Entranced**

Robert is skilled at manipulating juries until he develops a mental condition that causes his career to crumble. His symptoms are so unusual that Robert's wife wonders if he's faking them. Soon he is humiliated, alone, and desperate. He enlists the help of a several doctors, but the only cure comes from a spiritual cult leader, who restores Robert's health, but leads him to a devotion which is even more ruinous. This story explores the relation of allegiance to truth, if such truth can be manufactured, and the consequence of self-deception.



### **Sensorium**

Imagine that you have lost your family, your friends, and all of your money. Loan sharks will soon be knocking at your door. To avoid them, you pack a tent and a sleeping bag and decide to hide on the Appalachian Trail, but after an hour of hiking, you are exhausted. You hear things in the wind. Dark twisted shapes dart through the depths of the woods. As you walk on, these phantoms evolve until finally you are confronted by a fear far worse than the thugs you are fleeing.

