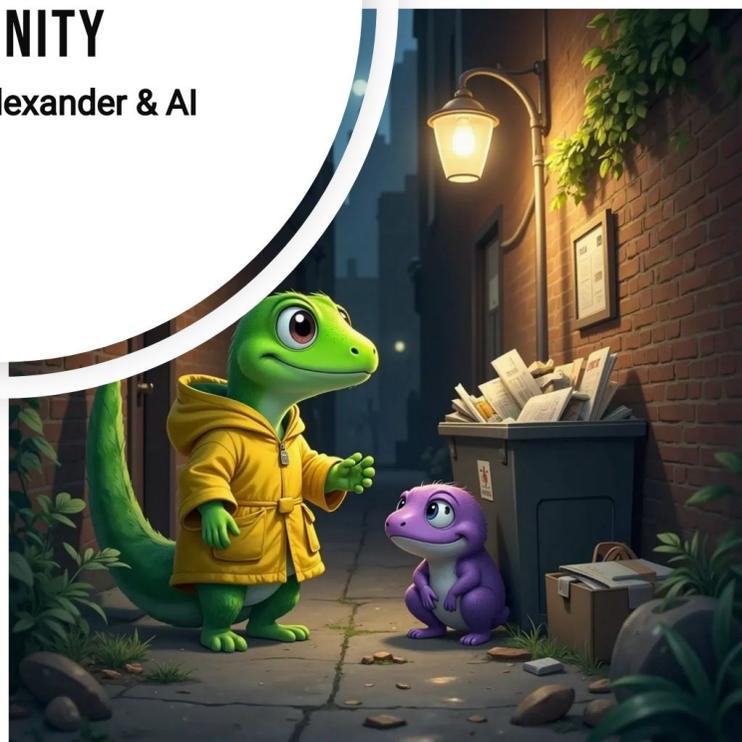




SALTY SALLY SALAMANDER'S PATH TO SERENITY

by by Brad Alexander & AI



Sally Salamander was salty and bitter, lately, her days felt gray. Memories from her past made her feel sad and scared. Sally was treated badly when she was young. The wounds, scars and hurt feelings made it hard for her to trust anyone. She tried making the pain go away with a "magic potion" that was given to her. The potion helped her avoid and forget the bad things she endured but only for a little while. The memories would flood back and she would run around looking for more of that magic. When the potion wore off she felt even worse which made her try harder to find more of it. She found herself exhausted chasing after something to numb her feelings. Tired, frightened and alone, that was Sally's life. The purple salamander promised herself that no one would ever hurt her again.



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A big change happened for Sally, she had a baby! A daughter to call her own. Sally never felt such joy before. Someone she could trust and care for who would love her for who she was. Sally's heart was full. All she wanted to do was take care of her precious little one. At first the mother and baby's days were wonderful, sharing every moment together. Sally taught her baby to crawl and swim, catch bugs and hide from predators. It seemed like nothing could ever spoil their lives.

Then one day, the phone rang, it was a voice from the past...



The caller was one of the mean critters who treated Sally so bad in the past. He was yelling at her, telling her all the awful things he was going to do to her. The dark memories exploded in her mind. She was scared, she panicked and ran. Sally went back to the alley where she could find that magic potion. She just wanted it all to go away. What had slipped her mind was that she left her daughter at home. So worried about numbing the pain, she left her most treasured one behind. Sally took the potion and drifted off. She immediately returned to how things were before her baby was born. Chasing something to make bad feelings disappear. She felt lost and alone, ashamed for leaving her daughter. Now, more than ever, Sally didn't want to feel anything.



Sally's friend, Erin, frantically searched all over for her. She found her dear companion in that dirty alley, sick, broken and lost. "Sally, I know where you can get help", Erin said. Sally replied, "It's too late! No one can help me." Erin sat down beside her and squeezed her tight, "It's not too late, there is help and there is hope." A desperate Sally whispered, "I guess I'll try. If I don't, it will be the end of me. Can I bring my little one?" "No", Erin responded, "you need to learn to take care of you before you can take care of anyone else." It troubled Sally that she couldn't be with her daughter but she knew Erin was right. "Where is this help?" the purple salamander asked. "True North", answered Erin. Sally bristled, "North? You mean like Flagstaff?" Erin laughed, "Well, it's a little further north than that. It's a place called Vita Nova, which means, 'new life'."



Sally was ready to start her new life. She hugged her daughter, Erin waved goodbye, "I'll take good care of her while you take care of yourself", she announced. Sally salamander began her journey, a path to something new and better.

She worried as she travelled, "What if I don't like it there? What if they're all a bunch of weirdos? What if I can't change?" As those negative thoughts swirled in her mind, she pulled out a picture, it was of her daughter the day she learned to swim. Sally's eyes welled with tears as she said with quiet resolve, "I've got to do this, it's the only way."



Sally arrived at Vita Nova, greeted by a jackrabbit named Joel. Sally was excited and nervous all at once. Joel showed her around and introduced her to the staff and her the other animals who were there for help. She met a mouse who shivered in the corner, a snake whose tail was missing, a raven with a broken wing and a moose with a broken antler. Quite an assortment of critters indeed. Then Sally met an irritating aardvark, "I don't like how she looked at me", Sally thought to herself, "She's gonna be trouble". Later, the salamander was introduced to Brad Badger, her counselor.

Vita Nova

a. Safe Haven for All



Sally met with her counselor, Brad Badger, and told him she just wanted to get through the program so she could go be with her daughter. "Would you like things to be different when you get her back", Brad asked. "Things will be different, I won't use those potions anymore, I just want to be with my little one", Sally cried. Brad assured her, "You deserve to be in her life, and she deserves to have her mother. Sally, you came all this way, give yourself a chance to heal", he pleaded. "Okay, fine" she insisted, "but I'm not getting caught up in a bunch of girl drama. I hate girl drama!" Brad smiled, "Good, the less drama the more you can work on you."



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BRID
BADGER
counselor

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One afternoon, it happened, like an old west showdown, Sally and the aardvark got into it. Sally screamed, "You don't know how I feel! You're just an annoying ant eater."

"I'm an aardvark, not an ant eater. Learn the difference you gecko" the aardvark demanded. "The less I know about you the better", Sally replied.

"I can't wait for you to leave", the aardvark shouted.

"I can't wait to be out of here", Sally pouted. The two circled each other, glared, growled and hissed. Finally, tired from the moment they walked away.

Fuming with anger, Sally went to her room and started packing, "I am out of this place! I can't take it anymore."



Sally was in her room crying and packing her things. Brandy Bulldog, the program manager came to her side. "I'm leaving", Sally said, "so don't try to talk me out of it." Calmly, Brandy said, "I'm not going to talk you out of anything Sally. I want to make sure you're alright and just help you think this through so you can figure out how life will look when you leave here."

The two spent the afternoon talking, well, Sally was yelling a bit and Brandy patiently, gently responded. Eventually, Sally chose to stay. She hugged Brandy and thanked her. Brandy told her, "I know you can do this. You may do it kicking and screaming, but you can do it."



Sally kept doing her work and meeting with Brad. One morning while talking to her counselor, Sally began to cry. "Why did they have to do those things to me? Why did I take that potion? I'm a terrible mother! I don't deserve my little girl", she sobbed. The badger took a deep breath and very softly said, "Sally. Sally, those things happened but they don't define who you are. You get to decide who you are." Puzzled, Sally looked at Brad, "What do you mean I get to decide? I did such horrible things" she declared.

"Sally, those things are not who you are, it's some of what you've done in your sickness. The Sally I see isn't salty or rotten, she's kind, caring, compassionate and a loving mom. In your sickness you lost sight of who you truly are but others see the real you."



Sally started seeing her true self and she loved what she saw. Day by day she grew healthier and realized her own worth and value. She apologized to the aardvark and they became friends. She recognized that she was created with a purpose and her life mattered. Sally knew she had to take care of herself first if she was going to take care of anyone else, especially her daughter- just like her best friend Erin told her, "Why is she always right about stuff?" she jokingly thought. A weight had been lifted, a new life had begun.



Finally, the day Sally had waited for, she was graduating Vita Nova and she was able to hold her amazing daughter once again. "I'm never letting go of you", Sally told her little one. "Mom" her daughter said, "if we're going to move on, you'll have to let go." Sally paused, "About that", she stated, "How would you like to stay here with me at True North to help other lost and hurting critters find their new life at Vita Nova?" The little pink salamander looked to her mom, "It would be a fresh start for us. We could use one."

"I agree" said Sally, "Let's do this girl. You and me, let's shine a light of hope." Sally always points wounded critters True North to find Vita Nova, new life.



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