



An excerpt from *Toomer Davis and Rose Island*.

The book is available at [Amazon](#).

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AUTHOR'S NOTE: *Toomer Davis and Rose Island* is what I call a novie—novel + movie = novie. The writing style makes use of film language and describes action as if it's unfolding on a screen.

## FRIDAY

Imagine we're watching a movie. It opens on a black screen as a man begins telling a story. The narrator has an English accent. His voice is cultured, warm and resonant. He says:

*It was a dark winter night and snow whipped against the windows of the Commodore's den. Inside, young Phillip was dressed in his warmest pajamas. He sat cross-legged on the hearth in front of the fire and studied the sea charts spread out on the stones. His grandfather, the Commodore, sat at his big wooden desk and worked on a ship in a bottle. He smoked a bubbling hookah as he tweezed and glued.*

Fade in on a sunny day. A gray SUV pulls into a parking lot and stops near a sign that says "San Antonio Public Library." The lot is packed and the driver of the SUV is waiting for a slot to open up.

It's hot. A shimmer hugs the lot's baking asphalt and the people we see going in and out of the library are dressed in light summer clothing.

The narration continues.

*The charts scattered on the hearth were all different types. Some were large and some were small; some were bound together in books and some were loose. But Phillip had noticed that, despite the differences, each chart had a spiky circle resting somewhere atop its web of numbered lines. The circles showed the directions of the compass.*

"Excuse me, grandfather," Phillip said, "but

*what's this round thing called?" He pointed to the circle on the chart in front of him.*

Inside the SUV, Alma Gorda sits listening to the story. She fiddles with her stereo's knobs, tweaking the sound.

Alma's a large woman—physically big, but not fat—and she's dressed in gray sweats. She's about thirty, olive skinned and has luscious black hair. Curls of the hair twitch from the air conditioning.

On the seat beside her is a stack of compact disc cases. The one on top has a library sticker below the title of *Toomer Davis and Rose Island*.

*The Commodore glanced up from his work, and when he did Phillip smiled at the sight of the old man's nightcap. His grandfather was big and fierce-looking with his bushy white beard and scarred cheeks, but he wore a silly red cap pulled down around his ears. He was also wearing red pajamas and a black brocade robe, and Phillip knew that beneath the desk his feet were snuggled into a pair of golden slippers with tassels on the ends of their curled-up toes.*

Alma drums her fingers on the steering wheel and looks at her wristwatch.

*"That," the Commodore said, "is a compass rose. It shows the directions. All of those charts have one."*

*"Yes sir, I saw that. But why do they all look so different? And why are they in different places on the maps?"*

*"It just depended on where the cartographers had room to put them."*

*"Oh," Phillip said, disappointed. "I thought, since they're all so pretty, there must be something special about them."*

Taillights flash. A car's about to leave a parking space. Alma puts her SUV in gear and creeps forward.

*The Commodore set his tools aside and puffed on his hookah. He studied his grandson, then he laughed a booming laugh just as the wind gusted*

outside.

*“Are you trying to get a story out of me, Phillip?!”*

*“No sir. I just thought the compass roses must be special. But, if you want to tell me a story . . .”*

*Phillip let the words hang, and the Commodore laughed again.*

*“Well, since you brought it up, there is something special about compass roses. They’re called that in honor of Rose Island. But not many land-lubbers know about the island, so old salts like me rarely talk about it.”*

The car Alma’s waiting on pulls away. She zips into the vacated space.

*“Rose Island?” Phillip said, feeling a tingle of anticipation.*

Alma hits the brakes and the SUV jerks to a stop. The CD cases on the seat beside her spill forward onto the floorboard.

*“Aye, boy. Let me tell you about Rose Island.”*

Alma ejects the disc and puts it in its case. She kills the car’s engine and gathers up the other cases from the floor. Beneath them is a glossy black folder with a red fist on the cover. The fist has “G.R.I.P.” printed across its knuckles in bold black letters.

Alma snatches up the folder along with the CDs. She exits the SUV clutching everything to her chest.



The audiobook section of the library. Alma has the black folder and the Toomer Davis CD in her hand. She must have returned the rest. She’s looking at other titles.

Her keys jingle and she looks down to see a small boy tugging at a pocket of her sweats. He’s three or so and very small next to her. We now see how truly big Alma is. She’s six-foot-four and towers over the boy. His head is tilted as far back as it will

go just so he can see her face. Alma smiles at him and he points straight up with a finger.

“Wha’s zat?”

Alma looks up.

“Well, it’s a ceiling. Those are lightbulbs, and there’s a . . .”

“No. Issa finger.”

The boy’s mother appears and leads him away. The keys in Alma’s pocket jingle again as he lets go of her sweats. Her lower lip trembles with emotion. She bites it gently, turns back to the audiobooks and takes one from a shelf.

And then she’s lowering her bulk onto a molded plastic couch. It’s warped and drops a couple of inches on her end when she sits. The middle-aged woman at the other end seesaws into the air. Her head bobs as she looks from the magazine in her lap to Alma. Alma shrugs apologetically and sets a stack of audiobooks between them. She glances at her wristwatch and opens the folder with the fist on the front.

She reads for a moment, then she winces and shifts her weight. The woman on the other end of the couch seesaws, down and up. She frowns at Alma and Alma massages behind a knee.

“Sorry. I have an old hamstring injury. Sometimes it hurts and I have to . . .”

There’s a commotion. Alma looks to see a man struggling across the reading room. His body is hunched and twisted, and every time he swings one of his legs forward he spasms backward and throws his arms into the air. The papers he’s carrying flap noisily above his head with each step. Flap, flap, flap, flap. The man makes it to a table with a stapler on it, slides the papers into the stapler and smacks it, once, then he turns to re-cross the room. Flap, flap, flap, flap.

The woman on the couch has been watching the man along with Alma. She looks at Alma.

“Oh, yeah. You got *real* problems with that

hamstring, don't you?"

Alma snorts and gathers up her audiobooks. She gets up from the couch and the other end drops down. The woman's head bobs as Alma walks away.

She pauses at a computer to set her wrist-watch by its clock, then she goes to the checkout line. She takes her place at the end of it, arranges her books and gets her library card ready.

"Another listener, huh?"

Alma turns to see a young woman behind her in line. She too is holding a stack of audiobooks.

"Oh, you mean the books. Yes, I screen them before I pass them on to my son. He's only ten."

"Which ones are you checking out?"

"Well, I just started this one." Alma shows her *Toomer Davis and Rose Island*. "I'm checking it out again so I can finish it."

"Good choice. And that writer, Mike Sheedy, he's written some other good books, too. I like his insect series."

The checkout line moves forward. So do Alma and the woman she's talking to.

"Read *The Mayflies* someday," the woman says. "It's by Sheedy. A comedy. It's about a mayfly who hatches out one morning and flies around for twenty-four hours mating with all the females he can. Then he falls to the ground and dies."

"Dies? That sounds more like a tragedy than a comedy."

"Yeah, well, that's the thing about Sheedy's work, even his comedies are tragedies. Anyway, before the mayfly dies, he talks to another one that's just hatching out, another male, and he tells him, 'You're born, you have a day of sex, and then you die.' The young mayfly's upset to hear that his only purpose in life is to have a day of sex, so he asks the old-timer if he has any advice. And the dying mayfly says, 'Skip the lunch hour.'"

Alma's SUV pulls into the parking lot of an old strip mall where half the stores have For Rent signs in their windows. She parks next to a chopped Harley, in front of a store with a hand-tooled leather sign on the door. "O'Grady's Skin Works."

A spring-mounted bell above the door tinkles when Alma steps inside O'Grady's. It rings again when the door closes, then everything is quiet.

Alma stands looking around at the cluttered shop. Shelves and tables are crammed with leather goods, motorcycle parts and sex toys. Framed photos and sketches for tattoo designs cover the walls.

Brady O'Grady sits behind the counter, asleep in a roll-around office chair. He's a bony old biker with thin gray hair tied back in a ponytail. His ragged jeans and T-shirt are spotted with motor oil. Tattoos run from his neck, down into the collar of the shirt and out the sleeves.

Alma walks to the counter and *slaps* it with her open palm.

"Wake up, Brady."

"Wickets," he says, coming to, then he sees Alma. "Oh, hi, hotshot." He rubs an eye and yawns, showing the five teeth left in his mouth. "Damn antibiotics. Make me groggy. What's up?"

"I heard Dewitt's been calling here."

"Who? Oh, Dewitt. Yeah, I'm designing him a tattoo for a chick named Gams. Who's Gams?"

"Gams Demilo. His new... A friend."

"Must be a good one. He wants me to tattoo her name on his butt cheek."

"Show me the tattoo."

Brady gets up from his chair and comes out from behind the counter. He goes to a table in a corner and lifts what is either a carburetor or a vibrator off a stack of sketchpads. He digs through the pads.

As he digs we notice that one of the spots on

his shirt is much darker than the others. Alma points to it.

“Is that *blood*, Brady?”

Brady lifts the front of his shirt. His stomach is covered with tattoos and there’s a four-inch square of blood-soaked gauze taped near his navel.

“Yeah. It’s from a tattoo that got infected.”

“I’m surprised you had room there for a new tattoo. Seems like you would’ve covered everything you could reach years ago.”

“I did, but I have an old surgery scar I never put any tats on, then I got this idea and thought I’d see what I could do. A way to beautify scars.”

“So you tattooed over old scar tissue? What’s it going to look like?”

Brady pokes at the bandage.

“New scar tissue.”

He goes back to digging through the sketchpads and comes up with one he hands Alma. She flips through it as he returns to his chair behind the counter.

Alma stops at a page that contains a florid design with the word “Gams” in the center. She studies it, then *rips* the page out of the pad. She tosses the pad back onto the table and tears the drawing to bits.

“You’re *not* going to tattoo ‘Gams’ on his butt cheek, Brady.”

Brady’s eyelids are drooping.

“Huh? On whose butt cheek?”

Alma goes to a wall and takes down a framed photo. She returns to the counter and lays the picture on it.

“On *his* butt cheek.”

Brady leans forward to examine the photo. It’s an 8x10 color glossy—a promotional picture showing a muscled-up wrestler dressed in black leather shorts, black knee-high boots and a black dog collar. He’s shirtless and his tanned body is



oiled and flexed. Tattooed lightning bolts and breaking chains cover his arms and chest, and his brown hair is waxed into a stiff flattop. The picture is signed “Ivan the Terrier” just below his cocky smirk.

Alma taps a finger on the picture, hard.

“Do you understand, Brady? You will *not* put any tattoo that says ‘Gams’ on Dewitt’s butt cheek. If you do, I’ll put a tattoo on *your* butt cheek.”

Brady leans back in his chair and closes his eyes.

“Fine. I don’t like doing butt cheek work on dudes anyway.”

Alma deposits the bits of paper from the tattoo sketch on top of the photo, then she turns to walk to the front door.

“And you can’t put any tattoos on my butt,” Brady says. “I already got my initials there. A big B on the left cheek and a G on the right.”

Alma reaches the door and opens it. The bell rings above her head. She stops and speaks over her shoulder.

“BG? I thought your name was Brady O’Grady.”

“It is. I’d have to bend over for you to get the full effect.”



Alma’s driving in her SUV. She checks her wristwatch as she enters a city park.

She drives along a winding road, over a speed bump, and pulls into a parking space. She gets out of her car with the black folder in her hand and looks around. Only one other vehicle is in the lot. The park is peaceful. We hear birds chirping but no voices. The sound of city traffic is some distance away.

Alma walks to a concrete picnic table, sits and opens her folder. On the first page is a graphic of the G.R.I.P. fist, with “Global Reign of International Pain” printed beneath. She flips pages until she comes to:

Match # 3  
MATCH MADE IN HEAVEN  
Ivan the Terrier  
VS  
The Rocket Scientist & Alma Gorda

Alma settles down and reads. She reaches the end of a page, turns it, then two girls walk past. They're nine or ten and each has a book bag on her back. They disappear behind another picnic table, and a moment later we hear a squeal. Alma picks up her folder and goes to investigate.

The girls are seated cross-legged on the ground just beyond the second table. Their backpacks are open and they're poking through bits of crumpled paper spread out on the grass in front of them. They look up as Alma approaches.

"I thought I heard someone yell."

One of the girls is brunette, the other is blonde. The brunette points.

"That was Lissy. She likes Weejer Meemack."

"That's not *true*, Mona, and you *know* it!"

Alma covers a smile and sits at the table.

"Did you just get out of school?"

"Yes ma'am," Mona, the brunette says. "We're looking at the notes we got today."

Lissy shows one to Mona.

"This one's from Lofton Puree."

Mona's surprised.

"Lofton? He wrote to *you*?"

Lissy clutches the note to her chest.

"He asked me for a date," she says dreamily.

"A date? To go where?"

"Hmm? Oh, nowhere. He just needed a date on the history test."

Mona looks relieved. She rummages through the notes and holds one up.

"Donova Brane passed me this and . . . *Oh!* Did you see Weejer at lunch today? He made grape juice

come out of his nose to impress Donovan.”

“Really? Was she impressed?”

“Yeah. He was drinking milk.”

“Eeeewww! How’d he do that?”

“I don’t know. He said he’d tell Donovan if she gave him a kiss.”

“Did she?”

“I think so. She had a purple spot on her dress after lunch.”

“Eeeeeewwwww!”

The girls continue to gossip, and while they do we see two young boys skipping toward them. They’re using tree limbs as stick horses. Alma watches them approach.

Mona holds up a scrap of paper.

“Here’s one I was going to send to Ruthie Bluchard.”

“You were going to send *Ruthie* a note?”

“Sure. After I made it into a spitball.”

The girls laugh, unaware of the boys skipping toward them from behind. They come up quietly and stop a few feet away. When the girls finally notice them they fall silent and sit looking up, wide-eyed. Lissy stares at the boy in the lead. He has grape juice stains on the front of his shirt. She breathes his name.

“Weejer.”

Mona scoops the notes from the grass and stuffs them into her book bag, then everyone is still. Nothing but eyes move. The girls look at the boys, the boys look at the girls, Alma watches it all.

Several suspenseful seconds pass, and then Weejer lifts a hand. He points to the girls but addresses the other boy.

“If they move, *kiss ’em!*”

The girls squeal, jump up and run off with their book bags. The boys follow unhurriedly on their stick horses.

“Your uncle was right,” Weejer’s companion says. “Chasing girls *is* fun.”

Alma chuckles and yells after the boys to be nice, then she opens her script. But she can't concentrate. She fidgets, looks in the direction the children went, and closes the folder. She reaches into the collar of her sweatshirt and pulls out a gold chain with a round gold locket on it. The locket's about the size of a quarter and has some bumps on the front. She pries it open with a thumbnail.

Inside are two photos of a dark-haired boy. He's little more than an infant in one, asleep in a crib, and in the other he's blowing out the candles on a cake. The angle on the birthday shot is from over the shoulder and shows a large 6 and the name "Cruz" in cursive icing.

Alma looks at the locket for a long moment, then she snaps it shut, tucks it back inside her collar and takes a cell phone from a pocket of her sweatpants. She thumbs a button on the phone. It speed-dials as she holds it to her ear.

Three rings then we hear a woman say, "Prepare for an aural assault in three, two, one." The woman's voice is soft, which makes the blast of heavy metal music that comes next all the more jarring.

Alma looks at her phone. An album cover showing four men made up with rouge, lipstick and false eyelashes is on the little display screen. The album is called *Bite* and the group is The Menstrual Singers.

The band's music is harsh and driving. Over the pounding drums and wailing guitars a man sings/screams, "*Pain!* Bite the bullet! *Gain!* Bite the bullet!"

Alma closes her eyes and rubs a temple, like she has a headache. The music plays for about ten seconds, then it drops in volume and a man's deep, grating voice comes on and yells over the background noise. The accent is Russian.

"This is Terrier's Lair! Leave message if you

dare!"

The music stops and the phone beeps.

"Hi," Alma says, "is anyone there?" She waits, no answer. "Well, this is Alma, and I'll be coming for Cruz tomorrow at four. He's *my* son too, Dewitt, and the judge said he *has* to be there. Four o'clock."

Alma closes the phone and returns it to her pocket. She stares off into space for a few seconds, then looks at her watch and gets up from the picnic table.



A glitzy diner, chrome and orange naugahyde. Alma enters carrying her folder and pauses to look around.

There are a dozen customers scattered among the tables and booths. A murmur of voices and the clink of dishes fill the air. Two waitresses tend to the customers. One moves among the tables and one stands talking to someone at a booth.

Alma scans the room and glances at her watch, then a braying laugh cuts through the air and the waitress at the booth takes a step back. To reveal Horst McIntosh. Alma starts toward the booth and studies Horst as she walks.

He's about twenty-five, pale and skinny, and a huge Adam's apple juts from the front of his pencil-thin neck. The dirty blonde hair that hangs down over his face tickles his chin and partly obscures his buggy eyes. He's wearing his usual T-shirt and jeans.

Alma slides into the booth, opposite Horst, and lays her folder next to his on the table. The folders are identical but Horst's is smeared with greasy fingerprints. He's eating onion rings and drinking iced tea.

The waitress clears her throat. Alma looks up at her and we see that she's in her mid-twenties and fairly attractive. The nametag on her uniform says "Susie."

At first Susie doesn't know who Alma is and scowls at her as if she's intruded, but then comes recognition and her jaw drops in amazement.

"Oh my *gawwwd*, you're Alma Gorda! I didn't know who you were because you're not in your makeup and . . ." She stops, and her face goes from excited to somber. "You poor thing. All that *suffering* you've been through with your marriage. I don't know how you do it."

Alma looks peeved and is about to respond, but Horst speaks first.

"I suffer too, Susie. I'm divorced and I *really* miss the . . . physical contact, if you know what I mean. My wife and I used to do it all the time. In the car, in the kitchen, in the refrigerator. Do you know how hard it is to do it in a refrigerator?"

"Sure."

"Well, that's how my wife died. Doing it."

"That must have been a shock," Susie says. "To you, I mean."

"It was. I almost fainted when the police called and told me."

Horst shoves an onion ring into his mouth and chews. He watches Susie as she tries to decide whether he's kidding or telling the truth, and then he winks at her. She breaks into a smile.

"You're putting me *on*, Mr. McIntosh!"

"Yeah. And you're supposed to call me Horst, remember?"

Susie blushes and turns to Alma.

"What can I get for you, Ms. Gorda?"

"Nothing. I'm not staying long."

"I could use some more iced tea," Horst says.

Susie looks at him and touches her nametag.

"I'll bring it if you say my name again like The Rocket Scientist."

"Thure thing, Thoothee."

Susie brays and walks away. Horst grins and pushes his hair up out of his face with a greasy

hand. He watches Susie depart, then he turns and looks at Alma. She's frowning at him.

"Can we get to work now, Horst?"

He shoves his onion rings aside and opens his folder.

"Sure we can get to work," he grouses. He flips pages. "Work, work, work. Let's see . . ." He scans a page, flips, scans. "We have one, two prelims, then our match starts on page . . ." Flip. "We start on page thirty-two." He reads. "Standard stuff. We make our usual entrance, then Ivan enters . . ." Flip. "Bone . . . Charges me . . ." Flip. "The 'elevating,' then Ivan goes out of the ring, then . . ." He sees that Alma's folder is still closed. "Why aren't you following this?"

"Because I already know what's in the script. I just want to make sure *you* know."

"I know what's in it," Horst says, irritated. He goes back to flipping and scanning. "The rulebook thing, then Ivan throws the ref out of the ring, then he throws *me* out of the ring . . ." He looks at Alma. "Are you sure all this swinging is safe?"

"Yes. I saw them testing it."

"Well, okay." Horst runs through the rest of the pages quickly. "Then you and Ivan mix it up, he pins you, end of show."

He closes his folder and looks at Alma.

"There's a lot more to it than that, Horst. Will you have it all memorized by Sunday?"

"Sure. I'll have *this* script memorized, *plus* the other one."

"The other one?"

Horst leans toward Alma and lowers his voice.

"The script where we win."

"What are you talking about?"

"*You* know. Where you pin *him* and we take the match."

"I can't do that, Horst. I don't want Dewitt to win, but when the commissioner tells us to lose, we lose."

Horst jerks back and throws up his hands.

"Fine. I was only thinking of you. See you Sunday in Fort Worth."

Alma moves to leave the booth. Horst pushes his folder aside and returns to his onion rings. Alma lingers.

"What's wrong?" Horst asks after a moment. "I thought you were in a hurry to go."

"I was, but . . . maybe I'll have something to drink. I need to do some errands, but then I'm just going home to eat with my folks."

"You're nervous about the visitation tomorrow, aren't you?"

"Of course I am."

"It's hard to believe you haven't seen him for a year."

"Oh, I've seen him, when I park at the end of the block to watch the school bus drop him off. I get to see him walk up the sidewalk to the house, but that's it."

Horst sucks his glass of tea dry.

"Still, a year since you've seen him up close, or since we've been able to wrestle Ivan. That was *real* cold-blooded of him, filing a restraining order to keep you away from him *and* Cruz." Horst shifts gears, goes conniving. "Don't you want to . . . get back at Ivan for that?"

"Huh? Oh, you mean with your 'other' script?"

"Yeah. We might even be able to bring *him* in on the secret. Have you talked to him lately? He might like the idea."

"You know he avoids me. We haven't talked."

Horst is encouraged.

"So for all you know he might go along with throwing the match."

"No, he won't go along with that. He'll do what he's supposed to do. He may be a jerk, but he takes his job seriously."

"Then that's it," Horst says, disappointed.



“You’ll stick to the script, and next week they’ll reteam you with Ivan.”

“What do you mean? Have you seen next week’s script?”

“No, but we both know that’s what’ll happen. The fans want to see you two wrestling together again, so you’ll be reteamed after he beats us, and I’ll be on my way to Central America.”

“Central America? I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“The commissioner called me and asked if I’d like to work for his franchise down there. He said he wants to give me a whole new identity and make me a star, but I don’t know. I mean . . . Central America. I don’t think it’ll be as nice as this.” Horst looks around at the chrome and naugahyde. “You’ve got it lucky. You get to stay here.”

“And you said you were only thinking of me when you brought up throwing the match. I should’ve known there was some other reason.”

“We *both* have a good reason to win, Alma. You don’t want to work with Ivan, and I don’t want to go to Central America.”

Alma shrugs.

“Sorry, Horst. We have to do like they tell us.”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah. Fine. Oh, by the way, what does ‘pendejo’ mean? It’s Spanish.”

“It means ‘stupid.’”

“Are you sure? The commissioner said my Central America character will be called El Pendejo.”

“Oh, uh . . . You know, I never did find out what that word means.”

“I bet it means ‘brilliant,’ since that’s the way I’ve been typecast here.”

“Yeah, Horst, brilliant. I’m sure you’ll live up to the name.”

“I hope so.” Horst looks around. “But I’ll sure miss upper America.”

Susie the waitress stops on her way past the

booth. She's shouldering a large tray stacked with dishes, and she reaches up to grab a pitcher of tea. Ice cubes rattle into Horst's glass as she pours a refill. She smiles at Horst and says, "The people in the corner over there don't believe you're The Rocket Scientist." She returns the pitcher to the tray. "Could you do that yell you always do when they're beating you up?"

Horst shakes his head. "No. That's a trademarked yell. I'm not supposed to do it outside the ring." He looks at Alma. "Didn't you want something to drink?"

"No, I guess I should go. I have those errands to do and . . . I'll see you Sunday in Fort Worth."

Alma picks up her folder, slides sideways out of the booth and stands.

"Good luck with the match," Susie smiles at her, but then her face goes sad. "And with the marriage, too."

Alma pauses, trying to think of something to say, but before she can speak Susie looks back to Horst. She bats her eyelashes at him.

"Can't you *please* do your yell for the people? *Pleeeeeease?*"

Horst makes an apologetic gesture.

"No. Sorry."

Alma turns away at the same time that Susie does, but Susie turns fast and we see the pitcher of tea start to fall from the tray. It tumbles toward Horst with a sound of rattling ice cubes.

Alma smiles when she hears Horst's falsetto, yodeling screech behind her. His trademarked yell.

The people in the diner applaud. Susie brays.



Alma is driving along in her SUV. Outside noise is minimal and *Toomer Davis and Rose Island* plays on her stereo. The Englishman narrates:

"*All of the Rose Islanders are magnetized,*" the

*Commodore said, puffing his hookah, "and the direction their heads point when they're floating free in a body of water depends on the person's individual magnetic orientation. This orientation is important to the islanders, so as soon a child's born his parents take him to a church, where a priest puts him on a little air mattress in the water of a baptismal font. The mattress is spun around, and when it stops the priest notes which direction the baby's head is pointing. And that's his direction in life. Forever."*

Alma is inside a drugstore. The narration continues while she shops.

*"Can't they ever change their direction?" Phillip asked.*

*"Well, one man did. Toomer Davis."*

Alma's SUV is in a car wash. She's behind the wheel, windows up. Foam and brushes move across the glass.

*"Toomer was the island's only midget, and he was the only adult small enough to fit into a baptismal font. So he was the island's font tester. It was his job to go to each church once a month, put his little air mattress in the water and make sure his head pointed northeast according to the compass markings on the edge of the font. That was Toomer's direction. Northeast."*

Alma's SUV rolls to a stop at the curb in front of a house. She leaves the car's engine running and studies the place.

It's a big old clapboard house, and the yard is littered with doors, fireplace inserts, porch columns and so on. A beat-up truck with "Gorda Demolition" painted on the side of its extended bed fills the driveway.

*Phillip didn't know what to say. The tale had become complicated, with all the talk about jobs and responsibilities. He asked his grandfather if Toomer ever got time off to play.*

*"Aye!" the Commodore laughed. "He got time off. And he liked to play with his dog, a talking*

*dachshund named Harry.”*

Alma reaches up to scratch above an ear, and her hair shifts. Her luxurious black hair is a wig.

*“He had a talking dog named Harry? What did they talk about?”*

*“Oh, different things. Like one time Harry said he could bring peace and harmony to the island, and when Toomer asked how, Harry said, ‘Kill all the cats.’”*

Alma twists the rearview mirror so she can see herself, and she removes her wig. Tufts of fluorescent red hair stick out here and there from under the edge of a wig cap. She removes the cap and the hair that isn't done up with pins spills down to her shoulders. Her roots are black, the rest is red. She scratches her head.

*The Commodore paused to smoke his hookah, and he puffed so long that Phillip thought he must be finished talking.*

*“Well, thank you for the story, grandfather.”*

*“What? Why, it's not over,” the Commodore said through a smoke ring. “We haven't got to the adventure yet!”*

Alma turns off the stereo and sits in silence. She looks at a doorframe in the yard. A “Private” sign is tacked to the door in the frame, but the door is ajar. She stares at the sign for a moment, then she sighs and lifts her wig cap to her head.