



Conversations with Robert Lashley, Author of *I Never Dreamed You'd Leave in Summer* (2023)

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As a visiting Scholar, faculty at Western Washington, USA during the 2023 Fall Quarter, I was excited to make the acquaintance of Robert Lashley, atalented contemporary African-American writer. Our meeting was very fruitfulas I managed to invite him first to my African-American class for one hour and a half to interact with my students at Bond Hall 105. The latter engaged in interesting conversations with him on his literary production. Lashley shared generously his rich experience and read some of his interesting poems in class, then they asked him questions. (see the video on YouTube through this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hZKc9EXODQY>)

After that, at 6 p.m. in the same room, I hosted a book signing event for his first novel *I Never Dreamed You'd Leave in Summer* published in 2023. It was a cool and rainy Thursday, the first big rain in the Fall in Bellingham, WA. However, the audience kept its promise and showed up regardless of the weather. So, my conversations with Lashley became intensive at this stage as I presented his interesting novel to the audience and asked him a range of questions that he brilliantly answered (see video on YouTube via this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UUL3nFXuZqY>)

After the event, I had great satisfaction with the way things happened. I kept the conversations going via mail asking Lashley more questions. He was very responsive and facilitated the process. I, then, decided to conduct a full interview collecting all our interactions.

ALASSANE ABDOULAYE DIA: *As it is the first time you interact with the public through these conversations, can you introduce yourself exhaustively in order for them to know more about who you are, your background, and your journey as a writer?*

ROBERT LASHLEY: Here is as exhaustively as I can get, and I have to start with my origins.

My grandmother, Rosa Mae Guilliford, was born in what they called a nigger breaker Plantation in Birmingham Alabama in 1920. When she was 12 and a half years old, she came into conflict with a confidence man named Bob Lashley, a bootleg cake maker, preacher, singer, and cultural influencer in the bishop Solomon Micheaux tradition(where black men received status and privileges for promoting Jim crow and white supremacy to black people). This was the reason he was allowed to rape and impregnate her at 13 and a half. Her opposition to him was also the reason she was subject to police harassment and open work camps, places in town where black women would do open labor in front of white people and a cycle many poor black women were forced into when they talked back to white men and continue to be if they responded to white men who came to harass them. In 1937, Helen Washington and EulalahMcDaniels, my grandmother's best friends who had migrated from Fort Lewis to work in the army laundry Department, raised the money to get her a bus ticket from Birmingham

From 1938 to 1970, my grandmother worked in the laundry Department in Fort Lewis Washington. From 1942 to 1970, she also ran a basement pool hall that served alcohol, chicken, and JoJo potatoes. Her friends from Birmingham and her husband's friends from his battalion served as her staff: Helen and Eulalah in the kitchen, She and Herman Watson at the bar, Moses Williams and Vollie Johnson,

serving food and doing dishes, and Melvin Willborn at the door as a bouncer. In 1944, her husband, Larry Daniels whom she married in 1939, died in the eastern theater of the war, leading her to be in a complex triangle with Moses and Vollie (which continued years after she married Vollie in 1970). For a generation after the war, her pub functioned as a cultural epicenter for black and Hispanic soldiers and bohemian outsiders, a place where you could hear an Edith Piaf record or listen/watch heavyweight title fights from Joe Louis to Joe Frazier. In 1970, she pistol-whipped a black nationalist activist, her renter refused to continue her lease, and her staff began to regularly convene in her decked out basement.

In 1947, she had enough money and health to send her son (my father, Robert Lashley, Jr.) up from Birmingham to Tacoma. My father was raised by virtually no one in the Jim Crow plantations in Birmingham Alabama. My grandmother had to give him up when she was 14, and he carried that abandonment for the rest of his life in disturbing ways. The composite I got from grandfather, grandmother, and aunts and uncles (the afore-mentioned staff), was that his relationship was tragically cold and distant with them until he became a crack addict. From the time he busted his knee playing football for The University of Puget Sound to the time he became a landscaper, he went from job to job, showing promise but breaking under structure and scrutiny. In the times I knew he was sober, I could see a distance and a tension between my father and my family, who carried an aspirant, blues sensibility and had no patience for his anger or self-pity

Yet, from 1970 to the fall of 1980, my father was a successful and sober landscape artist, so much so that he accrued the grass contracts for Fort Lewis, McChord, and half a dozen golf courses. At that time he married Glennis Evans, my mother, who I write about here. <https://breakingdownpatriarchy.com/episode-6-breaking-down-patriarchy-and-the-american-novel-with-robert-lashley/>https://misterlashley.substack.com/p/postscript-mama-i-got-my-bookstoday?utm_source=profile&utm_medium=reader2

This is the environment I was born in, of near wealth until I was 2 and a half years old.

After winning a discrimination case against the El Toro Marine base in San Diego, California, my father decided to try freebase cocaine to get out of the doldrums. Four cyclical years of abuse, apologies, and binges later, my mother left the house for the YWCA women's shelter, one of the places where she would shuttle around until I was 9 years old. At the age of 9, my uncle Melvin beat my father severely enough to make him stop chasing my mother from place to place during his binges, and my grandmother gave her a place where she could work to get out of the hood and I could have the first stable place to live in my life. I had the best and most stable memories of my childhood until I was 14 when my uncle found out what my father was doing to me sexually. Two years later, my father threw her down a flight of steps after she told him to get out of her house.

I write to grasp for and respect the best aspects of my life and history. Writing is my way to give, live life, and alchemize sorrow into humanity and joy. I've been able to overcome tremendous obstacles in my life because my family gave me a vast world of books to read. In their love of literature and their evangelizing for the mosaic of their shared humanity, they made me realize that my block wasn't the nexus of my world, that the blues that made my upbringing didn't make me unique but connected me with all the people who ever had blues. In my writing and teaching, I wanted to give as many people as possible what my family and mentors gave me

I am proud to have come from my place in the Pacific Northwest, a territory black people call Up South. It is a land both fluid and rooted, an area filled with people who needed the arts to mirror the complexity of their experience and artists who worked tirelessly to give them art that does so. Those artists understood they couldn't capture the multitudes of the people they knew in a single work, but knew that it was their responsibility to spend their lives creating new forms and ways to do justice to them.

I consider myself a Bluesologist and what is healing for me is the discipline of the blues. Ralph Ellison often talked about the negative capability of the blues singer as someone who would sing a song that has tremendous agony, but the craft of it is so well done and impeccable that it's a triumph to hear. So, I see the alchemy of turning the blues into something from sadness into something sustainable and can reach people.

To do that, I had to make my life's goal as an artist to fuse the idiomatic speech of my life with the rhythms and cadences of the Western canon. To do that, I had to commit to reading as much as I could to see how different writers had that shared sensibility (and read how they alchemized it on the page).

DIA: *Can you provide your potential readers with a summary of the plot and setting of the novel?*

LASHLEY: The plot of *I Never Dreamed in You'd Leave in Summer*, is the un-becoming of age story of Albert Robinson. At the beginning of it, he is on his very last chance for success in his life. He is an ex-drug runner whose mental state is more frail than he let on because of the guilt his violent actions played in the suicide of his mother. Taken in by Estelle Everett, her late mother's former best friend, and her husband, Nisqually University professor Dr. Scott Everett, he lives a somewhat charmed high school life as a devotee of Dr. Everett's philosophy about black men being both strong warriors and products of society. Then, as he comes to terms with actions he did when he was out of jail (by Judith Borin, a Jewish student he harassed in high school) and was triggered by some of the things toxic fellow male students said about rape, he has a severe breakdown, quits the family and agrees to live in a homeless shelter. Caring about him deeply, Estelle works a plan out with Andre Thompson, an adjunct at Nisqually who looks at Albert with a skeptical eye but considers Scott and Estelle a second family. That plan: to go through extensive honest counseling with Thompson, work at Eulalah's beauty shop, where he will be treated like a human being and not a deity because he's a man, and write him his progress in letters.

In his first ones to Andre, Robinson tells his life story to Thompson about his life, his mother, what made him go down the road he went down, and why he is trying to improve himself. Yet as he is telling Thompson the story of his life (in the arc of the conventional bad-into-good aspirational narrative, his reality with the Everett family begins to disintegrate horribly. Dr. Everett's obsession with his Jewish ex-wife's being appointed the head of the board of regents and demanding that he create more rigorous and pluralistic syllabi leads him to beat Estelle and Albert. Unwilling to castigate him because of his own history, Albert goes against his better judgment and takes his black humanities class, where he slowly bonds with Judith over their shared disdain of the violence, sexism, and antisemitism of his syllabus, Albert tries to process the shop and the class in his letters to Andre, but finds his life torn apart when Estelle's son tries to set him up with drugs. After a couple of weeks in the homeless shelter and not knowing that Kyle had admitted to the police that he had set him up, he goes to the college to commit suicide at the place his mother did when he was in Juvenile Hall. Before that, he witnessed Judith and Dr. Everett have a fistfight at Red Square, which he details in a letter where he cuts off Andre for what he thought his neutrality

The last letters begin with Albert apologizing to Andre after costing him at the food bank a couple of months later. He continues writing to him, less as a lesson and more as a friend, when Judith wins her lawsuit against Dr Everett and Nisqually University. Albert struggles with processing what happened in Nisqually and the internet abuse he is beginning to receive from it until he runs into Judith at a farmers market in downtown Tacoma. Realizing that they are the only people who know what they have gone through, they hook up and become a couple, and Albert has a lot of happiness moving into her house. That happiness is derailed slowly by drugs. the last letters detail the political mania of Dr Everett trying to position himself as a victim of society, and the drug decay of Albert and Judith, to the point where Albert becomes deeply paranoid of Andre, and Judith becomes deeply paranoid of Albert because of his history of antisemitism toward him in high school. The last letter Albert writes Andre is his suicide note, where he goes into the water where his mother committed suicide years before. The last two letters are Andre writing to Albert, with the subtext of him asking to be forgiven by the beauty shop, his repudiation of Dr Everett as a father figure, and his marriage to Nona after Albert dies.

The novel's setting takes place in downtown Tacoma, where the housing projects of Albert were, the outskirts of University Place the incorporated suburb of Tacoma where Miss Eulalah's beauty shop was, and the 8 square mile marsh outside of the Steilacoom/University Place border where I placed The University of Puget Sound body into when I created Nisqually University. (the college by the water)

DIA: *Can you provide a list of the characters and introduce them in detail to the audience?*

LASHLEY: ALBERT ROBINSON: born to Vonetta Robinson and Bill B Sharp Jones, lead vocalist and fifth bassist for Green River funk. When Jones becomes incapacitated because of his addiction to angel dust, Vonetta moves back to the housing projects and raises out as a single parent at a time when Hilltop's history was remarkably violent. Like many 11 to 13-year-olds of the time in the hilltop section of Tacoma, he gets caught up with a drug dealer who offers protection from the police and bigger men who are bullying him, but that comes with agonizing sexual favors and demands that he commit acts of violence. For several years, he gets cut up in that cycle until he finds out that his mother killed himself at the college she used to go to and until the end of the novel fights ideations to do the same thing

One of the things that I wanted to do with Albert was flip *The Stranger* from the end to its beginning. You know how Mersault finds his humanity when he can weep for his mother before he is executed for randomly killing someone? Albert sees his humanity over weeping about the relationships his actions had with her suicide and is punished by Everett, academic systems, and social media for trying to rectify them in being a better man than he used to be. Another thing I wanted to do with Albert in the first chapter and the furnace scene is to play with the *NativeSon* archetype and show that Bigger Thomas has become a brand. (Bigger beating the rat in the first chapter = Bros beating him up for fearing they would rat on him, the furnace scenes of murder=the furnace scene protest exhibit.

ANDRE THOMPSON: The person with whom Albert is writing his letters and the person who writes the last two Albert letters to Albert in the novel. Before the novel, he was a wounded young man taken in by Dr Everett after his mother committed suicide, and his aunt died of a heart attack. He was once seen as one of Dr Everett's biggest success stories, coming from the projects to become an adjunct psychology professor by receiving his lessons in black nationalist self-help and respectability politics. At the beginning of the novel he is a hard, disciplined man committed to a no-excuses bootstraps mentality of black masculinity and black power, yet shows fraying of that in his hesitancy about the way Albert was pampered, and his continuous relationship with Eulalah's beauty shop, the first job he had and people he's had the most consistent relationships with in his life. In the scope of the novel, he tries to reconcile his love for the beauty shop and his loyalty to Everett as his father figure, but it comes to the point where his refusal to see what Dr Everett has become causes him to lose almost everything in his life. A key component in the novel is how he breaks the cycle of no grace in the novel by coming back to the shop, admitting he didn't see Dr Everett for who he is, and developing his relationships there to the point where he marries Nona, the second chair.

EULALAH HARRIS WATSON: born in the Fifth Ward of Houston Texas, she leaves poverty via the Army and is stationed in Fort Lewis in the last years of her time there, where she develops a relationship and an affinity for the young women of color in downtown Tacoma who cannot afford beauty shops at a time when the neighborhood is becoming dangerous. She starts three of them, with Vonetta and Estelle as her assistants because she finds them the most vulnerable girls in the Hillside Terrace housing projects. Their home base was the first shop on the outskirts of University Place. When both girls went to school in the suburbs from her basement and helped her get grants to fund it, the other two buildings made it easier for working black women to get their hair done. When Estelle and Vonetta relationship starts to fray, Estelle becomes the housewife of Dr Scott Everett, and Vonetta goes back to the housing projects where she volunteers for Eulalah but has severe health problems because of her dabbling in PCP and her past traumas. As the years go by, she acquires Nona to be her second chair, who grew up in the same conservative orthodox religious sect in the Hillside terrace housing projects. Later, Macalester James, a trans woman, abandoned by her family will become her 4th chair.

Eulalah came up very hard and is very disciplined, but is deeply moved by the struggles that the women in her shop have gone through and tries to modulate her behavior to help them as much as she can without losing the discipline she believes they need to have

ESTELLE EVERETT, like Vonetta and later Nona, is born in the Hillside Terrace housing projects. She is part of a family that came from a troubled religious cult, one influenced by the right-wing orthodoxy of Solomon Micheaux. She was the best friend of Vonetta through high school and into college where she split with her (as she left their class with Dr. Everett and got involved with a funk band that had a brief snippet of fame before they got addicted to Angel Dust.) Frightened by alternative events she submits to the advances of Scott Everett who is almost twice her age, something

that Vonetta (when she got off angel dust) would find to be unforgivable. At 21, she gives birth to Kyle, her son whom Dr Everett neglects even though he is in the house.

Estelle struggled with her relationship with Vanessa until she found out about her death, upon which she reached out to Mentor her son Albert in juvenile hall. After making progress and obtaining permission to leave to her care, Albert is co-opted by the already declining Dr. Everett, who uses him in several videos and allows him to glide through high school as long as he does what he says. When that fails and Andre creates the plan to have him work at the beauty salon, she has more contact with Mrs. Eulalah until Kyle breaks a television during an attention tantrum, followed by her talking down to the women in the shop. Kyle becoming a drug runner and setting up Albert causes her to cut off contact with him, which is something that the beauty shop follows and mostly regrets. Estelle's obsession about Albert being a drug dealer climaxes in an argument where Eulalah has to cut her off. Her son is caught again with drugs, and she spirals, realizing that Albert wasn't a drug dealer in the first place. Upon hearing about Albert's death and Andre coming back to the shop, she comes back, where she starts her life and college all over again.

VONETTA ROBINSON: Estelle's best friend at the hillside terrace housing projects, and a gifted writer, and thinker. More sensitive, her years-long bonds with Estelle breaks when she chafes at Dr Everett's class and Eulalah tells her to suck it up and take it, to which she finds her relationship with Bill who becomes moderately and locally famous until he becomes an angel dust addict(along with Vonetta). She isn't as damaged from PCP as Bill is, but she is damaged enough by it and her religious history to struggle for the last years of her life. She pours her energy into being the best mother she can be to her son Albert, who is a beloved mama's boy until about age 11, when he becomes a monster. Heartbroken about his crimes of abusing women she screams the worlds of Grendel's mother the last time she sees him in the courtroom, and commits suicide when he is in juvenile hall.

DR SCOTT EVERETT: Like Andre born in the Winthrop housing project. Born to a single mother who died of a heroin overdose he willed himself to be a soprano student and writer. He processed a tremendous amount of pain integrating Nisqually High School and University in the 70s and '80s, and processed it poorly. He writes an autobiographical protest novel that becomes mildly successful and helps him become a professor at Nisqually University. Marries Miriam Berman who helps him write the novel, and then divorces her 7 years later over racial issues(Particularly his self-pity and his need to blame all of his problems on race). Puts the moves on Estelle when she is in his class when she is 19 years old. lives a life of relative academic Leisure until Miriam comes back in demands he get out of his self-pity spiral and try to do a decent syllabus. A key component in this book is that while he cost the University 2.3 million for his heinous actions, he had acts of racism committed against him which become the linchpin of the social justice support that he receives(even though that's social justice support conflates his oppression with some of the heinous actions that he did)

JUDITH BORNIN: Born to Henry and Elizabeth Bornin. Henry was a Desert Storm vet who became embittered when he was blamed for a friendly fire accident that hurt him in three members of a truck that he didn't drive. Came home disabled to run a Chevron station. He took out his traumas on the war on his wife and his three children, Judith being the oldest. Elizabeth died of a heart attack in 1998, which left Henry on a guilt and anger spiral that badly affected Judas and her two brothers. A teacher from Nisqually Prep School saw her potential in intellectual athletic competitions, and some of the abuse she was taking from her father; and decided that she would live with his family. She first meets Albert in the 10th grade of Nisqually Prep School when he picks on her because of her weight and her ethnicity. She rightfully shuts him down when he sees him in college orientation, fearfully expecting that he would continue this behavior. When she sees him in Dr Everett's class with a black and swollen eye, begins to show slight compassion for him. They bond over their disdain for the class and his admission that "he wasn't shit". They become friends when she asks him to do a Yiddish ritual which is to atone for one sins by helping the poor. They're close friends when the class starts to verbally turn on her, and the professor physically turns on her in an incident. Inundated with accusations of racism when she wins a lawsuit against Dr Everett, she sees Albert after the lawsuit and sees the only person who won't call her a racist or ignore her because she doesn't they don't want to look racist. Two lonely people, they strike a connection and have a beautiful bond slowly undone by drugs.

It is important to know in the novel that Judith never loses her mistrust of Albert deep down, and that it's understandable. It is the reason why, in her drug dementia and paranoia, she takes a gun out on him,

NONA: like Estelle and Vonetta also coming from the religious sect Eulalah saves them from. develops a fondness for Andre that develops and grows into love after he repudiates Dr Everett. The mother of Aisha who was conceived when she was outside of the beauty shop and a member of a fake gangster rap group (which is going to be the subject of the next novel). Like the beauty shop, she has no tolerance for the complex the complement machine industrial complex that Dr Everett comes from.

AISHA: A headstrong brainy college student who benefits from the mentorship the shop gives her.

DARREN AND JAMES: two deeply problematic young men who do not benefit from the mentorship Dr Everett gives them. Unlike Albert, they are mentored by the man at his absolute worst.

MACALESTER: The 4th chair in the shop, who is given a sanctuary and endures.

DIA: *Regarding your explanation of the characters' lives and relationships and your background, I am curious to know more about any biographical features of the novel:*

Is Eulalah a representation of the one you mentioned in your life experience as a friend of your Grandma?

LASHLEY: Eulalah has traits all three of them share, but is the closest to Aunt Helen because she died most recently. Especially, in the blunt style and the way she hides her vulnerability.

DIA: *Your first name is Robert and your novel's protagonist is Albert Robinson. Is it a coincidence? Does the protagonist share features of your life?*

LASHLEY: I will answer this way: I've often referred the documentary *Since I Been Down*, which talks about the Tacoma I grew up in. If you watch it, see the bicycling scenes between old houses and shacks. The main street to the right of them used to be the 27A bus that I would take at 5 in the morning to go to school. I did that till I was 13 and a half. Those are the streets and the corners Albert would have been running, and those are the streets I didn't run because my grandma gave my overwhelmed mother a daily support system and my mother was healthy enough to take it. Albert was me if I didn't have the grace of my grandmother.

DIA: *Pertaining to the use of language, one can easily seize a characteristic of the protest novel through the style. Some readers and critics might say that it is a bit vulgar. What would be your reaction to those questions that are likely to be asked in the future?*

LASHLEY: It's all in context. In regards to profanity, it's vulgar, but it's not cruel. It describes violence but does not glamorize it. Albert curses and sometimes is obscene toward Andre, but it shows his fallibility.

DIA: *What is the rationale behind the style of the novel?*

LASHLEY: One of the things I wanted to do is to write in the character of Albert as a distinctive character, which is to capture his staccato black English patterns in a literary and rhythmic way. I wanted to do so as an homage to Zora Neale Hurston and Gayl Jones who used dialect so well in their novels. There are places where I could have improved in the book stylistically but overall I am very proud of what I did.

DIA: *Is there any context that inspired you to write the novel?*

LASHLEY: First to process my aforementioned aunts Eulalah, Helen, and Virginia dying, and honor what they gave me late in life. People think I'm being sentimental when I say I had a very sophisticated and comprehensive education at my Aunt Eulalah's and Aunt Helen's sewing circle and my Aunt Virginia's beauty salon, but I say this with seriousness. The Essence Black Book Club and review section is one the few lasting literary institutions that wasn't funded by the government or a New England legacy pension; and the people who taught me my craft as a writer had been close, comprehensive readers of African American literature for half a century. More than the education they gave me, they taught me how to deal with being black in America. They gave me the routines and rituals to cope under this system, and a sense of proportion and context about who I was, what I wanted to be, and what constituted success.

When the women and institutions passed away, I put my grief into the novel. I knew I had to deconstruct the monologue of the protest form and play off it. I had to get out of the radical parlor discussions that have reduced so many coming-of-age works by black men and write a damn novel with damn characters (this is where the sterling lead editorship of Conn Buckley helped). And I poured my memories of Aunt Eulalah, Helen, and Virginia, into a complex ode to a beauty salon. I had to go deep, follow the fuck through and give the people in Albert's life their say. Particularly the ecosystem of Mrs. Eulalah's beauty salon, where Albert learns that life is better than "the good life" of the academic hustle Everett Scott's life has become. Albert unwraps himself from a life of radical leisure at the same time Dr. Everett's life descends into a radical chic hell, and the juxtapositions haunt everyone in the room. They haunt everyone in different ways, however, and not in one single black man's story.

Second, to make a tome on the need for grace and forgiveness. I believe we live in a country that is starving of grace, and a side effect of that lack is a surface distrust of each other. In my opinion, grace, the ability to understand that people aren't perfect, forgive, and expect the same in return, is central to an examined life of growth.

DIA: *Have you interacted with contemporary African-American writers? If yes, can you share that experience?*

LASHLEY: I am a huge fan of Ayana Mathis and how she alchemized and modernized the Lyric Realism of the early, indie James Baldwin. You can say the same thing with Brit Bennett alchemizing the influence of Paule Marshall. Toni Morrison's literary progeny are a lot better than snarky critics gave them credit for (especially Angela Flournoy and Robert Jones). Jesmyn Ward is a supernova whose grasp of America's shared literary history is so deep and encompassing literary range is reminiscent of the boom writers.

DIA: *When I read your texts, it seems that you are a civil rights activist. Aren't you?*

LASHLEY: I did work for Tacoma against Nazi's that I'm not comfortable saying, and I did it until Local Anarchists took over. The only thing I can say about activist poets now is that generally, I find their temper tantrums and lack of coalition building to be disgusting.

DIA: *Can you explain in detail what influenced you to write a protest novel?*

LASHLEY: First, to get some of the poison that the genre put into the culture out of me. Albert Robinson isn't me, but he is me railing against the Bigger Thomas institutional prototype that so many white straight men love to see black straight men be and that so many black straight men refuse to examine. But there are layers to this: the novel is about the complexities and price of fatherhood and mentor-hood, of what Dr. Everett meant to Andre, what his family meant, what his unmooring meant to his and Albert's psyche, and the hell that is unleashed when he takes out that unmooring on a class of impressionable students. It is also a parable about the relentless pressure put on women to forgive everything men do.

Another reason I wanted to write an irreverent protest novel is how it has become a brand in our cultural institutions. The flattening of Richard Wright's protagonist in *Native Son* from a Dostoyevkian lightning rod/warning designed to shock every reader into a manospherekiller saint has been seen in the worst of Chester Himes, Amiri Baraka, Steve Cannon, Huey Newton Eldridge Cleaver, and Ed Bullins and became popular thought again when "black literary Twitter" decided that each man should be designated for sainthood.

This is why I wanted to write a protest novel that breaks every rule of political protest novels. It is remarkably irreverent toward toxic internet culture, but it retains a tremendous heart. Albert Robinson is the narrator, but he is not the single central character of the story, on top of a campus satire, haunting love story, and haunting un-coming-of-age story, it is a complex ode to a working-class beauty shop and each character who works there or is influenced by the people there.

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