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**Beatniks**  
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## Michael Bowden

### BEATNIKS

Red neon staggers through tubes, endlessly leaving arrows at the entrance to the Wigwam Motel. Indicating vacancies. Outside the secondhand store, a Free Box bloated on mysteries and a romance in hardback. A slightly-used treatise on Being open to a random page on the scuffed linoleum. Now some cat with a black goatee mews his poem into a pool of shadows, looking for a mate or maybe just his bongos. Trumpeting the advent of a viral melancholy. Was it Ginsberg who first spotted the dead poets tramping back into ordinary streets-Whitman at the market, bagging blue plums? Cupping each in his palm a long moment, enjoying the skin's smooth coolness? So perhaps that is Rimbaud emerging from the flophouse alley, disappearing into the hissing doors of the Central bus. A rucksack thrown over his shoulder. A halo gouged into his scalp by some barber college novice. And there's Follain climbing down a manhole ladder to inspect a broken main. The past is a Class One narcotic. Memory, its dimebag. Its proactive agent. Everyone knows where to cop a fix. Everyone's loaded with stories. Remember the toyshop owner who bought a monkey to promote his store? He unlocked the doors one morning to find Jocko in a riot of torn boxes and dolls, his jaunty beret askew. A stacked cheerleader in one paw, his penis in the other. Which explains why the green parrot in the barbershop window munched a black gumball, watching, unable for a moment to imitate the real speech of men.