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## **If You're There Pick Up** Michael Bowden

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## Michael Bowden

### IF YOU'RE THERE PICK UP

The voice wanted to be a Buddha. Or at least some small-time denomination's minister, fresh out of Bible School. A wide grin and some white teeth the gospel could pour through. But the hyperthyroid eyes of the little stained-glass Christ embarrassed it. So the voice considered becoming the frycook in his paper hat wailing teen anthems on air guitar, peeling back the layers of an onion. Preparing a stew. Or a moth banking out of darkness as the diner's lights buzz on. A small voice. A soft voice. The voice was pretty sure it wasn't a waitress shouting *ham and eggs*, or a burly driver inscribed with blue tattoos, but it tried anyway. It paid its bill and left a nice tip and paused at the shoeshine stand to talk about the weather. So now this mummy in a bad wig and sunglasses appears in the alley, walking her dog. The voice gets this feeling. Something's ready to reveal itself. Thinks twice about it. Doesn't. Instead, the dog barks at the power lines or sprawled trash cans or the clouds or the yellow dervish of leaves. Who knows what the hell the dog barks at, the way it cranks its neck and twists its face and growls at everything. The voice figures why not? Barks too. Barks until it's blue in the face. Until its jaws ache. The voice that wanted to be a Buddha.