

The Heart of the Beats

Forgotten by history — never by themselves.

Written by Jennifer Juelich



Left on the margins of the Beat movement they helped shape, four women artists reunite at a coastal house to mourn a friend—until the arrival of a young woman searching for her missing mother begins to unravel the past they buried.



A woman with dark hair and a black top stands in front of the entrance to the Gaslight Cafe. The entrance features a wooden door with a sign that reads "Gaslight CAFE" in a stylized font. To the right of the door, there is a vertical sign that says "COFFEE". The scene is lit with warm, golden light, suggesting an evening or indoor lighting.

WHY THIS STORY / WHY NOW

- The women of the Beat generation helped shape a cultural revolution — yet history largely credited the men.
- A long-overdue reassessment of overlooked women artists is underway across literature, film, and academia.
- Intergenerational feminism is redefining legacy, authorship, and ownership of narrative.
- Queer elder lives remain largely invisible on screen.
- In an era of cultural correction, the question of who gets remembered — and who disappears — feels urgent.

STORY OVERVIEW

After the death of their former friend Carol Duncan, four aging writers reunite at the remote seaside house that once sheltered their Beat-era ambitions. The house holds more than memory: Carol's sudden disappearance decades earlier fractured the group and left wounds none of them fully confronted.

When a young journalism student arrives searching for the forgotten women of the Beat movement—and for answers about her own mother—the fragile equilibrium begins to unravel. Old loyalties, buried resentments, and unanswered questions resurface as the women confront the compromises and losses that shaped their lives.

When a violent coastal storm traps them together overnight, the past can no longer remain unspoken. By morning, the truth of Carol's life after them emerges. History itself is not rewritten, but something quieter is acknowledged—what was endured, what was lost, and what remains.

THEMES

- Women who helped build a cultural movement — yet were left out of its legacy.
- Abandonment — by a friend, by a revolution, by time.
- Chosen family and the fragility of artistic sisterhood.
- The tension between survival and artistic compromise.
- Queer identity and invisibility across generations.
- Acceptance — not revision — as a final act of grace.



The Women

ELEANOR LEVIN (64)

Professor. Critic. Reluctant witness.

Once the sharpest voice in the room, Eleanor built her identity on intellect and discipline. In the 1950s, she stood shoulder to shoulder with the men of the Beat movement — debating philosophy in smoky bars, reading her work aloud even when the lights were dimmed and the music turned up to drown her out. But history moved forward without her.

Now a respected academic, Eleanor teaches the very era she lived through — careful, composed, and fiercely protective of its narrative. What she cannot protect is the wound Carol left behind. Of all of them, Eleanor took the abandonment most personally.

AUDREY WALKER (63)

Published author. Quiet survivor.

In the 1950s, Audrey moved through the Beat scene with restraint and observation. Where others burned recklessly, she watched, absorbed, and wrote. A lesbian in an era that demanded secrecy, she learned early how to survive by choosing her moments carefully.

Of the four women, Audrey is the only one who achieved sustained literary success. Her books found publishers. Her name endured. But recognition brought its own burden — a quiet survivor's guilt she rarely speaks aloud.

JOYCE CLAUSEN (64)

Caretaker. Exile. The one who stayed closest.

In the 1950s, Joyce was fearless — sharp-tongued, curious, and unafraid to test limits. But when the pressures of that life collided with family expectation and cultural fear, she was institutionalized and quietly removed from the world she helped build.

After her release, she returned to Maine — to the small cottage within sight of the seaside house — and never fully left. While the others moved on, Joyce remained tethered to the landscape of their youth, living within view of what once felt like belonging.

KATIE LAFFERTY (62)

Artist. Peacemaker. The one who chose another life.

In the 1950s, Katie arrived in New York wide-eyed and hungry — a painter from Nebraska determined to call herself an artist without apology. Carol was the first to see it in her, to insist she claim it.

But while the others continued chasing the movement, Katie chose stability. She married, built a family, and slowly stepped away from her work — not because she was asked to, but because life grew louder than art.

She is the gentlest among them — and often the bridge between fracture and repair.

TOMEKA HARRIS (early 20s)

Journalism student. Daughter. Inheritor of silence.

Tomeka arrives at the seaside house claiming to write about the forgotten women of the Beat generation, but she is searching for something more personal — the truth her mother never shared.

Raised by Carol Duncan in New Mexico, Tomeka grew up between two worlds — a mixed-race daughter in a story that was never fully told. She knows the revolution only by its residue, not its reality.

Her presence does not rewrite history. It asks the questions that were never answered.

VISUAL LANGUAGE & TONE

Natural light interiors and weather-driven exteriors ground the film in realism.

The coastal landscape is not decorative — it is present, shifting, and observant.

The seaside house functions as a living archive, holding decades of memory within its walls.

Weathered textures, worn wood, and imperfect spaces reflect lives that have endured rather than been preserved.

Camera movement is intimate and restrained — favoring faces, stillness, and proximity over overt stylization. Silence is allowed to breathe.

Flashbacks appear as brief, impressionistic fragments — memory rather than exposition.

The tone is mature, unsentimental, and emotionally precise. Nothing is forced. Nothing is resolved too neatly.



PRODUCTION STRATEGY

The film is designed as a contained, performance-driven ensemble drama.

- One primary coastal house location
- Limited secondary locations (cottage, local bar, beach)
- 18–21 day shoot schedule
- Ensemble-blocked scheduling to maximize efficiency
- Natural light aesthetic to reduce heavy lighting setups
- Weather-integrated storm sequence using practical interior effects and sound design
- Impressionistic flashbacks shot economically with minimal production footprint
- Lean, experienced crew

AUDIENCE & POSITIONING

Primary Audience

- Women 35+
- Literary and art-house audiences
- LGBTQ+ viewers
- Festival-driven independent film audiences

Secondary Audience

- Academia and literary communities
- Streaming platforms with prestige catalogs
- Intergenerational viewers interested in cultural history

Positioning

A contained, performance-driven ensemble drama positioned for the festival circuit and prestige streaming acquisition. Character-focused storytelling with strong roles for women 60+ — an underserved demographic with awards potential.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Ensemble films about older women are often framed as comedies — stories about irrelevance or reinvention in a culture that prizes youth. While those films have their place, they rarely reflect the interior reality of women who have lived full artistic and political lives.

The Heart of the Beats is not a comedy about aging. It is a drama about legacy, invisibility, and the quiet negotiations that come with time. These women were present for history. They created, argued, loved, compromised, and endured — even when the culture moved forward without them.

I am interested in portraying women in their sixties without caricature or sentimentality. The writing is intentionally restrained, leaving space for subtext and silence. The camera will remain intimate and patient, trusting stillness over excess.

This story does not attempt to rewrite history or manufacture redemption. It seeks acknowledgment. I want the audience to leave with recognition — of women who were there, who created, and who endured.

They were there.
They created.
They endured.

