

Reginald Shepherd

THE GODS AT THREE A.M.

The foolish gods are doing poppers while they sing along, they're taking off their white t-shirts and wiping the sweat from their foreheads with them, the gods have tattoos of bleeding roses on their shoulders, perhaps a pink triangle above the left nipple, there's hope for them. The gods are pausing to light cigarettes while they dance, they're laughing and sharing private jokes while the smoke machine comes on, one of the gods told you they put talcum powder in the artificial fog, then walked away, how could anyone breathe talcum powder but it makes their skin shine with the sweat and smell of cigarettes and Obsession. Don't try to say you didn't know the gods are always white, the statues told you that. The gods don't say hello, and when you ask them how they are the gods say they don't know, the gods are drunk and don't feel like talking now, but you can touch their muscled backs when they pass.

The gods in backwards baseball caps say *free love*, they say *this is the time*, and disappear into another corner of the bar, they're always moving to another song. The gods with their checked flannel shirts unbuttoned under open motorcycle jackets, hard nipples and ghost-white briefs above the waistbands of their baggy jeans, say *get here*, the gods say *soon*, and you just keep dancing because you don't know the words, you hope the gods will notice small devotions and smile, maybe a quick thumbs-up if you're good. The gods whose perfect instances of bodies last only for the instant, or until last call (and then they disappear into the sidewalk), gods who are splendid without meaning to be, who do they need to impress, say *this could be the magic*, they say *live for tonight*, and then the lights come on.