

The Last God

This is how it's done, the instructor calls out, and he leaps across the floor, arms flung outwards, fingers dangling. He lifts up and glides, his ballet slippers just skimming the heads of the people who watch, open-mouthed. You wonder if he can stay up there. You remember a woman telling you he can. He learned what only the Russians once knew. Long ago, long before the Cold War, before even the reign of czars, a small tribe of bearded men flew. They hung out with the saints and gods. He is the last of a kind. He is the last God. Wherever he goes, stories are told. Not all of them nice. He has a bad temper. He tortures the faithless and sends plagues and famines and wars. He would like to end the world. No wonder people are afraid to say his name aloud. No wonder Lenin had him locked away. Who knows how he escaped? What crimes he has committed? Wherever he goes, a trail of believers and bloodshed follows. Most devotees are small men; meek and lost. The tallest ones reach only to his hipbones. All are leaping now, leaping and leaping, their pale fingers waving. They rise easily before sinking so softly, their feet whisper as they strike the floor. They are not real, you think, not flesh and blood. After God is done with them, they will become only light and air. But now they move and speak. You wish you could stop them. But you don't know how. Because these are the chosen ones, the ones who will never return.