

ANNA SEIDMAN

Untitled (TpPt2), 2015

Tape and water-based paint on rag, 10.75 x 13.75 in



COURTESY THE ARTIST

CHARLIE JANE ANDERS

Captain Roger in Heaven

1. Marith

Marith didn't mean to start a sex cult, she just wanted to feel sexy for once. She had a stiffness in her neck and shoulders, like a harness she could never unbuckle, and recurrent pain between the notches of her elbows, and she couldn't tell occupational pain from psychosomatic pain any more. Maybe it was all psychosomatic, one way or another. Marith lived near the Silver Spring station, in one of those narrow brick tenements that's an apostrophe in someone else's sentence. She worked in a record store that also sold sports memorabilia and old video games, and after work she went to the bowling alley, where she never bowled or watched anyone bowl. She sat with her back to the lanes, sipping a Bud Light and listening to the sound of the balls crashing against the pins, which made her feel like she was on a cruise ship.

This one night, a girl was sitting next to Marith at the bowling alley. Tanya was a grad student in psychology, who laughed with a skittishness that said she always put all of herself out there. Tanya's pale skin looked like it bruised at the merest touch, so she probably thought all hurt was superficial, and her blonde hair flopped in front of her perfect cheekbones. She was so damn beautiful, and she was talking about operant conditioning in a way that made Marith's heart clatter. Any moment now, Tanya would realize that she was talking to a dull person, and then she would bail.

So when Tanya asked Marith about herself, she lied: "Well," she said, "I work in a record store. But actually I'm apprenticed to Timur. He's a sex prophet. He doesn't like the word 'guru' because it's appropriative, and he's not really a sex 'god' or anything. Just a prophet." She found herself talking about Timur for hours: his shrewd teachings, his ability to collect orgasmic energy (or "Argroms") in a kind of flower vase for later use. His ability to make anyone sexually crazy just by inscribing symbols in midair. Tanya wanted to meet this amazing man, of course, so Marith had to improvise.

"He doesn't want to meet any new people," Marith said, keeping her voice down, so Tanya practically had to kiss her to hear. "He's very secluded and reclusive and secretive. People are always trying to steal his secrets or investigate him or exploit him, so he has to be really really careful. He