

A Quick Novel

As the baby crawls under a towel that had been dropped upon it by the old man, accidentally, it must have been, for he did not have wrinkles around his eyes from suppressing a smile, more a slack face, slightly parted lips, tan cheeks and glasses which magnified his dull expression, the baby's parents are having a slightly stressed out conversation at a short distance on the small lawn surrounded by a chain link fence in back of the house where the old man had raised the baby's father, on Long Island. The rental car had been scratched. The baby emerges from under the towel and smiles really big, because babies when feeling well enough themselves are capable of at least trying to diffuse a situation with a good attitude. What do you think you were like as a baby?

In sixth grade in the mid-90s, a Chinese-American boy, whose parents are scientists who study fruit flies, offers his friend a piece of Chinese rock sugar. She has a shameful addiction to candy. She eats it and really enjoys it and he says, well, if you bring me a dollar fifty I can get you a whole bag. This was not the kind of candy she could get at her local Walgreens. She brings him the cash, and because he trusted her he had already brought the huge bag of clear rocks of sugar, which are totally pure with no flavor other than sugar. She knew this was nice of him to do, but she paid for it so at least it wasn't a present. She keeps it in her locker and eats from it throughout the day for weeks until it's all gone. It was against the rules to eat in the hallways at school, but the candy was clear so it didn't dye her mouth. Candy to a kid is pure pleasure, and she was afraid of her uncontrollable desire for it. Is there a distinction between doing something illegal and feeling a personal compulsion to do so?

The restaurant owner told the manager that the waitresses needed to wipe down the bases of the tables at the end of each shift. Always, whatever the list of required tasks was at the beginning of a job, there are new ones to be added as bosses become worried that the employees have grown complacent as they get better and therefore faster at whatever they'd originally been assigned to do. So the manager tells the waitress to get down on her knees and scrub the black metal feet. While halfheartedly rubbing back and forth, the waitress notices that some customer stuck gum on the bottom of the table. It's in her nature to become obsessed by something like this. It's true that the restaurant uses cloth napkins, so the patron would have had to ask for a piece of paper, or find one, or put the gum on the side of his plate. It makes sense to put gum on the bottom of a school desk, but doing it in a restaurant seems to be evidence of pure evil. Research has shown that children who torture animals and wet the bed are more likely to grow up to be serial killers, but it's harder to pin down what more disturbing behavior leaving gum behind for an underling predicts. Insulting a wife's looks? The waitress does not remove the gum and the boss forgets to ever again enforce the execution of the new task. Did you know it's much better to tip in cash?

Okay, so maybe it's better really to be very free. To not worry about pleasing people, or about receiving gifts that create an obligation. Do something with a friend when it feels natural, put

something together. Not everything has to be some dangerous exchange where you worry about what's fair or whether there is a strange power dynamic. Man, woman, success, age, sometimes the trust is just there and it's obvious to everyone who sees it, simply gorgeous. Have you seen the musical *Nice Work If You Can Get It*?

— Elise Duryee-Browner, 2019

This is the debut exhibition of Cytter / Roebas, a collaboration between Keren Cytter and John Roebas, featuring a musical contribution from Sergei Tcherepnin.