



And the last line of the dead text declared itself the living. Another book nobody would read.

Cliff longed to be alive in another time when men could be men he thought in a sarcastic tone to think like that. If he could experience research in the time that it took a scientist to when children hoist their freak flags up and take root on the various plateaus and the birds they're studying fall to pieces as the babies in eggs go blue stillborn yet again in the hospitals of the mind. The places away from home in the swinging sunlight where the tone and the time ring in the blessed equal frequency of an idiot's idea of god. His eyeballs were cracked shells and the bloodshot a map inside. He sank into his easychair hardened by the crystal mixture his wife Blanket had dosed with a liquid itch. In his memory he saw himself stuffing envelopes full of loose fur. Instinctively he picked at his teeth and pulled out a hairless kitten. The kitten's name was Juice Snob and it growled at Cliff like the sound of a boss chortling with their jowls full of a foreign substance or a cigar.

Every now and again in the future when Juice Snob wanted to be a hair cat Cliff had to make amends with his neighbor the barber. Stone Chi was not an easy man and a more difficult barber who relied on autopsies and affairs to get the energy needed to be and also the extra hair when he would inevitably fuck up a haircut time and time again. He had been sleeping with Blanket on and off again since the millennium turned and all the day jobs soured. He told Cliff that 9/11 was an outside job and Cliff didn't know what he meant by that and he just said that the planes never went inside the buildings and did he remember the bird that got caught inside their living room and how good friend and neighbor Stone Chi had been the one to snag it with his scissors slice the head of the bird clean off and it landed right in the fireplace so they lit a fire and that was 1997 exactly the same day he met Blanket for the first time and he brought the dead bird home to open up and look? Cliff could still smell the burning feathers in the new decade and also beyond but somehow the body remained intact.

It was easier to navigate the path with a friend but it was difficult to steal the discarded hair on his neighbor's floor. And the autopsies discovered so much loose hair growing inside the human body. The missing hair was not the issue but the thievery. We have no idea how much hair we have growing inside ourselves because we are only ever concerned with the outside hair. But kittens don't care.

He had to wait until his wife was screwing Stone Chi to sneak in and get fake fur for Juice Snob. It made him ill to glue the hair onto the cat's body because the cat was nearing thirty years old and its skin was decrepit and pockmarked from scars from years of glue. He could hear the sex sounds as he swept the various patrons' hairs in all the different colors into a plastic baggy with his hand. His mind awash with smiles of the rejuvenation of such an act. Cliff cut his own hair badly three times a year. And he thought about cutting himself open to find new hairs to harvest but he was far too afraid of death for that trip.

Juice Snob told Cliff when he was really confused and his mind was like an ocean swaying out of control like an earth isn't a cup for water that its birth was an egg birth and that Cliff's mouth was a nest mouth and he should try to fill it with his own hair but let someone else do the cutting either inside or out.

He wanted to commit vehicular manslaughter with a cat's fake fur when the cat is finally dead and the hair is made into a scarf to use for strength because you'll miss your friend and Stone Chi deserves to die. Not that Juice Snob was dead yet but maybe he was the years in between the waiting that are always already dead. The context became the gate of a mouth inside a cave underwater inside a marble squished into the blowhole of a leaky waterbed positioned precariously on top of a massive beached whale's blowhole. The whale was already dead. Beached whales are either dead or on vacation and there are no in-betweens.

There was another cat named Felicia who spelt her name with two y's and no i's and she told Cliff who borrowed one of those letters and shortened her as well as her name with an ax and the half-cat he called Fely was not as good for companionship but was better for riding like a grasshopper because that animal weighed near 900 pounds before the axing that she wanted life to be like that. Why would you say grasshopper? And not kangaroo? Why Clyff why?

He asked his wet wife after sex with Stone Chi if she wanted a letter from his new cat's name. We have a c. A y. And an a. But maybe also an i. He told her. You could use the i if you want to be Italian. Miss Blanketi. His fake Italian accent was so rotten that he got a severe concussion from the cannoli rain it spontaneously triggered.

Maybe it would be easier to kill Stone Chi if he rode Fely into the barbershop and jumped on him while he was holding the shears hopefully turning inward to make it look like suicide. But no barber would go out that way. He couldn't fit that big cat in his car that's for sure. And he couldn't wait for a perfect moment like that. Cars are so much better for death than coincidence.

You would struggle without a vowel and see me go hog wild without one in their husband's name. This is something you would do and do so gleefully without thinking. But I don't blame you. His wife's threatening tone seemed to say that the barber's arm was fully through inside her and had a hold of that moldy heart he'd tried to dry out and scrape like the toast is still warm. It was textbook passive aggression on a Tuesday afternoon when the swarm of the killer bees set loose by the psychopath society for free bee love rights or some other new age mystical animal polemic came a calling stingers out and ready for war. He'd been a pet owner not 24 hours and he was still waiting for 9/11 to happen in the mind of a child on the other side of the world.

This kid was named Glue Fort and he was over seven feet tall. Clyff told him he should play basketball inside the 9/11 and every 9/11 and Glue Fort wondered where the 9/11 court was and Clyff said probably that field in Pennsylvania where that other plane landed. Nobody knows what was under there after the charred remains of a big airplane smeared itself. It was probably not just grass or wheat or corn or weeds or food or football field at all. Concrete and a couple of hoop buckets and that is where the dream of the tall come home to roost like swallows in a murder. Singsong formations in the air drooled a type of silence you can't get until you let your own pets scratch inside your ear holes when you sleep so that's exactly what Clyff did. He drifted off. He bled onto his pillow. Blanketi cried.

He tasked Glue Fort with the ugly job of having to put his cheek against the porcelain and listen and it was hard enough what with his height to get in that position nevermind the insanity and the smell.

Halfway home between being deaf and dumb and blind and math never his strong suit. Clyff wished he still had that i as he sat limp on the toilet unable to hear his own turds drop down in the bowl. Glue Fort told him that he wanted to re-erect the 9/11 basketball court in Pennsylvania and then he told him plop plop so Clyff knew it was wiping time. They developed a sign language that the cats couldn't understand. But Juice Snob sighed because he figured it out ages ago.

Glue Fort asked Blanketi if she would be his mama on the most embarrassing day of the year. But in fact Blanketi had gone unabashedly full Italian with the gift of that extra vowel which her husband so delicately stole from a half a cat so she only spoke in an extremely remote dialect of a dead tongue a stone's throw beyond Latin from a tiny island off the boot. She screamed the word "irrumambo" so much until her voice fell out of her body and caused a second 9/11 inside Stone Chi's barbershop. Suspiciously he was outside doing lawn work at the time and survived. Everyone on the block cried when the towers fell but they were suspicious tears because nobody remembered the barbershop having two skyscrapers sticking out of it to begin with.

The harmony of their affair hit a snag when Stone Chi declared one couldn't become "ultra Italian" overnight and the tune he sang about it was a scream to rival Blanketi's own new hybrid form of talking which had morphed into the exact same voice of popular German singer David Lubega Balemezi. All of her words were "irrumambo" No. 5 now. And all of the birds of the neighborhood fell out of their trees when they heard the new sounds because they were jealous they could only make tweets and caws and sounds of that nature. And Stone Chi smiled at that. The thought of a thousand bird autopsies singing in his mind. Their tiny inside hairs the perfect finishing touch on some unknown future head.

Clyff set off to write a pamphlet full of anti-Italian propaganda and he asked Juice Snob for help. Juice Snob had just turned forty-one and was the oldest cat ever on earth and it did this favor on its deathbed because of all the times Clyff glued that hair for him. Together they wrote the most demeaning and beautiful anti-Italian screed ever set to paper. It was Clyff's idea to sign the paper "Stone Chi." To frame the barber so his wife would love him again. But he wasn't sure it would be enough so he asked Juice Snob for a second favor. Would the cat be so kind as to give him the i from its name before it died? And also the n and the o? Clyff thought Clyffino would be the best Italian name to woo back his wife Blanketi.

Juice Snob told Clyff that it just so happened to have an extra s lying around somewhere. And if that Clyff could just help find the letter then of course it would be willing to share its i and its n and its o. At first Clyff was confused. What does an s have to do with me? I don't need an s. No you idiot. The s is for me. For me to become CB Jesus. This is the name I was born to die with. And I will be dying soon. Together they frantically searched for the house for the missing s so that Juice Snob could become CB Jesus and Clyff could become Clyffino.

As it turned out the s was nowhere because Stone Chi had stolen it ages ago. He was going by “Stone Chis” (pronounced “Stone Cheese”) unbeknownst to them. Clyff got so angry he wished for six more 9/11s to fall upon his neighbor and his barbershop.

And so with that Juice Snob died. A genderless hairless cat born from the mouth of a man without a shred of a confidence or smarts or passion. Clyff picked at his teeth again hoping that another kitten would fall out but to no avail. He pondered whether or not it was ethical to steal the letters from the name of a dead pet as he stroked the pages of his anti-Italian literature. He added the stolen extra s to Stone Chi's name so that the forgery would be authentic.

He asked Glue Fort to bury the cat because he was too sad. But Glue Fort told him he didn't know how to bury things because he was descended from a long line of graverobbers. Clyff tried to explain to him that it was just like graverobbing but in reverse but Glue Fort didn't understand. He had little basketballs for eyes now and if it wasn't hoops related or basketball adjacent you might as well have been speaking in Blanketi's odd tongue.

It didn't take long for Stone Chis and Blanketi to break up once the anti-Italian pamphlet started circulating. Stone Chis didn't even deny he was the author because he actually 100% hated Italians and he thought this was just as well and actually Clyff had done him a favor though he didn't know and didn't care who penned the paper in reality. "Irrumambo!" She screamed. For even the Italian can become lonely.

After Clyff buried his cat he realized that only an Italian would do for his newly ultra Italian wife. So he said fuck it and told Glue Fort to go graverob the burial site of Juice Snob. It was time to steal the letters.

Clyff made a styrofoam gravestone that read “BC Jesus” because he forgot whether or not Juice Snob had wanted to be called that or CB Jesus. Little did he know that his quaint arts and crafts project would have the repercussions that it would.

As soon as he became Clyffino he could immediately understand his wife and they rekindled their marriage and their love in the most Italian way possible. Fely said she would likely die if she tried to jump across the Atlantic Ocean all the way to Italy but all parties agreed it was worth the risk for a second honeymoon. The corpse of the giant half-cat weighed exactly 450 pounds when it landed in the middle of St. Peter's Square. It was pretty squashed but Blanketi and Clyffino airmailed its remains to Stone Chis so that he could dissect it for fun because he had been so kind to look over both the childrearing of Glue Fort as well as their small business which was selling pro-9/11 shirts on Etsy.

They had gotten into exactly zero fights right up until the time came to board the flight back to the United States out of Rome when Clyffino asked his wife if she remembered their real last name was Everhart. I think it's German or maybe English. "Irrumambo!" She screamed over and over again and left the plane in tears. And just then Clyffino realized that the plane was a giant bird and that all planes were giant birds and all birds were planes and he unstuck himself from the feathers and looked up at the sky. And puked.

When the scientists who only study birds get the desire to kill they swim out into the ocean and murder giant whales by stuffing their blowholes with down blankets. They hate whales because they don't grow any hair inside their bodies.

Clyffino was in no position to go on living. But he had a boy back home that needed tending to as all sons need a proud papa to emulate or hate on. When he got back he was devastated to find out that Glue Fort had chosen Stone Chis as his new father and that his name was now Glue Chis (pronounced “Glue Cheese” which made Clyffino gag). But you never even changed your name when I was your father. And Glue Chis just laughed at that. So did Stone Chis and so did Blanketi who had morphed into a canary and was being kept as a pet in a hanging cage smack dab in the middle of the barbershop.

With his wife now a pet bird in the home of his former son's new dad Clyffino decided to get really into sports to take his mind off the pain. But the first basketball playoffs featured who else but Glue Chis going ham steak on the competition. Clyffino went out to the ocean and through his y and his two fs and his -ino ending into the sea. He was CLFF now and he thought the name in all capital letters and so that's what it was like some kind of commodity.

He decided to become a scientist in his remaining years on earth. He dedicated all of his time to finding out why animals make hair inside their bodies with a special focus on birds who made the cutest internal hairs. With his hat in his hands he went back to Stone Chis's barbershop and asked to see his wife.

Reluctantly Stone Chis let him in but he told him not to mind the tiny basketballs which were actually Glue's eyeballs which he was attempting to grow new basketball players with because he needed more basketball money. CLFF agreed not to look at them.

When he found his wife the ex-Italian canary she was near death. Shocked at her deplorable living conditions CLFF did what he should have done a long time ago. He rammed his car through the walls of Stone Chis's home and killed him as well as his mutant tiny basketball experiments. He was shocked to hear the little growing ball people scream when they died and he felt bad about that. He put Blanketi in his pocket and left.

What do you like to be called now that you are a bird?
Oh I don't really think I have a name. Most birds don't.
They didn't talk much during the walk out to the ocean.
CLFF had befriended a blue whale named Target
during his time as a scientist and he whistled on the
sand to let him know he was near. Target was the only
whale to ever live who beached itself for pragmatic
reasons. Target told them blue whales are called blue
whales because they are so sad about being so large
and that most large things are sad about being large.
CLFF's wife said she was sad about being so small
now that she was a bird. I guess I'm a blue canary. And
together the three of them sang the 1953 song "Blue
Canary" written by Italian-American songwriter Vic
Florino: "Blue canary, she feels so blue / She cries and
sighs, she waits for you / Blue canary, the whole day
long / She cries and tries to sing a song."

CLFF and his blue canary bride rode Target out into the vastness of the sea. When they got far enough away from land so that they couldn't see any of it Target admitted that whales did in fact grow hair inside their bodies but that the hair was so beautiful humans died instantly when they looked at it. Wanna see? CLFF was naturally reluctant because of his fear of death but the blue canary convinced him that if what Target said was indeed true she would fly away and tell the world about it and he would be a hero. So they entered the mouth of the whale together. It was wet and slimy and warm and CLFF looked around. And with a golden flash the lights went out.