New Nonfiction from M.C. Armstrong: “J.F.K. Revisited: Through the Looking-Glass”

I write this review of Oliver Stone’s new film during the most bizarre month in America since the January of the Capitol riots and the de-platforming of Donald Trump, a president who promised to release the final government files on the assassination of John F. Kennedy. This November, a subculture of Americans known as QAnon gathered in Dealey Plaza. During the same month that Khalil Islam and Muhammad A. Aziz were exonerated in the 1965 murder of Malcom X, QAnon held vigil in Dallas, Texas. The Q crowd sang Michael Jackson’s “We Are the World” as they awaited the resurrection of President Kennedy’s dead son, JFK Jr., at the site of his father’s murder. I think it’s fair to say that what the stories of Q and X tell us, at the very least, is this: America has a problem with truth-telling.

Enter Oliver Stone and *JFK Revisited: Through the Looking Glass*. I locate Stone’s film squarely in the camp of the lawyers, experts, and citizen-journalists who worked tirelessly to absolve Muhammad and Islam. Stone’s argument in this revelatory documentary, is that Lee Harvey Oswald may also be innocent. Aligning himself with the facts revealed by unredacted government documents from the 1990s, as well as the conclusions of the 1976 House Select Committee on Assassinations, Stone argues that President Kennedy was murdered by a CIA conspiracy. Whereas Trump and his supporters may have indeed *attempted* a coup d’etat on January 6, 2021, Stone argues that the CIA performed a successful coup on November 22, 1963.

Stone brings the receipts when it comes to proving what he calls the "conspiracy fact." *JFK Revisited* is structured around two parts. The first part, narrated by Whoopi Goldberg, offers a devastating and compelling forensic analysis of the murder. This segment alone is worth the price of admission. The second part, narrated by Donald Sutherland, invites viewers into the "why" of the murder and reveals, through the voice of Robert F. Kennedy's son, that on the day after the assassination in Dallas, the attorney general's first reaction was to call the CIA and ask if they had "conducted this horror." Of course, five years later, RFK himself would be gunned down in Los Angeles during his run for president.

The structure of the first part is chronological and goes something like this: Here is a vision of America in 1963 just before the assassination (we begin with President Kennedy's famous commencement address at American University, known to some as the "Peace Speech"). The summer is then followed by

the fall and the first eyewitness accounts of the murder. Then comes the story of revision, the eyewitnesses to a shooter from the famous “grassy knoll” suppressed or ignored as Lyndon Johnson places Allen Dulles, former director of the CIA, in charge of the investigation into the murder of the man who fired Dulles. After briefly recapitulating Dulles’ findings as detailed in the Warren Commission and giving voice to the dissenting members of that body (like Senator Russell Long), Stone follows that dissent as it builds into the 1970s and culminates with the American public witnessing the murder for the first time on national television when Geraldo Rivera asks the African American comedian, Dick Gregory, to narrate the killing as documented by the home movie known as “the Zapruder film.” Without citizen-journalists like Abraham Zapruder, it is quite possible that America, to this day, would still be under the spell of the Warren Commission.

Echoing the rhetorical power of Gregory and Rivera, Stone and Goldberg together tell the story of how Stone’s own dramatization of the murder, the 1991 movie, *JFK*, catalyzed renewed public interest in the assassination. Just as Rivera’s show helped create momentum for the work of the House Select Committee, so did Stone’s Academy Award-winning movie inspire a fresh release of JFK files during the Clinton administration. It is through these unredacted primary documents and from the testimony of experts like Cyril Wecht, former president of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences, that Stone constructs the strongest part of his argument: the refutation of the “magic bullet theory.” As part one concludes, Stone reveals that the chain-of-custody on the magic bullet was broken. He shows a future American president, Gerald Ford, altering evidence. He gives voice to three women witnesses from the Texas School Book Depository who were systematically suppressed from the public record. But perhaps, more important than anything, through this people’s history of the Kennedy assassination, Stone demonstrates that there were, beyond a reasonable doubt, more than three shots fired that

day in Dallas. And as members of the Warren Commission themselves knew, if there were more than three shots, than there was more than one gunman and, thus, a conspiracy.

Recent peer-reviewed scholarship from Josiah Thompson (*Last Second in Dallas*, University of Kansas Press, 2021) supports Stone's forensic analysis. This achievement of taking the story of the Kennedy assassination from "conspiracy theory" to "conspiracy fact" cannot be understated and could not have happened without a people's movement, a subculture of JFK researchers dedicated to discovering the truth. Much like those committed to the exoneration of Muhammad and Islam, this community has worked tirelessly over the span of decades in the name of justice. *JFK Revisited* is a tremendous democratic accomplishment, especially considering the ongoing obstacles of state propaganda in collaboration with corporate media partners. What remains uncertain, however, and what constitutes the weaker part of Stone's film, is the "why" and the "who." I wouldn't blame viewers who walk away from the two-hour version of *JFK Revisited* still hungry for answers.

Stone claims Kennedy was killed because the thirty-fifth president wanted to end the Cold War and went behind the CIA's back to broker peace with Russia and Cuba, among others. Stone, a veteran of the Vietnam War, argues through a host of primary documents, that Kennedy wanted to end the war in Vietnam, not escalate it like his successor, Lyndon Johnson. However, if the second part of the film doesn't convince you that a war-crazed CIA was behind the conspiracy, perhaps Stone's soon-to-be-released four-hour version will more thoroughly address that question. Or perhaps the "why" and the "who" will continue to evade the American public until this country has a leader with courage. Donald Trump was not that president. He did not keep his campaign promise. He caved to CIA appeals and refused to release the final JFK files. Maybe Joe Biden, who often poses with a bust of RFK in the Oval Office, will be that man. Early in his career, Biden often

talked about the legacy of the Kennedy brothers and the tragic consequences that followed out of their murders. As late as 2019, Biden went on the record to talk about the way the assassinations of “the late 70s” still haunted the political landscape. Journalists had to correct Biden and remind him that these murders took place in the 1960s. But Biden, at the very least, seems to know that President John F. Kennedy, like his son, is dead. *JFK Revisited* will not be able to convince QAnon supporters that Kennedy and his son are never coming back. But for that small silenced minority of Americans who still read and don’t think of truth as some kind of joke worthy of air-quotes, Stone’s documentary just might do that thing that our post-truth culture seems algorithmically designed to prevent: It might just change your mind.

The Spotlight Trial

“Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.”

-The Gospel of John

One day you’re a teenage girl in the arms of Fidel Castro and you’re carrying the Christ child of the Christless revolution and you’re thinking this man needs a filling between his front teeth and then he will be perfect. The next you’re a lonely New Yorker taking a long walk just so you can sleep. It’s getting late. You clutch the American’s letter in your hand and stall by the summer stoop under the lightning on a night warm and wet like a mouth, the flashes revealing skyscraper spires and a proud trumpeting pig in the passing racks of silver nimbus. Most people don’t have enough imagination for reality. They find their only paints in the office and the TV and the two or three streets of their Saturday nights. You are

not one of these people, though tonight you wish you were.

Photo: Handout.
https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/4777676/jfk-files-confir

m-elaborate-cia-plots-to-kill-fidel-castro-included-exploding-sea-shell-and-contaminated-diving-suit/

The American lawyer wants you to tell your story. You hear thunder like the echo of a shot. You hear a click. You look over your shoulder at the door to your Queens apartment but it is only the old Italian with the brittle papery hands and the tomato garden where he seems to spend every hour of his summers.

You wave. You walk inside to a warm laundry smell that reminds you of candy, black and white subway tiles checkered beneath your feet except that one bare spot beneath the chandelier. This missing tile—this is you.

And the American wants to return you to your place.

Dallas.

Dallas. Dallas. Dallas. You imagine old American Indian women saying it around a fire while poking a pale doll with a needle. Dallas. Dallas. Dallas.

The American has organized his entire life around this one city and this one day and this one man named Eduardo and the American sees you as his key, his missing piece. He seems like some kind of lonely figure obsessed with a jigsaw puzzle: the body of John F. Kennedy. Who is the one woman who can fill in the holes? How many others are there like the American, lost men in small rooms staring into holes, waiting for the black jewel of your tale.

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You stand against the window holding the American’s letter between your thumb and your forefinger, hoping for another flash of lightning. The top of the Empire State building needles into the sky as if in bequest of the same strike, the start of the storm. You could turn on the TV, what you

sometimes call “the boob tube,” but you don’t care about the Olympics or the talk shows or the news. Instead you stand for a moment waiting for the rain, trying to make out the words of your Soviet neighbor next door with his grouchy wife and sick daughter. You listen to the Russian, the music of the dying revolution, the squabbling over the heat and the TV. You read the letter out loud:

“There will be no telephone service in the room,” the American says.

You almost trust his assurance. You have always been a fool for a strong voice, all these men like Eduardo and Fidel who want to protect you and feel they know the story of the future.

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A small woman with chestnut hair and a turtle brooch sits silent in the corner, prepared to record your story. This is the best most women can hope for: a place in the room. Like the blacks who mop the floors and the Mexicans who clean the sheets, most women in America move silently around the white men with the booming voices. Silence is survival. You know this. To come from Germany is to know a story that dwarves the evil of all others, but it is also to know that you do not tell that tale while the beast is still alive if you wish to survive.

“Come to Miami,” the American says.

“You are lucky to have me here,” you say.

You are lucky to be alive. You have been on the edge of death your entire life. Your mother was born in America. Like you, she fell in love with a foreigner and tried to help the laborers in Bremen escape the wrath of the Fuhrer and this is how a child ends up in the camp at Bergen-Belsen. This—this American blood—is how you end up daring enough—foolish

enough—to fall in love with Fidel and because of your ties of love to this one man you now have ties to the men who hate him and so here you are in this beige room across the street from Madison Square Garden with the American. You are the daughter of a German sailor and an American actress and now here you are standing in a black dress in a hotel next to the biggest stage in New York City with one more chance to sing your song.

The American keeps pressing you about coming to Miami for the trial. He wears the black Buddy Holly glasses you used to see everywhere in New York. Like you, he is not as young as he once was. You dye your hair. He does not. He takes off his glasses for a moment and taps the temples against his forehead. This is the man Lee Harvey Oswald's mother chose to represent her son. But the Warren Commission refused to accept him as the assassin's advocate. Dick Gregory, the famous black comedian, made this white man his vice-presidential candidate in 1968 for the Freedom and Peace Party, but now this American, like you, is largely forgotten. You are his last chance at a second act. And perhaps he is yours.

"If you don't come to Miami, I'm going to have to hire an actress to read your testimony in court," he says.

"How perfect," you say.

"Could be," he says. "But it might also ring hollow and contrived. People want the real thing."

"There you are wrong," you say. "People want the performance, not the facts. Look at the president. Why am I telling you this? You know this."

"I know a courtroom," he says.

"You don't know these people," you say. "They have killed and would not hesitate to kill again."

You know these people. FBI. CIA. Army Intelligence. Whenever

they get caught they change names like the corporations. The American returns his glasses to his face. He stares at you, as if seeing you for the first time—as if still trying to grasp the strangeness of your life, the incredible fact of your survival. Who else can build the bridge from Hitler to Havana to Dallas? Can the American see what Fidel saw—the ghostly glint of the eighteen-year old girl you once were? If beauty blinds men and ruins revolutions, you also know that it opens their eyes and fuels their fires and prepares them to die for an ideal rather than merely survive in the name of retiring to some small white home on a golf course in Florida. You were once the one who lit the fire. You were the one with the entire world wrapped around her finger. You were the one the young *lider* wanted and the one the old white men needed to kill him when he grew too big. But somehow, you and Fidel are still alive, and so is your son, Andre, who has has your eyes and your mouth and Fidel's nose, and maybe you are here because you want to give him a better world and maybe you are here because some part of you will always be faithful to Fidel.

"Let's talk about Eduardo," the American says.

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The American looks you in the eye and asks you about your present employment, but you just smile. You cannot tell him the truth. The closest you can come is telling him that you cannot tell him the truth. That is the truth. You refuse to give your home address. But when he finally asks if you have been employed by the Central Intelligence Agency, you answer, "Yes," and even the stenographer with the turtle brooch looks up, and outside a car honks its horn twice like they do every day in New York, but the sound makes you sick today because you know their ears are everywhere.

The American continues to question. You cannot believe Eduardo is foolish enough to bring this lawsuit against this tiny

magazine—*The Spotlight*. It is like there is some sick part of him that wants to give the left exactly what they want. Like he, too, wants to tell the truth before he dies. Or maybe Eduardo has become just another tired throwaway governed by the terrible truth at the black scoured bottom of America: money.

“During and prior to November 1963, did you live in Miami, Florida?” the American asks.

“Yes,” you say. “I did.”

“During and before November of 1963, did you work on behalf of the Central Intelligence Agency in the Miami area?”

“Yes.”

“Did you work with a man named Frank Sturgis, while you were working for the CIA?”

The American removes his glasses and skims the temples against his forehead. The motto of the CIA is from the Bible: “And ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.” If by free they mean dead, sure. Fine. You imagine the actress who will perform your lines in Miami with her chest thrust out and her lipstick bright red and her eyes dark and defiant like you when you were young and the world seemed a tree full of ripe low-hanging fruit. And you were not the only one who was once young. You know the American lawyer thought he could do what will never be done. You know he thinks CIA stands for “Capitalism’s Invisible Army.” You know he thinks you have served the devil and that the devil can be killed, somehow separated from God.

The American still believes. And maybe you do, too. It feels good not to lie for once. You admit to knowing and working with “Frank Sturgis.” You go further and tell the American that you knew him as “Fiorini” and “Hamiliton” and when the American asks you if you ever witnessed anyone give money to

Fiorini for the work both of you were doing on behalf of the CIA, you say:

“Yes.”

And with this one word you know you have just shot a hole into Eduardo’s story. Fiorini is the bridge. Eduardo claims *The Spotlight* ruined his life and convinced his children that he is Kennedy’s killer. He testified in the first trial that Fiorini—Frank Sturgis—never worked for the CIA and Eduardo won, but the magazine has appealed with the American as their new attorney and the only way now that they can strip Eduardo of his precious money is if they catch him in a fiction.

You imagine Eduardo played by Paul Newman but you know Paul Newman would never play a man everyone knows to be a murderer, a thief, and a swinger, so you imagine Gene Hackman instead. The Lex Luthor villain character from the Superman movie. You see Sally Field as the actress who plays the actress who plays you. You see Eduardo’s shiny bald head and those predatory eagle eyes and that Florida tan and that thin glint of a smile that was so cool and calm in November of 1963 before Capitalism’s Invisible Army killed their president, killed his killer, and then threw Eduardo into prison for the Watergate burglary like a common criminal. Today is not the first time that Eduardo’s last name—Hunt—has struck you as the perfect description for the life he has chosen.

“Who,” the American asks, “did you witness make payments to Mr. Sturgis?”

You see Sally Field bite her lip the way she does when she’s nervous. You see Anjelica Huston and Sonia Braga. You see Hackman smile next to a greasy lawyer played by the nephew of a director who is funded by the mob, the famous smile a wink to that one viewer who waits around in the theater after everyone else has left to study the maps of lies and compromise and money anyone can read in the credits, all those

fake names and those lawyers and editors who make sure nobody says anything too dangerous.

You bite your lip. You glance at the stenographer whom you imagine as Sissy Spacek. When the American asks you the name of the one with the money, you say:

“A man by the name of Eduardo.”

For the first time the American smiles. And his grin is not so different from all the others. Fidel, Kennedy, Hunt—they were all hungry young men on a mission and
you were always running their errands, wearing the costumes, the shawls and sunglasses. You see those days in Miami like a black and white movie in your mind: strangers passing through a square, a man looking like a banker, a woman like a housewife on her way to pick up the laundry. Eduardo was the moneyman and Francisco handled the guns and contacts. A live drop meant Eduardo put the cash in your hand like a husband giving his wife a bit of spending money before a business trip. A dead drop meant a briefcase or a brown bag left at a bench or an envelope stuffed in a mailbox marked with chalk or soap.

“Did you go on a trip with Mr. Sturgis from Miami during November of 1963?” the American asks.

You remember it like it was yesterday. You remember the wind from the open window as you drove north, the laughter of the men at the gas station with the old bald tires sitting flaccid in the weeds. There were seven of you before you arrived in Dallas. You see the sky over the gas station again: the grasping racks of clouds over the barren land, the brown mangy hound tied by a chain to a phone booth, the way it rose up on its hind legs to try to capture a fly in its mouth. Eduardo had not yet joined the party. He was on his way from DC.

“Was there one or more cars?” the American asks.

“There was a follow-up car,” you say.

“Does that mean two cars?”

“Backup,” you say. “Yes.”

“What was in the follow-up car, if you know?”

“Weapons.”

This was what the men liked to talk about more than anything: their weapons. The new guns and the new bullets. The scopes and the range. The angles and the number of shots it would take and you kept asking yourself, “What am I doing?” as you passed normal Americans driving south with men looking at maps and children looking out the windows and billboards for Coca-Cola with women in bikinis smiling to a single hand coming out of nowhere with a Coke and the single word, “Yes,” on the sign, but you were thinking, “No.”

“Did Mr. Sturgis tell you where you would be going from Miami, Florida, during November of 1963, prior to the time that you traveled with him in the car?”

“Dallas, Texas,” you say.

There’s that name again. The needle in the neck of the pale doll.

“He told you that?” the American says.

“Yes.”

“Did he tell you the purpose of the trip to Dallas, Texas?”

“No,” you say. “He said it was confidential.”

You almost betray more, but you have been trained well. There is a fine line between the obedient housewife and the intelligent operative. You take orders and you get taken care of. You speak when spoken to. Fidel was the same way with you. Most men are. They don’t really want to know what a woman thinks or remembers, but you remember everything and anyone with half a brain remembers what everyone was talking about in Miami in 1963: Kennedy, Kennedy, Kennedy. They called him a pantywaist and a nigger-lover. They called him a communist and

the anti-christ and a sonofabitch and they called him a traitor for letting all of those men die on the beach—the *bahia de cochinos*—and they—Francisco and Eduardo—they were always talking about "the fall" and "the beach," and you were no idiot. You knew exactly what the talk was all about. What you weren't exactly sure of was why Eduardo wanted you involved, but the more cigarettes you smoked on the road to Dallas the more you believed Eduardo knew that you still loved Fidel because you did and if Eduardo knew what was in your heart—and Eduardo knew everything—he would use you like he did everyone else and would throw you away to get exactly what he wanted and you knew exactly what Eduardo wanted. Eduardo wanted Fidel dead. He wanted World War III. Eduardo wanted to return to the beach.

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You want to know what the actress will look like. Sally Field is too fragile, not enough bite. You imagine some stock raven-haired refugee the American finds in a Miami theater troupe for a couple bucks, a little thing sticking out her chest as she places her right hand on the Bible and raises her left like a robot. You can hear her heaving her whispers at the obese jury. You see the scattered silhouetted heads of show-goers watching you scowl at Gene Hackman as you tell your story in a movie you know the Americans will never have the balls to make.

The American flips the page of his legal pad. For a moment, you remember that there are two Americas, two hundred and fifty million Americas, and this one has risked his life for the truth. You see him played by Gregory Peck. Atticus Finch suddenly in color, his hair going salt and pepper as he tells the obese amnesiacs in the jury the story they don't want to hear.

"After you arrived in Dallas," the American asks, "did you stay at any accommodations there?"

“Motel,” you say.

This one word tells the tale. Motel. Not a hotel where families laugh and husbands toast wives in a bright-lit lobby. No. You stayed at a motel, a small anonymous roadside hive of strangers plotting sex and death.

“While you were at that motel, did you meet anyone other than those who were in the party traveling with you from Miami to Dallas?”

“Yes.”

“Who did you meet?’

“E. Howard Hunt.”

You cough a laugh as you imagine Gene Hackman wincing and Eduardo wincing at the fact of Hackman wincing on screen. You see yourself walking into your apartment tonight as the actual Hunt, clad in a black turtleneck, waits for you behind your door and whispers “bitch” into your ear as he crushes your hyoid bone with his black gloved hands before tossing you down to the street where the lazy police and the lazy reporters from the tabloids will, of course, call your death a suicide.

“Did you see Mr. Hunt actually deliver money to anyone in the motel room which you were present in?”

“Yes,” you say.

“To whom did you see him deliver the money?”

“He gave an envelope of cash to Frank Fiorini.”

“Did anyone else enter the room other than you, Mr. Fiorini, Mr. Hunt, and others who may have been there before Mr. Hunt arrived?”

“No.”

“Where did you see the person you identified as Jack Ruby?”

This will be the moment the camera pans back to the obese amnesiacs in the American jury. Here will be the moment where the movie’s musical montage breaks and silence plays its seven-second role in the American mind. See the septuagenarian schoolteacher with the nervous sniffle and the octagonal glasses and the varicose veins. See the pale carbuncled walrus-faced machinist as the name “Jack Ruby” dawns in his pouchy eyes, the black and white television memories of his youth struggling to latch onto the colored drama of hazy middle age, the tragedy that so badly wants to remain a comedy.

If one day an actress will perform the actress who performed you, who will perform the killer who killed the killer to hide the identities of the true killers? You will never forget Jack Ruby. There he was: the mob guy who asked, “What’s the goddamn broad doing here?” Fiorini told him to be quiet, that you were part of the team, but Ruby said, “I don’t do business with broads,” and you couldn’t stand his macho bullshit. You stared at this squat, egg-shaped man with his stubby fingers and sebaceous skin and his adenoidal voice and his sick furtive smile, this man who would later bark Ozzie’s name before killing him on national television. There you were, the only “broad” in that smoky little motel room. You tell the American that Ruby arrived forty-five minutes to an hour after Eduardo left.

“When you say Eduardo, who are you referring to?”

“E. Howard Hunt,” you say.

You repeat the name with mock irritation. You know it is important that the American and his actress repeat the name E. Howard Hunt, like a chorus, as many times as possible. Hunt. Hunt. Hunt. America’s amnesia is fueled by names like Eduardo, Francisco, and Marita. Names like pills. White pills they

remember. Dark pills they forget. The “E” stands for Everette. Everette Howard Hunt, unlike most of his countrymen, could speak both Spanish and English. If you were a member of Operation 40, as you were, you spoke at least two tongues and had at least two names. You were all actors playing parts your entire lives. That was the great thrill of the CIA. It was all a performance. The name for the Dallas movie was *The Big Event*. Everyone in America, it turns out, bought a ticket to the show. Except you and the American and all the others who are now dead.

“Screw this mission,” you told the team that night.

You left that Dallas motel room the day before they murdered Kennedy in the streets and you returned to Miami where you saw it all on TV. Eduardo never imagined a Russian immigrant with a handheld camera could ruin his plan. The man with the home movie of the killing was named Abraham. Abraham Zapruder. He was a dress-maker and he captured the president’s head exploding and he captured the president’s wife in her pink dress and her pink hat crawling all over the brain-spattered back of the black convertible as it drove through Dallas. This is the movie that shows the shots. This is the movie that changed America forever.

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On a cold February night, your handler calls you to tell you that Leslie Armstrong, the foreperson of the Miami jury, has spoken to the local cameras, claiming that the evidence in the trial clearly revealed that President Kennedy had been murdered by his own government with the assistance of the plaintiff, E. Howard Hunt. Armstrong asked for the government to take responsibility and bring the killers to justice.

“This is not going to end well,” your handler says.

You say nothing.

“If this goes national, you’re in big trouble,” you are told. “Big big trouble.”

You smile and hang up. You pour yourself a glass of wine and wait for the nightly news, a break from the daily numbing charade of Reagan and the Russians. But Tom Brokaw, Walter Cronkite’s dashing but slightly effeminate young successor, doesn’t mention the trial. He doesn’t say a word about Miami or Eduardo. Sometimes NBC needs to wait for the CIA to know what they can say. So, with the rest of America, you wait. You turn up the heat. You mute the game show, but keep the picture on the screen in case the news breaks through.

You listen to the Russians through the walls, the horns of the cabs. You rifle through your bills. You throw away a summons for jury duty. You take off your shoes and sip on your Cabernet with your feet up on the couch and you now turn on the sound and watch the new show about the black family in Brooklyn with the doctor-father played by the famous comedian, Bill Cosby.

“Heathcliff Huxtable!” says the doctor’s wife in a mock-scolding tone.

They call the black doctor Heathcliff on the show, like the orange cartoon cat. Doctor Heathcliff Huxtable. The alliterative name, coupled with Huxtable’s nostalgia for jazz and his sweaters that seem both a tribute and an insult to Jackson Pollock—they all combine to suggest—no—you don’t want to say it. You are glad the blacks have their show. After what happened to King and the Kennedys the least they can do is give them this show with a good father.

You wait for the urgent horns, the symphonic interruption, the return of Tom Brokaw. As you finish your glass of wine and the laugh track triggers a smile at a line you don’t even hear, you wonder how the American pulled it off. You see Gregory Peck thundering and this woman named Armstrong actually

listening to the argument and you see Gene Hackman wincing and you wonder: Did Eduardo get too cocky? Did he explode in front of the obese amnesiacs and shake them out of their trance with his entitled anger? Who was this Leslie Armstrong who dared to dress down the American government on camera? Years later at a party, just after Eduardo dies, you will talk with an Israeli who was also sworn to secrecy for her entire life, and the two of you, the German and the Jew, will laugh about Fidel and Eduardo and their appetites and how America has no stomach for the truth.

“The truth in America,” the woman will say, “is like constipation. You know the business has to come out. You know you will die if it does not. But it surprises you how long a body can last.”

But that is the future. For now, before the constipation and the inflammations and Hollywood coming to you for the rights to your life, you drink your Cabernet and laugh along with America at the black family in Brooklyn. The show is so good there is a small part of you that prays that the news break will wait until *Cheers*, the show about the bar in Boston tended by the retired baseball player with the saddest name in the world: Sam (M)alone. You are like this Sam Alone. And you have a little crush on Ted Danson, the actor who plays Sam. You wish him well. You don’t want Sam to end up with Diane. You want him to wait, because admit it: if he does not the show will end, and when it finally does begin and the fat jolly Norm sits down with the erudite mustachioed postal worker named Cliff and the two men begin to drink away their day, you pour another glass of wine and you join them. You fall asleep years before the news finally breaks.