

My Friend the Hollywood Freeway

Tom Webster

Francis thumped the eight track tape player (with cassette adapter, of course, never leave home without it) and heard a brief

...The rum poured strong and thin...blehblehbleh...[hack,wheeze]...without the raindogs..

from Tom Waits. Wrong Album, dumbshit, arff, innit, innnit INNIT? Frances bludgeoned himself mentally, an occasional follower of Masoch and Sade, if only within the frame of his own mind. He imagined what life would be like if everyone knew exactly how everyone else felt, and daydreamt of many attractive women from various exotic locales with hmmmuh lotsa oh yes lotsa brains who would fawn most pityingly on him muttering things like "I'll do anything to relieve the stress" and strong tall firm-handshake type distinguished doctors with white coats gold-rimmed (please must be real gold yep) glasses saying solemnly "I know I would never take the stress of that brilliant mind" or "omigod, look at these brain waves never before seen in a human!" and Frances, dumbshit wildman that everyone knew and didn't respect

...and had a tumor as big as an egg, sang Tom Waits again, from the stereo, (Fast forward, said Frances, and pushed it)

and the dream was so amazingly F-I-N-E fine to ol' Frances that he smiled wide enough (he thought) so that the top of his head would catch the wind tearing through the Dart and rip the top of his skull right off. Uggh, he thought, and came back to reality, realizing his basic role in everyone's eyes as a ridiculous fuckup, and

Frank settled down in the valley, Tom Waits was yet again muttering, and hung his wild years on a nail that he drove through his wife's forehead...(right song!, Frances, exultant)

Scowled most resolutely at the horsefaced woman in the wood-panelled station wagon driving next to him. Decided that he might as well give her a shot of his good side, too.

“Heh heh heh,” he chuckled, trying to look about his own age, yet have a hmmmuh older thing maybe his face a bit worn, yes, the leather thing, face like Corinthian car seat leather (mahogany) and a certain world weariness, a look like he, Frances, was looking for a kind o’ peace but would of course never ever find it and was resigned to it [sigh] after all somebody’s gotta be tough, he supposed. He composed that basic feeling on his

He got a job selling used office furniture down San Fernando road, assumed a thirty thousand dollar loan at a fifteen and a quarter percent interest...Tom rasped.

face and looked to the horse-faced woman on his left.

She was gone.

“Shit,” he said, “Gaw-damn.” He pressed the lighter button on the dash and yanked a Old Gold from a freshly open pack. He got the cigarette between his lips just as the lighter went sproing! and stood erect for service. He lit the cigarette and puffed deeply to get the end lit all the way around, some smoke going out his nose and some his mouth and

...and put a down payment on a little two bedroom place. His wife was a spent piece of used jet trash made good bloody marys kept her mouth shut most of the time...same song. Same cheesy organ

Frances plucked the smoke from his mouth and held it just behind the mirror on his left. And realized he had slowed down to fifty. He stuck the cigarette back in the corner of his mouth, got a grip with his teeth.

“Shit,” he said around the cigarette, and floored the accelerator. The Dart, made by happy union people in 1967, roared back to seventy-three. Frances smiled.

“Hey, you, you little goddamn bastard!” said a voice from his left. Frances turned. Sized the guy up. Business man, he thought. Suit jacket hanging up. Cadillac. Suspenders. Short hair. Asshole.

“Hey! fuck you!” the man said.

...and had a little chihuahua named Carlos who had some kind of skin disease and was totally blind [ahem]. They had a fairly modern kitchen with all the conveniences, self-cleaning oven, the whole bit (Frances cut the treble a hair.)

Frances was in fact a bit disappointed. The angry man next to him was obviously the angry man who had been behind him a moment ago, and what the hell, so he, Frances did not have cruise control. It was, thought Frances, a petty frigging gripe, and a rather lame outburst.

“Go piss up a rope,” he replied, rather haughtily.

“You little bastard! You’re a goddamn menace!”

Frances smiled. Ah, he thought, maybe we can have some fun this merry morn.

“You wanna menace?” he asked.

Just then, Frances noticed a pair of dogs on the highway ahead. One appeared dead, and the other appeared to be guarding the body. Frances slowed down so that the business individual could cut out of the extreme lane and therefore avoid hittin the dog(s), but the driver of the Caddy failed to demonstrate any care and plowed the dog under.

Frank drove a little two-door sedan. They were so happy [growl]
Francis turned the volume up.

Unfortunately for the dog, the ride didn’t end there as the Caddy had not quite managed to kill the poor mutt on impact, but, as the dog leapt to one side in one of the finest demonstrations of grace seen on this planet, or anywhere at all as far as Frances was concerned, the bumper hooked the beast’s collar and snapped his neck. And so we all go, thought Frances philosophically, and then brutally, pummeling himself mentally again. Thud thud thud. Whack feel remorse, he said, whack whack whack. The agony/?/ecstasy cleared, leaving Frances hard as a diamond, a lesser vulcan.

“You wanna menace?” asked Frances again.

The Caddy driver, oblivious to the dangling, bouncing package of meat attached to his bumper (rear), tried to cut Frances off. Frances laughed and gunned the engine further.

one day, Frank stopped at a liquor store on the way home from

work and bought a couple of Mickey's Big Mouths, drank them in the car across from the Shell station, bought a gallon of gas in a can, the growl modified by the whipping wind.

Frances slammed his left front bumper into the right rear of the Caddy. Meohmy, I'm da road warrior! he thought. The dog tore free and rolled in front of the following vehicle.

doused everything in the house. Torched it, intoned the radio.

Whamwhamwham went Frances's car into the rear of the Caddy. Frances kept revving the bobbing, revving and bobbing, much like old Muhammed Ali, floating like a butterfly, stinging like a a...Dart. Frances was overjoyed with his wonderful wordplay, and sucked fresh tar and nicotine into his formerly healthy lungs. Ah, it won't really matter, he thought, I'm not planning a particularly long life in any case, not with all this attendant nay even compulsory (word learned at the elementary level, the hard way) bashing of Caddies. Hip-ho. He turned the radio up.

Frank parked across the street laughing, watching it burn, all Halloween orange—

Tires screeching, Frances's car groaned and his heart sang as he pursued the killer of dogs down the highway, in and out of moving traffic. The tape machine stumbled, blurred. Returned.

...and chimney red.

The Caddy, harried unto its death, made a last gasp of effort as Frances watched the owner attempt a call on the car phone, and then suddenly the car swerved aside, rolling over and over off the highway into a ditch with flames and a tremendous big bavoomroom pop! and a final slam into a tree on a bounce, nose of the car pointed down, rear pointed at the sky, midair, top impact with oak tree wraparound whammobammo. Francis was so engaged in the mirror's image that he didn't notice the truck that the Caddy had been following and plowed into it, impact very gentle, but firm and insistent. It hooked the Dart's mangled bumper to the steel steps on the back of the semitrailer, and neatly rapped Frances's head on the

steering wheel, causing him to expire as his skull cracked. The truck driver, mistaking the slight jolt of the joining for some goddamn concussion thinger another from the explosion did his Civic Duty and called in the Caddy's demise on the CB. He really didn't have the time to check a crash that could not possibly have any survivors, because he had a fresh load of horsemeat that he needed to get to the Alpo plant. Helluva wreck.

Frank tuned into a Top Forty station, got on the Hollywood Freeway and headed North. Never could stand that dog. The song ended.

Back up the highway, a bedraggled man crawled, life leaking out his side, up out of the ditch where his car still burned. He had recognized the Dart from the beginning.

"Goddamit, Frances, wait until your mother hears about this. Gonna call that bitch when I get home."

Frances's father Frank is upset because he was trying to call her before the car crashed. Of course, with that odd fire incident between them two years ago, he might have suspected that she wouldn't answer the goddamn phone, knowing that it might be him. He mutters again, as the ambulance pulls up.

"Fucking kid," he says, "fucking kid," and died.