

## **TRACK 1. INTRO**

BACK IN THE DAY, Franco told T they were gonna take this trip. Hop the Turnpike straight outta Jersey. Fill up on Philly cheesesteaks. Run the Rocky stairs. Blaze through the dirty dirty. Push a hunid thirty thirty. Refuel at a bodega in Talladega. See the city serenade that is a Nawlins jazz parade. Next to West Texas. Watch them Friday night lights burn bright. Rent a Stang, a '66, on Route 66. Eat enchiladas in East LA. Cruise Crenshaw with Dre. Catch a Little Tokyo drift and coast up the coast. Raid a Raider game. Mosh in a Wash mosh pit. Hit a rodeo in Colorado. See the Cubs in Chicago. Walk eight miles on 8 Mile. Believe in Cleveland and steal through Steel City. Ship up to Boston. Stomp through them mean towns of Beantown. Then catch the Bombers in the Bronx. A Chappelle show at the Apollo. And cross the Hudson River line. In a Jersey state of mind.

Breeze back to their own blue-collar melting pot that was a little like all of the above but exactly like none. Exit 11 along that oil tank Turnpike stretch of Jersey. The one Tony Soprano leaves in his rearview as his Escalade escalates to greener pastures. A place too small to be a city. Too broke to

be a burb. Too rough to be rural. Just a town. A tough little Turnpike town. The last of a line of them tucked underneath Newark. Elizabeth. Linden. Carteret aka Carteruff. Rahway. Where the inmates get it the raw way. And the town where the iconic prison actually resides. Woodbridge. Aka Hoodbridge. The Wood. The Hood. By any name, a town. Surrounded by a steel cage of bridges and refineries, warehouses and highways, rail yards and jail yards.

A town set in the eastern pinch of the state. Where the North Jersey head, the South Jersey body, the NYC shoulder, and the Long Island arm all meet. The armpit. Where the Turnpike (aka I-95), the Parkway, (I-)287, and US Routes 440, 9, and 1—the nation’s longest north-south highway—all converge. When Franco would sail his Stang over the Driscoll Bridge at night, he and little T would have a bird’s-eye view of the whole thing. A town laced with hundred-year-old highways hauling cars anywhere but there. Taillights on the Turnpike North to New York. Taillights on the Parkway South to Sea Bright. Taillights on 287 to suburban heaven. Taillights hightailin it on Highway 9. Taillights on highways headed anywhere but there. Woodbridge. The strained heart of Jersey. Pushing taillights along aging arteries.

Franco was one of the exceptions. Mainlining his blue Mustang into whichever vein brought him back to his hometown. The one full of cramped cottages, brick boxes, aging apartments. A bi-level if you were ballin. Occupied by residents who mowed their own lawns. Painted their own places. Helped friends move for a six-pack and a pizza. Boys from the hood rocking hoodies. Girls from around the way wearing stunner shades. All playing spades. Little tykes on their bikes. Cutting through old-timers. Immigrants. And everyone in between.

Franco saw the whole world in Woodbridge. A township

of nine baby boroughs. Firefighters affording houses in Fords. Indians integrating Iselin. Hispanics hooping in Hopelawn. Hippies n homies smokin Ls in Avenel. All kinds of crazies in Keasbey. The classy in the colonials of Colonia. Backyard weddings in Port Reading. Double-shifted longshoremen snorin in Sewaren.

All that and more in the primogenitor. The borough of the township’s namesake. Woodbridge. To distinguish Woodbridge borough, one of nine pups in the litter that was Woodbridge Township, people referred to it as “Proper.” To Franco, it was anything but.

It was a town older than America that had grown as motley as today’s America. The crossroads of the state that was the crossroads of the colonies that was, as Franco figured, the crossroads of the country. Connecting north to south. Red to blue. Old to new. Either a perfect alchemy. Or an insane stew.

In March of ’08, it was looking like the latter. One that would swallow up Franco and T both.

## TRACK 2. THE FIGHTER

FRANCO AND T walked the streets of Woodbridge that mad March day. Albeit in separate ways. As it was these days. Franco gettin ready for a fight. T hoping to avoid one.

Franco broke into a jog despite the weather hitting the northeast trifecta—cold, rainy, windy. His dark hair damp. A single curl defied the downpour. His soaked black thermal barely trapped his traps. Ran along his ripped arms as he ran along the ripped-up roads. Getting to the matter at hand. The matter that had him up at six in the morning. Training for the last fight of his contract. His last, period, if he didn't come correct. *Six in the morning*. Joggin in jacked-up weather while Snoop and Dre were drinkin gin n juice.

Franco must've ran Main Street a million times. But he'd still get nostalgic. He breezed by St. John's. His favorite building. The Catholic church looked like somethin outta the Renaissance. The peak. The spire. The bell tower. The stained glass and statues giving it a pizzazz the two Protestant churches lacked. A real work of art. Ah. Who was he kiddin? It was his favorite building because he married Julie there.