

Erotique

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The Wapshott Journal of Erotica

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For H. G. Wells, Chris Marker and Kilgore Trout.

Corey Mesler

Frank Comma and the Timeslip A Novella of Sex and Fantasy

“We need the world so that we may have the greatest possible number of opportunities to do our duty.”

Penelope Fitzgerald, from *The Blue Flower*

1

Frank Comma hesitated in the doorway. He could see the glow of the lamp beside the easy chair and he knew his wife was sitting in that chair, either working one of her endless books of crosswords or else crocheting another afghan.

The living room, his living room, looked lambent and strange, as if a set for a proposed movie about domesticity, a sterile setting, yet seemingly lit from within. The bloom came from his wife, Frank imagined.

He hesitated like a child and like a child he was unsure about taking another step, unsure he could face his wife with the news he carried like a death sentence. How could he tell his wife he had finished his time machine when she didn't know he was working on one? He had told her he was doing cabinetwork these past eight months and even that riled her, even that innocuous work incensed her.

“Why don't you spend time with me anymore?” she remonstrated. “Always slinking off to your ‘shop’ (she fairly spat the word out, as if it were ‘mistress’ or ‘bordello.’).”

“I don't slink,” was all Frank could come up with in reply.

What with his job at the radio station during the day, Frank relished every minute of every night he could spend in his workshop building his time machine. Ever since he figured out the trick to time travel (it came to him while he was reading *Popular Mechanics*) he was a man possessed.

And so some nights he would stay in the den with his wife, in front of some inane televised babble and he was as if imprisoned. The chair chafed his backside. He could not sit still.

"You got worms?" Gloria asked him.

"No dear," he answered, though he knew she didn't really mean worms was a possibility.

"Go on," she said.

And he sprang from his chair and darted into the basement. The machine took three solid months of diagramming and another five of nuts and bolts construction, but now, on June 7, 1997, Frank Comma was fairly well convinced he had finished a device that would enable him to move about at will in time.

2

He took one step into the room and his wife looked over her glasses and her shoulder simultaneously and registered his presence.

"Thanks for joining me," Gloria Comma puffed.

"Hello, dear," Frank lamely answered.

Gloria Comma was a woman whose infinite patience had long since become finite and then kaput. When she married Frank, twenty-one years ago, it was out of love, never let it be said otherwise. He had courted her with an off-key version of the Van Morrison ditty bearing her name (not the first man to do this, of course, but the first to offer it while undressing her and the first to sing straight from his heart as if he meant every word) and a sexual appetite which defied science. She was totally uninterested in his talk about physics and electrons and his boy-scout level dreams of making a big discovery, "where no man has gone before."

Gloria Excelsior had been a homely home-ec major, whose only dream was to be somebody's wife and have a man want her the way boys in high school had wanted the cheerleaders. Frank Comma fit the bill well — on the occasion of their first meeting he did nothing but stare at her chest (which was her best feature and led to cruel jokes in adolescence and a concurrent complex and willingness to show them at any occasion).

When she caught his eyes on her bosom and he blushed but didn't look away from her gaze, she boldly approached him and extended her hand.

"Gloria," she said.

"Fffffrank," he managed.

"Whatcha doing?"

"Girl watching," Frank answered and to this day he did not know where that came from. Luckily she thought it was charming instead of just horny and later that evening she opened her shirt to him and he was locked in for life.

When they were younger and Frank spent a preposterous number of hours with his face buried in her naked breasts, Gloria was unaware that this would never be enough to sustain her desire for an adult life. And when little Frank came along she still dwelled in a fantasy version of her own existence and it wasn't until little Frank was kidnapped by gypsies when he was twelve and disappeared from their lives that Gloria first began what was to be a rapid and full-time descent into depressed boredom. It wasn't just the loss of their only offspring (a disagreeable child, who seemed to always have a runny nose) but it was his vanishing which pointed up the true hollowness of their marriage.

And now Gloria Comma was a middle-aged woman, who had acquired an attractiveness that age brings to some plain women, with nothing to inspire her and nothing to make her raise her voice in either ecstasy or despair. She looked at Frank like she looked at *48 Hours* or *Nash Bridges*, as just more of the world's weary wasted stimuli. He was a puzzle she had already done.

3

"Dear, I have something to show you," Frank said and he couldn't help but let a little belligerent pride creep into his voice.

"Yes?" she deadpanned.

"Come into the basement," he asked.

Gloria rose wearily and set her crochet aside as if it were *The Pentagon Papers* and Frank had just interrupted work on her thesis.

She shuffled along behind him as he practically skipped through the kitchen and down the basement stairs.

He leapt over the last three steps and flung an arm out à la Vanna White. What he was presenting looked like an old-fashioned washing machine grafted onto a go-cart, or like a ride at a broken down midget circus.

"It's done," he said, temporarily forgetting that she had no idea what "it" was.

"It's lovely, Frank, but it's the damnedest cabinet I've ever seen."

Frank couldn't suppress a giddy laugh.

"It's not a cabinet, my dear," he said, almost with affection. "It's a time-machine."

Gloria was motionless for a beat or two and then her shoulders slumped. It was the same gesture she used to use with Frank, Jr. when she had wearied of his constant whining and she was about to relent to anything he was desiring, a gesture of disappointment and foiled love.

She sighed heavily.

"Ok, Frank. This is what you've spent the last year fiddling with. Ok. I don't care anymore."

She turned to go and Frank caught her wrist. She spun and for a half-second she was roused to fury. For a half-second it was that close to a bare-knuckle brawl. But Frank's expression arrested her. It was little-boy vulnerable, tinged with the old devil she remembered from their courting days. Something passed through Gloria like a dose of salts, an emotion maybe, a lambency almost extinguished.

She turned full body toward him and said his name softly. This was a reclamation project that suddenly, after all this time, interested her. This was Lazarus back from the other side.

"Frank," she said, more throatily. "Why?"

And it was unclear to them both just what she was questioning. Frank took her other hand in his.

"Gloria," he said. "I can travel in time, I truly can."

And for a moment she believed him because he had brought back, in that damp and moldy cellar, in that confined space, feelings from two decades gone.

Frank carefully unbuttoned his wife's print dress. (He

had always been crazy about dresses that button all the way down the front, suggesting, as they do, such easy access.) Gloria's breasts, still abundant though softened by age and childbirth, spilled out as he unhooked her bra. Like a child again he gave them suck. Like a happy puppy he licked her swelling chests and, husband and wife, they sank back onto a pile of dirty laundry. Gloria's head was resting on a pair of her unclean panties and Frank found new desire in this homey accident.

Gloria took Frank's member in her hand and it was stiff like a boy's and she marveled at it anew. She rolled it around in her hand and its firmness brought back storehouses of memory to her. She jiggled it a few times and Frank moaned.

"Gloria, you haven't touched it like that since Bartlett."

"Frank," she answered (they were taking new pleasure in using each other's names, the way new lovers do), "It feels bigger than I remember."

"It's been a long time," he said.

"Yes," she answered and her eyes moistened.

"Let me see something," Frank said. He moved his hand down her belly and over her pubic patch and into the downy place between.

"Mmmm," Gloria moaned. "What are you wanting to see, love?"

"If you're as wet as when we were at school."

"Ah, and how is it?"

"Lovely," Frank said, relishing the feel of her lubricity between his fingers.

"Frank," Gloria said, under sudden inspiration. "Remember this?" Her voice betrayed a little shame and a little naughtiness.

And she gently pushed him down into the laundry and rose over him like a great unwieldy bridge. She turned 180 degrees and her great ass rose like the moon over him as she put a thigh on each side of his head. She lowered her mouth onto his upright penis and gently sucked it a few times.

Then she slowly lowered her ass until Frank's face was up against her cheeks and her moist inner self.

"Gloria," he said. "This reminds me of your parent's couch, though how we ever—"

And the sentence died as Gloria pushed herself against Frank's face and they slurped away like frisky animals, long into the night, falling asleep on the damp, cool clothing and waking to find the world unchanged, except for them, neither suspecting that a timeslip would suspend their re-engaged sex-life.

4

The next day at the station Frank was antsy as hell. He wanted nothing more than to be home with his machine; he wanted to try her out. As far as he could determine he was now capable of calculating his destination along the time continuum within a couple of minutes. He had spent the last month or so narrowing that margin of error and he now felt that it was close enough. He had discovered a way to skip over the connecting links of time, a way to circumvent the chain. Once he'd discovered the chain itself nothing was easier than figuring the path parallel to it and devising a way to ease onto that path.

Charlie T. was Frank's boss at the station but their relationship wavered more toward comrades than employer/employee. Charlie was an okay guy and he never questioned Frank's ambition or doubted his drive though he certainly knew of Frank's daydreaming and his penchant for losing files and tapes.

Charlie stuck his head in Frank's door and Frank looked up as if he were roused from sleep.

"Frank?" Charlie said with good-natured interrogation.

"Oh, morning, Charlie."

"You not awake yet?"

"No, no, I'm fine."

"You feeling all right?"

"Sure, sure—actually, I've got a little headache, maybe some fever," Frank invented quickly.

"You wanna go?"

"Naw, I shouldn't. I've got the interview with the Admiral tape to edit, and, well..."

"That can wait. Tom says we're doing the teachers thing anyway all week."

“Oh.”

“Go on,” Charlie said, jerking his thumb over a shoulder. “I’ll call you later, see how you’re doing.”

“Maybe I will then.”

While Frank was driving home a song came on the radio that reminded him of his wife and he relived the tenderness of the previous evening. He would start right away being a better husband, he resolved. Starting tonight he would pay more attention to Gloria, less to his work, though that might be a little difficult, what with the crux he had reached.

Ok, he told himself. Once he perfected the time travel, once he had gone a little forward and a little backward he would begin spending more time with his beloved. Hell, he would be master of time; time would be his. Maybe he could build his wife a matching time machine and they could travel together. They had talked about a second honeymoon many years ago. Perhaps the time was right.

And he paused to wonder whether he could make money off this invention. It had never really occurred to him before that there may be practical applications for his discovery. Up until now the only cause had been to do it because he believed it could be done. Now it struck him that there was a fortune to be made. He couldn’t really envision it, how exactly he could wring money from this, but surely it could be so. It was a stupendous invention, after all. It was set to turn science on its ear. Surely there was money in turning science on its ear.

5

When Frank got home, Gloria was out. (She was across town telling her lover, Jimmy Columbo, goodbye, making the same sort of re-commitment to their marriage that Frank had made in the car on the way home. She was telling Jimmy goodbye in a very slow way, because first she had to fuck him, and then she had to listen to his post-coital conversation, which was normally a complete and detailed rehashing of the lovemaking which had just occurred, described with “First, I did this, and then you did this, and then I did this, which made you crazy...” So it wasn’t a quick process, this extrication. She

and Jimmy had a history, a relationship. There was right and there was right.)

Frank went straight to his shop and pulled the cloth from the machine. He sat down next to it and went over his notebook full of calculations one more time. He spent an hour or more refiguring every equation. It was all accurate; it would work.

He loosened his tie and sat at the controls of the machine, holding the wheel like it was the wheel of his first car. His hands were sweaty. The wheel had a rubberized cover to it which reminded Frank of his friend Glen's rattle-trap Mustang, the car they spent their nights in back at Bartlett High. He knew that car as well as if it had been his own; he could still feel in his wrist the subtle little pop it took to re-start the 8-track. He now popped on the computer and its amniotic hum was reassuring, the blinking of its lights a confirmation.

Frank began to relax. The chronometer on the console in front of him had a forward and a reverse and the calculations for how far could be entered on the computer keyboard. Just a couple of key strokes and he would leave June 8, 1997 behind. He punched in the formulas, looking at the notebook quickly. He would start slowly, travel forwards a couple of years and make sure all was well.

After entering the proper integers Frank sat back in the seat. The enter key sat like an island in the keyboard. It glowed with significance. Frank Comma stretched the index finger of his right hand forward, across that small distance it sailed like a spacecraft in free-floating space without gravity or boundaries, it moved inexorably toward that one remaining stroke.

Frank tapped the enter key.

6

Frank may have blinked, may have seen an infinitesimal flash of light, but he didn't think so. It was as if nothing had happened. There was a stillness, almost as if Frank sat in a vacuum. Yet there was air; he still breathed.

Frank switched the machine off and the silence was as complete as if Frank were deaf. At first he thought he had gone deaf but he rapped his knuckles on the computer monitor and