

Title

Ray Cummings

***THE MAN
WHO MASTERED
TIME***

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About this eBook

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To Gabrielle

Who has given me affectionate
assistance for a long, long time.

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Chapter One

"Time," said George, "why I can give you a definition of time. It's what keeps everything from happening at once."

A ripple of laughter went about the little group of men.

"Quite so," agreed the Chemist. "And, gentlemen, that's not nearly so funny as it sounds. As a matter of fact, it is really not a bad scientific definition. Time and space are all that separate one event from another. Everything happens *somewhere* at some *time*."

"You intimated you had something vitally important to tell us," the Big Business Man suggested. "Something, Rogers, that would amaze us. Some project you were about to undertake -"

Rogers raised his hand. "In a moment, gentlemen. I want to prepare you first - to some extent, at least. That's why I have led you into this discussion. I want you to realize that your preconceived ideas of time are wrong, inadequate. You must think along entirely different lines, in terms of, I shall say, the *new science*."

"I will," agreed George, "only tell me how."

"You said that time, space, and matter are not separate, distinct entities, but are blended together," the Doctor declared. "Just what do you mean?"

Rogers gazed earnestly about the room. "This, my friends. Those are the three factors which make up our universe as we know it. I said they were blended. I mean that the actual reality underlying all the manifestations we experience is not temporal or spatial or material, but a blend of all three. It is we who, in our minds, have split up the original unity into three such supposedly different things as time, space and matter."

"Take space and time," said the Big Business Man. "Those two seem wholly different to me. I shouldn't think they had the slightest connection."

"But they have. Between the three planes of space - length, breadth and thickness - and time, there is no essential distinction. We think of them differently; we instinctively feel differently about them. But science is not concerned with our feelings - and science recognizes today that time is a property of space, just as are length, breadth and thickness."

"That's easy to say," growled the Banker. "Anyone can make statements that can't be proven."

"It has been proven," Rogers declared quietly. "The mathematical language of science would bore you. Let me give you a popular illustration - an illustration, by the way, that I saw in print long before Einstein's theory was made public. For instance, think about this: A house has length, breadth and thickness. The house is matter, and it has three dimensions of space. But what else has it?"

A blank silence followed his sudden question.

"Hasn't it duration, gentlemen? Could a house have any real existence if it did not exist for any time at all?"

"Well," said George, "I guess that's something to think about."

Rogers went on calmly: "You must admit, my friends, that the existence of matter depends on time equally as on space. They are, as I said, blended together. A house must have length, breadth, thickness and duration, or it cannot exist. Matter, in other words, persists in time and space. Let me give you another illustration of this blending. How would you define motion?"

Again there was a dubious silence.

"Motion," said George suddenly, "why, that's when something - something material changes place." He was blushing at his own temerity, and he sat back in his leather chair, smoking furiously.

"Quite so," smiled Rogers. "That, gentlemen, is about the way we all conceive motion. Something material, a railroad train, for instance, changes its position in space." He regarded the men before him, and this time there was a touch of triumph in his manner. "But, my friends, that's where our line of reasoning is inadequate. Time is involved equally with space. The train was there *then*; it is *herenow*. That involves time."

"In other words -" the Doctor began.

"In other words, motion is the simultaneous change of the position of matter in time and space. You see how impossible it is to speak of one factor without involving the others? That is the mental attitude into which I'm trying to get you. I want you to think of time exactly as you think of length, breadth and thickness - as one of the properties of space. Isn't that clear?"

The Big Business Man answered him. "I think so. I can understand now what you mean by a blending of -"

"Oh, his words are clear enough," the Banker interjected testily. "But what's the argument about? He started in by saying -"

George sat up suddenly. "Mr. Rogers, you said we were to come here for something vitally important to you. Something about time and space. You said -"

Rogers interrupted him. "I did indeed. I asked you all to come here to the club tonight because you are my friends. Mine and Loto's. And the affair concerns him more directly than it does me."

He glanced across the room. "Come, Loto. You're the one to tell them."

The Chemist's son, a young man of twenty, rose reluctantly from his obscure seat in a corner of the room. He was tall, and slight of build, with thick, wavy chestnut hair and blue eyes; his delicate features were offset by a square firmness of chin. He came forward slowly, flushing as the eyes of the men were turned on him; a poetic-looking boy, with only the firm line of his lips and the set of his jaw to mark him for a man.

"My son, gentlemen," Rogers added. "You all know Loto."

"We do," said George enthusiastically. He vacated his own chair, shoving it forward, and selected another, more retired position for himself.

Loto settled himself in the chair and then hesitated, as though in doubt how to begin. He was still flushing, and yet his manner was thoroughly poised. His forehead was wrinkled in thought.

"Father and I were experimenting," he began abruptly, "about two years ago. We were interested in electrons. We were experimenting with the fluorescence in a Crookes tube - breaking down the atoms into electrons. Then we followed the experiments of Lenard and Roentgen. We darkened the tube and prepared a chemical screen, which grew luminous."

Loto turned to Rogers: "They don't want to hear all this. These technicalities -"

Rogers smiled. "We hit upon it quite by accident - an accident that we have never been able to duplicate. We had, that evening, an adaptation of the familiar Crookes tube. I do not know the exact conditions we secured; we had no idea we were on the threshold of any discovery and we kept no record of what we did. Nor am I sure just how I prepared the screen - what proportions of the chemicals I used -"

"You're worse than Loto," the Banker growled. "If you'll just tell us what -"

"I will," agreed Rogers good-naturedly. "We were working one night in my laboratory on Forty-third Street - only a few hundred yards from the Scientific Club here. The room was dark, and we had set up a small chemical screen. It grew luminous as the electrons from the tube struck it, but the glowing was not what we had expected - not what we had observed before. The difference is unexplainable to you, but we both noticed it. And then Loto noticed something else, something in the darkness behind the screen."

Loto was sitting upright on the edge of his chair; his eyes were snapping with eagerness as he interrupted his father.

"I'll tell them because it was I who saw it first. Behind the screen, the darkness of the room itself was growing luminous with a glowing radiance that seemed to spread out into rays that were not parallel, but divergent. It looked almost as though the screen were a searchlight sending a spreading beam out behind it.

"Father saw it almost as soon as I did. It was a very curious light; it did not illuminate the room about us. Then we suddenly discovered that it went through the walls of the laboratory. We were looking into a space that seemed to be opening up for miles ahead of us. The walls of the room, the house itself, the city around us, were all blotted out. We were looking into an empty distance."

"Empty?" echoed George tensely. "Didn't you see anything?"

"Not at first." Loto had relaxed; his earnest gaze passed from one to the other of the intent faces of the men. "We were only conscious of empty distance. It was not darkness nor was it light. It was more a dim phosphorescence. We had forgotten the Crookes tube, the screen,

everything but that glowing, empty scene before us.

"After a moment, or it may have been much longer, the scene seemed to brighten. It turned to gleaming silver, and then we saw that we were looking out over a snow-covered waste. Miles of it. Snow reaching back to the horizon, and dull gray sky overhead. The ground seemed about sixty feet below us, and we were poised in the air above it."

Loto paused a moment, and Rogers added, "You understand, gentlemen, that my laboratory is not on the ground floor of the building, but somewhat above the level of that part of the city."

"But - " began the Big Business Man.

"Let him go on," growled the Banker. "Go on, boy. Didn't you see anything but snow?"

"No, not at once. It was all bleak and desolate. But it kept on brightening, losing its silvery, glowing look until at last we could see it was daylight. It was apparently late afternoon - or perhaps early morning. The sun wasn't showing - it must have been behind a cloud.

"We sat staring down at this cold, snowy landscape, and then, almost from below us, something moving came into view. It had passed under us - under the laboratory - and was traveling on away from us."

"What was it?" the Banker demanded.

"Well, it seemed to be a huge sled, with fur covered figures on it, and pulled by an animal almost as large as a horse. But it wasn't a horse - it was a dog."

Loto paused, but no one else spoke. After a moment he resumed:

"The sled slackened and stopped about a quarter of a mile north of the laboratory - up toward where Central Park is now. And then we saw that there was a building there, a large, oval-shaped structure. It may have been built of snow, or ice - or perhaps some whitish stone. There seemed to be an enclosed space behind it. The whole thing blended into the landscape so that we had overlooked it before.

"The sled stopped. We could see the figures climbing down from it. Then there was sudden darkness. The scene went black. We were sitting facing the side wall of the laboratory."

"A wire in our apparatus had burned out," Rogers explained. "And that night I was taken sick. It developed into pneumonia and I was laid up for weeks. Loto was left alone to follow up our discovery."

"Just a minute," the Banker interjected. "Do I understand you to imply that you actually saw all this? It was not a vision, or an electrical picture of some sort that you were reproducing?"

"No, they mean it was an actual scene," the Big Business Man put in. "They were seeing New York City at some other time. Isn't that so?"

Rogers nodded. "Exactly. And while I was sick, Loto went ahead and -"

"Was it the past?" the Doctor interposed. "Were you looking back into the past?"

"We were looking across countless centuries into the future," said Loto.

"The future!"

"Yes," declared Rogers. "Must you always think of the future as a wonderful civilization of marvelous inventions, mammoth buildings and airplanes like ocean steamships? All that lies ahead of us, no doubt. A hundred years - two hundred - a thousand - will bring all that. But further on? What about then, gentlemen? Ten thousand years from now? Or fifty thousand? Do you anticipate that civilization will always climb steadily upward? You are wrong. There must be a peak, and then a down grade - the decadence of mankind."

"Please, let me go on," Loto said eagerly. "I need not tell you all now exactly how we knew we were looking into the future, and not the past. We, ourselves, did not know it that first evening. But later, when I studied the scene more closely, I could tell easily."

"How?" the Banker demanded.

"By the details I saw. The type of building. That animal that looked like a dog. The sun - I'll tell you about that in a moment. An artificial light in the house - I saw it once or twice when it was night there. And the girl. Her manner of dress -"

"There was a girl?" said George quickly. "A girl! Tell us about her, Loto. Was she pretty? Was she -"

"Go on, boy," growled the Banker. "Tell it from where you left off."

"Yes, she was very pretty," said Loto gravely. "She -" He stopped suddenly, his gaze drifting off into distance.

"Oh boy!" breathed George, but at the Banker's glare he sat back, abashed.

Loto went on after a moment: "I won't go into details now. While my father was sick, I was able to examine the scene many times. I even think I - well, I sat watching it most of the time for a week at least.

"The house had a sort of stable - or a kennel, if you want to call it that - behind it. And there was an open space, like a garden, with a wall around it. There was a little tree in the garden; a tree all covered with snow. But after a few days the sun came out and melted the snow on the tree branches.

"The girl was a captive. I guess they were bringing her in on that sled the night we first saw them. There was another woman about the place, and an old man. And a younger man - the one who was holding the girl a prisoner."

"You said the house looked about a quarter of a mile away," the Banker declared. "How could you see all these details?"

"I had a small telescope, sir."

"The scene actually was there," Rogers put in. "Loto used a telescope quite as he would have used one through the window to see Central Park. Go on, Loto."

"The girl..." George prompted.

"She was a small girl. Very slender - about sixteen, I guess. She had long, golden hair, but it was red when she stood outside with the sun on it. That's because the sun was red; an enormous glowing red ball, like the end of a cigar. It tinged the snow with blood, but there didn't seem to be much heat from it.

"Sometimes I could see the girl through the doorway. There was a door, but it was transparent - glass, perhaps - and the house was lighted inside. She would sit on a low seat, with her hair in sort of braids down over her shoulders. Once she played on some little stringed instrument. And sang. I could see her so plainly it seemed curious not to hear her voice.

"They appeared to treat her kindly, even though she was a captive. But once the man came in and tried to kiss her. She fended him off. Then he went out and got on his sled and drove away. He was gone several hours.

"The girl cried that night. She cried for a long time. Once she ran outside, but one of those huge dogs came leaping out of the other building and drove her back. The dog's baying must have aroused the place. The old man and the woman appeared, and they locked the girl up in some other room. I never saw her again.

"A week or two went by and father was better. But the next time I went to the laboratory, the apparatus wouldn't work. Perhaps the chemicals on the screen were worn out - We're not really sure. But we've never been able since to make a screen that would do more than glow. We've never had another that would affect the time-space behind it."

"You mean," said the Big Business Man softly, "that after those brief glimpses into the future, it is closed again to you?"

Rogers spoke. "Tell them the rest, Loto."

The younger man was hesitant. "Perhaps you gentlemen wouldn't understand. We have seen nothing more, but I couldn't forget that girl."

"I understand," George murmured. But Loto went on unheeding:

"It wasn't the scientific part of our discovery that impressed me most. We kept that secret because we had no proof of what we had done, and we couldn't seem to get any. It was the girl that bothered me. That girl - a captive - facing some danger.... You gentlemen will say she isn't living, that she won't be alive for thousands of years yet. But *I* say your conception of it is wrong."

Loto's voice had gained sudden power. He seemed abruptly years older - forceful, commanding.

"*You* say that girl *will* be living in the future. I say she *is* living in the future. She is living

just as you and I are living - right here in this exact space that we call New York - within a few hundred yards of this room. She is separated from us, not by space, but only by time.

"You, gentlemen, perhaps cannot conceive of crossing that time. But if it were a mile of space, or a thousand miles, you could imagine crossing it very easily. Yet we know that time is a property of space; not one iota different from length, breadth and thickness except that we think of it differently."

Loto's flashing eyes held his little audience. "Gentlemen, suppose you - with your human intelligence - were trees, rooted to one spot here in America. And suppose that the accustomed order of things was that Asia would come slowly and steadily toward you and pass before you. That is what time does for us. Do you suppose, under those circumstances, that you could readily conceive of going across space and reaching Asia? Think about that, gentlemen! It's easy for us to imagine moving through space, because we've always done it. But a tree with your intelligence would not feel that way about it. The tree would say: 'Asia will be here.' And if you said: 'That's true. But Asia exists just the same in a different part of space from you. If you go there, you will not have to wait for it to come to you,' the tree - even if it had your present intelligence in every other way - wouldn't understand that. Simply because the tree had always conceived space as we are accustomed to conceiving time. That conception of ours does not fit the real facts, for - except for the way space and time affect us personally - there is actually no distinction to be made between them. That is no original theory of mine; it is modern scientific thought - mathematically proven and accepted ever since Albert Einstein first made his theory public."

A silence followed Loto's outburst. Rogers broke it:

"We would like to have you gentlemen meet us here two weeks from tonight. We are not quite ready yet. Will you do that?"

Everyone in the room signified assent.

"But what for?" George asked earnestly. "Of course we will, but has Loto discovered anything? Has he -"

Loto interrupted him. "I have been working and experimenting for two years." He had fallen back to his quiet manner. "Father has helped me, of course. And given me money - more than he could afford."

He smiled at Rogers, who returned it with a gaze of affection.

"In two weeks I will be completely ready. Don't you think so, father?"

"Yes," said Rogers, and a sudden cloud of anxiety crossed his face. He was a scientist, but he was a father as well, and even his scientific enthusiasm could not allay the fear for his son that was in his heart.

"Yes," he repeated. "I think you will be quite ready, Loto."

"Ready for what?" growled the Banker. He was mopping his forehead with a huge white handkerchief.

Loto's glance swept across all the men in the room. "I have found a way to cross time, just as you are able to cross space. And two weeks from tonight, gentlemen, with, your assistance, I propose to start forward through the centuries that lie ahead of us. I'm going to find that girl - if I can - and release her - help her out of whatever danger, whatever trouble she is in!"

Chapter Two

"Honor to Loto," cried the Big Business Man. "The youngest and greatest scientist of all time!"

"There's a double meaning in that," laughed the Doctor, amid the applause. "The greatest scientist of time! He is, indeed."

It was outwardly a gay little gathering, having dinner in a small private room of the Scientific Club. But underneath the laughter there was a note of tenseness, and two of the people - a man and a woman - laughed infrequently with gayety that was forced.

The man was Rogers; the woman, Lylda, his wife, mother of Loto. She was the only woman in the room. At first glance she would have seemed no more than thirty-five, though in reality she was several years older - a small, slender figure in a simple black evening dress that covered her shoulders, but left her throat bare. Her beauty was of a curious type; her face was oval, her features delicately molded and of pronounced Grecian cast. Yet there seemed about her, also, an indefinable touch of the Orient; her eyes, perhaps, which were slate gray, large and very slightly upturned at the corners. Her complexion was fair; her hair thick, wavy and coal-black.

That she was a woman of intellect, culture and refinement was obvious. There was about her, too, a look of gentle sweetness, the air of a woman who could be nothing less than charming. Her eyes, as she met those of her men friends around her, were direct and honest. But when she regarded Loto this evening, a yearning melancholy sprang into them, with a mistiness as though the tears were restrained only by an effort.

The laughter about the table died out. A waiter was removing the last of the dishes; the men were lighting their cigars.

"Well," said the Banker, breaking the silence, "now let us hear it. If everyone is as curious as I am -"

"More," put in George. "I'm more curious."

"You're right," agreed Rogers. "We must get on."

"First," the Big Business Man interrupted, "I want to know more about that screen behind which you saw that other time world of the future."

"I know very little myself," Rogers answered. "So little that Loto and I could never duplicate it. But the theory is understandable. The space where Central Park now is has a certain time factor allied to its other properties. The light, the rays, from that screen, whatever may have been their character, altered the time factor of that space."