

Fast

by Paul Vigna

The ground was hard. It was October. The leaves were dying and falling, the days were getting shorter and cooler. The Indian Summer had abruptly ended, and the earth turned cold and rough.

"I'm a little cold," Lori said. Jake pulled off his jacket and put it around her. "Thanks." They sat on the brittle ground in a hillside clearing, the town laid out in neat little rows below them, lights dancing, the stars splayed across the sky above them. A line of trees loomed behind them, disappearing into the blackness that covered the hillside. The air was cool and clear, the stars brilliant and filling the sky. The dusky Milky Way stretched across the celestial ceiling like a canyon.

"It's quiet up here," she said. "Remember the first time you took me up here?"

"Course," he said.

"You were very proud of yourself," she said, smiling, "thought you'd found such a great spot."

"It is a great spot."

"It is a great spot. But you didn't discover it." They smiled at the memory, then their gazes wandered off in different directions. "It's so still, not a thing moving," she observed.

"That's not really true," he said, and the words spilled out as if a single thought had loosened an avalanche of them. "Everything's moving. The Earth's moving on its axis, and moving around the sun. The sun's moving around the Milky Way. The Milky Way's flying out from the center of the universe. Everything seems still, but it's not. Even us, we're carried along, we're constantly moving. We're not in the same place at the same time for even one second. Ever." Lori looked at him charitably, thinking about it.

"Always such big ideas," she said, smiling. "You're going to be famous some day, aren't you?" He got a little embarrassed, smiled, look down.

"Rich, too," he said.

“Rich, too.”

“Maybe,” he said. “I’d like to be one of those rich people who still drive around in their beat-up old car, and people say, ‘wow, he still drives around in his beat-up old car.’ ” They sat in silence for several minutes, Lori staring up at the stars, Jake at the town below.

“You know,” he said quietly, “I’m still in love with you.” She took a deep breath, kept her eyes fixed on the skies as she absorbed the comment. She tried to concentrate on the twinkling stars, that looked so eternal, peaceful and benevolent, but were even at this second flying so fast through the universe, carrying uncounted planets and solar systems to who knew where. Nothing ever stayed still.

“Do we have to talk about that right now?”

