



## Slow and Steady

Kind of quiet at the Lakeport ferry dock. That's how it is most days.

An old man who wore a filthy coat covered in moldy, crusty stains, was staring at the ferry. His mutterings were so low, they were barely audible, but I was close enough to make them out.

"I can make it go faster, much faster you see," he muttered, his eyes mostly closed.

"Oh, now why would you want to do that you ask?" he grumbled, and for a moment I wondered how he knew I was there. I hadn't even said anything.

"Just watch," the man replied, and then he turned bright red as he remembered that he was talking to a child. "Boy you sure are quiet," he added, "You a monk or something? Heh heh ... I'm just yankin' your chain, sonny. Just watch."

The old man nodded his head to no one in particular, shifting his cane to his other hand.

"Watch closely, and you'll remember this day for the rest of your life," the old man explained.

"You see, son, I wasn't always an old man. Not this old at any rate. There was a time when I traveled so fast, I would wear down my tires on every dirt road around these parts in a few weeks. Now that I can't drive anymore, I just make do with the ferry."

I turned my eyes back to the ferry as the man spoke. I looked at the grizzled captain, the way he sat in his seat behind the controls. The captain should have been at the Lakeport Grill getting ready for his hotel-cooked lunch since the sun had just begun to drop from its highest point in the sky. I didn't understand what happened next. There was a gentle breeze and the boat seemed to suddenly be at right angles for a moment, and then it was gone.

The old man grabbed my shoulder and said, "You ever notice how it takes a moment for the ferry to stop moving? Sometimes it doesn't stop." I looked where the boat was supposed to be and saw a light in the distance. It was dazzlingly bright as if it were coming from the biggest firework you've ever seen. Then I noticed the old man was gone. In his place was a younger man who could have been his son, wearing the same grubby clothes. I sat down suddenly on the pier, the water lapping below my feet, and began to wonder if I was really asleep dreaming all of this.

"I made it go so fast that it skipped space and time. It moved right up into lightspeed. It's still moving," the man said, taking out a folded piece of paper. "Allowing for rotation, it should be arriving at Kingsport just about now," he said tracing the spidery writing on the dirty paper with his finger.

I blinked my eyes and at first, I thought nothing had happened, but then I noticed the shadow by my side on the splintered pier. I concentrated my eyes and then I saw him back to his regular aged form.

"It's still moving," the man repeated loudly. "Hey ding-a-ling," he yelled, waving his hand in front of my face, "do you get that it's still moving?" I shook my head and I could hear the water of the lake lapping under my feet again. I turned to look at the ferry dock and saw the captain laughing with the dining room gals as he returned to his post. None of them seemed to notice that the ferry had left early and come back, too.

"What happened just now?" the man sneered. "You were supposed to understand this. That's the last time I'll ever show you how it's done. Just try to imagine how amazing this is," the man said to me as I stared back at him. He bounced his cane handle gently on my head and stumped off up the dock towards the town square.

"Old Doc Rogers, messing with his scientific foolery again?" chuckled one of the gals. "Captain has a soft spot for him and lets him use the ferry as a mass simulator, whatever that is, when he's at lunch."

"I don't know why the captain lets him gallivant around the dock. He smells like a rotting squirrel carcass," replied the other gal. "One of these days that old hermit's going to fall overboard and sink right down from the ton of dirt he's wearing. Ever since the captain let him measure the ferry's main shaft, he's been scribbling on that paper. He didn't touch anything, but he's got a one-track mind for math. Keeps talking about spin and local noon and sun rays. Something he figured out during the war. Something about light and weight he was working on at the State University."

"What's light got to do with weights?" asked the other. "I just hope I'll live long enough to see the day he floats off into space."

That night, after dark, I went to the pier to wait for the next ferry. I wasn't surprised when it came a quarter of an hour early. It was transporting less people than before, but it was moving at the same old speed.