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Thou Shalt Not Suffer
by Shawn Jacobson

The first Bible verse I learned was in Exodus, the twenty-second chapter, the eighteenth verse. You know the one; “Thou Shalt not Suffer a Witch to Live.”

The Sunday school teacher was Zenna Henderson, OK, I’d never met her, she’d passed on to wherever you go when you die way before I came along. I’d not learned her lessons in person but in story, in the catechism I cabled together from the weird books in the Science Fiction section of the library. It was the only Sunday School I attended since my parents were disgusted with Church and I sure wasn’t going. For all its shortcomings, my irregular Sunday school lessons helped me understand what I found when I went to the stars.

Don’t worry, this is not going to be one of those inspirational stories about the power of the word. If you can discern the hand, or claw, of God in the telling, then you are a parsec ahead of me in matters of theology. Nevertheless, the verse is relevant.

First, understand that I learned the verse shortly before first contact. The Kree, for that is what the aliens called themselves, were nice, after the fashion of Zenna Henderson’s people, but a whole lot less human looking. They were a plump, shaggy, lot, the kind of being too cute to be taken seriously. They offered a lot of solutions to man’s problems along with a lot of platitudes about the galactic community. In short, they were as close to the science fiction dream of first contact done right as you could get. It all seemed too good to be true.

Of course, this didn’t stop people from lining up for what the Kree had to offer. Want a cure for cancer? Call the Kree. Want a cure for baldness? Do the same. Worried about hunger, the environment, world peace, well, just bop on over to the Kree, or the shaggies, as people called them, and you could get whatever you needed. By the time they asked for volunteers to aid in their interplanetary expeditions, well, you can guess how many people lined up at their portal.

I had not planned to volunteer for the Kree’s project, to join with one of the Kree to scout for intelligent life on other worlds; it just kind of happened. To be honest, I volunteered as part of a dare.

A bunch of us were at The Final Analysis, celebrating the end of finals when it happened. The Final Analysis was the campus bar you went to if you were into tech. If you considered “nerd” the epitome of honorifics, The Final Analysis was your bar.

“What’re your plans for the future?” Amy asked me as we swilled beer. She was the closest thing to a girlfriend that I had, though I would not describe us as close.

“Don’t know,” I said honestly. I was too worried about surviving my classes to do in-depth planning for the future. Now that I’d survived, barely, I was still too mindwiped, coming down from the shakes I’d gotten from my terror of the tests, to think coherently. I was in no shape to worry about the future.

“Maybe he’ll go live with the shaggies,” Ken said. “Yah, he can go shag the shaggies. I bet they shag really well.”

“The voice of experience?” I asked. Ken and I had roomed together for one tumultuous semester; the tumult had been too much.

“Probably the only experience he’d get Amy replied. Ken fit the computer geek stereotype of relating better to machines than to people.

“Hell,” said Ken. “That stuff’s not for me. stew here,” he said pointing at me, “he’s the flyboy, in to all that space stuff. As for me, I want my feet planted firmly on the ground.”

“And your head firmly planted in your ass,” I grumbled; OK, I’m not that good with people either.

Ken went on with a rambling dissertation about the secret doings of the shaggies—speculations longer on imagination than on any factual basis—and explained why that would suit me just fine. As he continued, his voice soared above the rest of the barroom conversation. He finally lifted himself to his feet to get another drink, but the bouncer had other ideas, the kind they get when confronted by obnoxious drunks. In the ensuing shoving match, Ken stumbled colliding with the bar. That ended our drinking as we all hauled but to the hospital to see what could be done for Ken.

“I’ve always admired you,” Ken told me in the hospital the last time I saw him. “I never showed it,” he continued, “but I admired your sense of adventure, your willingness to take classes you weren’t good in to fulfill your goals.”

“You admired me?” I asked. That was a shock.

“I never showed it,” Ken said. “I was raised to believe that such admissions were a sign of weakness; I was taught never to be weak. But I admired you’re drive to get out of this town, to make something of yourself. Go to the stars,” he said with sudden force, “be the guy from around here who realizes his dreams. Go sail the space ways with the shaggies.”

“Really,” I asked. “You really want me to….”

“Go do it,” he said. “Up, Up, and away with you.”

At that, his head hit the pillow. Medical people came in and told me to leave. I don’t cry much, I was also taught never to be weak, but I did then. Somehow, I knew this was the end.

So, of course, I took his dare. After Ken’s revelation about how he felt about me, there was no way I could refuse. Besides, I’ll admit it, I was curious about all those other worlds out there, and what the Kree were up to and why they needed help from humans.

Not that I expected anything to come of it. As I’ve said, the Kree had no shortage of volunteers for whatever they wanted to do. So, it was a surprise when I got an invitation to take the screening test.

This consisted of questions which had a rationale beyond my understanding. I was asked to rate pictures of beasts by their attractiveness, foods by their taste, social deviations by their ability to shock, and other strange questions that were all over the map and, in some cases, totally off the wall. When I’d finished, I submitted my answers more certain than ever that I was not going to be chosen.

Therefore, it stunned me speechless when I got an actual letter in the mail requesting my presence at the local Kree friendship center for a second round of tests. I looked at the address and found the building to be familiar, close to my old college dorm and not much further than the apartment I currently inhabited.

I walked the campus streets feeling weird, wondering at walking the old streets with no classes to attend. As I approached the address, I noticed the pizza place, as empty as ever, on the ground floor. There was a door I’d never noticed before. The door itself had some official-looking signage in a script too elegant to be legible, but what I noticed was “Shaggy’s House of Horrors” scrawled on the adjoining wall. It looked like my destination.

I passed on the elevator and took the stairs to the Kree part of the building. I entered an office suite that seemed larger than the floor below. I recognized the receptionist, Amy, who I’d last seen at the bar the night that Ken had his fatal accident.

“So,” Amy said, “you took the dare.” I don’t think either one of us wanted to get into why we hadn’t seen each other since then, the night had been too traumatic for both of us.

“That’s why I’m here.” Then, after a second’s pause, “how are the Kree to work for?” I realize now that I should have asked how she was, but that didn’t come out.

“Not bad,” she replied, “pretty good in fact. Things can get downright strange, but since you’re going in there, you’ll see for yourself.”

Amy looked at her watch. “You’re fifteen minutes early,” she said. “Have a seat,” she continued pointing at some overstuffed chairs to the right of her desk.

I was about to sit when a voice said, “that’s fine, send him in.”

“Good luck in there,” Amy said as the Kree, the first one I’d ever seen in person, waddled through the door from the inner office. I followed him, I think it was a he, into a hall from which open doors gave vistas of rooms full of strange furniture. Through one door, I saw several Kree being affectionate in a way that would not be allowed in a human office.

“In here,” the Kree said pointing to a door further down the hall.

As I started through the door, I flinched as a tool, or something, the size of a remote sailed past me at eye level. My escort said something to the Kree in my destination room in what I supposed was their language—it sounded like a variety of squeaks to me.  *Strange indeed,* I thought to myself.

“My associate needs to watch it when he’s practicing telekinesis,” my escort said. “It’s not something we do around others.”

“It’s what we do among ourselves,” the other Kree said as he fiddled with some singularly odd-looking machinery. “If he’s going to join the team, this is as good a time as any for him to get used to it.”

My escort pointed at the chair; “please sit,” he said, “and we’ll get started.”

I climbed into the contraption, a huge padded chair-like thing with some sort of helmet attached to it. While doing so, I looked around and noticed my escort cuddled with the other Kree.

*Maybe this is what they do to blunt criticism,* I thought, *strange indeed.*

Before I could ponder this, the other Kree came over and settled the helmet on my head, and suddenly, I was elsewhere. I was on the bridge of a spaceship learning alien controls while a Kree stoked my back. Then, I was struggling to communicate with things that looked like something between a lizard and a worm. Then, I was eating a mealy gruel while conversing with bug-looking things. Then, I was trying to walk on a world with too much gravity. Then, I was pounding my fists against the padded wall of a spaceship after a frustrating struggle with the navigational system.

And the scenes continued, from ship to planet to other planet and to the ship again. My mind seemed tossed to and thro as if in some game of galactic hopscotch which required me to move just as I realized where I was. Finally, after what seemed an age, and after scenes beyond counting, a Kree lifted the helmet from my head. I was back home, or as close as you can be to home in a room full of aliens and their equipment.

You did well, my escort said as he helped me from the chair. Most people don’t hold up as well as you did. It’s quite possible that you will be selected to join us, but that is to be determined.”

I walked out, past the scrawled graffiti and wondered if the scrawls were left by someone who’d failed the test. Indeed, I wondered if I’d really wanted to pass. For sure there was wonder in the experience, but then, well, as Amy warned, it had been strange.

As I wandered toward home, I heard screeching behind me.

“Did you see that the light was red!” a policeman asked. “You just about got run over; it’s a blue wonder there wasn’t an accident. I aught to give you a ticket.”

Then, he took a serious look at my face; I got the impression he was comparing it to someone he’d seen recently.

“Weren’t you the guy who just walked out of that Kree place?” he asked.

“I was there,” I said.

“Well,” said the officer. “That explains a lot. You tell me your address and I’ll give you a ride home. You’re not safe walking around right now.”

“Thanks” I said giving the man my address as we walked to his car. “I guess I’m a bit dazed at that.”

“we’ve had someone watching the door to that place because of people like you though you’re far from the worst,” the officer said. “We saw the graffiti artist do his thing. We should have arrested him, but, in a way, he was doing folks a favor. People need to be warned.”

“Not a fan of the Kree?” I asked.

“Aliens,” the cop said as if “alien” were a curse word.

“I guess they are at that,” I replied. I wasn’t sure I was a fan of the Kree at that moment either.

“You know the real problem with them,” the policeman said, “is that they put us off guard. They come on all cute and cuddly reminding us of our favorite teddy bear, and we forget how different they are.”

“They sure are strange,” I said reflecting on recent events.

“And another thing about them,” he continued, “is that I’m sure they didn’t get to the top of the evolutionary pile by being cuddly. I think that if you really got to know them, you wouldn’t think they were cute.”

“Honestly,” I said, “I hadn’t thought…”

“That’s the problem,” the policeman said, “people don’t think. And if they do, they’re called paranoid.”

In a minute, the policeman stopped the car. Here you are,” he said. “rest for a while till you get it all sorted out.”

I did as the policeman suggested. I stumbled up the stars to my apartment and flopped on the bed giving myself some time to start the sorting process. I suspected it would take more than a while, several days, to sort out recent events. I never got that long.

The next day, I walked out the door and saw a police car in front of the building.

“Get in,” a familiar voice said. “I’ve been ordered to take you to the Kree spaceport.”

I climbed into the car and we headed out of town.

“Did I ever tell you about my master’s thesis?” the officer asked.

“No,” I said. I’d never thought of law enforcement officers as intellectuals.

“It was on what happened to primitive cultures when contacted by more civilized ones.”

“Like the Indians?” I asked.

“Generally, they’re called native Americans,” he replied, “but yes. They’re the example closest to our National history.”

“Pretty bad,” I said, though what I based it on was the minimal history I’d picked up from school.

“You could say that,” the policeman said. “I won’t go into the gory details here, not enough time, but it was pretty bad. I think that’s why I’m bothered by the Kree.”

“You’re afraid we’ll end up like the ind…, sorry, Native Americans?”

“Not the same deal,” the policeman replied. “The Kree are smoother customers. They don’t do land grabs and pillaging the way the Europeans did, but I’m afraid it will be bad, bad in a way we don’t understand yet. There are parallels, but it’s a whole new game in a lot of ways.”

After some time driving through increasingly empty country, we reached the gates of the spaceport.

“They’ll take it from here,” the policeman said opening the door. Then, as I got out of the car, he continued, “stay paranoid.”

The welcome I received from the Kree was not conducive to paranoia. The minute I entered the spaceport, the Kree who’d been my escort grabbed me and put me into one of those full-body hugs that I’d learn were common among their people. He then introduced me around the place, and I was hugged, stroked, and otherwise touched by the whole crew. After snuggling with more Kree than I’d thought had made the trip to our world, I met Eve.

“Eve will be your teammate on the voyage,” my escort said.

“Hello,” Eve said. “Is this how your people kiss,” she asked pressing her lips against my chest.

“Yes,” I said taken aback.

“Good,” she said. “We’re going to be working together, so we should be close. Besides,” she continued, “I wanted to know what kissing a human felt like. I find your kind challenging in a good way.”

In the next few weeks, Eve and I got to know each other well. We relived the scene from the test where she guided my hands over the controls so that I could learn to use them. We also relived the scene where I got so frustrated with their system that I pounded the padded walls of the simulated spaceship. It was on the last, bad, instance of this frustration that we became very close indeed.

“I can’t touch you through your clothes,” Eve said as she ran a paw-like hand over my back. I got the impression that she was as frustrated as was I. “Please take them off so that I can properly touch you.”

“Why,” I asked taken aback again. The Kree might be cuddly, but they could also be astoundingly direct.

“We can talk but words alone just aren’t enough. I can communicate with you so much better through touch, but you must let me. It will make us both less frustrated.”

“I took off my clothes. It was worth whatever modesty I lost to not be frustrated anymore.

Once Eve was able to touch me skin to skin, she learned more about me than I could imagine. It wasn’t mind reading, exactly, it was more that she could understand how my mind worked. Through her kind of touching, she could find the right words, the right gestures to make me understand what she needed me to know.

Later, I would learn that Eve’s touch allowed her to put some of her cells into my body, cells that specialized in reading the pathways of the mind of the body they were in. Then, by a process called “entanglement chemistry” by the Kree these cells would rely this information to Eve. Now, my mind fills with pleasure at the thought that some of Eve lives in me, even though it was put there to spy on me rather than as an act of affection.

Anyway, I learned more about how to operate the simulation than was previously possible, and we were ready to move from the simulation to the real spaceship.

You won’t learn how to build a Kree star-drive from me; mine is not that kind of story. The best I can understand, and this is probably garbled, is that they found a parallel universe in which the speed of light is close to infinite. However, since the laws of this alternative universe are not conducive to life as we know it, we need to take a bubble of our universe with us into that other place. Then, we shove the bubble in the direction we want to know. It happens that the only easy place to pop into, and out of, this other universe is near, but not too close, to stars; about the distance from stars that habitable worlds can be found. As I’ve said, I don’t understand it at all. However, the learned types who study these things for a living don’t understand it either, so I don’t feel bad.

This lack of understanding didn’t bother either of us, for once we started the real mission, saying good-bye to Mother Earth as it shrank behind us, Eve and I grew even closer. There was nothing sexual in our touching, this is not that type of story, but rather we shared a deep affection you can have for someone who you come to know intensely. Those days on the ship, venturing into the wonder of outer space, were some of the best in my life.

This was true even though the first three worlds we visited lacked life worth communicating with. The first had a sort of burrowing creature that might, on a good day, give a dog a run for its money in the brains department. However, they had no communication worth bothering with. The dominant life form on the second planet was some sort of walking plant that was good at grabbing prey with its vines, but, again, was not much for talking. The third world was an even greater waste of time; its dominant life form was a long and slender worm-looking thing that didn’t communicate at all.

From orbit, we could tell that the fourth world would be different. The place looked like it had seen the hand of intelligent life. It had what looked like roads and collections of structures that were probably cities, or at least large towns. Seeing this, we prepared for contact.

The night before contact, Eve confided things to me I hadn’t known until then.

“The policeman was wrong about us,” she said as we huddled together rubbing each other’s bellies.

“What policeman,” I asked.

“The one you met after the test,” she continued. “He said that we didn’t cuddle our way to the top of the evolutionary ladder.”

“He was wrong,” I asked.

“Well,” Eve said, “we may not have cuddled with all the predators we faced, but we found ways to work with them, to make it advantageous for them not to eat us. What your people did with dogs is a crude version of what we did with the predators of our world.”

“hmmmm,” I said, “you worked with all of your predators that way?”

“not all,” Eve said, “enough though. Nonetheless, it was a close thing. We survived by a narrow margin; it almost didn’t happen.”

“Sounds dangerous,” I said.

“It was,” Eve replied. “Many of us died along the way. That’s why we send only one of us on the first voyage to a new planet. Not all the predators can be worked with.”

“I hadn’t thought of that until now,” I said. “What you’re telling me is that you’re hoping that whatever lives down there is a predator you can work with.”

“Yes,” said Eve. “That’s what we’re both hoping for.”

The intelligent beings on the planet below were predators, at least they were primarily meat eaters. They had herds of dumb-looking beasts that they slaughtered for food with little concern. They used draft animals sporadically; mostly, they pulled their own carts and sledges. However, they were learning how to use steam for locomotion, so that pulling things was becoming less of a concern.

“The Hunters,” for that is what they called themselves, looked as tough—like giant lizards with the heads of grizzly bears--as the world they inhabited. This world’s biosphere was well provisioned with spiky plants and vicious little rat-looking things with sharp teeth. These were only the most common of a variety of critters with ingenious ways to do serious harm. The whole world looked as if it were possessed of a bad attitude that I’d never noticed back home.

After our first attempt to visit the planet, we licked our wounds and considered what we’d done wrong.

“I hope you were honest when you did your intake test,” Eve said to me as he rubbed balm over nasty cut on my legs.

“Why,” I asked.

“Because we need to wake up some beasts,” Eve said. “It’s best that you can bond with the predators who’ll be guarding us.”

We settled on some beasts the size of large dogs with nasty-looking tusks and an abundance of sharp teeth. We passed on some choices that my test results said I wouldn’t be compatible with—slimy things that gave me the creeps. As we exited the ship for another trip to the planet, I agreed that it was, indeed, a good thing I’d been honest in taking my test.

With our new animal companions, we got down to the business of learning to talk to the hunters. Eve and I developed a system for doing this. I would try to show the one who worked with us objects and say my word for them. The hunter would use its form of speech—a mixture of growls and hisses--to describe the object, then Eve would lay a hand on its body. Anyway, Eve would tell me how to pronounce the word and some of the nuance behind the sounds. Apparently, she was teaching it what my sounds meant, for we developed a basic common language. This worked because the hunters had no more use for clothing than did the Kree.

“Have you noticed something about the hunters?” Eve asked one brisk evening as we embraced for warmth.

“Lot’s of things,” I said, “anything I should be noticing?”

“Maybe it’s just the Kree way of thinking, but I’ve noticed that they don’t keep pets, not even in the cursory way your people do.”

“I hadn’t thought of that,” I replied.

I tried to think back to what I’d seen of the hunters. I realized that to them the draft animals were just tools. Also, they never used other animals to protect their herds the way people used horses and dogs. And, I never saw an animal in any of the hunter’s dwellings unless it was about to be eaten.

“These creatures don’t see the need to cooperate with other animals to survive,” Eve continued. “They trust in their teeth and claws.”

The one we talk to has some pretty impressive teeth and claws,” I said. “I can see why it would trust in them.”

“She does indeed,” Eve said.

“She,” I said, “I didn’t know that…”

“She was female,” Eve said. “I didn’t want to tell you. Your people have this thing about the female of the species being weak. I didn’t want you to underestimate her; she’s pretty formidable.”

“As if,” I said, remembering the hunter, towering over me as the light of her world’s reddish sun glinted of the purple and gold of her smooth, reptilian skin. She was quite formidable indeed.

“Don’t worry. I’d never fight that hunter male or female,” I said not realizing how quickly trouble would make me a liar.

Said trouble began with the landslide. Our encampment was on flat ground that was close to rugged country. We took walks through the nearby mountains occasionally because we both appreciated the beauty of that tortured landscape. The trail we liked best took us up a mountain to a place where we could look out over a valley studded with the sort of rock formations I’d seen once at The Garden of The Gods. We spent long afternoons deciding what the rocky spires looked like. Eve knew the beasts of a multitude of worlds and amazed me with her ability to see likenesses between the rocks and pets she had domesticated. I started calling the place “bestiary valley,” a name Eve did not argue with.

“We have nothing like this on our world,” Eve said in reverence on our last hike up the trail. “This world is blessed to have such majesty.”

“It is beautiful,” I agreed as the sun sank behind the daunting mountains on the valley’s far side.

On the way home, we said little as the sky darkened. We did not want to break the spell of that place. All we wanted was to enjoy each other in such a place of natural splendor.

Anyway, towards the end of the trail, where we could get our first look at our ship, the trail took us down a slope of jumbled rocks. I heard a sudden rumbling. I looked up and saw some large rocks tumbling toward me. As I said, I saw them, but it was too late for me to do anything about it. In what seemed an eternity, but was only an instant, I was beneath the rockfall. I feared that I would not be able to get out.

“Don’t worry,” Eve said, I’ll get you free.”

I’d forgotten that the Kree could move things with their minds. It had not been needed, and the Kree were not a folk who showed off. But I was gratefully reminded of the Kree’s talent that day as Eve pulled the rocks from atop my body. I lay there in pure relief and wonder as she pulled the last stone from my chest; she then lifted me back onto the trail.

“Can you walk?” Eve asked.

“I think so,” I said hobbling along a flat stretch of the trail. “At least as far as the ship.”

“You should have let me lead,” Eve scolded. “I could have warned you. I can lift you like this,” she continued, “but it tires us out to use our minds in that way. I’m almost to the end of my strength.

I do not know if Eve’s mental exhaustion allowed what happened the next day or not. Stones are heavy, but when they fall, they do so without malice. Once their fall ends. they stay where they land. This was not true of the dozen or so warriors who attached us. They came for us the next day and kept coming until they had taken us prisoner.

The hunters do not have a concept of justice, at least not the high-flown self-congratulatory philosophizing that we who like to think we’re civilized have. Instead, they kill and punish when they need to do so for the protection of their pack. This is done without a spirit of vengeance or with malice. Neither do they invoke gods or spirits when they make their decisions.

So, their hall of necessity was a bare, spartan place, a place to make decisions on what had to be done. Also, what they did was prosecuted quickly with brutal dispatch. Once they took Eve to face the judgment called for by their law, I asked the creature I’d communicated with for an explanation.

 “Our law says that thou shalt not suffer a witch to live,” she said.

This was said with no more passion than one would use to describe taking out the trash. For a second, I didn’t even realize that Eve would be put to death for practicing witchcraft. Certainly, she was not a witch in the old sense, someone who’d sold her soul to demonic forces for magic. But then, what did the term, “witch,” mean to modern man. To the extent that the word had meaning, and it was too overused to have much meaning at all, it meant someone, usually female, who could do things that the user of the word could not understand. I guess that Eve was a witch by that meaning. It seemed this used-to-death meaning worked for the rough-hewn law of the hunters.

Once I realized that Eve would be killed, I lost it, charging at the hunter in total rage. I’ve never used weapons, and the Kree don’t have them either, so I pounded on the lizard thing with my bare fists to no avail. Hunter guards pulled me from her and, for a second, I thought I too would die, but the hunters didn’t see my as worth killing. I sure was no threat to any of them. Then, the hunter spoke.

“I speak to you as den mother,” the hunter began, “we have experience with magic users. Like your companion, they were soft and kindly beings and like your companion they used beasts to guard their soft bodies from our world. But they took away our way of survival. To them, hunting was barbaric and cruel, so they gave us food and told us not to hunt. They found the laws by which we protect the pack odious, so they changed our law. Then we became dependent on their magic. Without our way of life and our customs of survival, we became weak; we started to die off.”

“But we figured them out before it became too late,” the den mother continued. “We figured out how to defeat their magic, to drive them from our world. Yet it was a close thing; we almost did not survive. To this day, we watch those who visit from the sky to spy out if they use magic. This is how we found Eve out. We watched you on the trail.”

“Go now,” the den mother concluded, “Our laws do not command the killing of fools, they accomplish that without our help. You are therefore free to go, take your dead and return home in your sky-ship if you can.” She made a downward slicing motion with her left claw; court was adjourned.

It happened that I could return to Earth, backtracking past the three worlds we had visited before, worlds without the wonder, and the danger, of intelligent life.

If the voyage to the world of the hunters had been the happiest time in my life, this was the loneliest. I remembered car trips across the plains of Nebraska, land I’d thought was empty until I experienced the void between the stars. Then, I would think of how the void of space was a mirror to the emptiness in my soul, and I would strive to think of something else.

I would remember holding Eve’s body after the hunters had loaded her corpse onto the ship. I remembered the affection she’d given; affection she would never give again, and I would again ponder the empty place she’d left in me.

This was worse than the grief I’d experienced when my Mother passed on into death or the pain I felt when my Father moved on. As for the parade of casual friends from my youth, there passing from my life left a mark of such relative insignificance as to not be worthy of mention. And so, contemplating my inner void, I returned home.

When I returned, I thought the Kree would be angry with me blaming me for Eve’s death. However, when I landed, the Kree came to take the body away and to console me for my loss. Far from blaming me, they welcomed me to stay with them for as long as I might want.

“Many races have problems with magic, mortal prohibitions against it,” my escort explained. “Yours did at one time, though most of you have forgotten. Magic is often viewed as dangerous to people because they don’t understand it and cannot come to terms with it. And truly powerful magic, the magic that comes with advance technology, is often destructive to societies not flexible enough to change. That’s why we pair our scouts with folk who are not magicians; that way, if the witch is killed, then, maybe, someone can escape punishment and come back to warn us. Thanks to your return, we know not to visit the hunter’s world.”

And so, I live with the Kree now. I would not want to leave their affection, for the hard world of humanity. Humans have no balm for the grief I feel for Eve that compares with what the Kree can give me.

This is true even thought I suspect that I may be a pet to them. After all, many animals we keep as pets have no desire to return to the wild, and the Kree’s skill at pet keeping makes ours look primitive by comparison. So, don’t be surprised that I have no desire to leave their affectionate confines.

Even so, there are times when I look out at the human world and wonder, just where do I belong. To what extent am I human? To what extent have I made myself a mere dog kept by Kree owners. Though I do not want to leave this confinement, I wonder if I am a victim of magic more subtle, and more powerful, than telekinesis, the power to bend wills under the snuggly power of affection. And sometimes I wonder if the great prohibitions of The Bible have reasons that the church has forgotten.

I will leave for space soon. It is the one thing I can do in the Kree’s affection-built cage that makes me feel more human than pet. My teammate Anne is soft and warm. She is insistent that I know she is female and has no problem with me thinking her weak. If she would not appreciate the beauty of a valley of rock formations, I also think that she would be careful, making safe choices that would not lead to the necessity for dangerous magic. I think that with my hard-won experience and her caution, we can keep ourselves safe so that neither one of us will suffer.