

The Magic Loom
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Once upon a time there was a magic loom. Unlike most looms, it could be used by a weaver *and* it could weave *by itself*. It could weave a path to new places, or it could weave a colorful picture which would sooth every sour mood. Also, it could teach anyone to weave, guiding their hands to link colors into magical cloths, whether made of yarn or twigs or fabric.

This magic loom never moved. It stayed in the same place - even when the home it was in was torn down, somehow it survived. New people would come and build a house around it again, often building a basement or a bedroom around the loom. Year after year, for centuries, it would weave for whomever lived in the house. For many years, weaving was a common skill, and women would spin yarn on a spinner next to the wheel, dye yarn with coloring made from local plants, and on the beds of the house and on the bodies of the people would be warm, soft blankets and clothing made on the loom.

After a few centuries, new kinds of looms were made which could be operated by machine, and no one even gave a thought to using a hand loom. Occasionally someone who was an artist would buy the house, and weave beautiful wall decorations. But more often, the people who bought the house were not artists, and not interested in learning about weaving, and didn't even sit down at the loom. The loom fell into disuse, and the rooms which were built around it were just closets. No one wanted to use the loom... and it felt lonely.

Eventually, there was no more yarn to weave. But the loom was hopeful. The last cloth it weaved contained the words, "TRY ME" and a picture of a mixture of foreign lands, trees, rivers and animals, as a message to someone who might find it someday. But over the years, the dust of ages had dulled the colors so that the words and pictures were merely odd shapes of no meaning.

As the twenty-first century began, the loom's home became a house which was rented to people who had just moved to town. That was perfect, because each family which came needed something different from the family before, and the loom could make something just for them.

A new family moved in one bright day. The people who owned the house before them, while not artists, had been quite interested in antiques – things older than one hundred years. The people had cleaned up the loom, and built around it a bedroom, placing it in a sunny, warm spot. But they had never read the message on the loom under the dirt. They hung their clothes on it, put toys on it, dressed it up, but never used it to weave. The loom felt better, but it still felt lonely.

The mother in this new family was an artist, who was very good at cleaning up spills of glue and dirt and other things which happen when you make art. Her two daughters were very, very curious about her work, but sometimes she had to tell them to stay away from her tools. Other days, she tried to involve them as much as possible. One day she spilled some dirt on a dress, and said “Oh, no! My new dress. I wonder if this new cleaner will work to clean it up? But I can’t test it on the dress, I have to test it on some fabric we don’t care about.” She looked about the room. Elsie, the youngest daughter, who was 6, jumped up and ran to her sister’s bedroom, where the loom was sitting. She looked at the fabric, and at her older sister Juna, who was 8, who was sitting on her bed surrounded by animals playing a traveling game. Then she ran back to her mother and took her hand, dragging her back down the hall.

“Mommy, let’s try it on this!” she said, pointing to the cloth on the loom. “It’s old and dirty and it’s not even really ours and we don’t care what happens to it.”

Her mother paused, and fingered the fabric. “If it weren’t so dusty, it might be quite nice – it’s rather soft.” She looked at her fingers, now black with sooty dust of ages. “Well, the dirt certainly comes off a bit! Let’s see if we can get it all off with the new cleaner”

She noticed Juna on her bed and added, “That is, if it’s all right with your sister – after all, the loom is in her room. I can’t see any harm in it. What do you say, Juna?”

“About what?” asked Juna without looking up from her bed.

“Is it okay with you if we try out my new cleaner on this old weaving?”

“Sure, mom,” said Juna, busy with her animals and not really listening. “Let’s go to an island!” she had her dragon saying to a fish. “Let’s go on a magic carpet!” “Okay,” she had the fish say, “just pack your bags and load them on!”

Mom left to go get the cleaning solution.

“Where is our magic carpet? We could make one out of these vines!” Juna said to her zebra, who nodded in agreement. Juna held up the caterpillar next to it, and in its small voice she squeaked “Yes! Make it as beautiful as me, with all kinds of colors!” Juna picked up some old yarn, and started to do some finger weaving.

Elsie looked annoyed. “Why are you doing that? Just jump over here and do this!” She jumped on to the throw rug, pulled up the fringe and started steering. “Vrooom! Vrooom! We’re off to Tobago on our Toboggan!” Juna just watched for a minute, then left her animals and joined Elsie on the rug. “Woohoo!” she cried as she grabbed the fringe, too.

Their mother smiled as she came in with the cleaning solution, and their father, who was just walking in the door from work, yelled up the stairs:

“Hey! What’s going on in there?”

They heard his large frame taking the stairs two at a time as he ran up, and could almost hear the smile which seemed as big as the accompanying leaps. He poked his head around the corner.

“DADDY!!!” the girls ran and jumped on him, Juna onto his leg and Elsie up into his arms.

“You’re home!”

“Come on, we’re going to Tobago!” Elsie shouted in his ear. She pushed her sister out of her father’s arms and tugged him down toward the floor. Juna glared at Elsie, but crawled back on to the bed with her animals.

The father said “Elsie, that wasn’t very nice. I don’t want to play with you right now if you’re going to be that mean to your sister.” He got up and kissed his wife, then went over to Juna on the bed and asked, “So, where are you and the animals going?” Elsie just pulled up the carpet and made it a toboggan and shouted louder than ever, “Whoohoo!”

“Charles, look at this…” said the mother. Charles looked up and said “What is it, Sherisse?”

“It’s beautiful. Just come here.” Charles wondered why she wouldn’t say what it was that had got her attention, but had learned long ago to trust his wife’s instincts. He said to a zebra, “I’ll be right back,” smiled at Juna and walked across the room to peek over Sherisse’s shoulder and give her a questioning nudge.

“Look at the picture. Mountains, valleys, sun, fog, beach, animals, it looks very inviting, doesn’t it? And feel it – it’s so soft, like nothing I’ve ever worked with.”

“Wow!” he said. “I’ve never noticed this here before. Where’d you get the yarn?”

“This is what was here to begin with. On the loom. I didn’t do anything but clean it off. What do you think it means, ‘TRY ME’?”

“Oh, it’s probably just advertising, you know ‘Push this button, test out the toy’ kind of stuff.” Charles worked in advertising.

“Advertising? Looks kind of old to have an ad on it still. You think no one ever used it?”

“I don’t know. What do you think?”

Juna looked over from the bed. Elsie was still in her own world on the carpet. Juna’s zebra asked her how to spell Tobago. Sherisse replied absentmindedly, “T-O-B-A-G-O”, tracing the letters on the fabric as she spoke.

Suddenly, the walls of the room started to shimmer and wiggle. Juna didn't notice, as she was so focused on her animals imagining a flying carpet. Before Charles and Sherisse could even gasp, the shimmering was over, and they felt a warm breeze. Then they started to notice things. Elsie, who had jumped up at the first glimmer and stopped in surprise almost mid-jump, finally got her voice back and whispered, "There's palm trees. And flowers."

Sherisse looked over her shoulder. "There's an ocean."

Juna looked up and said, "Oh! We're here. Tobago." She took her zebra by the foot and said simply, "Let's go." She walked off the carpet and into the sand.

Sherisse shouted "Wait, honey! Don't go away! Where are we? How did we get here?"

Juna turned around and looked over at her family. "We're in Tobago. That's where I wanted to go, and I'm there. So are you."

Charles listened to Juna's voice. She was calm, like she did this kind of thing every day. "Juna," he said, "have you been here before?"

"No," she said.

"Have you traveled all of a sudden like this?" he continued.

"Of course. Don't you? You travel all the time," she said.

He squinted in the sun as he looked around. "I usually take a plane."

"Oh," said Juna. "I go this way. It's faster than a plane. I thought everyone went this way when they weren't home."

Elsie was clinging to her mother, all thoughts of a toboggan lost. Her eyes went from fear to wonder in a brief moment, and she said to her mother, “Where are we? How did we get here?” She turned to Juna and said, “What do you mean, ‘this way’? What way? How did we get here?”

Sherisse looked at her fingers, still touching the soft weaving. “It’s the loom,” she murmured, suddenly sure of herself. She looked up at Juna. “It’s the loom, isn’t it? It goes where you ask it.” Juna met her eyes.

“Uh huh,” said Juna. Then she continued with a bit of disbelief but also a slight twinkle of pride: “You really didn’t know?”

“No, honey. We didn’t know.”

Elsie looked over to Juna and went to join her sister. They started to build a sandcastle, dripping wet sand through their fingers and watching it dry almost instantly in the warm sun. Charles and Sherisse walked off of the bedroom floor, which had traveled with them as well as all the furniture. As her toes touched the sand, Sherisse giggled. Charles caught her eye and laughed.

“You know we’re safe, too. I can tell. Very weird, but safe?”

She nodded. “I wonder how we know?”

Elsie was leading Juna in exploring the new territory. “It’s great to see them together like that,” said Sherisse.

“Maybe that’s how we know,” said Charles.

After about 15 minutes of castle-building, the girls explored the edges of the palm tree forest on the other side of the beach.

“Girls, don’t go too far. I know you’ve done this before, Juna, but for the rest of us it’s about enough for a first trip!” The girls looked wistfully at the forest, but came back to the bedroom set.

Charles looked at the girls. He sighed, not wanting to leave himself. “Do you know how to get back?”

“Sure!” said Juna. “You just write where you want to go. Like, ‘H-O-M-E’.” It seemed the most natural thing to her.

“Cool!” said Elsie. “Can I have a turn?”

“Sure,” said Juna, as Elsie sat at the loom. “Let’s do it together – I’ll spell, you write.”

Charles looked over to Sherisse. They both smiled. Elsie traced the word as Juna spelled it. As soon as she lifted her finger from the last stroke of the “E” in “home,” the warm air shivered, and they were back in Juna’s bedroom. Juna looked up at her walls, and at her parents and sister. They looked a little surprised that the walls had reappeared!

“Maybe next time we can stay longer?” Juna asked, hoping to distract them from being surprised. She went on: “I learned a lot traveling. You said first grade was a time for learning. I was just doing what you said. Aren’t you happy?”

Sherisse remembered Juna’s teacher talking about Juna’s strong interest in geography, her great imagination, her realistic stories at sharing time. Her pictures of places she had never been – or so the family had thought - which came home as artwork. Sherisse had thought it was due to the family moving across the country, and her husband’s travel. She looked at her happy, safe child, and looked back at the loom.

“Yes, honey, I’m happy. Tell me more.” Charles held Elsie, and the whole family listened. And so Juna told stories that thrilled Elsie and surprised her parents. The loom always kept its

travelers safe, always returned them home as soon as they wanted to come. She had traveled in time and to beautiful places. She had not yet learned to weave, but she knew that the loom would teach them when they were ready.

She knew they were ready, now. Elsie and Juna learned to weave, and made beautiful presents for the family. Soon they were weaving backdrops for their mother's art shows, and people were asking to buy their weavings.

The family traveled again. And again. At first they went on the weekends only. Then they started taking a quick visit to somewhere as an after dinner treat! The children's stories at show and tell times at school were filled with details of their trips – sounds and sights and smells and tastes and feelings. They kept the loom a secret, because somehow they knew that if anyone else found out about the loom, it would stop taking them places and teaching them. But it wasn't so hard to keep it to themselves, because they had each other to share with. They had a really fun *family* secret!

Charles and Sherisse snuck in when the girls weren't there, to learn from the loom. They knew that when either of them traveled for business, the Elsie and Juna missed them a lot. They wanted surprise them with something that would make the girls feel safe their hearts, just like they felt safe when the loom took them traveling. The girls had had an even harder time waiting for them to come home ever since the loom showed its magic -- business travel usually involved planes and trains which now seemed to waste a lot of time!

Charles and Sherisse kept their own secret from the girls until at last they had learned enough about weaving, and traveled to enough places to find just the right yarn, to make a weaving just for the children's room. It full of rainbow colors, soft yarn with unusual textures and twinkles woven it. And yet its message was the simplest and most twinkling thing of all: it read simply, "We love you - forever."

THE END