

LITERARY EXCERPT: EXPLORING THE UNIVERSE BY CAROL MALTHANER

**** Note: These pages are extracted from the middle of the story. ****

Summary: This is a chapter in a novel, Exploring the Universe, and in this chapter, Krista is reminiscing about her life, eventually explaining how her maternal actions have resulted in her teenage daughter taking over another character's mobile home in Florida while that character has it locked up for the season.

Chapter: Go To Your Loom

When I was really little, I mean barely-talking little, if my grandmother suggested, “Why don’t you go to your room and play for a while?”, I would crawl under my mother’s enormous, cavernous loom, the one her father had built for her when he couldn’t afford to buy her the beautiful Swedish Grimakrausa she wanted. As far as I was concerned that loom was “my room”. In fact, it wasn’t until shortly before I started school – Maybe I was around 4 and maybe my grandmother was worried that I would sound ignorant in kindergarten? – that she finally had to explain that not all rooms were looms, that there was a difference that my biased ears had not yet picked up on. “Krista,” she said while writing in big block letters on her grocery pad, “What’s this letter?”

“L,” I replied. She knew I knew the alphabet. Where was this going?

“OK, now what’s this letter?”

“R.” Fortunately for her, and me, too, I guess, I didn’t yet know to say, “duh”. That came in 1st grade, but my face was probably the visual equivalent of ‘duh’ right then.

She persisted. “Krista, now really pay attention,” she instructed. “I want you to say this letter (it was the L) and notice where your tongue is touching when you finish saying it.” It took a few tries, and she finally had to tell me to say L, and then when I got to the end to keep saying it, sort of like humming the ‘L’. That worked. I noticed my tongue on the roof of my mouth.

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But I was still in the dark as to what she was getting at. Tongues aside, I still heard ‘my loom’ as the place to go play.

“OK, you’re doing great. Now hum R. Rrrrrrrr. Where is your tongue?”

I tired. I really tried. I mean, she did get me to hum R. but I did not get the connection all this fuss had to do with my loom. She must have noticed tears welling up in my eyes because the story goes that she said we’d done enough and that I should go play in my room. I agreed and ran to the sunporch and my beloved loom.

Now, before you think I was backwards or something, I probably should add that the way in which I used “my loom” only helped to further confuse my ability to discern the two words. For example, the loom was not just my secret hide-away, my “house” if I was playing with my dolls and my “fort” when I was playing with my pirate ship Legos. It was also where I slept at night and where I kept the old green trunk with all my clothes. That other place upstairs with that big-girl bed she bought to lure me up there and to a life of normalcy was not my ‘loom’. Grandma could buy all the furniture she wanted, but my ‘loom’ was here in the sunporch where as an infant, my mother lay me to sleep on the floor while she wove. It was where as an older baby I used to roll around on my rubber keyboard, creating asymmetrical scales as I inched and reached to get a block or my Dumbo elephant or her keys. Of course, I don’t remember all this, but Grandma watched it all happen, and so after Mom died, she understood why I tended crawl back under there no matter where she left me in the house to play. And to cry bloody murder if she tried to pull me out. She eventually gave up and so for years now, my loom was my room.

In fact, I suspect I did not truly understand these linguistic subtleties until I was seven, and my best friend gave me a little toy lap-loom for my birthday. That probably goes down as

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my best ever childhood present partly because I loved the rhythm of weaving with it, but also because I loved the organizing of a new project: the selecting of yarns or the tearing up of fabric or the collecting of feathers or drying of flowers. Like a good cook, I liked to get all my ingredients ready and lined up before I started. I wove with a plan, the inspiration happening first, the weaving merely the implementation of that plan, a serene back and forth that allowed my idea to emerge before my gaze, all perfect, all as expected, all mine.

Of course, my grandmother watched all this for several months as she watched everything I did, and although I have always considered her a smart one, truly wise like a fairy godmother, I'm sure it did not require rocket science to deduce it was time to show me what else I could do with "my loom" besides use it for a bedroom.

Now that day I remember, the day my loom became my Loom! We had to take off the various covers we had draped over it: the pink baby quilt over the back left side for when I wanted to play house (and I still did when I was eight) and the big navy green wool army blanket over the right side for playing Legos and the oversized blue sweat shirt draped over the seat to create a puppet theatre that my friends and I could crouch behind to perform for Grandma. Once those coverings were off, all the clutter that had accumulated underneath lay exposed. Grandma said that the treadles would not work with Legos and puppets and shoes and dirty socks underneath them, so we had to get two of her laundry baskets and load all the stuff into those. When we were done, my beloved loom looked naked, as if vultures had swooped in and consumed all the tasty parts, leaving a skeleton of its former self behind.

This was a bitter-sweet experience for me as you can image. And the sweetness might have flown out the window if my wise Grandmother, knowing how I liked to work, had not entered into this activity fully prepared. While I stood there trying to decide if I was too old to

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cry, she disappeared into the kitchen and quickly returned with not bags, but boxes, several boxes, of supplies so I could get started on a project right away. She said she knew I hadn't planned it all out, but how could I if I didn't know how this loom worked, what it could do? This would be a practice project, she explained. Just a project to figure the big loom all out. I could even take the project apart when I got the hang of things and re-use the materials if I wanted. But let me tell you, at the risk of spoiling any punch line this story might have, I certainly did not take that glorious project apart when I was done. In fact, to this day it is one of my dearest possessions, and I hung it over my daughter Toni's crib many years later.

But getting back to the story, those before mentioned tears over my de-nuded loom were still lurking and might have gushed in full force if it wasn't for the splendor, the delicious beckoning possibilities of the large brilliantly colored spools that my grandma pulled out of the boxes. Spools, not just skeins, I'm telling you. I'm sure you remember the intoxication you felt as a kid when you opened the top of a new box of Crayolas, especially the 96 count with the build-in crayon sharpener in the back, and all those pointy, virgin colors blinked out at you? Well, multiply that by a 100, maybe a 1000, and that's how I suddenly felt as I looked around the room. Those spools stood at attention: luscious purples, startling greens, fiery reds, and insouciant hot pinks, all waiting for my command. But any future general still has to go through basic training, and without much fanfare, that's what Grandma launched me into. "What colors do you want to play around with? Pick just two for now," she barked. And then she added more gently, "Krista, pick two pretty ones for your new loom."