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## Trista

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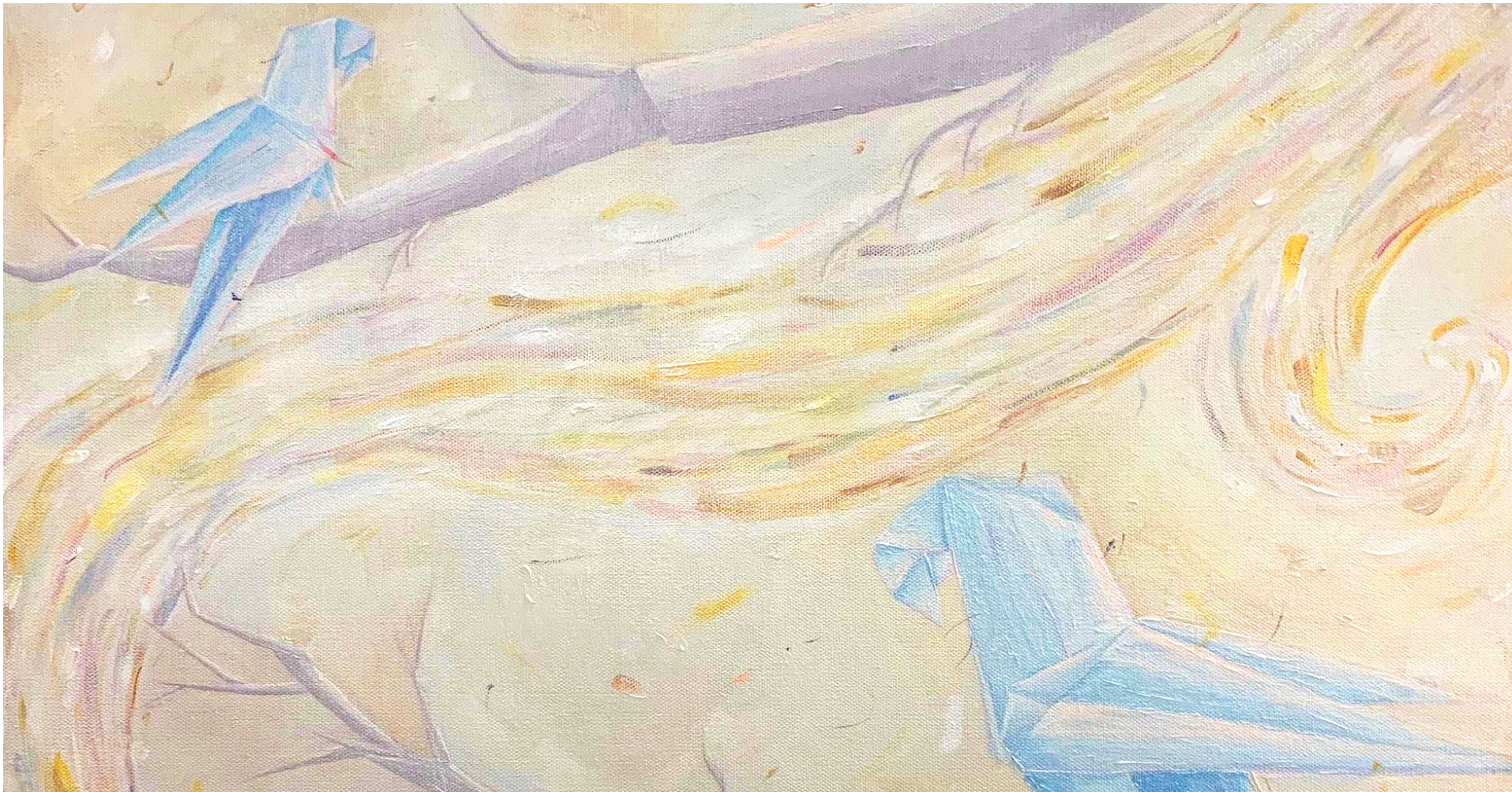
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*Winds of Change* | Megan Mishler | Acrylic

# Trista

andrew perabeau

She stared off into the drizzle outside the schoolroom, getting lost in its noise on the pane which reminded her of rice spilling on the wood floor at home. Well that's not home anymore. Ma had told her "limpia el arroz," which she did, with the exception of three grains that went under the counter just to see if Ma would notice. She wonders if the new owners will find them. Maybe when she goes back, she can finally pick them up. But what's wrong with leaving her mark anyway? In fact, she almost hopes those three grains never move.

"Trista!" the teacher says. "Hello? Over here please."

Her own name is hard to recognize - it sounds so different.

She looks at the board which is full of figures she's seen before but in an order all messed up. Maybe it's a puzzle to unscramble them? Her gaze bounces to a familiar Elmer's Glue in the corner of the room. It's good to see a friendly face in the bull on the packaging. He looks so honest, so steady.



Her parents haven't lied to her that she can remember. The only hint of dishonesty was the time she went fishing with Papá but didn't catch anything. Ma couldn't tell the difference between the salmon from the market and the water, he assured her.

There is no reason not to trust them. But this time feels different. It's hard to believe that "todo va a estar bien" amidst all the late night whispers and what little she knows of the big words on the TV leaving no room for hope. And yet, she clings to those words. Not as lint clings to her jacket or her skirt to the back of her legs after sitting too long in a hot schoolroom, but rather as her mother clings to the handle on the ceiling of the car when her dad drives on hills or as a baby chimpanzee clings to its mother on TV. Todo va a estar bien. Everything is going to be alright.

As soon as a stable, comforting thought finally settles, the bell rings and the room erupts into chaos. The teacher yells for them to be seated and to line up calmly, but to no avail. Trista picks out another girl - a pretty, blonde, confident girl who raised her hand a lot and follows her. Apparently, it's time to grab the brown paper bag Mamá handed her in the morning during ¡Despierta América! and go to the cafeteria.

She sat alone. It's just too much work to try to communicate when you're eating. She wanted to enjoy her torta in peace. Ahh. The chorizo and the huevos and the queso and the toasted bread - she stopped mid-bite to breathe in through her nose the comforting scent.

Todo va a estar bien.

Before she could chew and swallow, though, she was approached! How could she go from feeling like a cheetah to a pet cat so quickly? He made her nervous with his crew cut and American-flag tee. The cautionary advice from her parents

and aunts and uncles and friends came rushing back all at once but she still had hope.

"Hello. I'm Trista."

"Hi, I'm Paul."

He didn't have that rasp that sounds like he's weathered a centuries-long-struggle between us and them. It was a pure voice. Smooth and uncorrupted. They would be friends. Communicating was still a struggle but there was a soccer ball outside which they kicked around during recess after lunch. She knew he could play with the other kids, but he decided not to.

Having someone to stand by in line was so nice. Of course, they weren't supposed to talk - the "shhh!" of the teachers translates easily from back home. But just the presence of someone who also acknowledges hers.

As the little hand moved toward 3 and the big hand circled around one last time to 12, she knew it was time to go home. She was going to walk the three blocks but Paul offered to give her a lift home, and she agreed.

As the car pulled into the dirt driveway of their apartment - the apartment Papá assured Ma and her was only temporary - the tone in Paul's mom's voice changed ever so slightly. She remembered that voice from the principal talking to her mom. She didn't like it.

As she got out of the car to run inside, the screen door flew open and she was met with the pillowy hug of her mother, burying her head in her shoulder. But suddenly she felt dread, like everything but her stomach went into freefall. How can Ma say thank you to Paul's mom? How could they set up a playdate?

It was at this moment that she realized this feeling would last her whole life. School was okay, and home is great - but

the mix is unbearable. She felt like the yolk of an egg being passed back and forth to rid of the whites, losing just a little bit of mass each time, but she desperately wanted not to have been cracked at all and to stay in the comfort of yesterday. Safe with the rice on the kitchen floor.