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Hope

Your future is bright because God is for you

BY ARLENE PELLICANE
ILLUSTRATIONS BY BARBARA TAMILIN

You've seen the movie. A young woman in the big city goes home to her small town for Christmas. In the charming town square, she runs into her high school sweetheart. By the end of the movie, they're happily engaged.

I wanted that kind of romance in high school. I imagined holding hands with a cute boy between classes and sitting together at lunch. But high school came and went. No dates. No boyfriend. No nothing.

I was fixated on one romantic outcome. I longed for an imaginary relationship with a boy who didn't exist. But I wish I had put my hope in Someone more trustworthy.

The celebration of Jesus' birth is a good time for us to consider where we've put our hope—our confidence, worth and identity. After all, our expectations have a huge influence over the decisions we make. And those choices will help us or hurt us now and in the coming year.

If only

I used to think *if only* I had a boyfriend, all my dreams would be realized. What I didn't understand was that once my first *if only* was met, another *if only* would take its place. *If only* I had more money. *If only* I was more popular. *If only* I had a better car.

Is there an *if only* in your heart? Maybe you think you have to ace all your exams to get into your first-choice college. Or perhaps you feel the pressure to train harder to make it to the state finals. There's nothing wrong with practicing, studying and working hard to reach goals. That can be a good thing. But wishing *for* something and putting your hope *in* something are two different things.

If you're a Christian, you may know you need to give your desires to Jesus. He has saved you from your sins (Romans 8:24) and is trustworthy. But how do you put your hope in Him instead of in your own desires?

Hope renewed

As I moved away from longing for people and events, I realized that what I had based my life on were temporary goals. I wasn't putting my hope in God. Here is what I learned about trusting Him with my desires:

No one who trusts Christ will be put to shame. God's love has been poured out to us through His Son, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. God will always keep His promises. He says that no one who waits for Him will be ultimately ashamed or disappointed (Psalm 25:3; Isaiah 30:18).

He richly provides everything we need. God won't provide everything we want, but He will provide our daily needs. We aren't supposed to put our hope in money or material possessions because these are always changing. Instead, our hope can be set on God, who is unchanging (1 Timothy 6:17).

So don't put your hope in how many social media followers you have, an amount of money or even other people. The only hope that has a good return is the one that tells us we're loved (Psalm 147:11), accepted as children of the King and have worth. This is the desire that meets all our needs. This is what happens when we trust Jesus with our future and identity.

Relying on His direction through His Word and the wisdom of other Christians doesn't mean we can't want a relationship or a new car. But as we work to achieve these goals, our identity and worth can rest in the One whom we can trust and who doesn't change.

Moving forward

Feelings are real, and life isn't always bright. When hope is misplaced and our goals aren't reached, we feel sad or hopeless (Proverbs 13:12). Those days can be dark. Here are a few ways you can redirect your attention back to God:

- *Talk to yourself.* You can literally say your name out loud like this (I'll insert my name as an example): "Arlene, it's going to be OK. Put your hope in God. He loves you and has a plan for your life that is good." Talking to yourself can help shift your perspective and get you moving in the right direction.
- *Sing along with hopeful lyrics.* [illegible] Christian songs [illegible] follow the *Brio* playlist on Spotify. (See playlist songs on the next page.)
- *Read through the Psalms.* They describe joy and suffering and will point you back to God as the author of your emotions.

When our souls are anchored in Christ, He will guide us through our circumstances (Hebrews 6:19). You might not be able to see hope growing in your life among your many *if onlys*, but you'll feel its powerful effect. When you know the future is bright because God is for you, not against you, you can live in the promise of His hope. ✝

Arlene Pellicane is a speaker, an author of several books and the host of the "Happy Home" podcast. She lives with her husband, James, three kids and a goldendoodle.

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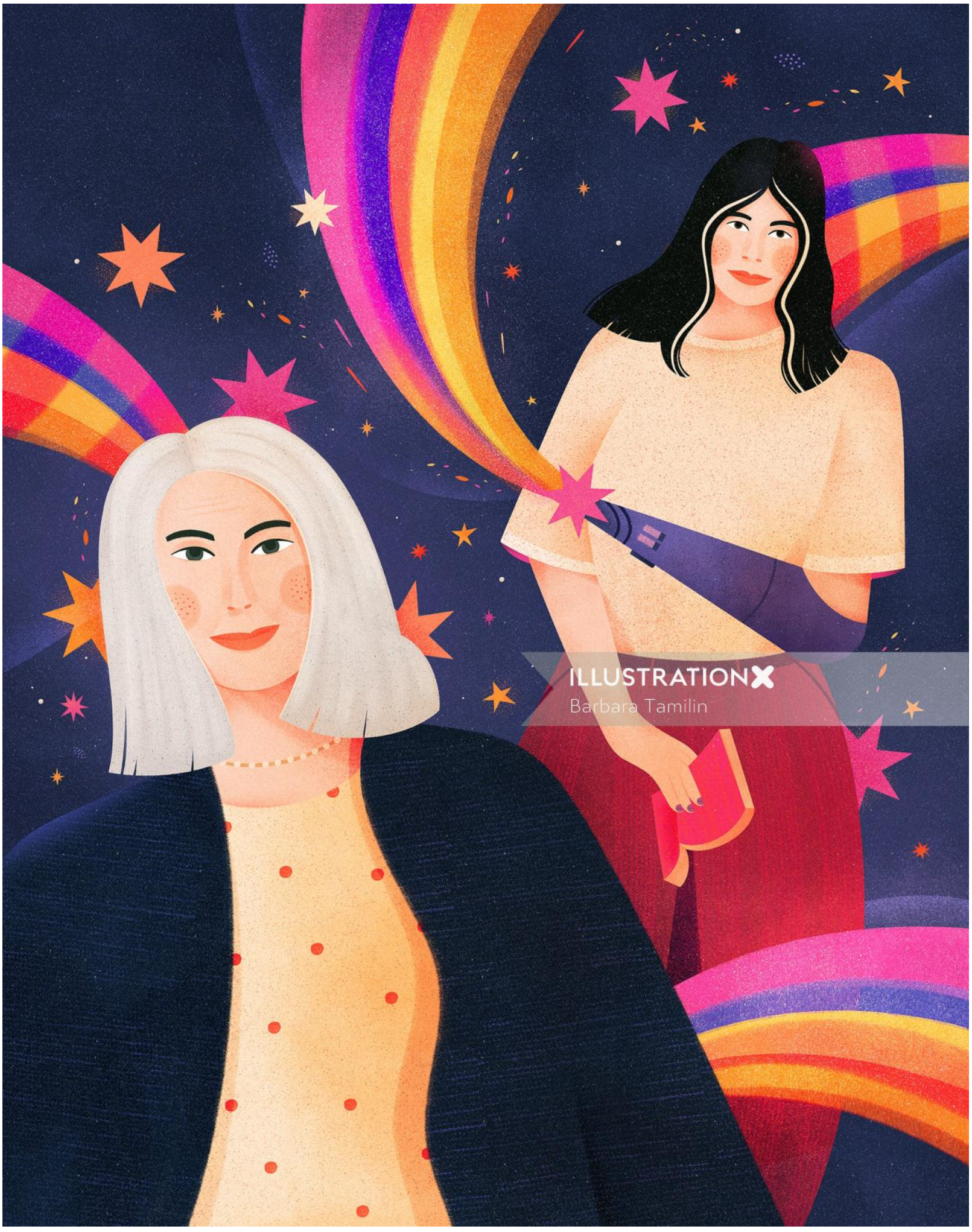

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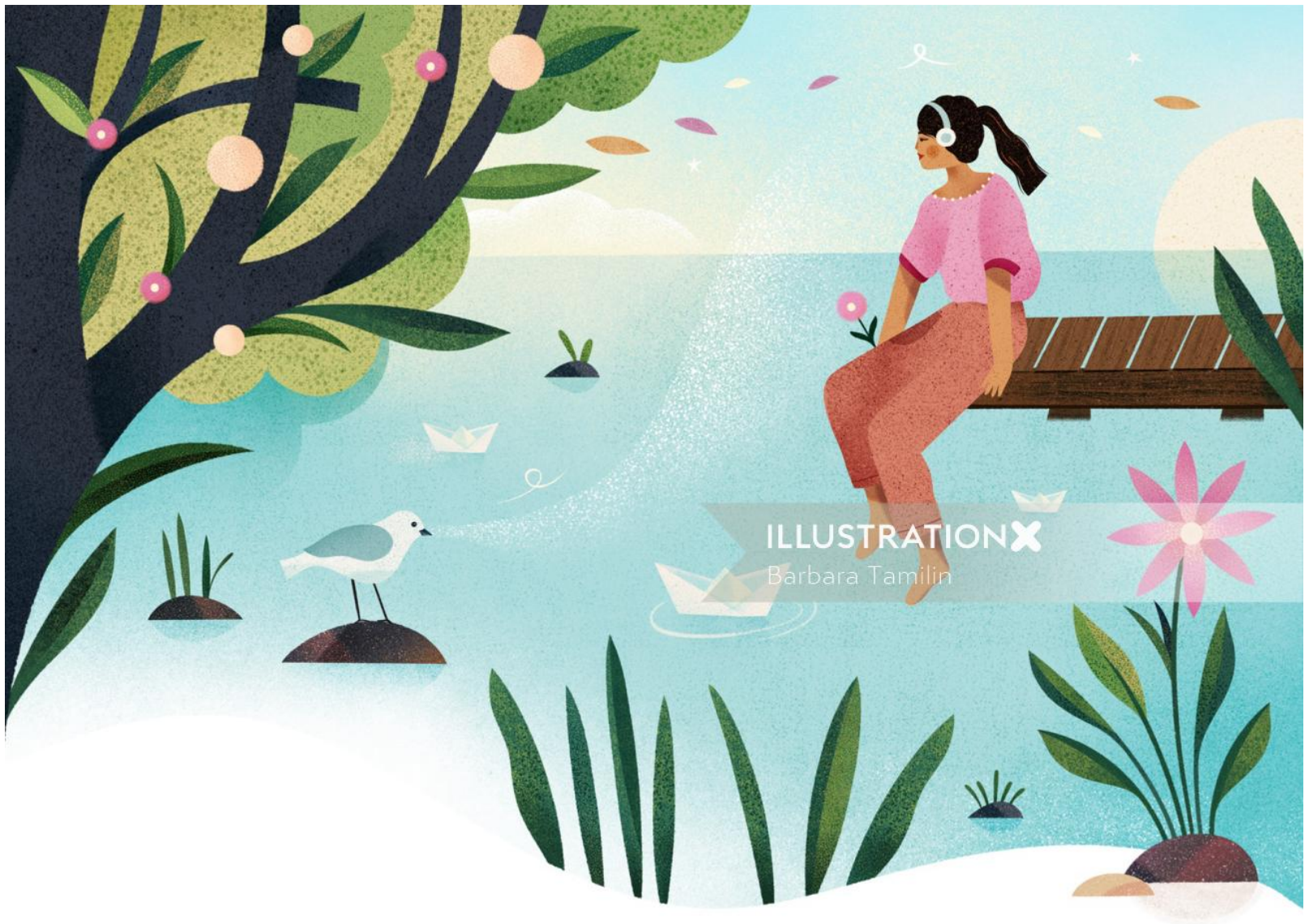

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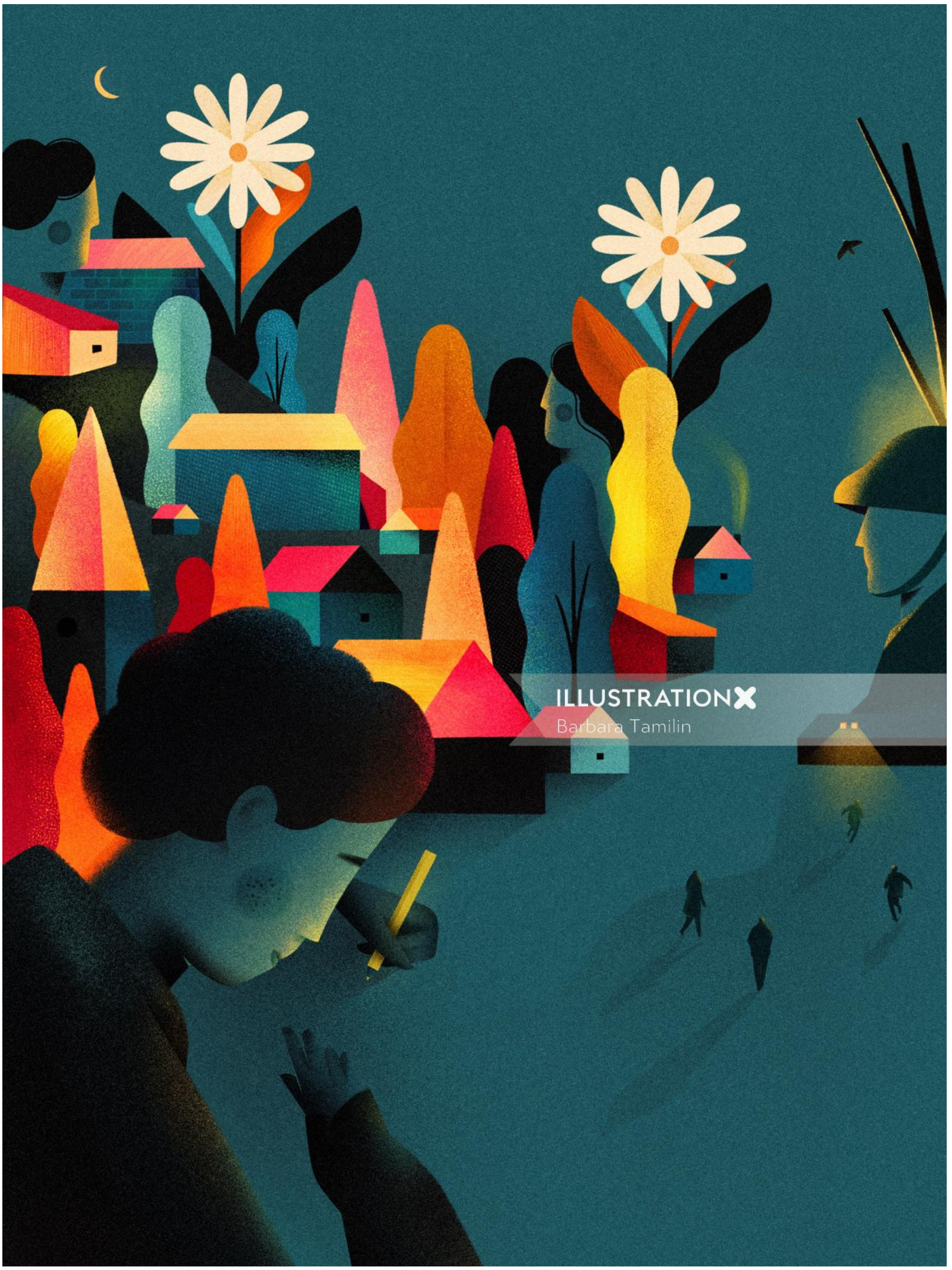

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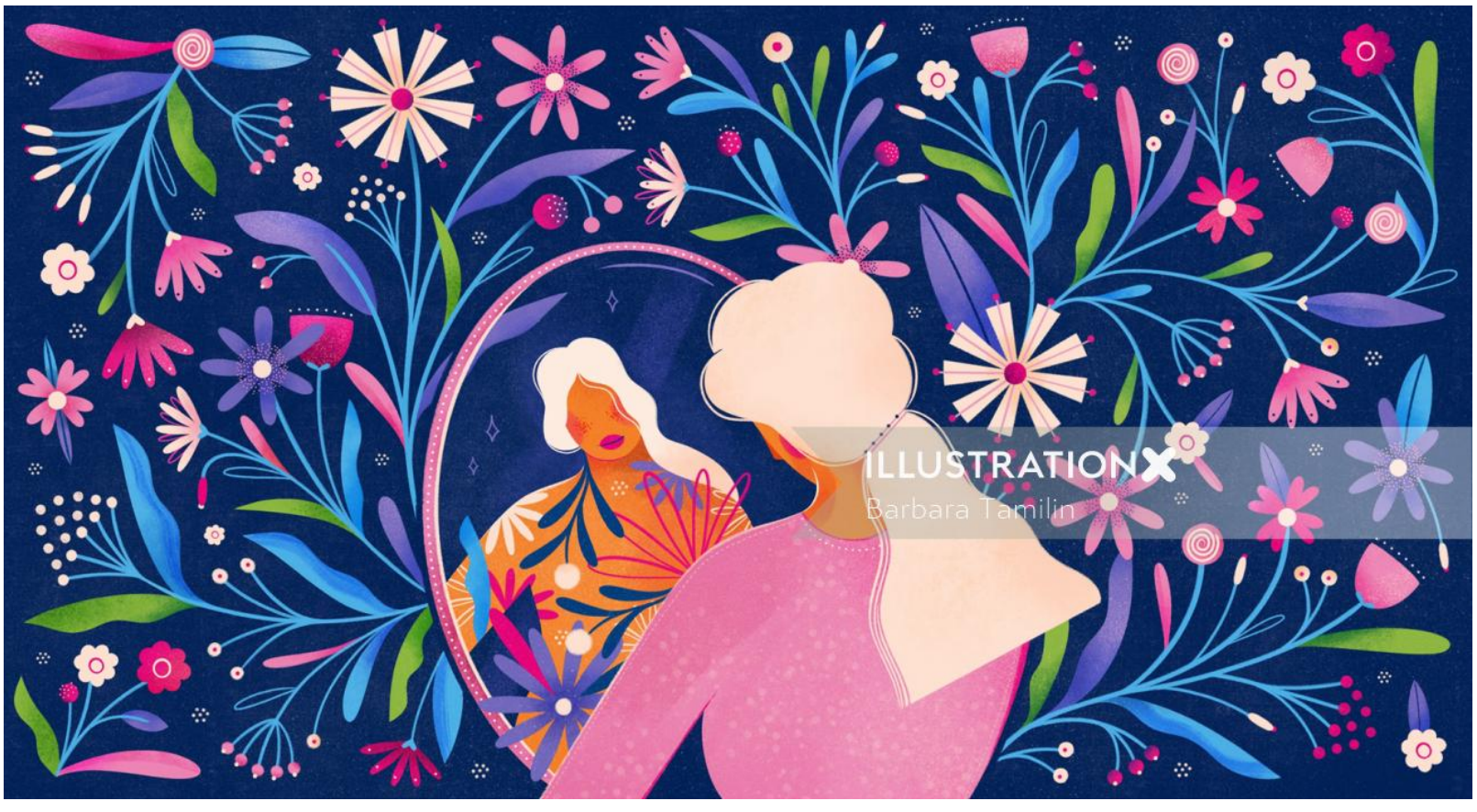

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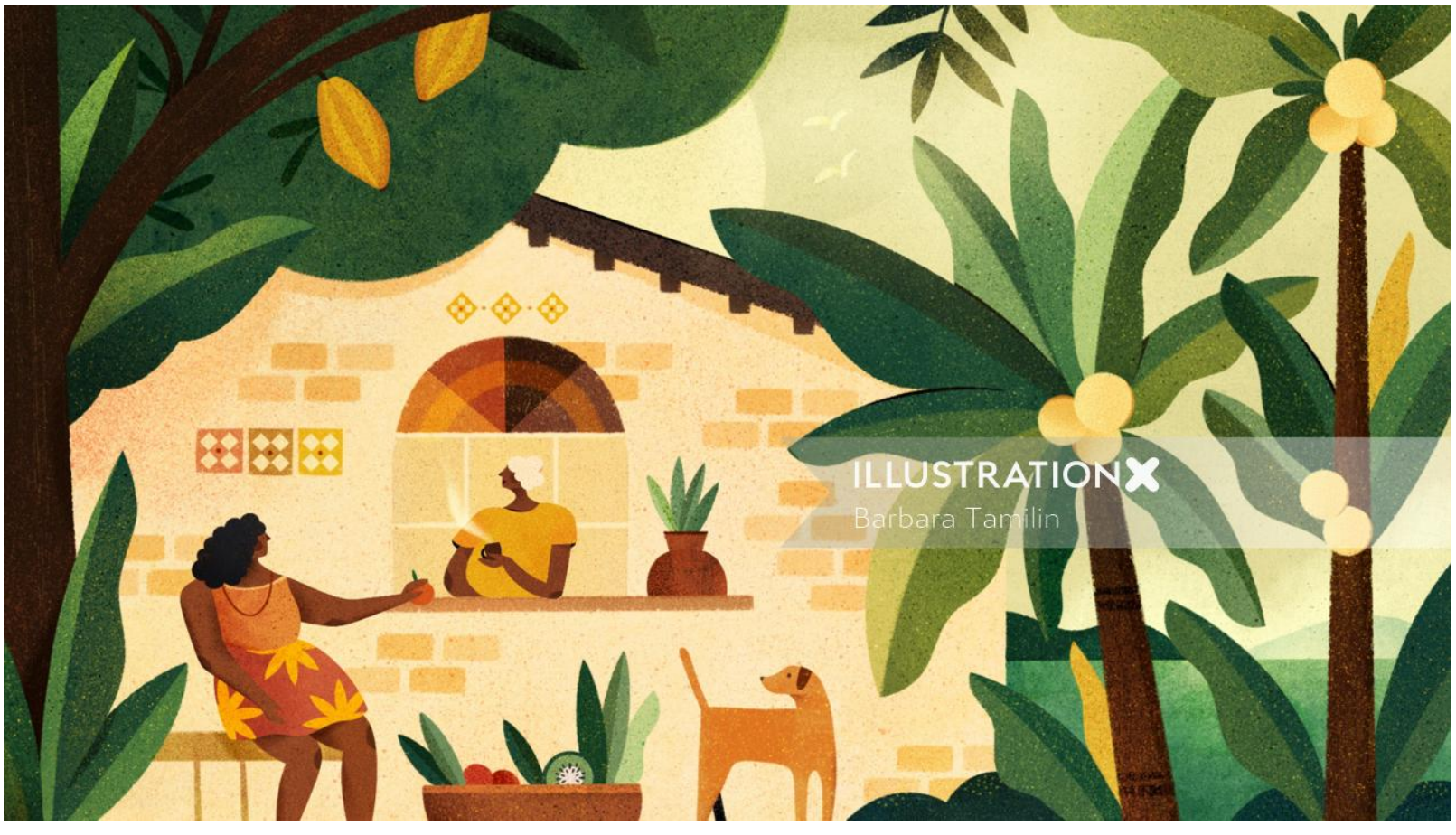

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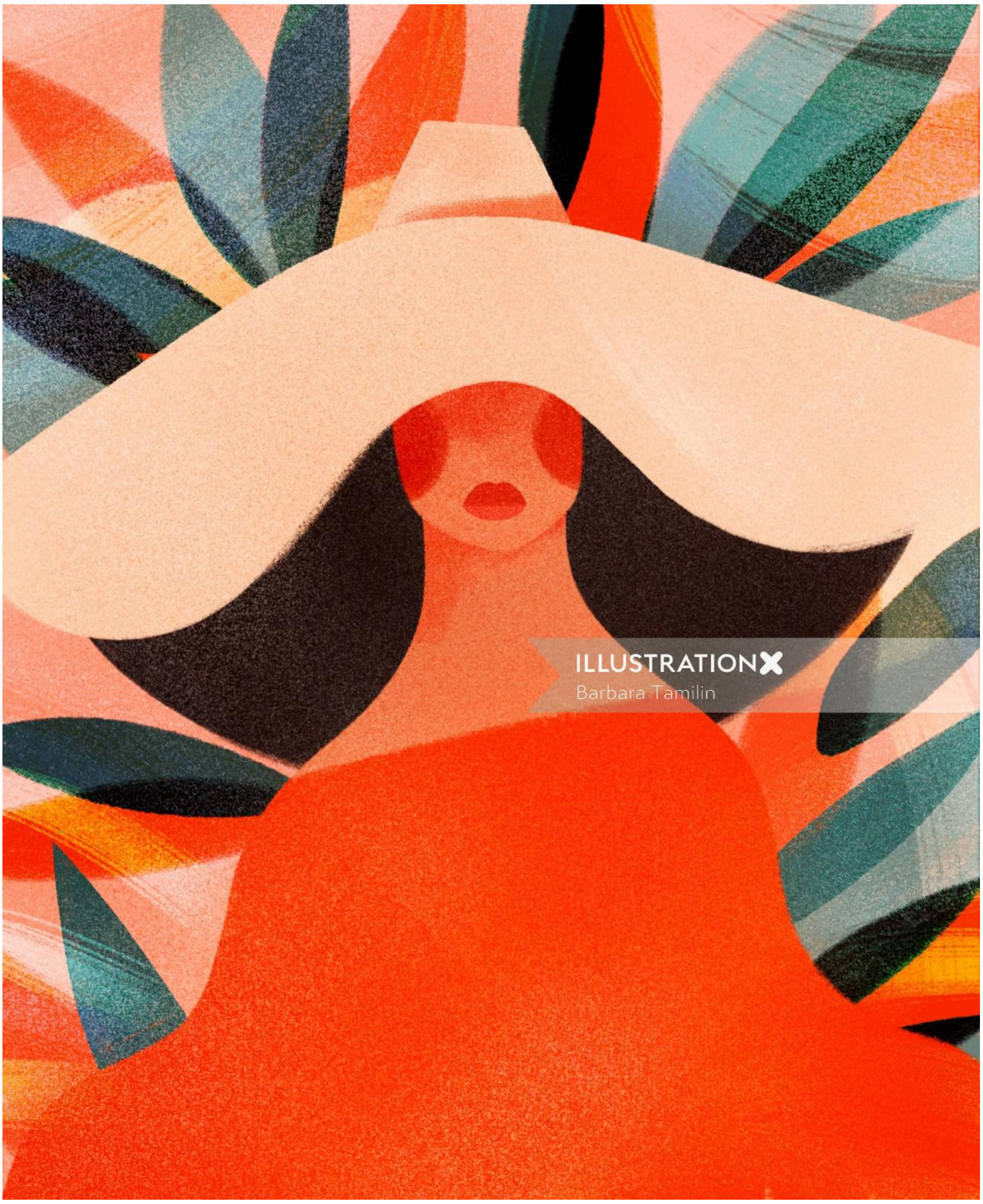

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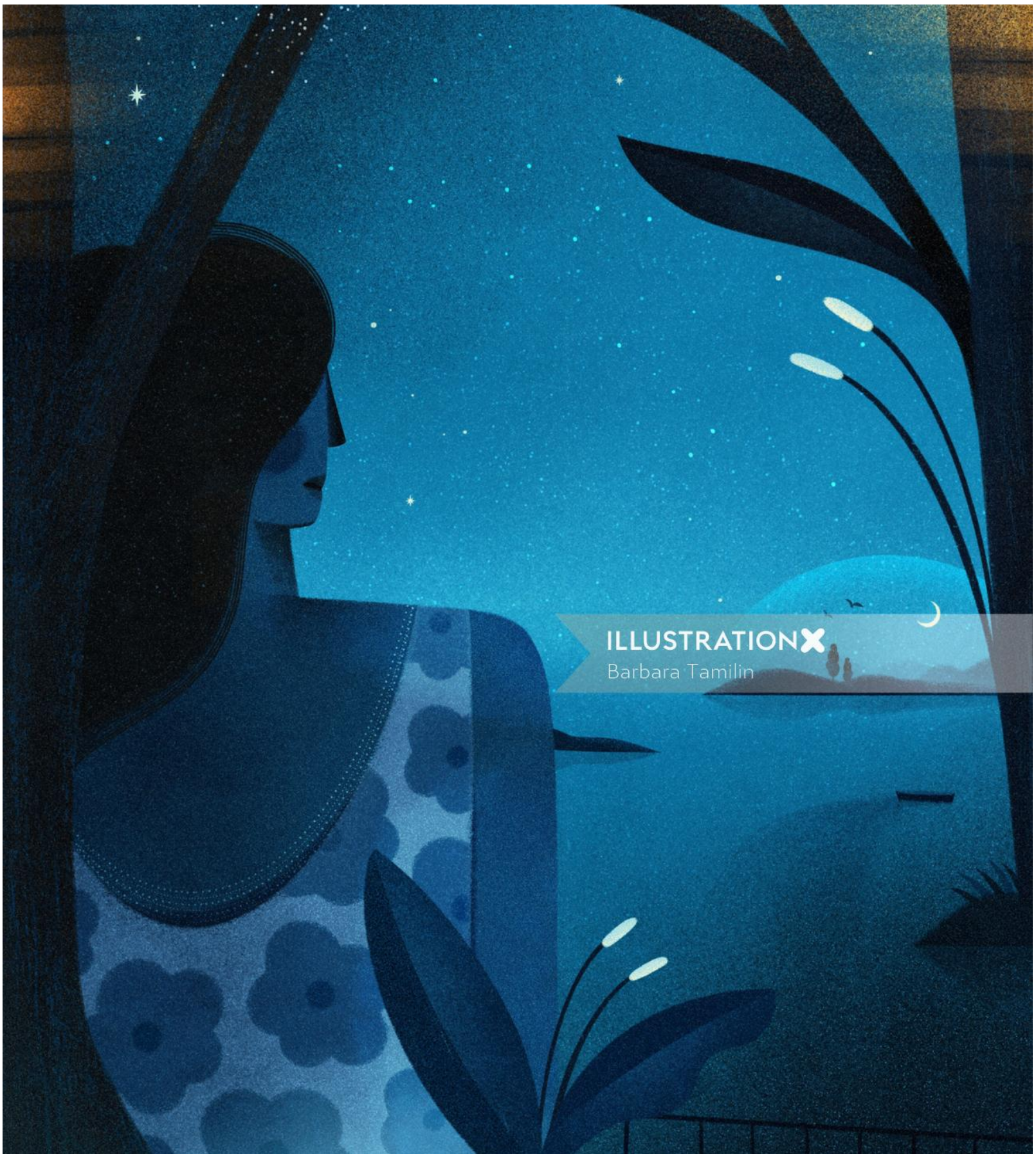

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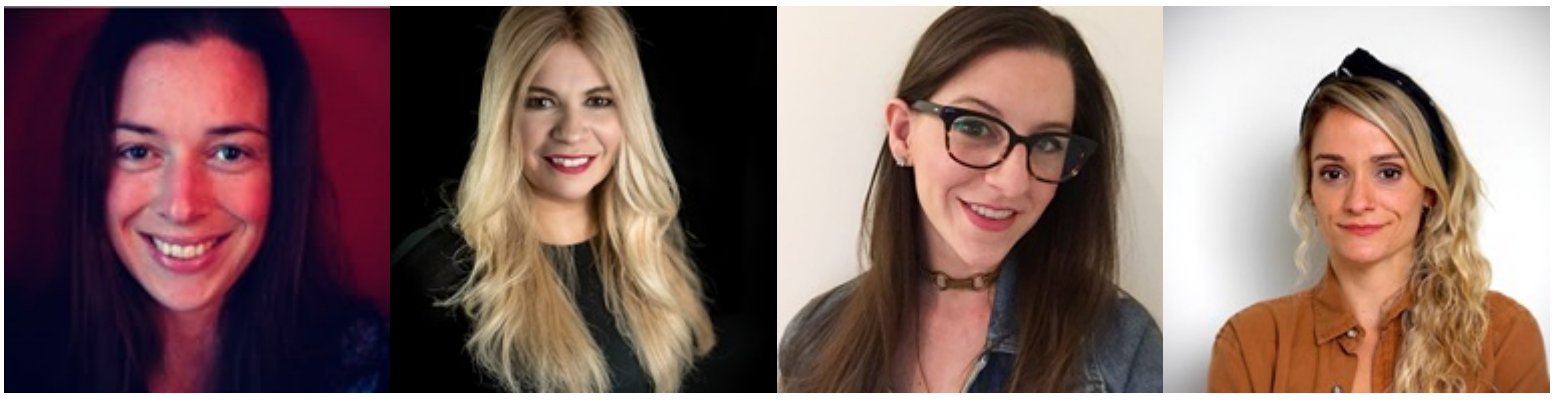
We're ready to help



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