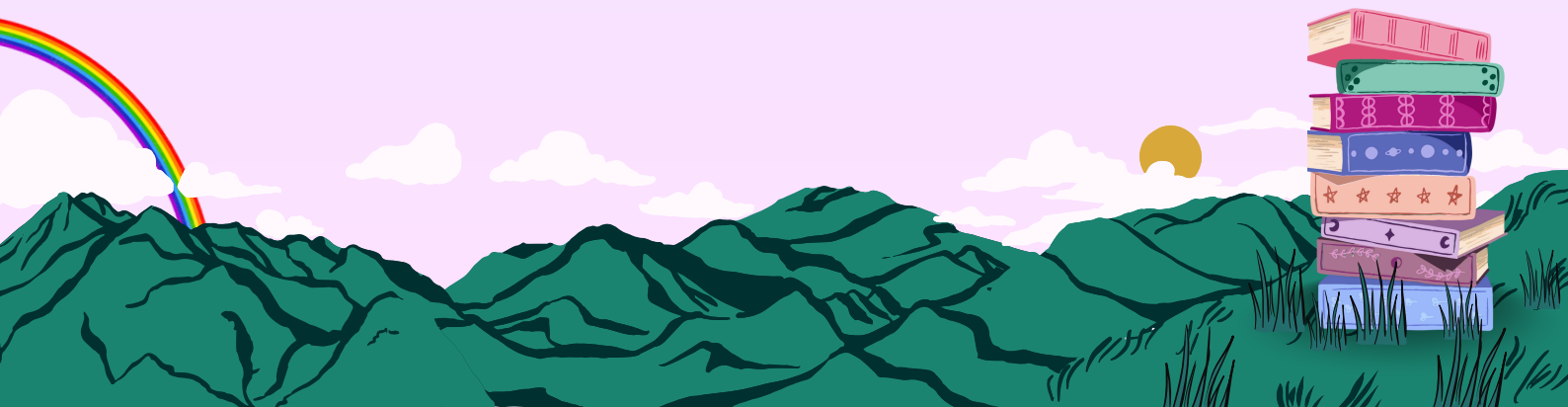# La Mer et la Terre
Felix/Agency/Polar/Cryptid Howett

The wave crashed against the ship as it groaned in the wind. The deck seemed to roll under the cabin boy's feet and he caught himself against the railing. The hungry blue water stared up at him as the ship righted itself, only to be rocked again by another angry wave. Something thudded against the wood and as the ship rocked and a crewman shouted out. Terre rushed over and tried to push past the crew that had gathered. He caught only a glimpse of the body floating on the surface. A net had already been lowered and the men shouted as they heaved it upwards. The theory that a crewman had fallen overboard was silenced once the net reached the railings and the lamplight illuminated what they'd caught. The waves crashed again and Terre was unbalanced and almost knocked to the ground, his view obstructed by the crowd. The roar of the captain and the ever worsening storm forced the crew to action and away from their mysterious prize. The cabin boy finally got his chance to view the creature they'd pulled from the water. It had the torso of a person and a long brilliant tail instead of legs. Its scales shone beautifully despite the low light. Blood was dripping from a gash on its forehead and its brilliant golden eyes were wide with fear and staring through the net at him. Terre found himself unable to look away. The longer he held its gaze, the more he began to think that it wasn't a mindless creature, but a person. A crewman suddenly slapped him over the back of the head and barked an order. Terre rushed off to fulfil the request and as he turned back to catch one last look, he noticed their chest was beginning to heave and their eyes growing frantic. The young man's feet moved before he even had a chance to think. But still no-one noticed as he alone shifted the net back over the water and drew his ragged blade from its sheath. Terre was about to start cutting the net loose when their hands shot forward and grabbed at his through the holes in the rope. He stopped and met their gaze. Despite their panic, their expression softened as if almost to say,
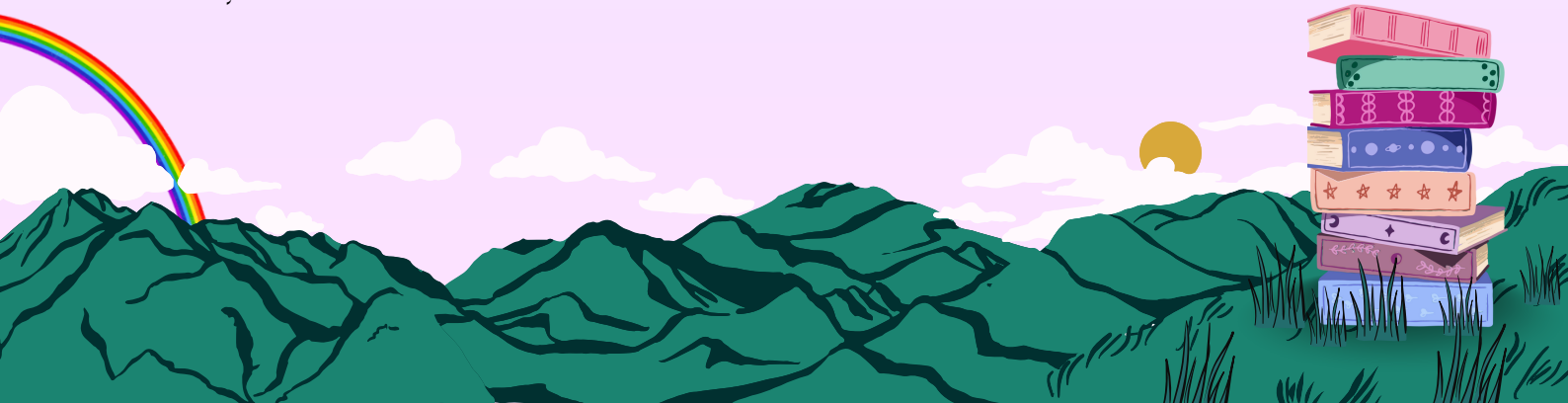
'Thank you.'

Terre let out a nervous breath and swung. The ropes snapped like thread and the mysterious sea-person fell back down into the sea.

As they swam up towards the surface, nervous excitement swirled in Mer's chest once again. Despite all the beauties of the ocean, the stars above were what always caught their eye. Right as they were about to breach, they hesitated. The memory of being caught in that net flashed before their eyes, and the tiniest bit of excitement was chipped away at by fear. But Mer wouldn't let themself be discouraged, it'll never happen again. The cool air tickled at their skin as they tentatively raised their head above the water. They tried to breathe it in and ended up coughing and spluttering. They retreated their neck below the water and filled their gills with deep breaths. Once they'd caught their breath Mer finally turned their gaze to the sky. It was sprinkled with countless shimmering points of light from horizon to horizon. It was the most breathtaking view; the scales of the Night God. They let their mind wander as they dreamed about how big the god must be to wrap around the world every night. They let out a sigh and basked in its beauty. They moved to float on their back and listened to the peaceful sounds of the gently lapping water and the warm sea breeze around them when they spotted something out of the corner of their eye. Something was floating on the surface ahead of them. Mer cautiously swam closer, just beneath the air. Quickly the figure became clear through the dark water, it was human. Mer rushed to his side and gently rolled him over so that he was face up. As they were looking over his body for injuries, they recoiled in shock. They recognised him instantly. It was the human from the ship. The one that had saved them. Mer frantically spun their head around, searching for any sign of the ship he'd been on. There was no vessel in sight. But there was land. It was far off but Mer was determined to help. They rolled onto their back and tucked their arms under the man's shoulders, locking their arms with his. They had to slow down time-after-time to readjust or to catch their breath.
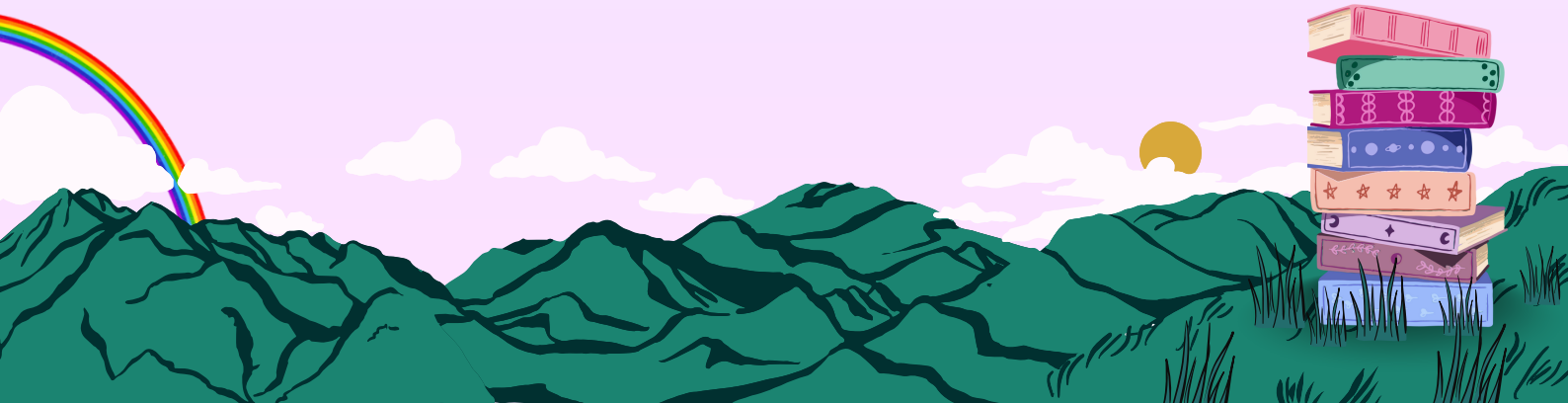
The man was too heavy at the surface, but Mer couldn't take the comfortable route and carry him underwater. If there was any chance that he was still alive, they weren't going to let themself be responsible for his drowning. Finally the land was within reach and, with a short burst of speed from their powerful tail, Mer had reached the shore. They pushed the man up and onto the sand and slumped into the shallows, sighing from the effort. Mer lay there for a few moments, their arms and head resting on the warm rocks just above the surface. They suddenly shot up as they realised they couldn't hear the man breathing. They grunted as they dragged themself up the beach. The surface air was coarse and dry in their throat as they tried to breathe it in. Mer practically flopped onto the man's chest and listened for a heartbeat. Their laugh of relief instantly became a hoarse cough and they rolled back into the water. They rested their exhausted body against the rocks again, and as they thought about leaving, they just couldn't bring themself to move as they gave in to their exhaustion and drifted off to sleep.

The sound of breaking waves shushed into Terre's ears as he roused from his sleep. He let out a groan and slowly raised a hand to his face to block the sunlight. His whole body ached and his mouth was dry from the seawater. He tried to remember what had happened to him but the only thing clear in his mind was when he saved the sea-person. Everything after that was a painful, water-logged blur. He pulled himself up to sit and rubbed at his eyes. He patted himself down, making sure nothing was broken or bleeding. His shirt was still slightly damp and so were his trousers. He stared disheartedly at his feet which were now shoeless and starting to be submerged by the shifting tide. He turned to look down at the rest of the beach. He was so focused on figuring out where he was that he almost missed the figure as his eyes drifted over it. Terre yelped and flinched backwards at the sight of the sea-person curled up peacefully at the edge of the shallows. A mocking seagull screeched overhead and the sea-person's finned ear twitched. Terre was frozen, unsure of what to do and too sore to stand.

He watched as their shimmering teal-blue tail stretched out and shivered as they awoke. They shook out their arms and sighed and slowly lifted their head a little. As their golden eyes blinked open, Terre gasped. It was the sea-person from the ship. Their head shot up and their gaze struck Terre's. They were still for a split second before turning and splashing away to deeper waters. "No! Wait!" Terre cried. But they were already gone. Terre let out a discouraged groan and flopped back onto the sand. He ran his hands down his face and grumbled. That was his chance to properly talk to the mysterious fish-bodied stranger and he'd scared them off.

Terre shivered as the cool ocean breeze hit him. His tired eyes scanned the shoreline. They weren't coming. He wondered why he still held out hope that they'd show up after three weeks of no sightings. Some part of his mind even started to doubt that they were even real at all. Maybe he'd just dreamt the whole thing up. An exasperated sigh escaped his lips and he let himself flop backwards onto the sand. He stared up the stars until his eyes watered. Terre raised a hand to his face just as a suspicious splash sounded to his left. His hand hovered in mid-air as he doubted whether he'd heard it or not. It sounded like something moving onto the sand. It seemed to interrupt the rhythmic shushing of the waves. Terre slowly pulled himself up to sitting and glanced over. There they were. Eyes wide with caution and propped up with their arms under them, the sea person waited. They were maybe only two metres away. Terre had waited for this moment, but he suddenly forgot everything he'd practised saying. "Hi..." He managed. In the light of the moon it was difficult for Terre to make out any of the sea person's features, except for their eyes. There was barely any light shining and yet, that golden shimmer seemed to glow within them. "I... I'm Terre. Can you even understand me?" The shock began wearing off as more words left Terre's lips. The sea person's brilliant eyes twitched for a second before they slowly, cautiously nodded once. Terre's face cracked into a giddy smile that he didn't quite understand.

"Good, good." He chuffed, moving to push himself to stand. "I wanted to thank you..." The moment he put weight onto his legs the sea person flashed into action and turned to splash away again. "No! Wait! Please. I'm not going to hurt you, I promise." Terre begged. He watched as their ears twitched and they seemed to shake their head and, to Terre's relief, turn around. "What... do you want to say?" They asked, their accent strange and unfamiliar to Terre's ears. "I want to thank you. You saved my life without even knowing who I was. You had no reason to do that and yet you did."

"You saved mine."

"Not a lot of people would care."

"'Not a lot of people would care'? Is that what humans are like?" The sea person's eyes seemed to dim as a sceptical look formed on their face. "Oh! No, no! Not all of us, we're actually quite empathetic." The sea person looked at him confused. "It's confusing. But I promise you I don't want to hurt you." A light suddenly flashed overhead and the sea person's head instantly craned up to watch as a group of stars streamed across the night sky. Terre chuffed, "You like watching the stars?"

"Ah..." They nervously chuckled and scratched the back of their neck, "The Night Mer is beautiful. They're what I named myself after." They shuffled forward up the beach and lay out on the sand. "The Night Mer?" Terre asked, looking down at them.

"Yeah, my name's Mer. What's yours?" Their eyes dazzled with a reflection of the stars as they stared upwards. "I'm Terre." He said as he shuffled a little closer and lay back. "What did you mean, 'the Night Mer'? What is that?"

"You don't have that belief?"

"The Night Mer is a giant, cosmic god that wraps its tail around the world, its shimmering scales creating the night sky." Terre listened intently as he too stared up at the endless night. "I try to come up to the surface every night just to see what new patterns I can spot."

"We call them constellations."

"Constellations…" Mer seemed to mull over the unfamiliar word.

"Is that what you were doing when we caught you?" Terre's question was met with silence. He looked over. Mer's eyes glanced away, a hand raising to their face. "Yeah… that's what I was doing…" More silence followed as awkwardness seeped into the air. "Could- could we do this all the time? Look at the stars together, I mean. I don't do much these days…"

"Yeah, me too. And I'd love that."