"Which one?"The title Monsters and Myths is emblazoned across the cover in scarlet calligraphy.It's well loved: cracked spine, dog eared pages, the ink of the printed watercolor illustrations faded to pastels.A small proto-planet strikes the Earth, blasting away its atmosphere and forming that vestigial sphere which now hangs just beyond our reach.Everything feels like it's moving even though we're lying perfectly still, and you're overcome with vertigo as the hallways spiral into increasingly convoluted tangles inside your own head."Reality as you know it only exists inside the mind. Perception. Consciousness. Boil away the redundancy of the external world, and what you're left with is essence -- of people, of feelings. In the right pocket of space, it becomes as real as the old reality."Ichor is spilled, bruising the sky with jewel tones of jade and amethyst.My mother used to crouch here every other week, scrubbing at her unsatisfactory pedicure with acetone, muttering about wasted money and wasted time.My fingers are weaving neurons, playing cat's cradle within the morass of your hippocampus.At our next chance encounter, we exchange numbers on scraps of mayonnaise slick wax paper.We're lying on my bedroom floor, our backs padded with enamel stained carpet.I don't tell you this story, but I do tell you that I'm thinking about installing hardwood floors, and you flinch."You fly from one place to the next like there's a predator on your heels. You devour your meals like food is nothing more than survival to you. You sleep late and rise early, because you can't bear to lie in one place for too long. What do you gain by refusing to lose even a single second?"The hands of every clock in the world weighed down by gravity instead of time, swinging back and forth like a pendulum.It's our second kiss, but the first one was unremarkable; an accidental brush of lips, a hastily murmured apology.You don't know what any of them contain, so you're content with remaining a wanderer.You look stricken -- you've seen this smile already, in all of its convincingly human variations.I'm sucking on a grape lollipop, my mouth puckered purple.My mother has just died, but I'll only tell you about it two years later over a game of checkers -- an afterthought.We're standing just beyond the awning of the local delicatessen, absorbing every inch of the sky.You buy me a tuna melt on rye, and I decide that it's a date.You don't often see me without that white stick dangling from my lips, a miniature purple planet nested beneath my tongue.Before the smell had even faded from my room, she'd have already spent another seventy dollars at the salon with identical results.You clamp down without thinking, and I hear the loud crack of hard candy splintering into shards."Imagine that," I mutter darkly, my body pinning yours in place.There's a word for what this is, but you refuse to be the one to acknowledge it. You close your eyes as I wind my body around yours, as I play harpsichord over your ribs.*** Your hand is inside my chest; squeezing, condensing, obliterating.Deify me. Slaughter me. Vanquish me. Bleed me dry.Forgive me. Forget me, and we'll remain here forever: two immortals hurtling through the universe, in search of something that ends."No," I whisper, the blood draining from my crescent mouth."Well," you remark with a wistful laugh, "because he asked me to.""Nothing tangible. Nothing real. Essence, if you will.""Of course," he replies coolly."Nothing you'll miss," the man assures."I see," he says with a dulcet sigh."Regardless, I'll honor the terms. I won't take anything else from you. Do we have a deal?"*** IN THREE DIFFERENT DIMENSIONS, A BOY FALLS IN LOVE WITH HIS OWN MYTH.I can feel your eyes flickering over me like a neon sign.I offer you my jacket because you're shivering, because it's the right thing to do. You refuse, but appear relieved that I was the one to open the door, to allow an opening for you to wedge

yourself into.For now we're strangers, and I remind myself to savor it. Someone once told you that a feeling can become tangible if you feel it hard enough.There's a certain edge to nostalgia that could slit a throat.A tenderness that splices nerves with red string.*** You don't like change, so it's difficult for you to open up. It's hard to invest pieces of yourself in something that might not stick, like whispering secrets into the wind.There is no longer a linear line of reasoning for any event."The flavor isn't that great, but they taste familiar. They're my favorite food."I can tell you want to make a remark about how lollipops can't be a favorite food, but you hold back."Come on, don't be like that," I grin placatingly.Expectant eyes waver over mine."Then hypothetically, at a speed exponentially faster than light speed, could you travel around the entire universe in a single instant?""Memories fade with time," I hum into your throat.There are an infinite number of rooms inside the labyrinth."I meant it as more of a blanket statement, but if we're getting into specifics, I guess I mean the one that I killed."blame.] "People aren't too pleased about that, you know.""I've heard.""Lost" implies that there was somewhere you were trying to get to in the first place."A swindler.""What do you swindle?""Essence?"His words are a whole bunch of nonsense to your ears, but you listen graciously."In that case you'd be right, but you'd be getting the short end of the stick," you shrug."I can't miss something I've never found."He laughs in your face.A little mean, but not malicious.He raises his hand, and for a second you half expect him to strike you."It doesn't matter at all."You want so badly to say something, but you wait for me to acknowledge you first.Always waiting, never seizing."I've seen you somewhere.""Haven't I?"I look at you askance, like you're a little bit stupid.You were being earnest, but I let you play it off as a pick up line.I don't know much about romance, but I suppose the backdrop is charming enough.You like the feeling of a storm on your shoulders, and I harbor a fear of desiccation.You tell me nothing about yourself and I tell you everything, everything that doesn't matter.We keep on meeting at the exact same spot in front of the deli, rain or shine.When you tell me goodbye, I smile at you so gently you think your bones might break.I read you a tale about a boy who falls in love with the night sky and ends up seducing the god of time.It concludes, like all the best love stories should, with a murder.From somewhere far away comes a little sputter.A spark.Why did such a thing occur?Perhaps the moon was formed because about 4.5 billion years later, there is a boy who loves looking at the moon.A little gift from the heavens, a sign that he is the only real person in the universe.He explains this to his friend/lover/god, who listens on with a smile.You like that story, even though you don't really understand it. At one point, you ask me about the lollipops.Sometimes I wish you wouldn't.The cycle would repeat."Why are you always rushing?"I wonder aloud.him.] You've seen this smile before.My blood staining your clothes.The weight of eternity lifted from our shoulders.I pull you back down to the ground, press my lollipop between your teeth.Always rushing."If you used an infinite amount of energy.""But moments are infinite.""I wish I could meet you for the first time again," you whisper.You become lost, hopelessly lost, even though you never knew where you were going in the first place.Haven't IEvery vow has been kept.Lose your faith and find the passage out.heard.] "Why did you do it?""You're back.""Have I been here before?""No, I suppose not.""Who are you?""Memories.""What is this place?""Do you know the way out of here?""For a price.""Such as?""Your first love.""Sure," you agree."But where do I go from here?"But all he does is point back towards the door.*** The first time you ever see me, we're both standing in the rain.Silence.You second guess

yourself."No, I can't say you have."This is the first time we find each other in this place, but it won't be the last.We talk on the phone that night.Eventually, we even make our way through the door.But that comes later.So I let you know me instead.The first time you come to my house, I show you my favorite book.It's not a happy story, nor is it a tragic one.The universe is being born.Follow the thread a little further, and you see the impact that created the moon.There's no particular reason for why he loves looking at it. He just sometimes gets the feeling that it was put there especially for him.And so there is a moon."When I was a kid and my parents would bring me with them to the bank, they'd always have a bowl of these by the door," I recall.At seven o' clock, right on the second, you sit up and announce that you should be going.You freeze."What?""What would I gain by losing?"you throw back."Won't you kill time with me?"[The lonly lway lto lkill la lgod llis lto lfall lin llove lwith lAlways waiting for something to happen."The universe is round, right?""I guess so.""Moving so quickly you don't go anywhere at all.""Over and over. That's the moment I want to live in."I cover your mouth with my own.It's the second kiss, but it's really the first of everything.Perhaps you were born to be lost.That's what you tell yourself.But because I feel a feeling that's strong enough to become real, I have mercy on you.I open the door first.*** "Will you be with me until the end of time?"[Time lis ldead.lyou lheard?] "It's a deal."The past is dead and gone."You came back.""Have I been here before?""I suppose not."

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