

“I hope that you remember me.”

Winter used to laugh when Andromeda spoke those words to her, be it across a cushioned bed, in the screaming crowds under the palace, or between a goblet of wine clutched in both of their hands.

Winter would lean forward and press her lips against Andromeda’s, tasting the wine on her beloved’s mouth and reassuring her, either in a vehement declaration or mumbled assurance, that she never could forget her.

The burning pyre of their dangerous love blazed higher and faster every day, but Winter didn’t acknowledge it the way Andromeda did, didn’t worry and fret over the approaching rush of flames, didn’t count down the days and try to savor each and every one. All she did was kiss the fellow princess and repeat that nothing would ever happen that would make Winter forget her.

Other lovers whispered “Never leave me” or “Stay with me” as a bond. Winter and Andromeda were given no such luxuries. “Remember me” was all they could promise one another.

Winter’s kingdom, against a mountain and beside the roaring sea, was so unlike Andromeda’s hidden forest dominion, scattered across the trees and leaves. Neither of them

were old enough to claim rule of their realms, but neither were young enough to claim innocence when they lay together or ran to the other's world.

As children, they had been close friends - the princesses from two opposing kingdoms, having tried to be brought into an alliance that failed for their realms but not for each other. Their families tried to dissuade them with every visit, every late-night trip into the sea in their small hand-crafted ship. But Winter and Andromeda's teenage years had been wild and reckless, the festivals and events held in each kingdom an obvious excuse to any who watched.

They weren't secret, didn't try to hide it when they were in public. In a party, any citizen might glance over his shoulder and notice two girls, one with ice-blonde hair and pointed ears, dancing with her hands on the face of a dark-skinned, ruby-haired girl with burning eyes. The whispers were more than whispers by that point, but Winter and Andromeda were in their own realm far beyond the scornings of the populace.

When the girls became young adults, they each learned individually that their kingdoms were going into an inevitable war. In that moment, each wished for the other and met at the halfway point that night, collapsing in the grassy fields that connected their kingdoms and falling into each other's arms, Winter, for the first time, letting Andromeda see her cry.

Their families weren't cruel. The war would happen, but not at once. They gave the girls a year, one year to remain in their charade, of celebrations and mad nights and beautiful mornings. After then, their relationship would be considered treason.

“Remember me,” Andromeda shouts over the roar of the sea as she chases after Winter, tripping in the fancy scarlet of her dress. Winter laughs as she runs through the waves, kicking up water and screaming “*Never*” as if they have all the world before them. The word unnerves Andromeda, though, and when she catches up to Winter she grabs her face and pulls her into a kiss. Winter, usually the one to make the first move, laughs in surprise and returns it.

“Don’t be them,” Andromeda says suddenly when they break apart. “Don’t become a ruler like that - choosing bloodshed and glory over - this.”

“Love,” Winter whispers, tracing a finger across Andromeda’s cheek. “Who would want to be a king?”

Andromeda tries, but she can’t hold back her tears, and Winter’s grin falls away as she takes her beloved in her arms and tries not to think about the number of days that they have left.

Their families are kind, and when the day finally comes and war is announced between their kingdoms, both families let the girls stay locked in their rooms for days on end. When they finally think to open the doors, they each find them empty.

The war is long and deadly and, ultimately, needless. The mountains fall and rise, the leaves are crushed into the earth and reborn again. Two girls sail across the great sea in a small boat, asleep in one another’s arms, no longer princesses but lovers chasing after a new world.

One that is not the wild nights and reckless days of their youths, but not the opulent wealth and comfort of their childhoods. The world they are gently sailing into is unknown to them, but if they were to burn their old lives away, it was always fitting that they would burn them down together.