in a sky full of stars, i saw you

by Bean_reads_fanfic

Summary

“We’re in a crater,” she says, gesturing, "and I saw a falling star earlier. This might be where it fell!”

“Yeah, this is where it fell,” Peter says, feeling peeved enough to play along. “And up there,” he points to a familiar spot in the sky, “…that’s where it tripped and knocked itself out of the sky like an idiot, in case you were wondering. Oh, and right here,” he gestures to the spot he currently sits, “…Here is where it got hit by a magical flying moron.”

Her face goes blank. Then she startles, pointing at him. “You’re the star! You’re the star?”

~aka~
Stardust AU (for Spideychelle week day 3: "fairy tale retelling")

Notes

I've never written in the Spideychelle genre before so uh... i hope this is not wildly OOC. Don't mind that there's a lot of direct dialogue from the movie, it's just that Stardust is my favorite film and it's perfection as it is. Title comes from Coldplay.

I did this bc i love u seekrest

See the end of the work for more notes
To Peter, this is Michelle: the girl who is not there one second, and the next is flying into him and
knocking them both to the ground. His hurt leg stings against the dirt as - for the second time on
this no-good, very bad day - he falls.

And even though she pushes up and away from him with a muttered apology pretty immediately,
brushing herself off and looking around with eyes narrowed in analysis, she still has the audacity to
do what she does next.

“This is a crater…” the girl says to herself. Because yeah, it’s just the two of them here under the
clear midsummer night sky, standing at the bottom of a wide, collision-shaped hole dug out of the
earth in the middle of nowhere. Peter hasn’t done more than push himself to a sitting position and
wince before she is spinning back around and pacing towards him.

“Hey you, have you seen a fallen star around here?” she asks.

He blinks. Deadpans, “You’re funny.”

“No, really,” she says, gesturing. “We’re in a crater, and I saw a falling star earlier. This, this might
be where it fell! Don’t you see--”

“Yeah, this is where it fell,” Peter interrupts matter-of-factly, feeling peeved enough to play along.
“And up there,” he points to a familiar spot in the sky, “...that’s where it tripped and knocked itself
out of the sky like an idiot, in case you were wondering. Oh, and right here,” he gestures to the spot
he currently sits, “…Here is where it got hit by a magical flying moron.”

Her face goes blank. Then she startles, pointing at him. “You’re the star! You’re the star? Oh,
that’s odd.”

Peter hardly agrees. After all, she is the odd one. She doesn’t act like any of the human girls he’s
seen before from his perch up in the sky. When he can bring himself to look down upon mankind -
when they’re not hurting and killing one another - he’s humored himself in watching their displays
of courting. The women are usually the quieter, softer gender. This one is not… that. She wears
pants like a man and has barely-groomed hair reigned back in a messy braid.

“I was told that things work differently on the other side of the Wall,” she laughs, looking him up
and down, “and stars being people is definitely different.”

“Where did you come from, anyway?” he asks, yelping as she grabs his hand and pulls him to his
feet. In the movement, she slips something over his hand that tightens without warning and he
blinks again, looking down at it. A thin silver chain.

The other end of it is in her hand now as she backs away with an almost-apologetic smile. “I used a
Babylonian candle,” she says. “You know, the kind that you light and then think of where you
want them to take you? See, I’m in the business of effecting change back where I come from, and
to do that you need people to listen to you, so… I told them I’d cross the Wall and bring back the
star that fell.” She smiles, finishing, “You’re going to help me prove myself!”

She yanks the chain and Peter takes a halting step forward, disbelief dropping his jaw. It is the
unbreakable kind of chain which magically lengthens and shortens as its master wishes.

“Oh, of course,” he sputters belatedly. “Because nothing says coming-of-age like the token of a kidnapped, injured stranger. I’m not going anywhere with you, lady.”

He gives his hand a tug, but her grip holds. Further, her brows lower and she glares at him.

“It’s Michelle,” she bites out. “Not ‘lady’... and sorry not sorry, but you have no choice, star-boy.”

“It’s Peter, not ‘star-boy’,” he mocks right back.

And so it goes.

She’s no better to him when she turns from a bright-eyed stranger into his grumbling captor; grumbling, that is, at the nervous talking that he can’t seem to stop streaming from his lips. He complains of the rockiness of the trail she chooses, mocks at the way she squints at her map and compass like someone who truly hasn’t ever left home before, and teases for the clumsy way she draws a sword over some rustling in the bushes that turns out to be nothing but a rabbit. She goes from ignoring him to biting back rudely to ignoring him again, all the while going heavy on the eye-rolling and huffing of annoyed sighs. He smugly thinks that he is wearing her down to the point she just might set him free.

By the time the sun is high in the sky, though, his footsteps are dragging and he can hardly keep his eyes open. Silence settles over them until he suddenly finds himself on the ground without memory of sitting.

Michelle groans, turning to face him. “Get up,” she says.

He tilts his head to squint at her. “Michelle, do you know what time it is? It’s mid-day. I’ve never stayed up this late before; you have to let me rest.”

Her mouth twists to the side and she juts her jaw out, seeming to scan him for deceit. He tries to appear as pitiful as possible. At least she sighs long-sufferingly, and that is how he comes to be sat up against a shady tree with the magic chain wrapped around the trunk to keep him from leaving.

“I’m going to get food and supplies from that village over there,” she informs him. And with a self-satisfied smirk, adds, “Don’t move,” before carrying off.

“Don’t move,” he mocks in falsetto after she leaves, resting his head back against the bark. For what it’s worth, he really does need the rest, and by the time he wakes, it’s dark out again.

She hasn’t returned yet, but from the darkness there is the sound of feet moving. He jolts upright, wide eyes scanning the darkness. “Hello?” he calls. “Michelle, i-is that you? You’re not funny…”

Then out of the wood steps a creature that turns his fears to happiness - a moonlit white horse with a gleaming horn between its ears. With some coaxing he invites the unicorn near, murmuring praises and thanks as it slips its horn between the chain and breaks the magic with its own. Just like that Peter is free and soon enough he sits atop the back of his newfound steed.

*Good riddance, Michelle*, he thinks as they trot away in the opposite direction. *Have fun with your homemade quest.*

Though he is far from tired now that it is night again, the abrupt outpouring of rain from above drives the earth-bound star to the door of a lone but homey-looking inn on the side of the highway a few miles away. Here he dismounts and knocks hopefully (having nothing *but* hope, really).
The door is answered hardly a moment later by a warm and welcoming innkeeper whose wife watches from within as he enters.

“Oh my - come in, come in, young man!” the gentleman greets, placing a guiding hand on Peter’s shoulder. “In, out of that wretched rain. My son William will take your horse to the stables; now, let’s get you settled in some dry clothes.”

The innkeeper introduces himself as one Quentin Beck, the middle-aged owner of this humble estate for many years and hardly ever one who sees visitors due to its isolated location. He draws up a warm bath for Peter and takes his wet clothes to be washed in the meantime. Afterwards he fixes the boy with some soup and fresh bread that tastes heavenly, and finally shows him to a large and cozy bedroom where he tends to the wound on his leg.

All the while as he talks to Peter - hardly requiring a response, just going on about the matters of life and business - the man’s voice is so soothing somehow, so gentle and fatherly, that Peter finds himself actually feeling relaxed and just the slightest bit sleepy despite the evening hour.

_This is a much nicer human than the last_, he thinks, as Quentin dims the lantern light and helps him into bed.

Peter ignores a slight unease in the back of his mind… merely chalking it up to the fact that he’s had an overly adventurous day. He allows himself a soft, contented glow.

“Nothing like a good rest to warm the cockles of that heart of yours,” Quentin is saying in a hushed voice, reaching for something just out of sight under the bed - perhaps another pillow or a blanket or something. Peter lets his eyes fall closed…

And that is when the door slams open.

He jumps, glow going out at once as he takes sight of the silhouetted frame of the last person he wants to see: Michelle, framed by stark light in the doorway. Her sword is drawn and her appearance is wild as though she’d run all the way here. To his annoyance, she looks right at him. Can’t she get a life?

“Peter!” she calls, reaching out in warning.

Peter opens his mouth to retort at her - perhaps get in an insult about how _she_ could use a bath while she’s here - but just then he catches sight of the jagged knife glinting in the hand of the innkeeper, Quentin Beck, who now towers over Peter with a malicious grin on his face.

A warning from childhood comes back to Peter then, the warning all stars are given, should they ever have the misfortune of falling to earth: _there are humans you must beware, for they know and may try to trick you… any human who cuts the glowing heart from a star and eats it, the same will gain immortality and eternal youth._

He has a fraction of a second to dive out of the way as Quentin’s knife comes plunging down in a flash of light. It sinks into the mattress right where his chest had been.

The man’s scream of disappointment is inhuman.

His once-kind eyes blaze with furious green flames and he rounds on Peter, now fallen from the bed and backpedaling away from him on the floor in shock. His shoulders hit the wall and he gasps, pressing himself away, unable to do more for the paralyzing fear.

A scream from behind draws both their attention as all at once, there again is Michelle with her
sword drawn and aimed for the now-revealed warlock who must surely have laid this entire illusion just for the same fallen star he - like Michelle - had seen fall in the area on the previous night.

As Michelle’s blade does brief battle with him, Peter gasps again and pulls himself to his feet. He makes for the door on shaking legs, but he’s hardly gone a few steps before green flames to match the ones in Quentin’s eyes spring up around the edges of the room to trap them.

Michelle stumbles back into Peter and he clutches onto her arm as their enemy levels them with an eerie smile.

“The burning golden heart of a star at peace is so much better than your frightened little heart,” he sneers at the boy. “Even so, better than no heart at all.”

“Michelle?” Peter says, voice high above the roaring of the flames.

Her face is lined with the same fear he feels and yet it’s set in determination and courage that he has no time to admire but will come to later ponder. Her hand darts into her bag and she withdraws a plain-looking candlestick. This she thrusts into the unnatural fire, hissing in pain but not removing her hand until the wick is lit.

“Hold on and think of home,” she yells at him. The warlock sees the Babylonian candle in her hand and his face twists in concern. He darts forward, knife brandished. “Now!”

It is an empty wall against which the knife shatters; the two souls who had been there seconds before now spirited away into the night.

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TONY

To Captain Anthony Stark, this is Peter and Michelle: two kids in their young adult years, probably way in over their heads by the look of things - because, really, how many kids do you find stranded on a rain cloud in the middle of a storm? - now squabbling at each other loudly from where they’re tied back-to-back on the floor in the belly of his sky vessel. They hardly even notice him when he enters so he’s just there waiting, leaning against the wall to watch them as one does with a fascinating storm.

No matter how many years he does this work (the “work” being illegally capturing lighting and selling it at marketplaces, outrunning sky marshalls as he goes)... there’s never a quiet day. And every once in a while, he does have the pleasure of being genuinely surprised. Today is such a day.

“You just said ‘home’! You thought of your home and I thought of mine, and now we’re halfway between the two!” the boy is squawking.

“That crazy guy was about to cut your heart out, and you wanted me to take time for specifics? What, did you want a diagram or something?” the girl bites back.

“Well the pirates are probably going to come back and kill us any minute now so it was basically all for nothing anyway, thanks!”

The girl just groans in frustration.

It’s at this point that they finally fall silent enough such that when Tony steps forward, both their
heads shoot up to look at him, their fiery tongues going dead with an almost audible sizzle. Cold
dread settles over them instead, and Tony allows it for a moment.

He whistles, turning a slow circle around them. “You and your girlfriend are a bit out of sorts, it
sounds like,” he says, toeing the boy.

“She’s not my girlfriend,” the kid answers with an air of confusion, at the same time the girl
mutters, affronted, “I am not his girlfriend.”

Tony holds his hands up, amused. “So be it.” He stops and folds his arms. “This is the part where
you tell me who you are and why you’re up here.”

Silence.

“...and if not?” the girl challenges.

He faces her. “Then I’ll break your pretty little fingers one by one.”

The boy pipes seemingly without being able to stop himself, “If you dare even touch her - ”

“What?” Tony interrupts, getting in the boy’s face now. At the attention, the boy clams up,
pressing his lips together and looking up with round eyes. “You’ll what, huh, kiddo? You’d do well
to show me some respect, seeing as I can easily send you both over the side. It’s a long way
down.”

“...Sir?” the boy adds.

Tony smirks. “Better.”

“You’re such a pushover,” the girl whispers, which sets off another round of bickering right there
in front of him.

Tony unsheathes his sword and sticks it into the planks by their side, yelling, “Enough!”

They fall silent once more. Tony waits. Again the girl is the one to speak.

“Please, we’re trying to get back to my home, a place called Wall,” she says. “There’s a bad man
after us and… we need help.” The boy looks over his shoulder at her as though surprised.

Tony picks up his sword again.

And he uses it to cut open their bindings.

“Not another one, Tony,” is what Pepper sighs when she sees him guiding them into his private
suite not long after, with the boy in front held by Tony’s hands on his shoulders.

“Two, actually,” he admits, turning so his wife can see the girl following close behind. She shakes
her head and laughs, knowing well her husband’s inability to resist taking in and helping out stray
kids in need of help here and there. She accepts a peck on the cheek as they enter and Tony pats
the boy’s shoulders roughly before releasing him so he can hurry back to the girl’s side.

“Daddy!” a small voice yells, and Morgan comes running just in time to jump into Tony’s arms as
he crouches for her. He swings her upside-down by her feet so that she shrieks in laughter, then
flips her right-side-up and places her atop his shoulders.

“Peter, Michelle,” he addresses, using the names that the newcomers gave him. “This is my wife
and daughter. If you tell anyone about them after leaving this ship, I’ll hunt you down and make you regret it. Sound good?"

They nod, looking dumbfounded. That’s the typical reaction.

And then for about a fortnight, he keeps them in his care.

He’s impressed by Michelle, her fighting spirit reminding him of Pepper in a way; it takes a special kind of woman to agree to be a pirate’s wife, after all, and by the same token a special sort of young woman to stand up to a pirate without knowing what the consequences may be. Further, he won’t deny feeling an immediate sort of paternal energy toward Peter… he seems like the kind who has trouble keeping himself alive, with the puppy eyes and the curiosity.

The first thing Tony does is get them into proper clothes, letting them have their pick of the many articles he’s swiped over the years. They get their own cabins within his suite, and they eventually come out of their shells enough to meet the crew of misfits he’s put together - a rowdy gang known as the Avengers.

Peter, it turns out, is bright-spirited and much more attuned to making friends than Michelle is; while he chatters away, she keeps to herself in an almost awkward way once the socializing starts. Spying this, Tony takes her aside and takes to giving her sword-fighting lessons. Fierce as she is, she’s in need of technique training. This, they have time to fix.

A few times as they fly through storms, he even lets them take part in the lightning-capturing process. It’s messy work but by the delight on their faces, they still have quite a bit of fun.

On their winding way to Wall, they make a stop or two through major markets down below in order to sell said lightning, as must be done before it loses its energy. He allows them to come along, stretch their legs, but only on a condition that Michelle grumbles about at first but which is necessary if they want to blend in:

“Dresses are an invention of the patriarchy,” she mutters while pulling at the floral gown that Pepper helped choose for her. Her wildly-curling hair is let down and brushed through just enough that the braid at her temple is a lovely adornment. For all her whining, Tony can see when she catches a glimpse of herself in the wall-length mirror that she is secretly pleased.

When they make their way above deck, Peter’s eyes find her and whatever contribution he was about to make to his conversation with Steve and Thor goes dead in his mouth. His own hair is groomed back, new clothes clean and pressed. He makes his way over.

“You - you look really pretty,” he manages.

Michelle raises an eyebrow. “So therefore I have value?”

While Peter sputters in confusion, Tony snorts, turning away. The girl finally puts him out of his misery by dropping the glare for a grin and punching him in the shoulder fondly.

“You look pretty too,” he hears her tell her not-boyfriend as the two of them follow Tony and his men down the gangway.

The usual scoundrels try to bargain down the price of his fresh lightning; he puts on his act of the trigger-happy, not-to-be-messed-with Captain Stark (maintaining that reputation is everything to business). All goes as usual until after the selling is done and the crew is milling around, because that’s when the scrappy man they just sold to approaches Tony in private and asks him lowly, “Have you heard these rumors going around about a fallen star?”
Tony looks up. “Fallen star?”

“Yeah, everyone’s talking about it. Someone gets their hands on one of them, they can close up shop and retire for good. You haven’t heard anything on your travels, have you?”

The captain turns his gaze and makes eye contact with Peter, who just so happens to be watching the exchange from across the room with a pale, troubled look on his face. He looks away, pretending to mind his own business.

Without breaking the gaze, though, Tony replies, “You’re wasting your time listening to that gossip, Ferdi. No such thing as fallen stars.”

The kid breathes out.

It is later, after the lightning sale but not before they’ve taken off again into the sky, that the crew’s spirits are up enough for a night of dancing. The rowdy kind of thing first, but eventually the softer kind, the kind where someone pulls out a stringed instrument and plays something that he and Pepper can dance to after Morgan is in bed.

“No, no, no,” Michelle says, though her lack of resistance betrays her as Tony pulls her onto the makeshift ballroom floor.

“Yes, yes, yes,” Tony says right back. “Believe it or not, missy, this is a life skill as much as fighting. You’ll know what I mean when you’re older.”

He guides her hands into place and proceeds to teach her the steps of a waltz, Pepper doing the same with Peter nearby… until finally the younger pair have their steps down enough to be passed off to one another.

Michelle is just the slightest bit taller than Peter, and she teases him of it to break the ice as they lay their hands on one another’s waist and shoulders, respectively, and haltingly begin to dance. With that ice breaking, cracking, falling away… Tony can almost pinpoint the moment that they look at one another and realize that there might be something new between them besides just their clumsy dance steps. And for the tender self-consciousness that young love always has as it springs uncertain and green into the world, they fall into laughter at themselves and one another and at nothing at all.

Most of the crew has gone by now and Tony is glad of it; not just to give privacy but also to hide the fact that as Peter looks at Michelle, he gives off an unmistakable glow in the dark.

“I never, uh… I never told you thanks,” Peter whispers when they stop. “For saving me from that guy who wanted to eat my heart, I mean.”

Michelle shrugs, but his glow sparkles in her eyes. “Anytime, loser.”

That’s it then, and she leaves to retire while Peter watches. When she’s out of sight he turns and does a sort-of skip to the edge of the ship, staring up at his brothers and sisters in the sky and sighing.

“Kid,” Tony murmurs, joining him. Peter startles just slightly but calms as the man places a comforting hand on his back. “I want to tell you something. I know what you are.”

All at once the glow that lingered blinks out of Peter so that he looks just human again. He looks up at Tony sharply, biting his lip.
“No, no, have no fear,” the man responds to the unspoken question. “No one on this vessel will harm you, but there are plenty who would. Your emotions give you away, you know - all that glowing. And I think you know why.”

Peter sighs, the corners of his mouth upturning. “Well, of course I glow… I’m a star, Mr. Stark, and what do stars do best?”

Tony hums, not failing to see how the kid dodged his point, but not bothering to push. They stand in silence a moment more before the man asks, “And what’s there for you in Wall?”

“No, no, have no fear,” the man responds to the unspoken question. “No one on this vessel will harm you, but there are plenty who would. Your emotions give you away, you know - all that glowing. And I think you know why.”

“And what’s there for you in Wall?”

“Michelle is taking me to her village,” the kid says with a measure of satisfaction. “As proof that she can do what she wants, or something. She’s kinda headstrong if you haven’t noticed.”

The man nods with a smile of his own. “And I have no doubt she’ll get you there safely. We have a few more days yet on our journey, and I can only take you to the nearest port which is still a few miles from the wall, but… if you should ever need safe passage again, you have a friend in the sky. Well… a human friend in the sky.”

Peter' glows a bit at that.

And when they do leave his care, these two ridiculous children, with new packs of food to get them through the rest of their journey and a set of new clothes each (Pepper informed him with amusement that Michelle had stashed the floral gown among her things), Tony makes sure to pull Michelle aside.

“Take it from a man who’s been on a lot of journeys in his life, not all of them worthwhile,” he tells her softly. “Your true path is right in front of your eyes.”

To Michelle, this is Peter: a branded image of heartbroken eyes that she can’t stop seeing in her mind as she runs harder than she ever has, hardly able to feel her legs anymore let alone notice the occasional calls of passersby or the snagging of branches on her clothes. Because she is shooting back down the path she came like the thing that started this all - a streak of light in the sky. A boy who was too good for this world, too good for her… she had made a mistake.

At one point she passes a group of men taking a break off to the side of the trail and without thinking, she climbs atop one of their horses, grabs its reins and kicks it into a gallop. The men’s protests fall on deaf ears.

Tony’s words had rung in her mind… she had realized that she could not bring Peter back to Wall. The place she’d grown up in, though good to her for a time, was ultimately closed-minded; full of people living their dull, provincial lives who cared more about gossip than they did about learning or helping or any of the things she cared about.

From a young age she learned that none of the children her age thought the way she did, and none of the adults liked to hear her ideas. They criticized her brain and her voice and so she cut back on her voice but she challenged her brain, threw out her horizons, and learned all she could of the world outside Wall. She wanted to do things, see things, effect change as she told Peter - but all her parents could talk about was marrying her off to that airhead Brad and getting their dowry and living the remainder of their years never doing anything that mattered. It wasn’t their fault, it was
how they’d been raised... but that was just not for her.

There was no ordinary way to get them to take her seriously; hence her self-proclaimed extraordinary quest.

And journeying alongside Peter on a beaten path once more, laughing and teasing him and seeing him smile - she felt as though the earth was actively shifting beneath her feet, angling her a different direction than she’d thought she wanted to go.

When they set up camp, after Peter fell asleep (at night, finally) - she made up her mind. Taking her blade, she cut a small locke of his hair into her hand and slipped it into a drawstring pouch at her waist. This she carried on as she walked the rest of the way alone, arriving at dawn to the familiar smell of her familiar little town where nothing had changed.

But she was changed.

Her parents were still asleep when she entered the house, but her sister - younger by a few years - was sitting at the table with a book and a mug of tea in hand. She looked up at the arrival and at once rushed forward to hug her sister fiercely.

“Did you find it?” she asked. “Did you find the fallen star?”

Michelle smiled a rare broad smile, pulling the pouch from her waist. “I did. But it wasn’t an ‘it’ - he is a boy. A boy named Peter, no less.”

“Peter is an odd name for a star,” her sister said. Michelle laughed, thinking, _everything about him is odd, in just the right ways._ She extended the pouch and nodded for it to be opened.

“I’m going back to him,” Michelle said, breathless by the very words. “I’m - I don’t actually know what we’re going to do, but I think that -”

Her sister interrupted, “What is this?” It was with a wrinkled nose that she peered inside the bag, and she looked back up at Michelle with disappointment. “It’s just a measly handful of stardust, Michelle.”

Michelle’s brow furrowed, side-tracked. She caught the bag when her sister threw it to her, and upturned it, expecting the lock of hair to fall out. Instead, into her palm poured a stream of sparkling sand dark as night.

At first there was plain confusion. Then there bled realization, and finally the fear.

“He can’t cross the wall,” Michelle stated without inflection.

A terrible image suggested itself in her mind’s eye: Peter, waking alone and probably assuming she had gone on ahead for whatever weird reason - _why didn’t I leave a note? stupid, stupid_ - wandering down the path after her, arriving at the broad empty field across which spanned the dreaded brick wall separating the magic and non-magic worlds, crossing over it -

_A plume of stardust in the wind._

She doesn’t remember if she said goodbye to her sister, if she gave any explanation at all - all she remembers is dropping the bag and running, running, running.

When the field came into view, surely enough she saw him on the opposite side coming down the same path she had barely an hour ago. They were too far away to see each others’ faces or even
hear, but still she screamed for him to turn around.

And then it all got worse, because of course it did.

From further back on the path, she saw it approaching: a black horse-drawn carriage rattling its way toward Peter. Michelle saw him jump back in surprise as it veered off the road and rounded to cut across his path. She lost sight of him then.

Until she finally made it to the wall, that is, grasping her side and panting, unable to do anything but watch as the carriage turned right around and started back the way it’d come, only now one passenger heavier. Said passenger being bound and gagged in the backseat, but not so hidden as to be unable to shoot Michelle that heart-wrenching look before the curtain was pulled shut.

So now she rides.

The horse’s hooves shake the earth beneath her and sweat beads her brow; her mind is focused only on the wish that he still has his heart in his chest, because she doesn’t know what she’ll do if not…

The particular witches who’ve taken him have a liar that is not particularly hard to find, given that she has followed their fresh trail for nearly half a day; it’s a terrible-looking building from the outside. What must have once been an extravagant mansion is now marked by shattered windows and cobwebs and an air of despair.

Michelle steels herself only briefly before dismounting and creeping toward it alone.

Sword drawn, she creeps through the dead leaves surrounding the facade and listens to the voices within.

“Ah, you’ve got him just in time - I look awful these days, it’s time for a face lift!” a deranged voice cackles, followed by laughter from her two sisters in the dark arts.

Then Peter’s sad voice, clearly speaking to the witches: “You won’t get me to shine,” he says quietly enough that Michelle strains to hear, though it breaks her heart. “Nothing - nothing matters anymore.”

Their cackles start up again, renewed by his sport. “Oh, you pathetic thing… don’t worry about us, we’ll be happy with what we can get…”

She creeps along until a side door is found, and this she hurriedly enters as quietly as she can. In haste she locates the throne room where they’re gathered with their voices echoing in the grand empty space. At the head of the hall, there lays Peter… strapped down on a stone altar like the sacrifice he is to them. He stares resolutely upward, his mouth pressed together, not giving them the pleasure of begging for mercy as they begin to argue over who gets the honor of carving his beating heart from him.

From behind a moth-eaten curtain, Michelle springs upon the nearest witch and runs her through before the hag can blink. The other two screech, backing away.

“Michelle,” Peter breathes, immediately beginning to glow.

It is only by the upper hand she gained in surprising them that Michelle manages to fall upon and slay a second witch, though not without parrying against an enchanted sword and thanking Tony wherever he is for the skills he had taught her. By then the third sister is missing and Michelle’s gaze darts around, calculating, but distracted for the moment by the sound of Peter struggling against his bonds. She turns and brings her sword down on his bindings. He sits up and faces her.
“You came,” he says with such innocent delight that she can hardly believe him.

There are many things she wants to say, but for now she says, “Let’s go. Can you stand?”

He gets to his feet, rubbing at his wrists as they hurry together down the steps and into the great expanse of the room, the wide double doors so close up ahead -

Then all at once the windows - those that remain intact, anyway - shatter from all around them, startling screams out of them both and they jump together and brace their heads from the falling shards of glass, the sudden inexplicable darkening of the room.

The figure of the third witch looms from the shadows. She is a wretched sight, her skin old beyond natural age, her hair stringy and falling off in clumps. “I have to thank you, girly… you got rid of my sisters, now I shall have the heart all to myself.” In her hand is a great jagged shard of glass, levelled at them as she approaches.

“Michelle,” Peter says, an out-of-place confidence overtaking his tone. “Hold me tight and close your eyes.”

Her hand itches for her sword, eyes on the witch. “What? Why?!”

“Michelle,” he says again, and she looks at him. He offers a fond look, and his hand reaches up and cradles her head in a way that narrows the world down to him and only him. “Have you not been paying attention? What do stars do?”

She goes willingly into his embrace, her eyes slamming shut as the glow surrounding him suddenly intensifies unlike anything before - as though the sun has suddenly appeared in human form.

It dawns on her as he says it: “Shine.”

Brighter and brighter, so that she burrows her head into his shoulder because it’s still too bright behind her closed lids, light fills that forsaken space. Somewhere behind them, the witch screeches and crumbles to dust.

When it all dies down, she peeks an eye open experimentally and then she pulls away and looks at him, affronted.

“Why didn’t you do that earlier?” she demands.

He blinks at her straightforwardness and grins crookedly. “Well… I couldn’t have done that without you,” he says. “No star can shine with a broken heart.”

“Oh,” she says. The immediate dangers dissuaded, she feels heat rush to her face and steps back. “Oh, Peter… I have no luck with - with people, really. It’s something I’m working on. I’m sorry I -”

“No, no!” he interrupts. “Listen, Michelle… something has happened to me over the past few weeks. My heart, it - it feels like my chest can barely contain it? Like it doesn’t, doesn’t belong to me anymore, it… it belongs to you. And if you wanted it, I’d wish for nothing in exchange. Like, no good or service or declarations, though I mean - ”

…Aaand he’s rambling, the same way she couldn’t get him to stop doing and hated him for not so long ago. Michelle tunes the words out, just looking at him, and she feels her own heart thump loudly against her ribcage. She swallows and looks down for a beat to compose herself, then steps forward and presses a kiss to his mouth to stop the outpouring of words.
He looks at her with wide eyes when she pulls away.

She takes his face in her hands and says seriously, “I have a question, Peter.”

“...Yeah?” he breathes.

“Did it hurt when you fell from heaven?”

It’s absolutely the best moment of her life, made all the better by the fact that he clearly has no idea what she means and after a moment starts laughing along with her without knowing why.

In years to come, well… she has time to explain it to him. And she does, and they learn together and from each other for as long as they both live. Which turns out to be a very long time, you see, when one is in possession of the heart of a star. So there is plenty of time; time to travel, to see the world, to all the while make it a better place - freeing captives, righting wrongs, getting in a bit of trouble here and there.

At home there will be rumors about that Michelle girl with the crazy ideas and the odd knack for knowing morbid facts who then one day vanished across the Wall in search of a fallen star.

The rumors of what happened to her are wild, but none are more wild than the truth.

Because the truth is that one day, having lived a very long life with her beloved and neither of them ever aging a day, well… they finally use the last of that old Babylonian candle to make a final trip back to the stars.

And even now they still live happily ever after.

End Notes

I left out the subplot with the ghost princes even though it's hilarious. If you haven't seen Stardust, go watch it because you're in for a treat. Thanks for reading!

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