

His Light in the Darkness

(Marcus and Elle)

by Anna Hackett



Art by MyFantastiWorld

Marcus Steele leaped off the Hawk, his boots hitting concrete. The recon mission was over, and he was tired, cranky, and covered in alien raptor gore.

He scanned the Enclave hangar and a muscle ticked in his jaw. There was no pretty brunette with big blue eyes waiting for him.

He turned to face his squad as they climbed out of the quadcopter. "Get some rest."

"I'm not resting." The drawl came from Shaw, their sniper. The tall, lanky man swung his long-range laser rifle over his shoulder and shot them all a grin. "I've got a woman to seduce."

From beside Marcus, his best friend and second-in-command, Cruz, laughed. "You going to whisper sweet nothings in her ear?"

Marcus looked past the men to where their lone female soldier, Claudia, still stood in the Hawk, leaning against the doorframe. She skewered Shaw with a narrowed gaze.

"Maybe I will," Shaw answered. "If she'll let me. I was planning to run her a bath, get some of her favorite chocolates, and tell her how much better my life is with her in it."

Marcus watched as tough-as-nails Claudia, one of his fiercest soldiers, melted. Her face softened, the tough edges smoothing out. "Shaw."

The sniper strode up to his lover, grabbed her around the legs, and tossed over his shoulder.

"Don't carry me." She slammed a fist against his back.

"Shut up, Frost."

Claudia's laugh echoed in the hangar as the couple left.

Marcus fought back a smile and saw the rest of his squad doing the same.

Cruz shook his head. "I have my own ladies waiting for me." He tossed them a salute and headed out to find his partner, Santha, and their daughters.

Suddenly, the sound of running footsteps made Marcus jerk his head up. His heart kicked against his chest and he searched for a small, pretty brunette.

Instead, it was a taller woman with short hair who raced in, a smile on her pretty face. Natalya Vasin leaped into Reed's arms. The former Navy SEAL held her tight and pulled her in close for a kiss.

Marcus looked at his final soldier, Gabe. "You heading to Medical?"

The big man nodded, a faint smile on his face. "The doc's waiting for me."

As they all left, Marcus looked around the hangar. It was empty except for a few Hawk pilots and maintenance staff. His frustration edged up another notch, his skin itching.

No Elle.

He blew out a breath and heading into the corridor to his quarters. He started to peel off his carbon fiber armor. He knew Elle was busy working to decode some alien cubes that had been collected on a previous mission. Working too hard, in his opinion. She'd spent the last few days in the tech lab, and she'd crawled into their bed this morning as he'd been getting out of it to go on patrol.

Elle made everything better. Before her, he'd just been fighting for survival. With Elle in his life, he was fighting for her. Fighting for their life together. She was his light in the darkness.

As Marcus stepped inside their quarters, he smelled her. Everything in their place held her floral scent. His hand curled into a fist. Damn, he wanted Elle.

He wanted his wife.

With edginess riding him, he finished stripping off his sweat-soaked clothes and headed for the shower. After he'd let the water pound over his head and wash away the mission, he toweled off and dressed. But he still felt on edge.

That's when he noticed the slip of paper on the kitchen countertop. He frowned. It hadn't been there before his shower.

He recognized Elle's loopy handwriting.

Hey, Marcus. I'm working on something important in the Garden. Stop by. I miss you — Elle.

A reluctant smile touched his lips. She'd be distracted and busy with whatever she was working on, but he needed to see her. Even if it was just for a few minutes.

Marcus made short work of the journey through the tunnels and on the small transport up the escarpment. Then he was striding into the Garden.

The space sat in a bowl that had been cut into the rock of the escarpment. Above, the sky was visible, littered with fluffy clouds colored orange by the setting sun. The dying light of day gave the Garden a romantic glow, bathing the grass, trees and vegetable gardens in golden light.

He saw a man moving through the rows of vegetable planets in a fence-off area of garden beds. Old Man Hamish had been with them at Blue Mountain Base. He'd survived the attack and mad dash to the Enclave but he'd been injured. Even now, Marcus could see the man was moving gingerly, but he had a peaceful look on his face as he talked to his plants.

Marcus strode into the trees. He scowled. He didn't see Elle anywhere. Why was she even up here in the Garden anyway?

He wandered deeper through the trees and rounded a garden bed filled with a planet covered in wild red flowers.

That's when he spotted her.

She was standing beside a dark-blue picnic blanket that was laid out on the grass. Sitting on the edge of it was a picnic basket.

She looked up and saw him. A beautiful smile broke out on her face, her blue eyes lighting.

Every tight muscle in Marcus relaxed in an instant.

“You took me on a sunset picnic once,” she said. “I thought I’d return the favor.”

Elle watched Marcus stalk toward her with powerful strides. She let her gaze run over his tough, battle-hardened body.

She never tired of watching him or touching him. Some days, she still couldn’t believe this warrior was hers.

She expected him to stop at the blanket, but he strode straight across it.

“Marcus—”

He swept her into his arms, pulling her tight against his hard chest, and pressed his face against her hair.

“Missed you,” he murmured.

She melted against him and tightened her arms. *Hers*. Her man. Her husband. Her love.

He pulled back and stared at her for a second before his mouth pressed to hers. She moaned and he deepened the kiss. She leaned into him, her fingers digging into his muscled biceps, and kissed him back.

Elle knew that without the alien invasion that had destroyed the Earth, she would never have crossed paths with her tough Marine. It almost made her grateful for the Gizzida invasion.

Almost.

She nuzzled his rough jaw. “Come see what I brought for you.”

He let her pull him down onto the picnic blanket. She opened the picnic basket and started pulling out food. She set down a bowl of fresh strawberries, a plate of sandwiches made with substitute roast beef, and a block of dark chocolate. All his favorites.

He snatched up a sandwich. "So, how are you today, Mrs. Steele?"

That gravelly voice was one she'd listened to for over a year and a half over the comm line. She'd listened to him shout orders, fight aliens, and ask her questions. Maybe she'd fallen in love with that voice first.

But it wasn't just his voice that gave her a thrill right now...it was his words. She never tired of being called Mrs. Steele. He belonged to her, and her to him.

"I'm good." She leaned over and picked up some strawberries. "I'm making progress on the data from the alien cubes." She held a berry up to his lips. "Let's not talk about aliens right now."

For the next few minutes, they fed each other. His intense gaze was on her face as he watched her eat. Marcus took great pleasure in taking care of her.

Suddenly, he pulled her into his lap and she gasped.

"So, if we don't talk about aliens, what will we talk about?" he asked.

She tilted her head. "I'm sure we'll think of something."

He tugged her closer, until she was plastered against his chest. His kiss was hard but playful, and left her breathless.

"How about we don't talk at all," he murmured against her lips.

"I like that idea."

This time his kiss was forceful, pushing her head back. Desire ignited inside her, burning hot, like it did every time this man touched her.

She felt one of his callused hands sneaking up under her shirt. Then he moved, and Elle found herself stretched out on the blanket, pinned under Marcus' big body.

They were in a quiet, secluded corner of the Garden, and she knew most of the Enclave's residents would be packed in the dining room for the evening meal. Still, it was a little thrilling to think that someone could stumble upon them.

But then she remembered something. She pressed her hands against his chest. "Marcus, wait."

He frowned down at her, desire stark on his scarred face. "What?"

She cleared her throat. "Doc Emerson removed my contraceptive implant today. It was well past its expiry date." The doc was working hard to find a way to replicate the contraceptive implants, but hadn't figured out anything permanent yet. Elle licked her lips. "And you've already had yours out."

Something flashed in Marcus' eyes. Something possessive and primal.

"Good," he growled.

"Good?" Her eyes widened. "We're in the middle of an alien invasion. You go out and fight every day, and we don't know what's—"

He pressed a finger to her lips. "We both know there are no guarantees, Elle." He leaned down and nipped her chin, his hips settling into the cradle of hers. He pulled one of her legs tight around his hip. "But one thing *is* certain. I love you." He shifted his weight and he ran one hand under her shirt, his calluses making her breath hitch. His palm slid over her belly. "I want to see you swollen with our child, Elle."

She stared into his beloved face. "Marcus."

"I want to see a smart little girl with her mother's blue eyes."

Elle cupped his jaw. "I want a little sturdy boy with his daddy's green eyes."

Marcus shot her crooked grin. “Well, I guess we’d better get started.”

This time he pushed her flat on her back, knocking plates out of their way.

Elle laughed until his mouth covered hers, hard and hungry. She kissed him back, surrounded by her husband and his love.