

# Soul Healers

by Luana Spinetti

Dust her feet scratched from the surface floated around her legs like sparkling powder from a little girl's magic wand. Sweat poured down her forehead as she delicately, accurately inspected a sample of rock she had extracted from the asteroid. A drop of her sweat fell down the inner side of her helmet, forming a weirdly irregular watery splat on the glass. She cursed under her breath.

A jump, a jet-pack shot, two steps, and she landed on the other side of the small asteroid, whose diameter barely reached one kilometer. The almost non-existent gravity would have swayed her from her path if it wasn't for her dented boots anchoring her to the surface. The asteroid belt had been her weekday home for nearly two months, she was comfortable with it.

She bent, knees to chest, and extracted a cube of terrain to examine. She handled her spacesuit-embedded tools skillfully to break the rock and scan the inside. Nothing. She tried again, another break into the core of the rock, but her communicator vibrated on her arm, making her loose grasp on her tools. She frowned and hit it, open palm.

«Yes.»

A ripped-paper-like noise responded to her voice. She let out a frustrated sigh. «I can't hear you clearly.»

«Rachel, hey.» The voice of her research coordinator, Paul. «How's things there? Found anything?»

Rachel shook her head, but clearly Paul couldn't see her. «Nope, not yet. I was breaking another rock when your call popped up, interrupting my work.» An angle of her mouth curved up. Revenge smirk.

His voice laughed. «Nice, nice. I can see you're in a good mood. So, report at once when you find something, if there's anything to find that's it. Over and out.»

Rachel lifted her eyes. Thankfully, to the stars. She cleared her throat, swallowed, and focused back on her job. No alien eggs found in the two months she worked for the Mineral Creatures company, no signs of living beings hatching under the asteroids surface. Maybe the researcher who had spread rumors about extra-terrestrial creatures in the solar system was none but an extravagant rich guy with an interesting story to tell magazines and propaganda pamphlets. Or hoax books, perhaps.

Tired and hungry from the long working hours, she pulled a tiny drill from her tool-covered belt and crushed down another layer of rock. She wanted to get done with this shift and go home, she decided.

A smoke of sparkling dust surrounded her like an eye-blinding light. It was sudden, and completely a new experience to her. She closed her eyes and lost her grip on the rock, which fell back on the asteroid surface and there it laid still. She hid behind a bigger rock and listened to her heart throbs.

The rock continued to sparkle inside even when the dust was gone.

«What a pity,» he said from the papers-covered floor he was sitting on. Observing the empty shelves at ground level he was putting into some order, Paul sighed loudly, hitting his palms on his crossed legs. Then he scratched his temple uncomfortably. «I would have loved to keep you in the team, you know, but... I'm not sure our darling boss would let me do that.»

She sat on a swivel chair, elbows digging into her muscular thighs. Her bust was bent forward but her abandoned shoulders betrayed a sense of impotence. Her face was pale but calm.

«Never mind, Paul. I was getting tired with the job anyway, tired of breaking rocks to find nothing. I need a more ordinary job to keep my mind healthy.»

«Oh. Be well then. I'm gonna miss you,» was the only response. His attention was tailored on his papers once again, and that was the end of the conversation. She went downstairs to cash in her very last wage and headed back home.

Home was a mile away, a tiny cupola of two hundred people and one grocery store. It was late in the evening, but daylight was still strong enough to allow for a good walk, until the bus would come and take her home.

She smiled. The sight of the red grounds of Mars comforted her for the lost job, reassuring her that she had made the right choice. It was for the best. *Their* best.

Rachel slowed down her pace until she stood still on the edge of the road, leaning back against the reinforced glass wall of the surface tunnel. A bus approached, stopped, and left again. Nobody took it, Rachel remained there, looking up to the sky turning from brownish to dark gray, and thinking of minuscule creatures with empathetic powers who hatched inside a sparkling transparent egg-like rock, small creatures that had healed her heart from years of grieve and despair. Years that had gone by leaving her barely alive, surviving. Her life had died with her husband's cancer, or so she thought.

Oh, she was wrong. All she needed was mourning and let go of the past. At last, her heart was at peace, with itself and the world, and she owed it to two tiny newborns that she had nearly killed by drilling holes into the asteroid rocks - thank heavens she had stopped. Small shiny beings who could kindle healing, positive emotions into disenchanting hearts, a flame of life. Rachel didn't believe in reincarnation, but she felt like she was a new person, a reborn creature, as alive as a phoenix.

She smiled up to the shiny Deimos and scattered stars. They're gonna be safe, she thought.