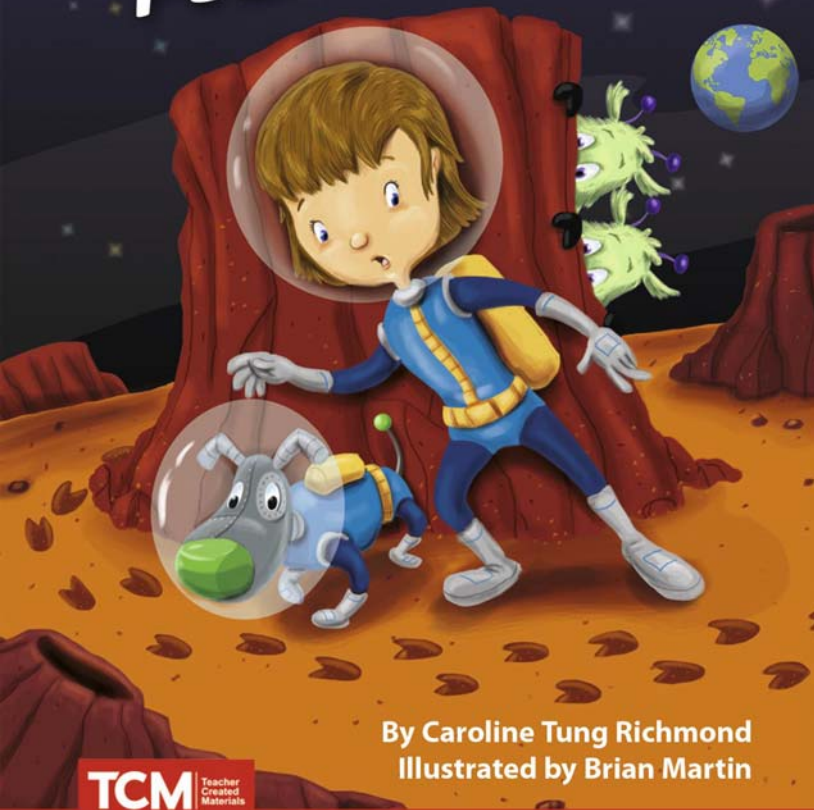


A MARTIAN ADVENTURE



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CHAPTER ONE



Waking Up on the Red Planet

I hate living on Mars. My mom says that *hate* is a strong word and that I should use it sparingly. But we moved here three months ago, and we still have three more to go—and I definitely feel strongly about that.

We flew millions of kilometers to Mars because of my parents' jobs. They're exobiologists, which means they study life on other planets, and they came here to search for ancient Martian fossils. They're super excited about this opportunity, but I think the desert is dusty and boring and kind of lonely. There's nothing outside my window except for boulders and sand the color of rust. Even the glaciers are covered in a thick layer of dust. No wonder this place is nicknamed the Red Planet.

At least I can video-chat with my family on Earth. I try to call my grandma now, but I get an error message that I need more power.

"Mom! Did you dust off the solar panels?" I call out.

When she doesn't answer me, I remember that she and my stepdad, George, drove their rover to the neighboring Mariner Colony to get more supplies. They won't be home until tonight.

Sighing, I glance down at Ruff. He's my robotic dog.

"We better get suited up," I say, patting Ruff on his smooth, metallic head. "We have chores to do."

I trudge into the changing room next to the airlock, with Ruff trotting behind me. Mars is very different from Earth—it's very cold and windy, and its air is poisonous to humans. That's why I need to wear a spacesuit whenever I go outside. And I need a really good reason to go outside—because putting a suit on is a lot of work.

First, I wiggle into a one-piece inner layer that has heaters sewn in to keep me warm. Then, I slip on the spacesuit itself, which is stretchy enough to let me move but tough enough to protect me from storms. Next, I put on an oxygen tank that fits like a backpack. I put a spacesuit on Ruff too. He doesn't need to breathe like I do, but the suit will keep the dust out of his mechanical parts.

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