

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.

As I grab my boots, I can't help but think about home. I miss walking out the door with just a jacket and sneakers. I miss playing soccer with my teammates back in California. And I really miss running barefoot through my grandmother's yard, with the grass tickling my toes.

Stay positive, Miri, my mom would say, so I try to take her advice.

"We'll take a bike ride after our chores, okay?" I say to Ruff. In reply, he wags his tail.

CHAPTER TWO



Chores Are Such a Bore

With my helmet locked in place, I carry Ruff into the airlock and punch a few buttons to open the door before we step outside.

We walk through my family's compound, our little piece of Mars. We pass by the greenhouse, where we grow our food, and the empty storage dome,

where my mom and George store their fossils. (They haven't found any—*yet.*) Last week, they started digging near a glacier to look for microbes in the ice. It's Mom's biggest dream to find evidence that life once existed on Mars. Even *I* have to admit that would be exciting, but I'm not sure how anything could survive in a place like this.

When we reach the solar panels, I get to work. A layer of red dust covers half of the panels, so I brush them off with a special broom. Ruff stays busy

