



A Martian Story

MARS
CITY

Susan Kay Martin



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It was an exceptionally warm summer, with temperatures actually past sixty degrees, the year my parents began to realize that Tesarae was different. I was nine years old then, and Tes was three.

At first they tried to push it out of their minds, as they really could not remember what it was like when I was that small or what I had done to get the attention of friends and family as a small child will do at times.

The first sign that worried Mother and Father was that Tesarae began to suck on her thumb. This may not sound unusual, but it was to us. Not one other child on Mars had *ever* sucked his (or her) thumb until now. They did not know what to make of it. Whenever Tes was tired or hungry, instead of politely relaying the message to Mother, she would cry and stick her thumb in her mouth.

Another odd thing about Tes's behavior was her love for summer. The hotter it was, the more she begged to go outdoors. While we were sweating in an unbearable sixty-five degrees, our Tes would run and scamper about. It was obvious the heat had no effect on her. During the winter months, though, she acted in a totally opposite way towards the

weather. Even at a mild five degrees, she would only leave the housing complex if she was bundled in thick clothes and shivered after only a half an hour of play in the dark red sand that covered that coated Mars during the winter.

But Tesarae adapted to it. She was still a child and began to adapt slowly to what seemed to her a harsh environment. Mother and Father fed her all the foods recommended by the doctors, and they seemed to help a little, giving her extra vitality and adding color to her cheeks. She seemed all right for about a year.



Tesarae was five when other people started realizing that she was different. When a Martian child reaches the age of five, automatically the special “adaptations” begin to take place. Under a special diet from birth, the child adapts easily to the new powers.

The best power, in my opinion, was teleporting.

Teleporting is just a fancy word for speed-flying from place to place. Mars has no need for moving vehicles on the ground because of the teleporting system, and every child on Mars can do it by the age of four. I flew at three. Unfortunately, Tesarae couldn’t even get up in the air, much less fly from place to place. So I became her personal teleporting teacher. Imagine! Having to be taught to teleport. Tesarae certainly was a strange little Martian girl.

"Tes! Tes! C'mon!" I commanded one afternoon.

Tes hurriedly drank her milk and ran after me. For a while I tolerated a game of hid and seek around the sand dunes and irrigation canals, but then got into more important matters. I eased myself upwards into the thin, cool Martian air, dragging Tes with me.

She screamed and clutched me. "Jeph, let me down, oh let me down!" Her face turned a peculiar red and I lowered her to the ground. She was crying and put a finger in her mouth.

"Tes, don't you want to fly?" I asked, getting a little mad.

"Oh, yes, Jeph, more than anything in the whole world I want to." She was gasping painfully for breath. She was *always* gasping for breath, as if she couldn't get enough. At those times I was instructed to give her a bright blue pill, which the doctors had given Mother and Father to help with her breathing.

After chewing the pill, she pushed the hair from her eyes and looked at me pleadingly. "What do I have to do? How do I fly? Teach me Jeph. Please."

What could I say? Teleporting came as easy as walking and talking. It was just one step in growing up.

"Just stand and then lift yourself, Tes. Like this." I rose slowly above the sand and eased myself next to her. "Now, you try."

Tes concentrated so hard that sweat poured from her forehead, but nothing happened so far as I could see. Tes looked at me and said, "I felt lighter."

She probably told me that to make me feel better. I was feeling pretty disgusted with myself.



It wasn't long until the story got around. Jeph's little sister couldn't teleport. Tes was nearing her sixth birthday and becoming a little self-conscious about not being able to teleport herself to school. I had to drag her to school, and every kid there knew it.

"Hey, Jeph, nursemaid, how's the "hauling" service coming?"

"She'll be stuck to you for the rest of her life, buddy!"

It didn't bother me so much. I could take it, but I was worried about Tes. Flying over the playground after a stray ball allowed me to hear the primary children at recess, playing and racing around. I knew where Tes was—inside the school complex, reading the letters of the alphabet. The children were chanting as I approached.

"Tes can't fly! Tes can't fly!" Faster and faster they chanted it until I couldn't stand it any longer. I landed near the entrance and yelled at the children in little sister's defense.

"Shut-up! One more word and you'll get clobbered. By me." They shut up. After all, I was one of the big, upper-level boys, and they were a

bunch of little kids in the primary lower level. We “uppers” were kings of the school.

I went into Tesarae’s classroom, where she was sitting and sobbing her six-year-old heart out.

“Tes, don’t cry. I’ll take you home.”

On the way home, she asked me a question I couldn’t answer. “Jeph. I do so much want to be like everybody else. What’s wrong with me?”

I shook my head in defeat. I felt so sorry for her. What could be wrong with my little sister?

Later at home, I made a list of what made Tes different. I used the *Word-Definer* and came up with the only logical answer. Tesarae was a mutant. According to the *Word-Definer*, it was quite simple:

Mutant-An individual or organism differing from the parental strain as a result of the alteration of genes or chromosomes of the organism.


I approached Mother and Father with my conclusion a little cautiously. I knew they wouldn’t go head over heels with joy about it, even if it was the only conclusion that sounded reasonable.

They didn’t.

“Jeph Sooinon. How can you say that about your own sister?” Father asked, stunned.

“Mutant is not an especially beautiful word, son,” Mother added.

I agreed. But it was logical. “Mutations are being studied, Mother. Isn’t it just possible that a Martian could be mutated?”



“Highly improbable,” Father said. “I’ve never heard of one.”

“That’s just it. No one has. Maybe there have been mutants, but people have kept it quiet,” I argued.

“These mutation studies,” Mother said, “have only been conducted on lower animals. And” — she looked me in the eye — “a mutant always dies when it becomes an adult.”

“Yes. That’s important,” I said. “Maybe if we let them study Tes, we could learn how it happened, and maybe she’d live.”

“NO!” Father should. “No bunch of scientists is going to study my daughter. And that’s final.”

I sighed.

“I’ve come to a conclusion of my own,” Mother said. “I think Tesarae is a bit ‘slow.’ It’s rare in Martians, but I’ve heard of it. I think we should give her time. I believe she’ll teleport when she’s good and ready, and not before. She’ll outgrow her lung condition, and she’ll get used to the weather. Just give her time.”

I sighed again. My parents could not accept the fact that their child could be different. But they simply couldn’t ignore it. Tes might die as an adult! Even younger. The Mars environment was extreme. *Anything* could happen.

Unfortunately, Tes had been listening through the air-vents. I knew it because I saw her face against the screen. I could even see the tears in her eyes.

Mother and Father stayed with her for a long time that night. She wanted me, too, so I got to stay up way past my bedtime.

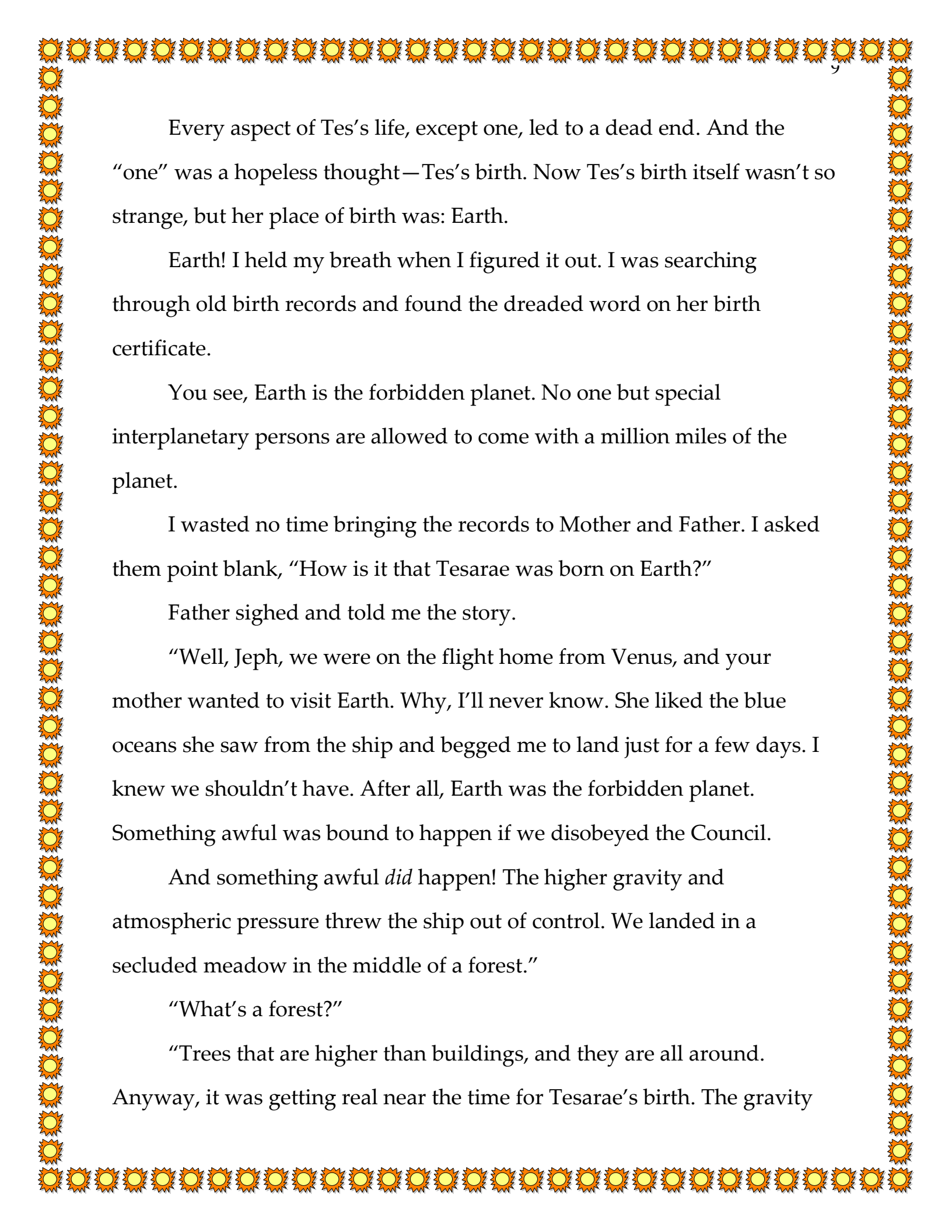
“I’m different. Oh, how come it happened to *me*?” Tes cried. “Will I outgrow it, Mother? Some day?”

“Hush, Tesarae. You’re not so very different. You’re upsetting Mother,” I commanded my little sister. I knew that she now realized she really *was* different, but she quieted down.

After accepting the fact that Tes was a . . . mutant (I didn’t like to use the word, either), we kept her home for school, and Mother taught her. The doctors fed her massive amounts of vitamins—the kind used for children who were “slow” in their physical development. The problems with Tes somehow leaked out, and scientists were forever at our door, paying us to let them examine Tes. We got plenty of unwanted publicity, and my little sister became reserved and quiet, content with just having a book to look at.

I felt helpless. I was only twelve. What could *I* do? A Martian mutant was unheard of. I decided to do a little research on my own. There had to be something in Tesarae’s short life that had affected her, and maybe it could be helped if the source of the problem were discovered. I began my research with growing hope.





Every aspect of Tes's life, except one, led to a dead end. And the "one" was a hopeless thought—Tes's birth. Now Tes's birth itself wasn't so strange, but her place of birth was: Earth.

Earth! I held my breath when I figured it out. I was searching through old birth records and found the dreaded word on her birth certificate.

You see, Earth is the forbidden planet. No one but special interplanetary persons are allowed to come with a million miles of the planet.

I wasted no time bringing the records to Mother and Father. I asked them point blank, "How is it that Tesarae was born on Earth?"

Father sighed and told me the story.

"Well, Jeph, we were on the flight home from Venus, and your mother wanted to visit Earth. Why, I'll never know. She liked the blue oceans she saw from the ship and begged me to land just for a few days. I knew we shouldn't have. After all, Earth was the forbidden planet. Something awful was bound to happen if we disobeyed the Council.

And something awful *did* happen! The higher gravity and atmospheric pressure threw the ship out of control. We landed in a secluded meadow in the middle of a forest."

"What's a forest?"

"Trees that are higher than buildings, and they are all around. Anyway, it was getting real near the time for Tesarae's birth. The gravity

did strange things to your mother, and I wanted to leave earth—and quickly. But your mother said she thought the gravity on Earth had caused Tes to be coming a little early.

“We barely made it to the Confinement Complex (hospitals, the Earth people call them) in time. So, unfortunately, Tes was born on Earth. We left in three days and rushed quickly back to Mars. Of course we’ve kept her place of birth quiet. It’s a shame and disgrace to be caught on Earth, much less to be *born* there.”

I was ready to burst with excitement.

“But Father!” I practically screamed, “this may be the key to Tesarae’s mutation! The gravity and heavy atmosphere of Earth might have affected a newborn Martian child on Earth. All that heavy oxygen content for Tes’s first breath. It could have been the cause of her mutation!” I was so enthralled with my discovery that I could hardly speak.

“Jeph! I believe you may have a good idea here. I shall try to get clearance from the Upper Council immediately to visit Earth and check it out.” Father had never been so excited.

I, too, was excited. In a few days or weeks I might be on my way to Earth!



We left Tesarae in the care of Grandmother and took off one week later. Father, Mother, and I carried the birth records with us, and even a

little bracelet that identified Tes as a baby. The bracelet had strange figures on it—Earth writing, I suppose.

Earth was a very strange planet. There were white clouds that covered the area where we landed. The trees were indeed tall, but Earth had no fine red sand or canals. Instead, I saw rushing rivers, and I admit I was afraid. The ship equalized slowly, but even so, I fell on my face when I stepped out of the ship. I could barely walk. *This is a horrible place*, I thought. I felt smothered in the thick atmosphere and sweated continuously in the heat. Mother said it was like this all the time, I wanted to get out of this place as quick as I could.



My job was a bit difficult. Since I had done all the research, I now got the opportunity to carry it through as “my project” to the end—whatever the end might be.

Our first stop was the hospital to check out the certificates. Maybe these records showed some difficulties Tes had when she was born, and the hospital people had forgotten to tell Mother. I now had a chance to try out some English that I had sleep-learned.

“Excuse please,” I ventured to a lady dressed in white.

She turned to me. “Yes?”

“Do you carry past records of each child born here?” From the way she looked at me, I figured my accent must be awful.

“Of course, young man, but I can’t show them to you. Are your parents nearby?”

I nodded, and Mother and Father came over. Father took over. “Here is our personal birth record” —(he had translated it to English)—“Would it be possible to look up her original one? We want to check if she had any problems being born that we don’t know about.”

“Certainly sir. One moment.” The nurse left the room, and I could hear her shuffling about. In a few moments she returned with our copy, a few papers, and a puzzled look on her face. “I’m new at this station, and we’re not a big hospital,” she said. “Are you sure your daughter was born here?”

“Oh yes,” Mother said, “I remember it well.”

“Well . . . there seems to be a . . . mistake.”

“What *kind* of mistake?” I asked. My throat went dry.

“There is no name in our records for Tesarae Sooinon. What’s her middle name?”

“She hasn’t any middle name,” I said. My heart started to beat fast.

“Well, I have two records here,” the nurse said. “One is for a “Teresa Rae Soionon”, and one is for a “Teresa Renee Simpson,” born the same day.”

I gulped. No, nothing like that could happen! I brought out the identification bracelet. I could only speak English, not read it.

“This is Tesarae’s ID bracelet. When she was born, they put it around her wrist.” I handed it to the nurse, shaking.

She looked closely at the small writing, squinting. I remembered Mother and Father—who could read English—a couple of days ago, laughing over the way the Earth people had spelled Tes’s name and our last name. How could they have known the correct spelling, with the accent mother had when they were last on Earth? The Earthers had guessed on the spelling.

I looked at Mother and Father. They weren’t laughing now. I spoke up. “The name on her bracelet doesn’t match our personal record. The hospital can’t spell.”

“I see. But there’s something definitely wrong here. It should match the incorrectly spelled records that we have of your child, but it doesn’t.”

I stared at her.

“No,” the nurse continued, “but as a matter of fact, this ID bracelet *does* match this other record. I can just barely make out the last name on the bracelet: ‘Teresa R. Simpson’”

“You mean it’s not misspelled?” Mother’s voice was shaking.

“No, it’s not. It matches perfectly with this other birth record.”

I held my breath in horror. The impossible had happened. Mother and Father had been given the wrong baby when they’d left the hospital. A baby named Teresa Renee something. I made a new conclusion in my mind.

Tesarae wasn’t a mutant. Tesarae was an Earther!



Back on the ship, Father gave Mother a sedative. I sat in a chair, stunned. Everything fit together perfectly. Tes's lung problems, weather problems, and maybe even her teleporting problems were all tied together (did Earth children fly? I rather doubted it). Anyway, our mystery was solved.

Mother tried to look on the bright side of things. "Tes isn't a mutant. Oh, thank heaven she's normal." Even a normal Earther child was easier to accept than a mutant.

I had managed to get the address of the Teresa girl's parents and we set off, for some strange reason, to see the child. We knew nothing would come of it. Trading kids or something like that was out of the question. The two children would never be able to change environments at this point. It would probably kill them both. But somehow we had to see the other Tes.

The street they lived on was tree-lined and rather nice. We passed a group of children playing on some mechanical contraptions with wheels. It looked dangerous, to say the least.

Father took it upon himself to be the spokesman. He rang the doorbell of the house and a young woman answered, carrying a small boy.

"Hello," Father said, "I know you don't know me, but you may remember my wife. She was your roommate when your girl, Teresa, was born."

"Oh, yes. You're . . . Janya, am I right?" She was looking at Mother now.

"That's right." Mother smiled. "And my little girl is named Tes. Our girls were born the same day. I just wanted to compare their growth."

The woman grinned. "Of course! Just a second, I'll call Teresa." Now that crazy earth woman was acting like she was Mother's long-lost friend.

"Teresa! Come home now!" she called.

A small, dark-haired girl came skipping up the walk. The minute I saw her I could tell she resembled Father. Even to her smile. Mother acted strange and calm. She spoke to the girl and the girl smiled and answered.

"Who are these strangers, Mama?" Teresa asked and went to stand near the earth woman. She looked and acted like no Martian child I knew. The closeness of the sun had burnt her a dark reddish coloring, and when she talked she sounded just as human as her mother. We left as quickly as we could.



Our ship sped towards Mars in silence.

Father apologized. "Janya, I'm sorry we can't do anything to get our own Tes back. I think it would have been most difficult . . ."

"Don't apologize, Rion. I have no regrets." Her eyes were dry. "The child we say is an alien. She never could be a Martian. Our Tes is more Martian than Teresa is, and Teresa is more Earther than Tes. I accept the

fact that it is done, and we know Tes is normal. Feeding her the special diets will affect her adaptations. I can feel it." Mother sighed in contentment. "Besides, the children could never readapt. I know that. It is better they live with the ones who have been their parents for six years."

The rest of the trip was uneventful. We decided not to tell Tesarae of her parentage until she was an adult. We kept my research paper and wrote up a summary that stated that the Earth environment had "slowed" her down.



Tesarae was there to meet the ship. We had been gone four months, traveling to Earth and back, and Tes looked like she had really grown. She ran into Mother's arms, squealing. Then she got serious.

"Mother, they say I'm not really a Martian. Everybody says I'm different. Did you find out anything on the forbidden planet?" Tes stared at her.

"Tesarae," Mother said, holding back tears. "We went to Earth to find out what could have made our little Martian girl different from others, but Tes, dear, you aren't different."

"You mean I'm really all right? I'm not different? I'm really one of you?" Her joy was suffocating.

"Yes, Tes, you are one of us." Mother hugged her tightly.

Tesarae wriggled with happiness. She jumped up and yelled to us.

“Look, Mother, I think I can begin to fly. The special food has helped.”

To our surprise, Tes rose gracefully, glided about four feet, and then fell with a *plop* on the ground. I shouted my glee, and we all ran to help pick her up. We were laughing and so was Tes.

I think that in her own way, Tesarae was more Martian than any of us. Those born Martians just took their heritage for granted, but Tes had earned the title by growing up and never giving up.