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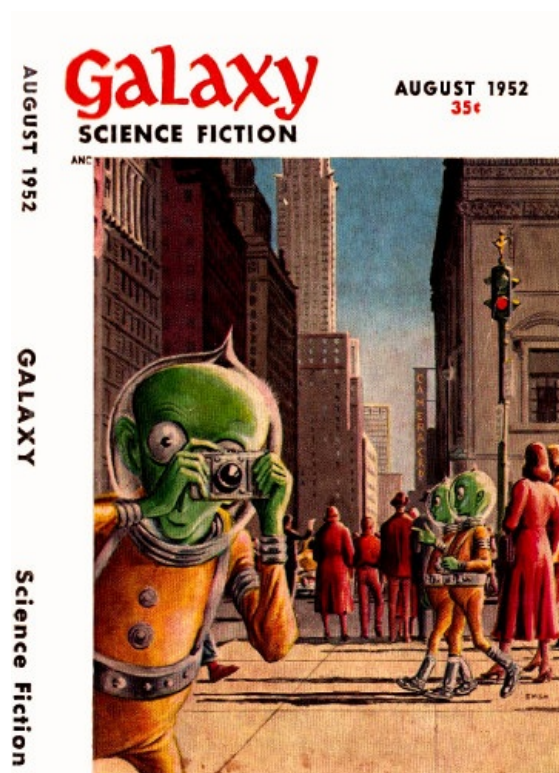
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK EDUCATION OF A MARTIAN ***



EDUCATION OF A MARTIAN

By JOSEPH SHALLIT

Illustrated by EMSH

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***It was for his ideals Joyce loved the alien.
But ideals are conditioned reflexes....***

Walter Harley glowered across the room at his daughter. He didn't like the willful tone that crept into her voice these days; he didn't like the way her gray eyes spread wide at him, the way her lips tensed, the way she drew herself up, tall and slim, an arch of determination. The darned girl had grown up too fast, that was the trouble.

Joyce faced up to his scowl, shaky as she was. She knew what he was thinking, because he had told her enough times—she was a headstrong girl without a brain cell to her name; her college education had been a waste; worse than that, it had pumped her full of crazy ideas, had knocked her sense of values upside down.

"How anybody in their right mind...." he growled at her. "Listen, you've already been to Mars. You've seen it. What do you want to go to that miserable, dried-up hole again for?"

"Because ... because I was happy there," she said tremulously.

"What? With those miserable savages?" He slapped his euphoria pipe down on the table. "Ethel, will you listen to that?"

Joyce's mother, plump and round-shouldered and vague-eyed, was deep in her reclining chair, the miniature transviewer on her lap, watching a garden party in Rome.

"What is it, dear?" she asked unhappily.

"This crazy girl wants to take her vacation on Mars again."

"Well ... it *is* educational," Ethel said.

Harley made a wild, exasperated sound. "What do you know about it? You've never been there. It's a dried-up hole, I tell you. It's a slum—it's one great big slum. Just one decent hotel in the whole place, and that's only because some of our boys went out there and put it up for them."

"That awful hotel—" Joyce caught herself. Not an argument about this, please! There was trouble enough waiting for her. "I wouldn't stay at the hotel," she said quietly.

"What do you mean? Where would you stay?"

"With some people I know there."

She saw his heavy eyebrows clench, saw his eyes search her suspiciously. She heard her mother's uneasy movements. She sat tautly, her hands in her lap.

"Who," Harley said finally, "are these people?"

"Just ... some friends," Joyce said. Now it was coming, now, now.

"What friends?" Her father's voice was lower, harsher.

"Just some people I met when I was there last time."

"Just some.... Say! Is this why we've been running up these solarphone bills? What've you been doing—talking to these people every week?"

"Only a few times."

"Look here. Look at me. Joyce, answer me. Have you been talking to that fellow you told us about—the one you met on your other trip?"

She let it out, a tiny, miserable, "Yes."

Harley's hand slammed down on the table. He wrestled his heavy body up out of his chair, stamped halfway across the room toward her and stopped.

"Young lady, I'm not going to have this. I'm not going to have anything like this! You hear? You want to get tangled up with him? My God, you've been communicating with him for a *year*?"

"Whenever I was able to," Joyce said hoarsely, looking at the floor.

"Joyce!" He came to her, reached down and lifted her chin. "Joyce, you're not—you're not in love with this—this creature!"

She nodded, suddenly angered at her weakness, angered at the wetness in her eyes.

"Oh, my God!" Harley raised his arms, brought them down with a slap against his thighs. He turned away from her. He glared at his wife, who was drifting nervously up out of her chair. He turned back to Joyce. "You're not serious. You can't be. This can't—this just can't happen to us. You'll have to get this foolishness out of your head right now. Right this minute. My God, the next thing you know, you'll be wanting to marry one of those things."

"I do...." The sound barely came out. She swallowed, forced her voice up. "I am going to marry him."

A blast of silence swept the room, but, strangely, the shock of it didn't touch her. All at once, she was calm, quiet. She had said it, and now she was armored against everything.

"No," her father was saying dully. "No, Joyce. No."

"I'm sorry, Dad," she said all in a rush. "I've thought about it a long time. I thought I'd forget him after a little while. I wasn't able to. I'm in love with him—I'll always be in love with him. When I come back, I'm bringing him with me. We're going to be married here."

Now, finally, the storm broke out of him. He yelled at her, he stamped around, his fists pounded the air—it was just as she had pictured it, dreaded it. Yet she was unshaken now, detachedly able to watch him as if he were some unruly, unintelligent child. I am going to marry him, she had said, and once the words were out, everything else was easy. There were no problems. There was nothing to be afraid of.

"His name is Gregrill," she said. "They don't have last names. We'll have to make one up or perhaps use mine."

"I'll see my daughter dead before I let her marry a Martian!" Harley roared.

"But if she really loves him—" Ethel intruded timorously.

"Loves him? Love that miserable scum?"

"Dad, please," Joyce said quietly. "You're condeming somebody you've never seen."

"I don't have to see him! He's a Martian, isn't he? He has horns, doesn't he?"

"They're not horns. They're antennae."

"Call them what you like, they're horns!"

"They're antennae, Dad," Joyce repeated firmly. "They're proof of advanced development. They can communicate with each other hundreds of miles. They can sense instantly—"

"I don't want to hear about it!"

"But, dear," Ethel tried again, "sometimes, when they marry an Earthling girl, they cut those horns off, and then they look just like us."

"I wouldn't let him—" Joyce bit off each word—"do any such thing. I'd be utterly ashamed of him. I wouldn't marry him if he knuckled under to our prejudices like that. What does he have to be apologetic about? He's a superior being—"

"Superior?" her father howled at her, but his voice was losing its power.

"In spite of our buildings and machines and things, they're far richer than we are, really. They have such a richness of feeling, such warmth, such sensitivity. They understand and feel so much more than we do. It's—it's fantastic. It's just something we can't comprehend."

"I see," he said bitterly. "And how are you going to comprehend them?"

"Gregrill can speak Earthling as well as I can," Joyce said. "He's a graduate of the university there in Memnonia. Maybe, with his guidance, I'll eventually get some insight into—"

"My God," Harley said dully. He walked unsteadily away from her and fell into his chair. "A daughter of mine..." He looked at her again. "Joyce, can't you see it's impossible? It couldn't work. These mixed marriages have never worked out. Never! Don't you see how it would be? You'd be an outcast. None of your friends would ever want to see you again."

"Well, if they should happen to be stupid and prejudiced—"

"*I'm* that stupid and prejudiced! I wouldn't let a Martian in my house! They're the scum of the Solar System!"

"Dad, I won't listen to you talk like that."

"What do you want to do—be the wife of a janitor?" he went on relentlessly. "Porters and janitors, that's all they're fit for."

"If they were ever given a chance—"

"A chance? What would they do with it? Loaf around dreamily, get nowhere. Nowhere at all! And pull us down to their level while they're fouling up our civilization!"

Joyce stood up, her hands trembling.

"You're not going to Mars!" Harley shouted. "You're not going, you hear? You're staying right here on earth!"

"I'm afraid," she said unsteadily, "that you're too late. I already have my ticket. I expected you'd make a fuss. My—my trunk is at the spaceport. Nothing can stop me now, Dad."

"I'll stop you. You'll never marry that scum. By God, if I have to take it to the Panterrestrial Court —"

"Good-by, Dad. I'm not booked to sail till Thursday, but I think it's better if I spend the remaining

days in a hotel. It'll be more comfortable for all of us."

"Joyce, come back here!"

"Good-by, Dad." She waved a shaky hand at her mother. "Good-by, Mom. See you soon."

"Joyce! Come back!"

She went out, quietly closing the door behind her.

The huge 1200-passenger spaceship settled down slowly toward the landing field, its braking jets making a queer whistling sound in the thin Martian air. The passengers crowded to the windows. Most of them were already in their thermosuits, though the daylight temperature was close to fifty degrees. Some were even adjusting their oxygen packs. These weren't necessary at all, except for long hikes or intense exertion, which few of the visitors would indulge in. But they'd bought the things and they were going to use them—it was part of the adventure.

Most of the passengers were working people on vacation, taking advantage of the special two-in-a-room rate. There were a few salesmen, nervous but hopeful about the possibilities of opening up the hinterlands; so far, only Memnonia, the Martian capital, had provided Earthlings with any business.

In the bow of the spaceship was a crowd of girls, a college graduating class. Some of them were dressed in the new skin-tight thermosuits which were stirring up so much fuss in the fashion magazines. Listening to their ecstatic, senseless chatter, Joyce suddenly felt immensely older. The day, thirteen months ago, when she first sighted the Memnonian landscape with her own class, seemed impossibly long ago....

The ship nestled in against the vast loading ramp. A whistle sounded. The doors slid open. Husky, bare-chested Martian porters crowded aboard, began wheeling out the luggage. Joyce stepped out into the pale sunlight. The clear, thin air tingled at her nostrils, dizzied her, as she'd known it would till she got used to it. She followed her porter down the ramp. It seemed to her, in her giddiness, that Greggrill himself was down there, down at the end of the ramp, bronzed, bare-armed, coming toward her—

It *was* he!

He had made the two-hundred-mile trip to meet her!

She began to run. She stumbled, caught herself on somebody's arm, ran again, plunged against him, lost herself against his big, powerful chest.

"Oh, Greg! Greg, you're here!"



It was a long while before she could pull herself away to look at him. She had forgotten his strength, the magnificent arch of his chest. He was wearing a white fiber vest in the traditional

style, sleeveless, cut low in front. His sun-washed skin glowed like polished bronze. The highlights shone on the strong, high arc of his nose, the ridge of his cheekbones. His fragile russet antennae swayed like wheat stalks in the wind.

There were muttered complaints around her. She was being shoved, prodded. She'd hardly realized they were standing in the midst of the swarming passengers.

"Oh," she laughed tremulously, "let's move. My luggage. Where—oh, there it is, that man over there with the cart."

"I will get it," Gregrill said.

"Oh, no, please."

But he was already striding away, big and powerful, towering over most of the Earthlings who were scurrying past. She saw him give something to the Martian porter, watched him swing the trunk up on his shoulder. It writhed in her, it devastated her, her father's contemptuous dismissal—"porters and janitors, that's all they're fit for."

"Greg, put it down," she said frantically. "I won't have you carrying it!"

He smiled at her indulgently. "It is not heavy."

"I don't want you to," she pleaded.

"Why do you not want me to?" he asked puzzledly. "Somebody must."

But how could she say it? How could she discuss it at all? She walked beside him, dumbly. They went down the ramp to where the aircabs were loading. An Earthling company had put in all the air transport here; the Martians themselves had never bothered to develop anything more advanced than the *eshbrug*, a lumbering, three-wheeled, sun-powered vehicle.

"We shall take the airbus," Gregrill said.

"Oh, do we have to?" she asked.

"How else can we go?"

"Can't we get an *eshbrug*?"

He looked at her wonderingly. "To travel three times as long? I am aware that you are tired—"

"I'm tired of a lot of things," she blurted. "I'm tired of all the smooth, cynical, streamlined—Right now, I'd rather walk the whole way than step into an Earthling airbus."

He gave an uncertain laugh. "I am not sure that I understand your meaning."

"I'll explain it some time."

But how could she ever? He thought Earthlings were all such noble, shining, gifted creatures. How could she tell him of the rot at the heart of so many of them?

"Come on," she insisted desperately. "Let's find an *eshbrug*."

The driver let them out at Gregrill's road. Gregrill shouldered the trunk, and they walked down past the irregular row of red, sunbaked, dome-shaped houses, each with its big tank in the rear for catching Mars' meager rainfall. Joyce felt a quickening, a surge of warmth, when she saw them and the quiet, open-faced people in their doorways, smiling their shy welcomes. She was coming home.

She was coming home....

Gregrill's mother and father were waiting just inside their door. They opened their arms; they hardly said a word. Joyce ran to them, folded them against her. She didn't mind the tears.

She let them lead her into the main room, let them seat her, put pillows around her. She sat there bathing in their tenderness, their simple good-heartedness.

Couldn't everybody see it? Why couldn't her father know it? These were the best people in the Universe!

Dinner was an Earthling meal. Joyce had been looking forward to a dish of *mrila*, the Martian rice, and *krulevak*, the white fruit that tasted like luscious chicken meat. But Gregrill's parents had obviously felt that their humble foods were too mean for her exalted taste and they had gone to the expense of bringing in vegetables and meats from the Earthling import shop in Memnonia.

Joyce hid her disappointment. She had an impulse to say, "Please, please don't mimic our Earthling ways. Stay the way you are. Don't spoil anything. Don't lose what you have."

After dinner, Gregrill took her for a walk. Joyce had her thermosuit on now. The Sun was setting, and the startling cold of the Martian night was coming in fast. Gregrill changed his fiber vest for a sleeved jacket, though of the same light material. It was incredible how little protection these people needed against the cold. But, of course, they'd adapted to it.

They walked along the edge of the gorge that cut through the stunted forest half a mile from Gregrill's home. The rough sides of the gorge rose sheer and splendid, a marvel of glittering color—red, orange, yellow, brown. Far down on the rocky bed, a shallow stream flowed sluggishly to the south.

Soon, as summer came on, the stream would quickly deepen. From the northern ice fields, a torrent of blue water would come rushing down the gorges, and the heavy rains would come, and the red ground underfoot would turn to a miraculous green, and the *mrila* would sprout up like a rug of green velvet across the wide fields and the terraced hills.

If she could only stay here, if they could only build their lives here with these simple, good-hearted people....

But she knew it couldn't be. Gregrill would be wasted here. Earth, despite all its hatefulness for her, was the only place where his genius would have a chance to unfold and display its potentialities.

"It is time that we go back?" Gregrill asked. "You are cold?"

Suddenly, helplessly, Joyce began to laugh.

"What is it?" Gregrill said, confused by the sudden laughter.

"The funny stiff way you talk!" She laughed on and on. She couldn't stop.

"I am sorry," he said, turning aside, his face full of hurt.

"Oh, no!" She caught his arm. "Don't misunderstand. I love the way you talk. I want you always to talk the way you do now. Don't change—please don't ever change. I love you just as you are."

Gregrill got his visa five days later. It was a complicated affair. Joyce had to sign half a dozen affidavits at the Earthling consulate, all certifying in one way or another that she intended to marry Gregrill as soon as they reached Earth, and that she guaranteed he wouldn't become a public charge. It was practically the only way a Martian had of getting to Earth.

It infuriated her, this stupid legislation by which Earth denied itself everything these people could contribute to its culture. A few years ago, the Earthling government had admitted several thousand Martians to fill the pressing shortage of menial labor, and had permitted Venusians to take jobs as room stewards and waiters on the spaceships; and by that trivial concession, it had felt it was fulfilling its obligations to the Interplanetary Union.

When would it learn what its narrow prejudices were costing? Would it have to wait till someone like Gregrill stepped forward and demonstrated all the richness it was missing?

The formal good-bys had been said. The neighbors had held a party for them. It had been in a clearing behind the houses, out in the clean, lemon-yellow sunlight. They had eaten roasted *trork*, the crustacean delicacy from the northern gorges, and *mrila* made into candied patties. Gregrill's mother and father had danced the grave, stately farewell dance. And now, on their final evening on Mars, Joyce and Gregrill were taking their last walk along the deep, echoing gorge.

She had just been watching him finish his packing, and the pain of it still sat in her throat. He had included his college books—every one of his texts and notebooks—packing them in so reverently, so pathetically confident that all he had to do was follow his classroom precepts, and recognition and success would come tumbling into his hands....

"I hope that your parents will like me as well as my parents like you," Gregrill said.

"Oh, yes," Joyce assured him hoarsely.

"Perhaps they will not be pleased that you marry a Martian."

"No, Greg, no. They'll—" But she couldn't carry it on.

He turned to face her; he looked at her hard. He was starting to speak, to ask the obvious questions, but she flung herself against him.

"Greg! Let's get married here! Let's get married before we leave."

He held her away from him so he could look at her. "But you had wished to be married on Earth," he said bewilderedly.

"I know, but I've changed my mind. I want it here, now. Oh, Greg, I'm afraid...."

His big russet eyes narrowed, his high-winged nostrils flared, scenting danger. "You are afraid of what?" he asked quietly.

"I don't know, Greg. I—I'm just afraid something will happen, something will go wrong, I don't know what." She couldn't look him in the eyes. "Let's get married here, in the morning, before we leave. Then we'll be married."

"Nothing can go wrong."

"Will not your parents be angered that you—"

"No, no, Greg. It'll be all right. This is the best way, believe me."

"I believe you," he said gravely.

And it caught her again, his small-boy solemnity. She was caught in a burst of helpless laughter. "Oh, Greg, I love you!"

They were married by a Martian priest in a small red-draped temple in Memnonia, not far from the spaceport. The ceremony was without words, like all religious rites on Mars. The tall, round-bodied priest, a huge cylinder of a man in heavy ritual fiber robes, stood facing them, his hands stiff against his sides, his eyes closed, his heavy features motionless.

Joyce closed her eyes, too. She strained to hear, feel, sense something of what was passing between the priest and Gregrill. Surely, if she strained hard enough, she would catch some echo, some aura. But the air defied her; she was deaf, blind, insensate; she was cut off irrevocably from this higher level of communication. Perhaps their children....

"He is saying the words now," Gregrill whispered in her ear. "You two together ... comfort each other ... against the darkness and the drought ... through the long dry misery of winter ... when the water is locked and nothing grows ... till the glad day of rain and running streams ... you two together ... comfort each other...."

"Say yes, my darling," Gregrill told her.

"Yes, yes! Oh, yes!"

They were outside, striding exultantly through the sunshine, the light wind tossing their hair, and the words kept singing to her: "Through the long dry misery of winter ... till the glad day of rain...."

Oh, yes, Greg! Yes!

When they reached the spaceship, their bags had already been taken to their stateroom, unpacked, the clothing arranged in the dressers—the meticulous work of the Venusian stewards. Even the bedcovers were turned down, her nightgown laid out.

"Greg," she said in a rush of embarrassment, "let's go out and watch the ... watch how we take off."

"You go, and I shall join you soon," he said. "I must wash and anoint myself as a bridegroom."

Joyce went down the corridor into the observation rotunda. The huge semicircular window was cluttered with jabbering passengers. She squeezed in among them, but she stayed only a moment. She pushed her way back out and went to a table near the head of the corridor, and waited restlessly for him. Midway down the corridor, a Venusian steward, a scrawny little gray-skinned, long-beaked fellow, was running a cleaning machine over the floor. She smiled at him, but he turned his face shyly away.

And then Gregrill came, moving up the corridor with his lithe, magnificent grace.

His wet hair glistened.

"Greg, you look wonderful!" she cried, instantly aware of how foolish she sounded.

He speeded his steps. He didn't see the cleaning hose in his path. The Venusian moved quickly to pull it aside, but it caught Gregrill's foot. He stumbled, caught himself on the corridor rail. Swiftly he turned, his arm swung out, his forearm slammed against the jaw of the little Venusian, sending him crashing down against his cleaning machine. Gregrill looked down at him a moment. Then he turned, gave Joyce a broad smile and walked to her table.

"Greg." Her throat was dry. "Why did you do that? He didn't mean it."

"It is his duty to avoid such accidents," Gregrill said.

"But look, he's still lying there. Let's go help him."

"Leave him there," he said. "He is only a Venusian."

"Only a—?"

"Venusian." His lips curled. "They are the scum of the Solar System."

The tremor that went through her was lost in the thrust of the jets as the ship took off.

"They are not even fit for cleaning floors," Gregrill said. He suddenly smiled. "Do you not see the change I have made?" He gestured at his head.

Through tear-blinded eyes, she saw his glossy waves of hair. The antennae were gone!

"It hurt only a little," he said. "I could not wait until I had them off. I have been ashamed of them for so long."

Lord, who was this person she had married? *She didn't know him!*

"I see that you are still upset," he said. "Please understand that these Venusians must be kept in their place."

It was some stranger. She couldn't be married to him. She couldn't!

"I wonder if I look like an Earthling now," he said. "Tell me, do you think that I look a little like your father and his friends?"

She answered him wearily, defeatedly: "Yes, Greg. You do. Exactly."

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