

Miss Smith is an extraordinarily versatile young lady; she has contributed to the Irish magazine Slant, published a children's book on architecture, constructed crossword puzzles for the New York Times, and written "vast quantities of beautiful but anonymous stuff for trade journals." Now she turns from these accustomed, if diverse, paths to concoct a hilarious rib on space travel, old-fashioned magic, BEMS or what-have-you. Bet the children didn't have as much fun learning about buildings as you will have with this tender romance between two highly improbable people.

The Martian and the Magician

by EVELYN E. SMITH

EVER SINCE childhood I had grown accustomed to being followed by Things wherever I went. I was never lonely. There was always a reptilian *zokk* from Mars, who changed progressively into a more and more fearsome variety of monster as I grew familiar with the initial horror. I was never harmed, since the *zokk* had to throw so much energy into projecting themselves from Mars (or *Zokk*, as the natives called it) that they had none left with which to execute any malevolent projects.

Naturally the *zokk* do not follow just anyone about. Twenty years before, my father, a small-time sorcerer, had gone on one of the rare expeditions to Mars — rare because the *zokk* consider human beings a table delicacy, which makes earthmen take rather a dim view of the journey. Dad was so miffed when the *zZik* or emperor of the *zokk* ate Dad's best friend that he retaliated by eating the *zZik*'s infant son.

How he managed to do this and yet get back I never found out. Actually, Dad never was more than a second-rate wizard at best. But the publicity he got for his feat enabled him to make quite a good thing of a small shop dealing in jokes, spells, and love potions that he opened in the Times Square neighborhood — where business is brisk in that line of goods.

Sorcery, the history books say, used to be called science up until the latter part of the Twentieth Century. Then the FBI discovered an atomic scientist muttering over his work in what they took to be Russian. He was immediately brought before an investigating committee, soon broke down and

confessed that he hadn't been speaking Russian at all but chanting a spell to make his atom bomb work.

It turned out that all the scientists had been doing the same thing, making a lot of hoopla about inventing stuff — atom bombs, jet planes, television — when actually they did it all with witchcraft. Seems all the magicians had gone underground since the Age of Enlightenment and had been passing off their feats as science — except for a few unreconstructed gypsies.

The first reaction of the populace was, as usual, to burn the wizards. However, a smart politician, and one of the best sorcerers we ever had, pointed out that without witchcraft modern technology would disappear. "Where would your movies, your refrigerators, your hot and cold running water be?" he asked. Because, of course, all those things are done by magic.

In the next election, running on the Third or Sorcerers' Party ticket, he made mincemeat out of the Republicans and Democrats and was elected president. Enemies whispered that he had bewitched the voting machines, but I know that wasn't true. He won fair and square through mass hypnosis.

Things proceeded apace after sorcerers could come out into the open. We reached the inhabitants of other planets and some of them unfortunately reached us . . . but that's another story. The only ones earthmen couldn't handle in the long run, though, were the *zokk*. They could look at you and just say, without any charms or signs or anything, "Drop dead" and you'd drop dead, no matter how many protective spells you were under. They couldn't project their powers effectively through space — a lucky thing for Dad and me because, although ordinarily they didn't put themselves out for mere earthmen, they sure had it in for us Bennetts.

This brings us to my twenty-first birthday. I was having the usual argument with Dad. "Son," he said, "I want to make you a full partner in the shop. You know I'm not a well man — my heart isn't good — and I want to be sure that when I'm gone you'll be provided for."

"Hell, Dad," I told him, "I don't want to go in for small-time stuff. I want to leave the Solar System, project myself out into the Galaxy."

He shook his gray head. "Wiser men than you have tried, Bob, and failed. And they used ships powered by hundreds and hundreds of poltergeists. You couldn't even begin to afford a dozen."

"Poltergeist power!" I sneered. "I want to get there by thought projection, like the *zokk*." The *zokk* could reach outer space easily enough but, being awful snobs, they rarely bothered.

"No, no, Bob, you mustn't try that!" Dad pulled his beard in agitation. "Earthmen can't manage thought projection and most of those who've tried have gone mad. It does something to our brain cells. Promise me you'll give up your experiments."

"Nonsense, Dad. Look, I can thought-project a little even now." I sent his *Kabala* zooming across the room. I was pretty proud of myself, because up to then I hadn't been able to levitate anything bigger than a pocket edition.

He got all excited — jealous, I thought. "You muttered a spell under your breath!"

"I did not either," I said, hurt.

"Sorry, son." He calmed down. "It must have been your subconscious muttering the spell. What you ought to do is see a good psychiatrist. People say Dr. McCrindle is one of the best witch-doctors."

That's always the way when you discover something new; everybody thinks you're crazy. Still, no use arguing with Dad — if my theories bore fruit I would be doing him and thousands like him out of their livelihood.

I got up. "Well, I can't sit around talking any longer. Got a date with the prettiest girl on Broadway." And, smoothing down my hair with a few drops of our highest-priced love potion, I was off to meet Linda.

I whistled for my Thing as I left the shop — that always annoyed them — but no *zok* appeared. Come to think of it, I hadn't seen one around for some time; but I knew that every now and then the one currently assigned to me would go off on a bender. Poor things, they didn't ordinarily get much chance to travel. The *zZik* didn't like to let his subjects pick up any democratic foolishness from visiting foreign parts.

I was just as happy, because when I was with Linda there was definitely a crowd — even if the third was a scaly man-eating lizard. She was waiting for me inside the little bistro we always patronized, and she was looking as beautiful as ever.

"Hello, Bob," she greeted me, "you don't seem very happy. Anything wrong?"

"Not really." We sat down at our usual table. "Dad wants me to become a full partner in the shop, but I feel I'm not the type to spend the rest of my life behind a counter."

"You're right, Bob. You're meant for something better."

I told her my plans to thought-project a ship beyond the Solar System. I even showed her. "Look!" and I lifted the cruet stand six feet above the table. Only one vinegar bottle fell off.

The proprietor came over. "Listen, magic man, any more funny business and out you go on your ear."

. . . I got home a little after midnight, went through the darkened shop to our little apartment in the back. Dad wasn't in the living room. Tom, our black cat, sat in Dad's easy chair. "Where's Dad, Tom?" I asked.

Of course Tom couldn't answer; he could only meow. He wouldn't be

able to speak until his sentence was up, which would be another eight years. The authorities had turned him into a cat for sorcery with intention to defraud.

But he led the way into the bedroom and there was Dad lying on the bed, gasping. His face was a funny color.

"I'll get a doctor!" I yelled.

He shook his head weakly. "No use, Bob. I know I'm dying. But, before I go, there's something I must tell you, something you must know. . . ."

"Yes, Dad?"

"Bob, you're not . . . you're not. . . ." With a horrible gurgle, he fell back against the pillows. He'd died without finishing whatever it was he was trying to say.

Well, there I was, stuck with the shop. I could sell it to finance my experiments, but I knew well enough that's just what Dad wouldn't have wanted me to do. I couldn't make up my mind what the next step should be.

. . . I was sitting in the shop one afternoon a couple of days after the funeral, waiting for Linda to bring some sandwich fixings for a picnic lunch, when a steely-eyed character breezed in, flashing a badge.

"Bob Bennett?" I admitted my identity. "I'm from the FBI, investigating *zokk* activity. I understand you're being followed by Things."

"Haven't seen 'em for weeks," I told him. "Besides, I'm used to them; they don't bother me." I wished he would go away. I was getting hungry.

"Perhaps you'll be interested to know," he said, "that they've developed full-power projection."

This put another face on things. As long as the *zokk* just hovered about trying to scare me, that was okay, but if they now had the power to injure me. . . . "What precautions would you suggest I take?" I asked.

"Put yourself under our protection. We'll form a cordon around you at all times. Even a *zok* would hesitate to attack 50 or 60 of us, charmed to the teeth."

"Supposing it takes another shape," I pointed out. "Then how'll you know what it is? It might even pretend to be one of your men."

"That's easy. Because we've developed a *zokk*-finder." He showed me a small box-like gadget. "See this? Whenever I come within a hundred yards of a suspected *zok*, I press this button. If it is a *zok*, the dial flashes purple."

He pressed the button to show me. Just then Linda walked in the door, carrying a large paper bag. The dial flashed purple.

I laughed myself sick. "And this is government efficiency!" I howled. "That's one hell of a *zokk*-finder!"

The FBI man's face was pale. "It works all right, Bennett. This is a *zok*."

"Nonsense!" I told him angrily. "This is my girl and she isn't a *zok*."

"Very well," he retorted, just as mad as I was, "I'll prove to you that she's a *zok*! I'll recite a spell for turning things into their proper forms."

He took out a piece of chalk and made appropriate symbols on the floor, muttering to himself meanwhile. I watched attentively. Government spells were generally classified as top secret and I certainly could use this one in my business if it worked.

It worked all right. Tom — and I must say he was a lot better-looking as a cat — streaked past us in human shape yelling "Me for the straight and narrow, fellows," as he charged out the door.

Then I looked at Linda. Her face was covered with green scales; she now had four arms instead of two and double the number of red claws. Her three eyes flashed purple. Yet, she looked more beautiful than ever to me.

But the FBI man wasn't paying any attention to her. He was staring at me in horror. I looked down. My pin-stripe had slid down to disclose a set of green scales. I had two sets of arms. I could see in four dimensions. In short, I was a *zok* too.

I looked at Linda, enlightenment dawning upon me. "Then I'm a . . . ?"

"Yes, your highness. The sorcerer who kidnaped you changed you into human form instead of eating you. *Zokk* are poisonous to the human system, as even a *yuj* would know. With typical cheap human sentimentality, Bennett raised you as his own son. You are, of course, Prince *zZuk*, heir apparent to the throne of *Zokk*. We've been trying to get you back for years, but only recently have we developed our thought projection far enough to get sufficient power to take you. We were afraid you might not return voluntarily."

I . . . a *zok* . . . a Martian . . . a prince. The Galaxy lay open before me. "I'll go back voluntarily," I murmured, taking her four little hands in one of mine, "on one condition, that you'll be my wife and rule *Zokk* with me. . . . When *zZik* passes on, of course," I added quickly. "Which won't be too long," I thought to myself.

Three pairs of eyelashes swept her exquisitely scabrous emerald cheeks. "I am yours, *zZuk*," she whispered.

"But what'll we do with this fellow from the FBI?" I wanted to know. "Can't release him until we get away."

"Dearest," she said apologetically, "in my anxiety to be with you I brought bread but forgot to get anything to put inside the sandwiches."

"Can you cook?" I asked her.

She drew herself up haughtily. "Of course you do not know, your highness, that the prime criterion of true femininity in *Zokk* is the ability to cook."

"Well, sweetheart," I said, "what are we waiting for?"