

THE SMART SET

A MAGAZINE OF
CLEVERNESS

Manuscripts, to receive prompt attention, should be addressed, "Editor of THE SMART SET."

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IN THE CASE OF BRADNER

By Hugh Irish

I AM a mortal coward in storms. One day, at the time of the *Titanic* disaster, I said to a friend:

"I don't know how water danger would affect me: I have always been a landsman, and never had much to do with the water; but a fair-sized whirlwind, picking up the dust and leaves, is almost enough to send me into the cellar and under the potato bin. I believe one of my ancestors must have been carried away in a tornado, and lived through it," I concluded.

"It's a pity," he replied mournfully. There was a strange note of mockery in his voice.

What is this emotion, called fear, that everybody has and yet tries to pretend he has not? My dears, it was fear that put the "man" in humanity. It taught our progenitors to climb trees and hide among their branches, there to chatter and mutter and brood, and develop cunning and mind. Man did not outrun his enemies; he outfaced them. Fear—greatest friend that man ever had, yet we despise it above all things!

When Bradner was a little tad—and you wouldn't have thought, to see him, that he'd ever been little—he was so afraid of the dark that he wouldn't get over one night's fright in time to take on the next. He accumulated a stock. The poor kid was afraid of dark corners on cloudy days.

His parents tried to cure him of his infirmity, until the family doctor, after he had pulled the child out of a fear spasm their experiments had brought on, told them a few things.

Bradner's fear was a natal heritage. Something must have happened somewhere along his ancestral line that would

have made falling out of an airship seem like shooting the chutes.

So he grew up to be one of those men whom a runaway team, a burning hotel, a burglar in the basement or a drunken bully on the street throws into a trance. Danger simply paralyzed him; he was as hypnotized by it, for the time, as a snake-charmed bird.

I do not know that he ever encountered any of the things I have mentioned; I merely say that he grew up with a certain marked trait; for he did grow up, believe me. When I saw him, he was six feet six—there's not many of them at large—and built in proportion. He could have tied knots in nine hundred and ninety-nine men out of a thousand, take them just as they come, with no more danger to himself than if he'd been playing croquet with his niece; yet he wouldn't fight a one-armed lungier with the asthma. His was a marvelous *mésalliance* of soul and body.

When Bradner struck Spokane, the city was as flat on its back as an overturned turtle. It was just one great sluggish maelstrom of despair. Substantially the entire business section of the city had been wiped out by fire a few years before; and into the rebuilding had gone every dollar that could be raked, scraped or borrowed. Then came the panic and hard times, bad enough elsewhere, but in Spokane, burdened with the fire's debt, the situation was one to speak of in a whisper. There wasn't enough business to pay the postage on the correspondence. The bread line was like the line-up at the general delivery window, and the river got a few.

"This town's going into the hands of a receiver," I said to Doc McClain one

day, as we sat in his second story office window and gazed down on streets that simply oozed with down-and-outs, milling about aimlessly.

"I'd hate to be the man who receives her," he grinned back, taking his eyes momentarily off the dizzying procession below, that mesmerized like a cataract.

Now that was the kind of a layout that Bradner sauntered into one matchless fall day, and him with the tender pedals right from the East, and not knowing a bit more of what he was up against than a man knows when he is going to fall in a well. I saw him one day, coming up Riverside—saw him two blocks away—plowing through the crowd like a mastiff through a bunch of kittens, and everybody looking around at him after he had passed.

"Great grizzlies!" I said to Jim Hudson, who was with me. "Look yonder, what's coming!"

"Say," he grinned, after he had taken a good look, "if I ever get into a mix-up with that rhinoceros, I want you to promise to take care of my folks."

Bradner had gone straight from the train he came on to Sim Bailey's old stand on First Street. He had known Sim back East. Likely he expected Sim to be able to put him next to a hundred per or thereabouts; but Bailey had been closed out at sheriff's sale a few weeks before, and had gone nobody knew where—some said Helena. It didn't matter; for Bradner couldn't follow him. He had just about enough money left to take him to Medical Lake when he landed, and he couldn't write home for more without eating a very choice batch of crow, for he and his father had disagreed about his coming West.

So he joined in the starvation promenade, and he didn't even know at first what it was that he had made connections with. He hustled out looking for work, as cheerful as a schoolteacher selling Bibles in vacation, when he might just as well have been digging for diamonds in Iowa. Later on, when he began offering to work for his board, he discovered that the vein in that bonanza had pinched out, too.

Once, by some strange whim of the

fates that watch over innocents, he did get a job, with a rancher out near Davenport. I suppose the man must have picked him out from among the others to move his house, or something like that, and save hiring an outfit; but the job didn't last. The rancher sold out and went back to Ohio, and Bradner hoofed it the thirty miles into town to save railroad fare.

By this time Bradner began to see what he was headed for, and he suddenly became fanatically frugal. Say, the rations that man doled out to himself wouldn't pay for the wear and tear of digestion. He lived like a man experimenting in the cause of science, and stretched out his few remaining coins until he was liable to arrest for mutilation of the currency. He received a few dimes and something very rare in the way of victuals now and then at the back doors of residences for doing little tasks; but he lived mostly on memories of the past.

One of his priceless dollars, which would have financed him about six weeks under the marvelous commissariat he had adopted, went into the coffers of a fake employment agency. He made the rounds of the pawnshops with a few trinkets, of course, but he might as well have thrown them in the river. The pawnsharks wouldn't loan two dollars on a deed to the falls.

Well, Bradner certainly did all that any man could. I can't think of any suggestions in domestic science that would have enabled him to pull through the crisis. Although it takes a man of his size a long time to starve, there is a limit, of course; and so, as he stood one day and looked at the passing throng, with eyes that saw instead a little white house, a red barn and a green orchard on an Illinois farm, he thumbed the remaining coins in his pocket and found that they footed up thirty-five cents.

With a quivering sigh, that sounded oddly weak and incongruous from the lips of such a giant of a man, he turned dejectedly down the street and strove to shake off the terrible homesickness that lay on him like a malaria. When he reached Second Street, he stood a full

five minutes in front of a little grocery store before he entered it and laid a nickel on the counter.

"Which kind is the cheapest?" he asked in a low voice, pointing at some cookies in tin cases on a low shelf.

"These," lied the grocer, laying his hand on the best in his stock.

Bradner nodded, his eyes on the floor.

He never looked up at the face of the man behind the counter, nor did the grocer look at him. Neither could have told afterward what the other looked like. It was like the passing of two beings in troubled darkness. The grocer kept his eyes fastened on one corner of the store room, as though fascinated by a rackful of brooms hanging there. His strange preoccupation caused him to keep on putting cookies into the paper sack until they ran over on the floor. He reached up and pulled down a larger sack, dumping the cakes into it, so that Bradner would not notice the extra quantity. And still neither man could look into the other's face, for embarrassment.

Bradner returned to the street and furtively sought a secluded place in an alley, to eat a few of the cakes in its privacy; a man never parades a spread of that kind. When he saw what the grocer had done, he looked into the sack so long and distractly that his hunger passed, its place being taken by a couple of very unpleasant sensations that we call self-pity and shame.

While he stood suffering the most poignant pain that ever comes to a strong man, a comely young woman came to the back door of a nearby restaurant. It was Katie Norris. Her husband had been killed by an explosion in the Northern Pacific yards a few years before, and Katie kept off her relations by running a little eating house on Second Street.

She sized Bradner up the minute her big Irish eyes rested on him. She had become an adept at reading faces during the past year; for she had been doing all that her conscience would allow for hundreds of hungry men. The stiff, straight-ahead gaze of shame with which Bradner started to leave the place was to

her infinitely more eloquent than the whining rote of mendicant or hobo. She saw the sack of cookies, more reliable than a special report from Bradstreet or Dun, and knew that the man's giant strength could not avail to earn for him a better meal.

She waited until the lump in her throat subsided a little, though enough of it remained to add a hesitating, tremulous quality to her slightly Irish brogue.

"You needn't be ashamed," she said gently, stepping in front of him. "You've tried to find work—I know that well."

"I've offered to work for my board, I think, a hundred times," he replied earnestly; and he was now looking straight into her pitying eyes.

"I know, an' 'tis not wan bit o' use." Her eyes shifted from his face to the row of empty boxes littering the alley. "But 'tis lucky I happen to be needin' a man for my heavy work just now," she lied glibly. "Come in."

Bradner set down his sack of cookies and followed her inside.

For a time he washed dishes, carried slops, went on errands and did whatever else he could find to do. After a few days he began to notice that whenever he was busy some of the other employees were idle; there wasn't enough work for all. He wondered, too, how it happened, with a city full of men hunting work, that Mrs. Norris had needed help just at the time he came along. He saw how she was giving away food to other unfortunates, and a suspicion of the truth rapidly became a conviction. Then his conscience got busy; for Bradner was as white as they make 'em, except the one terrible defect with which a malign heritage had branded him. He was a long way from the kind of man who could reconcile himself to living on a woman's bounty.

So one morning he failed to appear. Katie ran up to his room over the restaurant, and, finding the door ajar, went in. On a table lay an envelope addressed to her, and in it was a note and thirty cents in small coins.

If ever a woman went up in the air, Katie Norris made an ascension when she saw that money. She simply raved,

flung the money as far as she could send it, and anathematized the town and its environs for fifty miles out.

When she had quieted down, she sent for Bernstine. He had been on the police force three years, and ate most of his meals at her place. Seated at a table in the restaurant, she told him of Bradner's going, showed him the note, and told him of the money.

"Say, Ed," she continued, a cloud of trouble showing in her dark eyes, "it's an awful good friend you've been to me, and on the strength of it I'm going to ask you to have the force hunt up Bradner and bring him back. I can't—see him go under."

"Sure, Mrs. Norris, if he hain't gone over the falls we can find him in ten minutes. It will be just like hunting for an elephant that's got away from the show. He's been known to the force from the day he landed; never done a crooked thing, either. The boys all call him High Boy down at headquarters. I can find him all right, but bringing him in is a different proposition. I'll need a capstan if he's in a notion to pull back. What'll you do with him when you get him back?" he asked, nodding at the note lying on the table. "He won't stay here."

Katie gazed at the note, thinking deeply.

"He's just a great big ninny, and as square as a brick block," she mused aloud. "Can't you do something for him, Ed?" she asked. "Couldn't you get him a place on the force, or something?"

"Well, there's twenty men on the Mayor's list right now, so I've heard, and some of 'em promised." He thought a moment, and then slapped his thigh with his hand. "Say, he'd be a bear, all right," and he laughed like a half-wit. "I'm going to put it up to the Chief, anyhow," he went on. "Catherton was knocked out stoppin' a runaway on the Division Street bridge day before yesterday, and I don't think he'll get back on his beat for some time." He got up to go, still shaking with gusts of laughter.

"Hurry up and find him, first," Katie urged, worried by his suggestion about

the falls, but smiling slightly at his laughter.

The Chief laughed, too, very much as Bernstine had, when the idea was first mentioned to him; so did the Mayor. You know how a thing of this kind will sometimes lay hold on everything it touches. It was Bradner's size that did it.

"What do you say, Wilson?" the Mayor asked. "Do you think the rest of you could club together and hold him down if he should take a notion to run the department?"

"Oh, he'd be all right," grinned the Chief. "We'd have to handle him some way, anyhow, as long as he's in town. Better wait until we get a couple of special uniforms made, though; we may have to send East for more cloth."

And that is how it came about that Bradner either had to lie down or tackle a job that he had about as much desire for as a man would have to get sawed in two; for the work offered him half-jokingly was no joke. With the city full of starving men, and four or five hold-ups almost every night, there was something doing in police circles most all the time.

When Fate stacks the cards, she sometimes does not even take the trouble to hide the operation. Bradner saw clearly enough that Bernstine, the Chief, Katie and the rest of them were as mere checkers moved about on a board by a something that seemed bent on seeing whether there was anything in him worth saving. It was a plain case of make good or get off the earth, and that old, short-breathed demon, Fear, was closing in on him like a deadly gas.

For once, his shrinking soul was stirred to bedrock. Pale and distraught, in his little room over the restaurant—for he had returned to Mrs. Norris's—he paced the floor like a madman, his huge fists unconsciously clenched, as if in readiness for an awaited foe. If the Mayor and the Chief had come upon him just then, they might have withdrawn his appointment and wired the Governor for a detachment of troops. Bradner cursed himself, his weakness and his remote ancestry.

His poverty, his helplessness and his

desire to prove worthy of the confidence of the Chief and Bernstine would never have saved Bradner in this crisis; but when he thought of the woman downstairs who, from her footing on the banks of a torrent of disaster, had held out to him a helpful hand, he wished mightily that the intangible monster that held him might assume physical shape for just one brief minute, until he could lay hold on it with his bare hands.

Well, he settled down, at last, without wrecking the building, and when he came out of that eight-by-ten room, he had a funny little pale smile on his face that nobody had ever seen there before. He had called his curse.

"How's the Big One doing, Wilson?" the Mayor asked of the Chief a few weeks later.

"Finer'n silk. He's the best man on the force, and was right from the start."

"Scares them into submission, does he?"

"Well, I don't know as it's that so much. He's a born pacifier. There's something about the man—a sort of strange feeling he gives one that he has gone over the whole thing a million years ago—that makes the petty brawls of these geezers look cheap and not worth while. He smoothes things over and quiets the scrappers down nearly every time. He hardly ever has to bring a man in."

"Well, for heaven's sake, give him rope. He can't hypnotize too many of 'em to suit me."

Of course there were some things that Bradner could not smooth over, and some that had gone too far before he had reached the scene. It was in these cases that his newfound nerve got its try-outs. He had to fight it out with himself all over again each time, and he didn't have a little private room to do it in, either. Sometimes it had to be done quick.

Now, although Bradner did not realize it, he was doing the only thing that can be done for a case like his. Fate had placed him in a better school than the professors could have devised. Every time he faced the music, he was tight-

ing his strange hold on the Thing that heredity had saddled on him.

And while he was doing this, there was not a man on the police force who ever suspected that he was painting out a streak of ochre. They all supposed he was the kind of man that wouldn't run from a falling wall.

But Bradner wasn't out of the woods yet.

II

IN the southeastern quarter of the city there was, in those days, a place called Shantytown. It was a tract of land held by squatters against more wealthy claimants, the dispute being in the courts for years, the squatters, meanwhile, in possession. The district was covered with a lot of sheep sheds, which the squatters apparently mistook for human habitations; at least, they lived in them. These shacks seemed to be arranged on a plan derived from the debris deposited by a tornado. There was not a street or an alley in Shantytown; but there were a few well worn paths, and a great many little blind nooks and courts, among which a man could get lost in the daytime with a guide and blueprints. Labyrinthine, unlighted, unpatrolled, it was no place to take the visiting delegations from Seattle or Tacoma when showing them over the city.

About that time there was a man down in Southern Oregon who got his name in the papers in seventy-two-point Gothic type. It was Packard. He and a neighboring rancher locked horns over a little dab of wild hay that both wanted to harvest. You know there are places in the West where men will fight quicker over a few forkfuls of hay than they will over their women folks. It seems there isn't enough hay to go around.

Well, they carried the case up to the county seat, which was only about seventy-five miles distant, and Packard lost out. He was one of those men to whom defeat is bichloride of mercury. He left the courtroom in a frame of mind that would fuse platinum, swore he

would get both the neighbor and the town, and skipped out.

The neighbor had been dead a week before his body was found, and in the meantime two citizens of the little town, which had sprung up on one of the earlier irrigation projects, ran onto Packard one night, making ready to blow up the dam with dynamite. Packard shot them both, much as he would two jack rabbits, and was riding his cayuse into the desert like Sam Hill when the dam went into the air.

A man hunt followed, which the newspapers kept tab on from day to day. About a week after the blowing up of the dam, Packard put another man out of circulation when a posse got too close to him in the Blue Mountains. After that most everybody concluded that he'd make a good subject to let alone.

During Bradner's hard luck days, he was sometimes forced to associate with some pretty tough customers; he wasn't always in a position to pick and choose his companions. One night he and a little white-faced crook named Everts went into camp beside a shelving pile of lumber in Brown's yards, down near the falls. It threatened rain, and they edged the outer boards out over their heads as a kind of roof. A gust of wind came along in the night and tipped the pile over toward them.

Everts was asleep, and I guess there isn't any doubt that he would have commenced practising the scale on his harp about that time; but Bradner was sitting with his neck against the pile of lumber, meditating on the glories of the West, no doubt, and when he felt the weight of the lumber against his back, he dug his heels into the earth and held the pile from a complete fall until Everts could throw enough boards off the top to restore the shifting center of gravity.

Everts thereupon became a worshiper of Bradner, as you may have seen a terrier fasten its affections on a Newfoundland.

Well, Everts came to Mrs. Norris's place one night—snooping and furtive as a coyote—and asked for Bradner. He had gone up to his room, and Katie, distrustful, requested Everts to come

again. No, he had to see him that night. It was closing time and the restaurant was deserted. Seating Everts at a table farthest from the cash drawer, Katie ran up to Bradner's door and knocked. Bradner came to the door.

"Billy, there's a dopey-looking little man downstairs who says he must see you tonight. I don't like the look of him, and I'll order him out if you say so. He says his name is Everts."

"Oh, it's Everts, is it? You sized him up about right, Mrs. Norris; but I can't imagine what he'd want with me tonight. I'll come down."

"Can't we go some place where we can talk private?" Everts asked cautiously, after Bradner had taken a seat at the table.

"Oh, this is all right," Bradner returned carelessly. He had not noticed the other's agitation, and supposed he wanted to make a touch. The crook sank his voice to a low tone.

"Billy, I seen Packard tonight, and he's in a house in Shantytown right now."

"You're dreaming, Everts," drawled Bradner.

"I tell you it's Packard," protested Everts, forgetfully raising his voice in his excitement and quickly lowering it again, with a quick, ratlike glance around the room. "I knowed him in Walla Walla five years ago, just as well as I know you now. I was knocked silly when his picter come out in the papers. You'd know him in a minute, from it."

Well, Everts's words and manner convinced Bradner absolutely, and you would be surprised to see how quickly that Thing that Bradner thought he had choked to death came to life at this point—came to life and got on its feet and leaped on Bradner without the thousandth part of an instant's warning, wrapping its palsying tentacles about his great frame, until he sat there less a man than the scrawny crook at his side.

And right there at that little table, with its white cloth, its salt and pepper shakers and its mustard bottle, in a silence broken only by the infrequent flop and splutter of the electric lights, a terrible fight took place between a giant

older than the river's falls and a stripling of only a few months' nurture: a fight without rounds or referee, a fight to the death.

Bradner saw that Fate had followed up her little trick of stacking the cards, by loading the dice. This thing that she now offered him was the real goods, the last gage in her stock; for Packard was just another name for getting shot.

Everts didn't know what to think of the dazed look and deathly pallor that overspread Bradner's face as he sat gazing straight at nothing, motionless as a stone. So long he sat thus, Everts thought he had suffered a stroke. When at last he rose from the table, his great body was a-tremble and a mist of perspiration was on his face.

All he said was, "Come on."

After they had left the restaurant, Katie Norris suddenly woke up. She had overheard the name "Packard" when Everts raised his voice momentarily, and that was enough for anyone who read the newspapers. A dozen times she ran to the telephone to call the police station, but each time her nerveless hand fell away from the instrument. She was afraid of doing something that might cause Bradner to lose his position. At length she closed the restaurant and went to her room, there to await in an agony of suspense, listening, the dragging minutes marked by no sound or movement except her half-breaths of deepest emotion.

When Bradner turned eastward on Sprague Street toward Shantytown, Everts looked up at him as if he had just discovered smallpox breaking out on his favorite's face.

"Ain't you goin' to git the bunch?" he asked, stopping as short as if he had run into a clothes line in the dark.

"No, Everts, I'm going alone." Bradner spoke as one in deep thought, who had forgotten the other's presence.

"Hell's fire, man!" exploded Everts. "If you want to commit suicide, there's a lot o' better ways than this. Packard's crazy as a loon, I tell yuh, when he's mad. I know'd that long ago. You'll git the swag, anyhow, or most of it, if you take the cops with you."

"I wasn't thinking of the reward, Everts," drawled Bradner smilingly. "I've got a bigger stake in this than the reward."

Everts hung back. Bradner argued with him and tried to convince him that his plan was the best. He explained that, if they surrounded the house, Packard would be sure to get onto it and might kill off half the police force of the city before they could get him stopped.

"Yes, but where do we come out at, this way? That's what I'm interested in."

"Leave that to me, Everts. You come on and show me the house, and you won't need to go near it."

Everts went, eventually; but he didn't act much like a man trying to get first choice at a land opening.

The aspect of the city underwent a striking change as they entered the verge of the strange district of the huts. The brilliant lights, the throngs of people homeward bound from theater and lodge, the clanging street cars, gave place suddenly to a gloom faintly broken here and there by a lighted window. A stillness brooded, which enabled them to hear the snorts of switch engines in the distant railroad yards to the east. A few pedestrians appeared as fitting shadows in the darkness, their footfalls noiseless on the beaten paths of turf, their voices sunk to low tones, in keeping with the air of apprehensive alertness that seemed to prevail.

Everts led the way, stealthily as an Apache, to a point not far from the center of the district. Stopping beside an unlighted shack, he clasped Bradner's arm with the shaking fingers of one hand, pointed with the other across a small open area toward another building, one of the windows of which was lighted, but curtained, and whispered:

"He's in there! I seen him go in, less than two hours ago!"

Without a word, Bradner started toward the door.

He crossed that little court with the air of a general on parade. There was no crouching, no haste: he moved forward with the deliberate, relentless stride of an enraged saurian.

To Everts, who stood watching like a man waiting for a fuse to burn through, it seemed that the door was unlocked, so slightly did the breaking of the lock with his shoulder check the big man's progress.

At a table within sat three men playing cards. Packard was not in sight. Without a word to them, Bradner turned to the nearest of two doors in the flimsy partition dividing the interior of the building, and threw it open.

This is the way that Bradner, driven to desperation by a fault, finally met it face to face. He laid himself wide open, challenged death as unmistakably as if he had sent his nearest friend to arrange the details of the duel. He deliberately baited his fear; but it was a risky pastime, for Packard was there, in that room.

Packard snoring! The man was sleeping like a drugged drunkard.

Bradner had taken the only course by which Packard could have been corralled without another revision of the census, and, at that, it had to be coupled with a streak of luck that is as rare as a million-dollar legacy from a rich uncle. He removed a big revolver from under the man's pillow, a little one from one of his pockets, and then started in to wake the lunatic up. It took ten minutes to get the man up and get his clothes on him. Packard was just too dead for sleep to be even curious about what was happening, and he wouldn't have crawled out of a fire. Bradner had no handcuffs with him, didn't need them; when Packard felt that arm of stovepipe size linked in his, he didn't require the advice of an attorney to decide that his little private insurrection was over.

The three men at the card table never moved. One of them was Packard's cousin. Doubtless they thought the house was surrounded by police; for, though Bradner was without uniform, they all knew him by sight.

On the way back through Shanty-

town, Everts formed a badly scared rear guard, nervously fingering the trigger of a revolver in a way that endangered every resident of the district.

There was some commotion at the police station, believe me, when the pageant showed up there. As soon as Captain Ames could force himself to believe the evidence of his own eyes, he reached for a telephone and called up the Chief at his home.

"Say, we've got Packard!"

"Yes, you have! How about Charlie Ross, and the man who struck Billy Patterson?"

"I don't know anything about them; but we've got Packard, all right."

"Who got him? And where did you get him?"

"Bradner just now brought him in from Shantytown."

"But Bradner isn't on nights!"

"No; but a man went to his room and told him where Packard was."

The Chief came down to headquarters at once. He took time to absolve Bradner for a rank case of housebreaking, and spent the rest of the night dictating telegrams and giving out news to reporters. The newspapers didn't do a thing to Billy the next day.

When Bradner reached home, Katie awaited him in the dimly lighted hall. Bradner was walking on air and only touching the ground once in a while to guide himself. There was a song in his heart—two songs—and, without a word, he went up to Katie, and, picking her up as though she were a little girl, pressed her to his breast.

"Oh, Billy!" she gasped laughingly. "How c'u'd ye know that I wanted ye to do just that?"

"I've killed my Jonah, Katie," was his irrelevant reply. "I ain't afraid of the devil now."

Her glorious eyes were laughing into his as she replied: "In that case, Billy, I w'u'd pity the devil."

