


*C*ourage. Might we not learn as much about courage from those who aren't courageous as from those who are? What about people who are oftentimes courageous but sometimes just plain terrified? How well I remember one particular night in New York City: It was late, no one on the dark street that I could see, and eerily quiet. I was so apprehensive that I stepped out into the middle of the street and all but ran in order to escape to a well-lighted street.




## HEARTS UNAFRAID

*Hildegarde Thorup*



**T**he young missionary wife was trembling with fear: what might be making that *scrape-scrape* against the wall? She broke into a cold sweat. How could she ever make it through the night?



Joan Bradley lay, eyes wide open, staring intently into the darkness. What was that noise, that *scrape-scrape* against the wall just outside the paneless window of her African hut? Suppose it were a lion—ready to spring into her room and kill her with its merciless jaws and claws? Suppose it were a python, insidiously gliding over the sill, across the floor, onto her bed, near her throat—

Oh, would that noise never stop? Would the long night never give way to dawn and bring humankind to life again? Would her nerves never lose their tenseness; her heart never stop its painful pounding which shook the bed with each diastole pulsation?

“I wish,” she murmured to herself, “I wish

that Bob were here. The noise would waken me, of course; but then I couldn’t be so frightened if I were not so all-by-myself.”

Again that *scrape-scrape* against the wall chilled her blood, and froze her nerves, and brought its gruesome pictures to her mind. One white woman alone in the midst of the African jungle; her young missionary husband was away on an itinerating trip; there was another family on the station, but they seemed so *far* away.

Then Joan Bradley prayed again, for she had been praying ever since the rustling noise first wakened her to tense consciousness. But the long night wore on, and the rustling still continuing intermittently. At last the rosy-crowned dawn appeared on the hills and frolicked over the plains. Then Joan arose with nerves still unsettled from the terror of the night. She went outside to investigate; she found no lion tracks on the ground, no traces of the presence of any animals; but she discovered a tree whose branch bent over to almost

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reach the wall outside of her window. Could that have caused the rustling? Joan swayed the branch toward the house—it made the same scraping sound that had so frightened her. Back and forth she moved it until she assured herself that it was this branch swaying in the soft night winds that had caused her terror.

*Coward*, she branded herself. *There was absolutely no reason for you to be afraid. Why, even if you were all alone, and lions or other wild animals were all about, you should not be frightened. "Perfect love casteth out fear," the Bible says. But instead, you are a miserable coward.*

Thus she was relieved momentarily of her anxiety, but in the depths of her faint heart there lodged cowardice and fear which she hopelessly recognized.

Joan told Bob about many things on his return from his trip—all the happenings on the mission, the way Alringis was at last learning to spell, and read him the latest letters from the homeland. Bob, beaming proudly at his wife, said, "Well, dear, it seems as if you could manage even a union headquarters alone; you could be doctor, preacher, teacher, or missionary. Why, you don't even need this fellow you took for better or for worse—not at all!"

Joan returned his embrace and smiled at his intended compliment; but fear pointed its accusing finger at her and said, "If he only knew you are a coward, what would he think?"

*That*, Joan had decided, he should not

know. Never could she tell him of her fears—he who was so fearless, so brave, so heroic in all his dealings with man, animal, and nature.

There had never been anyone to whom she had confided that phase of her character. From her earliest years she had been conscious of a dread of dark rooms with their frightful beings that might be behind doors or in closets, with their mysterious forms that she was sure were beneath the bed ready to clutch her, drag her down, destroy her. One night especially stood out in bold relief as an eternity of living hell. She had seen pictures of savage wild men during the evening. That night she lay in her bed, her little body shaking with fear, the sheets damp and clammy with perspiration. In her mind were terrible imaginings. She was afraid to move, afraid to turn, afraid to shut her eyes lest a horrible something sweep down upon her. She had been too ashamed of her fright to tell anyone of it. The next day's sun had chased the shadows from every corner, and after a few weeks she had regained quiet, undisturbed slumber.

As she grew older, the recurrences of these periods of quaking, shaking fear came less frequently, and in her heart she kept the secret of them shut tight and locked. None of her friends knew that she could be frightened into a silent agony; even her mother never suspected her gripping, unrelentless fears. Only the preceptress of her college knew it when Joan, who had been rooming alone, asked if

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she might have a roommate because she could not sleep. The dean gave the girl a penetrating, all-knowing glance. “You should never feel that way, Joan,” she told her. “The Christian’s faith will keep him from being afraid of *anything*. ‘Perfect love casteth out fear.’”

And Joan had repeated that phrase to herself a multitude of times, wanting to believe it, but knowing that somehow she failed to realize it, to grasp it. Was her love made perfect? She could not tell, but she knew that she was willing to do anything for her Savior and to go anywhere for Him. So when Bob had asked her to sail away with him to Africa, she had gladly responded. But there was a haunting terror in the back of her mind. *Africa*—that meant jungles, darkness, lions, snakes. But she would go—with Bob.

The trip across the blue, rolling Atlantic had been lovely. The new recruits enjoyed Cape Town. All their anticipations of tropical verdure were realized as they moved day by day farther into the interior. One night they were riding by oxcart intending to reach the next village, and to encamp there till day-break. Suddenly there was a scream! Then into the circle of moonlight leaped a lion roaring as he sprang at a terrified carrier. But the older missionary was too quick for the beast. A rifle shot rang out. The lion fell dead, but not before the native’s leg was pitifully lacerated.

When the lion lay sprawled and

motionless on the ground, Joan suddenly went limp and hid her face in her hands. Oh, was *this* Africa—what other terrors would she have to face? She rode the rest of the way to the village, her trembling body held tight in Bob’s strong arms, her ear against his breast where she heard the beating of his heart,—the heart unafraid,—and contrasted it with the pulling surge of her own—the faint heart.

Bob made many more trips away from the mission station; once he was called out as far as Cape Town. Joan kept busy during the day with the pleasures and responsibilities which were her daily task. Then after a while another pleasure and responsibility was added to her list—a tiny, blue-eyed baby girl. How the natives admired Eunice, how the mothers loved her, and the children adored her! Then the new mother had the companionship for which she had longed. The times when Bob was away were no longer heartbreakingly lonesome—she had a child of her own now.

The baby grew into a creeper, then a toddler. With her Joan’s soul grew—fuller, richer, deeper. With Eunice always near, she no longer experienced those dreadful clutchings of fear which had so plagued her. Ever since the moment she first held the babe in her arms, she had determined that her little girl should never know the meaning of fear. Doing everything she could to prevent it, Joan watched with interest the development of courage and

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dauntlessness in Eunice. Obedient she was, for when the mother commanded her not to touch an insect, the child obeyed, and would thenceforth avoid any insects of similar appearance. As far as the night was concerned, Eunice loved it—the dark sky, the low-hanging stars, the wide, black veldt. She did not even quake when a lion announced his proximity by a roar, although Joan’s heart leaped to her throat and her skin tightened in chills.

The time came when Bob was made the regular outschool inspector. He often took his wife and baby along with him as he journeyed from school to school. One time he was forced to leave them in a strange village with two of his trusted native boys, while he journeyed several days to visit schools that were farther into the jungle. Knowing that there was an epidemic of a peculiar jungle fever among the children and babies there, Joan watched, carefully, anxiously, to notice the slightest indication of this malady in little Eunice. One morning the child lay languid in her little cot in the thatched rest hut. Joan hovered over her all day long, giving her boiled water to drink, bathing her fever-racked body, praying to the Jesus who loves babies. With consternation and trembling, she realized that the fever was quickly and violently sapping the life energy of her little one. Toward the cool of the day, she called one of the boys to her. He came instantly, for had he not been watching

hour after hour to see how his little white mistress was progressing?

“Isaac,” said Joan, “I want you to go and get Mr. Bradley. Eunice is very sick, you know, and we need him. He is over in Gandola village now—you must get him tonight and bring him with the early morning. Oh, Isaac, hurry!”

He sped off, glad to do all within his power to help in this hour of need. Darkness brought to the little girl a rise in fever, a tossing and twisting of body, a delirium of mind. Joan was frantic but calm—the calmness born of a horrible, unavoidable truth.

“As soon as Bob comes, we’ll take her to the dispensary,” she whispered. “But suppose he should come too late!” Then dropping to her knees, she prayed, “O God, send him quickly.”

The minutes were hours; the hours, endless space. Eleazer, the other native boy, stationed himself at the door of the hut to help or guard or comfort. A pain, deep as the slow cleaving of a knife, cut at Joan’s heart as she watched her baby steadily sinking. Then she decided on the only alternative.

“Eleazer, we must take Eunice to the dispensary ourselves—now! Quick, let us prepare.”

“Through the night, Missi? By ourselves?”

“Yes, we can make it by morning, and—Bob couldn’t get here before morning. It’s moonlight, so we can see the way.”

“Shall we take other natives?”

“No, we will go alone—by ourselves. They

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all have sick and dying babies of their own. Poor people!”

Quickly she wrote a note to Bob and pinned it on the crude table; quickly she wrapped the precious form of her baby in the few covers at hand; quickly she filled a bag of boiled water, and then off they started.

Eleazer bore the child. Through the moonlit path they took their quiet, swift way, Joan ever alert to note any change for the worse in her precious one. She saw nothing of the veldt on either side, she didn't even notice when they entered the jungle, until Eleazer, with a sudden motion jerked her far to the side of the path. Looking back, she shuddered as she saw the striped back of the large snake that was making off into the underbrush. Quick as a flash came a sudden apprehension, a quick fear that sought to grasp and overcome her. But a moment later, a noble, strong impulse swallowed her fear—for her baby, she would risk her all! She would cross mountain and stream, she would give her life for this little mite of humanity.

Then with the boldness born of a great mother love—a boldness hitherto unknown to her—she continued in her flight to save life. The faithful boy never faltered in his trust. Occasionally they stopped to give water to the feverish baby. At length they saw signs that told them they were gradually approaching the valley wherein was the dispensary. Then Joan suddenly realized—

“Eleazer,” she cried, “we must cross the river, but the boat is on the other side and every one is sleeping. What shall we do?”

“Never mind, Missi; I'll swim the river and bring the boat to take you and little Missi back.”

The moon had set, and the gray hush of the dawn pervaded the air. Silently Eleazer handed the little wrapped body to the mother and plunged into the water. Joan waited and prayed. The steady splash of the swimmer was heard in the quietness, then silence for a moment as he reached the farther shore, then the “hub-dub” of oars cleaving the water. He had aroused the natives in the hut nearest the river and told them to run and awaken the doctor that he might be ready for them at the dispensary.

With the first ray of sun came the first ray of hope to the mother. “The baby will be all right now,” the doctor assured her. “See, she has already fallen asleep.”

Still the mother watched anxiously. Then her vigil was broken by the arrival of Bob and Isaac. She told her deeply worried husband that all was well; and together they knelt to thank the great God for His delivering hand.

As they rose from their knees, Bob whispered, “Joan, my dear, a braver woman than you never lived.”

“Perfect love casteth out fear,” she answered with a slow smile. In her heart—now a heart unafraid—she knew that love, made perfect at last, had banished all fear. ❧