



*Mosdos Press*

---

Cleveland, Ohio

# ***Silver***

**A COLLECTION OF SHORT STORIES**

# MOSDOS PRESS *Literature Series*

---

Editor-In-Chief

Judith Factor

---

Graphic Design

Gila Morgenstern

Curriculum

Jill Brotman

Text Editor

Abigail Rozen

Copy Editor

Laya Dewick

Design Advisor

Carla Martin

Text and Curriculum Advisor

Rabbi Ahron Dovid Goldberg

**Copyright © 2008 by Mosdos Ohr Hatorah.**

All rights reserved. Printed in China.

No part of this publication may be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means, or stored in a database or retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from Mosdos Press.

**ISBN # 0-9742160-5-4**

---

# Table of Contents

Act of a Hero	Hugh Garner	.....5
Mick Harte Was Here	Barbara Park	.....13
Come of Age	B. J. Chute	.....23
Of Missing Persons	Jack Finney	.....41
The Gold Medal	Nan Gilbert	.....55
The Long Winter	Walter Havighurst	.....65
Lost Sister	Dorothy M. Johnson	.....81
Father and the “1812”	Todd Rolf Zeiss	.....97
The House Guest	Paul Darcy Boles	.....113
The Bet	Anton Chekhov	.....123
Going to Run All Night	Harry Sylvester	.....133
Stop the Sun	Gary Paulsen	.....149





---

## Consider This...

At the core of nearly every story is a conflict.

What is a conflict? A conflict is a clash. A conflict shows the coming together of opposing forces or wills or ideas—of two or more things that do not mix—like the old expression about oil and water.

Particularly in fiction, we read about characters who have a struggle and whose struggles must be resolved by the end of the tale. The conflict is what catches our interest. In fact, in storytelling, the suspense comes from waiting to see if the conflict will be resolved. Moreover, we wait to see if it will be resolved *to our satisfaction!*

*Act of a Hero* is about a man who struggles with himself. When he does not do what one part of him thinks he should do, he feels he is a coward. In truth, by story's end, the conflict is not resolved. It surely is not resolved, as we would hope it to be.



*Hugh Garner*

## Act of a Hero

George Ellsworth drove slowly along the small town's main street, waving occasionally to people he knew on the sidewalks.

The winter morning was cold and brisk, and the tires of his stakebody truck crunched on the snow. Now and then he hunched his long frame above the wheel as he shifted his position on the seat. Above his smooth thirty-year-old face his ski-cap was pushed back to release a few locks of taffy-colored hair, which hung on his forehead like a boy's.

While his truck was being loaded with flour at the mill, he had stepped across the street for a coffee, and now he felt warm and at peace with the world. If nothing delayed him, he could drop off his load at the freight sheds and be back home in time for an early lunch.

He left the business blocks of Main Street behind him and rolled down the hill to the residential section<sup>1</sup> of town. As he approached the public school, he glanced in its direction; several small children spilled from the front door of the school into the street. He slowed his truck, hoping to catch a glimpse of his own youngsters, Barry and Sandra, when they emerged too for what he thought must be morning recess.

When he drew abreast of the school, a larger group of youngsters shot from the doorway and tumbled down the front steps into the snow. They picked themselves up and ran around in frenzied<sup>2</sup> circles, shouting and pointing to the doorway, from which a steady stream of pupils and

1. *residential* (REZ ih DEN shul) *section*: the area of a city in which there are houses, not businesses

2. *frenzied* (FREN zeed): full of panic and urgency

teachers were hurrying. Now he noticed, for the first time, that none of them were wearing their outer clothing, despite the cold. The reason became apparent immediately as a heavy red-tipped cloud of smoke burst from a window at the side of the building. He twisted the wheel and pulled the truck into the curb.

As he ran across the sidewalk, he met Mr. Manning, the principal. “Children trapped!” Manning pointed without halting his headlong rush. “Got to phone—firemen—across the street!”

George felt his body slump as if it was suddenly drained of blood. He shoved his way through the screaming crowd of children, trying to spot the faces of his own son and daughter. As he stumbled about, unable to see them, his fear grew to panic, and he began shouting their names above the hubbub about him.

Now and then, youngsters, singly or in hand-holding pairs, groped their way through the doorway, wiping their eyes and screaming with fright, before rushing down the front steps into the crowd. These children were much younger than the ones he had first seen running from the building, and George remembered with horror that the kindergarten classroom was situated at the rear of the old building. It was the room in which his youngest child, Barry, was a pupil.

Clawing his way through the mob of children he reached the front steps. The front door opened and out of a choking cloud of heavy smoke came the kindergarten teacher, carrying a little girl in her arms. Clinging to her skirts and to each other were four other youngsters, their faces gray and their eyes wide-staring despite the acrid smoke. None of them were his own two children.

He grabbed the young kindergarten teacher by the arm. “Are there any more inside!” he screamed at her.

She nodded, coughing. “I lost some, I’m afraid.”

He pulled open the heavy door and ran headlong into the smoke-filled hallway. Ahead of him, showing beneath the billowing clouds of smoke, were two small girls, running across the hallway or corridor from one classroom to another. Farther along, towards the rear of the building, one wall was blazing. There was a sound like the whimpering of wounded dogs.



He peered<sup>3</sup> into the two empty classrooms nearest him, then bent low as he ran along the corridor to another classroom, into which he had seen the two little girls disappear a moment before. This room was almost free of smoke, and the two children were climbing to the top of the radiator so they could reach the catch on a window. They were in no immediate danger from either the flames or smoke, and George knew they would be rescued as soon as they were seen from outside.

He turned from the classroom door and saw that the flames had now scaled the wall and were licking their way across the ceiling. On their trailing edge, large sheets of wallboard were hanging like fiery stalactites,<sup>4</sup> curling and undulating<sup>5</sup> in the intense heat. When he drew closer to the fire the heat engulfed him in a nauseating wave, and turning his head away, he groped for the parka on his sheepskin jacket and pulled it over his head.

In order to reach the rear of the corridor, where he felt certain his own children were trapped, he would have to run the gauntlet<sup>6</sup> of the flames. It flashed through his mind that he had often thought of rescuing a family from a burning house, especially if it was his own. It had seemed such a simple fundamental act of manhood when he had thought of it. Now, facing the painful, stabbing flames that barred his path, and choking on the heavy smoke, he hesitated. From behind the fire came the sobbing cries of the trapped children, their screams muted<sup>7</sup> now by the crackling roar of the nearby flames.

He edged slowly into the burning section of the corridor, but a quick stabbing flame reaching towards his face made him retreat. *I'm a coward!* he realized suddenly through the panic that now closed in on him. *Now, the one time in my life when I need courage, I have none!*

---

3. *peered*: looked into searchingly

4. *stalactites* (stuh LAK tyts): a deposit of calcium carbonate shaped like an icicle often found hanging from the roofs of caves

5. *undulating* (UN dyuh lay ting): moving with a wavelike motion

6. *run the gauntlet* (GAWNT let): a form of physical punishment in which an offender was made to run between two rows of men who beat him with sticks or weapons as he passed; the expression is used to describe someone who must pass through a very dangerous situation

7. *muted* (MYOOT ed): muffled; quieted

With a coward's clarity he rationalized, *Perhaps my kids have already reached the yard*, excusing his fear and hesitation. There was only the slightest chance of getting through to the children on the other side of the fire, and if he failed it would mean the loss of *his own* life as well as theirs. And it was quite probable that they would be rescued by the firemen through the rear windows of the school.

That morning at breakfast young Barry had asked, "Can I go out in the truck with you this afternoon, Daddy?" G-d! He took a step towards the fire once again, fighting the cowardly voice of reason that told him to turn and run.

*Can I go out with you this afternoon, Daddy?* Of course! Of course! Now he remembered. The children had stayed home from school today so their mother could take them to the dentist. They weren't in the blazing school at all, but back in the center of town at the dentist's office! Oh, dear G-d! Suddenly the conflicting<sup>8</sup> fears and hesitations dropped their weight from his heart.

When he once again noticed the fire, his estimation of his chances of getting through it had become impersonal, and now the space between the burning piles of wallboard and wood paneling had narrowed considerably. It would be almost impossible to crawl or run between them without being burned. The sobbing of the trapped children and the noise of the fire were suddenly dimmed in his ears by the rising wail of sirens from the street, showing him that the fire trucks had arrived. He was no longer forced to make a decision, and he backed away from the flames and smoke with hurried stumbling eagerness.

As he hurried back along the corridor, he glanced into the room where he had last seen the two little girls. They were standing on a ledge, silhouetted<sup>9</sup> against the window, and had almost succeeded in opening a space large enough to crawl through.

He had to accomplish something to justify his frightened return to the outside. He ran between the desks and picked both children from the window ledge, and with one beneath each arm hurried out of the room and along the corridor to the front door.

---

8. *conflicting* (kun FLIK ting): differing; being in disagreement

9. *silhouetted* (SIL oo ETT ed): outlined; only their shape shown

As he emerged from inside the building, there was a loud cheer from the children on the lawn and from the thickening crowd of adults who were approaching the school along the street. Several cars parked along the curbs gave him an accolade with their horns.

He set the two little girls on their feet in the snow, and allowed the teachers and some newly arrived parents to pump his arm and shout their thanks in his ear. When he remembered the children still trapped at the rear of the building, he shouted the information to a passing fireman.

Much later, after being interviewed briefly by a young man from *The Clarion*, the local paper, he was able to drag himself away from the admiring crowd that now surrounded him. The fire was out, and the trapped children in the kindergarten class had all been rescued by the firemen. The schoolchildren had been formed into classes, and the only casualty was a small boy who had been overcome by smoke.

As George climbed into his truck he heard the principal shout, "Now, children, let's give three cheers and a tiger for Mr. Ellsworth!" With the children's cheers echoing like a mockery behind him, he stepped on the gas and pushed the truck as fast as he could away from the school.

He took his time unloading the flour at his destination, and drove as slowly as he could on the way home. When he arrived at his house in the late afternoon, the kitchen table was set, and his smiling wife and children came to the back door to meet him.

After making himself ready for supper, he sat down at the table and glanced up into the beaming face of his wife. She pointed in front of him at the open newspaper propped against the sugar bowl. There was a photograph of himself coming down the school steps with the two little girls under his arms, and a headline over the story of the fire that read, THE ACT OF A HERO. He swept the paper from the table to the floor.

"Are you mad, Daddy?" Sandra asked, in open-mouthed wonder.

He stared down at his plate, unable to face his wife and children.

"Why are you mad, Daddy?" his daughter asked again.

It was an unanswerable question. It was a question he would be unable to answer for the rest of his life.

---

# Thinking It Over

1. What does the kindergarten teacher say, when George Ellsworth questions her? Does her response have the tone you would expect?
2. Mr. Ellsworth sees “two small girls” enter a classroom. Why doesn’t he help them? Do you think his reasoning is sound?
3. What had George often thought about previously? Why did he have such a fantasy?
4. George reasons that perhaps his children have already gotten out. Would that excuse his leaving without trying to help the other children?
5. Why is George mad at the end of the story? Should he be?