



Video Story Transcript

Sudden Story

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Link to YouTube Video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9dp7H2b8K5M>

Note : The following is a transcription of a spoken story performance and may not reflect textbook perfect English. It will guide you as you listen (or read) along.

My name is Laura Simms. I'm from New York and this story takes place in New York, in 1996.

I was hired by UNICEF and Norwegian Peoples Aid to be a facilitator for a conference called Young Voices. And there were 53 kids from 23 third world countries there to create a Children's Bill of Rights. So, my job, of course, as a storyteller was to listen to stories and help kids tell stories. And I heard stories that, literally, changed my life.

So, I became really close to two boys from Sierra Leone, West Africa, who, on meeting them, their voices were gentle and sweet. They were skinny. It was snowing out and they're wearing summer clothes. When I heard their stories, it was something else. They were ex-child soldiers. They had committed atrocities. It was an amazing experience. And one boy, Aluzin Bah, fantastically, beautiful boy asked me to keep him in New York. And I was up every night, "Could I keep him in New York? How could I send a child back to war?"

I thought about if it was 50 years ago and I was in the Holocaust and somebody brought me out and then sent me back. At any rate, UNICEF heard about this. The boy told me, "Don't tell anybody," but he was 15, so, he told everybody. And ha ha. So, I, um, was told, "No conditions could I keep him in New York." Actually, both boys, I'm still very close to. And the other boy Ishmael is now my adopted son.

We were in the last day of the conference. In the morning, the kids were getting ready to get on the bus to go to JFK. And Aluzin was furious with me for not letting him stay, suddenly began to sob. But it wasn't just sobbing, it was a kind of, almost like, an earthquake in his heart. And I begged someone at UNICEF to just let me take him to JFK on my own, in a taxicab. And, of course, he didn't trust me. So, I was side by side with a tall, Norwegian, sort of Viking, humanitarian. So, the three of us were in the taxi. And Aluzin was crying. And I

thought to myself, "If he can't get on the plane, he can't go back to war in this way because it would make him in danger." So finally, when he was heaving and heaving, I just said, "Aluzin, I'll do everything I can. Everything. To stay in touch with you, to see if I could get you out of Sierra Leone. But I have to take you back. Tell me what can I do for you now? I can't keep you here. What can I? You can't go on a plane, traumatized."

And he stopped crying. And he looked at me and he said, "Tell me a story."

It was as if every story that I knew just sort of flooded out of my body. And I was... "What do you, what do you do?"

You have like five minutes. It has to be a story that means something. And then a story just arrived up the back of my legs and I had no idea if this was appropriate or not but I thought, just go for it. And I tell this story.

It's about a boy, a poor boy who had no money. It's a story from Morocco. And he went to market place he saw everything in the market. He wanted everything. He couldn't have anything. But in the middle of the market, there was a magician performing a magic act. The magician had a magic finger. Anything he touched, turned to gold. Everybody came, applauded, left. But the boy was like, *Wha!* The magician said, "Ha, ha, ha, ha. You like my magic."

And the boy said, "Yeah."

Magician said, "Do you want some gold?"

The boy said, "Yeah."

A little mouse came by, the magician touched it, turned to gold. He said, "Here."

The boy said, "No, I want more."

The magician looked. There was a huge table with, with plates and brass objects he turned to gold. He said, "Here."

The boy said, "I want more."

"Oh." The magician said, "Come with me." He took him. There was a field filled with cows. He turned all the cows to gold. "Here."

The boy said, "No! I want more."

The magician said, "What do you want?"

The boy said, "I want a magic finger."

Shuli, my Viking guard, said, "Why did you tell that story?"

Honestly, I wasn't sure I knew. But Aluzin said, "I know. Because that's what I want." And I knew, that if this boy survived, he would **more** than survive. He would live because he wanted his own life force.

We got to JFK. He got on the plane. He went back to Sierra Leone. I called him every Friday morning, as I could, until the rebels attacked and it was hard to reach him. And then I called him again.

And I'll tell you one tiny incident more, which is so beautiful about these kids. It was one Tuesday, I called him, was actually my birthday, and, selfishly, what I really wanted to do was have a cappuccino and get back into

bed. So I, with my cappuccino, did get into bed and did make the call and I wasn't going to tell him it was my birthday. I thought how lucky I am.

And when I called and, you know, there were two phones in Freetown through Sierratel, and I would say, "Aluzin Bah." And everybody would call out Aluzin!"

And then I would hear people calling, "Hello, hello." Hundreds of people waiting just in case somebody might call them. And he got on the phone. He said, "Laura, how are you?"

And I blurted out, "It's my birthday!" And Aluzin, crying and laughing, called out to hundreds of people and said, "It's Laura's birthday!" And in the middle of the war, all these people sang "Happy Birthday." And I realized that it would have been the most selfish thing if I hadn't told him and given them the opportunity for joy.

Then the story... I'll just tell you the great thing. That Aluzin graduated from college this year. He's working in a bank so he could bring his childhood sweetheart to Montreal, where he lives. And he's working for the benefit of children. And to me that's a great story.