

SENSE OF AN ENDING

BY KEN URBAN



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SENSE OF AN ENDING
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For Matthew

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank all of the artists who have worked on this play, especially directors Jonathan O'Boyle and Adam Fitzgerald. Special thanks to the MacDowell Colony for the time and space to finish crucial revisions. Heartfelt gratitude to the people who believed in the play, even when I didn't.

While the play is based on the facts of the genocide, it is a work of fiction.

SENSE OF AN ENDING received its world premiere at Theatre503 (Paul Robinson, Artistic Director) in London, in a co-production with Deus Ex Machina productions (Jessica Campbell and Ramin Sabi, Producers), opening on May 15, 2015. It was directed by Jonathan O'Boyle; the set and costume designs were by Cecilia Carey; the lighting design was by Joshua Pharo; the sound design was by Max Perryment; the assistant director was Hannah Jones; the assistant designer was Harriet Bennett; the production manager was James Ashby; prosthetics were designed by Carys Brown; and the stage management was by Rike Berg. The cast was as follows:

CHARLES	Ben Onwukwe
PAUL	Abubakar Salim
SISTER JUSTINA	Lynette Clark
SISTER ALICE	Akiya Henry
DUSABI	Kevin Golding

SENSE OF AN ENDING received its American premiere at 59E59 Theatres (Elysabeth Kleinhans, Artistic Director; Peter Tear, Executive Director) in New York City, in a co-production with kef productions (Adam Fitzgerald, Artistic Director), on August 20, 2015. It was directed by Adam Fitzgerald; the set design was by David L. Arsenault; the lighting design was by Travis McHale; the sound design was by Christian Frederickson; the costume design was by Hunter Kaczorowski; and the stage management was by Samantha Spellman and Chantal Mason. The cast was as follows:

CHARLES	Joshua David Robinson
PAUL	Hubert Point-Du Jour
SISTER JUSTINA	Heather Alicia Simms
SISTER ALICE	Dana Marie Ingraham
DUSABI	Danyon Davis

SENSE OF AN ENDING won the L. Arnold Weissberger Prize for Best New Play at Williamstown Theatre Festival, and was developed at the Huntington Theatre Company, Theatre @ Boston Court, and the Williamstown Theatre Festival.

CHARACTERS

CHARLES, 30s, an African-American journalist from New York.

PAUL, 20s, a Tutsi corporal in the Rwandan Patriotic Front.

SISTER JUSTINA, Bernadette, 40s, a Catholic nun of
the Benedictine order, Hutu.

SISTER ALICE, Consolata, 20s, a Catholic nun of
the Benedictine order, Hutu.

DUSABI, 40s, Tutsi.

SETTING

The play is set in the city of Kigali in Rwanda, a country in central East Africa.

It takes place over Easter weekend, March 31 – April 4, 1999.

NOTE

All punctuation and spacing is intentional and gives a sense of the line's delivery.

The em-dash (—) at the end of the line indicates an interruption.

A slash (/) indicates that the following lines begin to overlap at that point.

When set aside as a line, an ellipsis (...) is a pregnant pause, a moment when the character gets to the next place. It can be filled with sound or silence.

A shift is when time or location changes. They should be seamless, actor-driven events supported by sound and lights.

The native language of Rwanda is Kinyarwanda. Save for Charles, all of the characters speak English with a French-African accent. See the pronunciation guide at end of script.

Decimation means the killing of every tenth person in a population, and in the spring and early summer of 1994, a program of massacres decimated the Republic of Rwanda. Although the killing was low-tech — performed largely by machete — it was carried out at dazzling speed: of an original population of about seven and a half million, at least eight hundred thousand were killed in just a hundred days. Rwandans often speak of a million deaths, and they may be right.

—Philip Gourevitch

*We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow
We Will Be Killed with Our Families*

*There is the question of our growing suspicions of fictions in general.
But it seems that we still need them.*

—Frank Kermode

The Sense of an Ending

SENSE OF AN ENDING

DAY ONE

SISTERS JUSTINA and ALICE. (*Singing.*)

*Jesus loves me
This I know
Because the Bible tells me so
Little ones to Him belong
For they are weak
But He is Strong*

*Yes, Jesus Loves Me
Yes, Jesus Loves Me
Yes, Jesus Loves Me
The Bible tells me so —*

Shift.

CHARLES. Wednesday, March 31st, 1999. The guide the government assigned to me was supposed to take me directly to the jail. He stops at the church where the nuns lived and he shoots —

Gunshot. Shift.

The yard in front of the church.

PAUL. Got him.

CHARLES. This isn't the jail.

PAUL. This is the church.

CHARLES. What did you shoot? Is that a — ?

PAUL. Dog.

CHARLES. Why would you do that? He wasn't doing anything.

PAUL. Habit.

CHARLES. You make it a habit to shoot dogs?

PAUL. The first few days we entered Kigali, we'd see them. Traveling in packs. Feeding on corpses. Shot one my first night, had a woman's thigh in his mouth.

CHARLES. Saw that in Serbia. Cats though.

PAUL. Could never shoot a cat. I have a cat. Juliet. I have many cats. Ever since I was a boy. All called Juliet.

CHARLES. Really? You don't strike me as a cat person.

PAUL. What is a cat person?

CHARLES. Paul and his pussy cats.

PAUL. You teasing me?

Charles laughs. Paul cocks his rifle.

You tease me.

CHARLES. We need to go to the jail now.

Paul observes Charles for a moment. Paul takes out a canteen and offers it to Charles.

PAUL. Water, Charles?

CHARLES. Thanks.

Charles takes a swig. Coughs.

That isn't water.

PAUL. (Smiles.) Strong, yes?

CHARLES. Not bad.

Charles takes a small swig and gives the canteen back. Paul takes a bigger swig.

PAUL. I take you inside the church now. The bodies, we left as we found them. It is a way to remember those who died here.

CHARLES. My story is the nuns.

PAUL. This is where the nuns lived.

CHARLES. The nuns haven't lived here in half a decade. The jail, Paul. They're waiting for me.

PAUL. It isn't far. Our roads are good. It won't be long.

CHARLES. This is a big story. Everyone in the world is watching. It's gonna be a landmark trial. A Belgian court trying Rwandans for events during the genocide.

PAUL. These nuns should face trial here. What do Belgians know of Rwanda?

CHARLES. When the Rwandan Patriotic Front, when your army entered Rwanda five years ago, you stopped the killings, restored

peace. There was a lot of international support for you and the government you formed. But now? The RPF, how you look in the eyes of the world, it's not too good. We've reported on your treatment of prisoners. Denying them basic rights, convictions without trials —

PAUL. And what of the crimes of these prisoners?

CHARLES. Alleged crimes. No one's been convicted. I've come here to speak with the nuns, Paul. To hear their story, objectively. Without prejudice.

PAUL. You like these nuns?

CHARLES. It isn't about that.

PAUL. You worry that seeing inside the church will prejudice you against the nuns?

CHARLES. My assignment is waiting for me at the jail.

PAUL. You're scared.

CHARLES. There isn't a famine, war zone, atrocity I haven't seen.

PAUL. You've never seen anything like what's behind this door.

CHARLES. I can imagine —

PAUL. No, you can't.

Pause.

CHARLES. You born here, in Kigali?

PAUL. My family, they sent me away to Uganda when I was a kid. They stayed.

CHARLES. You joined the RPF, came back?

PAUL. This is where I must be.

CHARLES. And your family? Are they Tutsi?

PAUL. They were Rwandan.

CHARLES. (*Understanding what Paul is saying.*) I'm sorry for your loss.

PAUL. We go inside the church now.

CHARLES. No.

PAUL. All the same. Americans talk and never act.

CHARLES. Get me to the jail before lunchtime, I promise I'll come back before I go. Now, Paul, the jail, understand?

Shift.

An interrogation room at a jail in Kigali.

SISTER JUSTINA. We do not think the lawyers have taken the time to learn the truth. There are many lies spoken about us.

CHARLES. The *Times* has been following events in Rwanda since

the violence five years ago. But your story, it's a story that hasn't been told.

SISTER ALICE. Our story will be known?

CHARLES. *The New York Times*, it's read the world over.

SISTER JUSTINA. We speak only to you, to our lawyers in Belgium.

CHARLES. I am the only reporter you speak to. Understood? That's the agreement.

SISTER JUSTINA. Yes.

Charles takes out a Dictaphone.

SISTER ALICE. He will record this? You did not say he would / record this —

SISTER JUSTINA. Consolata, please.

It is fine, Charles, to record what we say.

CHARLES. My guide Paul, he got, lost. We don't have much time. Can we begin?

SISTER JUSTINA. Easter, this weekend.

CHARLES. Yes.

SISTER ALICE. You a Catholic?

CHARLES. I believe in goodness, Sisters.

Charles switches on the recorder.

Wednesday, March 31st, 1999. Kigali Central Prison.

Please speak clearly into the recorder. State your names and the crimes with which you are charged.

SISTER ALICE. Consolata. Sister Alice.

SISTER JUSTINA. Sister Justina. Bernadette.

CHARLES. And the charges you face?

SISTER JUSTINA. The court charges that we were complicit. With crimes against humanity.

CHARLES. They also charge you with homicide.

SISTER JUSTINA. Yes.

Pause.

CHARLES. Tell me about your life at the parish, Sisters.

SISTER JUSTINA. Our life is the church.

SISTER ALICE. We wake up. After morning mass, cook breakfast for Father Neromba and the men who care for the grounds.

SISTER JUSTINA. Afternoons are spent with the children.

SISTER ALICE. Evening prayers. Supper.

SISTER JUSTINA. On Sunday —

SISTER ALICE. Sundays, large breakfast with many visitors, followed by mass, in the evening —

SISTER JUSTINA. Cooking, washing up, mending of clothes —
SISTER ALICE. That is our life.

SISTER JUSTINA. I remember the day Sister Alice joined us.

SISTER ALICE. Never been so far from my family before. Bernadette took care of me. She takes care of me still.

SISTER JUSTINA. Sister Alice was just a girl when she arrived at the parish.

CHARLES. Like a mother and daughter.

SISTER JUSTINA. Yes, perhaps.

CHARLES. How did you find out President Habyarimana had been killed?

Silence.

Please. Walk me through the events of that day.

SISTER JUSTINA. It is a long time ago.

CHARLES. Yes, five years.

SISTER JUSTINA. The President. We are told his plane is shot down and all aboard perish. That is all we know.

CHARLES. And you, Sister Alice, what do you remember about that day?

SISTER ALICE. It is strange to say. But that was a happy time for us at the parish. Before all the trouble. I tell you, you think I am a silly nun.

CHARLES. Please.

SISTER ALICE. There was a miracle. The look in Father Neromba's eyes after she came to him. The Blessed Mother.

SISTER JUSTINA. Mary, the Mother of Jesus.

SISTER ALICE. Such joy. She spoke to Father on his morning walk / telling him —

SISTER JUSTINA. Sister Alice, the reporter did not travel all this way to hear us speak of miracles.

CHARLES. The Virgin Mary visited Father Neromba. What did she say to him?

SISTER ALICE. The Virgin Mother tells / Father that —

SISTER JUSTINA. Father, he does not say.

Charles notices the tension.

CHARLES. (*To Sister Alice.*) Sister, you were going to say...?

SISTER ALICE. (*Smiles.*) No, nothing.

SENSE OF AN ENDING

by Ken Urban

3M, 2W

Charles, a discredited *New York Times* journalist, arrives in Rwanda for an exclusive interview with two Hutu nuns. Charged with alleged war crimes committed during the 1994 genocide, the nuns must convince the world of their innocence or face a lifetime in prison. When an unknown Tutsi survivor contradicts their story, Charles must choose which version of the truth to tell. Based on real events, SENSE OF AN ENDING shines a light on questions of guilt, complicity, and faith in the face of extreme violence.

"There's a lot to admire in Mr. Urban's script. It argues persuasively for empathy and forgiveness as means of recovering from trauma. It is fast-paced, fluid and taut."

—The New York Times

"A superb play about the Rwandan genocide ... so intense that, in between each scene, you can hear the audience gulp for air."

—Time Out (London)

"One immediately feels the enormity of the devastation at the heart of SENSE OF AN ENDING ... A thoughtful meditation on guilt ... [that] raises important questions about tribalism, responsibility, and reconciliation: Can a country, in which nearly 20 percent of the population is murdered by their neighbors in 100 days, ever fully recover?"

—TheaterMania.com

"Cogent [and] troubling ... the [play's] striking final moments demonstrate that this playwright's sense of an ending is perfectly intact."

—The Village Voice

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