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*Dramatic Publishing*



# THE SOUND OF CRACKING BONES



**DRAMA BY**  
**SUZANNE LEBEAU**

“The shock of emotion and revolt could not be more explosive.”

—*Voir Québec*

## THE SOUND OF CRACKING BONES

**Drama.** By *Suzanne Lebeau*. Cast: 1m., 2w. Elikia is a child, among so many others, who has seen her life overturned from one day to the next in a chaotic, lawless civil war. The girl, kidnapped from her family, becomes a child soldier. She is a victim, but she is also an executioner in an untenable situation that blurs the most elementary laws of ethics. How can she grow up and remain human when the reference points disappear beneath a hopeless daily brutality? It is little Joseph, the youngest child to come to the rebels' camp, who reminds her of her childhood, her family, her village and her humanity and gives her the courage to break the chain of violence into which she has been pulled. *The Sound of Cracking Bones* is a play in two voices. Joseph and Elikia are on the run—experiencing doubts, fears and a wish to return to civilized life where children may grow up as children. Angelina, the nurse who greets them at the hospital where they take refuge, puts their painful reality into perspective and opens the window to a light that is uncertain—but a light, nonetheless. “An unforgettable piece of theatre, one of those moments that anchors us in a reality that is unbearable, but the knowledge of which is necessary. *The Sound of Cracking Bones* is a text that is intense, hard, raw, simple and direct ... [It] is a gift. A true gift.” (Dominique Marcon, *Zibeline*) Area staging. Approximate running time: 70 minutes. Code: *SJI*.

Front cover: (l-r) Emilie Dionne and Sébastien René in a production of le Carrousel Theatre Company and Théâtre d'Aujourd'hui (Montréal, Québec) in residence at Théâtre de la Ville (Longueuil, Québec). Co-produced with Théâtre Populaire with assistance from the Aide à la création program of the Centre National du Théâtre and support provided by SACD (Paris). Photos: Francois-Xavier Gaudreault. Cover design: Susan Carle.

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# **The Sound of Cracking Bones**

By

SUZANNE LEBEAU

Translated from French by

JULIA DUCHESNE & JOHN VAN BUREK



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“U.S. Congressman Tom Lantos was, as a child, taken to the death camps in Hungary by the Nazis. He said that the thing that haunted him the most in his life was not the brutal treatment of the Nazis but the things that haunted him later on in life were the faces of the passersby, who saw them as children being put on trains and sent to the concentration camps. The mute, faces. The silence. Not asking questions.” (*Bono, lead singer of U2, upon receiving the 2006 Ambassador of Conscience Award by Amnesty International*)

“It may be impossible to understand, but it is imperative to know.” (*Primo Levi*)

“The sound of boots is frightening, but the silence of slippers is even more so.” (*Thierry Van Humbeeck*)

“My tale begins with an extraordinary event: I was almost wiped from the face of the earth and yet, here I am, a survivor; my body is here but how can I tell you, without making you snicker, that a large part of my soul has been driven out of your very social planet ... My story is so unbelievable that you will smile, be troubled, get angry, preach to me, or even worse, find pleasure in the recounting of my sorrows.

But, since I am bound to tell my story if I am to discover who I am, and since you are incapable of hearing it, I will, in the deepest part of my being, endlessly detail the immense ordeal that secretly rules my plan to live, like a myth of genesis, staged for a single spectator, me. I will become the author and actor of my destiny and the only authorised witness of my struggles.” (*Boris Cyrulnik, Les Vilains Petits Canards*)

*Le Bruit des os qui craquent* (*The Sound of Cracking Bones*) premiered at the Centre Culturel Marcel Pagnol at Fos-sur-Mer, France, on January 13th, 2009. Created in residence at Théâtre de la Ville in Longueuil, Québec, it was produced by Le Carrousel and the Théâtre d'Aujourd'hui (Montréal, Québec). In France, the producers were the Théâtre Jean Vilar in Vitry-sur-Seine and the Fédération d'Associations de Théâtre Populaire. Support for the production was provided by the Centre National du Théâtre in Paris through its program, Aide à la création. Additional support was provided the author by the Société des Auteurs et Compositeurs Dramatiques (SACD). The translation was supported by the Canada Council for the Arts.

## CAST & PRODUCTION STAFF

Elikia.....	Emilie Dionne
Joseph .....	Sébastien René
Angelina .....	Lise Roy
Text.....	Suzanne Lebeau
Director.....	Gervais Gaudreault
Assistant Directors.....	Stéphanie Capistran-Lalonde
	Milena Buziak
Costumes .....	Linda Brunelle
Lighting Design .....	Dominique Gagnon
Set Design.....	Stéphanie Longpré
Sound Environment .....	Nancy Tobin
Make up .....	Francois Cyr
Hair .....	Anik Généreux
Production Manager .....	Dominique Gagnon
Stage and Sound Manager, Projections .....	Éric Gendron



# **The Sound of Cracking Bones**

## **CHARACTERS**

ELIKIA..... a young girl, 13 years old  
JOSEPH..... a small boy, 8 years old  
ANGELINA ..... a nurse

To indicate the difference between narrative speech and direct speech, the dialogue between Elikia and Joseph is in bold.

## **SETTINGS**

The place of the escape: a forest, tropical and humid, with its darkness and its clearings.

The site of the hearings and the public inquiry: a light that isolates.

# The Sound of Cracking Bones

## SCENE 1 – FLIGHT

ELIKIA. They were sleeping like swine, snoring like pigs, even Rambo was sleeping, like every night, when they would fill their bellies and drink like fish. I had put some hemp in their rice, hardly any rice in my own bowl and nothing for the boy. I let him sleep next to me, after smacking him enough, so they wouldn't get suspicious.

JOSEPH. She took my hand, in the middle of the night ...

ELIKIA. **Shhh!**

JOSEPH. **You're breaking my bones.**

ELIKIA. **Shhh! Be quiet. Get up and don't make a sound.**

JOSEPH (*half asleep*). **Let me sleep.**

ELIKIA. **Shhh! If you want to make it home in one piece, get up, right now.**

JOSEPH. **To my village?**

ELIKIA. **Hurry!**

JOSEPH. **To my village?**

ELIKIA. **The darkness will keep us safe ...**

JOSEPH. I couldn't see who was whispering in my ear but I guessed it was the girl with boots. I trusted her ... right away.

ELIKIA. **We've got to leave ... without cracking a twig. Without leaving a trace.**

The darkness could also make us trip and fall ... I took him on my back for the first steps, they're the most dangerous. I took a step ... The boy had an instinct for escape. He breathed with the wind and I could barely hear

him. I took a second step. One foot suspended in midair, the other barely touching the ground. Time weighed on my shoulders like an oil drum. My heart was beating like a tam-tam. I was afraid its mad pounding would wake up Killer, who'd watch me even in his sleep. The boy crossed his hands over my heart which calmed down ... leaving the night to the chorus of snores ... I took a few quick steps, more confident. We were away.

JOSEPH. She put me down in a nest of grass. Light as a feather, she went back toward the camp to brush away our tracks. I waited, frozen ... I heard a whisper of ruffled grass. All at once, she was at my side. She took me by the hand and started to run, to run like a maniac.

ELIKIA. **Follow me, come on, come on. Run.**

JOSEPH. **You're going too fast. You're hurting me.**

ELIKIA. **Run! Faster! Run!**

JOSEPH. She was running ... running ... I was gasping.

ELIKIA. He didn't have the pace that fear puts in your legs ...

JOSEPH. **I can't ... I can't ...**

ELIKIA. **Just look straight ahead ... Run ...**

JOSEPH. **You're going ... too fast ...**

ELIKIA. He fell down in a heap, his foot caught in a branch.

I went crazy, I hit him. I was blind with fear.

JOSEPH. With her fists. With her feet. With her head, as hard as she could, she hit me. She hit me so hard ...

**Leave me here! Leave me alone.**

*(ELIKIA puts her hand over JOSEPH's mouth to silence him.)*

ELIKIA. **Shut up! You want to get killed? Get beaten to death like a mad dog? When they catch runaways, and**

**they always catch them, it's 20 blows with a stick, each. Twenty blows, until you bleed, because anyone who doesn't hit hard enough gets beaten to death, too. Is that what you want?**

**JOSEPH. Just leave me, right here. I don't want to go with you.**

Her rage was burning my shoulders ...

**ELIKIA. Your village ...**

**JOSEPH. It's too far. Why are you taking me? Why?**

**ELIKIA.** He kept asking, "Why? ... Why? ... Why?" As if I had an answer ... To say something, and because it was true, I said I wanted to go back to school.

**JOSEPH. I've never been to school. I can't help you. Why are you taking me with you?**

**ELIKIA. On my own, I'm too scared.**

He looked up, to see if I was making fun of him. My anger dissolved. He was too little to understand.  
**You're lucky. I could have hit you with my gun.**

**JOSEPH.** She sat down beside me.

**ELIKIA. Drink.**

**JOSEPH.** I drank ...

**ELIKIA** (*brutally*). **Stop! Don't you know a gourd has to last a whole week ... You wet your lips ...** (*Starts to show him and realizes there isn't a drop left.*)

That's when I saw what a child he was, and what a burden he'd be.

**How old are you?**

**JOSEPH. I'm 8 ...**

**ELIKIA. Eight. Do you know today's date?**

*(JOSEPH takes out a little branch on which he has made notches. He counts.)*

**JOSEPH. I think it's March 10th ...**

**ELIKIA. March ... I'm already 13.**

I said "13" ... and my heart tightened. In the forest, they only celebrate the day you're taken.

**Where are you from?**

**JOSEPH. From the coast. From Namba ... We're fishermen. When the rebels took me, I was selling fish in the market. My brothers, my father, my grandfather, my mother, my grandmother—my whole family lives in Namba.**

**ELIKIA. Well, if you want to see Namba again, we've got to get moving.**

**JOSEPH. I don't know the way. With the rebels, we wandered around day and night, and the grass was always up to my chin.**

**ELIKIA. If we follow the river, do you think we can get there?**

**JOSEPH. She was saying "Village, coast, river, the sea ... "** and I completely forgot that my feet hurt.

**Namba's not far from a river. Do you think it's the one you're talking about?**

*(A vague sound in the distance, like movement in the grass. ELIKIA takes JOSEPH in her arms and squeezes him tightly, almost crushing him. She puts her hand over his mouth. He grunts and struggles to make her let go. She shoves her gun in his ribs.)*

**ELIKIA. Shut up. Shut up. Shut up or I'll kill you.**

*(A long silence in the night... a pin drop could be heard.)*

ELIKIA (*cont'd*). I'd said, "I'll kill you" and Joseph had heard me. He'd rolled away from my gun. He stayed quiet, so perfectly still, I couldn't even hear him breathe. (*Feels around for him in the dark.*)

**Where are you? Kid, hey, kid! I didn't bring you along to kill you. Trust me ...**

(*Silence.*)

ELIKIA (*cont'd*). **Let's find that river.**

### First Hearing

(*Lights up on the nurse, ANGELINA, as she testifies. It is not necessary to know where or why she is testifying. All that matters is what she has to say. Her moments of silence can be her breathing space between parts of her testimony, pauses for the questions she is asked which help her to continue, or comments that bring her back to the heart of the matter.*)

ANGELINA. I am here to testify on behalf of Elikia Mandoke ... I have the summons that she received. Elikia did want to come. She was prepared to tell everything, even the smallest details. She kept repeating, "It must be known. They have to know ... Once they know, I'm sure they'll make it stop."

(*A silence during a question.*)

ANGELINA (*cont'd*). They? For her, "they" meant those who listen, those who decide, those who sell the guns. You, me, the politicians. The adults, I suppose. She asked

me to give you this notebook. She wrote in a notebook, to be sure that she wouldn't forget anything and to be able to say things she didn't dare say out loud. She said that words from the mouth can't tell everything, that they're too close to hatred and vengeance. I would like to read you what she wrote on the first page, if you don't mind. *(Reads.)* "I want my memories to be useful ... I want to say to those who wage war, 'If a gun can kill the body of the one who is afraid, it also kills the soul of the one who shoots.'"

*(Blackout on ANGELINA.)*

## SCENE 2 – THE MEETING

ELIKIA. The boy had arrived in the camp at nightfall, along with other recruits who carried the loot. It was a good mission, we got provisions for two weeks. The boy was carrying the rice. A 50 kilo bag.

JOSEPH. The bag fell on her boots, which were covered in mud.

ELIKIA. He was really small. He collapsed on top of the bag, right at my feet.

JOSEPH. They laughed at me ... Right out loud.

ELIKIA. They bashed him in the ribs with their Kalashnikovs, to push him aside and get the rice for supper. Rather, so I could get the rice for supper because it was me who did the cooking.

JOSEPH. They hit me and with every blow they'd have a good laugh.

ELIKIA. That night, I didn't laugh with them. I was tired. I was hungry.

JOSEPH. By the way she moved her boots away from my feet, I could tell she wasn't with them.

ELIKIA. My gun hung lifeless, against my thigh. For the first time in years I forgot it was part of my arm. I looked the boy in the eye ...

JOSEPH. Something in her look was different from the hostile forest.

ELIKIA. It was like looking in a mirror ... I saw in his eyes the terror I felt when I arrived ... the refusal to believe this was actually happening to him. I knew his story. It was my own story ... and that of all the children who arrived at nightfall, the sack of rice on their back, the barrel of oil, the water supplies, the munitions, the beans, the slaughtered goat. They all come from the south and march north, a gun to their back. He was the smallest one to make it all this way. There were lots of new arrivals. Impossible to guess if they knew each other. They kept their heads down and waited for orders.

JOSEPH. I clung to the sack of rice to avoid their blows. I held my breath so as not to attract attention.

ELIKIA. He was barefoot and his feet were covered in sores, filthy, infected. To get him off the sack of rice, Killer gave him a kick in the crotch.

JOSEPH. I shouldn't have cried out ...

ELIKIA. Killer let loose. He yelled, "You think somebody's going to help you? You think you'll escape me? You belong to me, you're nothing, I'll do what I want with you. If I want to hit you, I hit you. If I want to kill you, I kill you. It's me who decides."

JOSEPH. He kept saying said, "You worm, you little shit," and hit me and hit me ...



ELIKIA. Joseph looked at him meekly ... to appease him ... to beg him to stop ... because he didn't know you must never look a killer in the eye. Killer went berserk. I saw his eyes change color; I could tell the smell of blood was rising in his head. He spoke the fatal words, "You want to take your fate in your own hands? I'll show you what we do when someone wants to take his fate in his own hands! I'll show you!" I knew what they did to anyone who tried to take his fate in his own hands. They'd chop off his hand, they'd slap the dead hand on his shoulder and they'd tell him: "There, now try taking your fate in your hands!" That always made them laugh.

JOSEPH. He was raising his machete when the girl with boots stepped between us.

ELIKIA. **That's enough! You can't do that! Rambo hasn't distributed the recruits. He's the one who decides. If you touch a hair on his head, I'll cut you down like a mangy dog.**

JOSEPH. She was screaming.

ELIKIA. **He won't touch you again ... At least not tonight.**

For that one night, I could still protect him.

## Second Hearing

ANGELINA. Elikia took an enormous risk in fleeing.

*(Silence.)*

ANGELINA *(cont'd)*. She'd lived three years with the rebels in the forest but she didn't have the slightest idea of where she was. They changed camps constantly.

*(Silence.)*

ANGELINA (*cont'd*). My name is Angelina Karimonjo. I'm a nurse at the children's hospital in Kina and I ... for 12 years. As you can imagine, in 12 years my work has changed greatly. In the beginning, I cared for my patients with a smile and clean gauze and I did it well. Now, it takes much more than a smile and gauze to heal the children who arrive at the hospital. Every day I see them arrive in worse shape. Every day I see little bodies wrapped in white sheets, carried out the back door, instead of seeing children walk out the front door to return to school ... This brutal war that's taken over ...

*(Comment by a member of the commission.)*

ANGELINA (*cont'd*). To whom should I say these things if I can't do so here?

*(Silence.)*

ANGELINA (*cont'd*). Very well, I'll answer your questions as briefly as I can.