



# TRIBES

BY NINA RAINÉ



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TRIBES was commissioned and first presented by English Stage Company at the Royal Court Theatre on 14 October 2010.

TRIBES was presented by Barrow Street Theatre, New York, NY in 2012.

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*To Pat, and Jules*

TRIBES received its world premiere at the Royal Court Theatre in London, England, on October 14, 2010. It was directed by Roger Michell; the scenic and costume design were by Mark Thompson; the lighting design was by Rick Fisher; and the sound design was by John Leonard. The cast was as follows:

BILLY ..... Jacob Casselden  
BETH ..... Kika Markham  
SYLVIA ..... Michelle Terry  
CHRISTOPHER ..... Stanley Townsend  
DANIEL ..... Harry Treadaway  
RUTH ..... Phoebe Waller-Bridge

TRIBES received its North American premiere at the Barrow Street Theatre in New York City on March 4, 2012. It was directed by David Cromer; the set design was by Scott Pask; the costume design was by Tristan Raines; the lighting design was by Keith Parham; the sound design was by Daniel Kluger; the projection design was by Jeff Sugg; and the production stage manager was Richard A. Hodge. The cast was as follows:

BILLY ..... Russell Harvard  
BETH ..... Mare Winningham  
SYLVIA ..... Susan Pourfar  
CHRISTOPHER ..... Jeff Perry  
DANIEL ..... Will Brill  
RUTH ..... Gayle Rankin

## CHARACTERS

CHRISTOPHER. Billy's father. Fifties/sixties.

BETH. Billy's mother. Fifties/sixties.

RUTH. Billy's sister. Twenties. The middle child. A year or two older than Billy.

DANIEL. Billy's brother. The oldest child. Twenties. A year or two older than Ruth.

BILLY. Twenties. The youngest child. Deaf.

SYLVIA. Twenties. Going deaf.

## TIME

Present day.

## KEY TO NOTATION

Brackets and italics indicate the presence of surtitles.

Within the brackets is dialogue that is signed, silently, and surtitled.

And, in the case of Act Two, Scenes 6 and 9 ONLY, silent subtext that is surtitled.

# TRIBES

## ACT ONE

### Scene 1

*Black. In the black, the hum of an orchestra tuning up. A few strings at first, then more and more instruments, until the whole orchestra is alive. Just as the noise builds to its climax:*

*Lights up on a dinner table and family dinner in progress. Noise. There is a piano in the room. Two chaotic and noisy conversations mid-flow between Daniel and Beth, and Ruth and Christopher. Billy sits eating in silence.*

DANIEL. These nuts are *all* rotten.

BETH. They're from the garden.

CHRISTOPHER. He's a *cunt*.

RUTH. No, he's *not*.

DANIEL. I know they're from the garden. I've cracked about *forty* and not one of them is edible.

CHRISTOPHER. He's sixty. He's too old for you.

RUTH. Sixty's not old.

BETH. I'm sixty.

CHRISTOPHER. I know you're sixty. *I'm* sixty and *I'm* fucking old and so are you.

BETH. Have you finished your pasta?

CHRISTOPHER. We're both old. Yes. I have finished my pasta. I'm not eating it. What the hell did you put on it?

BETH. Smoked roe.

CHRISTOPHER. It's like being fucked in the face by a crab.

DANIEL. Did you know he's never forgiven his dad for circumcising him?

CHRISTOPHER. *Brilliant!* That is wonderful.

RUTH. What's so bad about that?

CHRISTOPHER. What's so bad about that?? Every time he takes his cock out for a pee, he *hates* his father. Fantastic!

DANIEL. (*Rejecting a nut.*) *Another* one!

BETH. You are boring. I got them off the lawn, they're absolutely fine.

DANIEL. Right, the ones even the squirrels wouldn't eat.

RUTH. There *are* quite a few rotten ones —

CHRISTOPHER. He's full of that post-colonial *horseshit* —

BETH. Here! Here's one that's OK. Here you go.

CHRISTOPHER. "You say something nice about my book and I'll say something nice about yours." The coral reef school of criticism. They all stick together.

DANIEL. Oh thank you. It's perfect. Almost. "Ambassador, you spoil us with your rotten nuts."

CHRISTOPHER. Are you making fun of your mother?

DANIEL. In a nutshell, yes.

CHRISTOPHER. I won't have it — He married some dusky lady. Then he ran off with another one. He's a potato-nosed cunt. I just can't believe you're going to fall for that ... *bagel*.

BETH. (*Referring to Christopher.*) He's got a good word for everyone.

RUTH. Well, he was *nice* to me.

CHRISTOPHER. Bet he was.

RUTH. He seemed interested in what I had to say.

DANIEL. Well, you know what they say. "There's no such thing as a boring pussy."

RUTH. Oh, fuck you.

BETH. (*To Ruth.*) Where did you meet him?

RUTH. Natalie's christening. I was singing. It was full of people wandering around —

DANIEL. — Thinking, "What the fuck am I doing here."

CHRISTOPHER. He's a drunk, and a womaniser.

BETH. That's not fair, Christopher. He's trying to get a new post.

DANIEL. So now he's teetotal and impotent. (*Beth has got up, touches Billy's arm. Billy turns to face her.*)

BETH. Have you had some nuts, Billy? (*Billy shakes his head, goes back to his plate of food. Christopher carries on talking.*)

CHRISTOPHER. You should read his fucking book.

DANIEL. Oh shut *up*, Dad.

# TRIBES

by Nina Raine

3M, 3W

Billy was born deaf into a hearing family. He was raised inside its fiercely idiosyncratic and politically incorrect cocoon. He has adapted brilliantly to his family's unconventional ways, but they've never bothered to return the favor. It's not until he meets Sylvia, a young woman on the brink of deafness, that he finally understands what it means to be understood.

*"... subtle and scintillating ... Raine shrewdly builds [a] dense canopy of sound around Billy's silence, in order to make the narrative of his oppressive solitude and his subsequent liberation from it more than just a problem play about the hearing-impaired. TRIBES is as much about the tyranny of language as it is about the misery of not being able to hear it."*

—The New Yorker

*"A smart, lively ... play that asks us to hear how we hear, in silence as well as in speech."*

—The New York Times

*"There's so much going on in ... TRIBES that it's almost overwhelming: intellect and sentiment, love and cruelty, witty zingers and biting put-downs. But in Nina Raine's dazzling play, too much is a good thing."*

—The New York Post

*"... bright and boldly provocative drama."*

—Associated Press

*"What a pleasure it is to encounter Nina Raine's distinctive comedy-drama TRIBES. This story of what happens to a fiercely intellectual, relentlessly competitive, 'conventionally unconventional' (as one character puts it) English family when its youngest member, the sweet-natured Billy, who is deaf, steps into his maturity is ruthlessly unsentimental and well observed."*

—BackStage

*"TRIBES made me excited about New York theatre again; I haven't been this knocked out by a play in a long time."*

—NYTheatre.com

Also by Nina Raine  
RABBIT

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