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SF PERUSALS

Nigel Slater's

TOAST

by Henry Filloux-Bennett

SAMUEL FRENCH

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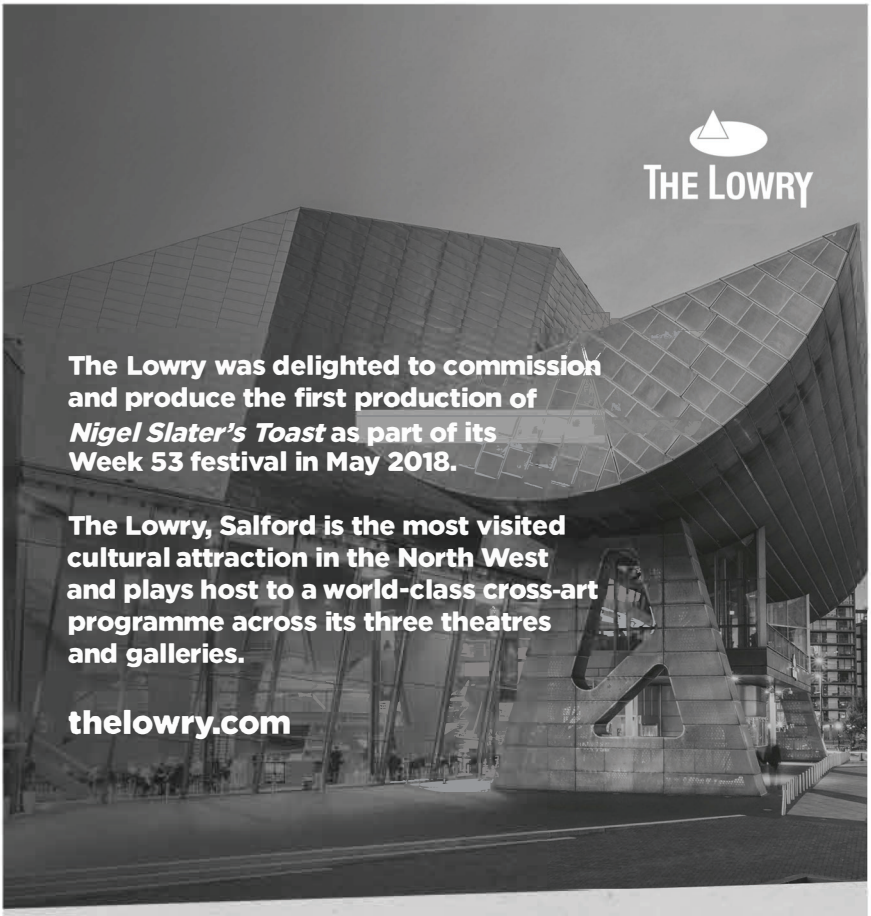

The Lowry was delighted to commission and produce the first production of *Nigel Slater's Toast* as part of its Week 53 festival in May 2018.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The author of a collection of bestselling books and presenter of nine BBC television series, Nigel Slater has also been the food columnist for the *Observer* for twenty-five years. His books include the classics *Appetite*, the two-volume *Tender* and *The Kitchen Diaries* trilogy. His memoir *Toast – the Story of a Boy's Hunger* won six major awards, has been translated into five languages and became a BBC film starring Helena Bonham Carter and Freddie Highmore. *Eating for England*, his collection of essays about Britain at the table, has been dramatised for BBC Radio 4. Nigel's 2013 book, *Eat*, won the National Book Award. Nigel has written a much-loved weekly cookery column, a sort of kitchen confessional, for the *Observer*, the world's oldest newspaper, since 1993. It is his curiosity and fascination for the details, and his observations of the small, human moments of cooking and eating that are the hallmark of his writing. Author, columnist, diarist and programme-maker, Nigel remains very much an amateur cook. He is not a professional chef. His food is understated, handcrafted home cooking. He believes there is something quietly civilising about sharing a meal with other people. "The simple act of making someone something to eat, even a bowl of soup or a loaf of bread, has a many-layered meaning. It suggests an act of protection and caring, of generosity and intimacy. It is in itself a sign of respect."

Nigel's writing has won the National Book Awards, the Glenfiddich Trophy, the James Beard Award, the British Biography of the Year and the André Simon Memorial Prize. Television awards include a Guild of Food Writers' Award for his BBC One series *Simple Suppers* and the BBC Food Personality of the Year. He is an honorary Master of Letters (MLitt). His most recent book, *The Christmas Chronicles*, was awarded the 2018 Fortnum & Mason Food and Drink Award for Best Food Book.

ABOUT THE WRITER

Henry Filloux-Bennett has worked for organisations including The Lowry, Bill Kenwright Ltd, Theatre Royal Haymarket, the Royal Shakespeare Company, Nottingham Playhouse and HighTide Festival. He was recently appointed as Director & Chief Executive of the Lawrence Batley Theatre in Huddersfield. From 2010 to 2012 he was Artistic Director of the Old Red Lion Theatre in London, during which time the theatre enjoyed one West End transfer and one transfer off-Broadway. As a director and independent producer West End credits to date include Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* (Theatre Royal Haymarket) and *Well* by Lisa Kron (Apollo Theatre).

Henry can be found on Twitter @FillouxPastry.

PRODUCTION NOTES

The play is set between the mid-1960s and mid-1970s and this should be apparent, the audience, at least in the sound design, although how much further the production is rooted in the period past the sound is a decision for the creative team and company.

Staging should be bold, physical and fluid – there should be no need for blackouts / scene changes. Settings may be indicated and these worlds should be created with an approach that is light and playful. A world should be created where we think nothing of moving seamlessly and immediately between different settings. Stage directions are given with a purposeful lightness of touch – this is to allow maximum freedom to members of the creative team and company.

The only casting requirement is that the character of **NIGEL** should not be portrayed by a child or young adult; the actor playing him should also not play more than one part – he is the central point around which the story unfolds. The rest of the characters in the play can be played by as many or as few actors as desired, but the minimum to do the production justice would be a company of five.

As much as is possible the audience should be included in the play. At appropriate moments within the play, where the characters are eating something, it would also be lovely if the audience were able to taste or smell it too.

At the end of lines " – " indicates either a cue to be particularly tightly picked up, or an interruption.

FIRST PERFORMANCE INFO

Nigel Slater's Toast was first presented as part of The Lowry's Week 53 Festival from 23 May to 2 June 2018.

Original Cast

NIGEL – Sam Newton
MUM – Lizzie Muncey
DAD – Stephen Ventura
JOAN – Marie Lawrence
JOSH/STUART – Andy Brady

Original Creative Team

Director – Jonnie Riordan
Designer – Libby Watson
Food Director – James Thompson
Sound Designer and Composer – Alexandra Faye Braithwaite
Lighting Designer – Andy Purves
Dramaturg – Ben Richards
Producer – Matthew Eames for The Lowry
General Manager – Rachel Candler
Production Manager – Ben Karakashian

FIRST PERFORMANCE INFO

Nigel Slater's Toast opened at The Other Palace, London from 4 April to 3 August 2019 with the following cast:

NIGEL – Giles Cooper
MUM – Lizzie Muncey
DAD – Stephen Ventura
JOAN – Marie Lawrence
JOSH/STUART – Jake Ferretti

Creative Team

Director – Jonnie Riordan
Set and Costume Designer – Libby Watson
Food Director – James Thompson
Sound Designer and Composer – Alexandra Faye Braithwaite
Lighting Designer – Zoe Spurr

For Gran

CHARACTERS

MUM

NIGEL

DAD

JOSH

WAITRESS

FLINCH 1

FLINCH 2

PEGGY

JANICE

WARREL

AUNT ELVIE

UNCLE LEN

MRS E.

JOAN

AD 1

AD 2

SAM

MISS A.

DOREEN

STUART

SAVOY CHEF

ACT ONE

We start the play at home in Wolverhampton. Lights up on **MUM** *preparing for an afternoon's baking – she is getting ingredients out and sorting through various utensils.* **NIGEL** *is on his own, reading a cookbook.*

NIGEL *(showing the audience) Cookery…in Colour*. By Marguerite Patten. The only real cookbook in the house. It's kept in the library. "Library" may be a grand word. It's actually three *Reader's Digests* on a bookcase keeping company with some *National Geographics*, Dad's Dimple Haig, the Christmas maraschinos, and this… *(reading from the book)*. "A really up-to-the-minute cookery encyclopaedia, it contains not only interesting familiar recipes but also a host of new ideas for meals of all kinds" – *(looking through)* Devilled kidneys. Spanish chicken. *(finding a section in the book)* – Duck! Mum? Is duck poultry? Or is it game?

MUM *ignores* **NIGEL** *and carries on her preparations.*

Mum?

MUM Nigel.

NIGEL Duck. Is it poultry? Or game? Only it looks like it could be either, and it makes a difference how you cook it! Look… *(showing* **MUM***)* Duck with orange sauce with port wine.

MUM Duck a l'orange.

NIGEL What's that?

MUM *That!* That's what they call it in fancy restaurants.

NIGEL Duck a l'orange. *(reading)* "Peel two oranges and cut the peel into very narrow ribbons… Simmer in a little water… Meanwhile make a brown sauce with stock from

the *giblets*?" – sounds disgusting! – add a little port wine, the orange strips and some of the orange stock. If desired add a little extra…" – have you had it before?

MUM I can't imagine anybody actually cooks like that at home, Nigel – it's all very fancy. Now come and help, me with –

NIGEL *(flipping to another page in the cookbook and still reading)* "Celebratory Desserts!" …Shall we make a *(struggling)* Crème Caramel?

MUM – Nigel, for goodness sake, come and help, would you?

NIGEL *goes over to* **MUM**.

I've got everything together, we just need to measure it out.

NIGEL *(surveying the ingredients)* Six ounces of flour. Two ounces of butter. And our secret ingredient – one ounce of lard. That's according to Mrs Patten, anyway. According to Mum, it's –

MUM *(very roughly "measuring" the ingredients in to the bowl)* Right. Bit more. There we go, that looks about right, doesn't it.

NIGEL Mum doesn't stick to recipes.

MUM I do! More or less.

NIGEL More or less. Mum's answer to weighing out almost any ingredients for anything she's making.

MUM The cheek! Anyway, recipes are just someone else telling you what *they* like. These are *our* jam tarts, aren't they?

NIGEL Yes, Mother.

MUM There we are then. So we make them the way we like them.

NIGEL It is five o'clock on a late summer afternoon and I am making jam tarts with my mum. Mum doesn't like cooking any more than she likes recipes. She does this for me. Every few weeks, out will come the big, cream mixing bowl, the rusty cookie cutters, the wooden rolling pin and… *(***NIGEL**

breaks in to a big wide smile – he is in his element.) it's our little secret.

MUM Right then, over to you.

NIGEL Over to me.

MUM *goes to get a jug of water* – **NIGEL** *starts rubbing the ingredients together.*

I start to rub it all together – tips of fingers, that's the key –

MUM – Higher.

NIGEL *brings his fingers up.*

Bit more?

NIGEL *raises his fingers higher as he mixes the ingredients together.*

Good. The higher up you do it –

NIGEL – The lighter it is. That's what Mum says, anyway –

MUM – It's *true*!

NIGEL And then Mum pours in a little cold water... Careful, Mum, not too much –

MUM – I know what I'm doing, thank you, Nigel.

NIGEL She doesn't!

MUM Nigel!

NIGEL Just a drop more please, Mother! I bring the dough together in to a ball, and then it's back over to my mum, who gets to work flattening it out, ready to cut. She has small hands, but long, delicate, gentle fingers, and they roll back and forth over the pin. Why is it cracking?

MUM It's OK, we just pinch it back together. Like that, you see? Right, what filling shall we put in them?

NIGEL She asks me this every time. She knows the answer – there are only three kinds of filling that are allowed in a jam

tart. Strawberry. Blackcurrant. And…lemon curd. I spoon just enough in to the centre –

MUM Not too much, we don't want them to boil over and stick to the tin do we? –

NIGEL – *But* still enough so there's more jam than pastry…and they're finished. Ready for the oven. They'll sit in the top bit of the Aga until they're done. Until the pastry's gone a pale sort of beige and the jam has just started bubbling around the edges. And while we wait…

MUM Toast?

MUM *goes to make toast for them both.*

NIGEL *(smiles brightly)* It's impossible not to love someone who makes you toast. People's failings, even major ones – like pouring too much water in to the jam tart mix – disappear as you break through the toasted crust and get to the doughy cushion of white bread underneath. It can be thick or thin, crisp or soft, gold or brown or black or a bit of all three – but, like bed sheets and underpants, the perfect piece of toast can only ever be white. Mum says brown-bread toast is for old people – old people who suddenly decide they should look after themselves a bit more –

MUM – Damn it!

NIGEL Burnt. Mum burns the toast as surely as the sun rises each morning. In fact, I doubt if she has ever made a round of toast in her life that hasn't completely filled the kitchen with smoke. I am nine now and have never seen butter without black bits in it. But that's not the point.

MUM *comes back, kisses* **NIGEL** *on the forehead and places the toast in front of him.*

That's not the point at all. It is *impossible* not to love someone who makes you toast. *(biting in to it, beaming, but then concerned)* – What's the matter?

MUM *is having difficulty breathing – she goes over to get an inhaler from a drawer. She holds her hand to her chest and closes her eyes for a few seconds.*

Mum?

MUM Nothing at all. The air's just a bit dry – now go and get yourself cleaned up before your father arrives.

NIGEL Mum has asthma. Apparently she got it when she was expecting me – it's fine most of the time but sometimes, if the kitchen gets too hot, she needs a few deep puffs to make her feel better again –

MUM Did you hear me?

NIGEL I was explaining about your asthma –

MUM *Now*, Nigel.

NIGEL Like I was saying, it's *almost* impossible not to love someone who makes you toast. The *making* might be for me, but the tarts are just as much for Dad – he loves them. Dad owns a factory that makes parts for cars. *Rover* cars. It's a bit of a drive away and it smells of oil, mostly. Dad doesn't though – he smells of Sweet Briar pipe tobacco. Oh, and greenhouse. I like smells. I keep a list. *(taking out a notebook)* I also like lists – I have a book of them. *(reading)* A list of Nigel's favourite smells, by Nigel Slater. Flapjacks. Old books. Snow. Roast chicken. Moss. The cress seeds sprouting on the blotting paper at school for our Biology project. Jam tarts. Mum.

MUM *(taking the jam tarts out of the oven)* Yes?

NIGEL No, nothing. You were just being part of my list.

Enter **DAD**.

DAD Good evening. Ohhh, jam tarts.

He kisses **MUM**, *gives her a box of chocolates.*

I've eaten all of the soft nougat, I'm afraid.

He ruffles **NIGEL***'s hair.*

Do you know what I saw coming up from town?

MUM What was that?

DAD *(putting the tart in his mouth whole, not realising it's just come out of the oven, burning his mouth)* Coming out of Batkins, a white woman with a – *(He dances on the spot, hands flapping, trying to swallow. A flicker of a smile on* **NIGEL** *and* **MUM***'s faces.)* Bugger it.

NIGEL So this is us. Me, Mum –

MUM – Go and have a drink of water for goodness sake –

NIGEL – And Dad. And this is our house. Our three-apple-trees-in-the-back-garden, wood-panelled-downstairs-loo, bluebells-along-the-path, cork-tiled world. We live in the Tudor-styled York House on Sandringham Road with a new bright-red Queen Elizabeth postbox just across the street, and just up Victoria Street is the statue of Prince Albert in Queen Square. Welcome to Royal Wolverhampton.

DAD Or this evening, should we say *Roman* Wolverhampton!

NIGEL I'm not sure that really works, Dad.

DAD – That's quite enough from you, Nigel.

MUM You're recovered then? Maybe that'll teach you to keep your views to yourself.

DAD And enough from you too, thank you. Right, come on. Are we ready for our continental culinary adventure?

NIGEL Tonight…spaghetti.

DAD Right, Nigel, pan of water on to boil please. And this –

NIGEL – *This* is a saucepan of reddy-brown stuff, bubbling, like mini eruptions every few seconds –

DAD – This is what we put on the pasta. Spaghetti Bolognese.

NIGEL We've never had it before. Well definitely not me. And by the looks of things nor has Dad.

MUM *(picking up a paper packet of spaghetti)* Tony, what do you do with these?

DAD *(taking the packet from* **MUM***)* These – go in here.

MUM They're never all going to fit in there –

NIGEL – He tries to read the instructions, but –

DAD – Kathleen, my glasses? –

NIGEL – He can't see. Mum hands him his glasses but they're no use, because –

DAD – They're all in Italian? Maybe if we –

DAD *starts breaking the spaghetti strands in to the pan.*

MUM – Be careful Tony, they're going all over the Aga.

NIGEL I watch and wait in silence, hoping just maybe Dad will abandon the whole idea and let Mum make us some chops.

DAD I think it must be done by now –

NIGEL – Dad says after twenty minutes of boiling the spaghetti strands. He pours the contents of the pan in to the colander –

DAD – Plates, Kathleen. *(beat)* Hurry up, they're getting away!

NIGEL We sit at the table with our plates, piled with pale yellow worms –

DAD – Hang on, wait for the sauce.

He brings over the sauce and spoons it on.

MUM This looks very sophisticated. And it smells delicious.

NIGEL How are you supposed to eat it?

MUM Look – give me your fork. Here. Twirl it, you see? Like this.

NIGEL It's not like anything I've had before, but I quite like it. It's hot, salty, tomato-y, Bovril-y – not bad at all.

DAD *returns with a drum of dried, grated parmesan.*

MUM What's that?

DAD I got it from Salt's.

NIGEL Percy Salt's is the grocer's on Penn Road, just down the hill. We'll go back there in a bit –

DAD – He said you sprinkle it on top. It's grated cheese.

DAD *sprinkles it on* **NIGEL***'s plate – he is immediately struck by the smell – and then offers it to* **MUM** –.

MUM – I think I'm actually OK for now.

DAD *sits down and sprinkles it on his food too.*

NIGEL *(whispering)* Dad.

DAD What?

NIGEL It smells of...sick.

DAD I know. Don't eat it. It must be off.

NIGEL We never have spaghetti Bolognese, or parmesan cheese, again.

DAD This was a disaster.

DAD *slams his cutlery down on the plate, gets up from the table and walks out, furious. Pause.*

NIGEL He's gone to the greenhouse. It's his favourite place in the world, and in there with his tomato plants and flower cuttings and no spaghetti, everything's a bit better.

When I say plants and flowers of course I mean "antirrhinum" and "Muscari". Anyone? No? Snapdragon and grape hyacinth actually. Dad likes it when I call them by their proper old names – Josh has been teaching me them. Everyone meet Josh.

JOSH *the gardener enters with some gardening tools and a tin box containing some sandwiches. We are transported in to the garden.*

Josh is our gardener. They don't usually last for long – the last one let frost get on the dahlias and was gone within two weeks. But Josh is different. Dad likes him because he knows the proper names, and Mum likes him because she says he's as bright as a button –

MUM – And such a good-looking young man! –

NIGEL Mother!

MUM Sorry darling.

NIGEL I like him too. *(pause – slightly embarrassed)* He brings his lunch in a tin box held together with an elastic band. He always has sandwiches, an apple and some biscuits – sometimes he gives them to me –

JOSH – Caramel wafer, or Bourbon?

NIGEL Ummm –

MUM *(appearing with a plate covered with a tea towel)* – Or flapjack?

NIGEL Mum!

MUM What?

JOSH *(taking one)* Thanks, Mrs Slater.

MUM It's a pleasure, Josh. Nigel?

NIGEL *(slightly embarrassed)* Thanks, Mum. Flapjacks are one of the few things Mum makes – one of the few things Mum *can* make, and I love them. The chewiness. The sweetness and saltiness all at onceness. It's odd, Mum has been making a lot of flapjacks since Josh arrived.

MUM *(leaving)* Well then. I'll leave you two to it. Have fun.

JOSH Thanks again, Mrs S. Right, let's be having you –

NIGEL – He lets me help, which none of the other gardeners have ever done.

JOSH Do you want to do the weeding in the front or the compost?

NIGEL *(considering)* Compost, please.

JOSH Right, come on then. And after that we see how your corner is doing.

NIGEL My corner is my bit of the garden. Dad gave it to me last year and I'm allowed to plant whatever I want in it. For my first year I did cosmos, daisies and marigolds –

JOSH Nigel –

NIGEL Yes, sorry. Before my corner, the compost. I turn it with a giant, long-handled, two-pronged fork while he works on the borders. *(Conspiratorially; he knows he should be concentrating on the task at hand.)* This year I'm growing radishes. Josh is going to help me. Josh?

JOSH Oh, come on then.

JOSH *takes out a packet of seeds.*

Open up your hands.

NIGEL *opens up his hands, and* **JOSH** *takes a packet of seeds, opens it, and pours some out in to* **NIGEL***'s cupped hands.*

Now, scatter them in to the lines in the soil.

NIGEL *starts to scatter the seeds.*

NIGEL They're such tiny seeds and they drop in little heaps in to the earth –

JOSH Be careful, not too close together. And not too many seeds.

Enter **MUM.**

MUM Nigel –

NIGEL Mum, come and look –

MUM Very nice, Nigel. Now, come on, in you go and get ready for bed and I'll come and tuck you up in a little bit.

NIGEL My mum always tucks me up. I think it's a sort of substitute because she can't play games or go to the park, on account of her asthma, and she can't make cakes, or, well, much else. *(beat)* A few days later, I come home to find Mum ill.

MUM *is sitting at the kitchen table, head bent down in her lap, eyes closed, breathing heavily and deeply. Socks in front of her, which she has been darning.*

It's like she has to concentrate as much as possible to make her lungs work. Mum?

MUM *(struggling)* I'm fine, honestly.

She picks up a sock and tries to continue putting the thread through the needle, but can't quite manage.

NIGEL Do you want me to do that?

MUM I'm not totally useless, thank you. I've nearly done it now.

NIGEL You're ill.

MUM I'm not. I'm absolutely fine.

NIGEL Mum might be lying, but I'm actually *never* ill.

MUM That's not quite true, is it, Nigel?

DAD *(entering, laden with suitcases and beach holiday paraphernalia)* – Right, socks down, come on both of you. *(pause)* Well, what are we waiting for? Here we go. Windbreak. Beach ball. Picnic basket. Bucket, spade, flags for the sandcastles –

MUM Savlon?

DAD Check.

MUM Bite-eeze?

DAD Check.

MUM Plasters and cotton wool?

DAD Check. And Dettol. And spare Ventolin for you. And...beach towels, and sun cream.

NIGEL Everything needed for a Slater holiday. Oh, and a four-hour drive.

DAD *sings* ***"OH I DO LIKE TO BE BESIDE THE SEASIDE"****, cajoling* **MUM** *and* **NIGEL** *in to joining in, despite their protests. We are transported to the seaside at Bournemouth.*

DAD Salt air, sunshine through the open roof in the car, seagulls squawking, and just over the hill, any second, beach as far as the eye can see... There we go – welcome to Bournemouth!

NIGEL Dad, is it OK if I do the descriptions? It's sort of my thing.

DAD Your father can cope with a bit of amateur theatrics, Nigel.

NIGEL Just concentrate on driving, Dad. We head down to the front past all the big houses and the –

DAD Oh look, it's petunias this year –

NIGEL – Father, please! –

DAD – Sorry –

NIGEL – Thank you! We head down past the big houses and the neat formal flower beds, which, as Dad has already said, are petunias this year. This is our second year in –

MUM – There's a space! There. There!

DAD *(irritated)* – I can see it –

MUM – Well then –

NIGEL – Can I *please* do my –

MUM – Sorry, darling. You go ahead.

NIGEL This is our second year in Bournemouth and we're back in the same hotel and exactly the same spotlessly clean rooms as last time, the same breakfast – bacon and sausages for me

and Mum, kippers for Dad. And toast. I love hotel toast. Cold and bendy in a little silver rack with even colder, rock-solid butter. The butter is nothing compared to the sea though, which is *freezing*. Mother insists on me wearing plastic sandals to go in, which are so tight, and the plastic so hard that they give me blisters. As if that's not bad enough Dad makes his annual attempt to get me in to ball games, which consists of kicking a ball at me, which hits me in the face with a shower of sand. We have lunch at one of the open-air cafés along the beach. Just to carry on with the torture, Mum, having seen battered fish and chips at the tables around us, asks the waitress for –

MUM – We'll all have chicken salad please.

NIGEL Why?! Who orders a chicken salad at the beach? When you can *see* battered fish the size of a beach ball right there?

MUM – And some bread and butter, please.

NIGEL – And why bread and butter? At home Mum is always buttering bread. I don't know why – no one ever seems to eat it.

WAITRESS No problem. Anything else? Any sauces? Salad cream? Maybe some ketchup –

MUM *(a touch too quickly)* Just the bread and butter will be fine, thank you.

NIGEL Did you see that? The *(recreates* **MUM***'s flinch)*? That's the Slater family reaction to ketchup. Tomato ketchup has never set foot in the house – I've only ever tried it a couple of times before. Dad will have mushroom ketchup with bacon, but never tomato. That *(recreates it again)* is also the reaction to a few other things. Take it away.

Enter **FLINCH 1** *and* **FLINCH 2.**

FLINCH 1 Heinz.

NIGEL No idea why –

FLINCH 2 – It's a bit common. Crosse & Blackwell always better –

FLINCH 1 – Except salad cream of course –

FLINCH 2 – Absolutely.

FLINCH 1 French mustard.

FLINCH 2 Mustard just isn't mustard unless it's English.

FLINCH 1 Bien sur!

FLINCH 2 Typhoo –

FLINCH 1 – PG Tips –

FLINCH 2 – Taylors –

FLINCH 1 – Lipton –

FLINCH 2 – Tetley –

FLINCH 1 *Anything* that's not Twinnings.

MUM and **DAD** *Twinings*!

FLINCH 2 Camp Coffee.

FLINCH 1 Why *would* you when there's Maxwell House?

FLINCH 2 Margarine –

FLINCH 1 Awful –

NIGEL And lastly –

FLINCH 1 AND 2 HP Sauce –

MUM Wash your mouth out.

NIGEL And lunch is just the start of it. Dinner is a completely different story. Scrubbed clean, tie neatly tied, socks pulled up straight, it's a minefield –

DAD – Best behaviour, Nigel –

MUM – Comb your hair properly, darling.

NIGEL Best behaviour is parent speak for remembering to say please and thank you just once too many times. Watch.

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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