

# If you want flour, go gather chestnuts

February 2, 2011

Bread was the next item on my shopping list, which was fortunate since bread was the next aisle in the shop. And what bread! Five shelves stretching half the aisle, all covered with the stuff. My only requirement was that the bread would last until the following Friday, four days thence. If I hadn't finished the loaf by then, then I would have failed both as an eater of bread and as a human being. I began to investigate the loaves.

Almost all the breads promised to last as long as I needed them, so the question became which one to favour. A dozen different brands of bread all perched on their shelves, hopping up and down with their hand thrust into the air squealing "Ooh, ooh, pick me, pick me!" It was like picking teams for lunch break football matches at school. Except at school I had been the loaf of bread, and now I was the team captain.

As I passed one loaf of bread it broke off from its repetitive entreaty to try something new. "Pick me," it chirruped, "I'm made with *British* flour!" This did indeed cause me to stop in my tracks, albeit not in a state of awed wonder as may have been the loaf's intention.

"Excuse me?" I uttered, a token phrase that my mouth produced without consulting my brain. I had of course heard the loaf.

"See?" the loaf responded, twisting around and throwing a thumb at the text splashed on its side. It did indeed proclaim that the loaf was made with British flour.

"You think I should buy you because one of your ingredients is derived from plant matter grown in the same rough geographical area as the city I'm currently living in?" I only applied a dash of sarcasm to the sentence, not wanting it to start dripping with sarcasm there in the bread aisle like the watery innards of a tomato dripping out of a poorly constructed cheese and tomato sandwich.

"Yes!" grinned the loaf showing a sub-Churchillian flare for debate and rhetorical flourish. I briefly wondered whether the loaf read the *Daily Mail*, then chastised myself for interpreting some misplaced pride in one's country as lunatic racism.

"But you're bread," I pointed out, "you're only made of flour and water and yeast."

"And a pinch of salt," it added, giving me a dangerous look.

"And salt," I concurred quickly. "Is the water British too?"

“Of course!” it said, puffed up with pride, although a flicker of worry scudded across its countenance before it quickly added “So come on, buy me!”

“Not so fast, suspicious loaf of bread. Where does your salt come from? Is it from Britain or somewhere else?” I pronounced ‘somewhere else’ as ‘the home of those filthy foreign man-devils’.

The loaf glared at the shelf beneath it, poking a speck of dust with its toe before muttering “S’from abroad.”

“Aha!” I said, giddy with success and possibly hunger, having spent a little too much time talking to foodstuffs rather than eating them. “Probably from the United States or China, who between them accounted for almost forty per cent of the world’s salt production in 2006.”

Distraught, the loaf threw its little arms up in the air. “Curse my salty foreign innards!” it wailed then started sobbing. The loaves next to it on the shelf edged to one side; no doubt their British flour made them uncomfortable with this display of emotion.

“Desist your sobbing, my little staple friend,” I said in my best soothing tone. “I honestly couldn’t give a flying bakery where your ingredients come from.”

“What?” it squeaked, its indignation momentarily overcoming its grief. “But British ingredients make the tastiest bread!” Having said this it set about crying again.

“Oh to be a naïve young loaf of bread again!” I said. “That kind of opinion is why I am the bread connoisseur and you are the talking loaf. Now, just answer me this: will you taste yummy in my tummy?”

My soothing tone worked as the loaf suddenly stopped weeping and looked at me with what may have been jubilant awe. Or possibly terror. “Yummy in your tummy?” it repeated. “You mean, you’d eat me? But, but I was going to be a poet, I thought we’d go for walks in the park and discuss the finer points of French literature over—”

“Good enough,” I proclaimed and threw the loaf into my trolley next to the bacon lardons who introduced themselves to the loaf as Svend. I scratched bread off my shopping list and moved on to the next aisle.