

***The Cabbage***  
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Charlie was peeved. He carefully counted his cabbages; another one gone! Though, he had to admit, they were generous these thieves. They carefully cut a cross in the top of the stalk to encourage another one to grow. Perhaps they were looking forward to nicking another one.

“This has to be investigated,” muttered Charlie to himself. Twenty five cabbages; everyone a potential Prize winner in the comp to be held at the Ding & Dong. This, he thought, is sabotage. But who would lower themselves to such dastardly deeds? A cabbage assassin? The cancerous thought leeches through his brain sapping his energy.

Charlie compressed his lips into a determined line as he always did when his bonnet was beginning to buzz. He adjourned to the Ding & Dong. “Half Joe,” he whispered.

“You OK Charlie?” asked the barman as he pulled Charlie’s half pint.

“Somebody’s nicked my best cabbage, but I’ll sniff the pesky knife wielder out. What soup’s on the Menu today?”

“Cabbage and Pea” replied Joe

“My Cabbage?”

“Who else’s Charlie?” he paused, “You’d better bring me some more Charlie, I’m about out.” Charlie muttered his thanks and thought H’m not him then. “OK” he replied, and had another half.

“Right Joe, I’m off” he called, wobbling to the door on his short stubby legs and headed for his car. He dropped heavily into the

driving seat and slammed the door, not noticing the police car parked up in a corner. He sat a moment. "I'll go down to Bridong and see what they know" he mumbled with a slight slur, and then it hit him, McClore! Allister McClore, his best friend, who would get up to any skulduggery to win. Charlie had pipped him at the post last year. It had to be him!

The Ding & Dong was this year's home to the competition. There were ten village pubs which competed in the veg section of the agricultural show, and the competition was fierce. Friends became enemies until it was over. Charlie set off, doggedly determined to do some quizzing in each one. At the next pub, the lunch time crowd were already a couple of jars down. He elbowed his way to the bar. "Half Jim" he called

"How's the cabbage growing going" a voice in the crowd shouted. Charlie bristled. His brain went into overdrive for a reply. He spun to face them. "Which one of you b..... lot pinched one of my cabbages last night?" He snarled his fists clenched, his eyes protruding like gob-stoppers on sticks.

"Not us" they chorused as one.

"What soup's on today then" he bawled

"Cabbage and Pea; it's up on the specials" they bawled back.

"Not your cabbage," shouted Jim from behind the bar, "I grow my own remember."

"Yey, and you wouldn't know a good sweet cabbage if it bit you" Charlie subsided into silence; finished his half and stalked out and trundled to his car. He crashed the door shut; let in the in gear, and found the hand brake off.

"Damn" he yelled at himself. "McClore! I'll go and tackle McClore"

The country lane was quite wide but Charlie's car sort of gently trundled from side. He didn't notice the car behind until the blue light began to flash. With a sigh of resignation he pulled over; it was the policeman who'd just moved into the village.

"Had one or two this afternoon, have we sir?" he asked.

"I had my best cabbage purloined last night, and I'm investigating who..."

"Now, now sir," chuckled the policeman, "You were speeding and that will be about a £100 fine. I think sir, we should get you home and you can investigate some bed. By the way sir, I'm a champion cabbage grower myself and I have an entry in the competition."

It was not Charlie's day.

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