

In the fog, or, Of cabbages and kings

by mazaher

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It is a foggy evening. Naked black trees drip chilly drops and the pavement is shiny with condensation on Montague Street. Lestrade inhales the damp air which smells like stale cigarette smoke, turns up the collar of his coat, and walks a bit faster.

A case has just been successfully closed in Camberwell. Sherlock solved it 26 hours ago, and left the arrest to Lestrade. He looked feverish when he left the Yard yesterday afternoon, and has not given signs of life since.

Lestrade climbs the three steps to the front door of no. 26, shifts the plastic bag he's carrying to the other hand and presses the doorbell button. No answer. Either the circuit's shorted in this dampness-- again, or Sherlock is holding himself incommunicado-- again. Lestrade draws his own key and lets himself in.

Upstairs, he raps twice on the door with the flaking green paint. Again no answer. A second key slips in the latch. Lestrade walks in.

The flat is dark, but the streetlights send a flickering gleam through the curtainless windows. Rasping breathing, faster than normal, comes from the camp bed which acts as sofa on the far side of the room.

"Sherlock...?"

"Go away."

"No. We got the forger, as you said. I've brought food and paracetamol. I'm switching on the table lamp now."

"No. Go away." A suppressed sneeze, muffled coughing.

"No." Lestrade presses the switch. The dim greenish light from the ministry lamp reveals Sherlock wrapped in blankets, curled on the cot with his face to the wall. "I got some meat-and-cabbage soup for you from that French place you showed me. You'll eat some and then take your medicine. Turn around."

"No. Go away."

"No." Lestrade pulls a spoon and plastic bowl from a styrofoam container in the bag, and lifts the hermetic lid. A thick warm scent wafts up and fills the room.

"Did you take your temperature?"

"No. Go away." More coughing.

"No. Oh, it smells good. What's its name again...? Cabo... Cabo-something."

Sherlock rolls around to face Lestrade.

"Cabochis. Go away."

"No. Here, have some and tell me if it's up to your granny's standards."

"Grand-mère. No."

"Yes. Hold the damned bowl! It will warm up those chilly fingers of yours while I make tea."

Sherlock sits up and takes the bowl in both hands, trying in vain to bite down a small moan of pleasure at the contact with the warm sides. He leans over and sniffs.

"Too much saffron. And not enough marrow with the meat."

"And the wrong sort of raisins, of course, and no Savoy in the cabbage. But you're eating it all the same," Lestrade answers from the kitchen.

"Only if you take half." Two sneezes, not suppressed.

"Don't sneeze in the soup. Did you really believe I'd let you have it all?"

Lestrade is back with two steaming mugs and one empty dish complete with spoon.

"Give." Sherlock holds the bowl for Lestrade, who carefully fills his own dish and begins to eat.

"Start, sunshine, before it turns cold."

"Hey."

Lestrade looks up.

"Thank you." Cough.

"You're welcome."

And they eat in silence.

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Recipe for Grand-mère's cabochis, perfect on cold foggy November evenings:

Boil in 2 liters of water two marrowbones with their meat attached, plus an onion, or a leek, or four cloves of garlic. When cooked, take out the bones and chop the meat and vegetables finely with a blender, until the broth is quite thick.

In the meantime, cut a cabbage (Savoy cabbage is best) and an onion or a leek in thin stripes and cook in a covered pot with a little olive oil until very tender (expect it to take about 20-30 minutes). Chop with blender for a smoother finish if desired.

Mix the cabbage to the broth; add one or two pinches of saffron and two handfuls of Zante currants.

Boil the whole for 15-20 minutes. Keep at hand some clear broth to dilute the mix, or some grated bread if it's too thin; the result however should be quite thick.

Season to taste with miso diluted in warm water.

Ideally served on toast with a drop of olive oil. But Lestrade knows that Sherlock doesn't keep a well-stocked pantry in Montague Street.

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Note: As to the house number of Sherlock's rooms on Montague Street, I'm following the deductions drawn by MICHAEL HARRISON, *The London of Sherlock Holmes*, New York: Drake Publishers, 1972.