The Flu Epidemic

Doctor Enzo Matanzamas reported the first case of Alquerian Flu to the *Ministerio de Sanidad y Política Social* at the beginning of the week. Influenzavirus B (Alquerian mutation) as it is officially known is a notifiable disease. It has all of the usual flu symptoms plus depression, fits of uncontrollable weeping and a large blue boil on the nose. Depression and fits of uncontrollable weeping are common in the healthy population of Alqueria so these symptoms can be misdiagnosed.

Manuela was the first confirmed case. She didn't like visiting Dr. Matanzamas. He didn't always take her temperature the way she expected. Her usual method of fighting colds was to take to her bed and place a large Sevillano Hat at the foot. She would then drink whisky mixed with lemon juice from a Cruzcampo Beer glass held in her gloved hand. She would continue drinking until the hat began moving on its own accord. She would then be cured or at least feel a great deal better. This was Alquerian Flu and not a common cold however.

Manuela was a fighter and was determined to carry on as usual, which she did. By the end of the week every man under forty had the virus. The olive mill came to a standstill. With no labour available the presses stopped and no Alquerian olives entered the national market. Shares in olive related companies rocketed. A spokesman for ENAC the accreditation body said it was the best news for the industry in fifty years.

Only one person in the village was immune. Antonio Poyato. His exposure to the precious Remitroot he cultivated was the likely key. Antonio experimented on Nestor Clacketo and sure enough he was cured. Poyato was in high glee, a cure for influenza. He would be a rich man. How to administer it? He couldn't give the whole village Remitroot wine, they were awkward enough sober. He dried the leaves and crushed them with olives to form a paste. Distributing this balsam free to the villagers he was sure he would make a fortune selling the recipe to the world's pharmaceutical

companies.

There was however a hitch.

Remitroot balsam cures only the Alquerian mutation and the Alquerian mutation kills all other forms of influenza. So to be cured one has to come to Alqueria and catch the local strain which kills the normal type. Then one has to take the balsam curing the Alquerian mutation. The Alquerian mutation is debilitating so a period of convalescence is required. If no rest is taken the immune system is so weak, reinfection takes place. The choice was clear, spend three week in Alqueria or suffer with the flu. Most people preferred the latter.

Poyato was heart broken, but Alqueria was back to its usual dysfunctional self and free to continue making a nuisance of itself once more.