Los Patios
(Part Two)

The individual patios were works of art. Flowers of colours so bright they hurt the eyes, they dazzled against the brilliant whitewashed walls of Alqueria. Perhaps the most charming aspect of villages in southern Spain are the patios and in general Alqueria is no exception. However there are exceptions within the village.

Halfway along the Calle del Siniestro lives Manuela, unofficial leader of Los Gente del Cerro and a very strange girl indeed. Her choice of plants, although decorative, is disturbing. Dominating her yard is a three metre high pink Adelfa tree, perhaps the most poisonous pieces of flora in the world. Among other toxins it contains leandrin and neriine which affect the heart. The bark contains rosagenin which mimics strychnine. She harvests the trio of lethal seeds for her Caster Oil Plant while her potentially hallucinogenic Angel's Trumpet is the envy of the village youth. Manuela's Mother used to live with her but after spending an afternoon in her backyard she left home muttering dark things about her daughter. Few people linger on Manuela's patio, a startling high proportion of whom later appear on the province's missing person list.

Turning right off the Calle del Siniestro into the Calle Horno one can find the house of the village's very own Englishman, Blythe Gruntmore. He once opened his patio for appraisal in the hope of winning the competition however the resultant fines for the Marijuana plants his cultivates didn't make fiscal sense. He now settles for cut blooms stolen from the cemetery and carelessly arranged in empty Newcastle Brown Ale bottles. His patio bares more resemblance to the backyard of the Hanging Monkey public house on Tyneside than a fragrant and colourful Spanish garden.

Between the school and the Olivarera de Alqueria is the small holding of Antonio Poyato. Not a patio proper but still a venue visited by the judges. Antonio grows only *Radix*. Known since Roman times as an aphrodisiac, a superb wine when fermented

and a potent spirit after distillation. It is also a useful building material and beneficial in goat rearing when fed to a reluctant doe. The judges spend a great deal of time tasting his produce and on four separate occasions Poyato has won the best patio prize without having a patio. Twice as many judges are selected than actually needed. This is necessary as some spend the night and following day wandering aimlessly in the adjacent olive groves before finally emerging hungover and red-faced.

As for the idiosyncratic patios of Los Recién Llegados and the final judging, we shall see.