The Howling

José Cabrasilbido listened intently to Manuela's story. The girl was out of breath. She had run all the way from the banks of the Río Verde. It was two in the morning. The policeman was in no mood for sectarian tricks but Manuela was not prone to hysterics and she was certainly shaken. She was interrupted during some nocturnal activity of which she was vague but it appeared to involve two local lads and a tub of Remitroot degreasing gel. An unearthly howling *'aymelaysheengang*' had echoed through the village. Manuela's two companions had taken to their heels. They were last seen passing through Mojácar white faced, sweating and trouser-less.

Now José, Alqueria's local policeman is not the wisest of men. He had mastered joined-up writing but was still baffled by his car's gear-lever. The Mayor had confiscated the bullets from his 'glock' after he accidentally shot the *Inspector Jefe* in the foot. At least it is assumed it was an accident. José was however tenacious and set about dragging the river. He feared the howling was the last desperate gasps of a drowning man or woman.

The dragging turned up a stone plinth inscribed 'Atlantis', an earthenware amphorae containing the fleece of a winged ram, gold in colour and a suitcase with 'Property of Lord Lucan' etched across the handle. “Nothing of interest here” he muttered as he threw the items back. Finding no tangible cause he began looking for a more unworldly solution. The gallant policeman set about an all night vigil. A lonely watch over the village and its people.

Settling himself in Manuela's much used clearing, he waited and listened. Darkness fell and the bars emptied. Giggling couples and arguing youths made their way home. A fragile tranquillity fell upon Alqueria as it prepared for slumber.

Hours passed.

José could feel those troublesome neck hairs start to rise. 'A*ymelaysheengang*' pierced the still night. The terrible wailing continued *'weeepastfooorkupradstannning'*. José plucked up whatever courage he could muster and headed in the direction of the lament. 'It is human' he thought 'but either in great pain or greatly demented'. 'H*orweslotsoadsanassesallwlingaces'* it continued. Along the Calle Horne José walked. Not looking back, nor right, nor left but grimly straight on. The light from an open window attracted the policeman. He wondered what sights would greet him. What carnage must await discovery.

Blythe Gruntmore the village's resident Englishman, stood knee deep in empty Newcastle Brown Ale bottles, afloat on a sea of nostalgia. He pined for the Tyne and its fog shrouded banks. He raised his head and burst into song.

"*Ah me lads, ye shud only seen us gannin',*
We pass'd the foaks upon the road just as they wor stannin';
Thor wes lots o' lads an' lasses there, all wi' smiling faces,
Gawn alang the Scotswood Road, to see the Blaydon Races."

José, not wanting the night to be a complete waste decided to pay Manuela a visit, he was sure he could find a suitable pretext.