Maria of Alqueria

Manuela looked Antonio Poyato straight in the eyes, jutted out her chin and let forth a heartfelt stream of abuse. Antonio staggered backwards under the force of her words, he was sure he didn't deserve such an outburst but replied with the same venom as he received. Manuela changed tactics and instead of hurling verbal abuse hurled something more tangible in the form of a ornamental paperweight containing a not very convincing model of the Eiffel Tower. It was however sufficient to floor Poyato and render him unconscious. The rest of Alqueria were equally at each others' throats but this was not the usual barrio rivalry, a bad moon had risen and chaos reigned.

Those who were once close friends were no longer on speaking terms and hostilities between the two barrios escalated to a state of overt warfare. The situation was such that a barrier had to be built separating the two factions. Even this was fraught with disagreement and violence, so much so that neither side would cooperate in the building of the 'wall'. The only solution was to build two walls some hundred millimetres apart but following exactly the same course. Construction was slow as flak jackets and hard hats made mobility difficult.

As the stone and fist throwing was at their peak an apparition appeared in the midst of the turmoil. It was in the form of a woman, Maria, no overly tall but very, very pretty and appealing, Antonio Poyato fell immediately in love her. Her presence seemed to reassure the wayward people of Alqueria. She assembled the entire village and spoke of compassion and fraternity, she spoke with reason and understanding and she touched the very souls of every Alquerian.

Friends became friends once more and the bar La Casa Devante started admitting those from the Newcomers' Barrio. Manuela apologised to Poyato and Loco Paco allowed little boys to take Bengy, his pet dung beetle for walks. The walls were de-assembled and a pretty pink picket fence with plenty of flowers was erected with gates ever fifty metres. A miracle had happened with peace and harmony the order of

the day. People smiled and slapped one another on the back, even the evil Rodriquez gave sweets to little children and stopped trying to murder Manuela. The Village slept soundly under the new regime.

Morning dawned with stones breaking the freshly repaired windows, Manuela once more stalked Poyato with sharpened machete and the picket fence was trampled under foot by energetic rioters.

Maria had to return to Madrid on domestic business. She never returned to Alqueria nor did peace and harmony which was never mentioned again.