La Hechicera de Alqueria

Sanchia Sústomore lives with the Hill People in their western *barrio,* although she doesn't owe allegiance to either of the village groupings. She lives alone in perhaps the oldest property in the Avenida de las Naranjas. The downstairs room is still a stable, although she has no horse. The attic is still for drying locally grown produce of which she produces none. Her whole house is given over to cauldrons and dried herbs, desiccated bats and hopping amphibians. For Sanchia is a hechicera, a sorceress, a witch, at least she believes she is.

She is the ninth daughter of a ninth daughter. This is believed to have special significance apart from demonstrating a total lack of self-control by her parents and grandparents. Some of the elderly residents of Alqueria believe she may be beneficial in the curing of minor skin rashes and mild indigestion. The general opinion is however that she is as mad as a snake but harmless. Unless of course one is tempted to swallow one of her potions. She once offered Manuela a love potion. The young men of the village couldn’t take the chance of it working and hastily organised a football outing to Barcelona. Sanchia introduced one of her concoctions into the town's water supply claiming it was a cure for Purple Gibbon Disease. This appears to have worked as there hasn't been a single reported case in the village.

Part of the stock-in-trade of witches is the ability to curse those unfortunate enough to incur their displeasure. Sanchia didn't believe in the evil eye method and had developed the evil buttock. Cursed with the left buttock is alarming, with the right it can put you off your food for a week. During her 72 years Sanchia has cursed just about everyone in the village. Whether they hold her responsible for their present condition or whether they just humour the inept witch of Alqueria, is difficult to tell.

She is on firmer ground when it comes to fortune telling. Those who use her services are halfway to believing before she gets her *nabo* out. She uses a nabo instead of a crystal ball. This is probably down to economics rather than a belief in the mystical

powers of root vegetables. Her customers seem reasonably happy with her generalisations and she relies on all prophesies being self fulfilling.

Alas, Sanchia is now in the *Loca Mujeres* ward at the *Hospital de Alta Resolucion El Toyo* in Almería. Admitted after an abortive attempt to launch herself from the roof of the Bar La Casa Devante. Whether this was because of a misplaced belief that she could fly or an overindulgence in Remitroot liquor, has yet to be established. It was probably a combination of the two. The upright vacuum cleaner she used in place of a broomstick broke her fall and prevented serious injury.

Those who are yet to be cursed, can rest easy for a week or so while Sanchia's wounds heal.