

Chamaco "El Gangster"

My uncle is an old school guapo (lone wolf wiseguy) who lives in the South Bronx projects across the street from the Jackson Avenue Train Station. I meet him at my grandfather Juan's funeral in 1968. Chamaco is the most elegantly still man I greet in my life. Yet, he's got so much going on. I approach him with all the bravura a nine-year-old can muster up,

"Hey, who are you?"

He squares his shoulders and lifts his chin ever so slightly - his white teeth gleaming like a 40's movie star, "The question isn't who I am but who you are - that's what's important." I'm his from that moment on.

Chamaco
Mi ocoro e tu ocoro
Mi corazon es tu corazon
My heart is your heart
Miss you but know your dancing in heaven
And guarding me from above

He teaches me the Rules of The Great Game behind the wheel of a 1975 LTD which he drives with abandon narrowly avoiding what he calls zombies - people who in his opinion carelessly walk the streets.

If you dont ask for directions
you won't get to your destination
but sometimes even without asking
you arrive somewhere new.

We examine together
Life's inner being
In a world gone mad
The Atmosphere People
During the days
Of tenuous comfort
Who rent the only way
They know how to be
It gets harder to react
Without acknowledging
The bootleg charm
We hold deep
In our hearts and souls
Reality without hope

Tends to stay in turmoil
Never to blossom
As it should

If you don't ask for directions
you won't get to your destination
but sometimes even without asking
you arrive somewhere new.

I pray before the light
Of an atomic TV

Conspiracies echo
Test patterns
That flash
Between US
We survive
In purgatory
Souls adrift
Like the electric snow
On my twilit screen
A Dali dreamscape
Self righteous terrorists
We treat fear as casually
As lit Camels and Bomber joints
Inhaling desperate smoke
And blowing out arrogant circles
Go Go Peeps who explode
Like microwaved aluminum foil
Like blood on punctured wrists
Anchored on cotton crosses
In the deep dark black dirt
Of our self pity
While Benzedrine soaked hearts
Finger our chests
and
Undo our shirt buttons
With the speed
Of a star 69
Long Distance
Yell
We laugh at the spectacle
Bound by the

Code of the Great Game

One: We're all going to hell
Except maybe You
And Me

But even I have been a whore

Two: Corruption has existed since the days of
Adam and Eve
And the two gorillas that came before them

Three: Needs are absolute

Four: Rain forgives tears and thunder masks bullets

Five: The easiest way to achieve complete strategic
surprise is to commit an act that makes no sense
at all or is even self destructive
And

Six: Remember,
We were vomited up
By the same seed
Blown west of the Canary Islands
A place not named for wild birds
But for wild dogs
And as dogs
Mark our territory
Guard each other
And Roam To Conquer

By day he works at The Metropolitan Life Insurance Building in lower Manhattan. Chamaco has the run of the building after getting tight and doing personal jobs for The Mets CEO who starts out as a maintenance man at the company.

"You see that guy there carrying a briefcase, Chamaco? Big Shot Executive. He doesn't know what carrying a workload is all about. We do."

Beginning in 1968, he comes over to our house every Saturday afternoon around 4 o'clock carrying a cake from the Italian bakery on White Plains road and his New York Post rolled in his coat pocket. He reads it from cover to cover each day. He reads a lot and will loose himself in the lines. His concentration is such all of the kids can be running around buck crazy when mommy is out of the house and he will sit silently

absorbed in his book. But let something be really out of wack - like my brother and me jumping from the second floor porch into the backyard - and he's right there before we fly.

After dinner my uncle and my father sit for hours at the kitchen table talking about life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness while drinking rum and smoking Camels and Pall Malls until one in the morning. They bond as brothers. They agree with Archie Bunker and George Jefferson, snap on Ted Baxter, lust after Raquel Welch and laugh with Carol Burnet. Even Jesus and heaven aren't off limits to these two,

"So Chuito" Chamaco's favorite term for Jesus "is at the Last Supper and says eat this bread this is my flesh and everyone looks at him kind of funny but, hey, it's Chuito - the main man. Then he takes a cup and says to everyone drink this it's my blood and they get nervous again but hey, it's Chuito - the main man. After everyone drinks he looks around the table and says someone here is going to betray me. Judas jumps up and says Ok cut him off! A couple drinks and this pendejo starts to get paranoid! I'm outta here!

"Aren't you afraid you're going to go to hell saying those kind of things?"

"Who wants to go to heaven? Everytime you see something about heaven it's white robed people playing these silly harps with complacent grins on their faces. Holy AHHHHHHH... BULLSHIT! But every time you see scenes of hell there's a band playing, orgies, wild-eyed men and women, even organ grinders with horny monkeys. Now where would you want to spend eternity in a boring place or a party with a funny horny monkey?"

Sometimes Chamaco draws me in by talking about writers or history and always challenges me to look at things from different perspectives.

"El read this."

"What is it."

"Dante's Inferno. When he says go to hell he isn't kidding around. Tell me what you think of it. Maybe someday you'll take the same trip. It's part of life."

Two years later the priests at Cardinal Hayes assign it to us in summer reading.

"El read this."

"What is it?"

"Heart of Darkness it's the real version of the Wizard of Oz.

"El watch this movie."

"What is it?"

"Cat Ballou - check out the funeral scene."

My uncle thinks a drunk Lee Marvin stumbling into a wake to wish happy birthday to the corpse then blowing out the funeral candles is the funniest thing since sliced papas.

"Happy Birthday Frank! Yeah, happy birthday -- what a pissar."

What I think turns him on more is the way Cat Ballou gets himself ready and wins the climactic gunfight only to be drunk again in the last scene.

"A man should only have one vice in life and let all the other good stuff in your world grow around that. If you're going to be a drunk then be the best one you can be. Just don't become a liar too because there is nothing more screwed up than a drunken liar. Lee Marvin knows he can win and proves it. So he goes back to being a drunk. Makes sense in this world."

I'm twelve years old when I see my first murder victim. When my uncle discovers the body hanging in the downstairs apartment everyone goes goofy except Chamaco. My mom asks him to check the old guy out after hearing a big blowout between the guy and his crazy wife about her lover.

Wiping his hands and calmly walking out of the apartment he announces with a slight chuckle, "Bueno Ana se fue a justa ... llama la policia. He's a goner."

Chamaco is more concerned about the kids not getting spooked and goes real still, mocking the situation lightly. When I'm ready he let me in his other world in 1979 after I return from a disastrous year at Amherst College. He's constantly wheeling and dealing out of his "office" at the Met. That place is hooked up with two phone lines, stereo wall unit, TV with closed circuit, a stove, bath and bed his partners can crash when it's too late to go uptown. He even rigs the time clock so he can appear to be on company time when he really is out scheming. To both their credits, my cousin Belencita demonstrates the smarts she gets from him to go from a Bronx street gang leaders teenage wife, dropout and mother of a little boy at 15 to being accepted at Harvard at the age of 25.

I meet my first drug dealer at Amherst College in '75 but that's just a little rich kid acting out. My uncle is a 44 year old Guaporican when I meet him and lives The Life long enough to know its riches and limitations.

"Check it out, EI - I can see Riker's Island from my apartment window way up here. Did you know they have a Picasso hanging in one of the main rooms? I saw it for the first time when I got locked up. While I was in prison I read a Picasso biography that listed

a Batlle as one of his contemporaries in art school. Yeah, our family name is all over the world. There Batlles in Cuba, Columbia, Santo Domingo - you name it." Today a Batlle is President of Uruguay.

Yeah. And there's a lot of smart successful ones and a bunch of gangsters in there too. I meet a couple in Cuba in the early fifties. Tough Guys. They're with me when I back up into Albizu Campos. Yeah, he's under house arrest in Puerto Rico with a couple of armed guards outside his place. I'm looking for a parking space. What the hell do I know? I back the car up into what I think is an empty space. Imagine my surprise when those guards draw on me and tell me to move. Never argue with a pointed gun. Looking at the three of us in the car - tres guapos -- they must think we were coming to bust him out. Well, Don Pedrito has his way to fight los Yanquis and we have ours. We all get locked up one way or another. It's what you do with that time that separates the men from the boys.

I think God got me this apartment on the 18th floor to make sure I fly right. Now, remember - whatever the hell you decide to do fucking around, make sure you have a day job. Always have a cover. And when you write our story I want ten percent -- net not gross and you got to pay the taxes."

"Alright, what about a gun?"

"That's bullshit stuff you see in the movies. You handle yourself with your mind and with your presence." (I will break this rule later. Bad move.)

Presence? More like boldness. One day he comes across a vacant lot on Longwood Avenue - near the Ortiz Funeral Home -- with a trailer parked in it. He watches it for two weeks and when he notices no activity he moves in with his running buddy Joe.

The two of them fence the lot off and set up a parking lot where he charges for both short term and overnight parking without a permit or ownership of anything on the lot. They also sell used cars and questionable auto parts while they're supposedly on the clock at The Met.

"So tell me, has this car been in any accidents?"

"Oh no. It used to belong to the parish priest at St. Ann's, uh... Father Flotsky. He really took care of it. In fact he used to have saints on the dashboard to protect him while he was driving."

"Oh, so that's what these holes in the dashboard vinyl are?"

"Yeah, he had them glued on but took them out when he sold us the car."

"So what should I do to cover up these holes?"

"Well, let's see ... I got it - Get Bigger Saints and glue them right over the holes. You know ... Holy saint squared."

New saints and all, the car blows a rod after a month while cruising upstate. Joe and my uncle square off with the owner and refuse to give him back his money,

"Hey, asshole ... Caveat Emptor - Let the buyer beware. But we'll do this for you. We'll pay the towing charges and garage fee to take it off your hands."

They resell that car three times.

When city inspectors come by and try to give him a summons he acts like he's crazy,

"Wait a minute. Make sure my dog is tied up or he'll bite ... Down boy."

"What dog, I don't see a dog."

"My dog Sparky ... down boy ... eh - don't bite this man ... down!"

"Let's leave this guy alone he doesn't know what's up here."

Poverty is a great equalizer. When Chamaco gets here from Puerto Rico in 1938 at the age of fifteen he only has his mom, his brother and his wits. Juan Francisco and Uncle Chamaco are a couple of tough guys who speak with their fists when all else fails.

"The cops come to the house one day to question my brother about a beating he gives this guy. It gets so wild during the fight that he takes off his shoes to get a better grip on the floor barefoot. That's his thing. When it gets hot and heavy fighting he always takes off his shoes. Prahhhh! Juan Francisco ends up throwing the guy down a flight of stairs. He denies everything to the police and my mom gives him an alibi. When they leave she asks him what's up and he shoots back the guy says some bad things about me, his brother ... Se puso fresco ... He got fresh."

The two of them get their fists from my grandfather Juan Batlle -- a rogue non-matched.

Juan attends school in Georgia in the early nineteen hundreds. His family in Mayaguez owns a string of coffee farms. Sale of property and farming provides a dwindling income, which my grandfather uses up entirely by the time of his death in 1968. He really is a throwback to the last days of the Spanish Empire in the Americas and capable of behavior that still shocks but seldom surprises. He lives the life he loves and loves the life he lives.

He once gets into an argument with his brothers and they decide to settle it by chasing each other with Colt six shooters. They empty their revolvers as they run from farm to farm. The local law is oblivious to what's going on since they own seven

adjoining coffee farms. Besides the Batlles think they're a law unto themselves in Mayaguez.

Don Juan speaks (and thinks in) English until his dying day with a pronounced southern cracker drawl because of his Georgia experience. He considers himself "An American, a Republican and God's gift to the white race" and gives my mother holy hell for marrying my dark skinned father. My mom still feels some of her cousins on her father's side turn their backs on her because of the marriage. Communications from the island are rare though she's tried.

The characteristic of Juan Battle's cracker mentality is best exemplified by the use of the word Negro. Its pronounced nihggerrahh. Get the picture. Real old school bigot who fathers a string of illegitimate sons with both white and island women throughout Puerto Rico and the United States; nine that are accounted for.

He begins by getting a lover pregnant while at college. Don Juan manages to pay off a lawyer who finds a John Battle in a local sanitarium to be convicted of the rape charge lodged by the woman's embarrassed parents. Leaving the first of these many illegitimate children behind him, Juan Battle sails for Puerto Rico and becomes a one-eyed one-legged lothario and backroom political boss in his district. He is impetuous and gets his share of consequences.

He storms a construction work site impatient with a dynamite charge he sets and manages to get blown thirty feet back sans his left eye. Now this type of event can dissuade most men from taking unnecessary risks, not Juan Battle. Despite missing an eye, drunk and tired he insists driving through the steep roads winding around the Mayaguez countryside during a hurricane season rainstorm. He's sharing a woman and a bottle of whiskey in the front seat with his younger brother. The three are disrobing in the car playing butt naked bingo while he speeds down the muddy dirt road. Rounding a tight turn that drops into a dense thicket Juan loses control of the car and plunges 100 feet into the woods. There goes the leg. Everyone else is fine. It doesn't slow him a bit. I always think of him as "The Pirate" and found out he literally could raise the dead.

During an uncles wake Juan rigs thin wires to the corpse. In those days wakes are held in people's homes. It's after sunset and the house in the countryside is only lit by kerosene lamps, which make the wires invisible. At the right time during the rosary Juan and his brother Orasio tug the wires and the corpse begins to rise in the coffin.

The place clears out in close to thirty seconds. Their brother Simplicio runs all the way to the next town.

My uncle Chamaco doesn't meet his father until he's 21. Juan never marries Chamaco's mother as he weds my Grandmother Christina. In the meantime, Chamaco becomes a member of the forties "Dawn Patrol" crew of bad boys, scheming alongside other immigrant homeboys on the mainland to get over during the war years. He beat

the WWII draft and sure as hell wasn't all rah rah about the war.

"Damn, who wants to go get shot for a country that doesn't cut Us any slack? I get my draft notice right after Pearl Harbor. I try the merchant marine and I last one trip. Too many guys giving orders and too many German U-boats threatening the shipping lanes. Too confined. My mother gets real nervous when the draft notice comes and besides I got no beef with those assholes over there. Believe me there a lot of Nazis over here too so I got ready to get busy.

I walk into the draft office with a huge oversized detective magazine that's popular in those days. It has a picture of a woman with a big knife in her hands and a crazy look in her eyes. Screaming Ahhhhhhhh! Real crazy bitch. I sit there flipping the magazine pages real hard one at a time. Picture after picture of this crazy broad cutting these guys up. And I chuckle to myself. Ah ... hahahahaha ... Ah hahahahaha. FLIP. When it comes time for the examination I just stare at the guy doing the test and I hold on to that magazine. Finally, they bring me in before the Captain and I tell him - Really the only person I want to shoot is you!

4F! Immediately!

Now, who's anybody kidding? The States are about making bucks and that's what they're fighting about over there so I cut through the bullshit and cash in at home. While those white guys are overseas there aren't that many to get in our way of making some long green here. And America's main business is vice. Just ask the Kennedy's, Roosevelt's and Capone's."

Chamaco gets up at three p.m. each day and works New York's streets at night with his boys Yo Yo Montalvo and a "high yellow" gambler named Faustus Green. He cops a shave at six in the morning at the local barber shop/numbers spot so he doesn't have to bother when he wakes up later in the day eager to hunt in the Manhattan jungle. Working out of Elizabeth Street in Little Italy he parlays his green eyes, handsome features and olive skin to fit right into the neighborhood. Chamaco kicks off the war years running a prostitution ring and gambling spots. He also sells marijuana, cocaine and heroin to the likes of Jazz singer Billie Holiday, Afro Cuban bandleader Machito (whose song Tanga is a riff on reefer smoking), and songwriter Pepe Becke (whose song Estoy Frizao -- I'm Frozen -- came about after a two day coke session supplied by my uncle)

"They were these cheesy clubs in the Bronx. You know, the kind that'll have a floor show where the girls don't kick together on time, whores that looked better after a couple of shots and bad comics. This comedian Bull Shit Pulley - he was the guy who played Big Julie in Guys and Dolls - once pulled out a glossy 8 X 12 picture of Jesus just to fuck with the audience. It was signed TO BS FROM JC - BEST OF Luck - Stay out of Jerusalem it's a tough room."

He says he knew Pearl Bailey when she's a part time working girl and is present when

Afro Cuban conga player Chano Pozo (who achieved stateside fame with Dizzy Gillespie) is shot and killed in Harlem in the late forties.

"New York is wide open, El. It's anybody's game. What happens to Chano Pozo isn't any shit about a fight over marijuana like people write about. Chano slaps and roughs up this guy Cabito who just gets back from the War. Cabito is still in uniform and the guys keep making fun of him after the slap because he's a war veteran that can't hold his own against a dandy conga playing spook. Cabito walks into this bar and blasts Chano. Too bad too. He owes me for a gram of coke.

That's a fast business to be in especially hanging out with musicians and gamblers. Man, sometimes it can screw up things. One night it's pouring outside and it's late and I decide to stay in the club. My friend Yo Yo taps me on the shoulder and tells me

"Chamaco let's go visit some trim in Brooklyn."

"Man, the hell with that it's raining and it's late."

About fifteen minutes later I hear behind me clink clink clink and I turn around to see Yo Yo standing there with a fifth of whiskey and a small jar full of coke.

"We're off!"

Man, it's pouring but, hey, we're drinking and taking hits riding a big rush, At some point I go to take a drink do the hit in my hand and I forget to steer the car. Bam, the car lands on top of the highway divider. Now, I'm shaken up during all this but I don't hear Yo Yo. I look around the car,

"Shit! Where the fuck did this guy go?"

I hear moaning outside the car. I reach over and open the door and there's Yo Yo lying on the side of the road in the rain.

"Shit, Yo Yo You all right?"

"Ohhh Ohhhh ..."

Yo Yo finally moves and holds up the jar of coke

"La Coca esta bien - The Coke is all right."

We don't call him Yo Yo for nothing. Man, you know how he got his name? One time we take the girls to the Copa. I get my date's coat and when I turn around Yo Yo is standing completely naked handing his bundle of clothes to the hat check girl and announcing

"I came to dance!"

"You Yo Yo, what the fuck are you doing?"

Man, they throw us out of there in about thirty seconds.

"What happens to the car?"

I report it stolen the next morning and collect the insurance money. Man I loved that car. A 1940 Cadillac. Ran like a dream. I use to race on the Bronx River Parkway headed out of town. Those upstate highways were new and few people drove on them early Sunday morning, not like today. I set up a run with Yo Yo and Faustus and we took off hitting 80 - 90 miles an hour. They pulled away and I noticed police lights behind me. But the state cop speeds away from me and keeps on racing ahead.

"Ah, great he's not after me."

I come to a turn and a hill in the road and I spot this State Trooper standing in the middle of the road with his gun out pointing it at me and ordering me to pull over. I did and we end up having to hitch to the city because they impound all our cars."

Eventually my uncle pays the price for his past indiscretions by getting popped in 1954. He manages to attract the attention of Federal Investigators looking into New York's underworld. It makes page three in the Daily News.

"The only time they come down on us is when the white kids start to get strung out. And the way they do it is bullshit too. In those days a prosecutor can ask you "what were you doing on such and such a date" and get you convicted on just that. What the fuck do I remember a date two years ago. I do wrong but they get me in a bullshit way."

He cops a plea by claiming he's an addict supporting his habit and lands at the Federal Penitentiary in Lexington, Kentucky. In those days the facility is run more like a therapeutic community than a prison with inmates assigned chores and prison therapy. He spends ten years in long term treatment.

"I read a lot and the guards use to sneak in some of the broads from the women's facility when we get too jumpy to cool us out. By the time of my release, I read over 700 books and write a 200-page plea. Eople are different when I get out in '64. They're hogs. I keep my shit low profile after that."

One day he takes me to pick up a pound of weed he buys from a Hasidic pot dealer on Fox Street. My uncle sells quarters and halves to the other workers at the Metropolitan. Chamaco and Abe go back forty years to a time when young tough immigrants grew up in the Bronx in far more integrated neighborhoods than sociologists would have you believe.

Abe the Hasid dealer is done up in full orthodox dress when we arrive at his apartment. He's in a little bit of a hurry because he has to wrap things up before sundown and the Sabbath.

"Chamaco, it's a very nice thing that you always come by and see me ... bring me a little kosher rice and beans ... always the gentleman. You have a good teacher here young man.

How long has it been, Chamaco ... forty years we met in St, Mary's Park?"

"Yeah, you stop me with a Sugar Ray Robinson left hook."

"Only after you and that colored boy Faustus Green try to pull my sideburns."

"Faustus, yeah. All I see is your eyes and your fist -- boom, out for the count. We become friends right after that."

"In those days we can smoke marijuana in the streets and those dumb Irish cops don't know what it is. Isn't it Faustus who brings it up from Harlem?"

"That's right but you already smoke before any of us."

"Pobre (poor) Faustus Green ..."

"He draws a bullet in a card game for eyeballing the dealers wife while I'm away in '56 at Lexington ."

"A shame. Such is life ... Oy ... but in those days we had a party, heh Chamaco. For five dollars we buy a Chesterfield pack full of bombers -- twenty huge reefers -- and sit in the balcony of the movie house puffing away. Remember, Chamaco -- Paul Muni in Scarface holding his machine gun and saying,

"Look out boys and watch me spit rata a tat tat tat tat tat "

blasting the whole place, huh, Chamaco -- The Big Gangshterr Mensch (man). It's such a time."

On our way back to my uncle's apartment we pass through 138th Street and St Ann's shopping bag of smoke in tow. Rounding the corner at el Teatro Puerto Rico a crowd suddenly surrounds us. And who appears in the middle of it all but Mother Theresa who gives Abe's weed and us a blessing as she passes. We're speechless but as soon as the crowd dwindles Chamaco announces,

"Ei we're blessed and we're outtahere. Blessings like that come once in a lifetime. It's time to get down to some holy business. Thanks little sister ... c'mon let's go."

When we get back to his crib and he starts to break up the brick we discover that underneath the top layer of regular brown bush is this sticky rusty military green skunkweed that is ecstasy on a branch. He can unload this at double the price.

"Unbelievable. Thank you God!"

The episode is the little known Teresa's South Bronx Green Miracle. We submit it to Rome but the Pope stops returning our calls so we don't know if they'll use it or not.

It only gets better. Early the next morning I head back to my uncle Chamaco's from a local after hours with my girl.

"Damn, Rosie -- I think the last woman I dance with at the club is a man."

"Are you kidding? The last four women you dance with are men."

"What? All of them drag queens? But they look so good! Damn, I got to stop wearing Raybans at night."

"You're scaring me El."

Bopping past St, Ann's Church, I notice an orange 60's Hippie Volkswagen with a surfboard on it. As I get closer to the loud Bug who comes out of the Church but Mother Theresa accompanied by an assistant nun -- Sister Juniper Tree, I think her name is. She stops in front of me and remembering our miracle the day before all I can stutter is,

"Th-Th-Th-Thank you mommy I mean Sister ... mommy .. Baby ... Excuse me Sister all over the place."

This young priest comes out of the church opens the car door for Sister T who slides in with her assistant and they sputter off to City Island to visit a fisherman. I hear that Jesus lives by the Bronx Riviera, Orchard Beach. He runs a little store on the docks of City Island called JC'S Treats.

Chamaco is diagnosed with terminal cancer in 1994 but does things his way to the end. He has me sneak in some pot to the hospital and nearly gets thrown out of the ward when nurses discover him puffing in bed.

"I may be dying sweetheart but I still want to eat something and it's the only way I can get the munchies after all that chemo."

When it's clear that he won't survive he asks several of us to help him bleed himself to death at home,

"I'm going out my way, help me do this."

My cousin Belen, brother Tito, mommy and I share this ritual. Belencita has him in her arms when he finally passes on. It kicks up a lot of stuff for all of us but especially Belencita.

Heavenly shades of night
are falling
It's Twilight Time
Out of the mist your voice
is calling
It's Twilight Time

And She
And She
And She
Embraces her dying father
With the grace of a Madonna
As he whispers to her
Relieve me of this life I'm leaving
Relieve me of this cancer
That's killing me
She squeezes dry skinned blood
From the tube in his arm
Onto the floor
Each drop
An instance of his time
As the bloody sea rises around her
She sails back in time
And is seventeen again
Wife of a barrio gang prez
Mother of a two-year-old
And
A new baby
that floats inside of her
But fear grips her heart
Because the baby is not her man's
But that of a gang rival
What to do
No legal abortion in those days
She tries everything
To keep her secret
Eats handfuls of
Humphries 98 pills
To induce a spontaneous result

Nothing
Tries jumping up and down
Nothing
She tries everything
Then the days comes
Three months in
When she accepts her
Sin-tuation
She hops on the bus
With her main grrrrrrl
To escape her troubles for the day
At the amusement park
At
Freedom Land
The day wears on
She tries to have fun
As they get ready to go home
They hit the bumper cars
As the ride ends
She stands up
And suddenly feels a wetness
A dizziness
And she
And she
And she
Sees blood dripping
from between her legs
Onto the floor of the ride
Each drop an instance
Of a time that never would be
Imagine that
God's Hand in Freedom Land
As the bloody sea rises
Around her mind
She sails back into the now
Through a gallery of memories

Come on Belencita
we're cutting out of school today
and catching a show
Poking my fingers
through the prison mesh
to touch him
Poppy holding my son Jamesy
after he got out
Poppy giving me away at my

marriage to Bill
Graduation Day at Harvard
and the smile on his face
Poppy correcting my papers
Encouraging me to finish
The doctor telling us ...

Her dying father's time comes
She kisses him
And his soul
Sweeps through hers

When purple curtains
mark the end of the day
We're together at last
in Twilight Time

Chamaco's last wish is to have his ashes spread out at a special high spot in St. Mary's Park. The day comes and my brothers Tito, Ronnie and Miguel cut through the brambles and bushes. They struggle for twenty minutes to get to this spot. They finally get there, drink a beer, open the urn and begin to toss the ashes. But a strong wind is blowing and the ashes blow back on my brothers. When they get home everyone asks them how it went.

"Perfect, no problem."

They don't have the heart to say till much later that part of Chamaco is now in a one hour dry cleaners on Southern Boulevard.