

James McMurtry **"Ruby And Carlos"**

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Ruby said "You're gettin' us in a world of hurt.
Down below the Mason-Dumbass line the food gets
worse.

I can't go back to Tennessee
That NASCAR country's not for me.
Go on, if you think you must."

Carlos packed his drums up in the dark of night
Ruby's standing just outside the front porch light
Chain-smoking Camel straights
The sky off to the east got gray
And he rolled off in a cloud of dust.

And the gray colt knickered at the gate
She said "You're right it's getting late.
You and me got work to do
We can't be burning daylight too."
She took down the long lead rope
And stayed off that slippery slope

The aspen trees were turning gold up top
The talk was buzzin 'round the beauty shop
"Wasn't he barely half her age.
Well that's just how they do now days.
We should all had been so lucky."

By spring she'd had the run of the free born men
Ruby turned 50 in a sheep camp tent
Her body still could rock all night
But her heart was closed and locked up tight

Potato fields all muddy and brown
The gossip long since quieted down

And after one more Coggins test
Pouring coffee for the county vet
Pictures on the ice box door
Of Carlos in the first Gulf War
Black-eyed brown and youthful face
Smiling back from a Saudi base

And then Carlos on the big bay mare

Heavier now and longer hair
Looking past the saddle she'd
From way on back inside his head

And the old vet said, "One day, Rube,
That colt will break an egg in you.
Now and then one comes along
You just can't ride." And he went on home.

And the storm door didn't catch
It blew back hard as she struck a match
But she cupped it just in time
And she sent that ash tray flyin'

And holding back the flood
Just don't do no good
You can't unclench your teeth
To howl the way you should
So you curl your lips around
The taste, the tears, and the hollow sound
That no one owns but you
No one owns but you.

Carlos took the road gig and he saw it through
He rode the tour bus while the singer flew
Managed out of music row
Carlos never saw the studio
Session guys had that all sewn up.

He looks out the window and it starts to sleet
Laying on a friend's couch on Nevada Street
Lately he's been staying high
Sick all winter and they don't know why
They don't know why or they just won't say
They don't talk much down at the V.A.

And Ruby's in his thoughts sometimes
What thoughts can get out past the wine
He feels her fingers on his brow
And right then he misses how
She looked in that gray morning light
She never shaved like they all do now
He sees it all behind his eyes
And his hands go searching but they come up dry

And half way in that wakin' dream
Carlos lets the land line ring
He never guessed it was Ruby calling
The pin in her hip from the gray colt falling
Figure eight in a lazy lope
Stumbled on that slippery slope

And holding back the flood
Just don't do no good
You can't unclench your teeth
To howl the way you should
So you curl your lips around
The taste, the tears, and the hollow sound
That no one owns but you
No one owns but you.

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