

and Carlos by James McMurtry

"Ruby and Carlos"

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Ruby said you're getting 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, when the sky off to the
east got gray
and he rolled off in a cloud of dust, and a gray colt
nickered at the gate.

She said you're right its 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.

Now Aspen trees were turing gold up top
The talk was buzzing round the beauty shop,
wasn't he barely half her age, well that's just how they
do nowadays
we should have all been so lucky.

By spring she had had the run of the freeborn men
Ruby turned fifty in a sheep camp tent
her body still could rock all night,
but her heart was closed and locked up tight.

Potatoe fields all muddy and brown the gossip long
since quited down
after one more Coggins test pouring coffee for the
county vet
pictures on the icebox door of Carlos in the first Gulf
War
black eyed brown and youthful face smiling back from
the Saudi base.

Then Carlos on the big bay mare, heavier now and

longer hair

Looking past the saddle shed from way on back inside
his head

And the old vet said "One day Rube that colt could
break an egg in you,
now another one comes along you just can't ride," and
he went on home.

And the storm door didn't catch and blew back hard as
she struck a match,
but she cuffed it just in time then she sent that ashtray
flying.

Holding back the flood, just don't do no good
You can't unclenched your teeth, to howl the way you
should
so you curl your lips around the taste of tears and
hollow sounds
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.

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 VA.

But 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 moring 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 halfway in that waking dream Carlos lets the
landline ring
He'd never guess it was Ruby calling a pin in her hip
from the gray colt falling
figure eights and the lazy lope stumbled on the
slippery slope.

Holding back the flood, just don't do no good
You can't unclenched your teeth, to howl the way you

should
so you curl your lips around the taste of tears and
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that no one owns but you, no one owns but you.

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