

The Misfits, Part IV

John Huston, Director (1961)

The rented station wagon speeds across the flat landscape, bare except for some trees. Rugged peaks and groups of clouds form the backdrop. Gay is driving. From the back seat, Guido says, "Boy, I'd like to have stopped off home and get cleaned up."

Roslyn turns around. "Why? You look nice." Then she turns to Isabelle, "Doesn't he?"

Isabelle agrees: "Lots better than some I've known." Gay chuckles.

Suddenly Guido says, "Hey, Gay, stop! That guy next to the phone booth. What's his name? You worked the Stinson Rodeo with him last year." A figure in a cowboy hat is sitting on the ground by the side of the road.

"Perce Howland?" asks Gay and toots his horn.

At the sound, Perce (Montgomery Clift) looks towards them, then stands up and walks over to the passenger side of the car.

"Gay Langland! You old buzzard, you!" He extends his arm into the car, past Roslyn, and gives Gay a hearty handshake.

"What are you doin' sittin' out here, fella?" Gay asks.

Perce explains, "Well, I hitched a ride down to the Dayton Rodeo, but this fella changed his mind and just left me settin' here."

"Oh! Roslyn, this is Perce Howland," says Gay.

Perce steps back and politely removes his hat, saying, "Well, old Gay's sure comin' up in the world. How do, ma'am?"

Completing the introductions, Guido adds, "This is Isabelle."

Just then the phone rings. "Oh, 'scuse me," says Perce, walking to the booth. "I got a call in for home." Perce picks up the receiver. "Hello? Hello?"

"Hello, Ma?" he asks, putting his hat back on. "This is Perce."

The passengers watch him attentively, as if at a movie. Guido props his head in his hand, frowning in concentration.

We hear just one side of the conversation.

"Yeah, I'm okay," Perce says. "No. I *was* in Colorado. I'm in Nevada now. Just won me a bull ride."

"Yeah, a pretty good rodeo."

"A hundred dollars," he boasts.

"Ma..." He closes the door and explains in a lower voice, "I was gonna buy you a birthday present with it... but I was comin' out of my boots!" He gives a quiet chuckle.

"No, Ma, I haven't been in the hospital since I talked to you. I just bought some boots, that's all."

"Ma, what would I wanna get married for?"

The group is still watching him intently, aware of the agitation on his face.

"I just bought me..."

He opens the door again so that the others can hear and changes the subject. “Hey, you know what? On top of the prize money, I won me a nice silver buckle. Got a – buckin' horse on it and my entire name written out underneath.”

He smiles. “You proud?”

“Oh, no, no. My face is fine. It's all healed up. It's just as good as new.”

A close-up shows Gay and Roslyn as they watch the changing expressions on Perce's face.

“You would too recognize me.”

“Oh, okay, operator. Ma, listen, say hello to Frieda for me, will you? And to Victoria.”

“Yeah, and to Uncle George...”

“Okay, say hello to him too,” he says reluctantly.

“No, no, Ma. It just slipped my mind, that's all.”

“Well, okay, I'm sayin' it now.”

He closes the door and says, a little bit exasperated, “Ma, you married him, I didn't.”

“So, say hello to him!”

“Oh, one sec,” he says to the operator, then to his mother, “Listen, maybe I'll call you at Christmas time?”

“Okay.”

“Hello?! Hello?!” The line's gone dead.

He walks over to the car and leans in towards Roslyn and Gay, saying, “I just know you'll take me to that rodeo, won't you?”

“Sure,” Gay replies, and we see Roslyn's happy expression. “You entered?”

“Well, I aim to be, if I can get me a ride to town. And, uh, if I can raise the ten bucks for the entrance. But I just spent my last two dollars in that phone booth. Boy, I'm real equipped, ain't I?”

“Say, how'd you like to do some mustangin' with us? We're just going down to Dayton to look for a third man.” In the front of the shot, Roslyn gazes out at Perce intently.

Perce turns to Guido. “You still fly that old plane?”

“It's a lot safer than buckin' horses.”

Perce turns back to Gay. “I didn't know there were still mustangs around here.”

“I spotted fifteen of 'em this morning,” Guido says.

“There might be a lot more, though,” Gay says hopefully.

But Guido is skeptical. “Well, I don't know. What do you expect to get out of it? I mean: fifteen horses? I mean, like, if there was a thousand or more... But goin' all the way up there just for fifteen, it kinda hits me sideways, I dunno.”

“Better than wages, ain't it?” Gay reminds him from off-screen. The camera stays focused on Perce's face as he figures the odds. At the edge of the shot, we see Roslyn's knowing grin.

“Oh, anything's better than wages,” Perce agrees.

Gay has a proposal: “I tell you what. We'll drive you to the rodeo, put up the ten for the entrance. You come along with us tomorrow morning and help us run some mustang.”

“All right. You go in there,” Perce says, indicating the store, “and get me a good bottle of whiskey to keep me primed for the rodeo.”

Gay agrees: “Just wait right here!”

They arrive at the rodeo in good humor, joking and warmed by the whiskey.

The place is full of cars. There is music and people mill around in the sun. They line up for carnival games; we see the Wheel of Fortune in the background.

Scanning the crowd, Perce comments, “Man, there are a lot of good men here. I sure hope I drew me a good horse!”

But only one thing interests Gay. He reminds Perce, “Just come out in one piece now, you gotta go mustangin' tomorrow.”

Suddenly, Isabelle calls out, “Charles!” and runs to a tall older man wearing a white shirt and tie. Smiling broadly, he opens his arms to Isabelle and she runs into his embrace.

After a minute, Isabelle returns to the group, her face radiant with happiness, and says to Roslyn, “Who do you think is here, dear girl? Who do you think is here?”

“Who?”

“My husband!”

“Oh, lz! I'm so happy.” Roslyn holds her close and kisses her.

“I never was so surprised. They're here on their vacation.”

It's a joyful, emotional moment for the women, but behind them, the men just look puzzled or distracted.

“His wife?!” Roslyn looks over at the couple. The woman seems passive and simple, nothing like vivacious Isabelle.

“Clara. You've heard me speak about her. She's my oldest friend, and she's sweeter than ever.”

“She must be, to make you so glad to see her,” chimes in Gay.

“Oh, Charles never would've stayed married to me,” she explains. “I even lost the vacuum cleaner once. They still haven't found it... I can't go mustangin'. They're gonna stay at my house for a week.”

She wishes Perce good luck, they all say goodbye, and Isabelle walks over to her ex-husband and his wife. Roslyn is alone with the three men.

Roslyn and Guido sit in the bleachers watching the rodeo. A rider is quickly bucked off his horse, hitting the ground hard. Roslyn exclaims, disturbed, “I didn't know it was that dangerous!” She can't bear to watch and hides her face in Guido's shoulder.

“That's the way they want it,” he explains, referring to the cowboys. Besides the injuries to the riders, Roslyn is upset about the treatment of the horses.

Gay is down in the pen with Perce, helping him get ready.

Perce looks up and spots Roslyn. “Hey, there she is!”

He waves to her, she stands and waves back, blowing him a kiss. She's wearing a sexy summer dress and, improbably in this heat, she has a white fur draped over her shoulders.

Then Perce corrects himself: “I mean, there they are.” But, clearly, it's all about Roslyn for these men.

As he gets on his horse, Perce says, “Gay, I wouldn't, uh... I wouldn't wanna move in on you. Unless, of course, you wouldn't mind.”

Perce's horse rears up and whinnies just as Gay replies with a smile, "Boy, I'd mind!"
Perce's name is announced and Gay asks if he's ready, which he certainly is.

As soon as Perce leaves the gate, the horse begins to buck fiercely. Before too long, he tumbles to the ground. His hat flies off.

We see him in the dirt, flat on his back. Roslyn screams; even Guido looks concerned. The other spectators stand to get a better look at Perce, but the band keeps playing as if nothing has happened.

Roslyn screams Perce's name and runs toward him. Meanwhile, he staggers to his feet, and the crowd applauds his bravado. A cowboy in clown makeup goes to help Perce off the field. If Perce had died, clowns would have carried him away: a chilling juxtaposition.

The clown puts Perce's hat back on his head and helps him over to the sidelines, where Gay is waiting. Then Roslyn and Guido catch up to them.
"You're bleeding!" she cries and grabs Perce's arm.

A medic arrives and sets Perce down at the side of an ambulance to clean him up. Roslyn asks if there's a doctor.
Gay answers, "Not for sixty miles. He ain't bad hurt."
"How do you know?"

Roslyn insists on taking Perce to a doctor, but Gay pushes her aside, saying, "Now don't start running things, Roslyn."
"I don't understand," Roslyn replies angrily. "He's your friend!"

Perce still has his number pinned to his back and his shirt is ripped. The medic has put a white bandage across his nose.
Kneeling down, Gay squints at him and asks, "You're all right, ain't you, Perce? Perce, you all right?"
In response, Perce asks the most important question on his mind, "Did I make the whistle?"
"Almost, boy," Gay assures him. "You done good, though."
"That old horse, he sure was tough, wasn't he?!"
"Oh, he was a real killer! You done good!"

The bull riding contest is announced and Perce has entered it. He stands to go, but Roslyn begs him not to. "You don't have to go back in there!"
"I'm pretty good ridin' bulls!" he boasts. "I want you to watch me, Roslyn."
She just doesn't understand. "But why are you doing it?"
"I put in for it. I entered," he says with a twinkle in his eyes as he heads for the bullpen.

Roslyn turns frantically to Guido: "Stop him!"
"How can I?" With a laugh, Guido explains, "They don't mind getting busted up."
Running over to the fence, she appeals to Perce once more, but he is determined to ride. Guido joins her at the rail, with his characteristic slumping posture, a frown on his face.

Once again, Perce is thrown to the ground. Roslyn puts her head in her hand. She can't look. This time Perce is out cold. Arms spread out, his body divides the screen into geometric shapes, in a careful composition. Blood drips from his mouth. Perched high on the fence, Gay looks worried.

As the clown runs onto the field, the bull starts to chase him. Perce is still stretched out on the ground. From the sidelines, Gay dashes in and picks up Perce, just as the bull reaches them.

A dissolve brings us back to the car, where Roslyn is alone, sobbing.

Gay walks over to the car with Perce. In addition to the strip across his nose, Perce now has a big white bandage around his head, his cowboy hat perched on top.

Gay gets into the front seat next to Roslyn and says matter-of-factly, as if nothing has happened, "Come on, honey. We're gonna have some drinks."

"Is he unconscious still?" she asks, between sobs.

"Probably, but it ain't noticeable. He's arguing with the judge about who won the bull ride."

She turns to look. Guido and Perce are visible through the open car window, standing next to the judge.

Gay asks, "You still mad at me?"

"I don't understand!" she sobs, her face wet with tears. "People dying, and people just standing around. Don't you care?!"

"I just went in for that boy with a wild bull runnin' loose. What are you talkin' about? I'm lucky to be sittin' here myself! Don't you know that?"

"You did? You did?" She presses his hand to her face and kisses it.

Gay brushes off her praise. "Well, I just thought I could get him out, so I did, that's all."

"But what if he'd died? It would be terrible!"

Gay is philosophical about it. "Honey, we all gotta go sometime. Reason or no reason. Dyin' is as natural as livin'. A man who's too afraid to die is too afraid to live."

Perce comes up to the car and leans in, asking, "Roz? Did you see me?"

"Perce, you were wonderful. Get in the back, though. We're taking you to a hospital."

"Oh, no. We're going out and having some fun."

"How do you feel?" she asks.

"How do I feel?" He stops and considers for a moment. "Like I was kicked by a bull!" The men chuckle.

"He was somethin', though, wasn't he?"

Gay exclaims, "Oh, I want no part of that bull, except on a plate, medium rare. Come on!"

Gay and Roslyn get out of the car and they all go to the bar. It's been a hard day for Roslyn. For Perce, it's just what he does, as Gay understands, without passing judgment. Guido is tagging along, wanting what he can't have and starting to feel angry.