

The Misfits, Part V

John Huston, Director (1961)

At the bar, while country music plays, Perce talks about his day: the bull, the injection the medic gave him, the stars he's seeing right now; he feels funny. His hat is perched awkwardly above the wide white bandage. Calling the barman by name, Perce orders drinks for the group: eight whiskeys . Then he turns to Roslyn, asking, "Hey, was that you crying in the ambulance?" She gazes at him sadly, without answering. So, still looking at Roslyn, he asks Gay, "Was that her, Gay?"

"Sure was."

Rising a little from his seat, Perce extends his hand, saying, "I certainly want to thank you." Roslyn clasps his hand.

Tipsy from the medicine, he gives a back-handed toast, "Oh, now... Here's to my buddy – old, elderly Gay."

"Gay's not old," protests Roslyn.

He continues, undaunted, "And to old, elderly Pilot and his five dollar, elderly airplane." Roslyn smiles now, delighted at the joke, but Guido glowers at him.

He finishes the toast, "And... to my friend Roslyn." He turns to Gay and asks, "Uh, is it all right if we have this dance together?"

"Sure," Gay answers drunkenly. "Roslyn, why don't you dance with Perce?"

"Okay."

Roslyn and Perce go out onto the dance floor.

Guido moves over to sit next to Gay. He scowls at the dancing couple and asks, "Nothin' like being young, is there, Gay?"

"No, that's right... But you know what they say," he adds philosophically. "There's some keeps gettin' younger all the time."

They throw down shots as they talk. Abruptly, Gay leans towards his friend and asks, "What's eatin' you?"

"Just my life." Guido shakes his head.

Out on the dance floor, Perce and Roslyn step along to the lively banjo. Perce bounces up and down stiffly, explaining, "This is the way my father used to do it." Roslyn smiles brightly as she matches his steps.

Guido glares at them, his eyes lit with anger. Why is Perce, who's not even his rival, having such a good time with Roslyn? Meanwhile, Gay, Guido's actual rival, is focused on his drinking and not the least disturbed.

Perce turns around and spins Roslyn under his arm. But then he staggers, puts his hand to his face and stops dancing. When Roslyn asks him if he feels okay, he suggests: "Let's go out and see the world." They head toward the door, arms around each other; Roslyn is pretty much holding him up. As they walk by the table, Roslyn puts her hand on Gay's shoulder to let him know, but he doesn't notice. Guido watches them, though.

Perce rushes outside into a yard littered with trash. He stops and takes a deep breath. "I'd better sit down," he says.

He walks over to the skeleton of an old car, next to a mountain of empty beer cans and liquor bottles, and plops himself onto the ground, setting his hat down in front of him. Roslyn sits next to him, stretching out her legs.

Perce puts his head in her lap, his arm covering his face. "Do you mind?" he asks.

"No," she reassures him.

"Damn that bull!" He laughs.

He looks up at her. "Gay's a pretty great fella, isn't he?"

"Yes," she says and means it.

"You know, I can't figure you, floatin' around out here like this. You belong to Gay?"

"I don't know where I belong."

He sits up with sudden intensity and, leaning in close, asks her, "How come you got such trust in your eyes?"

"I do?"

"Like you was just born. Was you really cryin' for me before?"

"You were hurt. Didn't anyone ever cry for you before?"

"No. No stranger."

"Can I ask you something?" He settles back down. "I mean, I don't have anybody, uh... you know what I mean, that I could talk to."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, see, this is the first year that I've been floatin' around." He gazes wistfully at the stars. "I'm not like Gay and Pilot. I got a pretty good home. I mean, I *had* a good home. One day... my father... we was out back, and boom! Like that, it happened. Down he went. Some damn fool hunters."

"They killed him?"

"Mm-hm. And then my mother changed. She used to be so dignified. She'd walk next to him like a saint. Well, pretty soon this man starts comin' around, and in three months, they got married. But I said to her 'Ma, look. You better get a paper from this Mr. Blackwell because I'm the oldest, and you know Papa wanted me to have this ranch.' So you know what happens? On their wedding night he turns around and offers me wages. On my father's place."

"What did she say?" Roslyn asks, concerned.

"Say? I don't think she heard. It's like she hardly remembers me any more. I don't know. It's hard to explain. It's like she's changed altogether." He stops then, and looks up at Roslyn, with a touch of desperation. "So what I want to know... What I want to know is... who do you depend on? Who?"

"I don't know," she answers quietly. "Maybe all there really is is just the next thing. The next thing that happens. Maybe you're not supposed to remember anybody's promises."

"You could count on mine," he says, looking into her eyes, searching for something that she is not willing to give him. "I trust you, Roslyn. I think I love you."

"Oh, no. You don't know me," she says with a cautioning smile.

Just then Gay comes to the back, looking for Roslyn. Sweat glistens on his face and his neck. He's profoundly drunk.

She looks up from where she's sitting on the ground, Perce's head in her lap. "Here we are," she says.

Sharing the frame with an abandoned mannequin, armless and decapitated, he sees her and smiles with relief. He's found her. And he's not a bit jealous. Maybe he can't trust Perce's promise not to move in on him. But he knows he can trust Roslyn.

"Come on now," he says. "I want you to meet my kids."

"Your kids are here?" She gets up, being careful not to hurt poor, injured Perce.

"Yeah. They came to the rodeo. I ain't seen 'em in a year. Oh, you ought to see the welcome they gave me, Roslyn – nearly knocked me over!"

He takes her by the arm and they go back to the bar. Roslyn turns around for a moment to make sure Perce is okay.

"I'm so glad for you, Gay," she says, as Perce gets up and follows them inside.

At the table, Guido is waiting. Gay looks confused. "Where are they?" he asks, slurring his words. For once, he's lost his composure.

"Where are who?" asks Guido.

"My kids. I told 'em I'd be back in a minute. You heard me tell 'em."

"They went outside."

The four head out the front entrance, Gay hollering his kids' names, with increasing desperation, "Gaylord! Gaylord! Rosemary! Gaylord!" Roslyn holds his arm. From her expression, it's evident that she believes the kids are there somewhere.

Gay stumbles over to a telephone pole and grabs onto it.

Guido yells, "Gaylord! Here's your father!"

Gay is distraught. He wanted his kids to meet Roslyn. That would show he's making something of himself.

He shouts with drunken abandon: "Gaylord! I know you hear me! Where you gone to? I told you I'd be right back! You come here now!"

Roslyn watches him anxiously.

Using the pole for balance, Gay steps up onto a car to get a better look. A woman in a cowboy hat and shirt tries to reassure him. "Don't worry, mister. You'll probably find 'em at home."

But Gay ignores her and continues to yell at the top of his lungs, "Gaylord! You come here now! I know you hear me!"

He drops onto the car and starts banging it with his hands. "Rosemary! I know you hear me! You come here now!" Behind him, Perce and Roslyn watch him, helpless. Roslyn's face is a mask of pain.

Losing his balance, Gay tumbles off the car onto the ground. Roslyn screams and runs to him. Guido simply leans on the car and looks down drunkenly at him.

Roslyn kneels down on the ground and embraces him, saying, "Oh, Gay! They'll be looking for you, I'm sure! They probably thought you left!" She cradles his head. "Oh, poor Gay! Poor Gay!" As she tries to comfort him, it's not clear if she believes what she is saying anymore.

In the rented station wagon, Gay is sprawled way in the back, passed out. Perce, also unconscious, has his head on Roslyn's lap in the back seat. Dooley the dog sits in front with Guido, who is at the wheel.

Roslyn warns him, "Aren't you going too fast? Please, huh?"

Looking back at her, not watching the road, Guido says, "Don't worry, kid. I never kill anybody I know."

She explains, "A fella smashed up my best girlfriend. She was beautiful, with black hair—" Suddenly the car swerves.

"Please, Guido!"

Then Guido starts to spill out all the hurt and rage that have been building up in him since the war. "We're all blind bombardiers, Roslyn. We kill people we never even saw. I bombed nine cities. I sure must've broken a lot of dishes, but I never saw them. Think of all the puppy dogs and mail carriers and eyeglasses that must've gone up." Through the rear window, we see the curving white line that divides the road. "Boy, you know, droppin' a bomb is like tellin' a lie. Makes everything soooo quiet.... Pretty soon you don't hear anything, you don't see anything. Not even your wife."

Again he turns to look at her, saying, "Now the difference is that I see *you*. You're the first one I ever really saw."

"Please, Guido, don't kill us!" She points desperately to the speedometer. A close up shows us the speed: 90 miles per hour.

He ignores her and goes on. "How do you get to know somebody, kid? Help me. I never said 'help me' in my life..." In the shot, his face reflects disillusionment. He's given up.

The car stops in the driveway and Guido steps out; the dog runs into the yard. Guido gazes at the dog and then back into the car. Roslyn and Perce are sleeping -- peacefully, it seems, but who knows what their dreams are? Guido leans in and peers in at Gay, passed out in the back.

Next, Guido surveys the unfinished skeleton of his house, which his friend shares with a beautiful woman, while he remains alone.

Suddenly determined, he staggers up to the house. Grabbing a plank, he props it against the frame and starts to nail it in place. The hammer is loud in the stillness of the night.

The hammering wakes Gay and he and Roslyn get out of the car. Roslyn goes to Guido and says, anguished, imploring, "Guido, I'm so sorry. I'm sorry. Won't you hurt your hand? It's so dark. Guido, look how dark it is. It's all dark." But he just keeps hammering at the house he never finished.

Gay arrives, still drunk, hatless, and pushes Guido aside. Slurring his words, he complains, "Hey! Hey! What in the hell are you stompin' the flowers for? You busted all the damn heliotropes! Look at that. Look at that now. Why the hell are you doing that?"

Roslyn tries to calm him down. "He's just trying to fix the house, Gay."

"What call has he got to fix the house?"

At last, Perce gets out of the car. He turns around and around, unwinding the bandage from his head. Roslyn struggles to stop him.

Drunk, raucous and laughing, the three men head into the house for bed.

“What is this place?” Perce asks as they stumble in. “Where are we?”

“It’s just my house. Or it’s Guido’s. Well, it’s a house, anyway,” answers Roslyn, as she follows them in. At the doorway, Gay hesitates, then turns and goes back outside. He sets himself down heavily on the unfinished porch. Drunk though he is, he seems deep in thought.

In the house, Perce is sprawled on the couch on his stomach, feet dangling off the end, still wearing his cowboy boots. Roslyn covers him with a striped blanket.

Half asleep, he protests, “No. No, Ma, Ma, don’t, don’t.” She presses down on his back gently as one would an infant, and he instantly quiets.

Then she stands and in the half-light we see the photograph of Guido and his bride displayed nearby. Roslyn glances over at Guido, who is sound asleep in a chair, his head dangling onto his shoulder.

With a small sigh of relief, Roslyn heads outside to find Gay, who’s still sitting on the porch. She whispers, “Gay? Come on, Gay.”

He starts rambling about his failures as a parent. “I wish you’d met Gaylord and Rosemary. If I had a new kid I’d know just how to be with him. Just how to do... Oh, I didn’t do right by those kids. I didn’t know nothin’.”

She goes to him, sits down and puts her arms around him. “No. I’m sure they love you, Gay.”

He turns to face her and asks, “Would you ever want a kid... with me?”

She turns away and says, “Let me turn off the light in the car. You get some sleep.”

She gets up and he stands too, challenging her. “I don’t wanna sleep. I asked you a question. Did I ask you to turn the lights out in the car? What are you runnin’ away from all the time? I wouldn’t wash the windows for my wife, even. Painted the fireplace, planted them damn heliotropes... Where are you at? I don’t know where you’re at.”

She grasps his arms and moves her face right up to his. “Gay, I’m with you. I’m here with you.” She pulls back a little and asks, “What if someday suddenly you turn around and you don’t like me anymore? Like before, when Perce got hurt, you started to give me a look. I know that look, and it scares me, Gay.”

“Honey, honey! I got a little mad, that’s all,” he reassures her. “That don’t mean I didn’t like you.” She throws herself into his arms. “Oh, Gay! Love me, love me!”

He holds her close for a moment, then she pulls back and smiles. “We made up now. Okay?”

“Yeah, okay, okay.”

“Let’s get some sleep,” she suggests.

They head toward the house.

Still slurring his words, Gay starts planning for their future. “Yeah, we’ll make out. I’ll farm. Run some cattle maybe. I’m a pretty good man, Roslyn. Best man you’ll ever see. I’ll show you tomorrow, up in the mountains. Not many can keep up with old Gay. You wait and see.” He goes into the house, but Roslyn pauses in the doorway.

She turns and leans against the house, shadows dappling her face. She gazes out at the yard, the vast expanse of flat land, the mountains at the horizon. Finally she looks up to the skies. “Help!” she whispers.