

The Misfits, Part VI

John Huston, Director (1961)

A dissolve to the next morning. Gay's truck is roaring down the road. Trailing a cloud of dust, it seems an intruder in the tranquil landscape.

Inside the truck, Gay and Perce are jammed in front with Roslyn, who holds Dooley in her lap. "Why is the dog shivering?" she asks. Gay glances down at the dog, "He'll do that up here." At the sudden roar of an airplane, the three look up.

Maybe showing off, or maybe just saying hello, Guido swoops his plane down low in front of the truck, making a shadow of itself in the road. Then he soars off again out of sight to look for the mustangs.

Later at the camp after dinner, the group is sitting in the twilight talking. It's a beautiful composition, sketched in the milky light: the black mass of the mountains at the top of the frame; in the center, horizontals defined by the plane and truck; and, in the foreground, a wide arc of almost bare trees, within which the figures sit. Dressed in white, Gay kneels at the right; Perce leans back against a tree, holding a tin cup of coffee. Roslyn sits at the left, a jacket thrown over her shoulders against the chill of the evening.

Pointing his index finger straight up, Guido says, "That star... That star is so far away that by the time the light from it reaches us here on Earth, it might not even be up there any more." The others lean their heads back to look.

Perce is impressed. "Boy, you sure know a lot, don't you, Pilot?"

Guido answers matter-of-factly: "Astronomy is in all the library books, Perce. Nothin' to it but readin'."

As he likes to do, Gay observes, and says nothing. He pats Dooley, who yawns extravagantly. "Still, it's wonderful to know things," Roslyn smiles.

"Knowin' things don't matter much," replies Guido. "*You* got somethin' a lot more important." "What?"

Gay watches, the dog at his side, surrounded by brush and mountains.

"You care. Whatever happens to anybody, it happens to you." He looks up and waves his hand out at the universe. "You're really hooked into the whole thing, Roslyn. It's a blessing."

"People say I'm just nervous."

"If it weren't for the nervous people in the world, we'd all still be eating each other."

Gay has heard enough. Yawning, he stands and stretches, framed against the vast sky. "I don't know about you educated people, but us ignorant folk gotta hit the sack."

Roslyn starts collecting the dinner dishes. She stops and stands over Dooley, looking down at him. Concerned, she asks Gay, "Why is the dog trembling?"

"Got a whiff of those horses, I guess." Gay turns to the pilot, remarking, "They must be close by, Guido."

Roslyn kneels down to calm the dog. "Baby... Baby..." Next to her, the delicate shadow of a tree fills the frame.

But Dooley snaps at her with a sharp bark. With a little scream of surprise, Roslyn drops the dishes she's been holding.

Gay doesn't hesitate for a second to protect Roslyn. He throws his hat at the dog and scolds him, "Keep quiet, you fool!"

Roslyn defends the dog. "Oh, don't, Gay. He couldn't help it... Have the horses ever kicked him before?"

Looking up at them from the ground, squinting, Guido says, "It's not the horses he's afraid of. It's us."

"What are you talkin' about?" Gay retorts. "I never mistreated that dog, and you know it."

"It's only common sense, Gay. He knows there's wild animals up there. Dogs were wild too, once. He's just remembering when. He's been up here enough times to know what's gonna happen. He's just scared he's gonna end up dead too."

In another carefully designed composition, the couple gazes down at Guido: Gay scowling, his eyes in shadow; Roslyn in the foreground, with a troubled look.

Roslyn slowly sinks to the ground, saying nothing. Gay changes the subject, perhaps because he recalls the exchange about the lettuce and the rabbit. He picks up a blanket and sets it up for her on the ground. "Come on, honey. Keep yourself nice and warm here by the fire."

She ignores that. Eyes lowered, not looking at Gay, she asks, "You kill them?"

Gay thinks for a moment, then kneels down. As Perce looks on, he explains, "No, no. We, uh... sell 'em to the dealer."

Still looking down, as if talking to the ground, she persists, "He kills them?"

Gay continues, "Well, they're chicken-feed horses. You know, turn 'em into dog food. Like you buy in the store for the dog and the cat... Well, I thought you knew that. Everybody knows that."

Roslyn keeps her head down, breathing heavily, thinking.

Gay stands up finally and suggests, "Maybe you better sleep on the truck, in case something comes crawlin' around." Roslyn gets up and strides wordlessly to the truck. Gay picks up her sleeping bag and shoots an angry look at Guido, who has stirred up this mess.

He walks over to the truck where Roslyn is standing, her back to him, and starts to set up the sleeping bag for her. With great care, he spreads it, smooths it out, and folds down the opening.

“Get some sleep now, come on,” he tells her. She ignores him, she stays immobile. He grasps her arms. “Honey...” She breaks away wordlessly and climbs onto the flatbed of the truck.

Then she slides into the sleeping bag and takes off her jacket, folding it to form a pillow, which she puts under her head. Then she lies down, her back to Gay.

He tries to explain, “Honey, I just round 'em up and sell 'em to the dealer. Always have.” She turns over and looks at him. “There's no need to look at me that way. You're lookin' at me like I was a stranger.” She turns away again.

He embraces her from behind, desperate for her to understand. “Honey!”

She says, with difficulty, “I thought they were used for riding, or for...”

Thinking back over his time with these horses, Gay replies, “Well, sure, they used to be. Well, like Christmas presents for kids, 'cause they're small horses, you see? But kids ride motor scooters now... They're real strong horses, though, little as they are. They used to breed 'em for stamina. Why, mustang blood pulled all the plows in the West. They couldn't have settled here unless somebody caught mustang for 'em.”

“Somehow it all got changed around,” he says, frowning. “I'm doin' the same thing I always did. It's just that they changed it around.”

“But you know what you're doing isn't right, don't you?”

“If I didn't do it, somebody else would!”

“I don't care about the others.”

He tries to reason with her. “You've bought food for my dog. What did you think was in it?”

She covers her ears with her hands. “I don't wanna hear it!”

“Nothin' can live unless somethin' dies.”

“Oh, stop!” She hides her face in her arm.

He bends down close to her. “Roslyn, we never kidded, you and I. Now, I'm telling you, I don't want to lose you. But you gotta help me a little bit, though, 'cause I can't put on that this is all as bad as you make it. All I know is everything else is wages. I hunt these horses to keep myself free. So I'm a free man. That's why you liked me, isn't it?”

She looks up, but not at him. She stares desolately into the distance. “I liked you because you were kind.”

“I haven't changed,” he points out.

“Yes. This changes it.”

“Honey, a kind man can kill.”

“No. He can't.”

“Well, if it's bad, maybe you have to take a little of the bad with the good, else you'll be runnin' for the rest of your life.”

Unforgiving, she says, “What is there to stop for? You're just like everybody else.”

“Yeah, sure. Maybe we're all alike – includin' you. We start out doin' somethin', meanin' no harm, somethin' that's naturally in us to do. But somewhere along the line it gets changed around into somethin' bad. Like dancin' in a nightclub. You started out just wantin' to dance, didn't ya? But little by little it turns out that people ain't interested in how good you danced. They're gawkin' at you with somethin' entirely different in their minds. And they turn it sour, don't they?”

He goes on, “I could have looked down my nose at you too. Showin' yourself off in a nightclub for so much a night. But I took my hat off to you, 'cause I know the difference. This...” he says, gesturing at the expanse around them. “This is how I dance, Roslyn. And if they make somethin' else out of it, well, I can't run the world, any more than you could.”

She turns over to face him. “You took your hat off to me?”

He looks at her for a brief moment, then falls into her arms and they kiss passionately.

“You mean that, don't you, Gay?”

He kisses her again, says good night and tucks her in.

With Dooley at his side, Gay walks over to the other men. He sits on the ground with his dog.

“Shame on you, you old fool,” he says, giving Dooley a pat.

Guido gets up, a blanket draped over his shoulders, and approaches Gay. “I can fly her back in the morning, if you want me to. I was wonderin' how she agreed to come out here.”

Gay says nothing.

Perce chimes in, thoughtfully, “She's got a lot of right, when you think about it. It don't make too much sense for fifteen horses.”

Gay is annoyed by these two men, who are both in love with his woman. “Don't worry yourselves about her. She's comin' along fine.” Dooley gives a little whimper, and Gay scolds him, with a look of mock outrage: “You be quiet now. *Everybody's* showin' off.”