

## A Girl in Black, Part IV

Michael Cacoyannis, Dir. (1956)

Marina trudges home, wicker basket in hand. It's around dusk and the setting sun casts a distorted shadow of her figure. The shadow looks hunched, and seems to reflect her desire to disappear. Someone greets her, "Good evening, Marina." She stops and, looking at the ground, answers, "Good evening."

By the time Marina arrives home, it's dark. She slowly climbs the stone stairs to the front door. The camera pans up to the window of the travellers' rooms. We hear their conversation. "Hurry up! I'm going..." says Antoni.

Once she has entered the building, Marina lets down her calm facade. She collapses against the wall with a sob. She eases herself down to the floor and sits, in tears.

At that moment, Antoni comes skipping down the stairs. He stops at the sight of Marina, then rushes down to her. "What is it?" he asks.

Marina stands up and he leans against the wall next to her, but doesn't touch her. "What happened?" "I hate them! I hate them!"

"Who?"

"All of them!"

She can't stop crying. "Please... don't..." says Antoni, comforting her.

"I want to go away," she sobs desperately.

He takes her chin in his hand and says with a smile, "Come on now... A brave girl like you! Eh?"

Pavlos appears, asking "What's wrong?" Antoni looks up at him, meets his gaze, and gestures helplessly. Pavlos looks over Antoni's shoulder at the distraught young woman.

"Marina," says Antoni. "Want to join us for a stroll? You'll feel better."

Pavlos tells him, "Wait for me at the taverna. She'll be all right."

Antoni starts to leave, but turns back at the door, telling Pavlos, with a touch of concern, "Don't be long."

Marina sits by Pavlos' big bed, her hands folded and her gaze cast downward, as it so often is.

The camera moves to Pavlos, who peeks out from behind the door. "Ready?"

She nods at him, almost imperceptibly.

He bursts out from behind the door, making comical vocalizations to the tune of a popular song of the time – "In the National Garden One Day" – and doing a crazy dance. He doesn't sing the words, but Marina surely knows them and here they are:

*In the National Garden one day I was strolling  
When I came across a blonde-haired young woman  
Her way of walking was charming  
Her stature was like a cypress tree  
She was holding an umbrella and a little satin purse  
And she had a small white dog*

Marina watches with sorrowful eyes.

Switching to a more dramatic song, he improvises a dance with a vase and he sings to the same tune: "Careful not to smash you, not to shatter you," then he replaces the vase and dances with his sweater. Marina watches without cracking a smile, as his dance gets faster and wilder.

Bounding over to her, he declares – using the familiar *tu* for the first time – "I'll make you laugh if it kills me." Then he lets out an operatic shriek, posing with the sweater. He retreats to the shuttered window. "I beseech you, I implore you –" he spreads his arms wide over his head "– laugh! At least smile!"

He kneels on the floor in front of her and pulls out his ears. He arches his eyebrows and puckers his lips, staring demonically, and finally – sweating a little from all this effort – he covers his mouth and nose with a doily he'd plucked from the top of the vase.

She tries to resist but it's no use: at last she laughs, covering her mouth modestly with her hand.

Then she gets up and walks over to the bedpost, leaning her face against it. Standing close by, he watches happily as she laughs. She looks radiant. "At last! You should laugh more often," he says kindly.

"You're more beautiful when you laugh," he goes on. She looks up now, worried. "Don't you want to be beautiful?" The light has drained from her face.

"No."

"Why not?" Moving closer, he gives her a long slow kiss on the cheek. She looks stricken. He leans in to kiss her on the lips, but she draws back.

She walks away and turns her back to him. Putting his hand on her shoulder, he asks, "Are you angry?" When she shakes her head, he gently pulls her around in front of him.

She looks into his eyes, approaching and pulling away at the same time.

He observes, "You're trembling. Why?" She doesn't answer. "I want to kiss you again," he says. Then he does kiss her, passionately, and she accepts – but just momentarily.

Pulling back, she says, "Don't!" Insisting on keeping her distance, she uses the formal *lei*. She falls to the floor in his arms.

"What is it?" he asks. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing. It's nothing."

She stands up, saying simply, "I'm fine now."

"You scared me."

"I must go."

At the door, she turns back, imploring him. "Don't tell anyone, please!"

Christos and his gang are seated at a table outside the taverna, singing boisterously the same song that we heard earlier in the film, with slightly different lyrics:

*A little fishing boat sets off from the seashore*

*From the seashore.*

*A little fishing boat sets off*

*From the small town of Hydra*

*And goes for sponges*

*For shore to shore.*

One of them is playing guitar. Then Panagos shows up with another guitar and takes a seat, strumming along with the group.

Something catches their eye and, still singing, they all turn to look. It's Mitso, walking by the table where Pavlos and Antoni are seated. The checked tablecloth is littered with the remains of their dinner and Pavlos, pouring himself some wine, doesn't notice Mitso. But Antoni does.

As the camera zooms in, Antoni asks his friend, "What's wrong?"

"Nothing." Pavlos shrugs and takes a drink of wine.

"I don't believe you. I can read you like a book." Pavlos doesn't respond. "Be careful, that's all."

"Of what?"

"Don't make her fall for you. It's not fair." Antoni gives him a somber look.

"Who says I won't fall for her?"

"Try and be serious. She's unhappy enough already. Why hurt her?"

"I hate being preached at!"

"You know I'm right."

"If I always did what was right, I'd have killed myself a long time ago."

At the other table, the singing continues.

*Health and joy for you, brave men, and take care,*

*And take care.*

*Health and joy for you, brave men,*

*bring us sponges,*

*Black coral and pearls,*

*From the beaches, all the beaches.*

Seeing Misto has given Christos an idea. He stands and walks over to the Athenians. His friends turn to watch, without interrupting their song.

“The boys invite you to come serenading with us tonight.”

Pavlos lights a cigarette, ignoring Christos. Antoni answers for both of them, “Thanks. We don’t have the voices for it.”

Christos puts his foot up on a chair and props his arms on the table, looming over the men. “We may go sailing later.”

“Some other time. Thanks,” Antoni answers politely, rebuffing him again. Pavlos looks elsewhere, ignoring him.

“The boys won’t like it if the Markantonis family has made you think poorly of them.”

Now he’s got Pavlos’ attention. “Meaning?”

“Poking a little fun at a girl is no reason for you to take offense.”

Pavlos looks Christos straight in the eye. “If you’re out for a fight, say so.”

Christos laughs. “What’s his problem?” he asks Antoni.

Pavlos insists, “We said ‘thank you, no singing.’ Must we apologize on top of everything?”

Christos stands up. “Now who’s itching for a fight?”

During this exchange, Antoni has been looking back and forth as if he’s at a tennis match. Now he tries to make peace. “Don’t mind him. He gets a little edgy sometimes,” he explains to Christos. “Anyway, thank you for inviting us. And goodnight.” He offers his hand.

Christos looks angrily at Pavlos. He considers for a moment, but finally takes Antoni’s hand, saying “Goodnight.”

Then he stands back with a menacing grin. His shoulders are spread, revealing his chest. “Sweet dreams!” He laughs and walks back to his table.

“You’re crazy!” Antoni mutters. “Who needs trouble?”

“Scared you, huh?”

“You knew I’d work it out, so you had to show off!”

“All of a sudden, I feel great!” Pavlos calls the waiter and orders a cognac.

“You’ve drunk enough!”

“So what?” Pavlos retorts. “We can’t all be perfect. You only live once. Let yourself go! Live a little!

Break a few rules before it’s too late!”

“You’re drunk or in love!”

“What if I am? I’ll enjoy it while it lasts. Ten, fifteen days...”

“To hell with the rest! Right, Manolaki?” he asks, grinning at the waiter who’s brought his drink and calling him by name. The waiter says nothing and smiles noncommittally before he leaves.

Pavlos toasts, “To her health.” He downs the cognac in one gulp and throws the glass back over his shoulder. What would normally be a gesture of celebration seems, for Pavlos, to be a calculated act of defiance.