

A Girl in Black, Part VIII

Michael Cacoyannis, Dir. (1956)

It's dusk. The villagers have gathered outside the coffee house. The camera looks up at the balcony of the hotel, where we saw Pavlos earlier. Now, through the open shutters, we see a uniformed police officer guarding him. Next, again from below, we see Marina, a dark silhouette against the white wall of the chapel, still looking out to sea in hopes of seeing him.

Finally Marina gives up. Head down, she begins walking back to the village. We see her silhouette passing the rocky mountainside and looking out to sea one last time for Pavlos. She encounters the priest, who passes by without acknowledging her. Then, once again, she is a lone figure in the growing darkness.

Still in silhouette, we see Marina approaching from the back of the shot, descending the stairs toward the crowd of grieving villagers. From inside the building, we hear a woman singing. It's a traditional song of immigration, but also a lament: "Immigrant Bird."

*What can I send you, my child, in the Underworld?
If I send you apples, they'll decay
A quince will wither...*

A woman steps outside and calls desperately, "Alik! Alik! Where are you?"

As Marina reaches the others, the little girl appears and the mother crouches down to scold her: "I told you to stay close!"

Walking on, Marina comes upon her mother in front of Pavlos' hotel. Froso clasps Marina's shoulder and asks, "Where were you? I was worried."

They look up toward the balcony. "The police are with him," Froso explains. "They say he'll be tried for negligence."

Marina frowns; something doesn't sound right. She thinks for a moment.

"Whose boat was it?" she asks.

"Christos'."

The camera looks again toward Pavlos' room, where a police officer is closing the shutters.

For the first time, we see Marina with a determined expression. She's made a decision.

She starts to walk away from Froso, who asks, arms extended, her face a point of light in the dusk,

"Where are you going?"

But Marina walks on, without replying.

Christos and his men sit in a garden, among trees. We hear a woman wailing, "Soula!" It's Soula's mother, in black mourning clothes, who walks out of the house and comes into view. The priest stands to comfort her.

The house is crowded with neighbors, come to console the family – and each other.

Marina approaches the yard, peering in through the open gate. The men sit together in their white shirts in the darkness. Ari alerts the others to Marina's presence. They turn and stare at her. She stands composed and decisive beside the tall iron gate.

A close-up shows us her expression: we see strength, self-possession, anger.

"I want to speak to Christos," she says.

Christos is sitting, his back to her, head hung low.

He doesn't respond; no one speaks. With a mocking smile, she nods ever so slightly. "One of the others will do," she says. Still: no response. Then she says scornfully, "I thought I was dealing with men!" Slowly, Christos gets to his feet, while his gang looks on. In the background, we hear the whimpering of the women in mourning.

With a weary expression, Christos walks wordlessly toward Marina. Her eyes are locked on his face. When she turns and begins walking, he follows her out.

They've walked out and passed the tall fence covered with plant growth. Panagos starts to go after them, but Ari restrains him.

At last, Marina stops and turns to him. "What happened?"

"I don't know."

"Boats don't sink on their own. What happened?!" she insists. We see their shadows on the wall behind them. "Nothing."

"A man may go to prison." She asks again, a fierce edge to her voice: "What happened?"

Silent, he looks guiltily from side to side as if hoping to escape.

She asks, "When you rented him the boat, did you know he'd take the children?"

He turns to her abruptly. "No! Soula was with them!"

"You didn't know," she accuses him. "So you pulled out the cork."

"No!"

"Yes!"

"No!"

She doesn't believe him: "Swear it! On Soula's soul!"

Gaze downcast, he walks away from her. Horrified, she knows at last that she is right.

"You did do it, so you could laugh, as you've been laughing for years at my mother, at Mitso, at me... at Niki." She seems to become stronger with each word. "Now it's backfired on you and you don't dare to speak up."

"But if you don't speak up, I will! I'll go down to the port. I'll shout so everyone will hear. You destroyed lives for a laugh, but I won't let you destroy his."

"You love him or you wouldn't do this."

"Yes, I love him! And I don't care who knows! I love him and I want him to leave with an easy mind."

Her mouth open, her eyes closed, Marina seems lifted up on a wave of feeling.

“And you?”

“I’ll stay,” she says sadly, resigned. “Without fear, without shame. There’s no shame in love. Shame is lying and being afraid!”

“The police are at the hotel,” she goes on. “We’ll go together, and you’ll tell them.” She’s taken charge of the situation. “Because if you don’t, I will.”

He closes his eyes, resigned to confessing. Then he starts off and she follows.

Pavlos’ hotel; some time has passed. In the darkness, light shines through the slats of the shutters. Christos appears at the front door; he’s going out. What has happened?

Oh! There’s a police officer with him. He’s under arrest: for murder.

They walk by Marina, who has been waiting outside with Froso.

Marina starts for the hotel, but Froso grasps her arm and asks in disbelief, “Where are you going?”
“Upstairs.”

“No, Marina. What will people say?”

Wordlessly, Marina removes her mother’s hand and goes inside.

In his room, Pavlos is collapsed on his bed. With his big bulk in it, it seems almost to be a child’s bed. There’s a low knock at the door. The knock again; no answer. Marina enters quietly, closing the door behind her.

“Good evening,” she says softly.

She walks to the foot of the bed. “I had to see you... They’ve taken him for questioning.”

He turns over with a loud moan.

She rushes to his side. “I know how you feel, but it’s not your fault... I want to help you, but I don’t know how.” Kneeling at his side, she touches his hair lightly. He stares blankly up at the ceiling.

“Pavlos, look at me! I swear it’s not your fault. You mustn’t suffer like this. Please!”

He turns over suddenly, and curls into himself. “The children! I keep seeing them!”

She embraces him.

“Listen to me, “ she says. “There’s a yacht leaving for Poros. Take it and go on from there.”

“No.”

“Why not?” She strokes his hair, to comfort him.

“I can’t leave now.”

“You must.”

“What does it matter?”

She has a practical answer: “Staying will only make it worse for us both. I can’t bear to see you suffer.”

“Why did I take them with me?” he cries in anguish.

She holds him more tightly. “Oh, god. You didn’t know. Pavlos, if one of us is to blame, it’s me.”

“No!”

“I got you involved with these people without meaning to, because I was afraid of them.”

“You’re very sweet.” He caresses her hair and neck.

“Promise you’ll go.”

“No, not tonight.”

“Tomorrow, then. For my sake... please. If you love me.” He looks up at her, staring out from the center of the frame.

“And you?” he asks. “How can I leave you?” In very tight close ups, we see how tightly bonded they are.

“I told you,” she replies, a tear running down her cheek. “I don’t mind now. I’m strong.” She smiles.

“Thanks to you.” She rests her head on his.

“I’ll be back,” he says. “I’ll write and I’ll be back.”

“Once you’re in Athens,” she begins, tears streaming down her face. “If you still want to...”

“I’ll be back. I need you... Marina, tell me you still love me!”

With her eyes closed, she reassures him, “I love you.”

A dissolve brings us from the hotel room to a funeral procession. As they climb the hill, in silhouette against the cloudy sky, the mourners cross the curve of an old stone wall. Behind the priest, dressed all in black, we see the coffins, each so light it can be carried by a single man. The women in their mourning clothes are the last ones in the group.

The ringing of the church bell fills the silence.

In a long shot, we see the mourners follow the winding pathway up the mountain, seeming small and insignificant in the rugged landscape, under the vast sky.

In an overhead shot, we see that the long procession is led by children carrying flowers. We hear the sound of women crying.

As the mourners pass between graves, each marked with a simple cross, the camera pauses to take in the view: a few trees, the tranquil sea, the dark shore beyond. In the foreground, a woman sits quietly and watches.

Heavy stone columns mark the entrance to the cemetery. The women in black enter, weeping.

The children carrying flowers lead the way along an avenue of cypresses. The girls wear white summer dresses.

The procession comes to a halt beside freshly dug graves. As the pallbearers lift the small coffins to lay them in the ground, a collective wail rises up.

Once the coffins are in place, the people file by. Each tosses a handful of earth into the graves.

We see Froso perform this simple rite, and then cross herself. Marina follows close behind, a black scarf over her head. As she stretches out her arm to drop the handful of earth, she hears the ship’s horn blasting in the distance. She pauses, standing motionless as several people pass by behind her. Finally she crosses herself and lets go of what she is holding.

To the sound of a slow guitar arpeggio, the mourners leave the cemetery, making their way back down the mountain. Marina walks alone.

She steps off the path and gazes down towards the port. She sees the boat sailing away. With a half-smile, she unties her scarf.

In the port, figures in black walk by the calm water, where anchored boats rest. The camera pulls slowly back, revealing a window frame, and, at the sound of a ringing phone, Pavlos appears in the edge of the shot.

He's still there! Holding the phone, he yells, "Hello! Is that you, Antoni? About that job: can you arrange it?"

Women with white scarves on their heads walk arm in arm past the barrels at the water's edge. Behind them, we see Marina. She stands pensively looking over the water, out to sea.

With a spring in his step, Pavlos goes down a long staircase, out of the shadow, and into the street.

He stops. The breeze gently moves his shirt. He sees Marina in her black dress, staring out at the water.

From above, accompanied by an arpeggio on the guitar, we see him walk calmly and with assurance through this elegant composition toward the woman he loves.