

A Girl in Black, Part VIII

Michael Cacoyannis, Dir. (1956)

The men run to the dock to put Christos' plan into action. Though Ari has said that he wants no part of this, he tags along, barefoot, hands clasped behind his back. Christos instructs one of the guys on what to do to his rowboat. Then he leaves with the others so as not to arouse Pavlos' suspicions.

Pavlos leaves the hotel, on his way to the boat. He stops and adjusts his pant cuff, standing on one leg, and we notice that he's wearing sandals.

At the dock, Christos' accomplice removes some pieces of wood from the bottom of the boat and reaches down for the cork. To remove it is a simple task. Then he carefully replaces the wood, hiding what he has done.

When Pavlos arrives at the dock, Christos' friend helps him aboard the rowboat. Ari is still there, leaning on a barrel. He's been opposed to the plan, but he does nothing to stop it, either. Once Pavlos is in the boat, the two men leave him to his destiny.

Preparing himself for the journey, Pavlos rubs his hands together and then takes the oars. Looking behind him, he starts out to sea.

The camera cuts away to show Christos' accomplice running to report that the plan is in motion.

We hear the clunking of the oars hitting the sides of the boat and the splashing of the water as the oars move through it. It seems arduous work. Suddenly, children's voices call out: "Mr. Pavlos! Take us to Kaminia with you!" Looking over his shoulder, he sees a group of kids on the shore, waving to him. They jump up and down with excitement, the clear sky behind them.

"Okay!" he says. "We'll go for a little ride on the open seas and then I'll leave you around the other side of the bay."

The children are so happy! They come running up the pier toward Pavlos, cheering.

In all, there are ten. The girls wear summer dresses. The oldest has her hair in braids. We've seen her before: she spoke up to save Pavlos when he was surrounded in the water by Christos and his partners in crime.

"Be careful!" she says and jumps down into the boat, holding one of the younger children in her arms. One by one, Pavlos lifts the others carefully and puts them into the boat.

"We won't be long. Just a short ride and back," he tells the children. The sea shimmers as they pull away from the dock. Now that the boat is crowded with little bodies, Pavlos has to pull harder on the oars to make headway.

In high, thin voices, the children start to sing:

*There was a frigate
named Seagull.
Tie a bowline...*

*On its first sail,
everything was fine.*

As they go farther out to sea, the sound of the song recedes with them. These lines are from a popular children's song, "Frigate" by Dimos Moutsis & Lefteris Papadopoulos. Any Greek audience would have known the rest of the lyrics, not heard in the film. They go like this:

*Tie a bowline...
On its second sail,
the ropes were cut.
Tie a bowline...
On its third sail,
the sails were ripped.
Tie a bowline...
On its fourth sail,
it sank in the deep.
Tie a bowline...*

Christos is hanging out by the water at Kanoni with a few of his pals, waiting for the culmination of their plot. It should be a laugh; nothing too serious. After all, they know that Pavlos is a strong swimmer.

The scene is artfully composed: Christos in front and three men in relaxed poses distributed across the back of the shot. Strong vertical and horizontal lines divide the image into quadrants, and distinctive elements – the backs of the slatted chairs, the harp-shaped branches of the tree – add visual interest. The breeze stirs the men's white shirts. Otherwise, everything is still, except for Panagos' swinging arms.

The men are looking out to sea. "No sign of him," one says.

Christos looks concerned. He turns to Panagos: "I don't understand."
"Where can he have gone?" Panagos asks. "The boat must be full of water by now."
"Come on!" says Christos urgently and takes off. The men follow.

We see a closeup of Pavlos' foot with the sandal, in a foam of swirling seawater. "All together, children!" he yells. The girls sit and cry hysterically. The girl with braids is holding a terrified little boy. "Don't be scared!" Pavlos says. The older boys are trying desperately to empty the water out of the boat with their bare hands.

Breathlessly, Pavlos starts to sing, so as to comfort the children. Once again, it's the song about the frigate named Seagull. He interrupts himself to urge, "Don't cry, my boy!" Then he resumes the song, with a desperate edge to his voice.

When the boat is completely full of water, Pavlos yells, "Jump!" In the water, he's supporting two of the smallest children. "Help! Help!" he yells. On their own, the others flail desperately, trying to stay afloat.

One of the girls disappears under the water.

As the rowboat sinks, one girl is still clinging to it. Pavlos yells, “Soula! Jump! Jump!” With a little boy in one arm, he tries to swim to the boat using the other. But Soula, in her pretty white dress, a ribbon in her hair, is too scared to jump.

The camera pulls away to show us the vastness of the sea, the indifferent waves.

At full speed, Christos and his men reach their boats, meaning to rescue Pavlos.

A voice calls out, “Run! Our children are drowning!” They leap into the boats and shove off.

A rapid pan from the boats shows us the deserted street next to the dock, where a woman staggers, wailing, “Help! The children...!” Others soon follow.

The priest, in black robes and a tall hat, runs to the tower and rings the church bell, as the woman continues to scream for help. We see the clock in the tower: it’s five thirty. Pavlos left with the boat at four o’clock, to meet Marina at five. The bell clangs and clangs.

Women wearing black rush down stone stairs between the whitewashed buildings. Amid so much panic, it’s a gorgeous image of stark contrasts and sharp angles.

From high above, we see the stairway wind between the tiled roofs and the tall white walls: the villagers seem tiny figures as they rush toward the harbor.

In the village, everywhere, people are running, summoned by the ringing of the bell.

The villagers watch from the shore as Christos and his men row out. Small ripples in the water mark the struggles of children from the sunken boat.

Pavlos is floating in the water, still alive. “Help the children!” he says. He can barely get the words out. Diving into the water, the men find what children they can and pass them up to the rowboats.

The girl with braids is saved. Holding onto the side of a boat, she calls out, sobbing, “Soula! Soula! Where’s my sister?”

Hearing her, one of the swimmers dives down to search for her under the water.

Pavlos lies on the boat, half dead. “The children...,” he murmurs. “Save the children...”

At last, the searchers despair of finding anyone else, and the boats head back to harbor.

Onshore, we see the troubled faces of the women as they wait. They cling to each other and to their children, all eyes on the sea.

The boats are approaching, on a calm sea bathed in sunlight. The camera pans slowly over the women gathered on the shore, showing the deep distress in their faces.

When the boats are close to the harbor, the camera pans again. We notice the women’s hands: held in prayer; splayed at an anxious face; grasping the shoulder of a friend; or tightly holding a child.

When the boats pull up, the dock is crowded with villagers, their bodies packed tightly together. They utter a collective moan of grief.

Parents jump onto the boats to claim their children's bodies, which are passed gently onto shore by many hands. The air is filled with the sound of wailing.

In this great throng of humanity, we notice a woman in a white headscarf searching for her child.

An elderly woman moves a little girl's arms, hoping vainly to revive her.

Two men in uniform help Pavlos to stand. He can barely walk. With the aid of the officers, he climbs onto the dock. A crowd gathers to stare at him and, after so much tumult, silence falls.

In close-up, we see Christos, Panagos, and the others, their gazes downcast, saying nothing. Ari comes running up, in horror, but also says nothing. The parents cling to their dead – those whose bodies have been found.

One mother looks up from her dead child and cries, "Murderer!" Then another takes up the cry. One by one, we see their faces, contorted with grief and rage. "Murderer! Murderer!" they scream at Pavlos, who stands on the dock in utter pain and despair.

The two men in uniform are still supporting Pavlos. They take him away. When a woman rushes out to attack him, men from the crowd restrain her.

Soula's grieving mother clings to Christos, her hands clenched at his bare shoulder, as Ari, with an expression both guilty and accusatory, looks on. Christos, devastated, tells him, "My niece was in the boat... Soula."

Marina, meanwhile, is waiting at the chapel at Kaminia, with no idea of what has happened. From below, we see the small hilltop chapel behind a stone wall. Marina looks tiny and insignificant in the shot, the endless sky above her. She paces back and forth, waiting for Pavlos.

As the scene ends, a close-up shows her, completely disheartened. She gazes out to sea looking for Pavlos.