

A Girl in Black, Part VI

Michael Cacoyannis, Dir. (1956)

The next scene opens with the strum of a guitar in a local bar. Men sit inside, talking, playing cards and backgammon, and, of course, drinking. No women are present. Almost all of the men wear white shirts, open at the neck.

Mitso, who had wandered by the taverna in a prior scene, almost like a ghost, comes into the place now.

Standing behind a group of card players, Mitso lights a cigarette and glares across the room, at the table where Panagos is playing guitar for Christos and the boys. Christos notices him and taps Panagos on the leg. The men all stare back at Mitso now. Christos has a taunting expression, a cigarette in his lips at a jaunty angle.

Panagos begins a song to mock Mitso. There are ten of them against one poor boy. They begin singing, loudly and with gusto:

*Athens, always Athens
Tonight my lips are singing
Athens, and Athens again,
Old people, young people,
Children, everybody loves you.*

In extreme close-up, we see the fury fill Mitso's eyes as the men ridicule him in front of all the patrons at the bar.

Mitso knows he's beat – at least for now. He turns and leaves the bar. The screen goes black.

The next morning, Antoni is out sitting on steps that lead up the mountain. He's working on a sketch of the village: he already has the outline of the houses and some surrounding trees. While he is drawing in a tiled roof, the camera pans over to a man leading a donkey up the steps, through the village. As the camera follows him, the tiled roofs come into view.

Oh! It is a donkey brigade for tourists! Mimi and his mom are perched precariously on the animals that climb the steep steps. The line of donkeys runs diagonally across the frame.

Mom greets Antoni and asks, "How are you?"

"Fine, thanks."

"We're going on a picnic!"

"Have fun!" Antoni says, with a broad grin, and in the back of the shot, in another diagonal composition, we see Mitso approaching.

The men exchange greetings and then Mitso leans down, hands on his knee, to talk to Antoni, who is still seated on the stone steps.

"Are you sketching?" Mitso asks, curious and friendly.

“Just killing time.” Looking upward, the camera shows us Antoni’s point of view: Mitso looming over him, and the jumble of white buildings on the far hillside.

“Are you an artist?”

“No, an architect.”

“And your friend?”

“He’s a writer.”

“He’s not quiet like you. People say he’s a playboy.”

Antoni gets to his feet. “Well?”

“Will you be staying long?” Mitso’s tone has changed and he doesn’t smile.

“A week. Why?”

“We’ll be needing the rooms,” he demands harshly.

“When?”

“Today, if possible.”

“I get it. I’ll tell my friend, but I don’t know how he’ll take it.”

Then Mitso lets Antoni know exactly what’s important to him. “Let him take it however he pleases. I only have one sister. I’d rather kiss her on her deathbed, than have her spoil her good name.”

Mitso stands firm as Antoni walks away, then turns back and says, “Okay. We’ll move to the hotel.”

At the house, Marina peeks through the open door. She can hear Antoni and Pavlos arguing.

Antoni says, “He told me quite bluntly.”

“You’re getting on my nerves!” Pavlos is furious. “You didn’t have to agree, did you?”

“You should have listened to me.”

As Marina advances slowly into the room – it’s Pavlos’ – she begins to understand what they are talking about. Pavlos’ suitcase is on the bed and he is packing. He moves around, collecting clothes. Always in the background, the peeling wallpaper reminds us of how she lives from day to day. We see the vase that Pavlos had used for his crazy dance.

Antoni is in his own room, out of sight. Pavlos calls out to him, “Why couldn’t he tell *me*?”

“Stop yelling!”

As Pavlos reaches for a shirt, he notices Marina.

He goes quickly to her, taking her head in his hands.

“Marina!” he says, desperately, and pulls her towards him for a kiss. But she sets her hand on his arm, stopping him. “Be careful!” she warns.

She pauses and then says sadly, “You’re leaving.”

“But I’ll see you.”

“Where?”

Antoni interrupts their hushed conversation, yelling from his room, “Do you have any razor blades?”

He’s still unaware of Marina’s presence.

“No!” responds Pavlos, then he turns back to Marina, “You tell me.”

“It’s impossible.”

Antoni goes on, oblivious, “We must send for Aristides to help us with the luggage.”

“Yes.”

Pavlos turns back to Marina, whispering, “At night, when –”
But a knock at the door startles her: she hurries to the back of the room, out of sight.

Pavlos answers the door. It’s Froso. He sets his hand on the doorframe, his arm stopping her from coming in.

“Can I be of help?” she asks.

“No, thank you.”

“I’m sorry you’re leaving.”

“There’s nothing to be done.”

Pavlos walks to the door between his room and Antoni’s. He asks, “Antoni, what are you doing?”

“Shaving.”

Pavlos closes the door slowly, leaving it open just a crack.

The camera follows him in a quick pan as he goes to Marina. He begins slowly, but then he practically rushes at her. She looks devastated as he takes her in his arms. The camera pulls in for a very tight closeup on their desperate kiss.

“I’ll never see you again,” laments Marina.

“The pine trees over the bay,” suggests Pavlos.

“They’ll see us.”

“The beach...”

“They’ll see us.”

“The castle, the ruins...” She makes a weak refusal, whispering a faint “no.” But she knows it’s a place where lovers meet in secret and that they may be safe there. And she can’t help herself.

She takes a few steps away from him, and leans on the wall, eyes closed in despair. “I wish I were dead,” she says.

He goes to her.

They kiss and just then Antoni comes in, drying his face after his shave. Marina notices him first. Over Pavlos’ shoulder, we see her eye, in the center of the shot, looking straight at us.

She breaks away from Pavlos and runs out of the room. Startled, Pavlos looks over at Antoni, who returns his gaze with a weary and disappointed expression. Pavlos lowers his eyes.

“Now you’ve had your way,” says Antoni. “I hope you’re satisfied.”

“I love her.”

“What now?” asks Antoni, still glaring.

Pavlos doesn’t reply. At the sound of a ship’s horn blasting out in the harbor, Pavlos looks toward it, ignoring the other man.

“I suggest we catch the next boat home,” says Antoni sternly.

Pavlos goes back to his packing and says nothing. Antoni returns to his room. Through the half-open door, we see him watching Pavlos with a troubled expression. The two men have very different ideas about what should happen next.

The next scene opens with a view of another whitewashed building, white shutters at the windows: it's the local hotel. We're looking at an ornate wrought-iron balcony. Pavlos steps out, smoking a cigarette, when who should walk by but Christos! He stares up at his rival and gives a long, melodic, provocative whistle. Pavlos returns his stare.

Hands in his pockets, shirt open, Christos seems prepared to whistle at Pavlos all day. After a short while, Pavlos goes back into the room. From inside the room, we see his dark silhouette against the sunny harbor in the background, crowded with boats. He wipes his forehead with his hand. This city boy gets it now, if he didn't before: he has gotten himself in deep.

Antoni lies asleep on his narrow bed. It must be warm out; his shirt is unbuttoned and spread wide open.

In the hotel, the men are sharing one spartan room: it's a striking contrast to their previous lodgings with the family. Two white cast-iron beds stand close together. There is a small table with a plant. The white walls are bare and spotless: no peeling wallpaper here.

Back at the house, Froso is on her hands and knees, scrubbing the floor. She wrings out the rag in the soapy water, and wipes it across the worn wooden boards. She sits up, leans back and give a long, long sigh that sounds almost like a moan.

She says, "Scrubbing floors, that's what I've come to. Who could have imagined this back in the day when your father was alive?" Clearly, someone else used to wash her floors for her.

Ah! We see that she's talking to Marina. They are in the rooms that Antoni and Pavlos have just vacated.

Light leaks in through the broken shutters behind Marina. Changing the sheets, Marina folds one and holds it briefly to her lips.

"I can't stand it anymore, I've had it," her mother continues. "Every day the same thing. But what can I do? The house is falling apart. I can't let it go."

Marina walks around the bed, holding the folded sheet to her face, as her mother goes on, "One minute I clean up, the next minute it's dirty again. And there's no money for repairs." Marina is in her own world; she doesn't say a word. "What will we do in wintertime? What was your brother thinking?"

"Just as we started making some money, he goes and spoils it... spoils it..." Froso sighs again. As she scrubs, her body stretches wearily along the bottom of the frame.

Marina is folding up Pavlos' mattress. There won't be other guests in the room any time soon. She looks exhausted; she fairly collapses over the folded mattress. "Where will we find another tenant?" her mother goes on. "Eh? Where?" Marina rights herself.

Apparently Froso is not aware of the love affair. She goes on, oblivious to Marina's pain, "What's wrong with him? He's getting worse every day... Picking fights with everybody." Marina stoops down to pick up a pitcher from the floor: it's the one that Pavlos used to pour water on the men who came to serenade her. "Why can't he get a job? He always puts the blame on me." Marina puts the pitcher on the bureau. "I've been after him to sell that plot of land –" Marina reaches out and touches the scarf that Pavlos left behind. "– to that Athenian who wanted it. Alas!"

Taking a used towel, Marina walks to the window and wipes the shutter. “He told Katina yesterday he’ll be going to Athens to close the deal. But will he?”

Something outside the window catches Marina’s eye. Standing on tiptoe, she looks out. It’s Pavlos: he looks up toward her, pacing as if standing guard.

Marina glances back at her mother, who is still venting her grievances: “If we could hang on to this house at least. You’d have a dowry... you could find a decent husband.”

Froso stands up and complains, “My bones ache.” She stretches her back, hands on hips. Picking up the heavy bucket of soapy water, she says, “I’ll get ready for church.” At the door, she turns back, reminding her daughter to get ready, too.

The moment Froso is out the door, Marina turns back to the window. Pavlos is still there, walking and looking up from time to time. But he may be walking away...

Marina leans against the shutters, which seem to imprison her. As she begins to sob, the camera pulls away. It’s a powerful image: the black mass of her dress and hair, the impassive horizontal bars of the shutters, the desperate curve of her arms. Marina clings to the shutters as if to pull them down.