

Recap: "AMERICAN HORROR STORY 209, The Coat Hanger"

Written by Samuel Zimmerman
Thursday, 13 December 2012 12:25



I think I've written something in this exact vein before, but whatever AMERICAN HORROR STORY is (and it's plenty), it's never subtle. "The Coat Hanger"—an episode that would put the titular object to the exact use its name causes folks to cringe—began with a returning Dylan McDylan expressing his inner struggle as the modern day Bloody Face to an unsuited therapist. Hint after hint is laid out, until in the clearest terms possible this rat-tailed Johnny offers, "I'm the son of Bloody Face." In case you were still befuddled, ASYLUM returned from its title sequence to tell Lana Winters there's a psychopathic baby in her womb.

Now, a show such as AMERICAN HORROR STORY, which clearly delights in twist after twist could be shooting for a fake out here; after all, we learned Ian McShane is alive(!). But this possibility doesn't change the fact if you happened to be thinking it, Ryan Murphy & co. wanted to be damned sure you were.

Speaking of fake outs, or more appropriately, foils, almost every major character's episode path was detoured, twisted or just plain ruined this week. Sister Jude stabbed Santa/Lee Emerson in the neck, but he's still kicking and working alongside Monsignor (who got some stuff to do!), Sister Mary and Dr. Arden to keep her in Briarcliff as a patient. Lana, resilient as hell, takes the upper hand this baby gives over Bloody Face/Thredson and succeeds in taping a confession with Kit. Unfortunately, her DIY abortion is unsuccessful (foiled by fate!) and her knife is taken away (foiled by orderly!), and Kit is intercepted by Dr. Arden after hiding the recording.

Finally, dopey, cowardly and outwardly gross Monsignor Howard is overcome with ambition and looks to save the soul of poor Lee Emerson. A prayer and a baptism later, and he's delighted...until Lee goes for the gold and crucifies the holy man. It's a relief of the highest order to see Ian McShane back in action in "The Coat Hanger." His role in "Unholy Night" was fun, yet inconsequential. He's now really playing into the proceedings and making his own mischief, while McShane clearly delights in it all. AMERICAN HORROR STORY is glorious in its ability to bring screen greats like Lange and McShane together in such ludicrous scenarios.

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It really tips the scale away from eye-rolling, which the series would otherwise deal in greatly.

I've previously lamented the lack of activity in which Monsignor Howard got to partake, but with the return of some societal parallels, he becomes a bit clearer. In "The Coat Hanger," his ambition of popedom and grandeur is revealed, in turn revealing the character of a man like most who want titles. He's not as aggressively ruthless as he is sniveling, and willing to go along with the misdeeds of those around if it pushes him forward. In Lee's acting, he sees an easy case of redemption, and another accomplishment to add to his resume. Unfortunately, his expectations are quickly, painfully and deservedly, crushed.



More hot-button nods come in the form of Thredson, an obvious disgusting human being berating Lana for her wanting to abort the baby. It's obviously dealing in extremity, equating the pro-life with someone completely insane and murderous in his own right (I believe pointing out hypocrisy was the aim here), but in its own way works in attacking the frankly insane view that a woman, especially one in a state such as Lana's (raped, physically assaulted) should have her choice denied, refuted and insulted.

Finally, it took someone as naturally inquisitive as Dr. Arden to encounter them, but the aliens are becoming more prominent. Arden figures out that Kit is of importance to these studious creatures and brings the boy to near-death in order to summon them. What he finds, is Grace, alive, well and pregnant. Baby season at Briarcliff is underway and everyone from extraterrestrials to skin-wearing killers have a hand in the pot.

"The Coat Hanger" ends with Lana—once again, ever resilient—and newly incarcerated Sister Jude making strides toward amends and partnership in the struggle against the powers that be. The scene, thanks to the continued prowess of Lange and Sarah Paulson, was unexpectedly

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moving and a lovely reprieve from the madness and ugliness that surrounds ASYLUM.

AMERICAN HORROR STORY: ASYLUM returns January 2, in which four episodes remain. While the aliens have returned with some significance, the show still feels fairly idling. Hopefully, "The Coat Hanger's" strides are larger than we notice and the build towards a finale of note is real. Do the birth announcements as we near the end of the season give you Déjà vu from Murder House? And does anyone lock the doors at Briarcliff?

Next time, Sister Mary consorts with the devil in the woods, *and I can't wait.*