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Written by Maureen Younger

ARTS

MY Outlander

Maureen Younger looks at episode three's drama and revelations. Can she take much more of the emotional turmoil? Contains SPOILERS.

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Play your cards right: Claire (Caitriona Balfe) has to keep to the sidelines while in refined Paris society.

Photos: Sony Pictures Television/Starz.

Although married, Claire (Caitriona Balfe) and Jamie (Sam Heughan) are leading separate lives. While Jamie is busy out and about ingratiating himself with the Bonnie Prince (Andrew Gower) and the French Finance Minister Duverney (Marc Duret), Claire is going out of her mind with boredom playing the grand lady and sipping lots of tea.

Salvation comes for Claire in the form of helping out at the Hôpital des Anges, a charity hospital run by Mother Hildegarde (Frances de la Tour). Forced to sit on the political sidelines due to the mores of the day, Claire finally feels useful and that her life has a renewed sense of purpose.

As for the plot, it takes another twist when Claire realises that Mary Hawkins (Rosie Day) was an ancestor of her husband Frank (Tobias Menzies), and that Black Jack Randall (yet again Tobias Menzies) has to remain alive for another year for her husband Frank to even exist.

Shaken by this realisation, she confides in Murtagh (Duncan Lacroix) about Black Jack being alive. They agree to keep the news secret from Jamie, fearing Jamie would return to Scotland to seek revenge and no doubt end up dangling from a noose.

Meanwhile Jamie realises the Bonnie Prince might be cannier than he seems, having apparently secured most of the funds for the Jacobite campaign thanks to some wealthy and influential members of the British aristocracy. On informing Duverney of this news, the Prince also promptly offers the French an alliance with Britain in return for their support, and much to Jamie's dismay, it's clear Duverney is tempted.

"Thank goodness for Murtagh. He at least is still the Murtagh we have always known, even if he now has a love life."

This puts Jamie in a quandary as to what to do next. The onus of trying to change the future is understandably weighing heavily on him, even if he is more adept at intrigue than he could ever have imagined. However, he hates himself for being so duplicitous even for a good cause.

But as luck would have it, the one time that Jamie desperately needs Claire's advice, she's not at home but at the Hôpital des Anges. Jamie, angry at what he sees as Claire's lack of support, flounces out into the night. This is definitely not the Jamie of old and how we do miss him, not least his smile and his wicked sense of humour.

So thank goodness for Murtagh. He at least is still the Murtagh we have always known, even if he now has a love life. And in a season that has a very different background and feel to it, not to mention a different collection of characters and with Claire and Jamie's relationship in trouble, that is all the more reassuring. It would seem that Murtagh is proving to be the viewer's rock in all this sea of change, just as he is with Claire and Jamie.

And as for Claire and Jamie, in a now-sexless marriage, they also seem to be at emotional cross-purposes. Their growing distance from each other is emphasised in the scene where Jamie informs Claire he has employed the child pickpocket Fergus (Romann Berrux) to steal the Prince's letters so they can copy them and find out what he is up to. "That's a good plan," Claire informs him. She is trying to be supportive but you get the feeling Jamie finds the remark rather patronising. "Thank you. Good night," Jamie stoically replies and leaves.



Jamie (Sam Heughan) recruits young pickpocket Fergus (Romann Berrux).

Mind you, Claire's right: it does prove to be a good plan. Thanks to one of the letters, Claire and Jamie discover that one of the English lords helping the Prince is Sandringham (Simon Callow), and if they can meet him and persuade him the Prince is a bad investment, then they might succeed in stopping the uprising. Here we see the Jamie of old. Relieved, his smile is back; he even kisses Claire and makes a form of rapprochement towards her, toasting: "To my wife who's always there when I need her."

For Claire and Murtagh, though the news is a double-edged sword. With Black Jack's brother, Alex (Laurence Dobiesz) working as Sandringham's secretary, Jamie needs to be told about Black Jack. Understandably Claire, seeing Jamie so happy for once, can't bring herself to tell him the truth.

And that is after all the real hook of *Outlander*: the relationship between Claire and Jamie. And witnessing these two much loved characters seemingly drifting further and further apart, both sexually and emotionally, has inevitably made *Outlander* an uncomfortable watch.

Nonetheless, it does make you appreciate how much, as a viewer, you have invested in their relationship. I only hope that the screenwriters and *Outlander* author Diana Gabaldon allow Claire and Jamie to find a way back to each other soon. Because along with Murtagh, I seriously can't take much more of this!

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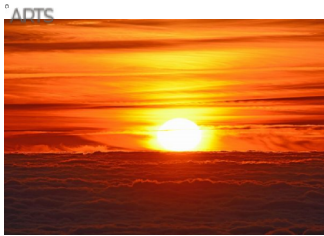
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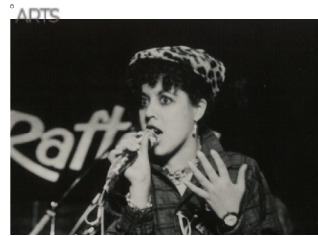
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