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'Mad Men' Recap: Off-Limits

Bob Benson's past comes to light, Sally does a lot of growing up in very little time

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Vincent Kartheiser as Pete Campbell on 'Mad Men' Jaimie Trueblood/AMC

By JAMIE BECKMAN JUNE 17, 2013 8:25 AM ET

Thank goodness there's more to Bob Benson than his sexuality. This episode, 'Mad Men' viewers finally get the "Who is Bob Benson?" payoff they've been waiting for, and although he's not a CIA operative, the truth is still pretty juicy. He's taken a page out of Don Draper's playbook by fabricating his alma mater and his work experience to the point that corporate recruiter Duck Phillips tells Pete - who's on a mission to push Bob Benson out of SC&P - that Bob's personnel record "might as well be written in steam."

Bob has certainly reinvented himself, from a West Virginia country boy to "manservant" for the senior vice president of Brown Brothers Harriman & Co. to up-and-coming SC&P accounts man... to Pete Campbell's adversary du jour. But Pete's been around this block with Don before, when he happened upon Don's box of secrets in Season One, and rather than trying to blackmail Bob into leaving the agency like he did with Don, Pete tells Bob he wants him to "graciously accept" his apology and that they're still to work together, but Pete is "off-limits." Even to Have and to Hold can't compete with this level of dual identities.

Inside 'Mad Men': The Cast in Their Own Words

Sally

The episode opens with Megan waking up alone, then going to check on Don, who's lying in the fetal position, hungover and sleeping in Sally's room. (And aren't we all a little hungover from watching Sally walk in on Don and Sylvia in flagrante delicto, and discovering beyond the shadow of a doubt that her dad's a cheater and a hypocrite, all wrapped into once nice, neat, drunk package?) Megan thinks he's simply been drinking too much: "I don't know what's going on, but you've gotta pull back on the throttle a little bit, honey." Later, in the kitchen, encourages him to stay home from work, saying, "Please try and sleep it off." Instead, Don mainlines orange juice and vodka like it's lifeblood.

While doing some numb channel-surfing - including a Nixon ad, The Patty Duke Show, and some fantastically bad acting by Megan as Colette on To Have and to Hold (Don looks horrified - he's never really seen her act past his one visit to cock-block her performance on set) - Don gets a call from Betty, who says Sally is not going to Don's this weekend, or ever again, actually. Sally has decided she wants to go away to boarding school. No surprise there, considering recent events. Don says, a little too quickly, that he'll "pay for all of it." Betty is delighted about Sally's choice of school, Miss Porter's, which Jackie Onassis attended. "Jackie did well twice," Betty says, referencing her two lucrative marriages. "As did you," Don says. Touché. In a lame attempt at fatherhood perhaps not seen since the fateful Disneyland trip, Don asks Betty, "Will you tell her that Megan - we both - miss her?"

Later, in the car with Betty, Sally's eating her feelings with McDonald's french fries and wearing her hair in a low side ponytail, a style that can't be an accident, as we last saw that hairdo on her world-weary, sycophantic friend Julie last episode. "I want to be grown up, but I know how important my education is," Sally tells Betty, in a blaze of Don Draper-esque BS glory.

Sally visits boarding school and encounters a pair of mean girls that would make Regina George shake in her pink pumps. "Our opinion is crucial to your acceptance," they tell Sally, upbraiding her for not having brought them a bottle or cigarettes, at least. Sally cutely offers them cash, which they scoff at. "Now... what do we want?" they say.

The answer is boys, obviously. The brunette is smoking a cigarette, the blonde has hemmed her plaid skirt to a decidedly un-Catholic level, and soon Glen enters through the window, his friend Rolo in tow, a bottle of booze in his hand, and sporting a jacket covered with anti-war buttons. Sally says she knows how to make a Tom Collins, they call her adorable, and soon the hooch is parceled out into paper cups and joints are rolled. Sally says she's "really drunk" and doesn't partake in the pot. The blonde leads Glen into her room, saying, "You should read my diary," and Sally is left alone with Rolo, looking profoundly young as Rolo tries to kiss her. "I've been with lots of girls; I know what I'm doing." Sally tries to talk music, Rolo tells her he'd rather not talk. Rolo blames her for not wanting to "fool around" and calls her "frigid." She goes to find Glen and says, "He tried to force me." "She's a lying little tease," Rolo counters. Glen proceeds to pummel Rolo as Sally looks on, smiling. I guess the sound of breaking glass is par for the course to the headmistress?

Glen leaves, saying he needs the ride and he "doesn't want to hitch." Glen flashes a peace sign on his way out the door and the blonde asks Sally, "You like trouble, don't you?" Sally makes a face for the ages, looking down shyly and up coyly. She's a shoo-in for boarding school.

On the way back from the visit, Betty gives Sally a cigarette, saying, "I'd rather you do it in front of me than behind my back." Because Betty's not a regular mom, she's a cool mom. Betty says Don must have given her a smoke before.

"My father has never given me anything," Sally says with the detachment of a woman 20 years her senior.

Peggy

Ted and Peggy seem to only have gotten closer since the last episode, with Ted eating up her Ocean Spray ideas and batting silly impressions back and forth across the table in a brainstorming session. Ginsberg is not amused. Ted jots down and nods at every idea Peggy throws out.

Harry calls Don at home, telling him Sunkist is interested in TV ads now, which would be two and half times the print budget. But Don, of course, sold his Sunkist birthright to Ted to get his mistress Sylvia's son Mitchell a get-out-of-the-draft-free card.

Later that day, Don and Megan run into Ted and Peggy at a 5 p.m. showing of Rosemary's Baby. Ted and Peggy explain that they're working on a St. Joseph's aspirin ad, and Ted says they had a difference of opinion about whether there was a "Japanese" in the movie. Megan says, "They always have a camera," lest we forget that we're still in 1968, not 2008. Megan stirs the pot by inviting the two of them to grab a bite to eat, but they refuse, Peggy saying she has a date and Ted saying he should go throw the ball around with his boys. At home with Megan, Don balks at the idea of using Rosemary's Baby for a children's aspirin ad. Clearly spurred on at the sight of Peggy and Ted together, Don puts in a call to California, a.k.a. Sunkist. So much for that promise to Ted.

The next day, in a meeting, Roger Sterling tells Ted and Jim that they'll resign Ocean Spray, as Sunkist now has a whopping \$8 million budget, to which Jim replies, "Great Caesar's ghost." Ted is less than thrilled, saying the move will call the agency's reputation into question "Someone has to let them know to look out for a knife in their back." (If you're playing a Shakespeare drinking game, that's two Julius Caesar references, plus one Merchant of Venice line as the episode's title.) Don placates Ted with a pack of faux apologies. Ted says he thinks Peggy should be on the account, citing her "juice experience." I guess that's what the kids are calling it these days.

Later, in the conference room, Ted and Peggy are giggling over the Rosemary's Baby-inspired aspirin ad. Joan's bemused expression says it all. Don walks in, and Ted acts out the ad for him: "You're the baby," he tells Don, "Just, 'Waaah, waaah.' You do it!" And Don actually does it, wailing like an infant, which is worth the price of admission for this episode. Ted gives Peggy the credit for the idea, and she looks ecstatic, which might be an understatement considering her treatment when she was Don's underling back at SCDP. Joan tells Don the idea is over budget by at least \$20,000, and the client doesn't know that yet - but Ted is sure they'll approve it.

Don joins Peggy, Ted, Jim and Joan for the St. Joseph's meeting. The ballooning ad budget, with its variety of characters, is a major issue. Don pulls a dirty trick from his sleeve, saying, after the most pregnant of pauses, that the ad is "personal" and, giving Ted and Peggy a pointed look, that it was deceased artistic genius Frank Gleason's last idea. Can't argue with a dead man, right Don? Ted reluctantly plays along, saying he didn't want to "lean on that." St. Joseph ups the ad budget to \$25K from \$15K, clearly not enough to make the ad as it was envisioned happen. After the meeting, Don tells Ted it was the "best he could do," and says Ted isn't thinking with his right head. "Your judgment is impaired."

And just like that, Peggy's credit and her potential Clio evaporate like the fumes from a fresh swipe of Glo-Coat.

Peggy confronts Don about his weasel-y move, saying that he hates that Ted is a good man. "Well you killed him," Peggy says. "You killed the ad, you killed everything." And then the Samsonite-level TKO punch: "You're a monster."

The closing shot is Don in the fetal position again, the strains of the Monkees' "Porpoise Song (Theme From Head)" playing as the credits roll. There's nothing terribly subtle to about the lyrics here: "My, my, the clock in the sky is pounding away/ And there's so much to say / A face, a voice, an overdub has no choice / An image cannot rejoice... Wanting to feel / To know what is real / Living is a, is a lie."

Bob

Early in the episode, we see Ken Cosgrove in full hunting gear with two Chevy execs. "See that tree over there? Is Ken dead? Ralph Nader and let's go get a drink." "Wait! They shoot anywhere? Pretend it's Ken dead? Nope, he just nearly got his eye shot out. Understandably, father-to-be Ken explains to Pete, "Chevy is killing me. I hate Detroit." And cars, guns and steaks. "Anyone here would trade places with you in a second," Pete says, and says he'd "gladly" take Ken's place, seeing as he, Trudy, and Tammy aren't exactly the happy family they once appeared to be. Back in his office, Pete literally starts polishing his rifle - yes, the one of chip 'n' dip fame.

When Pete meets with Jim, Bert, Roger, and Ken to say Ken wants to resign Chevy and turn it over to Pete, Jim, and Roger try to convince him otherwise. Jim says a client once cupped his wife's breast. Roger says, "Lee Garner Jr. once made me hold his balls." (Ah, the legacy of Lee Garner Jr. lives on!) The guys suggest that Bob Benson handle Chevy rather than Pete. "If you don't like Bob, we can find someone who does," Jim says. Pete faces Bob outside his office. Then, during the long handshake in history, Jim tells Pete that he doesn't want to share a hotel with him or work with him after his declaration of affection. Bob begs to differ about what actually happened: "Only my admiration, which is waning quickly," he says. "You should watch what you say to people," Bob adds. It's the first time we've seen Bob anything less than beatific, and it's chilling.

Pete calls Duck, telling him he has to "get this kid out of here." Duck says he'll do it for a cool grand. Cut to Bob speaking angry Spanish to Manolo, presumably about how awful Pete is. Pete's plan to push Bob out begins to backfire, as Pete's mother shows up to the office looking for her passport, telling Pete she's planning a "voyage" - with Manolo. Pete is visibly agitated.

When Duck calls Pete with some crucial information - or lack of information, rather - about Bob's background, he says, "I've never seen anything like this before." Pete replies, "I have," an obvious reference to Don.

Pete walks into Bob's office the next day. Bob is all smiles, until Pete tells Bob he knows about his fake background. Bob reveals that Don got the one who hired him after complimenting his tie, which echoes how Don got his job from Roger, when he was three sheets to the wind and in no condition to remember anything. Pete says, "I don't know how people like you do it. Where you are and who you are is not my concern. I surrender." Then: "I want you to graciously accept my apologies, work alongside me but not too closely. I'm off-limits." Pete takes a deep breath, surveying the office, and nods to Clara like it's any other day.

The Wrap-Up

Pete playing ball with Bob shows a leap in professional maturity from the days when he masterfully threatened Don, but what this "mercy" toward Bob will garner Pete in the end remains to be seen. It's disquieting to see Sally in such a grownup, careening-toward-disaster role when she's still so young, but we all saw it coming. No one escapes a household like that unscathed, even if you're the smartest young woman on the planet. Speaking of smart young women, no one escapes Don Draper's grasp at work (when he decides to work, anyway) either - especially not Peggy, and especially not when Ted Chaough is involved. Here's hoping Peggy gets her due - or at least some revenge - both professionally and romantically. We've been waiting long enough.

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