

= Mystery Date (Mad Men) =

" Mystery Date " is the fourth episode of the fifth season of the American television drama series Mad Men and the 56th episode of the series overall . It was written by series creator and executive producer Matthew Weiner and writer Victor Levin , and directed by Matt Shakman . It originally aired on the AMC channel in the United States on April 8 , 2012 .

The episode takes place in July 1966 , featuring much discussion among the characters about the then @-@ unsolved Richard Speck murders in Chicago . Don runs into an ex @-@ lover and cannot seem to escape her presence . Joan 's husband , Greg , returns from his tour of duty in Vietnam only to reveal that he is being sent back for another year of service . Sally becomes frightened after reading stories on the Speck murders , leading her step @-@ grandmother to educate her on the concepts of fear and defense . Dawn spends the night at Peggy 's apartment after becoming too afraid to return home because of racial violence near Harlem .

The episode 's title is derived from the 1965 Milton Bradley board game for teenage girls , Mystery Date , wherein several female players draw cards to advance to opening a door , hoping to find one of a variety of desirable male dates on the other side , while simultaneously hoping to avoid the lone undesirable one . A vintage television commercial for the game is viewed by Don 's daughter Sally during the episode .

The storylines involving Joan , Sally , and Peggy were well received , although some felt the dream sequence was a heavy @-@ handed way to have Don deal with his past infidelities . " Mystery Date " had consistent viewership with the previous week , with 2 @.@ 8 million overall viewers and 1 @.@ 0 million viewers in the 18 @-@ 49 demographic . Critics noted the dark atmosphere of the episode , with Weiner comparing it to a horror movie . The episode carried themes of sexual violence and the concept of masculinity .

= = Plot = =

Joyce Ramsay walks into Sterling Cooper Draper Pryce with graphic photos of the recently committed murders of eight nurses in Chicago . There were nine possible victims , with the one survivor hiding under the bed until the murderer left . Ginsberg reacts in disgust to the other employees ' fascination with the murder photos .

Don Draper , on the elevator to SCDP 's offices with Megan , is coughing profusely , sweaty , and feverish . A flirty former lover , Andrea Rhodes , walks into the elevator and starts to home in on Don before Don introduces Megan as his wife . Don tries to assuage a slightly perturbed Megan , who is upset over how many of Don 's old flames they run into in Manhattan . Don works with new hire Michael Ginsberg and Ken Cosgrove on the pitch to Butler Footwear . Ginsberg goes rogue during the presentation and ends up pitching a commercial based on Cinderella , which the group had earlier rejected as being too cliché - although that was what the executives were expecting , and they reject the pitch they had earlier approved in favor of a Cinderella campaign . Don is enraged and admonishes Ginsberg for the act ; Ginsberg doesn 't seem to realize the seriousness of his transgression until Ken points out he was on the verge of being fired . Afterwards , Don returns home early to an empty house and collapses on his bed in a weakened state .

Don awakens to a knock on the door . It 's Andrea , still in her tight yellow dress . Don directs her to leave immediately and forces her to go out through the apartment 's service elevator . After Don returns to bed , Andrea walks into his bedroom again , having entered through the unlocked back door . She seduces Don and the two end up having sex in his bed . In a post @-@ coital moment , Andrea declares to Don that he will continue meeting her for trysts because he can 't change who he is . Don flies off the handle and chokes her to death . Panicking , he kicks her under the bed , but one of her red shoes remains visible , recalling both the visual of Ginsberg 's Cinderella pitch and the lone survivor from the Richard Speck murders . Don awakens the next morning to realize he was having a fever dream . He says nothing of his vision to Megan and tells her she doesn 't need to worry about him .

Sally 's overbearing step @-@ grandmother Pauline is babysitting Sally while Betty and Henry are

out of town . Sally overhears Pauline having a telephone conversation about the murders in Chicago . After stealing a newspaper out of the garbage and reading about the murder , Sally becomes frightened and unable to sleep . Pauline comforts Sally by suggesting the nurses asked for their fate for presumed lasciviousness . Pauline takes out a butcher knife , intending to use it for protection , and splits a Seconal with Sally . Betty and Henry return home the next day to find Pauline asleep on a couch with the butcher knife on a table by her side . Sally is asleep underneath the couch , once again recalling the visual of the Speck survivor .

Roger asks Peggy to devise a new Mohawk Airlines campaign over the weekend , in an attempt to cover for the fact that he had neglected to put the creative team on that task a week earlier . Peggy , realizing that for once she has the upper hand , agrees to the favor only after Roger hands over all the cash in his wallet (\$ 410 , an exorbitant amount in 1966) , rejecting the ten dollars which Roger initially offered her (explaining that " the work is ten dollars ; the lie is extra . ") . While working late , Peggy discovers Dawn sleeping in Don 's office . Peggy offers Dawn a spot on her couch at home , as Dawn worries about returning to her own home in Harlem due to racial tension in the area . Peggy and Dawn drink beers at Peggy 's apartment , while Peggy reveals insecurity over whether she " acts like a man " or not . While leaving her apartment 's living room , Peggy has an awkward moment with Dawn when Peggy realizes that her purse (with Roger 's cash still inside) is alone on the table next to Dawn . Peggy cleans up and leaves the purse next to Dawn . Peggy wakes up the next morning to find a note from Dawn apologizing for inconveniencing Peggy .

Joan 's husband Greg returns home from the Vietnam War after a year of service , greeting their new baby boy , and spending an afternoon with Joan in bed . Afterwards , Greg breaks bad news to Joan ? he is being shipped back out again for another year . Joan complains about the government 's lies , but Greg backs up his duty to the country . During a dinner at a fancy restaurant with Joan 's mother and Greg 's parents , Greg is forced by his mother to reveal that he in fact volunteered to go back , sending Joan into a rage . She is absolutely horrified that Greg would abandon his duties as a father to head back to war , where he " feels like a good man " . The next morning , Joan sits him down and tells him to leave . Through her teeth , she proclaims that he was " never a good man " , subtly referring to the time he raped her back in the second season . Greg storms out , and Joan informs her mother that " it 's over " . Joan spends the night lying awake next to her sleeping mother and child .

= = Production = =

" Mystery Date " was written by creator Matthew Weiner and co @-@ executive producer Victor Levin . The episode was also directed by Matt Shakman . Director Matt Shakman had never worked on an episode of Mad Men before this episode . This was also the first episode of the series that co @-@ writer Victor Levin had penned . Levin had actually worked in advertising before becoming a television writer . He was the Associate Creative Director at both the Young and Rubicam advertising agency as well as BBDO . Both agencies had been either mentioned or depicted on Mad Men in the past . Levin also won two Clio awards for his work in advertising , which was an award Don won last season in the episode " Waldorf Stories " .

" The theme of sexual violence , of what it means to be a man , is a big part of that episode , " creator Matthew Weiner said of " Mystery Date " . " There 's this idea of this carnal , dangerous impulsive male . Of the dream sequence , Hamm said , " Unlike a lot of things on our show , it 's very visceral and immediate and scary and weird " with Hamm noting that Weiner compared the episode to a horror film . The scene in which Peggy blackmails Roger was one of Elisabeth Moss 's favorite moments , with Moss saying that she was " playing Roger Sterling " in that scene .

Weiner was fascinated by the presences of the Richard Speck murders in the media , despite the 40 race riots occurring in America around the same time . " Part of that force is the sex drive . No one wants to be a victim of that , but when you look at Pauline 's interest in the murders , it 's sexual . It 's such a deep touchstone of creepiness , " he noted .

The footage of Don returning to bed after kicking Andrea out of the apartment was actually reverse footage of Don getting out of bed only minutes before , which led some to believe that this was a

editorial touch by Shakman to help the viewer discern the dream sequence by including unreal footage .

= = Reception = =

= = = Ratings = = =

" Mystery Date " received steady viewership that was consistent with the ratings for the previous week . It received 2 @. @ 8 million viewers , down only from 2 @. @ 9 from " Tea Leaves " . The episode also received a 1 @. @ 0 rating in the important 18 @- @ 49 demographic , the same rating as the week before .

= = = Critical reception = = =

While the portions of the episode focusing on Joan , Peggy , and Sally were critically acclaimed , some critics were mixed on the value of the dream sequence . One writer for Zap2it declared the episode one of the best episodes yet . Alan Sepinwall , writing for Hitfix said that the episode was " full of nightmares and self @- @ realizations " as well as " horrifying images " . Sepinwall wrote that the " only way the strangulation scene would have been acceptable to me was with the understanding going in that it was a dream . Had the show not telegraphed that ? or had I not figured it out ? and Don woke up the next morning with no corpse on the floor , I 'd have been irked . " One writer for Paste Magazine noted that the " brilliantly shot " episode had a " Hitchcockian feel " , and pointed to the use of " reverse point @- @ of @- @ view shots " and " close @- @ ups of hands on doorknobs that added an air of suspense not usually present on Mad Men . " Eric Goldman of IGN declared it the " best episode yet for Season 5 , with some very good material for Joan , Peggy , Don and Sally packed into a busy hour . " Goldman praised the resolution to the Harris marriage , crediting Weiner with mastering " the slow burn on this show , and it was just so gratifying to finally have this issue be dealt with . "

Maureen Ryan of The Huffington Post called the episode " deeply unsettling " on purpose . She said that " Violence against women was inescapable in this episode , but what made Mad Men 's exploration of the topic worthwhile and compelling was the fact that two women in this episode asserted their power and control over their lives . It wasn 't a story about helplessness and victimization ; it was an episode about everything from sweaty discomfort to outright terror , and how we deal with those emotions . " John Swansburg , writing for Slate , said the episode was a " dud , " with the fever dream a " very obvious (and not particularly enlightening) way to depict Don wrestling with his infidelity issues . " Jordan Bartel of the Baltimore Sun compared " Mystery Date " to a Stephen King novel . Meredith Blake of the Los Angeles Times admitted that the dream sequence was " heavy @- @ handed " but that " there ? s also something terribly convincing about the link ' Mystery Date ' posits between Don ? s seemingly insatiable sexual appetite and his personal demons . If only these things dissipated as easily as a fever . " Rolling Stone writer Sarene Leeds praised Christina Hendricks ' performance and the dream sequence , asking " even though it wasn 't " real , " what makes Don Draper any different from Richard Speck , the student @- @ nurse murderer ? "