



The Auctioneer

Joan Samson, Ed Gorman (Introduction)

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Harrowing tensions explode in a series of events that could happen anywhere, to anyone, just as they do to John Moore—whose days of freedom run out, who is stripped of his possessions, his courage, and his hopes, by the ominous presence of an insidious stranger impossible to resist.

Published to wide acclaim in 1976, but almost neglected since then, *The Auctioneer* is a bona fide classic of American literature. The story of John Moore, his wife Mim, and his mother, it is a gripping tale of greed in a small town being quietly overrun by auctioneer Perly Dunsmore. Acclaimed by writers including Stephen King, and an influence on King's *Needful Things*, *The Auctioneer* is here reprinted for the first time in thirty years.

The Auctioneer Details

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Author : Joan Samson , Ed Gorman (Introduction)

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From Reader Review The Auctioneer for online ebook

Mindi says

Valancourt Books recently brought this 70's horror classic back from obscurity, and I immediately picked it up. I had been hearing some buzz around the rerelease, and I was excited to read something that a number of people really enjoyed.

Grady Hendrix, who single handedly started the vintage horror paperback revival with his excellent book *Paperbacks From Hell*, wrote the introduction for this edition, and I was excited for that as well. Hendrix knows and loves these classic horror stories, and it's always interesting to hear what his opinion is on a particular title. Essentially this book remained an underground classic for the long duration of time that it remained out of print. Collectors would search for copies wherever there could find one, and readers would pass around paperbacks to share the experience with fellow horror lovers. The book continued to be sought after and shared for 30 years after it had gone out of print, and then finally Valancourt release this edition in the wake of the 70s and 80s horror fiction revival.

John and Mim Moore live in the isolated farming community of Harlowe, New Hampshire with John's mother "Ma" and their young daughter Hildie. They live on a farm that has been in John's family for generations, and they adore the simple and quiet life they have created for themselves. Then one day Perly Dunsmore, the titular Auctioneer arrives in town, and before they know it, everyone in Harlowe has their lives turned upside down. Perly starts by helping the citizens get rid of the junk that has collected in their barns and attics, but he doesn't stop there. Perly has big plans for the town of Harlowe, and none of those plans have any of the current citizens in mind.

I found myself truly hating Perly, and feeling an intense frustration with John for not doing anything to stop him or help his family. Perly is an antagonist that is meant to be hated, but John is far more complex. He's a man who is truly torn. He doesn't want to admit defeat and leave the only home he has ever known, and so he puts his family in increasingly tension filled and dangerous situations that truly had me on the edge of my seat. I had no idea how this one was going to end, and I'm happy to say I think Samson wrote a very strong ending. I didn't expect it, and it was refreshing to not be able to predict where a story is heading.

I've heard nothing but praise for this novel, and all the buzz is true. I highly recommend *The Auctioneer*. It's a tense and unnerving novel that will definitely get under your skin.

TK421 says

The creepiest thing about this book is that my copy has a child's scribbling throughout it. A very unexpected (but appreciated) element to a story about a community losing its identity through loss of physical and emotional and familial possessions. Who was the Auctioneer? More troubling perhaps is: Are we not all the Auctioneer at times?

I wish there were more books of this caliber written in this genre. Any suggestions?

Karen says

The auctioneer is Perly Dunsmore. A newcomer to Harlowe, he preaches the virtue of the good old-fashioned values the town still has. He plays off the town's fears of the threat of the outside world, slowly manipulating his way into their trust and admiration. He has the type of charisma that draws the most clear-headed away from their senses and soon the people of Harlowe are all his willing victims.

John and Mim Moore, along with John's elderly Ma and their young daughter Hildie, run a farm that has been in their family for generations. They work hard and live simply; only a few of their possessions let you know this is the 20th century. The Moores are the epitome of the old-fashioned New England hardworking values that Perly hopes to capitalize on. Perly and local sheriff Bob Gore start coming by weekly, picking up unwanted and unused junk from the townsfolk and selling it at auction to tourists. It seems it's all for the good of the town. Soon Perly buys the town an ambulance and slowly he starts to deputize most of the men in Harlowe. When all the junk is gone, Perly and his deputies come collecting for more personal and necessary household items.

The Moores know something is wrong but they sit back and allow it all to happen. I don't think I've ever read a book that had me more upset with the victims than I was with the villain. And yet I could see it happening to innocent uneducated people who are out of touch with the rest of the world. This is an emotional, heartbreakin read.

The best psychological horror is that which creeps up on you silently and plays on your fears as much as it does on its own characters'. We're all willing victims to some extent—to our government, to the bullies at school, to our manipulative friend; we've all been taken advantage of at least once in our lives.

Char says

4.5/5 stars!

Evil in a small town is one of my favorite horror tropes and books like this are the reason why!

Harlowe, New Hampshire is a small town surrounded by small farms. It's a tightly knit community, or at least the townsfolk believe it is, until an outsider comes to town and slowly things begin to unravel.

Perly Dunsmore is an auctioneer. Taking over a recently available old mansion in town, (due to the death of the previous owner), Perly sets about "improving" Harlowe by holding auctions to benefit the police department. These auctions are funded by the generous donations of the townspeople. Until they're no longer able to do so, (eventually there's nothing left), in which case they are gently and quietly threatened to come up with more donations, or ELSE. Will Harlowe survive these auctions or will it rise up against Perly in protest? You'll have to read this to find out!

I've been thinking about what this novel was *really* about and I'm still not quite sure. The strongest feeling I have about it relates to that old poem: "First they came for the Socialists...", but that's not quite right. Then I was wondering if it was really about fascism—the auctions after all first funded a police department, to the

point of having almost as many officers and deputies as there were citizens in the entire town. But that doesn't quite fit the bill either, especially in light of the finale. Then I finally gave up the analyzing and endeavored to enjoy this novel for the yummy, atmospheric piece of horror fiction that it was.

If this is the type of story that usually works for you, (quiet, small town horror a la Tryon's HARVEST HOME, or maybe Michael Rowe's ENTER, NIGHT), I highly recommend you give this book a shot! I listened to it on audio, narrated by Matt Godfrey, whose voicing of Ma Moore I will never forget.

Atmospheric, full of tension and fear, THE AUCTIONEER still holds up as an excellent tale, even now, 40 years later. I give it my highest recommendation!

I received this audiobook from the narrator in exchange for my honest feedback. This is it! Further, I consider Matt Godfrey to be a friend, although we've never met in person. This has not affected the content of this review.

Kimberly says

4.5 stars.

THE AUCTIONEER, by Joan Samson, was first issued in 1976. This new edition released by Valancourt Books in 2018 comes with an all new introduction by Grady Hendrix, as well as an afterword by the author's husband, Warren Carberg.

This novel takes place in a farming community called Harlowe. In a quiet, peaceful American town where change is very slow to come, John and Mim Moore farm the land that John's family had owned for many generations. With their beautiful four-year-old daughter, Hildie, and John's mother, "Ma", living with them, we have a perfect postcard picture of perhaps a "simpler" time in America.

However, the author is quick to show the slow and calculating terror that can overcome a community almost before they even realize what's happening. In this case, it all starts with a newcomer named Perly Dunsmore and his slight request for old items to be donated to his planned auctions . . .

"When your life turns into a lie, the first person you need to deceive is yourself . . . "

Samson weaves this tale with exact precision. We'll get a taste of the happy Moore family going about their everyday duties together, and then a small intrusion into their slice of paradise to give the first stirrings of trouble.

THE AUCTIONEER is not *"in-your-face"* horror, but a much more subtle, slowly mounting terror that takes a while to reach its peak. Nonetheless, once it starts, the emotions, losses, and their implications never let up--the fear is always present, ratcheting up inexorably page by page.

" . . . He won't stop . . . There are people like that. Either you give in or you run. "

The language used is beautiful in its simplicity. We learn as much of how these changes are slowly devastating their traditional way of life by what is NOT stated as we do by what is. The omissions; usual outings that are cancelled, and the strain upon the household, shows us more than words could convey. This

was true--not only in households--but also in interactions between neighbors.

". . . They talked the way they always had, except that now the familiar conversations seemed to be built on a silence as deep as the one that prevailed at home."

Overall, I felt this was a brilliantly executed story that showcases how "unwanted" change can stealthily creep in on even the most complacent of towns. We are shown the old-time values, and how they contrast with "newer" lifestyles in more populated regions. Even the most loyal of citizens can be taken in by smooth-talking charlatans if the topic is right.

When things are beyond out-of-hand, how would you react, and how far would you go to protect your family and your way of life?

Recommended!

Jeffrey Keeten says

"Just remember this," he said in a deep voice that cut neatly through the confusion. "Whatever I've done, you've let me do."

When Perly Dunsmore moves to Harlowe, New Hampshire, with his auctioneering company and starts espousing the natural beauty of the community, he is mostly regarded as a man a few slices short of a full loaf. Most of the people in Harlowe have been on the land for many generations, and for most of the year, they exist at a sustainable level. They are poor and don't know it. They raise a lot of their own food and trade for what they don't have. They are salt of the earth people, suspicious of strangers, and content with what they have.

When Perly decides to start having a regular auction every week, there are snorts of laughter and several shaking heads over this fool from out of town thinking he could make money in Harlowe. Perly decides that the first auctions should be held as a benefit to add a deputy to the police force.

Deputy?

They barely needed a sheriff. Well, there was that person hacked up not too long ago, but then that crime must have been committed by a stranger passing through town, right? Because no one around here would kill someone.

The sheriff comes around looking for donations, stuff that people aren't using anyway. Everybody pitches in because no one wants to be seen as not helping the community, and everyone ends up with a check after the auction. Cash money is as scarce as hen's teeth. Then there is an auction to help the volunteer firemen. Perly puts advertisements in papers as far away as Boston for people to come to the auction.

And people come.

Perly doesn't seem to be as crazy as everyone thinks.

John and Mim Moore have a four year old daughter named Hildie. John's mother lives with them. Several generations of Moore's are buried up on the hill, resting under poison oak and the dust of many seasons. They clean out the barn of all the stuff they aren't using anyway for the auctions and then the attic. Every week the Sheriff, sometimes accompanied by the honey worded Perly, stops by to see if there is more to be contributed.

The weekly contribution is becoming something more than voluntary.

”Does it mean so much to you? I know the pleasures of a dressing table to a good-looking woman. But there are other things--better schools for Hildie, year-round church, more ready cash, more comforts...I know what I want.”

Mim could not move without flailing out at the man and making him back off, and she trembled from the effort of suppressing her need to do so.

‘Comfort,’ he said almost fiercely. ‘You’ve never known much comfort, have you Mim?’

Mim raised her eyes to Perly’s, blue and defiant.

*Perly dropped his gaze to Mim’s hands, pressed flat and angry against the wall behind her. Slowly, he raised his eyes to Mim’s again, his face curling into lines of pleasure, perhaps of triumph. ‘You and I will have to get together someday, Mim,’ he said. ‘I admire a woman with grit.’ Then, with his own **glittering stillness**, he held Mim motionless against the wall while the clock in the kitchen chimed over and over again. When she dropped her eyes, he moved quietly away.”*

I wanted to share this scene because it conveys the simmering, menacing uneasiness that permeates the whole novel. Perly keeps adding more and more deputies who are really just there to keep the contributions coming for the auctions. People give and give and give until all they have left is the land, and Perly has plans for that as well.

There are so many points in the novel where I wanted the Moore's to make a stand. To push back, but when others in the community push back, unfortunate misadventures happen to them. Everyone has families, and having families makes it natural for strong men to be afraid. It almost seems implausible, the level of control that Perly achieves over this community, but it is so gradual that, by the time people realize how bad it is, it is almost too late.

I kept thinking to myself, where is my line in the sand? Where do I make my stand and say... no more? How do I do that and keep my family safe?

Joan Samson

There is very little to share about Joan Samson, unfortunately. She passed away shortly after the publication of *The Auctioneer* from cancer. She was 39 years old and was working on a second novel. If she had lived, there was a good chance that she would have surpassed the work of Shirley Jackson or at least be mentioned in the same sentence as the famous gothic horror writer. This book has fallen into obscurity, but like other novels I've reviewed on Goodreads, a perfect example being *Mortal Leap* by MacDonald Harris, I'm simply not going to let this book stay a lost novel. It is a wonderful example of gothic horror with superb writing that will make you feel the mounting terror as options for these good people shrink to the size of a mustard

seed.

If you wish to see more of my most recent book and movie reviews, visit <http://www.jeffreykeeten.com>
I also have a Facebook blogger page at: <https://www.facebook.com/JeffreyKeeten>

Bill says

I'm not entirely sure this wasn't Bentley Little writing under a pen name...of course, he would have been a teenager, but you see what I'm sayin'.

"We're having an auction."

Now, pony up some stuff.

All of it.

I listened to this on audio and it was great. Matt Godfrey is quickly becoming one of my favorite narrators. The dude has serious skills and I have thoroughly enjoyed everything that I have listened to from him. Absolutely perfect for the story.

I also need to give a shout out to Valancourt Books who has been re-releasing some truly excellent rare and out-of-print fiction. Kudos and please keep it up.

"I was given this free review copy audiobook at my request and have voluntarily left this honest review."

Karl says

This is the first hardcover edition of the book published by Simon And Schuster in 1975 and has 240 pages.

Grady Hendrix says

A brief bestseller when it debuted in 1975, Joan Samson's *The Auctioneer* has been totally forgotten. Sites like Will Errickson's Too Much Horror Fiction have kept its tiny flame from becoming completely extinguished, but it's basically a literary shooting star that flared once, and was gone. Contributing to its short shelf-life, Samson wrote *The Auctioneer* in her 30s and died of cancer shortly after it was published. Her death is our loss. This is one of those books you stumble across with no expectations, and when you finished reading you think, "Why isn't this more famous?" Spare, unforgiving, and hard all the way down the line, if Cormac McCarthy had written *Needful Things*, you'd get *The Auctioneer*.

Read the rest of this review.

Ctgt says

I stumbled across an online discussion praising this book and when my local library had a copy I decided to give it a try.

An interesting look at the power of persuasion, namely the control one man is able to exert on a small rural New England township. In today's current environment of instant availability of news and information it can be difficult to imagine a time when people were still fairly isolated from the outside world and even their neighbors. Things start innocently enough when a recently arrived auctioneer convinces the sole policeman to visit the residents asking for contributions to raise money for a new deputy.

The auctioneer, Perly Dunsmore has some not so innocent long range plans. Dunsmore is one of these people who has an uncanny ability to use charm, subtle persuasion, innuendo, implied threats and shame to bend the community to his will.

The primary focus of the story is the Moore family. John, his wife Mim, their four year old daughter Hildie and John's elderly mother who all live together on one of the small farms on the outskirts of the township.

As the demands on the family and the community become more costly it is fascinating to watch just how far John and Mim will go to protect their family. How much will they give up? As the pressure mounts the strain on the family and their bonds stretches to the breaking point.

How long do you wait for someone else to step up and speak out.

As I'm reading I keep thinking to myself, there is no way I would let these things happen. I would like to believe this to be true. But as I think about my own family I can't help but wonder just what I would be willing to give up to protect my loved ones.

8/10

Lee says

I don't remember where/how I heard about this book about two years ago. When I looked up Ms. Samson, and found out it was her only novel (she was writing her second, when she passed away from that frikkin cancer), I thought I'd look at my local used bookstore, and she had a copy.

Her debut is a claustrophobic, slow boiling terror that's taking over a small town in New Hampshire. The effects of a charismatic stranger, with big plans for their quiet town...could happen anywhere. Great atmosphere and the characters of John and Mim Moore, trying to save their farm....and only child.

Would have been wonderful to read what Ms. Samson was working on next.

Valancourt Books says

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Tressa says

After all the glowing reviews I read about this book and seeing a critic's comparison of this story with Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery," I was somewhat disappointed because my expectations were so high.

The Auctioneer starts off with a slow menace, but I thought the events in the story happened in an unbelievable time frame. And when Perly began auctioning off children, that's when it reached a ridiculous point for me. And it didn't seem plausible that the townsfolk couldn't come together sooner and fight the power when they do so easily at the last meeting. This made the ending seem rushed and not well thought out.

Joan Samson is a deft writer who creates a little slice of New England in the seventies, filled with tough, stubborn, proud characters who know the importance of roots and land. And she expertly illustrates how even these kinds of no-nonsense characters can become cowed when authority overreaches with laws and regulations that turn them impotent. But I think I stopped feeling the menace of the story when Perly turned into the Grinch and took everything these people had, down to the last screwdriver. It was a little over-the-top for me and that's why I gave it three stars.

Bettie? says

[Bettie's Books (hide spoiler)]

Cody | cody'sbookshelf says

What happens when good people do nothing?

A searing hot read through and through, *The Auctioneer* — the author's only release, due to dying of cancer the year after publication — barrels forward like a race car. I was hooked from page one, helpless to put it down.

A stranger has come to Harlowe, a small farm town in New Hampshire. The stranger, Perly Dunsmore, has lived in forty countries and done business all over the world — he just oozes charm — and he's chosen to move in to town: a place that reminds him of where he grew up. And with money and persuasion he soon gains control of the local police force.

The story unfolds from the perspective of John Moore, a local farmer, and his family. Through them Samson captures a gritty, realistic 'American' perspective circa 1975.

The stranger holds weekly auctions for townies and strangers, using items donated by citizens of Harlowe. Dunsmore wants to use the money raised for expanding the police force and building up the town. It starts with old wheels and moth-bitten clothes. But it doesn't stop there.

Though this book can certainly be read as an allegorical examination of the dangers of fascism (with the increase of police in town too increases crime) and 'hive' mentality — that's the way I read it, and it is from this interpretation so much of the horror comes — this can also be read as a straightforward horror story a'la Shirley Jackson. Think "The Lottery" on a bigger scale. Or *Needful Things*, as written by Richard Bachman.

This is the sort of novel I love. It is a total success; I could not put it down. It is a shame this title has fallen into such obscurity, but a used copy can be obtained online for a relatively reasonable price. My highest recommendation.
