

SIGNED, SEALED, AND DELIVERED

By Jeff Dunne

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CHARACTERS

AUCTIONEER	A typical auctioneer.
BIDDER 1	An old, experienced, world-weary auction goer.
BIDDER 2	A young, inexperienced auction goer, relatively new to the process, and there representing someone else.
FACILITATOR	Someone who works for the auction house to facilitate paperwork after lots have been won.

SETTING

Some kind of auction hall.

TIME

Indeterminate.

SCENE

(Bidders 1 and 2 are sitting in seats at some kind of auction. Bidder 1 is at ease, clearly a veteran of the setting, whereas Bidder 2 is new – younger, nervous, and somewhat uncomfortable. Each has a paddle on his/her lap. An auctioneer – never seen – is calling the auction chant from offstage.)

AUCTIONEER

Unit two one four three six. Bidding will open at two thousand. Can I have two thousand? Two thousand two thousand. Do I—

(Bidder 1 raises a paddle.)

I have two thousand. Can I get three thousand? Three thousand three thousand. I'm looking for three thous... And I have three thousand. Can I get four—

(Bidder 1 raises a paddle again)

I have four thousand. The bid is four thousand...

(The sound of the auctioneer grows soft, as the following dialog transpires. During it, Bidder 1 occasionally bids, keeping the price battle waging.)

BIDDER 2

I was thinking about bidding for that one.

BIDDER 1

That so.

BIDDER 2

Decided against it.

(Bidder 1 nods, uninterested.)

Too many stains. *(Bidder 1 is still uninterested.)* You seem interested, though.

(Bidder 1 gives Bidder 2 a “so you’re still talking, are you?” look.)

I mean, it's got a lot of shine left, I suppose but... I don't know. Just seems too... too...

BIDDER 1
Stained?

BIDDER 2
Right! Stained. Too stained.

BIDDER 1
Then you probably shouldn't bid.

(Bidder 1 bids again.)

BIDDER 2
Doesn't seem to bother you, though. *(No response.)* You look like you've done this a lot.

(Bidder 1 shrugs.)

This is only my third time.

BIDDER 1
No kidding.

BIDDER 2
Do you mind if I ask you a question?

BIDDER 1
Whatever would have given you that idea. *(More of a statement than a question.)*

BIDDER 2
Are you bidding for yourself?

*(Bidder 1 turns to face Bidder 2 for the first time.
Stares at him/her for a moment, then...)*

BIDDER 1
Yes. *(Turns back to face front.)*

BIDDER 2
And you really like this one?

Apparently. BIDDER 1

Why? BIDDER 2

(Bidder 1 stares at Bidder 2 again.)

Oh! Oh. I won't bid. I promise. I just want to understand, you know. I'm here for—

BIDDER 1
(Admonishing...)
Dah dah dah dah dah.

Oh. Right. For, uh, not myself. BIDDER 2

It happens. BIDDER 1

What does? BIDDER 2

Collecting for someone else. BIDDER 1

That's common? BIDDER 2

It happens. BIDDER 1

BIDDER 2
So can I ask? Why this one? I mean, it seems pretty... I don't know. Pretty worn out.

BIDDER 1
Then don't bid.

BIDDER 2
I won't. Promise. I just want to understand. *(No response.)* Please?

(Bidder 1 considers for a moment, then...)

Not worn. Just stained.

BIDDER 1

What's the difference?

BIDDER 2

Stains are superficial. They fade away. But worn, that never fades. Makes the whole thing... unpleasant. Distasteful.

BIDDER 1

How can you tell if it's worn?

BIDDER 2

You just know. When you've been around as long as I have, you can just tell.

BIDDER 1

(Stares at Bidder 2 again, then finally decides to answer for unknown reasons.)

So you can just see it?

BIDDER 2

More like it's in the smell.

BIDDER 1

They all seem basically the same to me.

BIDDER 2

Whoever you're here for, they'll know the difference.

BIDDER 1

They will?

BIDDER 2

That's why it's pretty stupid to send someone... like you.

BIDDER 1

Like me?

BIDDER 2

Green.
BIDDER 1

(Bidder 2 isn't sure what to say.)

Have one for yourself yet?

No.
BIDDER 2

Like I said. Pretty stupid.
BIDDER 1

(The bid is now up to 20,000 or so, and Bidder 1 has just raised the paddle again.)

BIDDER 2
So you think this one is going to be really good?

Like a fine wine.
BIDDER 1

What do you mean?
BIDDER 2

BIDDER 1
They get better with age. So long as they don't wear out.

BIDDER 2
And this one's pretty old?

(Bidder 1 stares at Bidder 2 again.)

I promise. I won't bid.

BIDDER 1
Old enough. And those aren't a lot of stains for being that old.

BIDDER 2
How come more people aren't bidding, then?

BIDDER 1
How should I know? Maybe they're as green as you. Maybe their tastes differ.
What do I care?

BIDDER 2
So the old ones are the best, huh?

BIDDER 1
Unless they're worn out. Then they're worthless. Just a husk.

BIDDER 2
Are there a lot of old ones?

BIDDER 1
Yes. A lot.

BIDDER 2
But most of them are worn out?

BIDDER 1
That's why they're here.

BIDDER 2
But not this one.

BIDDER 1
Right. Not this one.

BIDDER 2
How did it get here?

BIDDER 1
How should I know?

BIDDER 2
If you had to guess...?

BIDDER 1
Probably some kind of mistake.

BIDDER 2
A mistake?

BIDDER 1
Anyone can make a mistake. A moment of distraction... a moment of weakness...

BIDDER 2
You think this one made a mistake?

BIDDER 1

Not here on purpose, that's for damn sure.

BIDDER 2

(Laughs, then...)

Right. Right.

(Auctioneer goes back to full volume. The bid number doesn't matter, just that it is high compared to where it started...)

AUCTIONEER

Looking for forty three. Forty three. Anyone? The bid is forty three.

BIDDER 2

Looks like you might get thi—

(Bidder 2 goes silent from a very nasty glare from Bidder 1.)

AUCTIONEER

Forty three going once. *(Pause.)* Forty three going twice.

(Bidder 2 suddenly grips his/her paddle as if to raise it. Bidder 1 stares intently, viciously, at Bidder 2, who then cowers and puts down the paddle.)

Forty three sold!

BIDDER 1

Wise decision.

(Bidder 2 looks uncomfortable but says nothing as Facilitator comes to Bidder 1, and hands over a clipboard as...)

Thank you, Merihem. Have it brought to my east side palace.

FACILITATOR

As you wish. Would you like it cleaned?

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BIDDER 1

Of course. What use have I for the body?

FACILITATOR

Very good, Mephistopheles. It will be delivered within the hour.

BIDDER 1

Good. I'm absolutely famished.

(Lights out)