

READING
GROUP
GUIDE

THE
GOLDEN
BOY

a novel

PATRICIA FINN

Dear Reader,

Writing this book began as a sequence of sketches about a wealthy couple dying a slow death from boredom in a gated community on one of the most beautiful islands on earth. These early sketches, written in haste and fury, piled up on my desk until I realized I could not sustain interest in a story about people I didn't like unless I was prepared to kill them off early at which point I wouldn't have a book. In short, the unhappiness of Agnes and Stafford Hopkins could only take me so far. More troubling, I was starting to care about them.

So, I added a character named Bobby Shepherd who brought tremendous joy to me, my characters, and the novel. I gave him elderly parents who gave him courage and a capacity for wonder. A small-town lawyer, a lost brother, a cut-throat career, a little girl learning to swim, and four unwanted children later, I realized I could challenge my wealthy exiles with something *far more terrifying* than the emptiness of Eden, past traumas, or even the suffocating guilt of transgression. I could terrorize them with hope. At which point, I knew I had a story about two people with that rarest of gifts—a chance to make things right.

But a novel needs structure—plot! pacing! humor! despair! twists and turns! and the transition from those early sketches to an interwoven story that spanned generations and locations was a much longer journey. For that, I needed to commit wholly to my characters, finish the book and, with the help of others, get it into the hands of readers like you.

This is my first novel, and I am not a young writer. Academic pursuits in literature and philosophy gave way to theatre and television, and from there, the career of a working writer, raising three boys on a cul-de-sac. In my case, it was ghostwriting, editing, writing, and consulting in a variety of industries. I was rarely center-stage, but the beauty of ghost-writing is that you learn to listen—really listen—until you're ready to speak for yourself. But fiction or nonfiction, I learned one consistent thing about writing (and a few things about little boys): *Remember who you're talking to.*

So, here I am now, talking to you, dear reader, with my thanks and, if you'll forgive me, a word of advice. If you feel, on occasion, like you've become something of a ghostwriter in your own life or career, take a breath and rattle your chains.

The Golden Boy is a love story about second chances.

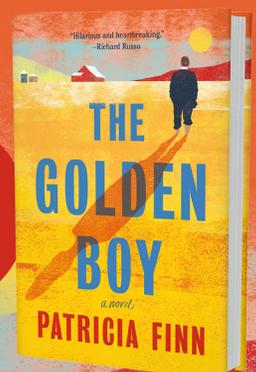
May you have a lifetime of them.

PATRICIA



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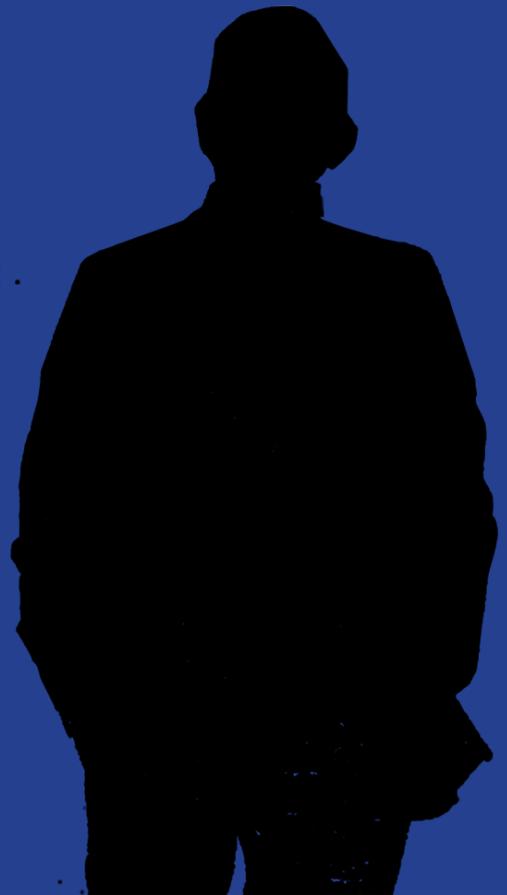
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

*Please note the following questions may contain spoilers to the plot.
We recommend you read only after you've finished the book.*

1. The chapters of *The Golden Boy* open with quotes from Aristotle's philosophical texts as well as the Bible. How do these epigraphs set the tone for the chapters, and what effect did they have on you as a reader?
2. What were your first impressions of Stafford and Agnes in Maui? What seems to be the source of their discontent?
3. Stafford and Agnes separately deal with feelings of shame. What do they feel ashamed about, and how do these feelings affect their behavior and outlook?
4. Stafford harbors a complicated relationship with faith. What do you make of Stafford's definitions of virtue? How would you describe his attachments to Catholicism and philosophy?
5. It's after Stafford nearly drowns in the ocean that he finds the letter from the Shepherds. When reading the letter, he realizes that "had it arrived a month, a week, or even a single day earlier, his response would have been so different." What changed? How do you think Stafford would have responded otherwise?
6. Why do you think Bobby is so shaken by Steven Truscott's fate?
7. After Stafford finally reveals his secret, telling the church caretaker about Bobby's death, he reflects that "the unburdening of his past had not set him free from it." Do you believe this to be the case?
8. From the Maui ocean to the St. Lawrence River in Canada, what is the significance of water in the story? Other symbols were important to the story as well, like walls and gates for example, what stood out or resonated most with you?
9. What were your reactions to the email correspondence between Agnes and her daughter Callie?
10. What did you think of the ending?
11. Did your view of Stafford and Agnes change over the course of the novel? Were there distinct moments—whether in flashbacks or the present—that made you see them in a different light?
12. What did you think of Stafford and Agnes's marriage, and how did the events of the novel reshape their relationship?

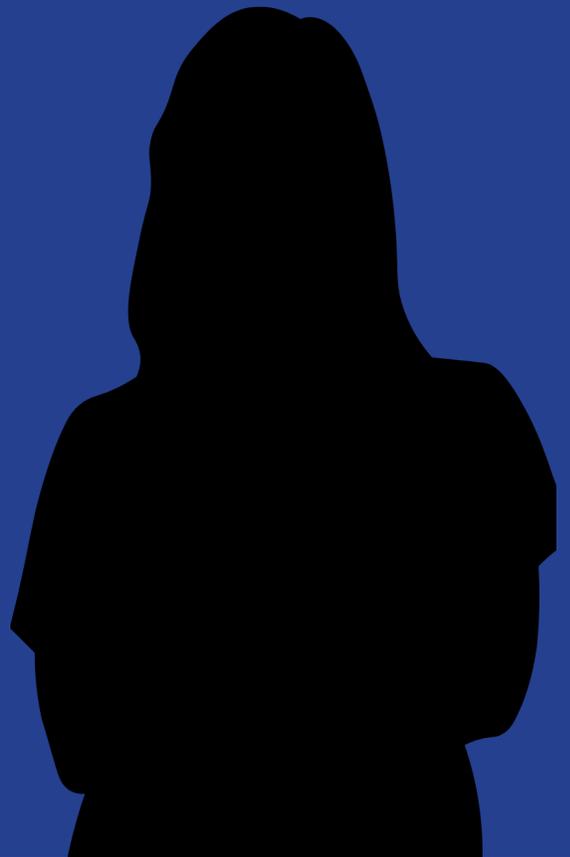
Meet **STAFFORD HOPKINS**

- RETIRED HOLLYWOOD POWER PLAYER
- OBSESSED WITH KEEPING UP APPEARANCES
- PRIVATE, CONTROLLED, ALWAYS COMPOSED
- THINKS AGNES IS UTTERLY RIDICULOUS



Meet **AGNES HOPKINS**

- LIVES FOR A FULL SOCIAL CALENDAR
- BIG FEELINGS, BIGGER TEMPER
- TOUGH CHILDHOOD, TOUGHER SKIN
- THINKS STAFFORD IS COMPLETELY HELPLESS



AGNES'S MARTINI

While Stafford craves a more private life, Agnes thrives on being the hostess with the most-ess. Check out the recipe for the perfect martini that Agnes would love serving their post-retirement friends!

INGREDIENTS:

Ice

2 1/2 oz. vodka or gin

1/2 oz. dry vermouth

Green olive or strip lemon zest removed with a peeler, for garnish

DIRECTIONS:

Step 1 (Optional):

Freeze martini glass 15 minutes before making the drink.

Step 2:

For a shaken martini: Fill a cocktail shaker with ice. Add the vodka or gin, and vermouth and shake until well chilled. Strain into a martini glass, garnish with olive or lemon peel, and serve.

Step 3:

For a stirred martini: Pour the vodka or gin, and vermouth into a mixing glass or cocktail shaker filled with ice. Stir vigorously, about 20 seconds, until well chilled. Strain into a martini glass, garnish with olive or lemon peel and serve.



Recipe from [Delish.com](https://www.delish.com)