

# Golden Boy

by Owen Kilfeather

Busybusy today. Right now my left ear the feng shui consultant flitting about the office and parently the place has good positive *chi*, my right pressed to the phone a woman youngsounding wants I drag her by the waist into a powderblue Beetle, stuff an amylnitrate-soaked satsuma in her mouth and a freezerbag over her head. I say hold the line.

*Chi* is the energy that everything in the universe living or no possesses. It is Chinese, and has replaced *vibes* as the word of choice. Living or no, everything has an energy field peculiar to itself, although influenced by and connected to everything else. The great stream of being, the feng shui consultant calls it.

Everything has a flow. Work with the current and one is harmoniously positioned in the universe. Peace prosperity good health follow. This office is she can see a peaceful and productive one. Clutterfree. Potted azalea to absorb electrical pollution. My walnut desk with curved edges. "Money will always slip off of a desk that has right-angles to it so we say," she says. No trophies or pictures of family or whatnot. Serve as distractions. My photo of Marion still facedown in drawer at any rate. Feng shui consultant hangs a set of metal windchimes above the door. Enliven and purify the air and dispel sickness, according to the good lady.

Office across the corridor a different story. She has not yet met the occupant but she knows whoever it is has read Kafka. To get behind the desk one has to climb over it. Teetering bookshelves. Cigartips float spat in fishtank. "Not conducive to healthy business," she says, summing up George Fox succinctly. Words with him later. Exit feng shui consultant to wave her wand across the corridor. Windchimes tinkle, enlivening and purifying the air, dispelling sickness.

I take freezerbaglady off hold. “That’ll be fine come by we’ll sort out particulars. Coming from the river pass the old mill a church in the middle of the street. Street ringing right around it, that’s correct. Take the ten o’clock road off it, Annesley. Righthand side greenglass structure. Can’t miss it. Look forward to seeing you.”

Ailbhe on the other end now. Greg Shurety on line two. She punches it through. Shurety. Ah. Perhaps to complain about the considerable amount of his whiskers that came off with the electrical tape. But no. Thank me. Late last Friday night we hauled Greg Shurety out of his bed, tossed him in my trunk and hung him by his bound wrists on an S-shaped hook in a meatlocker. Slapped him about some, in the style of *The Long Good Friday* (1981). “Thanks again,” he says. Since then he’s been running his restaurant with a newly-applied vigour. “Never felt quite so alive,” he says. We exchange Merry Exmases and I ring off purring.

Ailbhe on the other end now. George on line three. She punches it through. Traffic hiss background. Voice a hounded waver to its tone I’ve been hearing a lot of lately. Right now I don’t feel like having my fine humour punctured. “I’m busy can’t it wait? Good. Good. Marvellous. Bye George.”

Return to my paperclip-chain ball. Coming along nicely: size of an infant’s head already. Thus I occupy myself until I run out of paperclips.

Not stepped outside office all morning. Remedy this. I open the door against the sound of Ailbhe on the phone. Windchimes tinkle, enlivening and purifying the air, dispelling sickness. My eardrums pop and I feel I’ve burst through a membrane or somesuch, everything restored to full sound and brightness, stirring the air. Voices burbling, fingers aripple on clackclicking keyboards, dark tang of coffee, swarming colours, the gorgeous hustle and glow of the everyday.

Ailbhe, inspecting fingernails of loosely clenched hand through lidded eyes, is listening and speaking to a disembodied voice broken up into digital crumbs then reassembled and channeled into her ear by means of a moulded-plastic earpiece

manufactured by some equatorial non-unioner wearing a nappy and earning about ten cents a week: "...way the week is carved up. Oh isn't it just. It always seems to be Friday. Toss you a scrap of a weekend. Here you go. Play with that like a good little girl. And god forbid you get bline drunk and miss most of it. Um. Must go. Loveyoubye." She cradles it. Looking tasty as lead paint today.

"Ha. It's alive," she says, "Was waiting for a funny smell to seep out under the door before phoning."

"In medieval France, smelling funny was a sign of personal virility."

"Feel like anything special for lunch then do you."

"Seesawing towards going downstairs. Laziness prevailing."

Pink wet tongue slides out partway between pursed lips to indicate disapproval. "Ach," she says, "Mass-catering. Everything is shiny. Even the mash. I'm on this new detox thing. Meat is out, which I don't miss. So is cooking, which I miss less. Second Push for World Gubbermint the Japanese gave Brit and American prisoners raw rice and veg by way of rations. Cooked them cooking all the nutrients out. So I'm going to this new place, Venerable Cheese if memory serves. Pitta wrapped around peppers cucumbers almondbutter and garlic guacamole."

"Sounds good. Better bring me two."

"Come if you like. No man is an island."

I'm a continent with a small peninsula. "Waiting for a client. Said she'd be in around this hour."

"Anything interesting?"

"Nah. Grab and bag. Possible asphyxophile."

"Be careful."

"I will. Powderblue Beetle again."

"Second this month."

"Popular eh."

"Could be topical. Tell you what. I'll bring you back yours and have mine here too. Back shortly. Toodles."

Fortyfive minutes. Not a sniff of Ailbhe. *Ich habe hunger hunger hunger hunger*. Clock display in bottomright corner my monitor changes from 12:46 to 12:47. Feel as though I've seen something supposed to go unnoticed, interrupted a private moment maybe. First time I've seen this?

Windchimes tinkle, enlivening and purifying the air, dispelling sickness.  
George.

Curses.

"Fantastic Mr. Fox," I say.

"Hallo Dave," he says.

"Ailbhe coming by with lunch if you're hungry. Delinquent in her return so far but I'm sure she'll persevere."

He shakes his head. Fine. Don't want to break bread with me can fuck yourself. Only my groaning stomach speaking stomach groaning. A hungry man is an angry man.

George more root-faced than usual today. Jacket hanging just-so on his frame. He could have been my partner way back when. Offered him a groundfloor-in to David Blaize Garland pee ell cee. Equal share in my concern.

Too risky, he said. And? I said. Can I have a job? he said.

So far, he has not done right by me.

His personal demons are heavyweights it would seem. Gained a smidge of insight as regards this at the staff Exmas do on Saturday. Place beside the Tivoli. Had heard good reports. What I got was a modern art masterpiece of a meal. So George, after polishing off two Spanish reds by himself, told me each morning he looks at his face in the mirror shaving and thinks: Not yet.

Not yet.

This interests me. Like he's constantly waiting for some fixed point in the future when his looks and talents are to suddenly magnify, or realise themselves. Ailbhe, sat the other side of him, said, "Nothing but now, George," bless 'er.

How this attitude finds its mark upon George's professional life is he makes for a formidably crappy kidnapper.

This means clients yell the safe-word. One client a while back said and me tearing up his cheque he didn't feel at all during the experience that George was on top of the situation. Client was blindfolded and trussed with bungee cord.

Result: He slash she cocks a snook at nonbeing, as if it's actually possible to pass into a nonstate, elsewhere.

George has his palms out already. "About the McFadden package-"

I raise a hand to shush him. "George, another instance like that and my hands are tied. Next one. I am withered threatening. I am now a man of action. Looking over your progress just now," tapping monitor screen with fingernail tinktink, on it a page of a site devoted to celebrity skinconditions, "and things will not go on as they have for much longer."

"Whatwhy?"

"Why, George? Why is the sky blue?"

"Dust suspended in our shell of air quadrillions of prisms shattering pure sunlight into spectra. Blue is the colour that scatters. The moons' sky is black and the sky over Mars is red."

"Listen you. I'm going to have to see some agreeable numbers on this screen sharpish or your position here may become untenable."

Where. Is. My. Lunch.

George retains the presence of mind to stay silent and nod solemnly. I reach into a drawer and press into his hands a crystal paperweight as he stands. "Here. This absorbs *chi* and spreads it around the room."

He looks at me like I handed him an eggbeater and told him do a raindance.

"Keep it on your desk. Bring you luck. Keep it on the opposite side to your peecee though. It emits electrical vibrations as well as absorbs them."

Hand on doorknob, over his shoulder, "Your life turn out at all like you

pictured it Dave?"

"Course it did. So did yours. Though I had figured on a funk band with twenty others and we'd all wear capes."

Windchimes tinkle, enlivening and purifying the air, dispelling sickness.

Ailbhe returns with lunch. Fills the George-shaped hole in my soul. We make forts with sofacushions. Ailbhe practices her Beckett monologue minus the vowels. Doorbell jangles. Windchimes tinkle etc. "Y cn g rght thrgh," I hear her instruct. Freezerbaglady appears to be between eighteen and twentyeight. Lopsided Louise Brooks cut. Slung on crook of arm a tan and cream bag looks like it may contain a bowlingball. Cocks an eyebrow at scattered sofacushions. "We've had a feng shui consultant by. She must be new."

"I see. This is your baby then is it not."

"Mmm hmm that's right. Three glorious years. Story goes I was on the Tower Bridge one summer afternoon. Spotted a boy and girl sporting identical Jack the Ripper Tour teeshirts. Under the supervision of the royal abortionist, Jack the Rippers plural tore women's faces off and flung their innards over their shoulders as they breathed. Both on the bridge looked to be about your age."

"I'm sure. David Blaize Garland. Quite a handle."

"Dave Garland, sometimes Tickle, to those who know me," I say, "but I feel the presence of a middle name lends it an air of infamy. Like we call lone-gunmen by their full names. Sets them a comfortable distance apart from us. Course they acted alone, kids. And what of it? now they're fictional."

"Mark David Chapman."

"Zackly."

"Charles Julius Giteau."

"Jack The Ripper."

"Occupants of The Great American Hovel."

"Now now."

“Jaime Ramon Mercader del Rio Hernandez.”

“Have a seat.”

“The Donatists of fourth-century North Africa,” she says, legs crossed high, “were so keen on the idea of death and martyrdom they would stop strangers and demand to be killed by them, threatening death.”

I glance at her form. “Frudie. Quite a handle.”

“Isabella really. Called myself Frudie as a toddler and it stuck. Isabella too thorny a word for a twoyearold tongue to wrap around presumably.”

“Okay Frudie. What do you want?”

“A more authentic life.”

“Come to the right place.”

“Metaphysical consolations not enough.”

“Got any pets?”

“A golden retriever. Kumiko.”

I ask her how to spell that. She spells it. I jot it down.

“Frudie, Kumiko is to be your safe-word. You yell Kumiko, I stop the show. If you are unable to yell, strike me anywhere. As you can see, that’s a lot of available surface area. Anywhere. Arm or head say. Shave-And-A-Haircut. You know Shave-And-A-Haircut? Like this. Right. Safe-word?”

“Kumiko,” she reels off.

“The knock?”

She raps walnut with one knuckle. Dat dat dat-dat-dat.

Redtape: waivers, consent declarations. I give her the spiel, then, “That it?” she says.

“That it,” I say, “Unless...” stretching a rigormortis stewardess smile, “Choking or non-choking?” which earns me an insulated signal of a laugh.

“Ailbhe’ll issue you with a receipt. Go about your week. Do what you do. Your thing. We’ll find you.”

We shake and she sallies out of the room. Spy a tattoo on her coccyx. Small

black circle. Wonder what that. Celtic band. Zero. An oh. The wheel of being.  
Crosshairs for a tap.

Windchimes tinkle, enlivening and purifying the air, dispelling sickness.

Home soon. Bass scales bdangagungnagunnnghhh all twelve keys  
motherfucker... Seen what George goes home to every night? Holy Roman  
Empire, Batman. Crooked little semi overlooking a pissyellow alley. Cats yowl  
and screw all night beneath his sill. Paint flaking badly, white with blue trim  
reminds me of a pair of Burt Reynolds' underwear. Stuck with George even if dee  
bee gee pee ell cee, my baby, goes over the falls in a barrel. Perhaps have him on  
mopup a month or two. Scrubbing gouts of cornflower syrup off tiles. Balmatives  
to rope-chafed skin the like.

Windowsill decked with Exmas cards. Sun shines directly in my eyes and it is  
just gone four. It is winter remember. I see gridlock ant-trails, slow piddling  
streams of drivers with murder in their brains.

Come see me I say.

I'm in the book.