

Kathy's Gin

by Cari Jo

"Incredible," she said, turning her eyes down to the brochure in her hand.

The roaring waves sang in harmony through the open bay windows. She looked around the expansive living room into the open kitchen at the front of the house and through the large five feet tall windows facing the sand road. Megan focused on the beautiful hardwood floors, the presidential blue walls, the quartz counter tops, and stainless-steel appliances. The wall along the living room was pure glass, framing the soft sands of the beach as if it was a picture.

"Ms. Wole," Megan called out.

The real estate agent, Dharma Wole, came down the floating stairwell. She had long, thin, straight, brown hair that was cut just at her shoulder blades. Her eyes caught most people by surprise because they were so delectable. They were the color of key lime pie and encased by light brown eyelashes. Megan was uncertain if her toothy smile was because she was about to make a large sale or if she was attracted to her.

"Well, what is it missing?" Dharma asked.

"A fireplace," Megan said.

They both let out a laugh at the same time. Megan spent the last three weeks with Dharma, nitpicking at least fourteen properties from Crystal Beach to Freeport.

"It's absolutely perfect, but how come it is in my price range?"

The house had two levels, four bedrooms, five baths, and was almost five thousand square feet, and with all that, three hundred and fifty thousand was the amount highlighted on top of that data sheet.

"Well," Dharma started, "the thing is-"

Megan continued to stare at her, and the longer it took her to continue, the more horrific things went through Megan's mind: a leaky roof, an unsafe foundation, the place is uninsurable, or worse, she had just spent three weeks flirting with a woman who was attracted to men.

"Okay, I brought you here because I knew you would love it, but I am required to inform you that the previous owner died in this home."

Megan's dull blue eyes turned up. She was laughing at herself for overreacting. Her imagination has been known to run away with itself. For a flash she thought that Dharma was about to tell her about her husband and four kids, who set fire to the house last year. She was relieved to hear that it was a simple matter, someone died in the home. She had never been superstitious, and though the idea of the zombies of *The Walking Dead* were scary, she did not have much faith in the dead outside of the television screen.

"Ms. Wole, I would like to have an inspection and appraisal done, but I am willing to meet the asking price."

"Wonderful, I'll make the offer today. Now, which bank do you plan on going through? I am also a licensed mortgage broker."

Megan felt terrible as she told her that she would be paying cash for the house. Dharma perked up when she heard the news and went to hug her. Megan let Dharma hug her, but she left her hands at her sides. She didn't trust this athletically thin woman between her arms. Dharma was so excited about the commission she was going to get from this house that she barely noticed Megan's recoil.

"Dharma," Megan said, "how did the previous owner die?"

Megan did not really want the answer. She assumed the owner was an elderly lady who died of natural causes, and she wasn't prepared for what she heard.

"I am new to the Island, from Corpus Christi myself, but it was a major news story at the time."

Dharma began stuttering and playing with her hands.

"I guess it was a small story compared to what you are used to in D.C."

Dharma cleared her throat and shifted her feet before she continued.

"The young lady was shot from the beach while sitting on the balcony."

"Wait you mean she was murdered?"

Megan was far too rational to give up this dream home at this price, but she began to feel a bit dizzy and itchy all over. She was starting to have a panic attack.

"I can give you her name, and you can look up the news articles, but I am afraid I don't know much about the case."

Megan did not know much about Dharma, but she knew that she was lying. Dharma walked closer to Megan and took her hands to try and settle her. Megan suffered from a nervous disorder. Megan noticed a smaller nervousness within Dharma. Megan chastised herself for believing this woman would lie as she felt Dharma's hands taking hers in such a kind and friendly gesture. Her touch said she was a kind and honest woman, but as Megan let herself relax, she began to feel a shake of Dharma's hand. She was nervous. Either she was lying, or she returned Megan's feelings.

"Don't worry, Ms. Wole. This isn't going to change my mind."

Keeping it about business is how Megan made it through life. A reflex her friends would say. Dharma dropped her hands and walked toward the door.

"I believe it was a family dispute, but again, I am not from here."

Dharma was too scared to lose this commission by giving her more details.

"Your neighbor three doors down; her name is Kathy Finn. She's a local blogger of sorts. She wrote about the trial. If you want to know more about the owner, she would be a good source."

Dharma was confident Kathy would not screw up this sell for her. Dharma wrote down Kathy Finn's web address on the back of one of her cards.

"I know what would help. Why don't you look around some more? Enjoy the beach. It is such a wonderful day, and I will head back to the office and put your offer in."

"Ms. Wole that is a generous idea. Will you be back by to pick me up or sending someone else?" Megan asked in a professional tone that was meant to exude a lack of interest in spending more time with Dharma.

"I'll come back out with one of the assistants, and we will bring your car. How's an hour and a half possibly two?" Dharma said.

She noticed Megan's black, thick, wavy hair. It was perfectly pinned back with just a hint of a stray hair on either side of her temple.

"Stop being stupid, her outfit alone, probably cost more than my entire wardrobe," Dharma said when she got into the car.

After a long walk on the beach, Megan found herself walking towards an oddly shaped house. Megan thought that the house looked out of place on this upscale beach, which boasted large mansions in the Georgian style. A woman came out on to her massive wrap balcony and waved at Megan. Megan waved back and trotted up the wooden access walk to her house. After an uncomfortable bear hug, she introduced herself as Kathy Finn and then offered Megan a drink. When Megan said yes, her eyes lit up and ran inside to bring lemonade out to the balcony. They both sat down on the lounge chairs.

"It certainly is a beautiful day. Isn't it? Of course, it is. It's springtime in Texas. Dharma told us neighbors that you're from Virginia. I confess I was expecting a big burly coal miner, but you look just lovely. That blouse, is it cashmere?"

Kathy reached out to touch her sleeve.

"Nope, silly me, it's silk. Well, my eyes are getting old if I mixed those two up. What brings you to our little beach? Must be its access to Houston. I hear it every day, how nice it is to have a big city in such an easy distance."

Kathy never paused long enough for Megan to agree with her or answer her questions.

"So, I saw you coming out of the Sniper House? Are you thinking of buying it? It is an awfully good deal if you don't mind all that mess that happened last year."

It took a minute for Megan to realize that Kathy was waiting for an answer this time.

"Yes, ma'am. I am interested in that beautiful blue house. I am actually from a suburb outside of Washington D.C., and it does happen to be in Virginia, but no coal mining goes on there. Why do you call it the Sniper House?"

"Well, yes. That's the title of the book I am writing, *The Sniper House*. Tracy was shot right on her balcony. That awful woman, Jackie, shot her from the beach. Just like that Eastwood movie, dead before she hit the ground."

Kathy Finn was an elderly woman in her seventies with short teased hair and gray eyes. Megan noticed that she was very pale for living on the beach and assumed she didn't leave her covered balcony to go to the beach and get sun. The awning extended about four feet from the roof, and the four supporting beams were at least twenty feet long. Megan took a glance at the house again, and then finally realized what was so unusual. It was in a shape of a trapezoid, and there was no second-floor balcony.

"Ms. Finn-" Megan began but was stopped.

"No, no, no, you are in Jamaica Beach now. Stop that Ms. Finn, Ms. Kathy stuff. Just call me Kathy. Now, let's see. How do you like your lemonade?"

Megan wasn't sure if she should apologize or tell her that she hadn't called her Ms. Kathy at all, but she decided it would be ruder to correct the woman.

"Ms. Finn, the way I was raised, it's proper to address a lady in such a manor. In fact, my mother would fly down here and swat my behind if she heard that I was using your first name."

Megan was lying. Her mother was a cashier at Walmart who made up embarrassing nicknames for everyone. It was one of the few things that helped her deal with strangers.

"Now, I know I am from the East Coast, but I wasn't aware there were multiple ways to drink lemonade," Megan said in an apathetic manner.

Kathy laughed.

"Gin or Vodka? Or are you one of those tea toddler types? Gosh, I hope you're not one of those religious types. Are you? If you are, we have a lovely church here in the village. You don't have to drive into Galveston. The Minister, Father Newber, is a good sort of man but not much of an orator."

Megan imagined that there were not a lot of people who spoke well enough for Ms. Finn. She just pointed to the gin and let her new neighbor keep talking.

"Good. Gin is a fine choice. It's mine, too, you know. We have so much in common already. Well, now that you have your drink, I guess you want to know about that house."

"If you don't mind Ms. Finn, ..."

Megan sat back in the chaise and put her sunglasses down. She was a bit chilly. Her green silk blouse was not much protection from the winds. Ms. Finn did not seem to notice as she had already begun recounting what she knew about Tracy Birch.

"Oddly enough, the trial was not spectacular. You would think execution on the island would go viral, but that was the same time as Harvey. So, there was very little coverage at all, but I was there every day following and documenting the case. I am a real crime writer, written about fifteen books now, and I would have been done with that awful case in Texas City, but this one was right down the road. You see."

She paused hoping Megan would interrupt and say that she had read some of her work, but Megan sat staring out at the beach, and not looking at Kathy. Megan cleared her mind of Dharma's green eyes and finally took the hint.

"Oh, actually, Ms. Wole gave me a copy of one of your books. Unfortunately, it was only just yesterday. I am already halfway through, though. I can't put it down."

Megan lied. She felt cruel for not validating the old woman. Megan noticed Kathy had paused, and she reached into her pants and retrieved a small piece of paper and a small pin. She wrote Kathy's name down. Kathy also promoted her blog.

"You'll find a lot of articles about Tracy's case there," Kathy said as she handed the card back, "Yes, I am, mostly blogs now, but in my day, I was a true crime writer. That's how I can afford all of this."

Kathy turned around in her chair and laid back.

"You see, Tracy and I were friends, and she liked her lemonade too."

Kathy's voice went down in pitch as she saluted her friend. Megan noticed that she did not raise the glass up, but she pointed to the ground with her index finger that was wet from the

lemonade glass. Kathy did not seem to take notice that Megan had turned her head to the left and was staring at her. She just continued.

"But, we are just getting acquainted. I will not call you a friend until you call me Kathy. Now, you came to hear the story. Tracy liked the vodka, you know, and would come by often enough. She didn't have many friends. Oh, well, that's not true. She had lots of them, but none of them lived close by. You see, she was a veteran of the Navy and hadn't had a home in thirteen years, so she just picked a place to retire. Very sad."

Kathy saluted Megan and took a big gulp. Megan pretended to sip her drink and then sat it back down on the side table.

"How long did she live here? Must not have been too long if she didn't have many acquaintances..."

"About five years, but you see, she was injured from the war and didn't get out much. She stayed at home most of the time. I believe she was a Commander in the Navy, or possibly a Captain, not sure which, but anyways, she was young to be either, but really, she just looked young. I swear-"

She moved in close to Megan's ear. Megan pulled back by instinct but then realized that Kathy just wanted to share a secret with her, so she began to slowly move back towards her.

"I grabbed my breast in court when I learned that she was," Kathy lowered her voice and exaggerated each syllable, "Forty-six years old. I would have sworn she was in her early thirties, and I do not give flattery to anyone."

Kathy looked at Megan, and Megan centered herself on her chaise. She found it amusing that Ms. Finn was so discrete with Tracy's age. After all, it was just the two of them on the balcony and only a handful of people on the beach which was five hundred feet away from them.

None of them could have heard her, and she loved the embellishment of her speech. Megan thought it would have been funny if she actually grabbed her large droopy boobs in court.

"Well, anyways, what I was saying is that on a day to day basis she didn't socialize that much, so she would come over here and visit for a bit. She wasn't much of a story teller. Actually, she was a pretty bad one. If you ever asked her about the war, she would quip, 'Not as exciting as you would think', then shrug her shoulders and move on. Imagine my surprise to find out that she was a war hero, worked in intelligence."

Kathy stopped finished her drink. She moved her neck to see if Megan was done or not, but Megan's glass was still full.

"A real John Wayne, in her own right," she added.

It did not sound to Megan that Kathy knew that much about Tracy, and she was surprised quite a bit during the trial. Megan could not spend all day with Kathy, so she tried to steer the conversation back to the murder.

"She sounds like an enigma. Why would anyone want to kill her?"

"She definitely had her secrets. Well, it was an interesting day in December when she came and sat in my kitchen and told me that she was all shook up from a phone call that morning. You see, her brother called her, and he rarely called. She told me that his wife Facetimed with her, and he would only pass by on the screen with a wave. I guess they weren't that close.

"She sat right there in my kitchen drinking an Irish coffee. At the time, I didn't think much of it, but now, it's awful to think that I was privy to why she was murdered from the beginning and that I didn't do anything to stop it. I asked her if someone in the family died, but

she just sat there quietly, but then again, that was her nature. She was quiet. Just like you are."

Kathy stopped the story when she noticed that Megan wasn't drinking much.

"Is your drink okay, dear?" Kathy asked, staring straight at Megan.

Megan picked up her glass and gave her a silent toast and then took another drink.

"Yes, here's to you. Now, where was I?"

Kathy pulled her shirt forward. It was loose and had gotten trapped in between the chair and her back. After she was done adjusting herself, she took up Tracy's story again.

"I should have known something was wrong because she wasn't the type to share much about herself, but at times like that, I guess she just needed to get it out. I asked her if she was having man trouble, but she just said no. It wasn't until her second drink that she told me that a stranger had reached out to her brother, claiming to be a long-lost sister. Apparently, her mother had given her up in her teens, and she was trying to get in contact with her family.

"I handed her a third cup of coffee, but I thought this time she might like it a bit stronger, especially since I now understood why she was so upset. After I took down the Baileys bottle, I poured a shot until she told me to stop. She cleared her throat as I shut the cabinet, so I took out the whiskey. It's strange. I had never known her to be much of a drinker. She'd accept a glass or two but nothing like this."

Remembering Tracy drinking that much must have reminded Kathy that she was at the end of her glass.

"Oh, goodness my glass is empty," she said in fake surprise.

She had been hoping that Megan would hurry up and finish hers for the last seven minutes, but her guest had barely touched hers. That was the first indication to Kathy that

something was amiss about Megan. She just sat there staring out at the ocean with her expensive sunglasses on. It was starting to get grayer outside, and there was no reason to have them on.

Kathy excused herself and then slowly walked into her house and kitchen.

"She's hiding behind those glasses, and I'll figure it out."

She returned quickly to the patio and looked at Megan. She tried to sit down in the chaise next to her guest, but her hip had begun to tighten up. She wasn't sure if she could get back out of it, so she decided to move one of the higher deck chairs over towards Megan.

"Now, that didn't take too long. Where were we? Yes, Tracy was telling me about her family. It was just her and Kenny, but they did have a couple of half-brothers. You see, they had never met the two boys, so she didn't count them as family. So, I was right when I said it was just her and Kenny."

She looked at Megan, trying to decipher whether she noticed her mistake. Megan just turned her head. Kathy settled herself in her chair and took a big gulp of her drink, believing that Megan didn't know anything.

"Tracy told me that the woman's name was Jackie and that she was given up for adoption in 1969. Tracy said that Jackie didn't want anything but just wanted the opportunity to meet her birth parents. Of course, that proved to be nonsense. You know, I knew it right away, but you have to be delicate when dealing with other people's family situations."

Megan smiled and softly agreed with her. She took her glass and took a small sip of her lemonade to appease Kathy.

"So, she wasn't a sister?" Megan asked.

"Nope, not even four times removed. I knew something was wrong that first day, and I told her so. Of course, the truth didn't come out until the trial." Kathy said with a laugh and a smile on her face.

She was congratulating herself. Megan could see it in her head nods. Megan found the shameless self-promotion disgusting. After all, a woman was dead. A panic overcame her, and she began looking at her silver watch, hoping Dharma would arrive soon.

"I didn't actually know her mother because she had died when they were young. Such a tragedy, especially since her father was such a lousy parent. You know that he lost custody of Tracy and Kenny after their mother died. Yes, he moved that poor boy onto an orange farm in Michigan, or was it a pecan farm? Anyways, which ever it was when Kenny was down here for a visit a couple of years back, he had a major asthma attack, and she had to take him to the hospital all because he had eaten a salad with nuts in it. Apparently, he is allergic to nuts, or was it apples?"

Megan wanted to interrupt Kathy and correct her. Pecans, apples, nor oranges grow in Michigan. Either, the farm was elsewhere, or their father grew something else on a Michigan farm. However, Kathy refused to cede her story to Megan's inquiries, and she kept on. Megan sat up and turned her legs toward Kathy's chair, but now that she was lower than Kathy, she could not seem to catch her eyes. She decided to stand and walk about the balcony for a while. With barely a breath, Kathy continued speeding through the story.

"She told me that Jackie was a state investigator and got her birth records unsealed by a judge, and her mother's name was right on the certificate. I asked her if she had seen the records, and she told me that the woman had emailed copies to her. Apparently, this woman found her mother's name on ancestry.com, and because her brother is a fanatic about privacy she couldn't

find a phone number for him. So, she went down the leaves till she found someone with a number, and it was his wife's brother Wilson.

“Oh, I forgot to tell you that Wilson is the Sheriff of a neighboring county. When she contacted Wilson, she convinced him she was legit, and he called his sister, who told her husband, who called Tracy, and that was how that horrible story started.”

Kathy said all this rapidly while looking at her empty glass and then got up to go back inside. When she came back out ten minutes later, she had toilet paper on her shoe and a pitcher of lemonade in her hand. She fell back into her high patio chair and then scooted it closer to Megan chair. Megan was still standing and leaning against the patio rails. She wanted to sit down, but Kathy was in the high chair with her legs shoulder width apart. Megan averted her eyes from Kathy's open legs.

"I almost hate to finish the story, but you know how it ends, with her being shot, so I guess there isn't much more to say."

Kathy's verbal run-ons were getting worse. Megan sat down, and forced her head straight towards the beach and sat on the far right side of her chair. Her creamed colored silk pants got snagged on an exposed screw. Megan gently lifted up her pants, but the fabric was caught. She pulled a second time causing a small rip. Ms. Finn seemed oblivious and kept talking away.

"I can't remember anything else that Tracy said that day. I do remember that it had been several weeks before I went to visit her. The next time I saw her was when I brought her a copy of my latest book, *Galveston's Serial Killer*.

“Tracy was surprised at a local madman just as I am sure you are because after all neither of you are from here, and that story didn't get much national coverage either. There is a movie

that just came out. Has that nice guy from Walking Dead in the movie? There were thirty or so women buried in the oil fields on the other side of the causeway."

"I remember that Tracy teased me a bit about the title. She said, 'Now Ms. Kathy, wouldn't that make it *Texas City's Serial Killer*, and not Galveston?' She was a bit of a teaser in her time. I told her it was my write as a writer to name the book anything I wanted. 'Call it poetic license,' I said, and we both laughed and laughed. Then, I asked her about that new sister of hers. You know what she told me? She took my advice and hired a private investigator. Her eyes were nervous when she told me about the investigator. Apparently, he was a real professional from New York. He specialized in identity theft and was one of the best in the country. Tracy had looked into Jackie and found out that she was from the Georgia state police. She went to their website, but when Tracy clicked on several links and got a picture of her, the woman looked nothing like her or her mother, which she didn't think much of at the time until her brother had friended her on Facebook. Would you believe it the picture on her profile was different from the one on the state police website?

Then, when she tried to verify the documents that were sent to her, the adoption agency on the header didn't incorporate till 1976, seven years after she was supposed to have been given up. So, that is why she had spent the money on the investigator. I guess her internal bullshit meter had gone off because something wasn't right. It wasn't just the picture that bothered her. It was the 'why' as well. Her mother was dead after all. It didn't make sense that she contacted her children, asking questions. For Christ's sake, she died when Tracy was four. What was Tracy going to know?"

Kathy's voice wasn't quite as jolly as when the story started. She said the last sentence with anger towards the woman. Megan noticed how agitated she was getting and offered to stop.

"Ms. Finn if this is too much for you then we can stop."

She was getting a bit impatient. Kathy did not respond, so Megan sat silently. Then, if this was where the story was going to end, then she wanted to ask one more question.

"Ms. Finn," Megan said while Kathy was busy filling up her lemonade glass, "one thing I don't understand is that you said Tracy was a Naval Intelligence officer-"

"Why yes she was."

Kathy began sucking on the ice in her glass. Her aged hands rubbed the condensation off the glass, and she put her wet hands on her face.

"Well, if that is true, why did she hire an investigator? She should have known how to do a background check." Megan asked

"I am sorry?"

Kathy got out of her chaise and walked to the edge of the balcony and leaned out of the rail.

"It's just that-"

Megan noticed that fidgety Ms. Finn had disappeared. Her movements became exaggerated and with purpose. She stood straight up. Her legs were just as wide as when she was sitting, shoulder width apart.

"I don't know everything, why she did what she did, but I know for certain she walked through rattlesnake dunes when she hired that private detective," she screamed.

Megan felt bad for pointing out her new neighbors' inconsistencies. After all, she was old and had been drinking quite a bit that afternoon.

Just then, the rain came, and Kathy ran inside through her sliding glass door. Megan glanced up and noticed that the sky was still clear, but then, thunder came. Megan stood up and

looked behind her toward the highway. The sky was dark, and it looked like the clouds were coming fast. Megan hesitated to walk inside Ms. Finn's house. After all, she was not invited, but Dharma had not arrived yet with her vehicle. She also had left her phone in her car. She quietly knocked on the sliding glass door, and even though less than a minute had passed, she could see the sky darkening in the distance. She knocked louder.

The rain began to come down harder, and Megan decided not to wait but walk into the house. She went straight into the kitchen. It was cluttered with dirty dishes and food, and there was large dog shit on the floor. Megan tried not to breathe as she stood there looking around the filthy room for a phone, but she couldn't find one. She went through the door and straight into the dining room that was stacked full of papers. Megan went over to look at the papers, and most of them were blank with only doodles on them. There must have been a thousand of them all over the table. She felt around the rectangle oak table but could not find a cell phone, so she went through the door. There, she found Kathy laying on her floral couch. Her right arm was over the back of the couch, and her left leg was on the oak coffee table. Kathy's head rested on the couch arm, and her eyes were wide open. Megan screamed.

"Huh? Nothing is wrong," Kathy said as she dragged her leg off the coffee table and slowly pulled her arm down before she begrudgingly sat straight up.

"I am sorry. It's just that it is raining; I was wondering if I could use your cell to call Ms. Wole."

Kathy looked at her as if she did not understand what she was asking.

"Ms. Wole? The real estate agent? She went back to the office. She was supposed to come back and pick me up."

"Yes, hun. It's in my purse."

Megan sat her glass down and then nervously picked it back up.

"I'll just take this into the kitchen ma'am."

Kathy insisted she leave it, and then, she retrieved the phone and called Dharma herself.

Megan continued looking around the house and noticed the whole place was cluttered.

"I apologize if I offended you with my questions. It's just that this story is so interesting. I want to know more."

Kathy hung up the phone.

"Well, that will have to wait because Dharma said she was in her car about five minutes out. She'll be around shortly. I told her you were at my place."

Megan nodded her head and went toward the opposite side of the room to the door.

Megan opened the front door to see her rented Ford Taurus pass in front of the house and turn into the subdivision entrance. Megan ran out of the house, happy to be out of that filth. She looked down and saw that she had some dog shit on her shoes.

"Funny, I didn't see a dog when I was in there," she said to herself.

She opened the passenger side door, but Dharma was already moving from the driver's seat. She ran around to the driver side instead.

"Man, I wish I had left ten minutes before. You are all soaked," Dharma said with that smile on her face.

Megan nodded her head and stayed quiet. She was still thinking of Kathy's story. Her mind shifted from what she said, and what Dharma left out. Maybe it was best she had not admitted her feelings towards Dharma, she was hiding something. The two sat in silence for at least eight minutes. All the while Megan debated how she was going to get to what Dharma does not want to tell.

Dharma broke the silence. "I am surprised that you were at Kathy's house. Did she tell you about Tracy and her writing?"

"Yes, Ms. Wole. Ms. Finn was very forthcoming." She tried to keep her response succinct. She had this overwhelming feeling in her muscles that Dharma was not to be trusted, and that she had been a fool over the last three weeks. She was nothing more to her than a sale, and that was all.

Like most people, Dharma was set on needles with the change in her client's demeanor. "I guess I should have warned you about her. Though I had no idea that you two would meet today."

"Warn me about her?"

"I am not sure what she told you, but you should be aware that the truth and Kathy are strangers."

"That seems wrong since she is a true crime writer," Megan said the last word with a lower register, and with force in her vocal tone.

"Is that what she told you? Oh, my, you should know that she has written a total of two books, both novels were published by her family and were panned by critics. After that, she now fancies herself a columnist because she has that silly blog, that is more fiction than fact."

Dharma tried to explain to Megan that she should not give Kathy's story much credit. After relating the embarrassing truth of her writing career, Megan began to chastise herself for believing in her so quickly. After all, Kathy is a stranger. "She is not cruel though, and I do believe that she believes her own nonsense."

"Well, then why don't you tell me the story. I got the beginning from Kathy, and you told me the ending." Megan asked as a gesture of friendship.

"Well, if you would like to go to your hotel, I could call a friend, and he could give you the rest of the story."

Megan agreed, but she still couldn't shake the feeling that Kathy was not the only one who should not be believed.

Dharma was on the phone for a couple of minutes while Megan pulled into the hotel parking lot. By the time she hung up, the rain was beginning to lessen. Dharma waited in the lobby bar until Megan returned in a pair of jeans and long sleeved, light, black sweater. Dharma could not take her eyes off of her. Between her black wet locks, her black sweater, and her ivory skin, she looked like a doll. The room was full of people, but their booth was dead silent. Megan because she felt gullible in believing Kathy, and Dharma because she felt guilty for not telling Megan everything she knew. It was Dharma again who broke the silence.

"Well, uhm, I called Bobby, my ex's cousin - Angela. He was the court stenographer in his murder trial. I don't know him well, just family reunions and such, but he should be able to finish that story for you." Dharma asked, unsure that this gesture would make up for her earlier deception.

The two women sat there talking back and forth until it dawned on Megan what Dharma had said. "His murder trial."

"So Tracy was not killed by Jackie?"

"Oh no, it was her brother. Did that old coot tell you it was someone called Jackie?"

Megan and Dharma shifted their weights toward each other and concluded that Kathy hadn't told her it was Jackie that killed Tracy. The two woman waited in that booth with wonderment for Bobby to arrive, and to hear his story.

