**Chapter 1**

Colin Kilpatrick held his head in his hands as the constant ringing of the doorbell brought him out of a deep sleep. “What’s going on?” he thought, as a soft moan erupted behind him. Slowly, he turned, facing the beautiful back of a woman. “Dammit, who did I bring home?” he muttered, trying to ease the ache in his stomach? The room was dark and he was not able to make out the face of the woman, but the sunlight shined through the windows just enough for him to see she was not hideous.

Ding, dong, ding, dong, the bell rung, sending waves of pain to his head. Who in the hell could be stopping by this time of morning? Slowly he stood, trying to get his balance as his body swayed back and forth. The last thing he needed was for his unwelcomed guest to wake the woman sleeping in his bed. He wanted to figure out her identity before he woke her up. Using his bedroom furniture to guide him, he made his way into the hallway. He continued clinging onto the wall until he made it to the front door. The short journey seemed to have taken all his energy. Laying his head on the door to fight off fatigue, he peered through the peep hole.

Ding, dong, ding, dong…the intruder continued their intrusive pursuit, as he tried his best to focus on the small hole in the door. The annoying, gut wrenching noise, threatened to cause him to empty out the contents in his stomach onto the beautiful tile floor. Slowly, he took a deep breath, as he tried to focus on peeking through the tiny hole. Who idea was it to make the hole in the door so small? Come to think of it, what was the point of that damn whole if you had to concentrate so hard to see who was on the other side? Breathing out of his mouth, he put all of his focus on the small hole this time concentrating on the object on the other side of the door. Damn, Cynthia, this morning just got worst, he breathed, opening the door.

Cynthia pushed him to the side, inviting herself into his home.

The damp smell of rain filled the space as he tried to keep himself from vomiting. The mixture of rain, sea, and all things Folly Beach, made him nauseous. Quickly as he could, he closed the door, shutting out the smells and turning to find his mother.

“Cynthia, can you please come back later?” he strained. “I am not feeling well this morning.”

“You’re not feeling well because you are drunk,” she replied. And, what type of way is that to greet your mother? It’s bad enough you made me wait on the doorstep as if I am a stranger.”

“Ma, I’m sure Patrick has something you could do for him. I am not in need of your assistance at this time.” Patrick, one of his younger brothers, was always in need of his mother help. He seemed to have a screw loose that only she could fix. For most of his life he was always in the middle of some mess. Actually, most of the time, Patrick was the cause of mess and destruction. He and Cynthia were two pees in a pod. Their mother/son relationship had long been a sour topic in the Kilpatrick family.

“Patrick is busy at the moment,” his mother yelled, causing him to cover his ears.

“Busy doing what?” Colin asked, as he followed his mother’s voice into the kitchen. It seemed as if it took him forever to cross the short distance to the kitchen. Taking a seat at the counter, he placed his head down on his arms and prayed this was one of his mother’s short visits.

“Does it matter?” she replied. “It seems you are in need of my help at the moment.”

“Cynthia, I don’t need your help. What I need is a nap, aspirin, and a bottle of water, not necessarily in that order.”

“Where is the aspirin?” she asked.

“In the cabinet above the microwave,” Colin replied, not bothering to lift his head.

Cynthia reached for the bottle of Advil before slamming the cabinet closed. Usually she did not take pleasure in watching her children in pain, but she was upset with Colin and his poor choices. He was the oldest. He was supposed to be able to hold himself together. Folly Beach was a small town full of gossipers. The last thing she wanted to deal with at her local bridge meeting was gossip about her son. She could hear the ladies, “I did not know your son had a drinking problem” or “I know a doctor out of town who can help Colin get off the bottle.”

“Ouch,” he moaned, rubbing his temples. Must you slam the cabinet?

“Here you go,” Cynthia replied, watching her son sway on the bar stool. If he made any sudden moves, she was sure he would fall. Maybe that would serve him right for allowing himself to fall apart. The least he could do was get drunk in the comfort of his own home she thought, watching his body sway as he tried to lift his head.

“Thanks for your help, now if you don’t mind, please let yourself out,” Colin said, holding onto to the bar to steady himself. Slowly, he tilted his head to the side, tossing the pills inside his mouth.

“Colin, you are not about to get rid of me so stop trying.”

“Please lower your voice,” he requested. His mother had a way of making situations worse than they had to be.

“I’m not yelling. If you were not hung over, you would know that.”

“It is not as bad as it looks, Colin replied, unsure of how bad he looked at the moment. It wasn’t as if she gave him the opportunity to look in the mirror before opening the door.

“Cynthia, I promise if you leave, I will come by the house later.”

“We are expecting another storm tonight. I don’t think you will be going anywhere. Besides, from the looks of things you may need to stay in for a few days.”

“A few days,” he mumbled. “I’m a little hung over; it will only take a few hours for the aspirin to do its job.”

“Yes, but how long will it take for you to get that woman out of your bed? I can’t believe you would betray your brother this way.”

“Betray my brother? What does me getting drunk and sleeping with a woman have to do with my brothers? And how in the hell do you know there is a woman in my bed?

“I know because her car is parked outside. How could you go behind Patrick back and do this?”

“Do what?” he asked. “Never mind don’t bother answering that question. I don’t have the strength for this conversation. Can you do us both a favor and wake the woman up in my bedroom? You can give her a little speech about getting drunk or whatever it is you are attempting to do. I need to sleep this off, he implored, trying to stand.”

“I’m sorry but that request does not fall under my motherly duties. Would you like me to help you to the couch instead or would you prefer busting your head open on this beautiful tile?”

“If it’s not too much trouble, yes, please help me to the couch.

“Sure, that’s what mothers are for, she replied.

“Can you do it without being sarcastic,” he asked, holding on to his mother as she helped him onto the couch. Colin pulled an afghan over his face to block the blinding light out.

“About the woman in your bed, do you have any idea who she is?”

“No,” Colin replied. “I am sure it is somebody I picked up from the bar. I was trying to find out who she was but you kept ringing the doorbell.”

“My boys, you all never seem to amaze me. The woman in your bed is Tonya Lowe.” Cynthia watched Colin as the words she uttered reached his drunken brain. Taking his brothers business partner home was the worst thing he could do.

“What? Noooooo… it is not,” he slurred. There was no way he would sleep with Tonya Lowe. Patrick’s business partner was to structured and buttoned up for a one night stand. Cynthia had to be up to one of her antics. Tonya Lowe was not in his bed.

“Yes, it is. I know it is Tonya because her car is parked outside and Patrick and a couple of firemen are out at her home. It appears he went to her house to make sure she was not trapped inside. The neighbor stated he sees lights on in her garage late at night at least four times a week. I thought that was odd because who would spend time in their garage when they have a beautiful house, but that is beside the point. The point is, I am here to keep your brother from coming over.

“Why is what she does in her garage important to her neighbor, this situation, or you being here?”

“It is important because a tree fell on her garage. After the firemen arrived, they could not locate Tonya. The neighbor was hysterical thinking she was trapped inside the garage. After it was discovered she was with you, everyone was able to calm down.”

“Ma, that is not Tonya in my bed,” Colin replied.

“She is the woman in your bed. No matter how much you want to pretend this didn’t happen, it did. I suggest the two of you get together and come up with a plan. The gossip mill is already running amuck. Everyone knows the two of you got drunk last night and were escorted out of the bar as the storm began. To make matters worse, Kimberly O’Neal was your bartender. Kimberly has told everyone who would listen that the two of you were drunk out of your minds. She claims she offered you a ride home but you turned her down.”

“What? How is it possible to get drunk off the drinks at the bar, those drinks are water down and cheap?

“That may be the case but you are in fact drunk. Also, the way you two parked your cars show that you were pretty hammered. What I don’t understand is why you would get behind the wheel drunk; it one of the worst storms on record in Folly Beach.”

“I don’t remember driving home,” Colin replied.

“Well you did!” Cynthia yelled. Drunk drivers made her upset. She could not understand how anyone could get behind the wheel and drive after drinking. Sober or not, an individual knew the consequences of getting behind the wheel after drinking. What made her furious is that the person who drove drunk, was often the person who survived an accident. It was the innocent bystander or driver and their family that suffered the most.

“Ma, please lower your voice, you are making my headache ten times worst.”

“Really, well let me pile on some more details, maybe then you will think twice before getting drunk. After I got the call from Patrick this morning, I did my best to cover for you. I told Patrick that Tonya decided to stay here and wait out the storm. I also told him, since a tree fell on her house and it is currently declared unsafe, you would allow her to stay in your guest home.

“You did what,” Colin strained, removing the cover from his face. The onslaught of light made him light headed, as he leaned over praying he did not vomit.

Cynthia recognized the change in the color of Colin’s face, stepping back before he vomited on her. “If you vomit, you will clean it up,” Cynthia announced, disgusted by his actions.

Colin took a few deep breaths, before responding. “Why did you tell him she was here? She could have sought refuge in one of the B & B’s or at a hotel.”

“The convention is the weekend, everything was booked. Besides, how do you explain Kimberly’s story and the gossip going around town? Better yet, how do you explain her car in your driveway?”

“You should be thanking me instead of questioning me. I could have let Patrick mind wander. Just think about it, he would have been ringing your doorbell instead of me.”

“I can’t believe this is happening”, Colin replied, pulling the covers back over his face.

“Well, it is and you have to fix it.”

“Fine, I will deal with it later. If Tonya feels like I am feeling right now, I am sure she will be sleeping for the next couple of hours.”

“In that case, I will let myself out,” Cynthia fumed.

“Fine,” Colin replied, waving her away. He could not believe one night of drinking had led to all of this. How in the hell was he going to explain this to Patrick? Knowing his little brother, it was only a matter of time before he shows up, to check on his business manager.

The slamming of the door, made his head ring. Cynthia knew how to make a damn statement, he thought, before closing his eyes. “God, if you get me out of this, I promise you I will not drink again, he prayed.”