

Chapter 1

I am in the one place in Westwood, Rhode Island that reeks of possibility: the public library. I take in the papery smell of the books lined up on the shelves and detect just a hint of mildew. Possibility extends beyond smell; it also includes sounds. The hushed whispers of teenagers huddled over their textbooks and their suppressed giggles. I can hear Peggy at the front desk chatting to patrons as she checks out their books—do those people get as excited as I do about devouring their new finds? I hope so.

This is the one place where time slows down for me. I have never been one of those people who run in here and grab anything to check out. I take my time. I browse. It's a spa for my brain. I am strolling through the K section at the library, running my fingers down the spines lined up on the shelf to my right, so many of them I haven't read yet. Right now I am obsessed with tell-all memoirs written by 80s rock stars. I've read all of them I can get my hands on: Ozzy Osbourne, Stephen Tyler, Neil Peart from Rush, and Motley Crue, to name a few.

But today I am searching the stacks for the latest in a series written by Amy Kulpepper. When I am not reading rock star tell-all memoirs, Amy's work is my favorite escape: a period dramatic series about an 80s metal band on the verge of hitting it big. Apparently, I am not the only one in Westwood, Rhode Island who is obsessed with the rise and fall of Amy's band, Pound of Flesh: all of her books have been checked out.

Just before I decide to give up on Kulpepper, I find another book I hadn't noticed on the same top shelf. The book has a white dust jacket with the title in light grey font: *Colors Fade*. In a font a shade lighter is the name of the author: Keith Kutter. I slide the book off the shelf and look at his picture. He's almost as I remember him, though his hair is now shorter and more

modern, not the mullet I remember from the 80s. Then I examine the inside dust jacket blurb—“Keith Kutter’s journey to hell and back,” it reads tantalizingly. My heart beats just a bit faster as I gaze at his photo. The hint of age on his face makes him hotter than he was back then. Now he looks like a man who has it all figured out. It had been Keith Kutter’s face that I’d plastered all over my room when I was a teenager. He has a few more lines around his piercing blue eyes, but I still feel like he’s staring deep into me from in front of the camera. When I was fifteen, I had entire conversations with his photos; right now I feel like I could tell him anything.

Keith Kutter was the bassist from the multi-platinum metal band, Hydra. I wish I could stand here in the K aisle and spill my deepest darkest feelings to his photo. I feel like he’d understand. But since I got married, I’ve allowed myself to lose the ability to confide in someone that isn’t my husband, Tim. Sometimes my deep, dark feelings are about Tim.

He’s waiting in the car for me outside the library, and I hope he hasn’t gotten too impatient. I grab *Colors Fade* and head up to Peggy at the checkout desk.

“Hi, Brenda,” she says, looking over the cover. “Another rock star memoir, huh? Man, you are hooked on these things. Are they really that good?” Apparently my rock star memoir binge is trending.

“Peggy,” I say to her, “you know how some people are into history? Like my dad will read anything about World War II that he can get his hands on? Well, to me, this is art history. I grew up listening to these guys.” I point to Keith Kutter’s face on the back cover. “And now I get to learn about what their lives were really like back then, while they were making all that music. It’s fascinating.” Peggy nods, but I can tell she’s not interested. It’s like when my dad talks about World War II: I just smile politely, the way Peggy’s doing now. I don’t think Peggy’s the rock

and roll type. But I am. It's why I became a publicist in my professional career. Maybe someday I'll get to work on a band's PR. But for now I'm working in corporate public relations at Amanda Dixon PR, which provides me the occasional opportunity to work on a local personality's image. But I am hoping I can convince my boss, Amanda, that she needs to expand the company's reach into the local music industry—and that I am the one who should head up that division.

When I get out to the car I notice that Tim has moved to the passenger seat so that I can drive. He's got his Bluetooth in his ear and Skype on his iPhone. I can see Aria Kendall's salon-perfect long blonde hair filling the screen. How is it that Aria can look like a supermodel while Skyping? When I use my phone to do that, my skin looks both grey and greasy. Aria is Tim's campaign manager. He's running for State Senate, and it's completely taken over his life. Every day, he's either meeting or Skyping with Aria. By the time he is done with that, he's already told someone else—Aria—all about his day, and he's all talked out.

“Aria,” Tim is saying, “I'm glad that you agree about door to door campaigning. It would be a huge waste of time. Nobody wants me walking up to their front door, right?” As I'm listening, I realize that I agree with Tim on that point, too. The truth is, I've closed our front door—which we rarely use—on many candidates for this or that office, and instantly forgot them the moment I'd locked the door again. I have my own opinions about Aria as a person, which I wouldn't ever share with Tim, but I think she's a good campaign manager. Tim had met Aria at one of his mother's over-the-top expensive fundraisers. I suspect that Portia, Tim's mom, had really been trying to fix Tim up with Aria, but they'd hit it off anyway after they'd got to talking

about local politics. I am not sure that Aria's intentions are completely pure when it comes to Tim; but she really hasn't given me a solid reason to be suspicious. Yet.

"Can we film a TV spot at the shop?" Tim asks her. Tim is also a mechanic and he owns an auto repair shop in town. "I want to put up a big campaign sign out in front, too. There's a lot of traffic on Orchard Street; it'll be free exposure."

Now he's talking my language. I've asked Tim if there was any way I could help with the campaign, seeing as how PR is my job, but he's told me that he doesn't want to burden me with it. "I want you focused on getting your promotion at work," he said. And he's probably right. Amanda has been dangling a Vice President's role in front of me for about half a year now. I want it so bad that I work late just about every single night, and sometimes on weekends. And while I work, Tim and Aria are plotting to take over Rhode Island with his State Senate campaign.

The truth is, I don't really know where I would fit in, as Aria is running everything for him. Of course, I am interested in what Tim is doing, and I'd love to talk to him about it more. But by the time he gets home, he doesn't want to talk about the shop or his campaign anymore. What else is there for him to talk about? I don't know...are we just going through the seven year itch? We've certainly been married that long; have we run out of things to talk about? Am I not interesting enough anymore? Aria, I am sure, is fascinating, with her connections in business and government all over the state.

As Tim continues with his conversation, I pull the car out of the parking lot and head toward home. I reach over and take his hand. I give it a slight squeeze and he squeezes back briefly, then he lets go. That's how it's been between us lately. These mini-moments of

affection, kind of like “Oh yeah, we’re supposed to make loving gestures to each other in between all the stuff we have going on.”

Lately, I’ve been wondering what the next step is for Tim and me as a couple. I can’t help thinking we aren’t as aligned in our goals as we had been, that maybe we’re going too far off on our own individual tracks. I want to embark on an adventure together to get us back to being a team. A baby would be just the thing to get us focused as a family again. Right now I feel like we’re both on our own separate orbits, with me trying to get promoted at work, and him trying to get elected. When will it ever be the right time to start our family? For me, there’s no time like the present. But for Tim, there’s always some goal we need to reach first, like our bank balance getting to a certain amount, or his getting elected, or me getting my promotion. Just thinking about the situation is getting my jaw working and my teeth grinding as I drive—and as my husband is discussing his campaign talking points with some other woman. I decide, then, that we have got to do something to break out of this rut.

When we get home, I head to my computer to look up a travel site on the internet. “Hey Tim?” I call to him from my desk. “I just found a great deal for flights to Orlando next week. How about we get away for a few days? You know, before things really heat up before the election? I don’t know about you, but I could use some fun.” Okay, it’s probably not the right time. It’s never the right time. But that’s what makes a spontaneous trip exciting—going anyway, even if you’re feeling overwhelmed with life at home.

From where I am sitting, I can see Tim pick up his phone and swipe over a couple of screens, probably to his calendar. He furrows his eyebrows. He’s about to say no, I just know it.

“When is the last time you and I just packed up and went on a long weekend trip?” I ask him.

“We need this. Let’s go. Please.”

Tim ambles toward me, looking troubled. “Bren, I just don’t think…”

“Come on. We’ll fly out on Thursday night, and come back on Monday by noon. It’s only a day and a half off from work.”

I see him weighing the pros and cons of taking the time off; I start to tap my foot on the parquet floor, knowing eventually the tapping will make him nuts.

“OK, fine,” he sighs. “You win. Let’s go to Orlando.”

I jump into his arms, but they feel rigid to me. I know getting away from work can be hard for him; I’ll have to reschedule a few things at the office as well. I have the Smile Airlines product launch coming up soon, and I am in the thick of it with coordinating ad spots in the local media and organizing the redesign of the airline’s web site. But a little romantic trip will be just the thing to get us back to having fun together again, I just know it.