



Connected (Connections #1)

By Kim Karr

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What if a 'Once in a Lifetime' could happen twice? Suffering from a past full of tragedy, Dahlia London's soul has been left completely shattered. Happily ever after is a far cry from reality in her world. But, when she is reconnected with her past, the bonds that form are irrefutable. When River Wilde, lead singer of The Wilde Ones, comes back into Dahlia's life, the intensity that fires their relationship combined with underlying feelings that have never died lead her to believe she has met her soul mate. Struggling with confusion as old connections fade and new ones begin, Dahlia's grief begins to lift—but guilt remains. River wants to be the one to mend all that is torn within her. But with a past that is never really gone, can their future survive?

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Editorial Review

Review

Praise for *Connected*

"I was pulled in from the first word and felt every emotion...An incredibly emotional, romantic, sexy, and addictive read."—Samantha Young, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Down London Road*

"Emotional, unpredictable, and downright hot."—K.A. Tucker, author of *Ten Tiny Breaths*

"This book had all my favorite things. Sweet, all-consuming romance, smart and real characters, and just enough of every emotion to keep me unable to put the book down. This was one of those holy-smokes kind of books!"—Shelly Crane, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Significance*

"It's been two weeks since I finished *Connected* and Dahlia and River are still in my head."—Bookaholics Blog (5 stars)

"I am now in awe of Kim Karr."—Shh Mom's Reading

"I can't say enough about this book! I LOVED IT! You will be sighing, swooning, and smiling often but you will also be crying, yelling and you will have your jaw drop to the floor once or twice."—The Book Enthusiast

"I can't wait for more of [Karr's] books!"—Aestas Book Blog

"Grabbed my attention and held onto it from beginning to end...The romance, the heat, the angst, the storytelling and the characters are all captivating and very well-balanced."—Bookish Temptations

"A sexy, emotional and wonderfully romantic debut...Kim Karr has a fantastic 'voice' which will only continue to grow and refine."—Swept Away by Romance

About the Author

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CHAPTER 1

Out of My Head

October 2006

Walking through the Greek-lettered doors of Kappa Sigma, I felt like I'd just stepped onto a movie set. It was Halloween, everyone was wearing costumes, holding red Solo cups, and dancing ... well, not everyone.

I looked twice to be certain, but sure as shit, there was a large, dark blue ice luge in the center of the living room. The guy at the bottom of the channel was my boyfriend, Ben, and the person in line behind him was my best friend, Aerie. I didn't go to a lot of fraternity parties, and looking at the two of them now, I

knew why.

Frowning at the two drunken idiots on the receiving end of the ice luge, I headed toward the kitchen to grab a beer. As I crossed back into the living room, I saw Ben sucking on a lime and squinting his eyes with his nose scrunched as he moved his head from side to side. While shaking my head, I passed by a couple playing beer pong and laughed. Clearly she'd had a few too many drinks.

Noticing me, Ben shot a wicked smirk in my direction and crooked his index finger, gesturing me toward him. He strode a few steps closer, his gaze holding mine as the crowd cleared the way.

Standing face-to-face, I could see that his forget-me-not blue eyes were slightly hooded, allowing me only a glimpse of his dilated pupils. But his sly grin was still present, meaning he was in a somewhat coherent state of mind.

Raising an eyebrow, I pointed to the dark blue ice sculpture. "Hey, how many times did you hit that?"

Feigning confusion, he raised his hands palms up. "Not sure," he

said as he cocked his head to one side while shrugging his shoulders.

Ben took the cup out of my hand and set it on the table beside us. He snaked his arms around my waist and pulled me to him. "Hey, Dahl. What took so long?" he asked as he placed his strong hands on my behind.

Wrapping my arms around his neck, I rested my forehead on his

chin and let out a slow sigh. "Photo shoot took longer than expected. Drake had a meltdown when the models' outfits weren't the shade of purple he'd asked for."

Ben groaned and dipped his head to kiss me. "Drake's a fuckin' pansy-ass. He'd better hope you find a new internship for next semester because he's really starting to piss me off."

Flinching a little at his words, I leaned back to place my hands on his hard chest before looking into his slightly glazed eyes. "Ben, promise me you'll stay away from him."

"Will do. Promise, Dahl." He chuckled, the smell of alcohol strong on his breath.

I sighed and ran my hands up to his hair, combing my fingers through it.

Looking at me with concern, he whispered, "You okay?"

"Of course. The wrong color purple isn't really the end of the world."

He studied me and hesitated before responding. "Dahl, you know that's not what I mean."

I stiffened. I knew what he meant, but I didn't want to talk about the anniversary of my parents' death."

"Ben, I'm cool. Let's have a good time," I muttered. I broke our embrace, grabbed my beer, and looked around the room for Aerie.

Ben nodded, his sly grin returning while he watched me chug the entire contents of the Solo cup before chewing on the ice cubes. beckoning me to the center of the room, he pointed to the luge. "This way, gorgeous."

Having refilled our drinks, we stood at the liquor-filled ice dispenser. The party was in full swing, and I watched Ben hit the luge yet again. When I excused myself to use the restroom, I glanced around at the crowd and pushed through the chaos. There were wall-to-wall people in every room. I stumbled into a tall guy with red hair, and I knew he was beyond drunk when he tried to kiss me. I shoved him and giggled when he tripped over his own feet and fell on his ass. I continued making my way to the stairs. They were filled with students drinking, making out, or doing way more than I ever needed to see.

The room smelled like alcohol mixed with sweat, and I suddenly felt like I couldn't get out of there soon enough. Weaving around the crowd on the stairs I was thankful to finally make it to the bathroom.

After splashing my face with water, I headed to Ben's room for a much-needed mental break. This particular day was the hardest one of the year for me, but being around friends always seemed to help me through it. As I headed toward his bed, I noticed the tickets he had given me this morning. I knew he meant well by buying us Greek tickets to see one of my favorite bands, Maroon 5. He thought he would brighten an otherwise dark day, but I couldn't go back there.

Sighing, I threw myself on the bed. Yes, he meant well and he really wanted to be the one to take me there, but he knew I would never go back. I've told him this. The U2 performance was the last concert I went to with my family before my mother, aunt, and my father died in a small crash coming home from Mexico.

I'm not sure how long I stayed in his room thinking about my parents until I finally decided to rejoin the party. I first stopped in the kitchen to grab a third beer, and then headed back into the living room. All the lights had been turned off and orange candles glowed everywhere as the sound of haunting music filled the room.

I felt a strong arm wrap around my waist and Ben nibble on my ear. "Where you been, Dahl?"

"Just grabbing a beer," I answered, holding my Solo cup up in the air and twisting around in his arms.

Loud screams pulled my attention back to the ice luge where Aerie was jumping up and down, grabbing her throat, and squealing in pain. Motioning my head toward her, I set my cup down on the banister.

"What's she drinking?"

Clutching his arms tighter around my hips, he pulled me closer. As he slipped his long fingers inside the waistband of my black leggings, he fingered the lace of my panties and whispered in my ear, "Don't know." Then he placed one of his legs between mine and asked, "Want some?" I shook my head no but was nearly panting as I responded. "I promised Aerie I'd go with her to the bar and listen to some new band.

One of us should stay somewhat lucid-at least until we get there."

He trailed his hands across the top of my panties; the fingertips of his one hand grazed from my backside across to my hip bone. Before I knew what was happening, his fingers started drifting down into the front of my pants.

"I didn't mean the luge," he said coyly before plunging his tongue into my ear and grinding his hips into mine.

I pulled back from him and removed his hands from inside my leggings. I needed to stop this very public display of affection before I couldn't. I brushed his blond hair away from his seductive blue eyes and asked, "You coming?"

Grinning fiendishly, he answered, "I hope to be soon, gorgeous!"

I laughed and shook my head. "Ben Covington, you're impossible."

I reached around his neck and tugged his head down to mine, connecting my mouth to his.

Ben pulled his soft lips from mine and groaned in my ear. "My room now. I need to fuck you."

I leaned back and stared at his incredibly irresistible grin. Summoning all of my willpower, I tried to decide what to do.

Before I could respond, Aerie tugged my ponytail. She swayed slightly and slurred, "There you are, girlfriend! You ready?"

Separating myself from him, I shrugged my shoulders and mouthed, "Sorry. Rain check?"

He exhaled and muttered under his breath to Aerie, "Nice fuck-ing timing."

Aerie, being Aerie, thumped him in the forehead. "Watch the language, asshole," she quipped as she reached for my arm.

Leaning back toward Ben, I gave him a swift kiss. With Aerie forcefully tugging me toward the door, I managed to say, "Meet you back here later." Walking backward and giggling, I blew Ben a kiss and waved goodbye.

Rocking back on his heels, he stood with both hands in his pockets while biting his lip and shaking his head at me.

*

The cool night helped to settle the heat Ben had ignited. Sounds of Halloween echoed from every direction as we walked down fraternity row. We only took a taxi part of the way; then we walked the rest. Once we got out of the taxi, I glanced at Aerie, or more specifically, at her devil costume. She must have been plastered when she got ready because it wasn't something I could have ever imagined her wearing: a very short red sequin dress, a devil tail, high heels, and all the accessories to match. It could barely pass as an acceptable red-light-district ensemble-let alone a Halloween costume.

As we walked toward the bar, I grabbed a stumbling Aerie by the arm before she landed on her ass. "Have a nice trip?" I laughed, knowing full well she didn't like to be made fun of but not really caring.

Aerie shrugged, pulling her beautiful wavy blond hair back and fastening it with the clip she had been fishing out of her purse when she missed her step. "Be nice," she quipped, stopping me so she could readjust her shoe. "At least you can't call me a nonconformist!"

I never told Aerie that Halloween was the anniversary of my parents' death. Ben was the only one who knew I never wanted to camouflage my feelings with a costume.

I sighed and wrapped my arm around her shoulder and put on my very best Vincent Price voice from "Thriller." "Ahhhahhahaaahaaa, you know I never conform. It's against my religion."

We continued walking-Aerie in red high-heel vixen pumps, me in black Converse sneakers- and she tripped again, leaving her shoe behind her. "Aerie, really, I think your outfit could have done without those shoes.

They're too big, you dum bass." I turned around and picked up her shoe. "What size are these?" I asked, squinting to see inside.

"Don't worry about it; it's not like you'd ever wear them anyway, Miss I-Always-Have- to-Wear- Comfortable-Shoes. It was the only pair of red shoes left, and one size too big is hardly an issue when they match your outfit perfectly," she announced, yanking the shoe out of my hand. "You know it's all about the look. I'd sacrifice comfort for style any day. Ahem ..." She cleared her throat while looking down at my shoes.

Shaking my head at her, I couldn't help but roll my eyes. "What-ever."

I walked a little slower so she could keep her shoes on. Aerie said in a much sweeter voice, "Thanks for taking me out. Now, come on. Let's get moving and have some fun. It's girls' night out after a ll, and I have a broken heart to mend."

I gave her a little smile as I squeezed her arm. "Sweetheart, I think you started the mending process hours ago!"

Aerie shuffled down the sidewalk to hold her shoes in place, and I knew this was going to be an interesting night. Aerie, my best friend since freshman year, broke up with her boyfriends like I changed the flavor of my coffee creamer-often.

Aerie was type A, even though you would never have known it from her drunken state. She strove for perfection-not just with herself-but with her boyfriends. Which explains why she broke up with her last boyfriend yesterday. Tonight she was looking forward to new options, and I was looking forward to hearing a new band.

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