

Devoted: An Elixir Novel

By Hilary Duff

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“The sense of adventure and urgency are compelling” (*School Library Journal*) in this sequel to the *New York Times* bestselling *Elixir* by Hilary Duff.

Clea Raymond believes her soulmate, Sage, is lost forever, and it rips her apart. She is haunted by memories of him being taken away by his enemies. Then strange signs and dreams point to a way she can possibly win him back. To succeed, she'll have to put her faith in her former best friend Ben—despite the devastating reason he's lost her trust.

As Clea and Ben follow a dangerous and mysterious trail across the globe to reach Sage, all their loyalties will be tested. And Clea will face a terrible choice—she can save Sage, but only by betraying the people closest to her. With Sage's immortal soul in the balance, whatever Clea decides will change her life forever....

Devoted: An Elixir Novel By Hilary Duff Bibliography

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ACCEPTANCE.

I repeated that word over and over again in my mind, trying to clear my head.

I squeezed my knees into the horse's flank, pushing him to race faster, then faster still. I crouched low in the stirrups, my legs screaming as I hovered over the saddle. The reins were sandpaper on my blistered palms, and each gasp of air burned my throat.

For two beautiful minutes, I was *there*, free from every thought beyond the fight to stay astride.

But the horse could run that fast for only so long. Already he had slowed to a trot. I had to relax, and the second I did, the world crashed down on me.

Was it really only two months ago that Rayna and I were in France? That felt like another lifetime, and in a way it was. I was a different person before Sage.

Not that there was a "before Sage."

I pulled back on the reins and eased to a stop, then swung myself down. I pulled a small, hand-tied bouquet of wildflowers from a saddlebag. Resting my palms on the horse's heaving flank, I took a deep breath. I'd been doing this for weeks, but I still needed that moment. Facing the grave of someone you love never gets easier. I turned and smiled.

"Hi, Dad," I said. "I brought you flowers."

I knelt and placed the flowers on the memorial I'd put together. The large rocks looked like they were in the form of a cross, but I meant them as a caduceus, the symbol of my father's medical profession. I laid the bouquet by the largest stone, just under the silver iris necklace he'd given me when I was young. I'd worn that necklace every day, but now I preferred to keep it here.

The "real" grave for my father was in upstate New York, in the sweeping plot of land devoted to generations of Westons. Dad was a Weston by marriage, so when he was declared dead last year, he immediately earned a place of honor among the family's power brokers and politicians. I could picture the tombstone, long enough to fit two names. Throughout the graveside service, I kept stealing glances at my mother. Did she realize she was staring at her own grave, just waiting for her?

The funeral made it onto CNN, or so I was told. Didn't make a lot of sense to me at the time. It wasn't a real funeral. There wasn't even a body. My dad had disappeared from Brazil while on a humanitarian mission. He was a world-renowned heart surgeon, almost as famous as my mother, whom the media dubbed American royalty thanks to her political career and storied family. There was a worldwide manhunt when my dad disappeared. A United Nations of countries did their part to help, and the Westons were one of many wealthy families throwing money by the boatload into private investigations. Every single person involved eventually agreed: Grant Raymond was dead. His body was missing, and he was gone.

You'd think that would have been enough for me. It wasn't. I couldn't accept it.

Mom did. She threw herself into her career, which soared, and avoided the topic of Grant Raymond, even among her closest friends. Even with me. Tabloids called her the Ice Queen. They said her marriage had been a disaster, and the worst muckrakers wondered if Victoria Weston had planned her husband's disappearance, so she could both get rid of him and also use the ensuing public sympathy to propel her

career.

It wasn't true. Mom loved Dad, so much that she couldn't live with her grief. Instead, she dropped a steel wall between his death and the rest of her life.

I was different. I became obsessed with the idea that there was more to the story, and that my dad was alive.

I was partially right. There *was* more to the story . . . but was my father alive? I had no idea. He had disappeared the day he was supposed to meet Sage for a journey. When I first met Sage, he said he believed my father had been kidnapped by one of two groups, either of which would want to hold my father for what he knew.

Sage *also* told me his journey with Dad was a mission to retrieve the Elixir of Life. This was a lie. Sage and my father knew where the Elixir of Life was—it coursed through Sage's veins. The two of them were on a mission, but it was a mission to end Sage's centuries-long life . . . because they both wanted to protect *me* from an endless circle of tragedy.

Sage was my soulmate. Our hearts were tied together so securely that we found each other in every lifetime . . . and every lifetime ended early, in my own violent death.

Sage told me he believed my father was alive, but I'd had a lot of time to think over the past six weeks, and I understood now that Sage would have said anything to keep me around. Not because he loved me—he was fighting against that from the second we met—but because he was determined to destroy himself, and with my father missing, I was the only person who could get him the information he needed in order to do it.

So did my father's disappearance really have anything to do with Sage or the Elixir? Or had Dad simply wandered into the wrong place at the wrong time? The investigators had found no shortage of possibilities. They proposed everything from Dad getting caught in the cross fire between rival gangs in the *favelas* of Rio to Dad being mauled to death by wild animals.

I didn't know. What I *did* know was that Sage himself *was* alive. Gone, but alive. And I had to give him my full concentration if I ever wanted to get him back.

I fingered the iris charm hanging off my father's memorial. "I miss you. . . . I love you . . . and I'm sorry."

I had to apologize. Every time I came here, I felt like I was killing him all over again, but for me it was the only way. I had to let go of pipe dreams if I wanted to hold on to Sage. What-ifs only got in my way; I needed to close off everything but what I knew for certain.

Acceptance.

In one fluid motion, I rose, turned away from the memorial, pulled my camera from its shoulder case, and started shooting. Once, I'd have taken my time, lining up every snap for the perfect angle and layout, but now I didn't care—I wanted quantity. This was my fact gathering; it was how I knew for sure Sage wasn't dead. For weeks now I'd take pictures every day, and at night I'd download them and scour them for Sage. It always reminded me of the first time I'd discovered him, tucked impossibly into the backgrounds of Rayna's and my vacation snapshots. It terrified me then, even more so when I learned Sage had been lurking in pictures from all parts of my life—the same ageless face, whether I was six or sixteen. Back then I'd thought I was going crazy, and I'd have given anything for the whole thing to go away.

Now I ached for his image. It was the sign of our soul connection, and it wouldn't be there if his soul had

been destroyed.

I clicked off countless pictures, turning in a slow circle to get every angle. Not that the view mattered—I could just as effectively have taken a hundred pictures of my shoe. But I *felt* like I was doing more if I changed the view. I needed to do things to try to find Sage, or I'd start to feel helpless, and I did *not* do helpless well.

I slipped my camera back into the saddlebag and swung onto the horse . . . which screamed and bucked under me.

"Whoa!" I yelled. "Roosevelt, stop!"

I pulled the reins as Roosevelt's front, then back, legs kicked into the air. I had a feeling pulling was the exact opposite of what I was supposed to do, but the reins were the only thing keeping me attached to Roosevelt. I tried to squeeze his flank with my legs, but he was too strong—each buck flung me higher off the saddle.

"ROOSEVELT!" My screams were as frantic as the horse's, which had grown louder and more shrill. With a final buck, he launched me off his back, then raced into the surrounding woods. My last thought before I thumped to the ground was about my camera. I hoped it wouldn't break, bouncing around like that in the saddlebag.

I landed flat on my rear end. I screamed as the pain shot through me, and every horror story about horse-throwing injuries flashed through my head. I squeezed my eyes shut and took deep breaths, waiting for the worst to pass.

"I think we scared your horse," a small voice said. "I'm sorry."

My whole body whipped around to face the voice. Apparently I wasn't damaged from the fall, but what I saw paralyzed me just as effectively: four people, standing just a few feet away. Three adults and a young girl. The adults held themselves upright and motionless, but the girl smiled and waved. All four of them had shockingly blue eyes.

They hadn't been there a minute ago, when I was snapping pictures, and there was no way they could have raced to their current spots without me noticing.

"*You're* not scared of us though, Clea, are you?" the girl asked.

"No," I said.

The crazy thing was, it was true. Once, I'd have been as terrified as Roosevelt by four people appearing out of nowhere, especially four people with glowing blue eyes, three of whom looked like living statues, and who somehow knew my name. Now I was a veteran of far eerier sights (A decimated mummy rising from the dead and chatting with me? Been there, done that.), and I knew better than to think just because something was impossible, it wasn't real.

Acceptance.

"Oh, good," the girl said. "My name's Amelia. It's nice to meet you." She seemed about to say more, but the man next to her cleared his throat, and instead she closed her mouth and lowered her head. She kept her eyes on me though, and they danced with excitement.

“You’re so sad, Clea,” the man said. “Too sad. It weighs on you, I can feel it.”

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Robert Marques:

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Norma Brier:

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