



Always (Forever Trilogy Book 3)

By Jude Deveraux

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Darci has never given up searching for her kidnapped husband, Adam Montgomery. But her quest has taken her deeper into the world of psychic phenomena than she ever dreamed -- or dared to go. When the FBI enlists her help in locating the missing father of undercover agent Jack Rose, Darci signs on for the covert operation, not knowing that her attraction to handsome, sexy Jack is about to lead her into deadly territory -- and into an era long past. For Jack has a protector, a mysterious nineteenth-century lady who pulls them into a time and place where Darci is stripped of her abilities. Can she find the key that links to the modern-day crimes she's set out to solve? And will a showdown with a wicked force from the past hold her hostage...for all eternity?

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

More like a video game without rules than a romance, Deveraux's follow-up to her previous paranormal romance, *Forever and Always*, is a madcap and often nonsensical romp through time and space. Jack Hallbrooke, a perpetually enraged undercover FBI officer, is none too happy to rescue his kidnapped philanthropist father, who has treated Jack terribly. The quest infuriates him all the more when he learns he must work with Darci Montgomery, an all-powerful psychic who was dubbed the "Hillbilly Honey" after she married rich and supposedly killed her husband. Those who've read this novel's two predecessors will know Darci did no such thing and, in fact, has been on a long quest to find her handsome husband since he disappeared on a philanthropic mission. Newcomers, though, will be mystified by the goings-on in this book, especially when Jack and Darci start using magical objects that bring them into contact with spirits and even transport them back to the Victorian era. Sparse character development and a haphazard plot make for a jolting read, and the absurd conclusion, in which Darci realizes she has an impressive power that allows her to manufacture a happy ending for herself, is pat but somehow appropriate for this off-kilter adventure. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

About the Author

Jude Deveraux is the author of more than forty *New York Times* bestsellers, including *Moonlight in the Morning*, *The Scent of Jasmine*, *Scarlet Nights*, *Days of Gold*, *Lavender Morning*, *Return to Summerhouse*, and *Secrets*. To date, there are more than sixty million copies of her books in print worldwide. To learn more, visit JudeDeveraux.com.

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Chapter One

Connie and Kayla were almost the same age and about the same size. Even their coloring was nearly the same. But as alike as they were, they couldn't have been more different. Kayla exuded golden bloneness, while Connie was pale and washed-out looking. Kayla's height was statuesque, whereas Connie seemed to tower over people and slumped to keep from doing so. Kayla was a woman no one could overlook, while Connie was easy to miss.

Connie had been working at Wrightsman's jewelry store for six years; Kayla had been there for three weeks. Connie knew everything there was to know about the cut and clarity of jewels. She could tell you the weight and the color number of a diamond at a glance. She knew the provenance of every jewel in the store, knew what was in the safe and who had owned what and why they'd had to sell it.

Kayla asked customers if they liked "the blue ones or the green ones" better.

But in three weeks Kayla had sold more jewelry than Connie had in the last six months. After the first week, Connie had complained to Mr. Wrightsman. "She *models* the jewelry. She wears low-cut dresses, hangs a million-dollar necklace around her throat, then leans over so men can look down her front." Connie had not been pleased by Mr. Wrightsman's answer. He'd told her to "join the real world."

It was late on Friday when the man entered the store. After having worked at Wrightsman's for so long, Connie was used to the rich and powerful stepping into the store. Besides the professionally lit showroom where the customers could show off their wealth by buying something Marie Antoinette had once owned,

there was an elegant room in the back where they could sit in private and sell what they could no longer afford.

Connie had met many politicians, movie stars, and jet-setters, but she'd never seen this man before. He was handsome in a masculine way, with heavy black eyebrows, dark eyes, and an aquiline nose set above lips that had a slight, teasing smile, as though he knew something no one else did.

As Connie looked at the man, she felt her knees start to melt. The only other time she'd felt this way was when Sean Connery had walked into the store. This man was wearing a black leather jacket that she was sure had cost thousands; she could almost feel the softness of the leather under her fingertips. His tan trousers had to have been cut to fit him. As he walked toward the door, when she saw that he wore no jewelry, her heart dropped. He was buying for a woman, not himself.

She didn't really think that a man like him would be interested in her, but still, she relished the thought of searching through the vaults for just the right jewel. She prided herself on being a good judge of financial position and this man exuded money. Naked, dripping from a shower, she thought, this man would have an aura of wealth about him.

As he pushed the glass door open, Connie nearly giggled at her thought of this beautiful man being wet and naked. Catching herself, she looked across the cases filled with sparkling jewels on blue satin to Kayla -- and was horrified to see Kayla staring at the man with the same expression that Connie was probably wearing.

Connie wanted to scream, "Oh, no you don't. This one is *mine!*" Men like this one, men who possessed old world manners -- and old world money -- were her reward for putting up with tourists who wanted to see "where Brad Pitt shopped," and with rude rock stars and ego-tripping two-bit actors who wanted the world to know that they bought their jewels at Wrightsman's.

The man entered the store, removed his sunglasses, then stood for a moment as his eyes adjusted. When they did, he looked at Connie and smiled. Yes, she thought. Come to me.

But in the next second he turned his head and saw Kayla -- and it was to her he walked.

Connie had to duck behind the counter to hide her anger. Before Mr. Wrightsman had hired Connie, he'd dumped a pile of diamonds on a velvet tray, then sat there in silence and looked at her. He didn't tell her what he wanted her to do with them. Arrange them in order of size? Clarity? Connie had paid her dues at half a dozen retail stores and two wholesale merchants before she'd dared to apply at a prestigious store like Wrightsman's. With no hesitation, she had chosen one diamond out of the pile, one of the smaller ones. She had no loupe so she couldn't judge it for flaws, but for color, the diamond was nearly perfect.

She set the diamond on the side of the tray, then looked at the old man. The tiniest of smiles appeared at a corner of his mouth. "Monday, nine A.M.," he'd said, then looked back at the ledger in front of him, dismissing her.

In the past six years Connie had brought the old, family-owned store into the twenty-first century. She'd put in a computer system, made a website, had arranged for some discreet publicity, and had twice foiled Mr. Wrightsman's youngest son's plans to abscond with the store's profits.

Her life had been nearly perfect until Mr. Wrightsman had, for some unfathomable reason, hired a woman whose only selling advantage was a lot of hair and a lot of bosom.

Now, surreptitiously, Connie watched the man as he bent over the counter in front of Kayla. When she put what Connie called "the tourist tray" before him, she heard the man give a low laugh. His voice was silky-smooth and deep, a voice that made Connie close her eyes for a moment.

And when she did, she dropped the tray of rings in her hand. Never had she dropped a tray before. Cursing Kayla, cursing Mr. Wrightsman for hiring her, Connie got down on her hands and knees and began to pick up the scattered \$20,000 rings. One emerald beauty had bounced under the cabinet so Connie had to bend low to get it -- and when she did, she glanced through the glass case just in time to see the man slip a ruby and diamond necklace into his trousers' pocket.

Connie was so taken aback that she sat down on her heels and stared at what she could see of the man through the glass. Surely not, she thought. Slowly, she stood up, then even more slowly, she walked over to where Kayla and the man were standing, keeping her eyes away from him. She mustn't let a pair of sexy eyes distract her.

While Connie had been scurrying to pick up the rings, Kayla had done what she'd been repeatedly told not to do: she'd covered the countertop with merchandise. She'd been told to take one item at a time out so she could keep track of what was where.

It took Connie all of three seconds to see that the case that held the necklace of an empress of Russia was empty, and that the necklace was not in the jumble of jewels lying in a heap. Unaware of what the man had done, Kayla was bent down, pulling three more trays out of the bottom of the case.

Connie raised her eyes to look at the man and when her gaze met his, he smiled in a soft, seductive way that made her want to run to the vault and get out the really good jewels. Maybe he'd like a Fabergé egg or two.

But Connie had morals, and wrong was wrong. The man was beautiful, but he was a thief. With her heart pounding in her throat, she smiled back at him while she reached under the counter, opened the little metal door, and pushed the button of the silent alarm. In six years, she'd only pushed that button one other time.

Kayla saw Connie push the button and looked at her coworker in disbelief. With her head turned away from the man, Connie gave Kayla a look meant to silence her.

After the button was pushed, there was about five seconds of quiet, then all hell broke loose. Sirens sounded outside and heavy iron bars began to drop down across the front of the store.

For a moment Connie's heart seemed to stop. She locked eyes with the man and she had to fight against screaming at him to run, to try to get away. If he broke a window...if he pushed open a door...but no, the glass had a high-strength plastic in the middle of it and the doors wouldn't open because of the gates.

But Connie's feelings of compassion, her desire to see the man get away, ended when Kayla stood up. "You mean, spiteful bitch," Kayla said. "You couldn't stand that *I* got him and you didn't."

Flustered, Connie couldn't speak. She hadn't pushed the alarm because she was *jealous*.

"Quiet, little one," the man said to Kayla in his smooth voice, then he picked up her hand and kissed the back of it.

Connie turned away at that and in the next second three policemen were there, and she used her key and a

code number to open the gate. "He put a necklace in his pocket," she said, not looking at Kayla.

The police were oddly silent, and when the man held out his hands, they put handcuffs on him and told him his rights. It was almost as if they had been told not to ask questions. And throughout it all, as far as Connie could tell, the man had never lost his smile, and she was puzzled by it. Why had he been so stupid? Why wasn't he protesting? After all, until he'd left the store with the necklace in his pocket, he hadn't actually committed a crime. Maybe she'd been hasty in pushing the alarm button.

It was when they reached the front door that Connie heard her own thought. The necklace! Grabbing the empty velvet tray, she held it out to the man. "He still has the necklace," she said.

"You know where it is," the man said, so much sex oozing from his voice that Connie could almost see the two of them sitting on a mile of white beach, margaritas in hand.

She couldn't help herself as she reached forward to slip her hand inside the man's front pocket to retrieve the necklace. And when she did, he bent his head and kissed her. Time seemed to stand still. She could feel his warm thigh under her hand, his chest was touching hers, and his lips were...She closed her eyes and she could almost hear steel drums, feel soft tropical breezes on her skin.

"Okay, let's break this up," one of the cops said. "Lady! Get your hands out of his pants and your face off his."

This brought guffaws of laughter from the two other policemen. Connie pulled the necklace from his pocket and, her eyes never leaving his, spread it on the tray.

Standing by the window, the tray in her hand, Connie watched them lead the man to the waiting police car. She could still feel his kiss on her lips.

"Is that the right one?" she heard Kayla ask. Reluctantly, Connie pulled her eyes away from the man and looked at the necklace on the tray. It was not an exquisite ruby and diamond creation but a cheap concoction of glass and gold-toned pot metal.

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When Connie glanced up, she saw that the man was about to enter the police car. "He still has the necklace," she shouted, but the thick glass was almost completely soundproof. She banged on the window to get their attention and when the policemen turned to look, the man took that moment to go into action.

His hands were in cuffs, but standing on one leg, he kicked out to send one policeman spinning, then whirled to plant a foot in the chest of the second one. The third cop pulled his gun, but the man knocked it with his cuffed hands, sending the gun flying into the street.

In the next second, the man was sprinting down the street with the speed of an Olympic runner, and Connie saw him disappear into an alley a block away.

"If he gets caught, it will be *your* fault," Kayla said as she flung the door open and went outside.

For a moment Connie stood alone in the shop, then she thought of what Mr. Wrightsman was going to say when he heard that Connie had allowed the thief to take the necklace. She hadn't even looked at it when she'd taken it from his pocket. She'd been so ensorcelled by his kiss that...that she was going to lose her job.

Dropping the horrid necklace, she ran out the door, reaching into her pocket to push the electronic door lock as she ran. She *had* to get that necklace back!

By the time she got to the alley, the three policemen had recovered and were searching inside the Dumpster and behind the garbage cans. She stood back, watching them, her heart pounding from her run. If the man had run in here, unless he was Spider-Man, there was no escape. There were twenty-foot-tall brick walls and the few windows were painted over, unused for years. All the fire escapes ended two stories above the ground.

Connie's first impulse was to join in the search, but instead, she stood back and looked. Where could a man hide?

She never would have seen him if he hadn't moved. It was almost as though he wanted to be caught.

There was a tiny ledge on one of the buildings and he was lying flat on it, so still that there were two pigeons on his back. She took a moment to figure out how he'd managed to climb up there. He must have leaped from the Dumpster to catch the bottom of a fire escape, swung upward, crept along the four-inch-wide ledge into the deep shadows where two buildings intersected, then lain flat out, half-hidden under the broken remnants of an old iron and concrete balcony.

Why had he moved? she wondered. Why had he *purposefully* let her see him?

One of the cops saw Connie looking up and drew his gun. But before the policeman could do whatever he was going to do next, two cars screeched to a halt at the end of the alley and six men in suits and dark glasses jumped out. They flashed badges at the cops and one man said, "FBI. We've been looking for this guy for a long time. He's ours."

Two minutes later, the beautiful man, still handcuffed, was standing on the ground, this time surrounded by FBI agents.

Boldly, Connie stepped forward. "He still has the necklace he stole," she said, not looking into the man's eyes. His eyes -- and his lips -- had the power to make her forget about everything.

"You'll get it back," one of the FBI agents said brusquely as he led the man away.

Standing at the end of the alley, the three policemen behind her, Connie watched them put the man into the car. He winked at her through the window, then they were gone.
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Users Review

From reader reviews:

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