

Afterburn by Sylvia Day

In this exclusive excerpt of Afterburn, Gianna Rossi's world is turned upside down when the man who broke her heart, Jackson Rutledge, strolls back into her life. In one heated glance, Gia realises that the sparks are burning hotter than ever...and nothing is going to stop her from unraveling the mystery that is Jackson Rutledge. No matter how much it will cost her this time...

It was a tough pill to swallow, realising that my ex-boyfriend, Jax, still affected me so strongly. He'd only been part of my life for five short weeks two years before. I'd slept with two other men since him and thought I'd moved on.

He was studying a display of our bestseller cookbooks when I rounded the corner. His expertly tailored suit showed off his tall, powerful frame. I'd never seen him dressed so formally. We'd met at a bar, of all places. I'd gone out with some classmates, and he was attending a bachelor party.

I should've known it wouldn't turn out well.

But God, he was magnificent. His dark hair was close-cropped on the sides and in the back, slightly longer on the top. His eyes were a brown so dark they were nearly black. Had I really thought they were soft and warm? I'd been blinded by that lush, sensual mouth and wicked dimple. There was nothing soft about Jackson Rutledge. He was a hard man, cut from a ruthless cloth.

As I approached him, he looked me over from head to toe.

Jax didn't have a 'type.' He loved all women. I told myself I could have been anyone and gotten that look from him, but I didn't believe it. My body remembered him.

"Hello, Mr. Rutledge," I greeted him formally, because he still hadn't acknowledged that he remembered me. "Ms. Yeung will be out in just a moment," I continued. "I'll show you to the conference room."

As he followed me, I could feel his gaze on my back, my ass, my legs. It made me feel awkward.

He didn't say a word and I was afraid to say anything as well. I felt a terrible yearning; the almost desperate need to touch him. It was hard to believe I'd had him in my bed. Had him inside me. How had I ever had the courage to take on such a man?

I was relieved when we reached the conference room, the door handle feeling blessedly cool as I pushed it down.

I felt his breath in my ear as he said, "How long are you going to pretend you don't know me, Gia?"

Pushing the door open, I stepped inside, holding on to the handle so there was no mistaking that I wouldn't be staying.

He walked right up to me, standing face to face, a little more than a head taller even though I wore heels. His hands were in his pockets, his head bowed over me. He was in my personal space. Too intimate. Far too familiar.

"Please step back," I said quietly.

He moved, but not in the way I wanted. His right hand slid out of his pocket, and then down my arm, from elbow to wrist. I felt his touch through the silk of my navy blouse.

"You've changed so much," he murmured.

"Of course. Enough that you didn't recognise me earlier."

"Jesus. You think I didn't recognise you?" He turned away, but that didn't lessen his impact. The back view was just as splendid as the front. "I'd recognize you blindfolded, Gia."

I was shocked. We'd gone from distant and impersonal to searingly intimate in a heartbeat. "What are you doing here, Jax?"

He walked to the windows and looked out at New York. "I'm going to offer Lei Yeung whatever it takes to make her go play in someone else's sandbox."

"It won't work. This is personal."

"Business should never be personal."

"Nothing's personal, right?" I said, remembering how he'd just failed to show up one day. And every day after.

"Things were personal between us," he said, his deep voice husky. "Once."

"No, they weren't." Not for you...

He turned abruptly, causing me to take another cautious step back. "There are no hard feelings, then. Good. There's no reason not to pick up where we left off. When I'm done with my meeting, we can head to my hotel and get reacquainted."

"Fuck you," I snapped.

His mouth curved, revealing that delicious dimple. Oh, how that changed him, concealing how dangerous he was with a touch of boyish charm. I hated that playful little indentation as much as I adored it.

"There you are," he said, with an unmistakable note of triumph. "You almost had me fooled into thinking the Gia I knew was gone."

“Don’t toy with me, Jax. It’s beneath you.”

“I want you beneath me.”

I’d known he would say that, if I opened the door, but I’d had to hear it. I had to hear him spell it out. He was direct when it came to sex, sensual and natural as an animal. I loved it, because I’d been that way with him too. Greedy. Insatiable. Nothing else had ever made me feel as good.

“Hello, Mr. Rutledge,” Lei said, sweeping in on her killer Jimmy Choo slingbacks. “I’m going to assume this is a pleasant surprise.”

“It can be.” He turned his attention to her so completely, I felt dismissed.

“I’ll leave you two to it,” I said, walking out. Lei’s gaze caught mine and I understood the silent message. We’d be talking soon.

I didn’t look at Jax again, but I still got the same message from him.

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