



## Her Secret Fling

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Jake Stevens—star reporter and celebrated literary genius—is a snake. How else to explain the way he turns Poppy Birmingham's hero worship into loathing with a single conversation? So what if she's got a lot to learn about journalism? Aren't they coworkers now? On the same team? Jake can take his attitude and...

Then during a job-related road trip, their relationship goes from antagonistic to hedonistic in no time flat. And suddenly Poppy can't think of anything more delicious than having a secret fling with Jake. But with all this intensity, can she really keep it no-strings-attached?

## **Her Secret Fling Details**

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Author : Sarah Mayberry

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## From Reader Review Her Secret Fling for online ebook

### Nisa Rahmah says

Wow, aku suka Poppy Birmingham. Dan aku suka tulisannya Sarah Mayberry ❤

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### KarenH says

\*sigh\* Don't you just love the way Sarah Mayberry writes? If you're looking for a quick Harlequin fix, this is definitely the book to read!

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### Hemavathy DM Suppiah says

Again, the transition from a casual thing to a serious relationship felt too rushed, too soon. There wasn't much character development once they slept together, and it became rather dull. Would have liked to have had more secedes with the family, and Jake and a poppy trying to make it at work.

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### Leslie says

Another Sarah Mayberry and another win! The setting is a newspaper, the Melbourne Herald. Our heroine is a former professional swimmer who is the paper's newest writer. Our sexy hero makes it clear that he isn't happy with the newest staff member. Our heroine is determined to succeed at her new career and refuses to let the hero's rude attitude stop her.

Hmm... let's start with Jake the jerk. LOL Okay, I totally get why our handsome, award winning writer is not happy when someone with no writing experience is given the job of columnist. He's worked hard to get to where he is and to have someone come in without paying their dues really ticks him off. Mayberry had her work cut out for her when she wrote Jake. He really was a jerk to Poppy when they first meet. Beyond his good looks, I didn't like Jake at first. I liked Poppy and Jake was mean to her. Bastard. So for me to come around to not only liking Jake but liking him with Poppy, Mayberry had to work her magic, and she did.

Poppy Birmingham gives up her swimming career when an injury forces her into early retirement. When offered a job as a columnist she takes it, looking for a career away from the pool. Her first day on the job doesn't go as well as she'd hoped. She does get to meet her hero, columnist and author Jake Stevens. She also gets a rude awakening when he's less than friendly, making it clear that he thinks she's just a dumb jock. This attitude doesn't help Poppy's insecurities. She knows the only reason she got the job is because of her experience in the sports world. She barely finished high school and with that in mind she has enrolled in an evening writing class.

I totally enjoyed Poppy's persistence. The way she refused to let Jake get to her while still finding him attractive. You go girl! Show him what you're made of! She was great when it came to standing up to Jake. There were times when she was barely able to hold it together but she did and I couldn't help but cheer her

on. It turns out she's a natural when it comes to getting the story. Her insight into the athletes world gives her writing a unique perspective.

Jake was funny with his irritation and dislike for Poppy while grudgingly admitting, if only to himself, that he finds her attractive.

He couldn't help noting the firm bounce of her ass as she walked. Probably she could crack walnuts with that, too. He wondered idly what she looked like naked. Most swimmers didn't have a lot happening up top, but she clearly had a great ass and great legs. page 20

He's caught and he doesn't even know it. LOL This is early on and Jake is still acting like an ass towards Poppy. Still wallowing in his own problems and willing to take out his frustrations on her. Jake is suffering major writers block. His one and only novel was a huge success but that was years ago. His personal life took a downward spiral and the only writing he has done are his columns for the paper. His second novel is still rattling around in his head and he can't seem to get it out. Maybe he's in need of a muse... or a kick in the ass. :)

After the sexual tension hits it's peak, Poppy and Jake give in to their attraction with a one night stand that continues beyond the one night. Neither wants anyone to know that they have become more than coworkers so they meet in secret. Soon it becomes more than just sex, and something or someone had to change. Mayberry does a wonderful job in developing not only Poppy and Jake's relationship but developing Poppy as a reporter and writer. As she writes, her confidence increases and she blooms. She develops friendships with her coworkers and begins to enjoy her new career. Jake, on the other hand, is closed off with a big "Do Not Enter" sign when it comes to relationships. And he is determined to not let anyone get close. He really needed to be hit with a 2 X 4 before he would acknowledge his feelings. Out of the two, Poppy was the stronger character, causing change in both her own life and Jake's. The way they played off each other and the way they ultimately encouraged each other made for an appealing couple.

Mayberry, for me, has developed into an author that I can count on to give me unique characters, uncommon situations and an interesting story. Fortunately I still have some of her back list to read through while waiting for her next release.

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### **D.L. says**

I know a lot of people are big fans of Ms. Mayberry, but I just wasn't feeling it. I couldn't really connect to either character, and that just made the book fall flat for me. This really comes down to personal taste, but Poppy was too bubbly and optimistic. It might have been the Olympic athlete in her that had her always keep going, never give up, and keep her chin up high. While Jake was a bit of a prick, I could relate to him more.

I felt that Jake was justified in being annoyed with Poppy for getting the job at the newspaper. There were tons of people who worked really hard in journalism and deserved that job. Poppy worked really hard in her field and did deserve recognition, but didn't necessarily deserve rewards that she wasn't qualified for. She didn't have a college education, and a full time job at the paper didn't seem to fit. It seemed more like a midlife crisis. I don't know. I think I sound a bit mean, but it's mostly because Poppy spent most of the book being stressed out rather than achieving something meaningful. Other than being a big fan of Jake's works, there didn't seem to be anything pulling Poppy to a career at the newspaper, and I don't think writing was her passion.

All in all, while *Her Secret Fling* didn't click with me, I'd be willing to give Sarah Mayberry another try in the future because the writing was ok and the sex was steamy.

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### **Pauline Destinugrainy says**

Hwaaa...senangnya akhirnya bisa mendapatkan waktu dan semangat untuk membaca lagi. Poppy seorang mantan atlit renang yang beralih profesi akibat cedera yang dialaminya. Dia menjadi wartawan olahraga di sebuah media massa olahraga terkenal di Australia. Meski menulis terasa sulit baginya, Poppy tidak menyerah. Terutama ketika dia dipandang sebelah mata oleh Jake Stevens, wartawan olahraga terkenal sekaligus penulis buku best seller. Dari tidak suka menjadi suka. Tema klasik, tapi selalu bikin deg-degan membacanya. Karakter Poppy yang tangguh dan realistik menjadi poin plus untuk novel ini. Dia menyukai tantangan, dan tidak ragu membuat dirinya bahagia. Sementara Jake, playboy yang agak brengsek tapi loveable. Beberapa kali dia harus menjilat kata-katanya sendiri karena tidak bisa lepas dr pesona Poppy.

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### **MissKitty says**

Excellent story. The couple start out as antagonists, but a long car journey forces them to spend time with each other and acknowledge an uncontrollable physical attraction. They start having sex, keeping things casual (and secret from their work colleagues) but then the caring starts, and the friendship develops into an unexpected relationship. The romance was gradual, but I like how they became friends and truly cared for each other.

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### **Afifah says**

Always love Susan Mayberry's work

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### **MBR says**

#### **4 star Harlequin Blaze. Reason why I LOVE Sarah Mayberry**

Aaah! Finally a book that has left me satisfied on all aspects after a long time. Sarah Mayberry is one of my favorite Harlequin Blaze line authors and it does help that her book titles do not make me cringe, and the fact that they contain believable stories of men and women who fall in love with each other.

Poppy Birmingham an ex-star swimmer who has gold medals to her name, takes up a job offer on writing for the sports column of one of the most prestigious newspapers in Australia. There she comes face to face with Jake Stevens, someone whose style of writing Poppy has admired from the very start.

However, Poppy is left with the impression that Jake is hardly what she has pictured him to be. Callous to the point of being rude, Jake lays it out that Poppy doesn't deserve to just walk in and attain a job that takes

journalists years of studying and experience to claim.

However, Jake is proven wrong when Poppy proves to be persistent in what she does, and a quirk twist of fate ends both of them together alone on a road trip back from Melbourne. Pitted together with nowhere else to go, Poppy and Jake reluctantly come to realize that rather than the initial dislike that they thought they felt for each other, both of them were coming to find qualities that they liked in each other immensely. Not to mention the scorching hot passion that flares between them when Jake offers to teach Poppy the wonders of sex.

Quirky dialogues between the two characters kept the pages turning and when Poppy finds herself inevitably in love with Jake, with no sign whatsoever from Jake to show that he might feel the same way, and Jake but all pushing away Poppy without really trusting her and letting her in makes Poppy realize that their no-named relationship had been doomed from the start.

Jake has his own reasons, with a failed marriage on his conscience, which has made him into someone who absolutely has nothing left to give. However, unknowingly, the time spent with Poppy slowly works its magic on Jake and ultimately Jake and Poppy get the happy ending which they both deserve.

I loved this book. Sarah Mayberry sure knows how to pen a fantastic story. Highly recommended to those who love Blaze line stories.

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### **D.G. says**

\*\*3.5 stars\*\*

I became a fan of Sarah Mayberry's writing ever since I read *Her Best Worst Mistake*. She writes real contemporary romances with tons of sexual chemistry, where you can sympathize with the characters and understand their issues. Even with the silly title, *Her Secret Fling* has lots of good things to offer, as I come to expect from anything by this author.

Poppy's swimming career is over due to an injury. She accepts an offer in a newspaper as a sports columnist, but she's very nervous because she's a fish out of water, so to speak. Enters Jake, her favorite author and co-worker, who's not too keen on Poppy getting that kind of job with no experience whatsoever. Sparks fly and Jake quickly becomes a thorn in her side.

Then during a business trip they end up in bed. This couple had incredible chemistry and their banter was so funny and flirty. But all it's not fun and games. Poppy suffers a great loss and having to work at something that doesn't come easy for her (writing) while Jake has to confront the fallout of his marriage, which hurt him so much that he hasn't been able to write a second book.

If the ending hadn't been so abrupt, I would have rounded up instead of down. Regardless, it's definitely worth the read.

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### **Kaetrin says**

Her Secret Fling by Sarah Mayberry - C+. I had a bit more trouble than usual getting into this one. Perhaps it's because I am Australian and I'm familiar with various ex-Olympic swimming stars who have taken up a role in the media after their retirement and I kept trying to work out which one Poppy was based on. I had to take 2 goes at it which is unusual for me but after finishing Home for the Holidays I thought I'd pick it up again. The book nearly became a wallbanger for me when Poppy and hero Jake are in BRISBANE (Queensland) for the AFL GRAND FINAL where 40,000 people attend. Um, sorry but not just no, HELL NO! Sure, the Gabba (which is where the Brisbane Lions play their home games has a maximum capacity of 40,000 so, as far as that went, that was accurate) but any self-respecting Australian (or any non-self respecting Australian with, you know, GOOGLE) KNOWS that the AFL Grand Final is ALWAYS and HAS ONLY EVER BEEN at the MCG (Melbourne Cricket Ground - yeah, I know, but they play footy there too). The AFL Grand Final is a massive big deal (in fact, this year, such a big deal they played it twice) and attracts a capacity crowd to the MCG well in excess of 100,000 - and that's only because they can't fit any more people in. I understand that the author needed to get the characters interstate to further the plot, but could they not have been attending a preliminary final instead? For any other author, I would have thrown the book at the wall (except that would have ruined my Reader, so not really) but I decided to give her a pass this time - but I still marked the book down a bit. Grand Final in Brisbane? As. If.

As for the rest of the story, it was a pleasant but fairly standard story of a commitment phobic hero and a young ingenue - I thought the conflict was resolved too quickly at the end and Jake started to lose some of his alpha mystique in the doing of it. Not my favourite Mayberry.

ETA: I commented on DA recently about this and Ms. Mayberry replied. She told me that she had meant to put an explanation in the reader letter at the front of the book. She wanted the characters in Brisbane and particularly wanted to use the AFL Grand Final - I think the preliminary final or the NRL Grand Final (rugby league) would have worked better - they could both have legitimately been in Brisbane. I appreciated her taking the time to comment though.

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## Fallen says

My disdain and disbelief in the *Harlequin* brand is anything but conspicuous so, I'm sure people can only wonder why I pour any more time or TBR slots into the enterprise. The answer is simple in this case: this book was kicking around in my basement, a relic from way back when I used to splurge on cheap reads at thrift stores. *Harlequins* were (and still are) substantially cheaper than all other used books; and at three for a dollar, I couldn't get any better of a steal. I actually had to buy more books than I needed (or wanted) to get the deal too. It was either three for a dollar or one for 50¢ or 69¢ so, I figured I may as well pick up whatever. That's why I ended up with so many, so many that I never even got around to reading.

But then, I actually got to reading some of the books themselves - and realized the low cost was no coincidence. Contrary to the original price tags, their titles had gotten justice amongst the thriftier stacks because one really does get what they pay for. Their lack of cost reflected a lack of quality, almost next to no insight or innovation for readers whom indulged an idyll that involved intimacy as well as imagination. Like many romance publishers, this one notoriously capitalizes upon comic cliches and markets them under some pretext of carnality or libidinous liberation - and I honestly do have to wonder how culpable such crass commercialism is given its sustenance by quirked, clammy clientele.

The tropes tantalize people like the old me, the kid roaming romance aisles because reads gave her a whimsical fix which were entirely believable or partially plausible given my inexperienced grasp of the world. Banking upon uncertain seas and trying to anchor my ambition, my moral compass was less nuanced than simply nautical. *Harlequins* gave me an outlet to oblige a somewhat optimistic, overrated ideal of what

romance and sex entailed.

But then, I grew up. I started reading other books. My library expanded into all sorts of esteem, which included non-fiction. And I started to see life unfold for what and whom it was. Gradually, *Harlequins* (and other "romance reads") became less of a haven or "hot"; and their characters rubbed as prospects that pandered more than they imparted impressions. Which is why it still baffles me how these books have still maintained an empire, mostly on the backs and various other buoyant breadths of generally middle-aged to older women; women whom I would think had more insight, more experience, at least more of a library than I did.

This is why *Her Secret Fling* stuck with me. Through Jake Stevens, Mayberry acknowledges and briefly answers my question. I found myself relating to him more than the lackluster leading lady, Poppy Birmingham - and I have to wonder if that was anticipated by the author who ardently articulates (both subtly and explicitly, even in Jake's consciousness) he is an unjust cynic more than a force to be reckoned with. He's valid, vindicated, and entitled to his realistic opinions - and this book would've stuck with me quite deeply if the author had embraced that. But alas, who needs *that* when we've got sexscapades and quickies to supplant for catharsis?

I hate how these women are portrayed as pouty protagonists, dejected and otherwise depressive until they drown in desire as opposed to diving through the personal depth of their issues. I hate how Poppy is hypersensitive, almost histrionic what strikes me as a vapid victim complex further coddled by her family and peers. I hate how Jake becomes a wasted observer who simply slacks into her sheets as opposed to offering her something substantial, especially because we know he's got industrious and interminable insight given he doesn't shy away from being frank. I didn't just relate to Jake; I was rooting for him. For once, I thought I'd stumbled onto the ever so rare, slowly going extinct *Harlequin* that made me take a hard look at the individual and interpersonal - and from jump, Jake effects that prospect.

Only for it to be shot to shambles. Only for Poppy to prove that going along to get along trumps truth or tact. Only for Poppy to be peddled as some People's Princess as she pours camaraderie into her coffee runs, then knocks boots with Jake when she doles out some drunken dribble about dissatisfaction. I can't help but think Mayberry's catalog of titles that start with "Her..." likely prove to be just as banal or reductive.

Still, I have to hand it to Mayberry for throwing the barest bone in this story - if only to dryly drop the ball.

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### **Mojca says**

Former Aussie swimming champion, Poppy Birmingham, gets a chance at becoming a sport columnist. Unfortunately, her new coworker, her idol, and author of one of her favorite books, Jake Stevens, isn't overly enthused about working with a jock and lets her (and everybody in hearing distance) know about it.

Their mutual dislike turns into a forced truce on a long car ride across the country, and the forced truce turns into something more after a few drinks and a veiled challenge thrown into the mix...But Jake's painful past and deep-ingrained defense mechanisms just might keep them at a one-night-stand basis.

This is the first Sarah Mayberry book I've read, but it certainly won't be the last. I was surprised by the amount of angst and actual darkness suffusing this book, but instead of giving me pause, it just drew me in

more.

I loved both Poppy and Jake, even though I wanted to smack the guy on the head for being such a jerk at the beginning. They were great characters individually, and even greater together, though the aforementioned jerk needed a little more time to see that.

They had great chemistry together, producing quite a truckload of steam and fireworks.

The story flowed effortlessly, I loved the narrative and writing style, and though everything revolved around the romance between the two leads (there wasn't any trace of suspense or intrigue, which I thought I would miss), I loved this little story.

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### **Jane Stewart says**

3 1/2 stars. I enjoyed it. It's nicely done contemporary romance. It's what you expect from Harlequin.

It's 2/3 the length of a regular novel. I wanted more at the end. It stopped too soon. Harlequin has page limits and won't let authors go beyond it. Those limits hurt the stories and make me reluctant to read Harlequin.

As part of the formula there is a separation. I was impressed with the reason for it. It did not feel contrived.

The sex scenes were good. And the relationship development was good.

#### **STORY BRIEF:**

Poppy is a former Olympic gold medal winner in swimming. She is starting a new career as a journalist after a shoulder injury. Jake is a sports columnist, doesn't like Poppy, and doesn't want her working in the same office with him. He insults her.

#### **NARRATOR:**

The narrator was ok except for her timing. She did not pause between scenes and point of view changes. I was startled and confused several times because she read the first sentence of the next scene too quickly after the former scene - as if they were in the same paragraph or the same character talking.

#### **DATA:**

Narrative mode: 3rd person. Unabridged audiobook length: 6 hrs and 40 mins. Swearing language: sh\*\* about 3 times. Sexual language: moderate. Number of sex scenes: 8. Setting: current day Australia. Book copyright: 2010. Genre: contemporary romance.

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### **Nisha says**

I loved the writing, as usual for Sarah Mayberry, but wasn't extremely attached to the characters. I liked them in the oh-they-aren't-too-bad-but-not-my-friend type of way, if that makes any sense.

Poppy is a 31 year old woman who used to swim for Australia until she got injured and decides to make a transition into Journalism. Jake is a 35 year old divorcee Journalist/author, who hasn't written a second novel after his debut 7 years ago. While it isn't obvious at first, Jake needs to fix his life more than Poppy does, and

she's the one with the career change. Their start is rocky, since Jake harbors some animosity toward Poppy, feeling that she got an easy ride to get her job (somehow, I agree) and probably because he still can't write a 2nd novel. They go through the motions of 'hating' each other, until some type of Airport strike forces them ride together in the same car. Then everything gets easy, they gain some mutual like and respect toward each other, they have good chemistry, they have sex, they comfort each other, and then they fall in love, somewhat in that order too, so it follows the general pattern. Honestly, I have nothing against this.

The trouble is Jake was slow for the longest time, while Poppy was already invested from day one. This just doesn't sit well for me, especially when Jake doesn't do enough to redeem himself. He only did what he was supposed to do in the first place, no extra groveling. Maybe this isn't all Jake's fault. Poppy let him off easy. It's the same thing I didn't like in Anything For You.

I liked the story, how they grew to like then love each other. It's not my favorite or anything, because there was something missing, I can't tell what, exactly. Something about the comedic aspect maybe, since most of it was getting out of a tragic event and learning to live again. The funny parts were wonderful, true to SM standards. Worth a read, especially to feed your blaze addiction.

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