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By Sarah Morgan

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Except the dark-hearted tycoon is nothing like the white knight she remembers. Seduced, bedded and betrayed in a matter of days, Selene realizes it's not always better the devil you know. She's sold her soul—and her heart—to the enemy!

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## **Sold to the Enemy** By Sarah Morgan Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #2116343 in Books
- Published on: 2013-01-22
- Released on: 2013-01-22
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 6.62" h x .51" w x 4.21" l, .20 pounds
- Binding: Mass Market Paperback
- 192 pages

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

'Morgan never disappoints, and this time her powerful narrative and breathtaking setting combine for an exceptionally emotional romance.' 4.5 Stars Top Pick. RT Book Reviews

'..fresh and original...' B+ Dear Author

'A fun, sexy read.' smexybooks.com

#### About the Author

USA Today bestselling author Sarah Morgan writes lively, sexy stories for Harlequin Presents. RT Book Reviews has described her as 'a magician with words' and her books have been nominated for their Reviewer's Choice Awards and their Top Pick slot. In 2012 Sarah won the prestigious RITA® Award from the Romance Writers of America for her book *Doukakis's Apprentice*. Sarah lives near London with her husband and children who innocently provide an endless supply of authentic dialogue. Readers can find out more about Sarah and her books from her website [sarahmorgan.com](http://sarahmorgan.com). She can also be found on Facebook and Twitter (@SarahMorgan\_)

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'No one will lend you money, Selene. They are all too afraid of your father.'

'Not all.' Selene sat down on the bed and stroked her mother's hair—hair tended regularly by hairdressers in order to keep up the appearance of a perfect life. 'Stop worrying. I'm going to get you away from here.'

Her mother lay still. She said 'from here' but they both knew that what she really meant was 'from him'.

'I should be the one saying that to you. I should have left years ago. When I first met your father he was so charming. Every woman in the room wanted him and he only had eyes for me. Have you any idea how that feels?'

Selene opened her mouth to say *How could I, when I've been trapped on this island for most of my life?* but realised that would only hurt her mother more. 'I can imagine it must have been very exciting. He was rich and powerful.' She wouldn't make that mistake. She would never let love blind her to the true nature of the man underneath.

'It's stupid to talk of leaving when we both know he'll never let us go. As far as the world is concerned we're the perfect family. He isn't going to let anything ruin that image.' Her mother rolled away, turning her face to the wall.

Selene felt a rush of frustration. It was like watching someone adrift on a raft, making no effort to save themselves. 'We're not going to ask him. It's our decision. *Ours*. Maybe it's time we told the world this "family" is a lie.'

Her mother's lack of response didn't surprise her. Her father had dictated to them and controlled them for so

long she'd forgotten she even had a choice.

Despite the oppressive summer heat and the fact that their fortress home had no air-conditioning, a chill spread across her skin and ran deep into her bones.

How many years did it take, she wondered, before you no longer believed your life was worth fighting for? How many years before hope turned to helplessness, before anger became acceptance and spirit was beaten to a stupor? How many years until she, too, chose to lie on her side facing the wall rather than stand up and face the day?

Beyond the closed shutters that blotted out the only window in the tiny bedroom the sun beamed its approval from a perfect blue sky onto the sparkling Mediterranean, its brightness a cruel contrast to the darkness inside the room.

To many, the Greek Islands were paradise. Perhaps some of them were. Selene didn't know. She only knew this one, and Antaxos was no paradise. Cut off from its neighbours by a stretch of dangerous sea, rocks that threatened ships like the jaws of a monster and by the fearsome reputation of the man who owned it, this island was closer to hell than heaven.

Selene tucked the covers around her mother's thin shoulders. 'Leave everything to me.'

That statement injected her mother with an energy that nothing else could. 'Don't make him angry.'

She'd heard those words more often than she could count.

She'd spent her life tiptoeing around 'angry'.

'You don't have to live like this, watching everything you say and everything you do because of him.' Looking at her mother, Selene felt sad. Once, she'd been a beauty and it had been that blonde, Nordic beauty that had attracted the attention of the rich playboy Stavros Antaxos. Her mother had been dazzled by wealth and power and she'd melted under his charm like candle wax under a hot flame, never seeing the person beneath the smooth sophistication.

One bad choice, Selene thought. Her mother had made one bad choice and then spent years living with it, her heart and spirit crushed by a life spent with a ruthless man.

'Let's not talk about him. I had an e-mail this week from Hot Spa in Athens.' She'd been nursing the news for days, not daring to share it before now. 'Remember I told you about them? It's a really upmarket chain. And they have spa hotels on Crete, Corfu and Santorini. I sent them samples of my candles and my soap and they *love* them. They used them in their treatment rooms and three of their top clients insisted on taking them home and paid a fortune for the privilege. Now they want to talk to me and put in a large order. It's the break I've been hoping for.' She was buzzing inside and longing to share the excitement so it came as a blow when her mother's only response was to shake her head.

'He'll never let you do it.'

'I don't need his permission to live my life the way I want to live it.'

'And how are you going to live it? You need money to set up your business and he won't give you money that enables us to leave him.'

'I know. Which is why I don't intend to ask him. I have another plan.' She'd learned not to speak without first

checking to see who might be listening and instinctively she turned her head to see that the door was closed, even though this was her mother's bedroom and she'd secured the door herself. Even though *he* wasn't even on the island. 'I'm leaving tonight and I'm telling you this because I won't be able to contact you for a few days and I don't want you to worry about me. As far as everyone is concerned I am at the convent for my usual week of retreat and meditation.'

'How can you leave? Even if you could slip past his security and make it off the island you will be recognised. Someone will call him and he will be furious. You know how obsessed he is about maintaining the image of the perfect family.'

'One of the advantages of being the shy, reclusive daughter of a man feared by everyone is that no one is expecting to see me. But just to cover all eventualities I have a disguise.' And she didn't intend to share the details with anyone. Not even her mother, who was now looking at her with panic in her eyes.

'And if you do manage to make it as far as the mainland, what then? Have you thought that far?'

'Yes, I've thought that far.' And further, much further, to a future that was nothing like the past. 'You don't need to know any of this. All you need to do is trust me and wait for me to return and fetch you. I'd take you now only two of us travelling together are more likely to attract attention. You have to stay here and keep up the perfect family pretence for just a little longer. Once I have the money and somewhere to stay I'm coming back for you.'

Her mother gripped her arm tightly. 'If by any chance you manage to do this, you should not come back. It's too late for me.'

'It drives me mad when you say things like that.' Selene hugged her mother. 'I will come back. And then we're leaving together and he can find someone else to control.'

'I wish I had money to give you.'

*So did she.* If her mother had maintained her independence then perhaps they wouldn't be in this mess now, but her father's first and cleverest move following his marriage had been to ensure his wife had no income of her own, thus making her dependent on him in every way. Her mother had confessed that at first she'd found it romantic to have a man who wanted to care for her. It had been later, much later, that she'd realised that he hadn't wanted to care for her. He'd wanted to control her. And so her mother's independence had slowly leached away, stolen not by a swift kill but by a slow, cruel erosion of her confidence.

'I have enough to get me to Athens. Then I'm going to get a loan to start my business.' It was the only option open to her and she knew other people did it all the time. They borrowed money and they paid it back and she would pay it back, too. All of it.

'He has contacts at all the banks. None of them will loan you money, Selene.'

'I know. Which is why I'm not going to a bank.'

Her mother shook her head. 'Name one person who would be prepared to do business with you. Show me a man with the guts to stand up to your father and I'll show you a man who doesn't exist.'

'He exists.' Her heart pumped hard against her chest and she forced herself to breathe slowly. 'There is one man who isn't afraid of anyone or anything. A strong man.'

'Who?'

Selene kept her voice casual. 'I'm going to see Stefanos Ziakas.'

The name alone drained the colour from her mother's face. 'Ziakas is another version of your father. He's a ruthless, self-seeking playboy with no conscience and not one shred of gentleness in him. Don't be fooled by that handsome face and that charismatic smile. He's deadly.'

'No, he isn't. I met him once, years ago, on the yacht on one of the occasions we were forced to play "happy families" in public. He was kind to me.' Selene was annoyed to feel herself blushing.

'If he was kind, it was because he knew it would annoy your father. They hate each other.'

'He didn't know who I was when we started talking.'

'You were the only seventeen-year-old there. It was obvious who you were.' Her mother sounded weary. 'Ask yourself why a sophisticated man like him would spend his time talking to you when he came with the actress Anouk Blaire.'

'He told me she was boring. He said she only cared about how she looked and who wrote about her and that being with him enhanced her career. He said I was much more interesting. We talked all night.' About everything. She'd told him things she'd never told anyone before. Not about her family, of course—she was too well trained to let that particular truth slip—but she'd talked about her dreams and her hopes for the future and been grateful when he hadn't laughed. He'd listened with those sexy eyes fixed on her and when she'd asked him if he thought she might be able to run a business one day he'd spoken words she'd never forgotten.

*You can do anything if you want it enough.*

Well, she wanted it.

Her mother sighed. 'The schoolgirl and the billionaire. And because of this one conversation you think he'll help you?'

*Come back in five years, Selene Antaxos, then maybe we'll talk.*

She'd wanted to do a whole lot more than talk and she suspected he'd known that, just as she suspected he'd guessed the truth about the fabricated life she led. She'd felt more of a connection with him than she had with any other human being. For the first time in her life someone had listened to her and his words had stayed with her, day and night. When life had grown hard it had been a comfort to remember that she had someone to go to if things were desperate.

And things *were* desperate.

'He'll help me.'

'That man is more likely to hurt you than help you. You have no experience of men like him. I would not put you with a man like Ziakas. I would find you someone kind and gentle who deserves you.'

'I don't want him to be kind or gentle. I need him to be ruthless or this isn't going to work. If he doesn't have the guts to stand up to my father then there is no hope for my plan. I want to run my own business and Ziakas knows more about how to do that than anyone. He did it all himself. He lost his parents when he was young. No one helped him. No one gave him a helping hand. And look at him now. He was a billionaire by the time he was thirty and he did that by himself.'

She found his story inspirational. If he could do it, why couldn't she?

Her mother struggled upright, finding energy from anxiety. 'Do you honestly think you'll just be able to walk up to a man like Stefan Ziakas and ask him for money? He is protected from the outside world by layers of security, just like your father. Getting an appointment with someone like him would be almost impossible, especially at short notice. Even if you could somehow find a way to leave the island undetected while your father is away, Ziakas won't see you.'

'He'll see me. And I have found a way to leave the island.' Determined not to reveal too much, and even more determined not to let her mother batter her confidence, Selene stood up. 'I will be back tomorrow, which gives us plenty of time to get far away before my father returns from—from his trip.' 'Trip' was the word they both used to describe her father's frequent absences from the island. It disgusted Selene that he didn't even bother to keep his infidelities a secret. Disgusted her more that her mother accepted them as part of the marriage deal.

She couldn't allow herself to think about what she'd do if her mother refused to leave, as she'd refused so many times before. All she knew was that she didn't want to spend another day on Antaxos. She'd lived here all her life, trapped within its rocky shores, thirsty for a life other than the one she'd been given. She didn't want to spend another day in this 'family' pretending that everything was perfect.

The events of the last week had shown her that she had to do it sooner rather than later.

Bending down, she kissed her mother on the cheek. 'Dream about what you're going to do on the first day of your new life. You're going to laugh without worrying that the sound is going to draw his attention. You're going to paint again and people will buy those paintings, just as they used to.'

'I haven't painted for years. I don't feel the urge any more.'

'That's because he didn't like you doing anything that took you away from him.' The anger was like an energy source, giving her a determination that felt close to power. 'You're going to get your life back.'

'And if your father returns from Crete early and finds you gone? Have you thought of that?'

It was like stepping off a cliff or missing a step on the stairs. Her heart bumped uncomfortably and she wanted to clutch something for support. 'He won't return early. Why would he?'

Bored out of his mind, Stefan lounged with his feet on his desk.

Far beneath the glass cocoon that housed his corporate headquarters, Athens was slowly waking up. Athens, a city in trouble, licking its wounds as the world watched in wary fascination. People encouraged him to move his base to a different city. New York. London. Anywhere other than the troubled Greek capital.

Stefan ignored them.

He had no intention of abandoning the place that had allowed him to become who he was. He knew what it was like to have everything and then lose it. He knew how it felt to go from prosperity to poverty. He understood fear and uncertainty. And he knew all about the effort required to drag yourself back from the edge. It made winning all the more satisfying and he'd won in a big way. He had money and power.

People would have been surprised to learn the money didn't interest him. But power? Power was different. He'd learned at an early age that power was everything. Power opened doors that were closed. Power turned no to yes and stop to go. He'd learned that power was an aphrodisiac and, when it needed to be, it was a

weapon.

It was a weapon he wasn't afraid to use.

His phone rang for the tenth time in as many minutes but he chose to ignore it.

A tap on the door disturbed his thoughts. Maria, his PA, stood in the doorway.

## **Users Review**

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