



The Forbidden Ferrara

By Sarah Morgan

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But Fia is living a lie. If it's ever discovered that her precious little son is Santino's heir, she'll be disowned—their families' feud is legendary! But her real fear? That she can't forget the scorching memories of her one night with the enemy—and that she still craves more....

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Editorial Review

Review

'Morgan is a magician with words.....' (4.5* Top Pick) RT Book Reviews

About the Author

USA Today bestselling author Sarah Morgan writes lively, sexy contemporary stories for Harlequin.

Romantic Times has described her as 'a magician with words' and nominated her books for their Reviewer's Choice Awards and their 'Top Pick' slot. In 2012 Sarah received the prestigious RITA® Award from the Romance Writers of America. She lives near London with her family. Find out more at www.sararahmorgan.com

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There was a shocked silence round the boardroom table.

Amused by the reaction, Santo Ferrara sat back in his chair. 'I'm sure you'll all agree it's an exciting project,' he drawled. 'Thank you for your attention.'

'You've lost your mind.' It was his older brother who finally broke the silence. Cristiano, who had recently relinquished some of his responsibility in the company to spend more time with his young family. 'It can't be done.'

'Because you didn't succeed? Don't beat yourself up. It's fairly common for a man to lose his edge when he's distracted by a wife and kids.' Santo loaded his tone with sympathy, enjoying the brief interlude in what had been a long, punishing few weeks. And if he felt a slight twinge of envy that his brother had gone on to be as successful in his personal life as he was in business then he told himself that it was just a matter of time before he found the same thing himself. 'It's like seeing a great warrior fallen. Don't blame yourself. Living with three women can soften a man.'

The rest of the Board exchanged nervous glances but wisely chose to remain silent.

Cristiano's gaze locked on his. 'I am still chairman of this company.'

'Precisely. You've taken a back seat while you change nappies. Now leave the good ideas to the rest of us.' He was being deliberately combative and Cristiano gave a reluctant laugh.

'I'm not denying that your proposal is exciting. I can see the business potential in adapting the hotel to accommodate a wider range of sports and appeal to a younger demographic. I even agree that expanding on the West coast of Sicily has potential for a certain type of discerning traveller—' he paused and when he looked at Santo his eyes were deadly serious '—but the success of the project rests on you gaining the extra land from the Baracchi family and old man Baracchi would shoot you through the head before he sold to you.'

Good-natured banter gave way to tension. Those around the table kept their eyes down, everyone well aware of the history between the two families. The whole of Sicily knew the history.

'That is my problem to deal with,' Santo said in a cool tone and Cristiano made an impatient sound as he

pushed back his chair and paced over to the expanse of glass that overlooked the glittering Mediterranean sea.

'Since you took over day-to-day running of the company you have more than proved yourself. You have done things I hadn't even thought of doing.' He turned. 'But you will not be able to do *this*. You will simply inflame a situation that has been simmering for almost three generations. You should let it die.'

'I am going to turn the Ferrara Beach Club into our most successful hotel.'

'You will fail.'

Santo smiled. 'Shall we bet on that?'

For once his brother didn't return the smile or take up the challenge. 'This goes deeper than sibling rivalry. You *cannot* do this.'

'enough time has passed for us to put grievances aside.' 'That,' Cristiano said slowly, 'depends on the grievance.'

Santo felt the anger start to heat inside him but alongside the anger were darker, murkier emotions that sprang to life whenever the Baracchi name was mentioned. It was a visceral reaction, a conditioned response reinforced by a lifetime of animosity between the families. 'I was not responsible for what happened to Baracchi's grandson. You know the truth.'

'This is not about truth or reason, but about passion and prejudice. Deep-rooted prejudice. I have already approached him. Made him several more than generous offers. Baracchi would see his family starve before he sells his land to a Ferrara. Negotiations are closed.'

Santo rose to his feet. 'Then it's time they were reopened.'

A man cleared his throat. 'As your lawyer it's my duty to warn against—'

'Don't give me negatives—' Santo lifted his hand to silence the man, his eyes still fixed on his brother. 'So your objection isn't the commercial development which you concede makes sound business sense, but the interaction with the Baracchi family. Do you think I'm a coward?'

'No, and that is what troubles me. You use reason and courage but Baracchi has neither. You are my brother.' Cristiano's voice thickened. 'Guiseppe Baracchi hates you. He's always been an irascible old man. What makes you think he will listen to you before he loses that infamous temper of his?'

'He may be an irascible old man but he's also a frightened old man in financial trouble.'

'I'm willing to bet he's not in so much trouble he'll take money from a Ferrara. And frightened old men can be dangerous. We've maintained the hotel there because it would hurt our mother to sell our father's first hotel, but I've been talking to her recently and—'

'We're not going to sell. I'm going to turn it around but to do that I need the land. *All* of the land. The whole bay.' Santo saw the lawyer's agitation but he ignored him. 'I don't just want the land for watersports, I want the Beach Shack. That restaurant pulls in more custom than all our restaurants in the hotel. This is not about fuelling a feud, it's about protecting our business. While guests walk away from us to eat at the Beach Shack and watch the sunset, we are losing revenue.'

'Which brings us to the second problem in this ambitious scheme of yours. That restaurant is run by his granddaughter—a woman who very possibly hates you even more than her grandfather.' Cristiano looked him straight in the eye. 'How do you think Fia will greet the news that you intend to make an offer for the land?'

He didn't have to think. He knew.

She would fight him with everything she had.

They would clash. Tempers would burn hot.

And woven through the tension of the present would be the past.

Not just the long-standing feud over land, but their own personal history. Because he hadn't been entirely honest with his brother, had he? In a family where no one had secrets, he had a secret. A secret he'd buried deep enough to ensure it would never see the light of day.

The sudden rush of black emotion took him by surprise. With an impatient frown he glanced out of the window to the beach beyond but he didn't see sand or sea. Instead he saw Fiammetta Baracchi with her long legs and temper hotter than a red chilli pepper.

Cristiano was still watching him. 'She hates you.'

Was it hate?

They hadn't discussed feelings, he thought. They hadn't discussed anything at all. Not even when they'd ripped each other's clothes off, when his body had screamed for hers and hers for his, not once in the whole wild, erotic, out of control experience had they exchanged a single word.

And instinct told him she'd buried her secret as deeply as he'd buried his.

As far as he was concerned, that was the way it was staying.

The past had no place in this negotiation.

'Under her management the Shack has gone from a few rickety tables on the beach to the most talked about eatery in Sicily. Rumour has it that she's a talented chef.'

Cristiano shook his head slowly. 'You're walking into an explosive situation, Santo. At best it's going to be messy.'

Carlo, their lawyer, put his head in his hands.

Santo ignored both of them just as he ignored the elemental rush of heat and the dark memories that, now woken, refused to return to sleep. 'This feud has lasted too long. It's time to move on.'

'Not possible.' Cristiano's voice was harsh. 'Guiseppe Baracchi's grandson, his only male heir, died when he wrapped a car around a tree. *Your* car, Santo. And you expect him to shake your hand and sell you his land?'

'Guiseppe Baracchi is a businessman and this deal makes perfect business sense.'

'Are you going to tell him that before or after the old man shoots you?'

'He won't shoot me.'

'He probably won't need to.' Cristiano gave a grim smile. 'Knowing Fia, she'll shoot you first.'

And that, Santo thought without emotion, was entirely possible.

'This is the last snapper.' Fia lifted the fish from the grill and plated it up. The heat from the fire warmed her cheeks.

'Gina?'

'Gina is outside checking out the driver of a Lamborghini that just pulled into our car park. You know she has a taste for men who can keep her in the style of her dreams. I'll take those.' Ben scooped up the plates and balanced them. 'How is your grandfather tonight?'

'Tired. He's not himself. He doesn't even have the energy to snap at people.' Fia felt a ripple of worry and made a mental note to check on him next time she had a lull. 'Are you coping out there? Tell Gina to leave the customers alone and work.'

'You tell her. I'm too chicken.' Ben skilfully dodged the waitress, who came sprinting into the kitchen. 'Hey, be careful or we'll be sending you out on the boat for more snapper.'

'You'll *never* guess who just turned up—'

Fia shot a glance at Ben as she started on the next order. 'Serve the food or it will be cold and I don't serve cold food.' Aware that Gina was virtually trembling with excitement, Fia decided it would be quicker and more efficient just to let her gush. She added seasoning and olive oil to fresh scallops and dropped them onto the pan. They were so fresh they needed nothing but the best quality oil to bring out the flavour. 'It must be someone exciting because I've never known you star-struck before and we've had plenty of celebrities in here.' As far as she was concerned, a guest was a guest. They were here to eat and her job was to feed them. And she f...

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