

Illicit Night with the Greek (One Night With Consequences)

By Susanna Carr

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The Greek's unexpected parting gift...

Stergios Antoniou hasn't seen his exiled, troublemaking stepsister, Jodie Little, since the night they finally gave in to their forbidden attraction. Learning she's returned to Athens during a business deal too crucial to jeopardize, he holds her prisoner on his private island until it's over.

Jodie wants to rectify the past, but being so close to Stergios's potent sensuality, she's once again a slave to their destructive desire. One last illicit night should have put their affair behind them, but Jodie leaves the island with more than scorching-hot memories...

Illicit Night with the Greek (One Night With Consequences) By Susanna Carr Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #1589058 in Books
- Published on: 2016-01-19
- Released on: 2016-01-19
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 6.55" h x .52" w x 4.25" l, .21 pounds
- Binding: Mass Market Paperback
- 192 pages



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Editorial Review

About the Author

Susanna Carr has been an avid romance reader since she read her first Harlequin at the age of 10. She has written sexy contemporary romances for several publishers and her work has been honored with awards for contemporary and sensual romance.

Susanna Carr lives in the Pacific Northwest with her family. When she isn't writing, Susanna enjoys reading romance and connecting with readers online. Visit her website at susannacarr.com.

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Tension gripped Stergios Antoniou as he stood alone on the balcony that jutted out from his cousin's mansion. He ignored the iconic view of the Parthenon against the blue September sky as he scowled at the blonde woman at the garden party below.

Jodie Little. His stepsister. His darkest secret.

Burning hot fury ate away at him as he watched Jodie glide through the crowd of Athens's high society. She looked different. She had cut and straightened the long mop of curls. Her hair now fell into soft waves that reached her pointed chin. The yellow floral dress was modest as it skimmed her slender figure. Her bold red lipstick was at odds with her delicate appearance.

He knew the presentable image was false. It was a masquerade, a shield. It had been years since he'd last seen her but he knew time couldn't have tamed her true nature.

"There you are," his mother said as she stood beside him. "When did you get here? Come join the party."

Stergios didn't look away from Jodie. "How long has she been in Greece?" he asked.

Mairi Antoniou sighed. She rested her forearms against the ornate balustrade as she watched her stepdaughter charm a guileless shipping heiress. "She let her father know she was at a nearby hotel about two days ago. If she thought she would be welcomed with open arms, she is going to be extremely disappointed."

"Why has she returned?"

"Something about missing her father."

Stergios studied Jodie intently. The seductress didn't understand the meaning of family. She had been absent from her father's life for four years and she suddenly wanted a reunion. "What do you think is the real reason?"

"I don't know," she replied softly. "Gregory doesn't have money of his own."

"And Jodie recently inherited a fortune," he murmured. He tore his gaze away from Jodie and scanned the sophisticated crowd for her father. Stergios spotted the tall, well-dressed man on the other side of the lush garden.

Gregory Little had a talent for marrying wealthy women. His only goals were to keep his powerful wife happy and live in the luxury she provided. Stergios knew his stepfather was a benign presence in their lives, unlike his daughter.

"Gregory didn't know she was coming for a visit," Mairi insisted. "They've been in contact after her mother died earlier this year, but he didn't invite her."

Stergios's stepfather was given a generous allowance. The man knew what was expected of him if he wanted to keep the money flowing, but having a wealthy daughter meant another stream of revenue. "Do you believe him?"

"Of course. Jodie has caused him nothing but trouble and embarrassment." His mother's voice was brittle with anger. "That girl almost caused a rift in our family because she couldn't keep her legs closed."

The blood pounded hard in Stergios's veins as he remembered. Jodie knew how to create problems with minimum effort. It could be uttering an explosive comment at a formal dinner or creating a public spectacle at Athens's most popular nightclub. But none of that compared to seducing his cousin Dimos. If she had succeeded, it would have destroyed a bright and promising future for the Antoniou family.

"She shouldn't be here," he declared gruffly. Why had she shown up this week of all weeks? "Does Dimos know that she's around?"

Mairi stiffened. "I asked him to put Jodie on the invitation list for this party," she reluctantly admitted.

Stergios cursed as he pushed away from the balustrade. He scanned the guests at the party but he didn't see his cousin. That alone was suspicious. Dimos had always gravitated toward Jodie.

"What happened between them is in the past," his mother argued. "Dimos was in a rebellious stage and was easily misled. He was no match for a determined whore."

Jodie had entranced Dimos almost instantly, yet his cousin had not been an innocent victim. Stergios knew his mother refused to believe that. She'd like to think that an Antoniou man had better standards.

"It took us too long to realize that she was a manipulative liar," his mother declared. "When she said you'd followed her into the wine cellar that night... Well, no one was going to believe that."

Stergios closed his eyes briefly. Everyone in the family knew about his aversion to dark and confined spaces. But he had pushed past the reluctance that night because of Jodie. Because of her special brand of trouble.

"Of course she couldn't bewitch you, but Dimos was unworldly back then," his mother continued. "Just remembering everything she has done makes me—"

"It's too much of a coincidence that Jodie has returned when we need this alliance with the Volakis family. She's out for revenge."

His mother scoffed at the idea. "She's not the type who would follow the financial news or understand your long-term plans for the Antoniou Group. Jodie is not that smart. For goodness' sake, she's a finishing school dropout."

"Jodie wasn't kicked out of all those schools because of her academic performance," he reminded her.

"She has no interest in destroying us," his mother said. "She wants to *be* one of us."

"Sometimes the enemy is within the family."

Silence pulsed between them. Stergios inhaled sharply as he firmly pushed back the memories. He sensed his mother turning to face him. Stergios mastered his troubled thoughts and didn't flinch when she tentatively placed her hand against his shoulder.

"You don't need to protect us against Jodie." Concern wavered in her voice.

His mother was wrong. He must always remain alert. Build enough power and wealth that nothing could touch them. He didn't want anyone in his family to know the bleak and cruel world he had experienced.

"She's a problem but we've dealt with worse. In fact, we won't need to do anything," Mairi said brightly, dropping her hand before she turned away. "Jodie can't pretend to be demure and innocent for long. Her true colors will show. They always do."

"And while we wait, she'll seduce Dimos and stop the wedding," he predicted.

His mother gasped. "No, Dimos won't betray us like that."

"Dimos will bed Jodie the first chance he gets," he countered. He knew his cousin would view Jodie as the one who got away.

"He won't," she argued. "He knows how important this merger is to the family."

That didn't stop Dimos four years ago, Stergios thought grimly. If anything, the need to claim Jodie was more imperative to his cousin now. But Mairi Antoniou had a blind spot when it came to family. It was his duty to recognize and eliminate any threats.

"Jodie knows the importance, as well," he warned as he grasped his mother's elbow and guided her back to the party. "She has returned because she has some unfinished business and the money to fund it. She's a real threat to the Antoniou-Volakis marriage. We need this alliance and I won't let Jodie Little destroy it."

Some things never change, Jodie told herself. She flashed a friendly smile at one of the older Antoniou women. The curmudgeon in unrelieved black didn't reciprocate as she drew the lovely heiress away to the other side of the garden. It was as if this family believed Jodie could corrupt the young woman with just her presence.

She strolled along the garden, sipping from her water glass as if she didn't feel all eyes on her. Jodie knew she was being paranoid. Many of the relatives had been indifferent to her when she had lived in Athens. Yet no one seemed happy that she had returned.

Jodie sensed a strange undercurrent that hung in the late summer breeze. These people were convinced she was going to make a mistake or cause a scandal. It was as if the Antoniou family was waiting for disaster and bracing themselves for impact.

They were in for a long wait. Jodie locked her smile into place. That was the old Jodie. She was wiser now, and more in control of her emotions. This time she was determined to fit in. She straightened her shoulders and took a deep breath, inhaling the fragrant garden flowers. This time she would belong.

"Jodie?"

She gave a start when she recognized the male voice. She whirled around and saw her cousin Dimos Antoniou. Jodie instinctively took a step back and wished she hadn't shown any sign of weakness. She corrected herself and welcomed him with a smile before he embraced her with a strong hug.

"It has been so long," Dimos said as he kissed both her cheeks.

"It has," she agreed, not allowing his touch to linger. He looked exactly as she remembered, with his long face, lanky build and black hair that flopped over his forehead. "Thank you for inviting me to your new home. It's beautiful."

"Zoi's family gave it to us as a wedding present."

"I think you and your fiancée will be very happy here."

He thrust his hands in his pockets and rocked back on his feet. "Can you imagine me getting married?" he asked.

She silently shook her head. Dimos was three years older and she had been grateful for his friendship, but he had always seemed immature for his age. "And you're a vice president with the Antoniou Group."

He ducked his head. "That won't be official until I come back from my honeymoon."

"Your family is very proud of you and they want you to have the best of everything. You deserve it," she said huskily as the words caught in her throat. Dimos had understood the rules very early on and, more importantly, had followed them. In return, he was rewarded handsomely.

She wondered what it was like to be loved and accepted by family. She wanted that now more than ever. Jodie had yearned for a wisp of connection with her parents but she had waited for them to make the first move. She now regretted her lack of action when her mother had died suddenly of a heart attack several months ago. Jodie knew she had to do something immediately if she wanted to have a relationship with her father, her only living relative. She would have to be the first to apologize, to yield, to change.

But what kind of sacrifices would she have to make to have her father accept her? How much would she have to hide about herself to be considered lovable?

Dimos's smile dipped as the light dimmed from his eyes. "That's very kind of you, Jodie. Especially after what happened between us."

Shock washed over her and she fought for a mildly interested expression. She hadn't been prepared for

Dimos—for any Antoniou—to mention that night. Jodie wanted to cross her arms and back away but she was immobile. The only thing she felt was the pressure of her fingertips as they pressed against the cool surface of her water glass.

Dimos shoved his hand in his hair and looked away. "I did not handle the situation well," he confessed in a low tone.

She fought the urge to find a quick getaway. "No one did," she mumbled. She had been branded a Jezebel, a woman determined to snag an Antoniou man for a husband and ruin any potential marriages that had been carefully orchestrated. After that night she had been considered extremely dangerous to the Antoniou family's future.

"I didn't know that one of the maids had seen us."

Jodie blinked. That was what he was apologizing for? That they had been caught? Interrupted? She pressed her lips together before she said anything. It was tempting to give a scathing reply but she had to be on her best behavior.

"I couldn't believe that maid went and told Stergios." Bitter anger bloomed in Dimos's voice. "What had she been thinking?"

Jodie wondered if she might bite her tongue off as she fought back the words. The maid had known exactly what Dimos's intentions had been. Jodie wished she had figured it out earlier. She had seen Dimos as a cousin who helped her navigate a big family, not as a viable lover.

"And I know this is years too late, but I should have spoken up." Dimos splayed out his hands. "I didn't realize you would have been severely punished."

She was wrong, Jodie decided. Dimos was still immature for his age. Her jaw hurt as she fought to remain silent and took a small sip from her water glass. She wanted to point out that she had never encouraged him, or that it was never too late to right a wrong. He could have protected her from the fallout at any time. But that wouldn't have served him.

And if there was something she had learned over the years, especially after that infamous night, it was that men didn't understand the meaning of honor, respect or protection. They pursued, they took what they could get and they got out fast.

"So, how long are you planning to stay in Greece?" Dimos asked with a puzzled expression when she didn't respond.

She darted a glance at her father standing among the older Antoniou men. Her first goal was to ask for forgiveness for her past behavior but she didn't know if her father would give her the chance. "I'm not sure," she murmured. "My plans aren't set in stone."

"Then you must come to my wedding," he said, his eyes widening with enthusiasm.

Jodie raised her hand to halt that line of thinking. "I don't want to intrude."

"Intrude?" Dimos laughed. "That's not possible. You're family."

She wished it were true. She wished she didn't have this need to belong somewhere. To belong with someone. She had always been the outsider. The burden. She was used to it, and at times wore the label like a badge of honor, but everything changed after her mother's death. She wanted to be loved, accepted and part of a family.

"You must agree," Dimos insisted.

"Jodie must agree to what?"

She went still when she heard the low, masculine voice. Stergios Antoniou was here. She swallowed hard. He was standing next to her. Her pulse began to gallop as her stomach made a sickening turn. Her skin went hot and then cold but she refused to look in his direction.

"I invited her to my wedding," Dimos said with a touch of defiance.

"I doubt there's space," Stergios responded.

"I can make space," Dimos promised Jodie. "It's going to be on an island that Zoi's family owns. It's small, but not that small."

She nervously licked her lips as the panic swelled inside her. It pressed against her skin, ready to burst free. Every instinct told her to run but she stood as still as a statue. "I wouldn't want to cause any inconvenience for you or your bride," she explained huskily.

"You won't," Dimos said with a lopsided smile. "I'll go ask Zoi right now."

She watched helplessly as Dimos strode toward his fiancée. She wanted to run and hide but knew she had to be brave. At least appear fearless. From the corner of her eye, she saw Stergios's crisp white linen suit. She forced herself to turn. Jodie looked straight ahead at his pale blue shirt. She tried to ignore how it emphasized the breadth of his powerful chest before she jerked her gaze to his face.

Her breath snagged in her throat as her heartbeat roared in her ears. She stared at Stergios's luxuriant black hair that fell past his chin. The shadow of a dark beard almost diminished the whitened scar on his upper lip.

This was not the Stergios she'd known. She blinked several times, noting the bold lines of his cheekbones and nose, the slash of his mouth and his warm golden skin. She recalled how he'd once kept his hair ruthlessly short and had shaved twice a day. Now it looked as if he could no longer contain the wildness that rumbled through him.

His dark brown eyes were cold as he callously assessed her and immediately found her lacking. "I don't know what you're trying to achieve—"

"I wasn't asking for an invite," she bit out. "He offered and wouldn't take no for an answer."

"Perhaps he didn't understand what you were saying." His gaze drifted to her mouth. "You're not good at saying no to any man."

She swallowed the gasp of outrage and fought the driving need to fling the contents of her glass into his face. Damn it, her new and improved image was already slipping. She was never in control when she was around

her stepbrother. She had to get away from Stergios or risk making a scene. That wouldn't help her gain forgiveness from her father.

"Don't confuse me with the women you associate with." Jodie turned on her heel.

"Running away already?"

She whipped around, wobbling to a standstill as she glared at him. Stergios had sounded disinterested and bored while she was a jittery mass of nerves. It wasn't fair. "I don't run away. That's your signature move, stepbrother dear."

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