

# The Deleons

By

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## Chapter 1

“Satine.” He caught her wrists and flipped her, pinning her to the bed and glaring down at her as he finished, “You are not yourself.”

“That’s ridiculous,” she said with something very close to a giggle. No, that couldn’t be right. Satine Tierney did not giggle. “Of horse I’m myself.”

When she heard what came out of her mouth she burst into another fit of giggles, laughing so hard she could barely breathe. What was *wrong* with her?

“Get a hold of yourself, woman,” Desmond growled, shaking her by the shoulders. “We will not make an inconspicuous retreat with you falling apart every two seconds.”

“I’m not falling apart,” she said, abruptly stopping mid-laugh to frown at him. “I am quite put-together if I do say so myself.”

Feeling unusually happy all of a sudden, she once again changed topics, and without even thinking blurted, “I think you should kiss me now.”

Desmond muttered something under his breath that sounded a lot like, “Bloody Curse,” and tried to pull her up. She simply flopped back down, pretending to be a wet noodle. Her dead weight and gravity out won his struggle to keep her upright, and Desmond sighed.

This was not working.

He tried convincing her that it would be best to continue this outside of enemy quarters where someone *wasn’t* trying to kill them, but Satine just closed her eyes and swished her head back and forth on the satin pillowcase, claiming she liked the sound her hair made on the fabric.

When she started imitating the swishing noises, Desmond stared down at her, wondering what could possibly have happened to turn such a smart, sharp-tongued, down-to-earth, infuriating young woman into... well, this. Strike that. She was still infuriating. Somewhere along the lines, however, she had taken a dip into the crazy pool.

Her sudden ditsy attitude wasn’t the only thing different about her. In his efforts to keep Satine quiet without falling off the bed, the short barely-there robe she had tied around her waist had come loose, and the way she was constantly running her bare legs against his was not helping the situation.

“You need to hold still,” he said, once again trapping the leg sliding up the inside of this thigh before it could reach its intended target. “And stop giggling,” he hissed.

“Kiss me,” she said wistfully, not hearing a word he was saying.

He felt The Curse binding him to her flare and knew he would not be able to disobey her if that’s what she really wanted. Drugged or no, he had to do what she said. Hating the *astheneías agápi* with renewed passion, Desmond realized he was glaring at her and forced his expression to soften.

“Satine,” he said, taking great care not to growl at her. “Look at me.” Finally, she did. “This is not what you really want.”

“Yes,” she said with a nod of finality. “I do.”

He swore under his breath, feeling the tug of obedience grow stronger. Drugged or no, this was what she wanted. Until she snapped out of it of course. Then she would probably just want to kill him.

When she saw the severe look on his face, Satine let out a frustrated noise and ordered, “Desmond Décar, I demand that you kiss me right this—”

With a flash of disdain, Desmond kissed her. Hard. His lips crushed against hers with a fervor that screamed, *you asked for it*. His tongue swept against hers, and she snuck her hands out from under his, gripping his open shirt and tugging him closer.

He tensed and tried to pull away but she just deepened the kiss, sliding her hand into his hair. Fingers curled around a handful of soft brown curls and she tugged him even closer. He was losing his battle of resistance, and Satine took the opportunity to slide her free hand down the toned muscles of his bare chest.

He managed a strained version of her name as Desmond tore his mouth away from hers, fighting both his instincts and the Curse. He tried to speak but couldn't quite get his thoughts together as her hand slid lower. Gritting his teeth to keep from groaning, he finally wrenched himself away from her.

Desmond's feet landed briefly on the thickly carpeted floor as the mattress bounced, and he glared at his reflection in a nearby mirror. *Astheneías agápi* or no, he should have more self-control.

It was the bounce in the bed that momentarily (and quite literally) knocked some sense back into her, and Satine winced, squinting at the end of the bed. A shadow sat hunched over, tense and breathing hard. There was something familiar...

“Desmond?”

The sound of her voice froze him and he sat up straight. She sounded much more like herself. However in his current predicament, that did not necessarily amount to a good thing.

“Desmond?” she asked again, sitting up hesitantly. She studied his face a long moment, then a sharp look crossed her face and she all but shouted, “Where on earth have you been?!”

## Chapter 2

Desmond Décar awoke with a start, suddenly wide awake and alone in a dark room, sweat beading his brow. Kicking at the sheets twisted around his feet, he did a quick survey to reassure himself that no one else was there: Bed, desk, dresser, door—still closed and locked like he'd left it.

Satisfied, he sank back against the pillows, closing his eyes and allowing his heart to settle back into a normal rhythm.

Silently, he cursed the insufferable night. Even alone he couldn't escape her. It had been weeks since he'd left her in safer care and still the dreams came to him.

Every. Single. Night.

If he didn't do something soon, he was going to go crazy—and not just from the *astheneías agápi*. Although if they did not find a way to break the Curse, that was very likely to happen anyway.

Shoving back the sheets, Desmond got to his feet and headed for the door. It was time.

### Chapter 3

Three weeks ago if you'd have asked Satine Tierney what her goals were in life, they would have been pretty simple: Find a place big enough for her baby grand piano and a job she loved that didn't involve the family business, *Tierney Tech*. Maybe get married and have kids somewhere in there, but for now, at only 25, she felt no need to hurry in that department. Nowhere in her long list of things she wanted to do before she died did the words "get cursed and spend the rest of my life avoiding people who want my blood" appear.

And yet, this was exactly what happened.

After getting summoned back to her parents' house under the guise of meeting her possible future husband, Quinnlan Laroche—long story—Satine had spent a week running around with a group of men she'd never even met before, three of whom were, get this, *vampires*. Oh yeah, it does happen.

As it turned out, Quinn and the vampires, Calder Solaris, Micah Caractacus, and Kenji Oshiro, were not at all what she was expecting. They were perfect gentlemen, funny, and had constantly sacrificed themselves for her life more times than she could count the week before her birthday—a crazy whirlwind of a week involving explosions, curses, magic, and her father's long-time nemesis, Montauk Alastair. Satine owed these men her life, and had grown quite fond of them during their short time together.

The last man, however, Desmond Décar, had become the bane of her existence that fateful day. He was Quinn's best friend and the most infuriating man she had ever met. It had been bad enough that she'd been Cursed with a capital 'C' when she hadn't known such a thing was possible, but getting hit with a doubled love spell and being forced to pine pathetically like a love-sick schoolgirl for Desmond had been more than a little frustrating for all parties involved. There were times when she'd actually felt her IQ slip into the danger zone and there hadn't been a thing she could do about it.

They'd done everything they could think of to break the spell, but in the end they'd failed, and now they were linked. Forever. And if that wasn't bad enough, Desmond had sacrificed himself, stupid wonderful man that he was, and, as per the rules of the spell, had become her slave. Also forever. Except that he'd disappeared the night *The Curse* got what it wanted, and for the last few weeks Satine had been driving Quinn and company crazy trying to find him. So far, they'd had no luck.

Although she didn't feel the pull of Desmond like she had before they'd been officially, stupidly bound, Satine still felt like a part of her was missing. She'd been hoping that somehow she'd just be able to close her eyes and focus in on his location, or something equally cool, but so far all she'd managed was to work her unconsciousness into the annoying habit of dreaming of him every night.

The dreams were definitely not helping.

Scrubbing a tired fist across her eyes, Satine got up, splashed some water on her face then sat back down on the bed, staring at the dark TV. She didn't really feel like watching anything right now but she didn't like the silence either.

Glancing at the clock, she saw it was only 3:15. Twenty floors down on the Las Vegas strip, the night was still young. Inside her hotel room, alone and in the dark, she wondered how many of those tourists knew that not all the acts they were seeing tonight were of the theatrical kind.

Biting her lip, Satine glanced at the door leading to the rest of the hotel suite. Quinn would be asleep but Micah and Kenji would be up. A few days ago their presence had been “requested” in Las Vegas for the opening of a new casino. This particular casino, Satine’s current home away from home, would be a very special Vegas offshoot of a European club ran by a very powerful vampire named Nyathera. Nya’s European club *Enigmatico* was branching out with *Ephemeral*, and judging from past experience, Satine did not want to go wandering around by herself in the middle of the night.

Pacing the plush cream carpet and determined not to go back to sleep if she was going to dream again, Satine wondered if some of the rooms had coffins instead of beds. Although vampires could sleep in a bed like anybody else quite comfortably once they were old enough, she’d discovered recently that newly-made vamps needed the security of tradition. It was learned long ago that the caution was not just for the safety of the newly-turned, but for the safety of the nearby human beings they had a tendency to, uh, snack on.

Satine shuddered at the thought and tried not to think what might be on the room service menu.

Her restlessness getting the better of her, she grabbed her robe off the hook in her huge walk-in closet, slipped on her slippers, and quietly padded out into the living room with every intention of raiding the human-friendly refrigerator their suite’s breakfast nook provided. As she tightened the pink sash, Satine frowned, wondering why the men she’d been stuck with were suddenly so dead set on buying everything pink. What was so dangerous about doing her own shopping? Satine was pretty sure they were just doing it to irritate her. They all thought it was hilarious.

Stubbing her pink-slippered toe on the edge of the counter as she entered the kitchen, Satine bit her lip.

“Up for a midnight snack?”

She spun around, suddenly wishing she would have grabbed one of the many weapons the boys were still trying to get her familiar with. Even a real shoe would have been better than her fuzzy slippers.

A lamp clicked on in the living room and Satine glared at the intruder. “What are you doing here?”

“Relax, I’m here as a friend.”

A friend? Was she serious? “The last time I saw you, you were trying to kill us.”

“No, if I remember correctly, the last time you saw me, I saved your life.”

Alana Firenze with her matching green eyes and nails stood up, casually taking a glance around the room as she headed for the kitchen table. Satine took a step back, not at all about to trust the woman who had been all too happy to see her dead—or worse, a slave to a very bad man named Septimus.

“What do you want?” Satine asked, trying to decide how long it would take to make it to the drawer with the knives. Alana could move pretty fast, but would it be fast enough?

“Like I said, I’m here to help,” Alana answered, finally turning to look at her. She took in Satine’s pink wardrobe and smirked. “Nice.” Sitting down, she crossed one slim leg over the other, leaned back, and began tapping her nails on the table.

“Well, thanks, but I don’t need your help,” Satine said, ignoring Alana’s offer of the seat across from her.

“Really? Because it seems to me like you’re not exactly having the best luck locating Lover Boy these days.”

Forcing her face not to betray her sudden interest, Satine dryly asked, “And you can help with that now, can you?”

“Actually yes, I can.”

There was a pause as Satine considered her words. She very much doubted Alana was offering up Desmond’s location out of the goodness of her heart.

“In exchange for what?” she asked.

Alana smiled mischievously, leaning forward on her elbows and suddenly looking much too childlike. This could not be good.

“You know what I want.”

“I told you before, I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

The last time Satine had run into Alana, the little woman was convinced Satine knew the location of some lady who, up until then, Satine had thought only existed in her dreams.

“You saw her again, didn’t you?” Alana asked. “When your hand dipped into that water.”

So what if she had? “I still can’t give you any location, because I’m not really sure myself what happened that night.” Quite frankly, she’d be okay if she never had to remember that particular night ever again. Being thrust into a dream world in the middle of an emergency with no idea of what to expect was not her idea of a good time.

“Have you had any more dreams?” Alana said, studying Satine’s reaction carefully.

“No.” Not of the woman in the forest anyway.

“Have you even tried?”

“Why would I want to go back there?” The last time she’d somehow stepped into her dreams with Desmond, he’d traded himself for her. Satine was still not clear what exactly had happened, but whatever Desmond had done, he’d managed to ensure that he would be the one enslaved by The Curse and not Satine. She was still furious at him for it.

Alana sighed. “Don’t these people tell you anything?”

She wanted to answer, *No, and trust me, I’ve tried*, but kept her mouth shut.

“Fine, whatever.” Alana stood up. “You don’t want my help...”

Cursing herself, Satine gave in. “Wait.”

Alana stopped at the door, turning to grin at Satine, who rolled her eyes.

“I’ll try,” she said, knowing it’d be pointless anyway. She’d tried and tried to go back to that strange place, back to the mysterious woman who somehow knew Desmond and entered Satine’s dreams, but so far she’d been unsuccessful. Alana didn’t have to know it though.

Grin deepening, Alana skipped—literally, the girl bounced—back to the table and Satine tried not to gape. Who was this strange little woman?

“Now?”

“You want me to try it now?”

“Why not? It’s as good a time as any.”

Satine sighed and sat down at the table. This was turning out to be one very long night. She looked at Alana, who was now eagerly staring back, and said, “I can’t guarantee anything.”

“I know, I know, just try.”

“Fine.”

Closing her eyes, Satine tried to relax, concentrate. She willed her mind into a peaceful state, trying her best not to think of anything. She'd only managed to enter the forest once while awake, but those circumstances had been pretty extreme.

When nothing happened, she tried imagining freshly mowed grass and the sound of a softly bubbling brook. Blue skies... trees... maybe some butterflies...

Just when she was about to give up, a flicker of light tugged at her mind's eye. Satine furrowed her brows trying to concentrate, trying to will that light closer, but as quickly as it had appeared it was gone—like a TV had shorted out and lost all signal.

“Sorry,” she said finally, opening her eyes. “Not even a no service signal.”

Alana's face fell and Satine felt a little sorry for her. She didn't know why she was so interested in the lady of the woods, but ever since Satine had met her, Alana had seemed to want nothing else.

“We can try again later,” Alana said, and Satine kept her *We?* to herself.

“So...”

“Lover Boy, right.”

“Just get on with it already,” Satine said, trying not to lose her patience. If Alana didn't know where Desmond was, Satine didn't have the time, nor was she in the mood for her games.

“Well I didn't have to look far,” Alana said, sitting back to study her perfectly manicured nails. “I'm really surprised your boys didn't find him already. Unless,” she added, stopping to glance at Satine, “they did.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Desmond Décar is in Las Vegas.”

Satine didn't bother hiding her surprise this time. “Are you sure?”

“Oh yeah. In fact, I wouldn't even be surprised if sooner or later he found his way to *Ephemeral*.”

She couldn't believe it. Desmond, right there under their very noses. How long had he been in Vegas? Did the guys know?

“How did you find out?” Satine asked, so many questions coming to mind she could hardly focus. They'd been in Vegas only four days. Had Desmond been there the whole time? Did he know they were there? Would he try to leave before they found out?

“I have my ways,” Alana said, back to studying her nails. She stood up. “Anyway, it's been fun.”

“That's it?” Satine stood up too. “He's in Vegas. That's all you're going to give me?”

“It's not *that* big of a city. Oh,” she said, once again stopping on her way to the door. “But if I were you I'd get out before the end of next week.”

Satine was following her without even realizing it. “But the Casino's dedication isn't even until Friday.”

Alana met her gaze. “Exactly.”

Before Satine could say anything else, Alana was suddenly out the door. Satine opened it to try and stop her, but the hallway was empty. Alana Firenze was gone.

## Chapter 4

"Something wrong?"

Startled, Satine spun around to find Quinn standing in the light of the lamp. Even though he'd just woken up and wore only long pajama pants his blond hair looked as perfectly quaffed as always—a fact his friends constantly teased him about.

"No, sorry, did I wake you up?" Satine asked, very glad to find him there instead of another unexpected guest.

"I heard voices." He was waiting for an explanation and Satine finally answered, "Yeah, it was nothing, sorry. I couldn't sleep and was considering room service, but I was a little too scared to look at the menu."

She didn't think he believed her but Quinn didn't press the issue.

"Probably a good idea," he said, heading for the refrigerator. He pulled out a carton of orange juice, eggs, bacon, butter, and milk, and began making a very early breakfast. Satine went over to help him, popping in a few pieces of toast and starting the eggs as he began the bacon.

"Think Micah and Kenji will be back soon?" Satine asked, glancing at the clock. The sun would be up soon enough, surely it was about time for a break in business.

"Who knows what Nya's got them running around doing now."

"Doesn't she have her own people to run things?" Satine cracked an egg into Quinn's skillet and reached with her foot to pull open the refrigerator door again to grab some cheese. She snagged the ketchup while she was there and turned back to the stove.

"After our last meeting, she wants to make sure there will be no bumps in the road," he said, buttering the toast and putting in two more slices. The smell of bacon and eggs filled the room, reminding Satine why she'd ventured out so late in the first place. Mouth watering, she poured herself some orange juice while she finished the eggs and Quinn got out the plates.

"You mean she wants to make sure *I'm* not the one causing the bumps," she said.

Ever since she'd turned 25 and The Curse got what it wanted, it had become glaringly obvious to Satine and everyone around her that things were far from over. Word had spread quickly of her existence, and rumors of Satine's danger to vampires and use to their enemies had made it tougher than ever to go anywhere or trust anyone without trouble.

Knowing that more people than ever were going to want to use or kill her for whatever mysterious element it was that ran through her blood—something that was toxic to vampires yet seemed to possess some sort of healing power for humans—Quinn, Micah, Kenji, and even Solaris had spent a full week trying to teach her how to defend herself. They'd tried before, but this time there wasn't an extremely pressing deadline pushing her to hurry up and learn. She was no expert for sure, but she was at least getting more comfortable with a knife. Though she didn't carry her own firearm, she was now a decent shot in an emergency.

The only thing Satine was finding herself somewhat good at was mixing various concoctions with Kenji. She found the patience he had tending to his plants and his knowledge of ancient medicine both relaxing and fascinating. He taught her about aromatherapy and what to do if they ran into certain deadly poisons she'd never even



heard of. He even let her in on certain secrets that only vampire healers were in on, just in case.

When she'd first witnessed Micah's true form he'd been poisoned by a deadly amount of silver. He probably would have died had Kenji not been there to help. Satine knew firsthand how precious every second was when it came to the weapons their enemies, now hers, might use against them. No doubt she'd be encountering a whole host of new ones before this mess was over, and like it or not, Satine needed to be prepared.

They finished the breakfast dishes just as the first rays of the sun were peeking over the horizon. Not that they could see them, of course. Being in a hotel tailored to vampires, the windows were perfectly sealed off from any unwanted light. There was a switch that could be flipped to simulate a holographic picture of the outside world though, if you so desired.

Satine walked over to the huge set of windows lining the living room and flipped the switch, watching shades of red and orange spread like soft paint streaks over the horizon. She could almost feel the warmth of the sun on her face and closed her eyes. Another day, another—wait. She had a lead. Finally after weeks of fruitless searching, she might really have a lock on Desmond's location. Unless he'd discovered that she was in Vegas too and was already running.

No. She wasn't going to let him get away this time. Like it or not, Desmond Décar was going to have to face her sooner or later, and Satine was more determined than ever to make that time now.

"Rise and shine my human friends," Micah called from the doorway as he and Kenji entered the suite. They were both dressed much more formally than usual. Kenji's long black hair was pulled back from his face, some of it in an impressive braid down his back, and even Micah's unruly locks looked slightly better behaved.

"Today we get the 'official' tour," Micah said, running a hand through said locks to mess them up again.

"Wow, I'm actually being let out?" Satine asked. "What's the special occasion?"

"The Ancient's in town," Micah said, tugging at his tie. "And your presence is requested."

Before Satine could ask who or what an Ancient was, Quinn said, "The Ancient is here? In Vegas?" The way he said it, he might as well have been talking about the Pope.

"Yes," Kenji answered softly, moving to gaze out at the holographic view. "Which means this is not just about the opening of a casino."

"I take it this... Ancient person doesn't make a lot of house calls?" Satine asked, wondering what one wears when meeting someone called "Ancient". She hoped whatever it was, it wasn't pink.

"That's putting it lightly." Micah plopped down on the couch and propped his feet on the glass coffee table, placing them on the ground when Satine frowned.

"But why is my presence requested?" she asked. "I'm not a vampire and Nya and I aren't exactly BFFs."

"She wants everyone to see her secret weapon," Quinn said grimly. "We should have seen this coming."

"We all knew it'd happen sooner or later."

"Wait," Satine interrupted, sitting in a high-backed Victorian era chair. She wouldn't be surprised if the gold thread interweaved in the fabric was real. One thing about living forever, vampires sure didn't seem to spare any expense on their decor. "I'm not a weapon. And even if I was, Nya doesn't own me."

Micah exchanged a look with Kenji. "She helped you escape Septimus and now, well, let's just say Master Vamps don't dole out favors like that easily."

"You're saying I owe her?" Being in Nyathera's debt made Satine feel a little sick.

"All you have to do is smile and nod. Everyone just wants to make sure you're not here to cause any problems."

She let out a dry laugh. Like they hadn't run into enough already? The last thing Satine wanted to do was bring on a fight with a bunch of vampires. If it was up to her, she'd happily stay away from them for the rest of her life. Sure, Micah and Kenji were alright, but others she'd run into weren't exactly jumping at the chance to be friends with such a tainted human. Even if that tainting wasn't her fault. She couldn't help what had been done before she was even born.

"What happened to Bundt," she said, trying not to remember how the vampire's fangs had felt in her neck, the way he'd died horribly afterward, "I didn't do on purpose."

"The guy was literally sucking the life out of you, no one blames you."

"But..."

"But they're uneasy. The fact that your blood could take out a vamp that fast? They just need to make sure you're not planning anything. Not..." Micah glanced at Quinn, then said, "for lack of a better way to put it, working with the enemy."

"This is ridiculous," Quinn said.

"I agree. But we don't really have a choice." Turning to Satine, Micah offered an apologetic look. "I promise you nothing bad will happen on our tour. We're not here to start another war."

"Fine," she agreed with a sigh. "I'll act like the good little guest and try not to fry any of our hostess's friends."

"Thank, you."

"There is one thing though, and this is not negotiable" Satine said, and Micah waited to hear what it was. "I'm not wearing the pink taffeta."

He grinned. "Deal."