
Chapter 1

On Christmas morning, Damon, bent on his knee and in front of his family, finally asked Elizabeth to become his wife.

"Yes!" exclaimed Elizabeth, her eyes shining with happiness. It had been a long time coming, and the feelings she was experiencing now had been worth the wait.

Damon then announced that he had been able to procure a special license, and they would be married the next day at St. Thomas Anglican Church. The penthouse erupted into a frenzy of phone calls, arrangements and activities after that, to ensure the St. Claire – Ashton wedding was memorable.

The couple had thoroughly enjoyed being with their family, friends and staff, taking pleasure in the Christmas season. Their son René's first birthday, celebrated in their newly renovated penthouse, completed the family picture and hope that the best was yet to come.

After the proposal, as if by magic, Damon's PA Amanda and her daughter, Tamara, had appeared with Mrs. O'Grady, Damon and Elizabeth's housekeeper and their son's official Nana.

Damon hugged Elizabeth and explained that he had taken Amanda and Mrs. O'Grady into his confidence. With Amanda's usual efficiency, she'd arranged to have several wedding dresses delivered from Vera Wang and hidden away in her office. She handed Elizabeth a guest list and asked her to add any names she and Mr. St. Claire might have forgotten.

Elizabeth felt excited and giddy, not quite believing yet that all this was happening. "May we have the reception dinner at my gallery?" she asked.

Mrs. O'Grady sped off to her kitchen, saying, "Leave everything to me, luv, the gallery it is, and me prayers have been answered."

Elizabeth watched Damon as he phoned his best friend, Peter, telling him that she had said 'yes' and asked him to be his best man. She had to grin as she thought, *did he really think I might say 'no?'* She turned to Damon's sister Abbey and asked, "Will you be my matron-of-honor, and I'd love for Kyla to be my flower girl and Egan, the ring bearer?" She had grown fond of Damon's niece and nephew.

Abbey stepped forward and hugged her sister-in-law to be. "We would be honored," she said. "We love you and couldn't be happier that you will officially be a part of our family. Who will walk you down the aisle?"

Tears formed in Elizabeth's eyes as she thought about her parents, who were no longer living. "I'll walk down the aisle holding our son, René," she answered bravely, "and give him to Mrs. O'Grady while our vows are being said."

Elizabeth was relaxing in a soothing bath after a busy but exciting day, getting ready for her wedding. Everything had fallen magically into place. Peter Laurent, Damon's oldest friend and best man, insisted that Damon not spend the night before his

wedding with his bride-to-be and had packed him off to a suite at the Four Seasons, promising to have him at the church on time.

Steam rose from the tub, and Elizabeth let herself sink into the bubbles, remembering the journey she and Damon had traveled and the choices they had made along the way. Stepping out of the tub, she wrapped a warm towel around herself and walked into her dressing room. There, hanging at the end in front of the mirrors, was her wedding dress. The gown was a juxtaposition that paired a low-corseted top with a voluminous tulle ball skirt. Extensive beading and floral appliqués covered the dress and the edges of her bridal train. Her hand ran down the train, and she blinked back the tears in her eyes. *I wish you were here with me, Mom and Dad,* she thought, *I hope you can look down and see how happy I am.* She turned with a smile and walked into the bedroom. She then snuggled under the covers and turned out the lights, knowing now there would be few nights she and Damon would spend apart.

Elizabeth woke rested the next morning. She wandered onto the terrace to a beautiful sunny day. Mrs. O'Grady brought her breakfast and coffee, René toddling after her, raising his hands, asking to be held. Amanda interrupted, saying that the Baxters, Damon's sister and brother-in-law, and their children were outfitted for the wedding and had gone out for a short walk to enjoy the sunny weather and their last day in New York. Melody, Elizabeth's gallery assistant and manager, had returned from Christmas at her parents' home in Staten Island to assist in the preparations for the wedding reception. Everyone had accepted their invitation, and Elizabeth was excited that their friends and some of the staff would be joining them. After finishing her breakfast, she handed René back to Mrs. O'Grady. Amanda said that a makeup artist and hairstylist would arrive at 2:00 p.m., giving her plenty of time before the 4:00 p.m. wedding.

"I wonder what Damon is doing before the wedding?" Elizabeth thought aloud.

"Being kept busy by Mr. Laurent," answered Amanda. "Father Robert sent over a list of what to expect at the ceremony, as there was not time for a wedding rehearsal. We'll go over those with Mrs. Baxter and the children when they return from their walk."

Well, that will keep us occupied, thought Elizabeth. "I know Damon has a lot of influence, Amanda, but how did he manage to get around the church's posting of banns and no interviews or rehearsal?"

"Well, I obtained your and Mr. St. Claire's birth and baptism certificates, and with the special license and Damon's pleading, the bishop granted his permission, after which St. Thomas was added to the list of yearly donations from the St. Claire foundation," replied Amanda. "Have you and Mr. St. Claire discussed any plans for a honeymoon?"

"No," answered Elizabeth with a giggle, "but you'll be the first to know."

After lunch, Elizabeth, Abbey, and her children practiced for the wedding, while Abbey's husband Byron stood in for Damon. When Amanda pronounced that everyone had their roles down pat, Elizabeth left René with Mrs. O'Grady and returned to the master suite. Opting for a shower, she let the warm water run over herself, cleansing her body and her mind. The intercom buzzed as she toweled herself dry. It was Amanda, saying the makeup artist and hair stylist were there and to let her know when she was ready. Wrapping her hair in a towel and donning one of the white robes hanging by the shower, Elizabeth rang back and asked her to please send them to the suite.

In a few minutes the artist and stylist arrived with assistants, equipment and large quantities of every possible beautifying product. "Would it be possible to have my matron-of-honour's

hair and makeup done?" asked Elizabeth. "And maybe the flower girl's hair?"

"Of course," replied Amanda. "I'll let Mrs. Baxter know to expect them when you are finished."

"I'd like to have them here with me," said Elizabeth. "And I'd like Abbey to help me get dressed, so please bring her and Kayla's clothes when they come. Doctor Baxter can see to himself and Egan, and we'll meet when we are ready to leave for the church."

Minutes later, Abbey and Kayla entered the master suite. "I wanted to share this time with you," Elizabeth said, smiling at them. "Thank you for being part of my wedding. I always wanted a sister, Abbey, and now I'll have one and a beautiful niece."

In Elizabeth's dressing room, Abbey helped the bride into her wedding gown and veil.

"You look beautiful, Aunt 'Lizabeth," said Kayla.

A photographer snapped photos, under Amanda's direction, and the women left the suite to meet Dr. Baxter and Egan in the foyer. Cal, Elizabeth's bodyguard, stood by the elevator waiting to escort them down. Amanda said that Miss Ashton, Mrs. Baxter and Miss Baxter would be driven in the Rolls by Anthony, Damon's driver, and that Shane, Elizabeth's driver, would drive Dr. and Master Baxter. Mr. St. Claire was being picked up and driven by Mr. Knight, Damon's head of security, and she, Mrs. O'Grady and René would leave first, with René's bodyguard so she could ensure everything was in readiness at the church.

The sun was still shining as they drove in front of the church at the corner of 53rd and Fifth. The current church building was completed in 1914, in the French High Gothic Revival style. It was home to the St. Thomas Choir of Men and Boys which

performed music in the Anglican tradition at worship services. Amanda told them that the choir would be performing during the ceremony. Cal opened the door, and after he helped them out of the car, they followed an attendant into the church and to a room set aside for the bridal party. Mrs. O'Grady was already there with René, and she informed them that Amanda was checking to make certain things were in order. A few minutes later, Amanda entered the room, saying everything was ready and for Elizabeth to let her know when she would like to begin.

"I'm ready," said Elizabeth, taking René from Mrs. O'Grady. Amanda sent Mrs. O'Grady with an usher to her seat. Elizabeth, René, Abbey and Kayla stood at the back of the church where Egan joined them. Amanda spoke into her microphone and the strains of *The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face* filled the church. As they had practiced, Abbey began to walk toward the altar. Next, came her daughter, Kayla, spreading pink and white rose petals from her basket, then Egan, bearing the rings on a satin pillow. Elizabeth looked down the aisle at the smiling faces of friends and staff. Her heart quickened, and she felt embraced by Damon's smile. She hugged René and began to walk. When she reached the altar, she handed René to Mrs. O'Grady as planned, and her bridal bouquet of white lilies and pink peonies to Abbey. Turning, feeling her heart was about to burst with happiness, she smiled at Damon and placed her hand in his.

Father Robert opened the prayer book and began the service. Elizabeth had been raised in the Anglican Church and knew that their wedding was part of a service that joined them through Communion with the community. As the wedding proceeded, Elizabeth was surprised and pleased to see Damon accept communion after those in the church and she had done so. When they recited their vows and placed rings on their fingers, Elizabeth thought, *I have never been so happy and so in love*. Father Robert pronounced them husband and wife and said that Damon should kiss his bride. Damon looked deeply into Elizabeth's eyes, pulled

her toward him, and sealed their commitment with a passionate and lengthy kiss.

Just when Father Robert was about to cough, having never seen such a passionate display, René burst from Mrs. O'Grady's arms, saying, "Da Da, me up." Damon and Elizabeth broke apart, laughing, and Damon lifted their son between them. René looked at his parents and smiled from ear to ear. The *Wedding March* by Mendelssohn began to play. Elizabeth took her bridal bouquet from Abbey and she, Damon and René began to walk between the happy faces who had come to witness the ceremony and wish them well.

Anthony opened the door to the Rolls, and after the bride and groom entered, got behind the wheel and raised the privacy screen. In the back, Damon pulled Elizabeth onto his lap and kissed her passionately. Elizabeth curled her arms around Damon's neck and laid her head on his shoulder. His arms held her close as the Rolls sped away from the church.

Elizabeth sensed the Rolls had turned off Fifth and then was headed north, in the opposite direction of her gallery. She gave Damon a questioning look, to which he replied, "Amanda made me promise that we would arrive after everyone had time to be at the gallery, so I directed Anthony to drive north and then down Fifth at the Met. Anthony will be in contact with Amanda and will tell us when we are approaching your gallery."

Elizabeth smiled and thought, *past the Met where Damon first told me he was a Dominant and I didn't know what that meant. I didn't know what my feelings were then, but patience and love have tied us together and bound us. His love and protection are what I crave and what will keep our family safe as we build a life together.*

Anthony's voice broke into the silence, "Mr. St. Claire, we're two blocks from the gallery and everyone is awaiting your arrival."

Damon looked at Elizabeth, who smiled and nodded. "And my wife and I are ready to receive our guests," the groom replied.

Ashton Gallery was decorated beautifully with flowers in white and pink. Art on the first floor had been stored. The head table and smaller round tables for their guests wore white linen tablecloths, topped with pink and white rose petals scattered around vases filled with pink and white roses. On the second floor, its catering kitchen was busy with the final preparations for the wedding dinner. Waiters stood ready with champagne and appetizers, and a chamber orchestra played music that floated through the gallery's floors. The wedding photographer stood ready to capture the event, and guests held up their champagne flutes as the Rolls pulled up in front of the gallery. Cal knocked, then opened the back door of the Rolls. Damon exited and extended his hand to his bride. A security guard held open the door to the gallery as family, friends and staff called out their wishes.

The head table was made up of Elizabeth and Damon, Peter Laurent, and Abbey. The first round table held Mrs. O'Grady, René and the Baxters' children. Babs Smith-Wilkins, Elizabeth's close friend from her days at Sotheby's, sat with her husband, Doug, Dr. Baxter, Simone Manage, an artist whom Elizabeth represented, and Syl Cohen, Elizabeth's friend from her days at Columbia University, who was now head of Frieze New York. Amanda and her daughter, Tamara, sat with Melody and Charles Knight. Extra security had been hired for the evening, so that Anthony, Cal, Shane and Vlad, René's bodyguard, could join the reception. A small, but intimate group of people who were important to the bride and groom. Elizabeth's friend, Paula, from her high school days in Vermont, was unable to attend. Also absent was Damon's mentor, partner and father figure, Elder Tong and his wife, who resided in Hong Kong.

Peter Laurent rose to begin the toasts as the waiters served the first course. Knowing better than to roast his friend, he talked about knowing Damon for many years, and that Elizabeth had made him a warmer, happier human being. Next, it was Abbey's

turn. She said she had all but given up on her brother, and she thanked God every day that he met Elizabeth, who had the patience, strength and love to draw him out and give her back the brother she used to know.

As the plates were cleared, Damon rose and lifted his glass to Elizabeth. "To my beautiful wife and the mother of my son. Today, you have made me the happiest of men. Thank you for your patience and your unwavering love. For those reasons, and for the gift of our son, I love you more every day. I would like everyone to rise and toast Elizabeth, my wife, my lover, today and forever." Damon kissed Elizabeth, and she rose to give her toast.

"To my husband, the man who awakened my desires, helped me become the woman I am, and whom I will forever love and honor."

Damon rose and led Elizabeth for their first dance as man and wife to the strains of *You Light Up My Life*. When the music ended, he passionately kissed her as their friends clapped. The chamber orchestra began again, and Elizabeth picked up René to join them in the next dance. Abbey and her husband, Peter and Simone, Babs and Doug Smith-Wilkins, and the Baxter children joined Elizabeth and Damon. Charles Knight persuaded Amanda to dance, and seeing that, Shane stood up and walked to where Melody was sitting, bowed and extended his hand. Tamara was happy to see her mom dancing with Mr. Knight. Syl smiled, hoping she would someday find someone to love. Mrs. O'Grady shed tears, happy to be René's official Nana and to see her prayers answered. Anthony, Cal and Vlad clinked their glasses, agreeing that they were lucky to be part of the St. Claire family.

Later in the evening, Elizabeth changed from her wedding gown into a J Mendel dress whose design was white links which crossed diagonally on a midnight blue background. She held her bridal bouquet and stopped on the last step, coming down to the main floor.

"Everyone, please, will all the single women gather? I'm anxious to throw this bouquet and be off to enjoy the first night with my husband!" exclaimed a smiling and excited Elizabeth. Simone, Syl, and Melody stepped forward. "Amanda, please join in," Elizabeth said. "Otherwise, they'll never truly know if they were meant to catch the bouquet." Amanda rose and insisted that her daughter, Tamara, join. Elizabeth smiled, turned and threw the bouquet over her head. When she turned around, a startled Amanda looked at her, the bouquet in her hands. Everyone clapped, Elizabeth and Damon descended the staircase, hugged René and headed out the door where Anthony and Cal had resumed their duties as driver and bodyguard.

The Rolls sped to the Four Seasons where the couple would spend their first night as husband and wife. Tomorrow, they would meet the Baxters at the airport, fly to LA with them, and then spend a few days at the Malibu residence.

Elizabeth snuggled close to Damon as he carried her over the threshold of their suite. A gas fireplace was burning, and candles illuminated the living room. Damon bent and rested Elizabeth on the sofa in front of the fire. Lights from other buildings twinkled and provided the perfect backdrop. She watched as Damon uncorked the champagne and filled their flutes. "I know you prefer your scotch," she said as Damon handed her one of the flutes.

"I prefer you, my wife, and cannot wait to spread your legs and bury myself inside you."

Elizabeth handed him her flute and replied, "And I, you, my husband." She sat up and began to unzip the front of her dress, unbuttoning the cuffs and letting the sleeves fall. Standing, she wiggled out of the dress and stood with no bra or panties and

only midnight blue Jimmy Choo heels. Their eyes met and held, silently transmitting their desires.

She smiled as Damon picked her up and carried her into the bedroom, placing her on her back with her hands above her head. Elizabeth's arousal built and she could feel the wetness between her legs as he placed her feet wide, her high heels digging into the sheets. Her pulse raced as she watched her husband undress and climb onto the bed between her legs.

A moan escaped her mouth as he began a slow trail with his lips and tongue down her body. *It's like the first time he made love to me*, thought Elizabeth, *only now, it's the first time we come together as husband and wife*. A tear of happiness ran down her cheek which was promptly kissed away. She opened her mouth and savored Damon's tongue as it danced with hers. He broke the kiss and whispered in her ear that he loved her and was the luckiest man alive. It took every strength she had not to wind her arms around his neck as he trailed his tongue and kisses down her body.

Stopping at her breasts, he licked and sucked, saying he was glad they were his alone again. Her body writhed as he teased her belly button, and her hips bucked upward, urging him forward. Elizabeth thought she would come undone when he licked her lower lips and dove his tongue into her folds. His thumb circled her clit and he withdrew his tongue to flick it then began to suck. She moaned and began to pant.

"You taste like honey," he whispered as he was flipping her over and swatting her bum with his hand. "I can't wait to get you to Malibu where there are toys that will please us both."

She pushed back against his erection. He laid his hand on her lower back, squeezed his penis at the root and rubbed its head against her dripping entrance. In one thrust, he was deep inside her. She could feel her arousal increase as they moved together and her muscles tightened around him. She climaxed saying his name, her orgasm spilling over her body as he held her tightly to him.

When she had spent, he turned her over, kissed her deeply and said, "Look at me. I want to remember this night and see your face when we come together and make love."

Elizabeth smiled, and her hands moved to hold him as they melded together, the first time as husband and wife.