



Chapter One

Waking Up To Your Potential

Amelia was sound asleep on Gold Rock Creek's beach on Grand Bahama Island in the Bahamas, nestled into pure white sand like the finest percale sheets.

She started to claw her way back to an awareness of where and what she was doing there. Ever so slowly, she began to sense a brightness attempting to penetrate her eyelids, even before she opened her eyes. Amelia wondered if she really wanted to do that. Staying asleep would be grand, and there was no overriding reason why she should wake up just yet. But then her eyes snapped open in opposition to her mind, and she let the impossible and very hurtful brightness of the sun penetrate her consciousness.

"Shit! I didn't want to face this day in this way, but here I am", she thought and then allowed the sound of the surf to enter the beach in mini cascades. A few voices from far away down the beach began to enter her ears and then marched onward into her brain. But then there was a flock of seagulls screaming at one another, and they were drowning out the people's voices somewhere down the beach.

Amelia was now aware that she had fallen asleep on an extra-large beach towel she had somehow thought to take from the hotel she was staying at. She had passed out on this beach and had stayed there all night long. The tide had almost risen during the night until it was only a foot from the edge of the towel. She glanced to the side and saw an empty vodka bottle. She remembered that she had thrown it there sometime

before falling asleep. How had she been sober enough to grab a towel and bottle of vodka to take with her to this place, wherever this place was?

She used whatever strength she still had left after last night's ode-to-dumbness party took control of her. She rolled sideward to her knees to progress, getting up onto those knees and then, with her hands, maneuvered to attempt to achieve an upright position. Now, she pushed with everything she had and somehow ended upright on her feet, but not without experiencing a dangerous backward stagger. She looked around to see if anyone had seen this pitiful act, but the beach was nearly empty. A few dogs were investigating the surf line to see if anything edible or playful had washed on shore with the waves.

Amelia began forcing herself to march landward to the road and the car that had brought her to this beautiful, somewhat isolated beach last night. Hopefully, someone didn't take off with it during the night.

After just a minute or two of walking along a road that once had asphalt but now only traces of it, she found her car in a parking lot in a deserted building called the East End Missile Base Library. The name of Alan Sheppard, who was the first United States astronaut in space, was painted on the building. Amelia knew that Shepard was picked up when his space capsule plummeted into the ocean near Grand Bahama Island. He had rocketed into space from Cape Canaveral in Florida on May 5th, 1961. Alan Shepard was retrieved and then flown to the Grand Bahama Missile Tracking Station for a debriefing. This special place must have been on Amelia's mind at the party in the Our Lucaya Hotel on Lucayan Beach near Freeport. Somehow, something happened enough for her to flee the party and head to this beach. But at least she now knew where she was.

As she thought of that, she also wondered who could be so stupid to drive a rental car to this place when she was intoxicated and in a foreign country as well. She usually had little tolerance for other people who did things like this, and now she is doing something worse. Amelia had just been selected by the current President of the United States as the next Secretary Of State. That is if the President didn't find out what she just did here in the Bahamas, and that is also if she didn't figure out how to turn this very high appointment down.

Amelia got into the car and looked into the rearview mirror. The reflection did not display anyone who could be one of the world's most essential and powerful women. Amelia Castro was no Madeleine Albright, Condoleezza Rice, or Hillary Clinton. She was sure of that. She didn't feel that way at all, and you would most certainly have to feel that way, wouldn't you?

She started the car and then headed towards her hotel on Lucayan Beach. She was sure her best friend and Chief of Staff would have noticed she was gone by now, and the United States and Bahamian authorities would be searching for her. She was disgusted with herself, but she was now competent and sober enough to know her next steps.

She grabbed her smartphone from her purse and called Pete Anderson, her Chief of Staff, who had come to the Bahamas with her. Pete answered the phone and sounded agitated.

"Amelia, where have you been? This isn't like you at all. You were so smashed when you left the party. I was trying to decide whether to follow you and didn't know if the guy you left with would take you back to the hotel room. Later, I saw him in the casino. He said he had taken you back to your room because he was concerned about you. And once you were in the room, he left and headed to the casino, where I found him at the roulette wheels."

"Thank God, Pete. Then nobody thinks I am missing, other than you, that is?

"Yeh? Pete said questionably. Where are you? Are you missing, or what?

"No, I'm not missing, Pete, except in the area of intelligence. I drove to Gold Rock Creek, 22 miles from Freeport, and spent the night alone on the beach.

"Oh! OK, Amelia!. David will be glad that you are OK as well."

"Who is David, Pete?"

"He escorted you to your room, where you didn't stay put."

"I vaguely remember some good-looking guy walking me to my room, and I also recall thinking about how I would turn down any

advances from him, but not much more. What do you know about him, Pete?"

"I know you didn't need to be concerned about turning down his advances. He was concerned about your safety and not interested in your body."

"And how do you know that Pete?"

"Because he spent the night with me in my room."

"Oh!" Amelia replied. "At least that's one more thing I don't have to worry about."

"Right!" When will you be back at the hotel, Amelia? Are you ready for breakfast or going directly to bed?"

"I need some breakfast, Pete. That sleep on the beach was all I needed, but my hangover may require several cups of coffee. I'm only twenty minutes from you, so you could go to the hotel's beachside dining room and have coffee waiting for me. I'll shower and get into some beachwear or something. And please order some scrambled eggs with cheese, ham, and a Bloody Mary."

"Right, and is it all right if I invite David to join us for breakfast?"

"Of course, Pete. I need to meet him, properly apologize, and thank him for attempting to help me last night."

"OK, Amelia. See you in a little bit. Drive carefully."

Amelia adjusted to being alive again as she continued the drive to Lucaya. She had decided to spend a few days in the Bahamas to unwind from the various pressures of the past year. She had actively campaigned for John Block's Presidency, which he won with a significant margin. They have been friends and associates in business and political activities for the past five years. President Block had previously been Senator Block from New York.

Amelia had been the President of a large technology firm she created with her husband. Oversight Inc. specializes in acquiring and managing various established defense and technology design companies. The firm

also provided manufacturing solutions for innovative defense product development.

She had started Oversight Inc. with her husband Tom, and it had grown into one of the highest-grossing corporations of its business classification. Unfortunately, her husband had been killed in a plane crash twenty years ago. The corporation was only ten years old at the time. Amelia continued to run the business and successfully expanded it, but she was beginning to tire of the business routine. Her highly talented thirty-year-old son, Taylor, came on Board soon after he graduated from Harvard. He had shown that he could take the helm of the company and was extremely well-liked by the Board and employees who worked under him. It was an easy decision to hand over the reins to Taylor, and she was then free to put her energies into the various foundations she and her husband had created.

Soon after leaving her position at Oversight, Inc., the then-President of The United States requested that she take over as the Administrator of USAID. USAID is the world's premier international development agency. USAID's work advances US national security and economic prosperity, USAID is one of the largest government agencies that work with NGOs. She immediately fell in love with the organization and the types of people who ran and supported it.

She had known Senator John Block before her appointment to USAID and worked with him while he was Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee. They became best friends, so it was natural that he would select Amelia as Secretary Of State in his Cabinet. Many people were saying that Amelia was perfect for this job. Although she was grateful for the appointment, she was apprehensive about performing as well as Amelia thought she should. She was known to be very competent, but apparently, she didn't trust her own abilities.

According to many publications, she was one of the country's most beautiful, high-power women and perhaps one of the world. She was blond, had blue eyes, and still retained a young woman's body, according to the newspaper statements and talk show pundits.

Her actions last night were understandable, but they were still among the most stupid things she had ever done in her adult life.

While she fretted about those things, time quickly passed, and she was soon pulling into the Our Lucaya Hotel's parking lot. She jumped out and went to her room to shower and dress for breakfast. She knew that Pete and this David person she didn't remember would be ahead of her, so she hurried her preparations.

As Amelia arrived in the beachside dining room, Pete saw her and waved to identify where they were. She went directly to them and immediately sat down. Pete didn't need to greet her as they were almost joined at the hip, but he introduced David. "Amelia, this is David Stanford, your benefactor from last night."

She looked over at David and said. "I am so sorry about last night, David, and also sorry for not being able to recognize you this morning. I was awful, and I don't know how to apologize to you for my actions."

David smiled broadly and replied. "No need for that, Mrs. Castro. I have long admired you and saw you were in trouble. I didn't want anything to happen to you, and fortunately, you remembered the number of your room, so I took you there."

"Please don't call me Mrs. Castro, David. I owe you way too much to be that formal around you. Amelia or anything else you would like, other than Mrs. Castro."

Both of the men laughed at that, and David said. "Amelia, it is then."

Pete said, "Your coffee is right there, Amelia and the Bloody Mary is now arriving." The server set three large Bloody Marys with tall celery stalks and three olives impaled on a small, thin bamboo cross sticking out the top of the glasses. Amelia dived right into the drink and said, "I hope this drink and the coffee perform up to their reputation for being the hair of the dog that bit you."

They all chuckled at that comment, raised their Bloody Marys in a toast, and were more relaxed now that the introductions were over.

Amelia looked at David and thought to herself how nice he seemed. She also noticed how animated her Chief Of Staff was. Pete was not precisely giddy, but she saw how uplifted he was when talking, notably when he directed his words to David. He was generally quite introverted

and conservative when he was around people. And this David Stanford was indeed very handsome.

She was happy for Pete.

Amelia then directed her conversation to David. "Are you here in the Bahamas on holiday, David?"

David answered, "Yes, I am. I suddenly felt the urge to be here."

Amelia said, "An urge? It sounds like you were reacting to some force that pushed or at least nudged you to come here."

"Well, it is often that way, Amelia. I don't know what I am doing next until I get such urges, but they are never pushy. My will to do what I should or want to do is always intact. But I am also pleased to respond to those subtle urges as they always turn out to be a great thing for me to do. Always!"

"Well, that sounds intriguing, David," Amelia responded. "Almost spiritual the way you made it sound."

He responded, "Of course, it is spiritual, and I can tell that you felt an urging to believe it and wonder what it has to do with you."

Pete looked at both his friends with a quizzical stare and said. "I think you two made a strong connection of some kind, And Amelia, I don't think you know it yet.

Amelia decided not to comment on Pete's statement, and David didn't say anything more. However, that small subtle repartee caused all three of them to focus on their coffee rather than comment further on the subject.

Then, after two minutes or so, Amelia said something. "Well, David, whatever reason you had to come to the Bahamas, I want to express my gratitude. As I am sure Pete told you, the new President has tapped me to be his Secretary of State, and although I am honored, I am very unsettled to take on that role. It isn't that I am nervous about taking on responsibility; I am far more concerned that I don't know what to do with being Secretary Of State for the most influential country in the world."

She took a large sip of the Bloody Mary and then continued.

"When I ran my company, Oversight Corp, which was quite large and then went on to manage the USAID, which is the United States Agency for International Development and was also very complex, the goal of each organization was a lot narrower and specific in concept. It seems that the State Department job will have to be more open-ended and composed of bureaucrats, who might feel I won't be as effective as their structure demands." She rested a moment, sipped on her coffee, glanced over at David, who was softly smiling, and then resumed her narration.

"Pete knows how I feel about this and considers my feelings to be total inferior female nonsense. He thinks I can put on a Wonder Woman suit and then conquer any challenge I may be required to face."

Pete raised his Bloody Mary to them and nodded during Amelia's explanation. He said, "I'm not wrong about that."

Amelia smiled at both men and then continued explaining her recent actions, but she was attempting to provide a remedy for herself. She was starting to divest herself of the negative, fearful, and apprehensive attitudes that had been dogging her since President-Elect John Block announced her appointment. It was becoming evident that she had adopted a terrible solution to a problem she didn't have.

She looked at David, who was smiling while offering a response to her problem, which he had understood this whole time. "There is very little that you do not know about handling any task, familiar or not. There will be many challenges you have not dealt with before. Still, whether you admit it or not, this has always been the case, Amelia, within Oversight, or with your responsibilities managing ASID, and even when dealing with the complex relations of family and friends. The satisfaction in your new job will come when you are fulfilling challenges with the newest, the unfamiliar, and the most difficult tasks ever. And as you prevailed in your previous challenges, you will in prevail in the new ones as well."

"Thank you, David. Those words are encouraging and offered with wisdom I expect was earned from previous challenges. But you don't look old enough to have had all that many challenges, though."

He replied, "I'm 35, but older than you think, Amelia. One of these days, I'll reveal just how much, but not at present. Let's enjoy this breakfast and continue creating ideas through talking so that we can become friends."

The rest of the breakfast was enough medicine to control Amelia's hangover. By the second coffee, she was unaware of any damage she had acquired from last night's party. She shared her recovery with David and Pete and gave them full credit.

Pete suggested they drive to the Lucayan National Park that was east on Grand Bahama Highway. Amelia and Pete had planned on doing this before the party last night. Amelia agreed and said she would like to show them the Gold Rock Creek beach where she had spent the night. Sharing that space would be part of shedding her shame over her actions. She insisted that David stay with them for that trip, assuming he had no other plans. He did not and was happy to go with them.

Later that morning, after enjoying a trip through the island's pine forests, they arrived at the Lucayan National Park in less than an hour. The park was nearly 2,000 acres of land and mangrove-bordered waterways. They all marveled at an underground cavern, which looked small, until they read a sign saying that it had 6.4 miles of chartered tunnels meandering under the island. They went down into the cavern via a circular spiral staircase and into a large cave with a crystal clear tiny lake with plenty of fish swimming about. This cavern was called Ben's Cave and named after the man who discovered it. It was beautiful, although a little eerie because voices tended to reverberate and come back to you almost as an echo.

Every so often, Pete or Amelia voiced a question about something they saw or thought of, and David could answer those questions. Amelia began to understand that David was knowledgeable and incredibly astute in many concepts.

After going underground to experience the underwater caverns, they traversed the raised wooden walkway over the mangrove swamps, home to many small birds flittering on or off the handrails. The mangrove swamp contained many native black olive bushes and trees that David said did not produce olives for people but as fruit for the birds. At the end of the walkways, they arrived at the beautiful Gold Rock Creek Beach, a different section from where Amelia slept all night.

After an hour or so, they walked back to the highway, got into the car, and drove to the section of Gold Rock Beach where Amelia had spent the night. She recalled very little or nothing of that arrival but certainly loved it on this visit.

They then drove on the highway to the High Rock settlement, where Pete had heard about an excellent native restaurant called Bishop's Bonefish Resort. They arrived there to find a covered wooden structure on the dunes. It had several small resort rooms in a long building behind the dune line. The concrete building also had a restaurant with a small kitchen, bar, and dining room. Many people in Lucaya said this was the best fried cracked conch, and today's fresh fish is prepared any way you prefer, along with some homemade potato salad. They were right. For a place where you might expect the worst, you end up with the best.

Today had turned out to be one of the best days she had experienced lately, but Amelia was nearing a certain level of exhaustion, and they all agreed that it was time to head back to the hotel.

Once back at Our Lucaya, they all decided to take a small nap and meet for dinner in the hotel later. David had suggested that Amelia may have had enough of him for the day, but she said that was far from being the case and insisted that he was to join them if he had nothing better to do. She meant it, but was sure Pete wouldn't want this any other way. Those two had significantly bonded in their friendship, and in an entirely different way, so was Amelia.

Amelia went to her room, tossed herself on the bed, and drifted off when her cell phone rang. She grudgingly stretched over to the end table and picked up the phone. It was President-Elect Block calling.

Amelia said, "Hello, Mr. President."

He answered, "Not yet, Amelia. It's still John and will continue to be, except when we can't. How are you enjoying your Bahamian rest -break?"

"Well, John. That is a subject I want to bring up and clear the air around me as soon as possible. Since you told me that you would appoint me to the State Department, I have been apprehensive about handling that responsibility and everything that goes along with it. It went so far as to cripple the good judgment that I thought I had. I allowed myself to get drunk to the point where I drove drunk and went alone to a remote area of the island and slept on the beach all night."

There was silence on the other end of the phone. "Did you get into an accident, hurt anyone, or get involved in anything else that might cause you undue stress, Amelia?"

"Thank God nothing happened, John. I woke up and drove back to the hotel about 25 miles from there. Pete arranged for breakfast and Bloody Mary's to ward off a hangover. But another odd thing has to do with a man who saw me trying to get to my hotel room, bouncing off the walls and confused. He escorted me to the room, helped me open the door, and left me alone. Then, for some reason, I suddenly decided I wanted to drive out to the abandoned old missile tracking station I had read about. It was 20 miles or so east on the island. And don't ask me why, because I don't know. In any case, I walked or possibly staggered to the beach once I got there, placed a large beach towel down to lay on, promptly fell asleep, and stayed that way all night."

John Block laughed and said, "It sounds like you dodged all the bullets heading toward you, Amelia. The lucky thing was the man who led you to the room and left you. It could have ended much worse. And the other thing that stands out to me was the intentional action on your part to leave your room and go to the beach. The natural thing would have been to fall into the bed, but you seemed to have had a mission to attend to. Why would that be?"

"I don't know, John, but I am beginning to think I can find the answer from the man who led me to the hotel room. His name is David, and he is now an extraordinary friend of Pete's. They met in the casino after David left me in my room. I spent the day with both of them today, and he has an extraordinary aura. I am sure you would like him, and he has an answer to any question I have about anything. It's a bit of a mystery.

After she told him about David, John Block didn't answer for quite a while but then said. "Well, I'm sure you will work it out, Amelia. Anyway, I called you because I need you in Washington next Wednesday. All my Cabinet appointees will meet with me for a strategy session. The present administration has invited us to use the White House facilities and staff to help in the transition planning. I want you and Pete there, of course. Is that doable for you two?"

"Of course. We will be there."

"Do you want me to send my plane to Vero Beach for you?"

"Thank you, John, but no. I'll have Oversight's corporate jet pick us up and deliver me there. We will go to Washington on Tuesday. Pete has

already bought a house there to use as our headquarters, and I am excited to see it.

"Excellent! See you Wednesday, Amelia." And then he hung up.

Amelia rolled over on her side and finally got her nap.

She seemed to be awoken almost immediately by her phone ringing. She reached over and saw that it was Pete calling, and the time indicated it was almost six o'clock in the evening. She answered, "Hey, Pete."

"Hello Amelia. Are you still sleeping?"

"No! You made sure of that."

"Sorry. What time do you want to go out for dinner?"

She responded, "How about an hour? I can be ready to go by then."

"Fine. The desk clerk said there was a great Italian restaurant across the street in the Marketplace. It's called Giovanni's."

That sounds good, Pete. I'll meet you and David there."

"OK!" Pete answered and hung up.

Amelia showered and selected a one-piece white form-fitting dress and white shoes. She wanted to keep it simple while she was on vacation in the Bahamas but also wanted to dress to impress. Amelia was blond and fifty-two years old. She still turned men's heads when she entered a room, although that was probably as much because of how she carried herself. Amelia worked out a little every morning, at least when not suffering from a hangover like this morning. Her posture when she walked was excellent. Her attitude was straight and strong, and it showed. And she cared enough to look impressive whether the people looking at her were women, gay men like Pete and David, or straight men. It didn't matter. She was a beautiful, impressive woman who intended to stay that way for as long as possible.

The meal at Giovanni's was excellent, and the weather was ideal, which was nice because they ate outside. All three raved about how much they were enjoying being together. Amelia and Pete had always had a great relationship beyond the professional one.

Amelia and Pete updated David on what the following year's professional life would contain for them. As did almost everyone in the United States who cared about such things, he knew that Amelia was to be Secretary Of State. David also said he knew that Pete, who seemed to be second in all things to Amelia, was to be a Deputy Secretary of State and still a Chief Of Staff to Amelia.

Amelia asked David what he did for a living, and she was surprised to hear that he was not presently employed. He had recently sold an internet business he had founded several years ago to Google. It was one of the most well-known AI software firms in the United States, and both Amelia and Pete were familiar with the company, even though they didn't know David was involved with it. David also told them he had a PhD in computer engineering and political science.

Over dinner, he filled both of his new friends with a lot of detail about his past and his present time but said nothing about what he planned for his future. He excused himself when they ordered a light dessert and coffee and left for the restroom.

After he was gone, Amelia asked Pete what he thought about appointing David and whether he would consider taking on a position in the State Department and working with them to organize the Department. Pete said yes. Amelia said that she would typically not have considered such a rash decision, but she felt very good about such a step. She would start the vetting process immediately if David agreed to join them.

When David returned to the table, Amelia immediately brought the subject up. "David, would you consider joining Pete and me at the State Department and helping us create a successful transition of the new Administration?"

"I'd love to do that, Amelia. I first studied political science because the field interested me. I transferred to computer engineering because of the new lure of artificial intelligence, but I have that out of my system now. So, Amelia, I am confident that I would be willing to do everything I could to make this a successful venture on all our parts.

Amelia ordered another bottle of champagne to celebrate their agreement, and they toasted once more to a beautiful new friendship and partnership.

