



Launching That New Life

Amelia was heading to the airport in Vero Beach, where she had a home. Her son Taylor had sent a corporate jet for her, which would arrive in Vero Beach in about one hour. She would then fly to Washington, D.C, to prepare for a Presidential Transition Planning meeting with the other Cabinet appointees.

Pete was already in Washington setting up their new offices and housing. David Stanford, who would not be in the first transition meeting sessions with the President-Elect, would still be involved in start-up planning with her and Pete and heading for Washington today.

Now that Amelia had reconciled with her monkey-minded attitude about taking the Secretary of State job, she was looking forward to it. She never hesitated about her Chief Of Staff, Pete, handling his part of their new assignment as Deputy Secretary of State. She felt that he would be a better Secretary of State than she would, but the fact was that President-Elect Block had selected her.

She also found significant comfort in having David as Deputy Secretary for Management and Resources. He had a fantastic talent for knocking aside her negativity and replacing it with positivity when a problem reared its ugly head. She discovered this after spending many FaceTime and Zoom call sessions with him.

On her way to the airport, she received a text from the pilot saying they would be an hour late due to an airport delay. She was not disappointed about this delay as she had not had breakfast at home before she left and loved the ones that C.J. Cannon's restaurant at the Vero Beach airport offered.

When she arrived at the restaurant, the owner, Pat Cannon, greeted her by name. She then escorted Amelia while filling her in on what's happening locally, until they arrived at a window table overlooking the runway.

When the server arrived, Amelia ordered her favorite breakfast dish of chipped beef over toast, hash browned potatoes, and coffee. She was happy to see that, other than Pat, no one recognized her, allowing her to relax in the dining room's comfortable surroundings.

After eating, she received a refill of coffee, looked out the window, and saw her jet arriving on the runway. It no sooner started to taxi on a ramp heading toward the terminal when Amelia received a text from her pilot telling her they were in Vero. She replied she would see them on the tarmac side of the restaurant.

She gathered her check and went to the checkout. She saw Pat again there and gave her a thank you, and said goodbye. She walked the short distance to the gate and saw the jet's door open and a ramp descend to the tarmac. Amelia was soon on the plane and headed to Washington.

The trip on the Oversight Corporations jet took less than two and one-half hours to get to Washington, DC. Amelia called Taylor as soon as she settled on the plane. They discussed all the relevant news about their company and personal interests but only needed to go into a bit of detail. Oversight Corp. was doing very well in all financial and other matters. Amelia was delighted that she had left the company in her son's capable hands and was glad he enjoyed running it. Taylor had gotten married three months ago, and Amelia was also pleased with his choice of a wife. This daughter-in-law was an actual case of the mother of the son feeling she had gained a wonderful daughter when her son married Grace. To make it complete, Amelia would look forward to becoming a grandmother one of these days, but she didn't want to hurry it. It would be better to wait to

expand the family until Amelia finished the Secretary job. But she knew that was a selfish attitude on her part.

After finishing the call with her son, the pilot arrived at her lounge seat and sat beside her. The pilot's name was Jessica, and she carried two martinis on a tray. One had a lemon twist, and the other an olive on a little spike. She set the tray down on the cocktail table in front of them.

"Thank you, Captain," Amelia said with a big grin. "But I didn't think you should drink and drive Jessica."

"I have a copilot driving right now, Amelia. Besides, only one of them is for you. Despite all you have heard, I don't drink alcohol at all. The lemon twist is for you, and the spiked olive is for me. My olive drink had been neutered."

They laughed together as a silly repartee of this style was a tradition. Jessica had been a college classmate of Amelia's at Harvard, and they had remained friends since then. After graduation, Jessica wanted to become a pilot. She started flight training and eventually became a commercial pilot. Both remained friends throughout their lifeline pursuits. When Amelia learned that Jessica wanted to leave the airline she worked for, Amelia offered her the job of Chief pilot for the Oversight Corp, a fleet of four jets. Since then, Jessica always made it a priority to pilot for Amelia whenever she scheduled a flight.

Both women picked up their martini glasses, toasted each other, wished for the best, and then ended the toast with a mutual "Friends Forever" and clinked glasses.

Amelia filled Jessica in on what was going on with her. Of course, Jessica knew of the Secretary of State thing, but she wanted to know what all girlfriends wanted to know if time had passed between them being together. Was there anything new on a romance campaign?

The answer from each was none. Then both, as was their custom, raised their martini glasses to give a toast and yelled. "To the ramparts!" Anyone listening would have their thoughts about those two losing it.

The Captain then left to join her copilot shortly after their short get-together, and Amelia started making more of her obligatory phone calls to everyone. It didn't seem like much time had passed when Captain Jessica's voice came over the speaker, saying they were landing at Ronald Reagan Airport in ten minutes.

As Amelia disembarked from the jet, Pete greeted her as expected. Every time she saw him in this role of taking care of her every need, she was struck with gratitude that he existed in her life. He was never obsequious in any manner of action. It was like a family member who cared for you and was always there for virtually every need. If she was wrong, however, you could be sure that he would let her know that, in a respectful manner, of course.

After a courteous hug, he walked with her to their car. She was still pulling her carry-on-sized luggage, which she felt was appropriate. She always liked it being close to her when traveling.

Amelia realized she would have Secret Service protection once she was officially the Secretary of State, but she wasn't looking forward to it. She understood the need, but it was one of the reasons she initially turned down the assignment when President-Elect Block offered it to her. She was well aware that this negative attitude on her part on this subject was not going to go away quickly.

As usual, Pete was driving the car, and they were heading directly to her new home on the Potomac River in Maryland. It was about 12 miles from the White House and the State Department Offices. She also knew that it was likely that she would have to put up with having an assigned driver once she was Secretary of State.

The drive seemed short, and they arrived at the house before Amelia thought they should be there. She was surprised that a very imposing and sturdy-looking gate with high walls surrounded the house. Pete had prioritized security because of her future position, and the fact that she was also known to be very wealthy was a security risk. She knew that she needed to put up with it.

The new house was impressive enough outside, but it could not be considered an imposing estate. Pete said it had nine bedrooms, eleven

baths, and a poolside cabana. It was unlikely that she would ever need that many bedrooms, as her son and his family were the only regulars who would reside there, and that was on occasion. Pete may occasionally stay overnight when they were working, but he preferred to be in his own home.

As they entered the house, she was very impressed with the foyer. Like the exterior, it was exquisite and spacious but stopped before it became overly grand. It had a double spiral staircase that would deliver you to whichever upper side of the house you wanted to go. The foyer had a nice, spacious living room on the right. You would enter through large and beautifully crafted double wooden doors. The same entry style and double doors on the foyer's opposite side led to an extensive library. Pete told her there were four garages, two on the right side, behind the living room, and two on the left, behind the library.

Walking under the spiral staircases in the middle, you entered a formal dining room flanked by the kitchen, laundry, and storage on the right. Pete said the two-bedroom guest apartment on the left would be assigned to Secret Service agents. The view from the dining room would center on the swimming pool and gardens.

The bedroom suites were upstairs, and an elevator was available to the left of the dining room doors. They were all beautiful, and anyone residing here would have no complaints about their size, which was perfect. None were too large, and none were too small.

A small three-bedroom, two-bath guest house was also approximately two hundred feet from the main house. Pete said it had been initially home to the parents of the principal house owners. The guest house would be used as additional Secret Service quarters.

The gardens were also perfect. They were lovely to look at. The swimming pool was particularly nice, with a semi-formal shape that allows for playing or Olympic-style lap swimming, depending on what one wants to do.

Planters with interesting freeform shapes framed and accentuated the swimming pool, and a spacious lawn led to the Potomac River. On the river was a large fishing dock and a classic mahogany power boat similar

to the older Chris-Craft style moored to the pier. The dock had an overhead roof. Large oak trees existed throughout the riverside yard to frame the river view.

Amelia was delighted and told Pete that. She said, "You didn't seem to leave anything out.

Pete smiled and then told her. "I have one more thing to show you, and he led her to a wall on the right side of the dining room. He pressed a rose bloom designed feature, and a wall panel swung open. They entered a small closet-like structure with a spiral wooden staircase. From this position on the staircase, you could climb up to the main bedroom or walk down to a safe room, sometimes called a panic room, connected to the garage behind the living room. Your special State Department limousine is in that garage bay. The car is designed with the same features as the Presidential limousine and is bullet and blast-proofed to protect you if you need to escape. If your attackers have that escape route under their control, a secret tunnel is accessed through this storage closet here".

He opened it up by kicking the bottom molding. A tunnel opened up, and Pete told her that it led underground to the river behind the house and the power boat for escaping on the river.

Amelia told Pete that the whole idea of needing this protection has returned her to that state of anxiety that she started with. She said to Pete. "Do I need all this security?"

"Amelia, perhaps the answer is no. Remember that all the other Secretaries of State and most recent Presidents except for Kennedy made it through danger. However, many wealthy people have been kidnapped or killed for their money. You have gotten used to that risk, and we now have more protections for you."

"You are right, Pete. Keep reminding me of that fact to keep my worrisome self in check. It's just that having to have this panic room makes me nervous."

"Just remember, Amelia. Very few people know about this room. The original house contractor didn't build it in, and the Pentagon had it reconstructed for a four-star general under top secrecy orders when it was

constructed. He was under threats of death from foreign interests, so the Pentagon felt the need to do this. The mechanisms that open things within the escape system are all new.

"This intrigue is suitable for a James Bond movie, but I appreciate it, Pete."

"Good," Pete answered and then asked Amelia. "But let's talk about the meeting with President-Elect Block tomorrow. Is there anything about the meeting that we have to plan for?"

"I don't think so. John said that everything was pretty routine. The Senate confirmation for all of his appointees should also be routine. The same political party controls the Senate as the new Presidents, so no major opposition is to be expected. I understood from John that the vetting for both of us is completed, and here again, no opposition from the Senate or anyone else is likely."

Pete hesitated for a moment and then asked Amelia. "What about David?"

"What about him? From what I understand, the Presidential Transition team had already vetted him, and you thoroughly investigated him yourself. He is very well-known, and I haven't heard of any negatives regarding him or his past."

"Nor have I, but what about his new association with me?"

"What about it, Pete?" What do I not know about this concern you seem to have?"

"Well, as you know, I have been seeing David since we met in the Bahamas."

"Yes, of course, I know that, and I am very happy for you both."

"You have offered me the Deputy Secretary of State position."

"Yes, I did."

"And you have offered David the Deputy Secretary For Management and Resources position."

"And you are right again. I say again, what is bothering you, Pete?"

Won't the President or our political enemies find that situation objectionable?"

"I don't think for a minute that President Block would care, and I couldn't care less what our political enemies think. Why should you?"

"Well, with the Deputy Secretary For Management and Resources reporting directly to me, I am concerned that they might consider that an abuse of the political system, Amelia."

"I will resolve that right now. I have decided that the Deputy Secretary For Management and Resources will report directly to me rather than to the Deputy Secretary of State, who is you. It's simply a division of internal authority. If I resign or otherwise lose that position, it will be up to you to accept the Deputy Secretary For Management and Resources or fire him. How about that?"

Ah, Okay, I guess." If you are sure that both you and President Block are okay with that,"

"I'll bring that up with the President just to be sure. But remember, you and David got together long after I decided to name you as Deputy Secretary of State and chose David as Deputy Secretary For Management and Resources, so there was no hanky-panky going on there. Understood?"

"You're the Boss, Boss. And I will always accept what you say, except when I don't want to. But in this case, I want to."

"Great. Oh! What about the staff running this place? Have you picked any?"

"Sure, all the current house staff are willing to stay on for the same pay rate. The previous owners said they were excellent and like family to them."

"It is your usual excellence, Pete, and as usual from me, thank you very much for being you and keeping my life livable. I love you for that and much more."

"I love you too, Boss. Now let's get dinner. I have found out about a great restaurant near here."