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Who Shot the Speaker?

By Christopher B. Emery

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**WHO SHOT THE
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CHRISTOPHER B. EMERY

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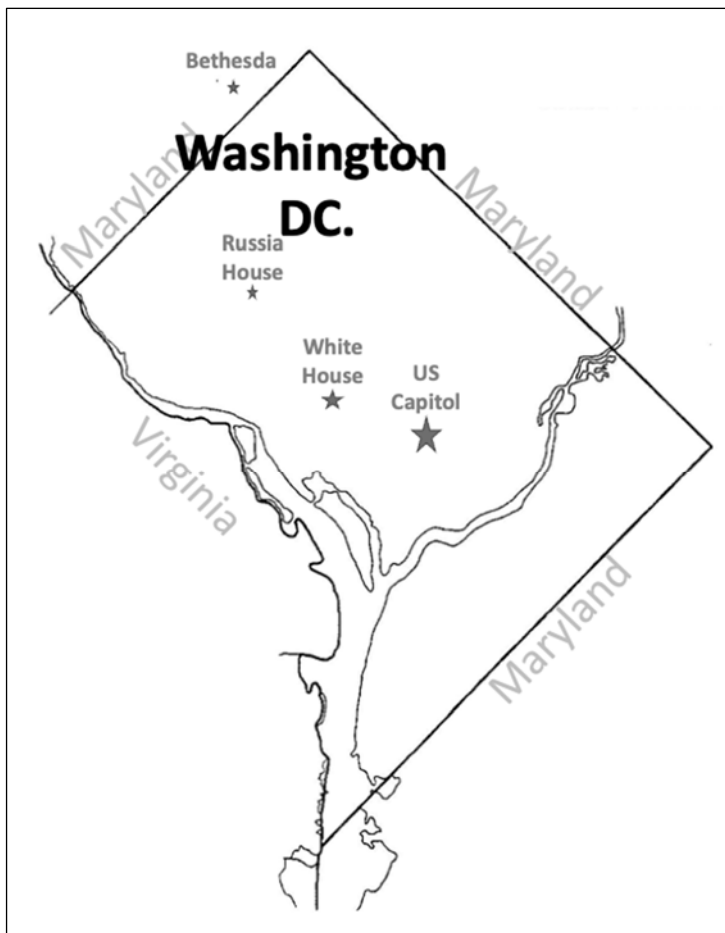
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Chapter 1

Saturday, October 29
Omni Springs Resort, Bedford, Pennsylvania

The sun had burned off the last of the morning mist. The surrounding Allegheny Mountains, their fall foliage at their peak, provided a breathtaking view.

Gus had been in position since before sunrise. His shoulders and knees ached, and his neck was stiff from lying motionless on his stomach for nearly three hours.

He sighed. Back in Vietnam, this kind of twelve-to-fifteen-hour-long routine had never brought any discomfort. Now, just a few hours were torture. “God, I’m getting too old for this,” he muttered, struggling to focus on the beauty and tranquility of the golf course below instead of his aching bones. It didn’t help—he still hurt all over.

Gus was still lost in thought when he heard a voice in his earpiece. He reacted on instinct, pressing his hand over his ear in time to hear the message repeated:

“Repeat. We’re good to go. Principal is wearing white visor, pink top, and white pants.” Gus caught a heavy foreign accent and raised an eyebrow. He reached down to his waist and pressed the transmit button on his walkie-talkie twice to confirm receipt of the message.

Wearing his camo Woodland Ghillie Suit, which blended him superbly with his surroundings, he was practically invisible. He shifted his head in one deft motion, peering through the Nightforce BEAST 5-25x56mm scope of his Accuracy International AT .308 rifle, then fine-tuning the focus until he had a clear, unobstructed view of the fourth tee. He gazed on through his scope, observing four golf carts pull up. Several individuals disembarked from the vehicles, with three approaching the tee. His target, the Speaker of the House, was easy to spot given her bright pink windbreaker. The speaker’s two-person security detail positioned themselves twenty feet apart from one another, a full twenty feet behind the tee.

Gus’ eyes fell on the gallery of three dozen spectators, and he tensed. He had not calculated this as a factor. After taking a deep breath to settle his nerves, he checked his range finder, confirming the target was

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457 yards from his position. There was the typical six-mile-an-hour breeze coming out of the west, which he felt gently blowing onto his face. The sun was at his back, bright and shining; he had been extra careful in his preparations to ensure nothing in his immediate surroundings would cause any reflection that could give away his position. He double-checked his ballistics chart, making the final adjustments for distance and windage, and then waited until he was sure none of the spectators were in the way of his shot.

Gus slowly squeezed the trigger, the report of the 150-grain .308 bullet initially muffled by the AI tactical sound suppressor, but then, the crack of the bullet breaking the sound barrier echoed loudly through the valley. Gus peered through his rifle scope, expecting to see the burst of gore as the speaker's head exploded, but instead was stunned as the screen of the golf cart behind the speaker shattered. He had missed! The scene instantly became mass bedlam. The speaker's protective detail immediately reacted based on their training. They jumped on top of her, knocking her to the ground and covering her. Spectators panicked, many screaming and running in all directions. Gus grimaced; there was no opportunity for a second shot. He hastily grabbed his equipment and scrambled to get

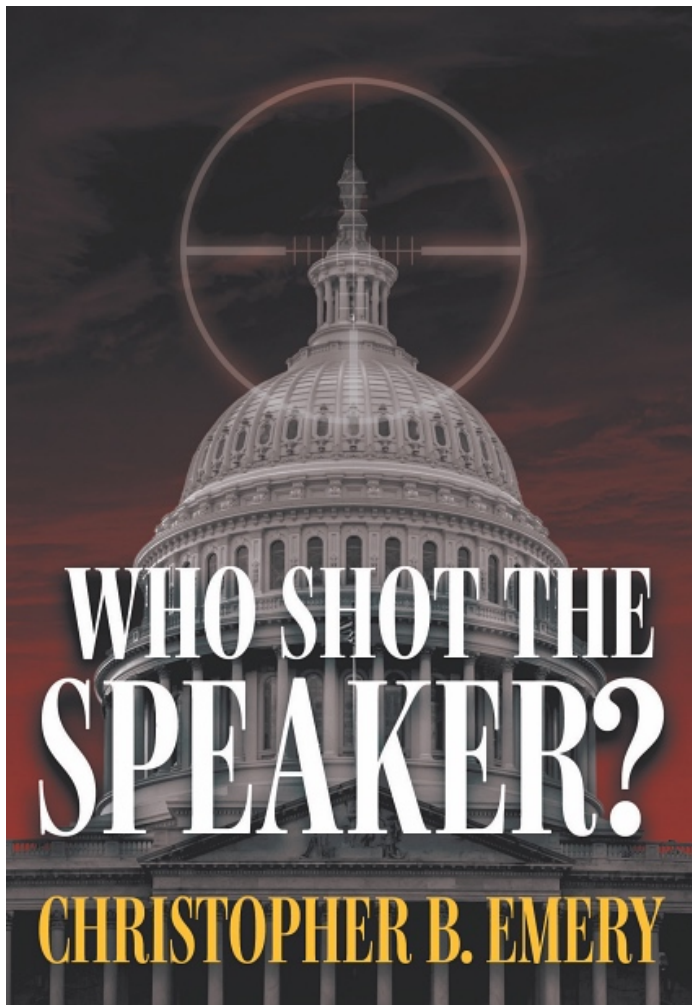
out from beneath the brush. As he started to stand, something hard slammed into the side of his head; he fell to the ground unconscious.

Lucifer and Elsa, a local couple in their mid-forties who had fallen on hard times, were sneaking around the golf course, gathering balls that they could sell. For a while, they had been making good use of a TaylorMade 3-iron club they had swiped one night after hours to dig up hidden balls. They heard the shot, then saw the rifle; a quick-thinking Lucifer dropped his bottle of Jack Daniel's and crept up behind the distracted sniper, using the golf club to clobber Gus over the head. He then yelled at Elsa to take a pic and call the news, drunkenly slurring, "Here goes me bashing the motherfucker!" He struck a triumphant pose as he stood over Gus, about to strike again, but then held off as he looked down at the fallen man. "Sonbitch, I ain't kilt ya yet!"

Lucifer was a giant of a man; his long, straggly hair and full beard made him resemble a hairy ape. Sinking to one knee, he examined Gus for signs of life and found a pulse just as Gus was starting to stir. Lucifer looked at Elsa. "Quick, babe, call Channel 8. Tell 'em you just witnessed a local hero stop this bastard from

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killing someone!” Lucifer then put Gus in a headlock and dragged the sniper onto the nearby golf course while waving his free arm over his head. Elsa followed along while continuing to search her phone for the local TV affiliate.



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