

# MIKE EVANS



# THE CANDIDATE



P.O. Box 30000, Phoenix, AZ 85046

Published by TimeWorthy Books  
P. O. Box 30000  
Phoenix, AZ 85046

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Copyright 2012 by TimeWorthy Books  
P. O. Box 30000  
Phoenix, AZ 85046

Design: Lookout Design, Inc.

USA: 978-0-935199-47-5  
Canada: 978-0-935199-51-2  
Hardcover: 978-0-935199-46-8

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# CHAPTER 65

## WEST VIRGINIA

**LOCATED IN THE MOUNTAINS** of West Virginia, Greenbrier Resort enjoyed a reputation for seclusion and anonymity, which made it a favorite retreat of the wealthy and famous. Wallace Jordan had been there many times. He checked into his room and made arrangements with the dining hall for a private meeting the following day.

The next morning he went downstairs and was ushered to a small dining room where a table was set for two. A few minutes later Caldwell appeared. When they were seated and coffee had been served, Jordan looked across the table. “We have a problem.”

“I have all kinds of problems, Wallace. Which one are you talking about?”

“Malta knows about the break-in and they aren’t happy about it.”

Caldwell sounded indignant. “They aren’t happy?”

“No. They aren’t.”

Caldwell’s eyes narrowed. “Our friends on Malta need to stop and think. We didn’t dream this operation up on our own. This was the work of the Military Vicariate.”

“Execution was your responsibility.”

“Right. And if the vaunted Knights of Malta had done their job, none of this would have been necessary.”

“How so?”

“We were just to clean up after them. It was their documents we were looking for. They’re the ones who let that guy get off the island with them. Him and that Greek.”

“I think the extent of what you did was too much for them. And it was your guys who got caught.”

“One team.” Caldwell gestured with the index finger of his right hand. “A single team. Out of fifteen total. And they were the ones who wanted us to hit all fifteen locations.”

“Well,” Jordan shrugged, “it was one team too many.”

“We planned for that. And made it look like they worked for Wilson.”

“That’s a problem, too,” Jordan replied.

“What?” Caldwell was beside himself. “They have a problem letting the media throw this off on a Democrat?”

“They think the cover story is unbelievable.”

“Who cares if it’s unbelievable? When we leak this to the press, it’ll stick all over Wilson and that’s all anyone will remember.”

“But Wilson is polling so far ahead, and Cook is so far behind, no one will believe it. The story will be seen for what it is— a cover for something else.”

“Then they should have taken care of this before that priest left with the documents. Look, McNeil will win the Republican primary without much trouble. We’re ahead of all the Republican candidates. We don’t—”

“But,” Jordan interrupted, “we don’t poll well against any of the Democrats except Jacob Rush.”

“I know. That’s why we want to run against him. Which is why we put the break-in on Wilson.”

“All the same,” Jordan reiterated, “Spoleto and the Council were not impressed. They feel like you risked their candidate and all they’ve worked to achieve. And for not much of a result.”

“I’ve worked hard at this, too, you know. I want the Jews gone as much as anybody. They’re ruining the place— them and the Mexicans. But it wasn’t our problem we were trying to correct.”

“Well, now you have to clean this up.”

Caldwell looked over at Jordan. “Are they really upset?”

“Yes,” Jordan nodded. “They are serious.”

“Are they thinking of finding another candidate?”

“No,” Jordan replied. His face was like stone and his eyes bore in on Caldwell. “They’re thinking of finding another you.”

The sound of those words and the look on Jordan’s face sent a chill down Caldwell’s spine. He was right— the teams who entered Cook’s offices were cleaning up after the Order’s mistake— but in the larger picture none of that mattered. They’d failed to execute the mission and now the Order had to clean up after Sierra. If they blamed Caldwell, they wouldn’t simply fire him.

“Okay.” He cleared his throat. “I’ll take care of it.”

“Meet with Logan and fix it.”

“Logan’s in trouble, too?”

“I’m just delivering the message.”