

STEPHEN J.
CANNELL



THE
PLAN

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T H E P L A N

Stephen J. Cannell

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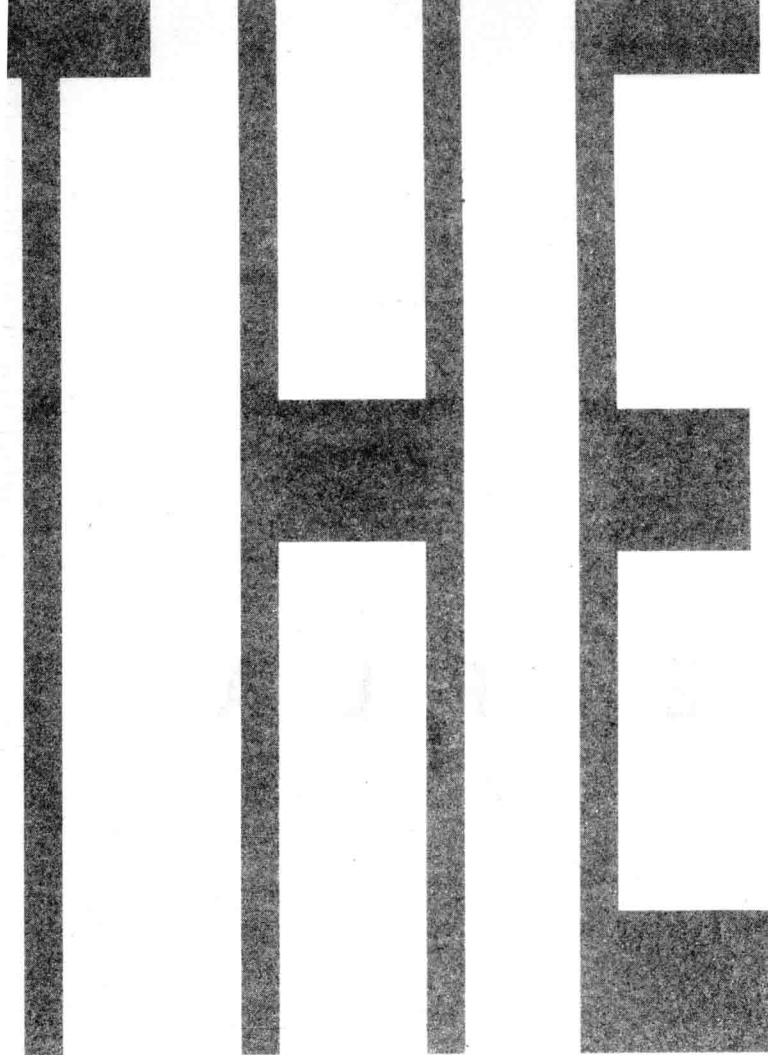
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T H E P L A N



**To Marcia
who sees me through
and to
Derek, Naja, N'Gai,
and Garrett who all left too soon**

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T H E P L A N

P R O L O G U E

THANKSGIVING WEEKEND SADDLEBACK, NEW JERSEY

1974

"DAMN NEAR NAILED TINA LAST SUMMER. DRY HUMPED THE SHIT out of her. I would a' got in but her dad came home," Mickey bragged. "I'm telling you, Ryan, I was two inches from the goal line." Mickey's black eyes and round cheeks were shining like polished fruit. He ran a chubby hand through his oily curls and grinned at his prep school roommate.

They were sitting in Mickey's upstairs bedroom under a huge brown plastic B-25 that hung from the ceiling by a thread. Two fifteen-year-olds on a hormonal bombing run, engines roaring, diving out of boyhood, bomb racks full, searching for targets of opportunity.

It was Thanksgiving vacation, and Mickey Alo had invited Ryan Bolt to his parents' huge house in Saddleback, New Jersey, for the weekend. Ryan who lived in California, would otherwise have been stuck at boarding school. The boys were at opposite ends of the physical scale. While Mickey was short, dark, and round, Ryan was tall, blond, and angular. He was handsome in a way that most teenagers could only dream of. But Mickey was the leader. What he lacked in looks he more than made up for with charisma and energy. He was always at full throttle, balls to the wall on everything... a

chubby adolescent kamikaze leading a charmed life.

"So what do I do, stand around and take pictures while you and Tina do it?" Ryan asked.

"Fuck no. Her sister Gina, she's a year older, tits out to here. My mom and dad are picking up guests at Levit Field. They're gonna be gone for at least three hours. We steal the Olds and zip over there, take the girls out to Frazier Lake, peel them and feel them."

"We're gonna take your dad's car? We don't have licenses. What if we get stopped?"

"We can't ride over there on bikes like fucking Beaver Cleaver and hope to get laid. Come on, I'll call her."

"You got rubbers?" Ryan was trying to act as if he knew what he was doing.

"You pull out before you come. Ain't you ever done this before?"

Mickey jumped off the bed and moved to the hall phone. Ryan trailed along, scared of the adventure yet drawn to it. If anybody could get them both laid, it was Mickey. Mickey could make stuff happen.

He was on the phone now, talking to the girl he had almost scored with last summer. "Hey, Tina . . . it's me. Yeah, I'm home. For only four days. I was thinking I'd drive over and we could get together."

He was so confident, talking with no hesitation.

"Listen, is your sister home too?"

While Tina was talking, Ryan held his breath and crossed his fingers.

"Great, 'cause I brought my roommate with me. He's a surfer from California. Blond guy, good enough looking to be on *American Bandstand*."

There was a pause.

Mickey cupped the receiver and turned to Ryan. "Can you be seventeen? Gina won't go out with a fifteen-year-old."

"Shit, seventeen. She's not gonna believe that."

"Lie to her, man. That's the secret with women. Tell 'em what they want to hear." He was back on the phone without waiting for an answer. "He's almost eighteen. Are your parents around?" He listened to her, while Ryan bit his fingernails. "Well, look, just tell the maid you're gonna go to the store. I'll pick you up in a few minutes."

He hung up and grinned at Ryan. "Let's get outta here."

They ran down the stairs into the marble entry hall with its statues of Roman figures on Doric columns, white marble muscles flexed and shining. They moved out into the porte cochere. A light snow had fallen that morning, and patches of it still remained. Mickey's seven-year-old sister was throwing snowballs at the garden wall.

Ryan thought Lucinda was the prettiest little girl he'd ever seen, with her olive skin and perfect features. She looked at him with the most remarkable green eyes, almost the color of emeralds.

"Listen, Lu . . . Ryan and I are gonna take off for a while. Don't tell Mom and Dad."

"It's Marta's day off, and I'm not supposed to stay home alone," she said softly.

"Come on, Lu, me an' Ryan got an important errand to run . . ."

"You're not supposed to take the car," she said, reading the mischief in his eyes.

"If you tell Dad, I'm tellin' him you're giving kitchen scraps to Rex. And you know how Dad feels about feedin' bird dogs from the table."

She nodded but said nothing.

"You go inside and lock the door," he commanded as she moved toward the house.

Mickey backed the red and white Olds two-door out of the garage and floored it, spewing gravel like bird shot.

Gina and Tina were stamping their feet to stay warm when Mickey pulled up. Tina got into the front seat with Mickey, Gina in the back with Ryan. Tina leaned over and kissed Mickey, who grabbed her around the neck and pulled her close.

"Come over here you," he said playfully.

"Mickey," she protested as he drew her roughly to him.

"Ryan, meet Gina and Tina," Mickey said.

Tina and Gina were more than Ryan had even dreamed of. Both had dark hair and dark eyes. They were well fed but not fat, with large breasts.

Gina was sixteen, and Ryan thought she looked hot to trot. "Where in California are you from, Ryan?" Gina asked.

"Santa Monica." Ryan's adrenal glands were wide open, jolting

his senses, hardening his erection. He put his arm around Gina's shoulder and pulled her closer. She laid her head on Ryan's shoulder, without even being coaxed.

I'm gonna get laid, Ryan thought.

They parked out at the lake. Neither of the girls had worn bras, and within minutes all were locked in deep embraces. In the front seat, Mickey and Tina were rolling savagely on the leather. In the back, Ryan fumbled awkwardly with the buttons on Gina's shirt.

"Let me," she whispered, quickly shrugging off her blouse. Stripped to the waist, she pulled him to her . . . In the dim glow from the dome light he could see her nipples were erect.

Ryan had never encountered a girl like this one. He'd just met her and she was half-naked, dry humping like a bunny. They rolled on the back seat, fighting for better embraces. The windows dripped with steam. He reached down for her panties, but she grabbed his hand.

"Not yet," she whispered.

They pushed their hips at one another, and then he felt himself ejaculate. His erection went down like summer wheat. "I love you," he said to the girl he had just met and prayed that his hard-on would come back. Ryan had fumbled on the one. In the front seat, Mickey streaked into the end zone, the score was celebrated as Tina let out a squeal.

They got home two hours later. Lucinda was watching television, and they sneaked upstairs without disturbing her.

An hour later, Penny and Joseph Alo arrived from the airport with Paul Arquette and Meyer Lansky. Penny checked on the boys, who were lying on the twin beds in Mickey's room reliving their adventure. "Lucinda was supposed to be in bed at eight-thirty," Penny said.

"Sorry, Mom. Forgot."

She gave him a disapproving frown. Penny Alo was tall with a long neck and marble-white skin and the same dazzling green eyes as Lucinda. The same lustrous black hair. She reminded Ryan of a model in the soap ads.

"Your father's having a meeting in the den. Don't bother him. Nice to have you with us, Ryan. You boys get to bed soon."

Downstairs, a fire crackled as Mickey's father, Joseph, crossed to the bar and poured some port out of a cut crystal decanter, filling three of the long-stemmed wineglasses. Joseph, like Mickey, was physically unimpressive. At fifty-one, he was dark-skinned, short, and wide around the middle. Like his fifteen-year-old son, however, he radiated power. He crossed to Paul Arquette, handing him a glass.

"That's a nice port. I get it sent over from Oporto," he said, handing the glass to the tall, aristocratic governor of Nevada.

Paul Arquette wore a perfectly fitted gray suit. His sandy brown hair and box-of-Chiclets smile was a recruiting poster for his state. Now forty-five, he had been a behind-the-scenes friend to the Alo casino interests in Las Vegas for years.

He took the glass of port from the Sicilian and watched as Joseph Alo crossed to Meyer Lansky, seated in a large wing chair near the fire, breathing heavily.

Meyer was in his early seventies and had withered physically since Paul had seen him last. His hands shook, but the laser-sharp eyes were windows to his shrewdness. "Ain't supposed t' drink," Meyer said. "Fucking doctor has me eatin' Gerber's. My colon X ray looks like nine miles a' dirt road." The mob financial genius took the glass of port from Joseph anyway.

"When did Wallace say he'll get here?" Joseph asked.

"Nine-thirty. He's a punctual nitpicker, the fuck. He'll be here," Meyer said.

They talked about Meyer's lawsuit against the State of Israel. Lansky had been trying to move to Israel with his wife to live out his days until his cancer took him. But the Israeli Supreme Court invoked a constitutional clause denying immigration to Jews with criminal histories. "What'd I ever do to them?" Meyer lamented. "My own people quitting on me like that."

Then Penny let C. Wallace Litman into the den.

Litman was as short as Joseph Alo, but with a Prussian general's bearing. He was trim in all departments from his tailored suit to his diminutive frame. A Wall Street wizard, he had already been on the cover of *Fortune* magazine, and he was only forty years old.

"This is Meyer's meeting," Joseph said, "but before we start, I want to invite all of you to a duck hunt I've arranged tomorrow. I bought

Mickey a new hunting dog for his birthday. A trainer has been coming here for two months, and we're going to try him out in the morning. Meyer, I know you have to get back to Miami, but I hope Paul and Wallace will stay."

Paul didn't want to go duck hunting, but he was trapped; Joseph had arranged for him to take a casino jet back to Las Vegas. He nodded and smiled.

C. Wallace Litman stood his ground. "I'll have to take a rain check, Joe. We're in the in the middle of a stock acquisition. Gotta drive back tonight."

Joseph nodded without expression. "Meyer, you have the floor."

Meyer started to speak in a nasal voice. "I don't have to tell you what's been going on since Hoover died," he said. "We had that butt-slammng fairy in a box. He hadda look the other way or I'd a released them pictures a him in that motel in Detroit. But Hoover's gone and things have changed. We got nothin' but trouble in Washington. The off-track betting, the drug business, numbers, vice, everything is getting hit by these new bastards. We got the head of the FBI running unchecked and shitballs like this renegade fed in Vegas, this Solomon Kazorowski, trying to bust everybody. Now the Congress goes and passes this RICO Act."

They all knew about RICO, the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act; it said that any prior knowledge of a crime made you as guilty as if you had committed the crime yourself. All the feds had to do on a RICO prosecution was get just one member of the outfit to admit that he had discussed a crime with his don and the boss was automatically culpable. In La Cosa Nostra, you couldn't commit a crime on outfit turf without notifying the boss and giving him a "taste," so all of the top guys were now at risk. The feds were also setting up a witness protection program to encourage informants. It was a depressing law to contemplate.

"We gotta find a way to shut this fucking thing down," Meyer wheezed.

"How we gonna do that? It's a federal law," the Nevada governor said.

"Joseph and I been talking and we got a way maybe works, but you gotta be involved."

C. Wallace Litman straightened his shoulders. He had been a silent financial puppet of Meyer Lansky's since the sixties. Wallace had been Theodora Lansky's investment adviser in Chicago. Meyer had spotted him working on his wife's account and saw that Wallace was shrewd and ambitious. He'd recruited him ten years ago. Litman was to set up a holding company called Litstar Industries. Meyer would funnel offshore mob money into blind accounts that C. Wallace could draw on to buy legitimate businesses. The businesses were technically owned by Litstar, but the real owners were Meyer Lansky and Joseph Alo. The three men rarely met and nobody suspected that C. Wallace Litman was a shill and a laundry for organized crime. He had risen rapidly on the wings of illegal financing.

"It's not smart for us to be involved too closely in anything," Paul said.

"Our plan is simple, but it's going to take some time. We have decided that you are going to be the President of the United States," Meyer said without preamble.

Wallace could see a change in Governor Arquette's demeanor. He seemed to glow with the prospect.

"How we gonna do that?" Paul asked softly.

"The world has changed," Meyer said as he picked up his glass of wine. "Radio made it small, TV made it smaller. Politics is changing. Nixon was smarter, better qualified than Kennedy to be the President, but Kennedy with them Boston manners and that fucking hair. He looks like a movie star, so the schmucks elect him. Nixon always looked like he should be selling dirty magazines. TV killed Nixon. TV is the future. You control TV, you control what people see, what people say, and what they think."

"Wallace and I have already begun to liquidate the real estate we own and started looking around for electronic media properties to buy," Joseph continued. "Once we own a television network, we're gonna use it to put Paul in the White House."

"... And once you're there," Meyer said softly, "you're gonna fire these new fucks in the FBI and over at Justice. You're gonna appoint a new attorney general, new head of the FBI. You pick guys like Hoover who will look the other way. And then, when you get Supreme Court openings, you're gonna start packing the bench with judges

who don't like RICO. We're gonna either overturn this thing or neutralize it with friendly cops." Meyer tried to set the wine glass down on the table but misjudged, and it tipped over.

All of them watched the drops of port as they spattered on the beige carpet, leaving a stain that looked like blood.

The pale morning sunlight woke Paul Arquette early. He was still flush with ambition and the thought of being President. He showered and, before he went down for breakfast, heard Joseph's limousine leave to take Meyer Lansky to the airport.

The dining room was huge, with a forty-foot-long marble table and high-backed chairs that Joseph had imported from Italy. Mickey Alo was already in the room with his prep school roommate. Paul couldn't take his eyes off the remarkably handsome boy. Penny sat at the foot of the table.

"Ready to murder a few ducks?" Joseph said as he swept into the room a few minutes later. Paul had always thought duck hunting was one of mankind's least noble adventures.

"Did you get enough to eat?" Penny asked.

"Up to here." Paul motioned as he smiled broadly.

It had always amazed him that Joseph had managed to hook a woman like Penny. What could she possibly see in the Sicilian gangster? She came from a wealthy family. She was cultured and refined. She was like a pearl in a pan of gravel, and Paul thought she didn't belong married to Joseph. But maybe she found his power seductive. He wondered what she would be like in bed.

The men walked into the den, where the twelve-gauge bird slayers were in slots behind the glass of a built-in oak wall cabinet.

Paul chose an English Purdy over-and-under, with an initialed stock and solid-gold butt plate.

"That thing was custom-made," Joseph bragged. "Cost more than a hundred grand, so don't drop it in the mud, Paul."

Joseph lifted out a Beretta with a five-load magazine and engraved barrel.

They slogged along, their valuable shotguns broken open to expose the breeches. Mickey Alo had an English handmade Purdy, the stock cut short for his pudgy arms. Ryan Bolt walked beside him, unarmed.