

THE MULTI-MILLION-COPY BESTSELLER

Shari Lapena

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home

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people

GETTING AWAY WITH MURDER

'Lapena's
books are
addictive!'

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About the Author

Shari Lapena is the number one internationally bestselling author of ten stand-alone thrillers. Her debut thriller, *The Couple Next Door*, was a global phenomenon, selling over four million copies worldwide. It was named WHSmith's Book of the Year in 2016 and became the UK's No. 1 bestselling adult fiction title in 2017. Her recent novels include *Everyone Here Is Lying* and *She Didn't See It Coming*. Shari's thrillers have been *Sunday Times* and *New York Times* bestsellers, and four have been selected for the Richard & Judy Book Club. A former lawyer and English teacher, Shari now writes from a farm in Ontario. Her books are published in over forty territories, translated into dozens of languages, and optioned for film and television.

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Also by Shari Lapena

The Couple Next Door

A Stranger in the House

An Unwanted Guest

Someone We Know

The End of Her

Not a Happy Family

Everyone Here Is Lying

What Have You Done?

She Didn't See It Coming

Shari Lapena

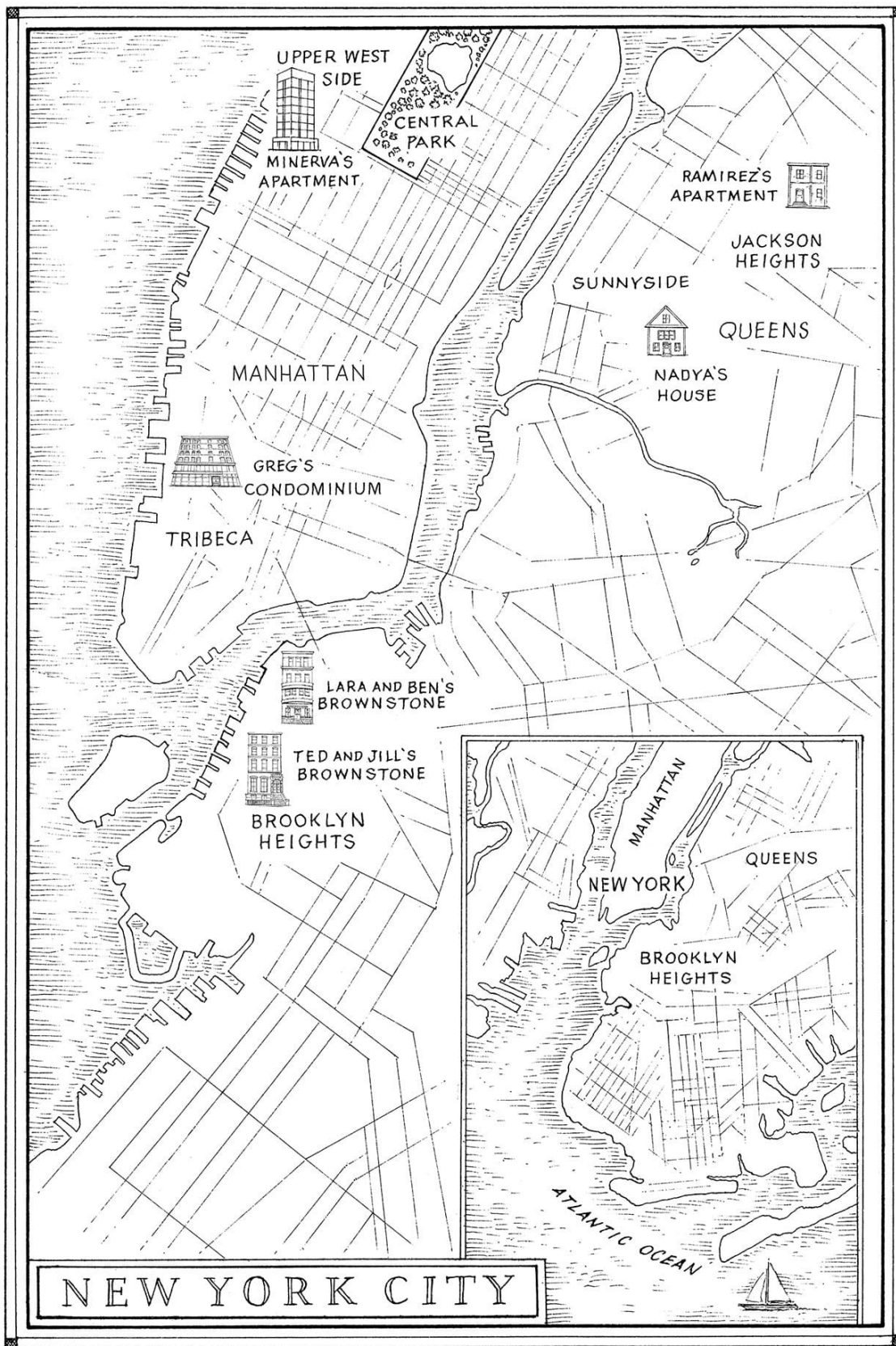
GETTING AWAY WITH MURDER



To Ginger and Nutmeg

Everyone, soon or late, sits down to a banquet of consequences.

Commonly attributed to Robert Louis
Stevenson



Prologue

HE SAID IT would be the perfect day for it.

The September weather has turned brisk, finally, after an almost unbearably hot, humid summer in New York City. The waves out on the Lower Bay are rolling and swelling, the water dark and threatening under scudding clouds. Jill breathes in deeply and fills her lungs with the sharp, saltwater scent of the sea. The sailboat rises and falls rather alarmingly. The two men have her under control, but it doesn't feel that way to Jill. They have left the marina in Lower Manhattan and Upper New York Bay far behind and are heading toward the open Atlantic. Jill suddenly wishes she was anywhere but here.

She holds on to the pitching boat, closes her eyes, and tries to remember having coffee with her husband earlier this morning, in the serene kitchen of their Brooklyn Heights brownstone. She focuses on that. Out here they are no longer safe, cloistered; here the wind screeches and howls and whips at the sails as if they are at the gates of Hell. For a brief second, she asks herself what the fuck they're doing. She looks across at her husband, and his steady gaze reassures her. He's an excellent sailor. She must trust him.

He gives her a barely perceptible nod and reaches for the rigging. She sits in the companionway, holding on for dear life, life jacket on, hair wild, keeping out of the way. Two men can handle the boat, even one, if necessary, and her husband, Ted, and his older brother, Greg, have been sailing together on this bay since they were boys. They like it when it's challenging.

They are so confident – or careless – that neither of them wears a life jacket. Ted had told her the conditions would be perfect.

Greg flashes a big grin at her from the back of the boat, where he stands firmly gripping the steering wheel, his dark hair blowing about. He's enjoying himself; he's in his element. Ted was right about that. The sailing is putting him in a good mood.

The boat is named *Fortune Seeker*. Sleek and white – a fully equipped 36-footer. She cost a small fortune. Greg is worth a great deal of money, and he can afford it. She's a beauty, and apparently a pleasure to handle in any conditions.

They'd ventured out around noon and had a light lunch on the boat while they were still in the Upper Bay, slipping away from Manhattan. The water had been calmer then, closer to shore. As usual, Greg provides the boat, she and Ted provide the meal. She'd brought chicken salad sandwiches that she'd made herself that morning, and champagne. They're not celebrating anything – not yet – but they know how much Greg likes champagne and they want him to have a bit to drink. To that end, they brought his favourite – Dom Pérignon. Ted told her to think of it as an investment.

They sat on the deck of the boat eating sandwiches without crusts and downing Dom Pérignon, waving at passing boats, the embodiment of privilege. They were headed further out of the bay to where the real sailing was. Ted and Greg ate with gusto, but the mayonnaise felt thick in Jill's throat. She was feeling a trifle ill, although she had never been seasick before. Her husband was drinking enthusiastically, which worried her a little. He seemed slightly too boisterous, and she wondered if Greg thought so too, if maybe Greg thought that Ted was going to ask him for money. She watched her husband and his brother carefully, while trying to appear uninterested. She knew Ted was encouraging Greg to drink more, but this wasn't going to work if Ted had too much. He grabbed the champagne bottle out of the ice bucket, leaned over, and topped up his brother's glass. He proposed a toast. 'To the future,' he said, and they all touched glasses. 'To the

future,' they repeated together. Ted's eyes met hers over the rims of their glasses. She knew what he was thinking. She was thinking the same thing.

The going got rougher, and she packed away the remains of their lunch and the glasses and took it all below, but not before she'd tried to fill Greg's glass once more. He waved her away, wanting to focus on the matter at hand. He had to pay attention to the boat. She stayed down below for a few minutes, breathing deeply, trying to get her nerves under control. She didn't like sailing at the best of times. She estimated Greg had had at least two glasses of champagne. Was it enough? She climbed back up on deck, the wind hitting her full in the face.

And now she's been here, hunched in the companionway, for she doesn't know how long, but it feels like a lifetime. She stares at the vastness of the ocean. Ted leans close and says into her ear that they're about twelve miles from shore, then moves away from her again. She alternately closes her eyes and opens them to scan the ocean all around them nervously. To see if there are any other boats nearby. There is one, it might be a small sailboat, so far away it appears as a speck upon the sea. As harmless as a seagull rocking on the water. The boat rises and falls, and Jill feels her stomach lurch.

The waves look even higher now, and for the first time she's actually frightened for her own safety. The wind is suddenly stronger too.

'Maybe we should turn back,' Greg suggests from the wheel, shouting over the keening wind.

'Why?' Ted shouts back. He looks almost manic, she thinks, his eyes so bright and his hair flying around. He's going to give them away.

Greg points at her and yells, 'I don't think Jill is having fun.'

Now they are both looking at her. She swallows and shouts, 'I'm okay!'

But she wants Ted to hurry up. She wants this to be over and done with.

Greg shakes his head and shouts, 'I'm going to turn her around.'

They both know it's now or never. Ted gives her a frantic glance, his back to Greg. Jill quickly scans all around them, sees nothing but empty water, and gives Ted a curt nod. Ted turns around and makes his way to the back of the boat. He wordlessly offers to take the wheel. As Greg surrenders the

steering to his brother and turns away, Ted lets go of the wheel and the boat jerks sharply. Greg, his back to Ted, is caught off balance. Ted plants his feet and pushes Greg hard with all his weight as the boat dips. His brother cries out and half turns in the air as he falls backward over the safety lines at the rear of the boat. Jill sees his expression as he goes over; for a fraction of a second their eyes meet. She sees the shock on his face, but she can't tell if he knows what's going on. If he knows that it was deliberate. Does he realize?

Now everything seems to be happening in slow motion. She sees Ted standing at the back of the boat, holding on to the wheel again, alone where a second ago there were two. She staggers over to him, grabs the safety line, and looks at the wake behind them as the *Fortune Seeker* pitches wildly. She can't see Greg. She finds herself crossing her fingers as she scans the roiling waves. His head pops up, already some distance away. But now Ted, who has been looking over his shoulder, must adjust the heading and take charge of the boat, or they will be in trouble. She sees Greg wave one arm and hears him shout over the wind. He expects them to rescue him. Ted had told her that his brother never wore a life jacket. How stupid of him. How lucky for them.

She casts a panicked look around them again to make sure they are alone, but she already knows there is no one else there. Even the speck is gone. Greg's shouts now sound more like muffled screams, and his head goes under a wave. He pops up again, his dark hair sleek like a seal, and begins to swim after the boat. Greg has always been a strong swimmer. But Ted is turning the boat in a wide arc now and heading back toward the faraway shore. He's trying to get as much speed out of the sails as he can. She notes that he doesn't look back at his brother, not once, as he swims through the rough water in a frantic breaststroke, bobbing and sinking in the foaming waves, seeing the boat retreat, leaving him there. But Jill, crouching at the rear of the boat, grips the safety line and keeps her eyes fixed on Greg. Exhaustion will finish him off in a matter of minutes. No one could survive this.

Greg keeps swimming after them, refusing to accept what's happening. Jill watches until he doesn't bob up any longer. Finally, she grabs the binoculars around her neck and scans the water carefully. The blood rushing in her ears seems louder even than the wind.

When they decide that enough time has passed and they are absolutely sure he's gone – and they are far enough away from where he went over – Jill goes down into the cabin, gets on the radio, and calls the Coast Guard, shouting 'Mayday! Mayday!', sounding suitably distressed. Ted drops the sails, turns on the engine, and steers the boat in a circle, now a considerable distance away from the area where Greg went overboard. They throw out the safety rings, most of them, now that it's too late. They have to look as if they tried.

Ted is busy piloting the boat. But Jill sits down in the stern to wait. Now that it's done, she doesn't feel sick at all. Just relieved. She's struck by how easy it is to kill someone who doesn't suspect anything. How easy it is to murder someone who trusts you. How quickly it can happen.

What remains to be seen is how easy it is to get away with it.

They have their story ready. They have been rehearsing.

Chapter One

Two months earlier

TED WESTCOTT SLIPS out of their king-size bed. Jill is still asleep, the luxurious covers thrown off, lovely in a silk nightgown with lace trim. He stands watching her for a moment. She lies on her back, one arm thrown over her head, her limbs long and pale, her breasts rising gently and pushing against the rose silk and cream lace. She's thirty-five years old and he thinks she's the most beautiful woman he's ever met. He hesitates, remembering how he used to kiss her awake, then turns and walks across the thick carpet and out of their bedroom. As always lately, he has too much on his mind.

He makes his way quietly down the handsome staircase to the main floor of their brownstone. They dote on their home the way others dote on their children, with great pride and sparing no expense. They love to show it off, the way others show off their progeny. They can talk endlessly about the house, the way people talk endlessly about their kids. Are he and Jill as boring as those people are? Ted and Jill both find children very boring.

The staircase alone is a thing of great beauty – the wainscoting and railings are a rich, carved mahogany. The runner on the stairs muffles Ted's footsteps. When he reaches the bottom, he rests his hand briefly, appreciatively, on the elaborately carved newel post, so smooth beneath his palm. He turns to his right and heads down the long hall to the kitchen at the rear. The kitchen spans the entire width of the house and looks out onto the professionally landscaped garden, blooming with colourful hollyhocks,

hydrangeas and roses. The porcelain floor tiles are cool beneath his bare feet on these hot July days. In the winter, they're heated. Early morning light filters in through the tall windows. Just being in the kitchen they'd had remodelled so painstakingly three years ago would normally fill him with satisfaction. But today it simply occurs to him that he's glad they did it then, because they certainly couldn't afford to do it now.

He reaches into the stainless-steel fridge, takes out the orange juice, and places it on the marble-topped island. He starts the Italian coffee machine and selects a cortado. Then, as the coffee machine whirs, he leaves the kitchen and walks back down the hall to the front door. He lingers for a moment in the foyer between the two sets of mahogany entry doors, gazing through the glass panels of the arched double doors as if afraid of the world outside. Then he unlocks and opens the heavy door. Even this early, he can hear the familiar sounds of their historic Brooklyn Heights neighbourhood waking up – delivery trucks and the occasional dog barking. He reaches down for the newspapers – *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* – and steps back inside, closing the door. Once again, a soothing silence engulfs him. His home is his sanctuary.

This is Ted's morning ritual. Coffee, newspapers, breakfast – and pleasant conversation with Jill when she gets up and joins him before they both go off to work. He's always been an early riser, but lately his depression, or anxiety, or some fiendish blend of both, has him rising earlier and earlier. These days he's tired and irritable, and striving not to show it. He's not enjoying life the way he should, the way he's been accustomed to. Well, how can he, when everything's going to hell?

He tries to read the *Times*, but the headlines, bold and frightening as they are these days, fail to grab him. He simply doesn't care. He turns to the business section but finds he cannot concentrate. He's a man from a prominent family, who lives in an expensive brownstone in posh Brooklyn Heights and works at an investment firm in Manhattan, so everyone assumes he's rich. For a long time, that was essentially true. But that's

because he inherited money from his father, and he's run through it more quickly than anticipated.

Therein lies the problem. Things have been getting away from him rather badly. So far, he has managed to keep it quiet. He has been borrowing from Peter to pay Paul. Jill is aware that things are a little tight, but she has no idea how tight. He's mentioned it to her casually, but she hasn't bothered to rein in her spending. She must think it is a temporary problem. He can't bear to see her disappointed. He can't bear to see her disappointed in *him*. They have had a very pleasant life until now, their way smoothed by money and comfort. He likes to think that they are made for each other, that theirs is a great love story, their marriage a complete success – so rare these days – but he's not such a fool as to think that ease has had nothing to do with it. Would they still be happy if the wolf was at the door? Would she still love him? He pushes away his cold coffee, feeling sick in the pit of his stomach. If his latest investment gamble doesn't pay off, they are going to find out.

He can't bear the thought of losing all this. Of losing *her*. Who is he really, who would he be, without her, the love of his life, and without all the trappings of success? He realizes he doesn't have an answer. He was a child of privilege, he is a man of privilege; he has never really been anything else. He has never been tested. Perhaps now he will find out what he's made of. The thought frightens him. What if there's nothing there?

He senses Jill's presence and looks up.

'You're up early,' she says. She stands in the kitchen doorway, long, bare legs and short nightgown, her glossy dark hair framing her perfect face.

Is there a note of reproach in her voice? Is she worried? About him? He observes her carefully. She doesn't like weakness, especially in men. It makes her angry. He knows this about her. She told him this early in their relationship; she said she couldn't explain it, but any display of weakness in a grown man provokes rage in her rather than sympathy. He'd wondered about this at the time but hadn't fretted unduly. He knew she'd had a weak, alcoholic father who'd lost all their money, and that would justify rage in anybody.

He can't disappoint her. He can't tell her the truth. Everything might still be all right.

She walks over to him and he rises from the kitchen table and pulls her into a kiss. They are still in love, still very much adoring of each other in bed, even though they have been married six years and he is five years older than her. Surely they can survive anything?

Jill sinks into her husband's kiss and then pulls back and studies him. Such an attractive man she married. Everything about him – his voice, the way he smiles, the way he moves. The way he kisses her, the way he touches her. She's still in love. She feels lucky. More than that, she feels that she has made good decisions. She congratulates herself on this almost every day.

She has an ideal life. She loves her job working four days a week at Clives, an art gallery on the Lower East Side. They don't need the money, but more is always nice. And she's ambitious – she'd like to have a gallery of her own one day. She likes being surrounded by good art, she likes meeting interesting people, she likes the parties. She loves working in Manhattan, and their gorgeous home in Brooklyn Heights – they have invested so much of themselves in it. She brings people here to entertain; they tell her she is a natural and charming hostess. It's easy if you have caterers and an excellent cleaning lady. She wouldn't be up for it if it required cooking and cleaning all day. She has her friends, her shopping, her gym, her cultural events – the theatre, the opera, the galleries. She's beautiful and rich and has a gorgeous husband, and they are unencumbered by children. It's all perfect. There is the faint spectre of aging, but she's doing everything she can to keep it at bay with creams and routines. The thing is not to fight it too hard, not to look like you're trying.

However, several times lately she has felt Ted rise from the marital bed and steal away. Why? He has been quiet lately, even a bit moody, which is not like him. He's a man who usually enjoys life to the fullest. It's been going on for a few months now, but it's been more noticeable recently. Is he having a midlife crisis? He is forty years of age. Something has been bothering him,

and whatever it is, she wishes he would snap out of it. Should she ask? Maybe she doesn't want to know. This change in him makes her uneasy. It can't be another woman, she's sure of that. It must be something else.

‘Everything okay?’ she asks lightly.

He smiles at her. ‘Everything is perfect,’ he assures her.

She smiles back. She doesn't believe him.

Chapter Two

A WEEK LATER, Ted stares at his reflection in the bathroom mirror, a feeling of pressure on his chest. He wonders if he is about to have a heart attack. Well, that's one way out, he thinks bitterly.

Ted's financial crisis has been a slowly snowballing nightmare. When he married Jill, he let her believe that money would never be a problem. But it hasn't worked out that way.

He'd inherited a bundle when his father died. They'd put a lot of that into buying and renovating the brownstone. The work had gone almost grotesquely over budget, but he was simply unable to deny his wife anything. Those were heady days. It would have been fine if they'd been able to live on his salary afterward – it was respectable enough. The house and cars were already paid for, after all. But Jill had expensive tastes, and once he'd started wooing her with travel to Europe and the Caribbean, he didn't feel he could suddenly say no. They'd gradually begun eating into what capital he'd had left after finishing the renovation. And then Jill had started floating the idea of starting her own art gallery some day, which he knew would cost a fortune.

This is where he could have said that they had to begin living within their means. He should have laid it out for her. But he didn't want to disappoint her, to appear lesser in her eyes. He'd never been sure that she loved him as much, or as helplessly, as he loved her.

But now he is staring into the abyss. They are about to lose everything. Because instead of facing reality, and asking her to face it with him, he'd

started to borrow. And to save himself, he'd begun taking greater financial risks in the hope of greater returns. He'd seen it work for others. He'd seen it work for his brother, Greg, who was always banging on about *no risk, no reward* – and *he'd* made a fortune.

But Ted has never had very good instincts about the markets. He's essentially a client-relationship manager at his firm – an affable, charming person who meets with high-net-worth clients and reassures them that their financial goals are being met, based on advice from the firm's team of financial geniuses.

His downward spiral had begun with taking out a small mortgage on the brownstone. Jill hadn't liked it, but he'd explained that it was a smart financial move: their money could make more invested. When the bills started to come in faster than he could pay them, he'd gone to the bank – alone – to see about borrowing some money. He couldn't get a line of credit without securing it against the house, and Jill, being on the title, would have had to agree, and he didn't want her to know. Instead, he got a personal loan, using his sports car, a Porsche 911, as collateral. He hadn't had to tell Jill about that. Meanwhile, he'd tried his hand at some short-term investments, but overall, they'd made losses.

And then he'd overheard some of the investment guys at the office – mainly the young hotshot Jamie Pollard – talking about a 'sure thing'. He listened in and decided that this would be the solution to all his problems. It was as if he had gone mad. The temptation to save himself was too much. He had no ready cash, so he found a private, high-risk lender for a short-term loan, who hadn't insisted on security – though the loan terms were almost criminal. Ted was so sure he'd get the money back in spades in a couple of months that he was willing to take the risk. He knew others in the firm were doing the same thing. He thought he'd make a killing.

At some point during that time, he'd seen Greg's ex-wife, Minerva, who was a client, and he'd told her 'off the record' that he had a 'sure thing' that he was recommending to her strictly as a friend, rather than as her investment adviser, and that he was investing in it himself. He'd convinced