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Ambition

Stephen Maitland-Lewis
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George Tazoli is a young, successful floor trader at Forest & Vignes bank, an institution reeling from a portfolio of bad loans. He is also dating billionaire bank president Peter Donovan's daughter, Sam. Although he is an outstanding employee, his working-class roots put Tazoli in a poor light, particularly for his girlfriend's socialite mother. When Donovan concocts an elaborate scheme to divest of the bank's bad accounts in order to court new investors, it seems that sending Tazoli from Los Angeles to New York to secretly disposition the loans would solve two problems simultaneously. Given a raise and an apartment, he could focus on turning around the bank's financials in a secure location thousands of miles away from Sam.

Normally trading and settling activities would be handled by two different people to assure adequate checks and balances, but in Donovan's mind the need for confidentiality overrides fiduciary caution. He has, however, drastically underestimated Tazoli's ambition. His arrangement opens the door for Tazoli to manipulate the system in his own favor. Discovery of a hidden sex tape involving his boss and a trio of prostitutes adds leverage to Tazoli's schemes.

Stephen Maitland-Lewis had a long career as an attorney and investment banker before turning to writing. An award-winning author, he is a member of the Executive Advisory Committee of the International Mystery Writer's Festival. Pulling from his vast industry experience he has crafted a startlingly realistic, yet interesting, story of greed, lust, and corruption set in the world of high finance.

Fans of the film *Wall Street* will recognize the basic theme, but *Ambition* brings it to the next level. In fact, the first three pages are packed with glowing testimonials from luminaries in a variety of different fields, including bestselling author Kitty Kelley, former Orion Pictures President Bill Bernstein, and former Los Angeles Mayor Richard Riordan. This means that the author has friends in high places or is damned good at his craft; a couple chapters into the novel it becomes clear that the answer is both.

The brazen greed, depravation, petty feuds, and boardroom manipulation of many of the characters may seem over the top at first blush, but when you remember real-life incidents like the CEO of the world's largest aerospace company being fired for violating the ethics rules he put in place, followed by his successor falling due to the same foibles a few years later, it puts such things in an entirely different light. Fascinating characters, credible dialogue, and outstanding pace drive the story. The term "page-turner" is cliché, so let's just say that his writing sucks you into the story and holds you there throughout the entire book. As Kitty Kelley states in her testimonial, "it's un-put-downable."

LAWRENCE KANE (January 28, 2013)

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