

MARDIS GRAS HOMICIDE

This is the first computer writing of the idea for a play that will be a fun filled fund raiser for some pretty incredible kids. Everything is fluid at this point. The ideas are taking form into what will be a script.

The time and place is post Katrina New Orleans. People have been injured by the elements, their government and insurance companies. There are major sections of the city that some developers believe can be converted into a different “higher and best use” of the scarred property. Money is to be made. Value takes on different value if people can be made to believe that “neighborhood” no longer exists and commerce must prevail.

This idea can only move forward if we have property that has a different value if viewed under different spectacles; a tenant that requires the geographic presence of his business; a person that has the capacity to develop such a property in to a new state, and an individual that knows where these opportunities exist.

That is the condition in NE New Orleans.

An industrial tenant from Chicago has voiced an interest in acquiring a deep water port with at least 14 acres of support land and two street access to the sight. A friend/developer is capable of delivering the project if he can assemble the land. This developer has contacted a local insurance person that has dealt with local persons that have been wiped out by the hurricane and its flooding.

The project will create 200 construction jobs and 125 full time well paying jobs in to the future. The tenant and developer have met with government officials who believe this would be a good project for the recovery of New Orleans.

The problem is that the project is a little “land short”. The developer has acquired or optioned 12 acres of land. They need to augment same with three additional properties that not only give them the acreage they need but also afford the second street access. The whole deal rests on being able to acquire these three properties.

Government is willing to exercise “eminent domain” and forcibly take the properties but everyone knows that would take a couple years and the tenant would go away. The time to act is now. The owners must be convinced.

The three properties in questioned are owned by the following;

Laurent Bishop: He owns a double lot at a critical intersection that has been in his family for 85 years. His son Laurent Junior went to college and got a marketing job in Atlanta. Laurent Sr. is alone and loves New Orleans as he remembers it. He was annihilated by Allstate claiming the damage to his home was “flood” not hurricane. He is living in a FEMA trailer on his land.

Krissy Sage: Krissy also lives in a FEMA trailer with her Children Kadassa and Waltewr. Krissy is proud to tell you that she is the 11th generation living on this land and looks forward to her children being the 12th. Kadessa, a hair style student is concerned that the neighborhood has crashed with frequent acts of violence and gang crime. Walter graduated high school, barely, and works at the 7/11.

Emma Bligh: Emma is 69 years old with no children. She has always been a friendly neighbor with cookies and lemonade for the kids on the street. Emma is a craft person, spending most of her time knitting and crocheting. She is getting used to her trailer but does not consider it home.

Tom Crane is a low life.. He made big bucks working for Allstate classifying hurricane damage as flood damage hence escaping coverage from policies dutifully paid by claimants. His knowledge of the local market has made him employable to a national developer seeking to assemble properties for a large real estate project.

Mr. Hudson is a well financed businessman with operations in many cities. He has a friend in the distribution business that is seeking a deep water port with support land to create an international distribution center in New Orleans.

Susie is Tom Crane’s secretary. She doesn’t like her boss but jobs are scarce and is happy to have one.

Hudson, aided by Crane have assembled the site necessary to satisfy the tennant’s needs. Almost. There are three properties that when added to what has already been acquired yields the necessary acreage to support the project as well as a second street access which is critical.

Hudson and Crane know that they must acquire these properties to make their project a reality. If they don’t they will endure a significant financial loss for the properties already acquired or optioned.

SCENE 1

Susie is in the outer office working on some files as Hudson and Crane meet. She always listens to what is going on.

Hudson: I'm glad we've got the time to get our game plan together before our guests arrive.

Crane: We'll be able to skin these guys.

Hudson: We should be able to but I'm a little concerned that you stuck it to them on their insurance claims.

Crane: Hey, that was my job then. I saved Allstate millions, and picked up some bonus cash along the way.

Hudson: I just hope their anger at you won't get in the way of their making the right decision.

Crane: They've got to make this deal. They are living in a crappy trailer in a bombed out neighborhood. Nobody is buying these properties and government isn't doing squat.

Hudson: Here's what we have to focus on;

1. Patriotism- this project is good for our country
2. Support for New Orleans – Same as above
3. Good for them- Make the benefits real

Crane: We got 'em. They aren't that bright.

Hudson; Above all they can never find out that we need their property. They have to think we are proceeding with or without their support. Our guests are here.

SCENE 2

Enter Lauernt, Laurent Jr., Krissy Sage, Kadessa, Walter and Emma.

Introductions all around. Glaring looks and finger pointing at Tom Crane.

Hudson: I've got some good news for our country, some good news for New Orleans and if you want some very good news for you.

Laurent: When people say they've got good new for me that usually means they've got great news for themselves.

Jr.: Hear him out dad.

Laurent: Do you remember when this lowlife came in and told us that my house went away from a flood and not a hurricane. Don't trust anybody that even knows this guy let alone works with him.

Jr: Mr. Hudson can you tell us about the project?

Hudson: I'll be happy to. We have acquired or optioned all the property behind you all the way to the river. In total it's about 12.5 acres with 1,100 feet of river frontage. I have a tenant that wants me to build a dock, staging facility and warehouse to receive international product, distribute it nationally and receive product we crate here in America to ship to global markets.

Jr.: That's pretty impressive dad.

Krissy: So what do you need us for?

Crane: He doesn't. He's just trying to be nice.

Laurent; Bullshit.

Walter: Yeah, I agree with Laurent.

Hudson: Actually it's both. We're going to do it anyway but it would be better with your help. Can I tell you why you should go along with my proposal?

Kadessa: I'd like to hear that.

Emma: If she wants to hear it than I want to hear it.

Hudson: Creating commerce is important but the big thing is we are creating jobs. This is a \$25 million project that will create 200 construction jobs over 2 years. When completed there will be 125 full time high paying jobs to support our community.

Krissy: If I had a kid or two that needed work could I put them in the deal?

Walter: Yeah, I wouldn't mind one of those jobs.

Hudson: I can put them at the front of the line with a gold star on their applications but they have to be able to do the job.

Kadessa: We don't want a free ride, we just want a front row seat at the opportunity.

Hudson: I can do that.

Laurent: I don't want a port, warehouse I want my neighborhood back.

Hudson: This might sound crass but the people in hell want ice water. We don't always get what we want. But if we are smart we can do well for our community and do ok for ourselves. Your neighborhood isn't coming back. It's going industrial. You can either profit from it or live next to a facility with 24 hour lighting, noise and the rest.

Krissy: Define profit.

Emma: Yeah, I want to know that too.

Crane: Before Katrina houses in this neighborhood were selling between \$46 on the low and \$72k on the high with most about \$68k. These are facts. Now you have trailers instead of houses.

Hudson: I'm offering \$65k to each of you, cash in 30 days. If you need another month or two to move out that's ok too. It's terribly fair.

Emma: I'll do that.

Laurent: No way.

Jr: Dad

Emma: Maybe I won't do that.

Laurent: I've had rich people pushing me around for my whole life. Don't believe these guys. They're going to make millions. They wouldn't be talking nice to us unless it meant something big to them. It's time for pay to play. If you want me to play then you are going to have to pay.

Jr.: I've been looking at there plan dad.

Crane: What do you know about plans?

Jr.: I know if you are all about distribution it would be better to have one street in and one street out. Without us you've got one street.

Krissy: You need us.

Walter: Yeah, they need all of us.

Crane: No, we don't need you, but it would be better.

Hudson: I think we are missing the point. Don't you want to help your country? Don't you want to revitalize your city? With the proceeds of this sale you could acquire and build on another chunk of this city. You could move away. You could take a cruise and live well. You win, the city wins, the economy wins; what am I missing?

Laurent: Your greed and your association with lowlifes. You want my dirt the price is \$150k.

Emma: If he gets that then I get that.

Krissy: I'll sell at \$150k.

Kadessa: Momma, we've lived here forever. I wanted to raise my family here.

Krissy: Honey, we can move across town. We can get you and your brother a job. It's all good if we can all agree.

Emma: I'll do whatever everybody else does. You all have family. With me it's just me. I don't like living in a trailer.

Laurent: You've got a \$25million project. Another \$200 k to give you a second street access is small potatoes.

Hudson: You're a tough man. I was prepared to ante up to \$100k each just to get it done. Now you are abusing me. It might just be better to live next to you as compared to buying you. By the way I can survive on one street access because I already have the city's approval to widen that street to support the project. You should know that your stubbornness is possibly stealing a \$100k opportunity from your neighbors and friends. Look, I'll go back and look over my numbers to see the best that I can do. Right now it doesn't look good. But we've had enough business for today. It's MARDIS GRAS. I invite all of you to be my guests at St Jacque's tonight. I made reservations for all of us and a few others.

Come tonight , it is going to be fun. Tomorrow we will meet and see if we can make a deal.

FIRST BREAK: Tim; Everybody get out your 'WHO DUNNIT CARDS AND FILL IN WHO YOU THINK WILL BE KILLED' Later you will add your guess to who did the dirty deed.

The band plays two songs The rest of the cast enters.

Hudson greets his guests.

Hudson: Welcome all, welcome all. It's MardisGras, lets have fun.

Off to the side Walter and Jr. talk to each other.

Lrt jr. – So what are you doing now?

Walter – Just working at 7/11 now. I'm saving up to buy a car. It's tough to save when you're making minimum wage.

Lrt,jr – A job on this project could be a life changer.

Walter – Yeah, maybe some construction work too.

Lrt jr – Lets see if our folks are going to screw this up.

As the conversation is coming to a close Susie walks over and starts talking to the two of them.

Susie – I overheard them talking before you got here. Your dad is right. They do need you. They wont pay crazy money but I bet they are good for another bounce.

The boys together- Interesting

Back to the conversation between Laurent and Hudson

Laurent: Do you think you can party us up to get your way?

Hudson: Laureant, what you don't understand is that I don't need this deal. I've got it anyway with or without you but if I didn't my world wouldn't change. I've got all the money I need. I just do it because it's fun. With you trying to bite me the best way to bite back is simply go home. I can live with that and you're in a trailer.

Laurent: Maybe. But sometimes the little guy has to mess with the big guy just to let him know that we ain't chattel.

Hudson: That's a good message but it could be expensive.

Laurent: I can live with it.

Hudson: How about your friends?

Jr.: Hey it's 2 line dance. Business later it's Mardis Gras.

As the conga line type dance moves across the dance floor it folds back upon itself, allowing each person to pass by everyone else. As the line makes its way back to the start Laurent falls out on to the floor with a scissors in his chest. Everyone reacts and the scene closes to intermission.

Tim – Alright folks we are going to serve dessert now. While we do, fill out your cards with your guess on who is the murderer.

ACT 2

Inspector Coltrane is the head of homicide in New Orleans. He enters the crime scene.

Inspector Coltrane: (looking at Crane) – My first question is if someone in this room got murdered how come it wasn't you?

Crane – Me?

Coltrane – 20% of New Orleans hates you for the screw job you gave everybody after Katrina.

Crane – Hey I was just doing my job.

Coltrane – Did you do this thing here tonight?

Crane – Why are you accusing me?

Coltrane – Well you have no character. If you can screw folks out of their homes I gotta believe you could kill someone if there was some money in it for you. Mr. Hudson, how much money is this scumbag..

Crane – Scumbag!

Coltrane – Excuse me, how much money is this citizen going to make if this deal goes through?

Hudson – About \$350,000

All Others – What? Bullshit, you’ve got to be kidding me...

Coltrane – Settle down everybody, that’s how big business works. He’s brokering the whole thing. If Laurent screws up the deal he gets nothin’. Sure sounds like motive.

Hudson – Well I guess that means you want to hang that same motive on me?

Coltrane – Not really, you don’t look like you’ve got the onions for wet work. Instead, you’d just wind him up and set him to it. Same punishment if found guilty by the way.

Hudson – What you don’t understand is that Laurent wasn’t screwing up the deal he was just negotiating.

Krissy – Sounded like he was screwing it up to me. A hundred grand and jobs for my kids lit my fire. Then Laurent ups it to \$150,000. Nobody would pay \$150.

Jr. – That’s what dad was trying to tell you folks. They need us. If they don’t get that second street access the whole deal will blow up in their face and they will be stuck owning 12 acres of nothin’. Tell ‘em Susie.

Susie- Yeah, I heard them talking earlier. They do need you guys. Laurent had it right all along.

Kadessa – What I don't understand is why you mom want me to work at a factory. I'm going to college.

Krissy – It's beauty school honey. You should finish that anyway. Once you graduate see what you can earn. A job here is more than \$20 an hour. You've got to cut a lot of hair to make \$800 a week.

Kadessa – Is she right sir?

Hudson – These are union jobs with strong pay and benefits. If we can make a deal you will be at the head of the line.

Coltrane – Lets not jump ahead to the gravy we've got a murder to solve. I know that both of you wanted this deal which gives you motive but I can't picture either of you doing the dirty deed. That brings me to Miss Emma.

Emma – My dear they will all tell you I was happy to go along with whatever anybody else wanted to do.

Coltrane – Yeah I heard that but the thought of \$100,000 could get you thinking about a new life.

Emma – You don't understand.

Coltrane – Well I understand one thing. At first I thought Laurent was stabbed with scissors. Upon further inspection they were sewing shears.

All – Whoa

Coltrane – Everybody knows that Miss Emma has the prowess for making magic with fabric. I bet forensics is going to find your fingerprints all over those shears.

Emma – I keep saying you don't understand.... I'm all alone. Krissy you have your kids, Laurent had Junior. I've got nobody

Kadessa – What does that have to do with anything? Why did you kill Laurent?

Emma – That hard headed stubborn man was going to screw up the deal. With \$100,000 I could move into a senior facility, make some friends maybe take a trip. I'm sorry everyone. I just needed to get out of that trailer before I go mad.

Jr. – This has been a strange and horrible night. Mr Hudson, I think you should offer everyone \$125,000 and speaking on behalf of all...we will make that deal.

Hudson – Alright, alright. I shouldn't but under these weird circumstances I will.

Coltrane – (looking at Emma) You can use your money for a lawyer. Take her away.