

Mardi Gras Ghost by Erin Wade

# **MARDI GRAS GHOST**

## **A Java Jarvis Thriller**

by Erin Wade

Edited by Melissa Barker

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Covers by Joolz & Jarling  
Julie Nicholls & Uwe Jarling

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By Erin Wade

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### DEDICATION

To the one who has always supported me in everything I have ever undertaken. You have encouraged me and have always been my biggest fan. Life is sweeter with you.

Erin

### Acknowledgements

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## Chapter 1

“We need to change the route this year,” Mayor Clarence Frane declared. “We’re on national television for god’s sake. We don’t want to televise our ghettos. We want people to see the good things about New Orleans not our high-crime areas. That’s bad for our tourist trade.”

“We could pull everyone together and clean up the area,” Councilwoman Avery Warren noted. “Add some patrol officers to help out the law-abiding citizens that are trying to survive.”

“It’s a lot cheaper to just change the parade route,” the Mayor insisted.

“Let’s take a vote on it.” Frane held up his hand to end the discussion. “I have an appointment with my barber in an hour.”

A stunning black woman stood in the audience and silence filled the room. “I’d like permission to speak,” Déjà vu LeBlanc’s voice dripped honey as she asked permission to address the council but everyone in the room knew the high priestess was not a woman one would refuse.

Déjà was tall, voluptuous, beautiful with glorious dark skin and a wickedly funny sense of humor. Her coal black eyes never missed a thing. Highly respected and deeply feared the voodoo priestess was the recognized leader of the Creole population in New Orleans.

Mayor Frane begrudgingly acknowledged Déjà. “Of course, you may speak to Miss LeBlanc.”

Déjà glided to the microphone in the center of the audience. “Thank you, Mayor Frane. I’m certain you are aware that for each of the past three years four women have died during the French Quarter Mardi Gras parade. I would like to know what steps are being taken to catch the killer and stop the senseless murders.”

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The Mayor glared at the other council members then swung his gaze to the Chief of Police who squirmed in his chair. “We have set up a special investigative team to handle the situation. Captain Gary Landry and his squad of serial-killer specialists are already working on the case. We hope to apprehend the perpetrator before Mardi Gras.”

“I respectfully request that the decision on the route of the Uptown New Orleans parade be postponed until my community has an opportunity to discuss the situation with Captain Landry.” The priestess challenged them knowing that they had no plans in progress.

“We can do that,” Frane grumbled. “Do I have a motion to postpone finalizing the parade routes until next week?”

Someone put forth the motion and it passed unanimously. Déjà smiled and prepared to watch them scramble to find some unsuspecting member of the law enforcement establishment to manage her.

Captain Landry approached her, “Miss LaBlanc, you can expect a call from Metro Squad Leader Beau Braxton within the next twenty-four hours.”

“Thank you, Captain. I’ll look forward to working with Lieutenant Braxton.”

###

“The council will now retire to a closed-door meeting to work out the logistics of Mardi Gras,” Frane announced to his colleagues who followed him into another meeting room.

Frane waited until the council chamber had cleared before he joined the council and closed the door. He wasted no time getting down to business.

“We are trying to keep the parades out of the more unsavory sections of our fair city,” he informed the council members.

James Praytor turned on his computer, linked it to the overhead projector and flashed a map onto the solid white

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wall at the end of the room. “The path marked in red shows the route we think the Krewe of Zulu Parade should follow.”

“That is a drastic change,” Councilwoman Avery Warren pointed out. Doesn’t that end the parade right in front of the new bar and grill you and James purchased a few months ago?”

“Well, um, yes,” Frane sputtered, “but that isn’t why I’m suggesting this route. This route keeps the party goes away from the unsafe areas of Orleans.”

“And dumps them on your establishment’s doorstep.” Warren raised a perfectly arched brow. “Surely the old route will be seen as less self-serving.”

“I don’t have time for this,” Frane glared at Avery. “I’m calling a special meeting for eight in the morning. We will discuss this in depth then.” He closed his council folder and motioned for Praytor to follow him from the room.

Déjà lowered the temperature on her air conditioner as she waited in her black Cadillac to follow Frane to his barber shop. She felt in a devilish mood and wanted to give the man something to think about. She didn’t have to wait long. Frane and Praytor charged from Town Hall as if the devil was after them. They crossed the street in front of Déjà’s vehicle and walked a block to the Orleans Barber Shop.

Déjà eased her car to the front of the shop and waited until the barber began cutting Frane’s hair. She entered the shop and walked to the mayor. “Sir, I thought that it might be a good idea to assign an officer of color to help Lt. Braxton with this case.”

“Why would I do that?” Frane demanded.

“All the victims have been wealthy Creole women.” Déjà informed him as she bent over and picked up a handful of his hair from the floor.

“What are you doing?” Frane demanded.

“Just tidying up.” Déjà smirked.

“That’s my hair,” Frane squealed. “Give it to me.”

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“I think I’ll keep it,” Déjà glared at him. “It may come in handy.”

Before Frane could rise from the barber chair the priestess was gone.

## Chapter 2

### Monday, February 1

Detective Beau Braxton headed up the elite serial killer team of the New Orleans Police Department. For the past three years Mardi Gras had produced all-night parties, parades, staggering drunks, and four dead women killed by the same perpetrator.

*Twelve murdered women with no clue to the killer*, Beau thought. He picked up the phone and called the number he reserved for a crisis.

“Java Jarvis.” The perky voice on the line relaxed Beau.

“Java,” I need your help with the “Mardi Gras Ghost” this year. I’m tired of women dying on my watch and the City council has tasked my squad with stopping the carnage.”

“You know our team is always ready to help you,” Java answered. “Why don’t you come to the supper club tonight and fill us in on the case? Why don’t you make the official request to Karen, I’ll notify Penny and we should include Déjà? Nine, okay? Kat will be finished with her show by then.”

“I’d like that.” Beau smiled into his phone. Things felt better already.

SKIRT the FBI’s Serial Killers Investigative Resolution Team consisted of five beautiful FBI agents and was directed by Special Agent Java Jarvis and her wife Special Agent Kat Lace. Working undercover the team had a one hundred percent success rate and was only pressed into action when others failed, and local authorities requested their assistance.

A dark-haired beauty sashayed into Java’s office carrying two cups of strong coffee. She placed the cups on the blonde’s desk then leaned down for a prolonged kiss.

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“Um, I love kissing you,” Kat Lace murmured against her wife’s lips.

Java pulled the sensuous woman onto her lap and kissed her soundly. “And I love you kissing me.”

The two teased each other’s lips then lingered for a final, deeply felt kiss. “Your coffee is getting cold,” Kat said standing and straightening her skirt. “Who was on the phone?”

“Beau. They are finally requesting FBI assistance on the Mardi Gras Ghost Murders. He wants to meet with us tonight. I suggested a dinner meeting and he agreed. I’m calling Karen and Penny. I also think we should invite Déjà. If anyone has their finger on the pulse of the Creole community, it’s Déjà.”

Kat nodded. Although she was aware of the high priestess’ feelings for her wife, she knew Déjà was their main source of information when it came to dealing with the distrusting Creoles. “Only twelve women had to die before they ask for our help.” She noted.

“Twelve women in three years, triple crimes. That classifies it as serial murders,” Java said. “I’m dying to get my hands on Beau’s files.”

“Um and I’m dying to get my hands on you,” Kat gave her a sultry look then flounced from the room.

Java blew the air from her lungs. Kat always made her catch her breath. *Married five years and she still turns me inside-out*, Java chuckled to herself trying to move her thoughts away from making love to Kat and onto the case.

She called New Orleans’ medical examiner Dr. Penny Short and filled her in on the meeting, saving Déjà for last. “Are you missing me?” Déjà hummed into the phone.”

Java laughed. “Always. Be serious a minute. Beau has requested our help with the Mardi Gras Ghost Murders. You on board?”

“Always!” Déjà tossed Java’s statement back at her.

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“Supper at my place tonight, 9:00 pm.” Java invited. “I’ll chill some of your favorite wine.”

“You do know how to make a girl feel special,” Déjà purred.

Java disconnected from Déjà and was about to call her boss when FBI District Director Karen Pierce called. “Java, I’ve received a request from Lt. Braxton for SKIRT’s assistance in the Mardi Gras Ghost Murders. The sooner we can jump on this the better.”

“We could meet for supper at my place, combine business with pleasure, and let Beau fill us in,” Java volunteered. “I’d like to see their files and find out what they know or suspect.”

“That works for me.” Karen agreed.

“9:00 pm, okay?”

“Perfect. See you then.”

Java doodled on her note pad as she thought about the qualifications of her team. Her wife Katrina (Kat) Lace was one of the best profilers in the business and her hand-to-hand combat abilities were second to none. Java knew from experience that Kat could kill a man faster than she could blink an eye.

Auburn-haired “Chris Canton’s weapon was pressure points. She could kill or paralyze a two-hundred-pound man in a few seconds. Her first love was computers, and she could process any situation as fast as Excel could calculate a row of numbers.

The newest member of the team was Barbie Wallace whose specialty was poisons. Blonde and beautiful Barbie always had enough poison hidden on her body to kill several villains.

Java, Kat, Chris and Barbie ran the supper club known as Java’s Place or simply Java’s by the locals. Java had inherited the club from her parents, and it was a perfect setup for four sexy undercover agents.

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The final member of their team was mysterious Déjà vu LaBlanc, high priestess to New Orleans deeply religious voodoo community. If she told the truth, Java would have to admit she was a little in awe of Déjà who adhered to the religion that originated in West Africa and Haiti. A mixture of magic, spiritualism, and Roman Catholic rituals, voodoo had been blamed for everything from Loki Carter's son being born with an extra toe to Mariam Kline's apparent resurrection.

Java knew that Déjà made a small fortune telling amazingly accurate fortunes. Her shop in the French Quarter catered to the gullible tourists who flocked to the "real" voodoo priestess. Java would also have to admit that Déjà's beauty alone was worth the price of admittance into her world.

###

Java and Chris set up a round table to accommodate eight on the balcony overlooking the diners and the stage where Kat performed two shows nightly. People came from surrounding states to dine at Java's and watch Kat Lace perform.

The balcony was Java's private area where she drooled over her wife and fell in love with her all over again each night. Close friends and staff were the only ones allowed in the balcony. They completed the table set up in time to sit down and enjoy Kat's last performance.

"You are one lucky woman," Chris said admiring Kat's vocal ability and her beauty.

"Yes, I am." Java agreed.

The elevator dinged announcing the arrival of their dinner companions. Everyone quietly found their chair and watched Kat's show. Ares, Java's Pit Bull curled up under her chair.

## Chapter 3

After dinner the team moved into Java's office and closed the door. Penny set up her laptop and focused the first photo on the wall behind Java's desk. Java sat on the sofa between Kat and Déjà.

Beau reported on each murder describing the women and where their bodies were found. "The first year we were baffled. We had four dead women, each on a float that had just finished the parade. They were murdered the last four nights of Mardi Gras, one each night.

"There were no wounds, no poisons or strangulations. No apparent cause of death. Their eyes were opened wide in fright as if they'd seen a ghost. Here's the kicker and the one fact we haven't released to the press. Each one of them had their mouths sewn together with surgical suture. Not to be unfeeling, but they looked like zombies."

Everyone looked to Déjà as if expecting an explanation.

"Don't be looking at me, you skinny white girls," the priestess lapsed into a campy voodoo dialect. "I can't even hem a skirt."

"I've been through everything," Penny shook her head in disbelief. "I can't find a reason for the deaths of the women.

"Do y'all have a problem with me requesting a forensic scientist from the FBI. I hear they have a hot shot in Huntsville, Alabama that has yet to be stumped by even the most bizarre cases?"

Karen pulled a form from her notebook. "Sign this and I'll consider it an official request for our help." She told Penny. Penny scribbled her name on the form then addressed the room.

"Barbie, if you will turn off the lights, I'm going to show you photos of each of the victims. How they looked among the living and how they looked on my table. See if you can

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spot anything they have in common that would make a serial killer murder them.”

Silence fell on the room as the team watched the grotesque photos Penny projected onto the wall. The women had various hair and eye colors, short and long hair styles, different weight, and height.

Java cleared the lump that had formed in her throat as she watched the slide show. “They were all beautiful,” she noted.

“And wealthy,” Beau added.

“Do they have anything else in common?” Kat asked. “Like the same hairdresser or message therapist, or shop in the same boutique?”

“We’ve followed up on all that,” Beau answered. “A couple of them had children that attended the same private school, but we couldn’t find anything to tie it to the murders.”

“I recognized a couple of them,” Chris said, “but I’ve never seen the others.”

“So, our killer is just randomly killing women and sewing their mouth’s shut.” Karen frowned. “Kat you’re the profiler here. What do you make of it?”

“If Penny and Beau don’t mind, I’d like to keep the files and go through them with a fine-tooth comb and see what questions I need answered,” Kat answered.

“I’ll check out all the women’s social media pages and see if there are any of the same people commenting on their posts,” Chris said. “We did freeze their media accounts, didn’t we?”

“I let them run for a couple of months to see if there was any activity after their deaths,” Beau explained. “Then we secured them as evidence.”

“Good,” Chris said. “I hate it when victim’s accounts are closed and deleted. Facebook and Twitter are a wealth of information just waiting to be mined if one knows what to look for.”

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“To be honest,” Beau grinned, “I was hoping you would say that.”