

ROB ROGERS



DEVIL'S GAPE

DEVIL'S CAPE

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If New Orleans has earned its “Sin City” nickname for its debauchery, then its nearby sister Devil’s Cape has earned its “Pirate Town” moniker for the violence and blatant corruption that have marred the city since its founding. Yet Devil’s Cape draws us, like a glittering treasure dangling from a skeleton’s beckoning hand.

— Excerpted from
A Devil’s Cape Traveler’s Guide



Pericles Kalodimos wiped his forehead with the back of his sun-darkened hand. Scars from spattered grease pockmarked his arm, and the pale scar tissue glistened in the fluorescent light of his restaurant like chips of mica on brown earth. He'd turned up the heat in order to keep his newborn children warm, but he'd turned it up too far and the room was stifling even to a man used to standing over hot stoves.

He watched the sleeping babies, who looked to him like a single child beside a mirror. Often, they even moved in sync. Desma had snorted and rolled her eyes when he'd suggested tattooing each on the foot to tell them apart, but he still wondered every time they bathed the twins if he hadn't somehow mixed them up.

It had taken some quick talking to convince Desma to leave him alone with his sons for these brief two hours before their baptism, but he had a baptism of his own in mind for the boys before the family arrived. His family. He sighed. Whatever he could do to keep his sons out of the Kalodimos "family business," he would do.

Pericles walked over to his restaurant's front window, his bad leg forcing him to take five halting steps instead of the three he might have taken in his younger days. He'd named the restaurant Zorba's after *Zorba the Greek*, had plastered red velvet on the walls, then hung neon



signs, bottles of olive oil and ouzo, and framed posters of the Parthenon and the Aegean Sea. It was everything that someone who knew nothing of Greece would expect a Greek restaurant to be. The air hung thick with the scents of spiced meat, feta cheese, and strong coffee. At the window, he flicked off the OPEN sign and the overhead lights, shut the window's thick Venetian blinds, and reached over to lock the door. It left the room dark and quiet. The only light in the room—the red light of the EXIT sign—flickered across his sons' faces.

Stepping into the kitchen, he filled a small basin with warm water then carried it back and set it beside his sons. He reached over to one of the tables and lifted up a small, sealed urn, its face decorated with the black-etched figures of Greek heroes wielding spears and swords. The urn was dusty and smooth in his palm. He held it in front of his sons' faces. As one, both boys woke and reached for it, their newborn attention gaining new focus. He smiled and pulled it back.

“Not quite yet,” he said. He ran a knife-scarred finger along the urn's surface. “It is entirely possible, my boys, that your father has been sold a bill of goods. If so, I'd appreciate it if you kept it secret, yes?”

His broad smile revealed cracked, coffee-stained teeth and a flash of gold. Then, with a sudden squeeze, he crushed the urn in his hands. It made a popping sound like an old balloon. The odor of stale air filled the room. He let the clay dust and shards flow between his fingers, then fall to the deep blue tablecloth. Two long, gold hairs remained in his hand, glistening like wounds in the red EXIT light.

“These strands,” he said to the boys, who looked in his direction in mute fascination, “are from the Golden Fleece itself. I was told they can pass on the strengths of the mighty Argonauts.” He shrugged self-deprecatingly. “It is foolishness, of course, but it is all I have.”

The boys reached out their arms toward each other. Their fingers entwined. Slowly and carefully, he pulled one of them away. They both began to wail. Moving



quickly now, he dropped one of the golden hairs into the basin of water. It sank below the surface, curling and uncurling, and he imagined that he saw steam rising from the water, though it wasn't hot. He pulled off the infant's diaper, then lifted him into the air.

"This is Julian," he said.

He dipped the boy below the water's surface, and it seemed to shimmer with gold. When he pulled Julian out, the boy had stopped crying and stared around as if in sudden wonder. The strand of golden hair—or fleece—was gone.

He repeated the process for the boy's brother, this time saying, "This is Jason." As he lifted Jason from the water, the boy peed on him and Pericles laughed heartily. He cradled the boys to him then, both dripping wet from the basin, one clutched in each arm. "I love you, my sons," he said. "I hope I have done you good this day."

Then he carefully dressed the boys and prepared the restaurant for his family's arrival.

