



## HOW THE WINDY MOUNTAIN BECAME DEVIL'S PEAK

AS TOLD BY ANNARI VAN DER MERWE

Once, in the days when there were only a handful of houses huddling in the shadow of Table Mountain, a great sailing ship dropped anchor in Table Bay. Soon the quay was packed with people: fish sellers, fruit vendors, farmers and wealthy citizens in their finery; even the man who played the bugle at the Cape Castle was there. Everyone was curious, because such a big ship always brought something interesting to see and something interesting to talk about.

The passengers streamed off the ship the moment the gangplank was lowered. They were weaving and staggering a little, because after all their weeks at sea, they weren't used to solid land any more. The throng at the harbour was about to turn away in disappointment, sad that this time there was nothing of any great interest on board, when a tall man with a broad, muscular chest appeared on deck. A murmur rippled through the crowd.

“It's Van Hunks!” someone gasped.

“But look at him now!” said someone else. “When last we saw him



he was a lowly sailor! And now? Look at those expensive clothes! Look at that fine satin waistcoat! Who would have thought that?”

Van Hunks stood to one side while porters carried his baggage to the dock: three enormous suitcases and a small wooden chest that he kept within arm’s reach at all times. He never took his eye off that chest. Jamming his hat firmly on his head, the big seaman stalked through the crowd of people, looking neither right nor left as he passed by.

“The rumours must be true,” said someone in the crowd. “He has become a pirate. What else could be in that chest but looted treasure?”

Van Hunks vanished into the crowd on the Parade, with the porters scuttling close behind him. But Van Hunks did not stop there; he walked quickly and purposefully in the direction of the Windy Mountain. One of the houses clinging to the slope of that mountain belonged to him.

From that day, Van Hunks was seldom seen on the streets of Cape Town – and never again near the harbour. People said he was afraid that a ship would one day bring to harbour someone he had robbed, out there on the blue seas. Or, they claimed, he was afraid that his old drinking buddies would try to borrow money from him, or lure him back to the grubby taverns he had once frequented.

In fact, Van Hunks preferred to climb up to the top of the Windy Mountain every day, and from there he kept a sharp eye on the bay and the harbour. He would stand for hours with his brass seaman’s telescope, staring into the distance. Then he would put aside his telescope and take up his big-bowled pipe with its curved stem, and blow lazy white clouds of tobacco smoke into the air.

Time passed and people began to forget about the sailor who had

returned from the sea. One day, Van Hunks was sitting as usual on the top of the Windy Mountain, passing the time with his telescope and his pipe. Suddenly he realised that someone was standing behind him. Van Hunks whirled around. There stood a man with a black pointy hat and a small black beard on the tip of his chin. He seemed familiar – perhaps he was a drinking acquaintance from back in the days when Van Hunks spent his time in the taverns near the harbour. Van Hunks was alarmed.

But when the man said, in a very respectful tone, “Good day, Mr Van Hunks,” he relaxed and began to chat. He forgot to ask the visitor his name. It had been a long time since last Van Hunks had had someone to speak to, and he just couldn’t stop talking. The stranger stood and listened, his eyes narrow. When dusk fell the man said good night and disappeared into the darkness, without Van Hunks noticing in which direction he had left.

A few days later, Van Hunks was again on top of the Windy Mountain when the man with the black pointy hat and the little black beard unexpectedly said from behind him, “And how are you today, Mr Van Hunks?”

“Very well, thank you,” Van Hunks replied, and once again he began to talk and talk, but on this occasion he began to boast as well – about how many seas he had crossed and how much treasure he had won and how many vats of rum he had brought home with him.

The stranger listened attentively. He didn’t say a thing; he just nodded his head every now and again, and at dusk he once again vanished as silently as he had arrived.

It was an extremely hot day when next Van Hunks sat on top of the Windy Mountain. He just sat there smoking, too lazy even to look

through his telescope. “Mr Van Hunks,” came the now familiar voice of the stranger beside him, “may I smoke a pipe with you?”

Van Hunks frowned at this, because he preferred to smoke alone. His special pipe tobacco was particularly strong and heady, and he could blow the best smoke rings in all of the Fair Cape.

“If you like,” Van Hunks said reluctantly.

The stranger filled his pipe – a very attractive, slim, white clay pipe – and lit up. The aroma of the tobacco was surprisingly pleasant. But soon Van Hunks noticed that a far larger cloud of smoke was cloaking the stranger than was billowing from his own pipe, and he began to inhale more deeply and exhale with more vigour.

The stranger began to do the same.

Van Hunks’s broad chest began to rise and swell, rise and swell. Then he began to fill his pipe with a vengeance; fortunately, that very morning he had packed his biggest tobacco pouch.

The stranger followed suit, although Van Hunks couldn’t see where his tobacco kept coming from. All he knew was that they were matching each other pipe for pipe, and the great white cloud around them was getting thicker and thicker.

“Let’s swap pipes,” suggested Van Hunks at last.

The stranger paused and his eyes narrowed. “All right,” he said, and held out his white clay pipe to Van Hunks.

Van Hunks stuffed the big bowl of his pipe to the brim before he handed it over.

He lit the stranger’s pipe and inhaled deeply. But nothing happened – he couldn’t draw any smoke from the pipe. He turned angrily to the stranger. “That’s cheating!” he said.

But the stranger couldn’t speak.

He had dragged too deeply on Van Hunks's pipe. His face turned white. Then it turned green.

"What's wrong?" asked Van Hunks, nervously smoothing his satin waistcoat.

But the man couldn't say a word. Now his face was purple, and his little narrow eyes had grown big and round. He tried to cough, but he couldn't even manage a hiccup.

"Wait - let me help," said Van Hunks, and gave him a big booming slap on the back.

But instead of helping him, the slap sent the man's pointy black hat flying. Van Hunks's blood ran cold. On the stranger's head, poking from the thick black hair, were two small, pointy horns!

"You devil!" yelled Van Hunks. "You child of Satan! Take back your pipe! I'll show you a thing or two!"

The devil took back his white clay pipe, and Van Hunks took back his curved pipe with the big bowl. And then they really began to smoke! Van Hunks couldn't work out how the devil drew smoke from his pipe, but soon the whole of the Windy Mountain was shrouded in smoke. Gradually the smoke spread and covered Table Mountain as well, but neither Van Hunks nor the devil was prepared to give in. Day after day they sat and smoked on top of the mountain, high above town.

Year after year the competition continued. The Windy Mountain became known as Devil's Peak, and the handful of houses grew into a small city. The only time the pair took a break was in the winter, when it was too cold to stay sitting up there. Then the devil would go back to his home, where it was hot enough to suit a devil's taste. No one knew where Van Hunks retreated to in winter, because after that

first warm summer's day, back when the Cape was still Dutch, no one ever saw him up close again.

But when the white clouds come pouring down on a windy day from Devil's Peak and spill over Table Mountain, people still look up to the mountain and say to each other, "Ah, yes, today Van Hunks and the devil are really smoking up a storm."

