

Lüftner, Das Kaff der guten Hoffnung  
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Translation by Katy Derbyshire



## Chapter 1

It was a rotten day. Grey clouds barricaded out the slightest hope for anything. Not that anyone could have seen anything through the dirty windows of the children's home by the name of "Good Hope" anyway. A torrent of gloom poured over the building. That was very conducive to the overall negative impression. □ It was the kind of day that only absolutely heartless writers can come up with. A day you could forget, because it was simply one of a never-ending series of exactly identical days, which were not only rather similar to this day, but so identical and grey and gloomy that it's a cheek to pick this one day out of all the days.

It was a rotten day. But today everything was different. Today was the beginning of a new age. At least in the "Good Hope" children's home.

A boy mounted the lowest step on the way up to the home's entrance, as if he'd just completed the very last stage of a mountain climb after a long ascent. And in fact he had, because the house was on the top of Gigantokatepetel, the highest mountain in a whole chain of mountains, in the

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middle of the unassuming town of Calabria Minor.

The town was so nondescript and pitiful that a travelling entertainer had once (during an equally nondescript and pitiful performance) called it “the Dump of Good Hope”. The joke had crumbled into nothingness in front of his silent audience and the entertainer had never come back. But the name had stayed behind and it stuck to Calabria Minor like a terribly embarrassing nickname that you’d actually always wanted to keep a secret and now your whole class has found out about it.

The boy looked down at the valley. Below him lay the Dump of Good Hope, above him his future.

He planted his hands on his hips.

A dramatic piece of music would have been appropriate, but instead grotty, greasy water dripped from the leaky gutter onto the mouldy doormat. It dripped with a sad plop, plop, plop...

The building in front of the boy looked like a painting. A painting by a drunk and hopeless artist without the slightest talent and with the same kind of warped sense of humour shared by the narrator of this book.

A crooked little tower, reaching for the sky like a warning finger; the façade crumbling and dirt-encrusted, dumped randomly in the bare mountain landscape, the three-storey something ducked down beneath a bogey-green roof as if waiting to collapse for good any time now. And that time seemed so nearby that the boy hardly dared to go any closer.

With moans and groans, the rotten floorboards of the small terrace announced their lack of lust for life when he did venture on to them – the door before his eyes looking like the cracked and calloused sole of a very old man’s foot.

Something like agitation rumbled in the boy’s innards, but it was nothing he couldn’t have swallowed. It was just a feeling. Nothing unusual under normal circumstances, but here there was also a touch of expectation, even a tiny portion of hope. And that had really never been his style before.

He’d never actually had any expectations, you see, this boy without a name

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– only a plan and what was probably the strongest willpower ever to live in a boy of his age.

As doubts did not exist in his mind, he took another step on the groaning floorboards. As he did so, he left something behind him that he would certainly never miss.

## Chapter 2

That boy was not the only one who first set foot in Calabria Minor on that perfectly normal and yet completely different rotten day. A man poked his pointed shoe, polished to a shine, out of a plush black car and felt about with it on the cobbles of the marketplace. One his shoe had found a foothold, he dragged a skinny body clothed in the finest of silks after it, topped by a rectangular skull, which wobbled threateningly. A black cape fluttered down around him, like the tattered wings of a gout-ridden raven.

“Dieter!” called the man.

“Yes, sir?” An elderly manservant with a stiff collar and thick, knobbly ears got out of the driver’s door, looked around for orientation and finally found his master. “Yes, sir?” he repeated with a clumsy salute.

“Not you, Dieter! The dog!”

“Hog?” asked the butler.

At that moment, a dachshund with blond streaks leapt out of the car and latched onto the servant’s trouser-leg with his teeth, growling.

“Stop that, Dieter!” said the gentleman, more annoyed than shocked, and rolled his eyes as he always did when he was bored.

“I’m not doing anything!” blustered the old servant, trying to shake off the bottle-blond dachshund.

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Once again, the gentleman rolled his eyes. “Not you, Dieter! The dog!”

While the two Dieters tried to disentangle themselves behind his back, he cast a passionate gaze at his property, which was on the top of that accursed mountain. Gigantokatepetel – what a ridiculous name!

Not just the name – everything was ridiculous here. Everything! But that was about to change. Oh yes.

And he laughed a genuine evil bad-guy laugh, which was immediately interrupted by a sneeze. He was allergic to laughter in any form, you see. Even his own laughter.