

SAHARA ADVENTURE SERIES



2. FOOTSTEPS TO DEATH

Meiring Fouche

Translated by Andelene Brits



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FOOTSTEPS TO DEATH

by Meiring Fouche and translated by Andelene Brits

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ABOUT THE TRANSLATOR

“Andelene Brits was born in Paarl in 1966, the youngest of three daughters. I attended Paarl Gymnasium and matriculated there in 1983. After that, I worked in financial institutions. I got married in 1989, and I have three sons. I do not have grandchildren yet, only a lot of dogs! For the last twenty years, I have been a housewife. I have written many stories over the years but have never published anything, although writing is my passion. I love books and have a whole library in my house. I go and browse in second-hand bookstores for treasures. My other passion is people, and I do charity work for those in need. There is not much more I can say about myself, just that what I am doing now is something I have been waiting for all my life to do. Deal with the written word. Words are power. Thank you.”

SUMMARY

“Footsteps to Death”, is the sequel to “Witch of the Sahara” by Meiring Fouche’s thrilling Sahara adventure series. Set in the scorching Sahara desert, the story follows Legionnaire Teuns Stegmann whose past encounter with the beautiful but deadly El Karima has left him entangled in her web once more. Can Teuns resist El Karima’s intoxicating charm or will he succumb to the passions that bind them?

Six months after betraying El Karima’s love and destroying her Dulac nation, Teuns finds himself drawn back into her clutches when two mysterious riders are ambushed near the desert outpost of Dini Salam. Among their possessions is discovered a locket belonging to none other than El Karima herself, confirming the white princess of the Dulacs is behind the abduction. In exchange for the riders, El Karima demands Teuns be handed over to face punishment for his treachery. But one of the captives is revealed to be Madame Le Clerq, wife of the garrison commander Colonel Le Clerq. Now torn between sacrificing Teuns or his own wife, Le Clerq faces an impossible choice. Against orders, Teuns takes matters into his own hands and escapes into the desert accompanied by El Karima’s envoy, the Arab Kadar Hoessein. Enduring injury and the unrelenting elements, they arrive at El Karima’s encampment. While she still harbors feelings for her betrayer, will her desire for vengeance prevail? Meanwhile, back in Dini Salam, the

master escape artist of the Legion, Captain D'Arlan, hatches a daring plan to rescue the hostages and defend the fort against El Karima's impending attack. But with time running out and lives on the line, has El Karima's web become inescapable?

In this gripping tale of war, betrayal, and forbidden romance, Fouche delivers nonstop adventure and drama. When Teuns refuses to join her tribe and train her men, the stakes climb ever higher as Teuns finds himself in a brutal hand-to-hand duel to the death against Atroek, El Karima's formidable henchman. Their contest will determine not only Teuns' fate but that of Madame Le Clerq as well. Karima's treachery knows no bounds. Consumed by bitterness and the desire for revenge, El Karima condemns Teuns, Madame Le Clerq, and El Saoed to a horrific public execution in Dini Salam. Her promises to return Madame Le Clerq unharmed were but empty words, concealing her true intent. Now along with Teuns and El Saoed, Madame Le Clerq faces a gruesome end bound between wild stallions who will tear them limb from limb.

In this racing page-turner, Fouche maintains breathless suspense as the condemned three stand poised on the brink of death. Can the ingenious Captain D'Arlan come up with a daring plan to save Teuns, Madame Le Clerq, and the entire Dini Salam garrison from utter destruction at the hands of the vengeful El Karima? What shocking

choice must Colonel Le Clerq make to try and save his beloved wife from a gruesome fate? As El Karima raises her whip, will salvation arrive in time or has she finally outmatched D'Arlan and checkmated Teuns? Brimming with rivalry and passion, and dramatic twists and turns, "Footsteps to Death" captivates from desert ambush to palace showdown. Fouche transports the reader with vibrant details directly into the milieu of the 1930s Sahara. It is a land full of danger and desires in this sweeping tale of warfare, sacrifice, and star-crossed romance set against the perilous backdrop of the unforgiving Sahara. Full of memorable characters, a rich historical atmosphere, and heart-pounding action, "Footsteps to Death" is a thrilling addition to The Sahara Adventure series. This ebook will have adventure lovers and romance readers alike racing through the pages to learn the fates of Teuns, El Karima, and the embattled Legionnaires of Dini Salam.

EXTRACT

At that moment, Akbra Krim raises his bejeweled sword into the air, out there in the desert, and then he lowers it again. It flashes in the early sunlight.

There is the thundering of hooves, and a thousand, young Dulacs, their lips dry, because it is their first fight and they are nervous, are racing in a circle towards the Legion soldiers.

The older warriors give their battle cry and look in satisfaction at the spectacle. Then, at a hundred paces away, the Dulacs jump from their horses, and with a terrible cry, they storm the columns of Captain D’Arlan. The war cry is enough to scare even the most formidable soldier.

“Death to the Legion...” the Arab officer leading them, shouts. He wanted to add the word “dogs”, but he does not get the chance because when he is fifty paces away from the Legion men, he falls forward with two bullet wounds in his chest.

He had not even heard when D’Arlan had blown loudly on his whistle. He does not hear the deafening sounds of the salvos stuttering over the desert because he dies right there, with his face in the cool sand.

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2. FOOTSTEPS TO DEATH

Chapter 1 TWO HORSES

The line of men is small and insignificant against the backdrop of the vast, sandy wasteland of the Sahara. They move listlessly through the sand, with their heads bowed down, and they are even unaware of the crunching of their heavy boots in the sand. The heat of the relentless sun tortures and pains them. Their lips are dry and sore, but still, they are grateful. They are grateful that they are returning to Dini Salam, the southern front post of the French Foreign Legion. They are happy to get away from this colossal desert, where the warlike, cruel Arabs are not your biggest enemy, but the sand and the heat.

“Do not cry or lament, brothers,” says Fritz Mundt, the colossal German. “Before the sun had gone down, we will be back in that fly-infested nest they call Dini Salam - that famous place where we can drink some wine again and think about how the Arabs can smell when the sun is scorching. Are you not looking forward to seeing your esteemed friends of the garrison again? Are you not looking forward to the wonderful drill exercises?”

Most of the ten men walking here snort in disgust. They are grateful that their patrol work through the desert is nearing its end and that it will not be expected of them to do it again for at least the next three months. However, they find it impossible to get excited over that miserable Dini Salam. It is a stinking, old Arab town full of dirty,

milling blacks, groaning camels, and braying donkeys. There are also millions of flies that land on you as soon as you arrive there.

But still, Dini Salam is better than the torture of patrolling through the desert. Patrol work! This patrol they are returning from was useless, as they did not even see as much as a vulture. They have come across no strange tracks and have not seen a dead camel or an Arab.

“You have a strange sense of humor, big guy,” says Teuns Stegmann, walking beside Fritz Mundt. Stegmann is a tall, athletically built, South African with lively blue eyes and a shock of blonde hair.

“What is it that attracts you to Dini Salam? It is merely a nest, a dark cave full of drama. Sometimes I would rather walk through the desert than spend time in that hole.”

“Yes, but it is because you have no taste for the finer things in life,” Fritz retorts playfully. “Can a man have a little drink here in the desert? Can you lie on your back here in the shade and think about the days when you were still a human being? Do you ever see the swish of a dress out here, brother? And what life is worth living if a man cannot see a dress now and then?”

“Hear-hear!” Jack Ritchie, the scrawny Englishman, throws in. “But it seems that Teuns is not interested in women anymore since he has been mixed up with El Karima.”

These words hurt Teuns Stegmann, who does not even look at the Englishman. Instead, his thoughts go back to those couple of days, already more than six months ago,

when he had been involved with El Karima, the beautiful leader of the Dulac Arabs. She is the most beautiful woman he has ever seen. He thinks back to the exciting hours when they had been together in the palace of Dutra, where she had given him her love. He was her prisoner, the same as his fellow soldiers, but she had loved him. And then he had betrayed her.

El Karima, the white woman with blonde hair, deep blue eyes, and a stunning body, became the princess of the Dulacs.

She is also El Karima, the cruel who has no mercy for her enemies.

Once more, he sees her eyes in front of him and feels the soft burning of her lips on his. He feels her magnificent body pressed against him and can still smell the scent of her glossy hair.

“Do not hurt old Teuns,” Fritz Mundt teases. “He has tender memories of her, but if she ever finds him again, she will surely skin him alive, or what am I saying, *mon ami*?”

The big German looks down at Teuns and sees the young South African’s eyes shooting sparks.

“You have a lot to say today, Fritz Mundt,” Teuns warns, slowly balling his hands into fists.

“The last time she had you on the rack,” the German continues, as if unaware of the threat in Teuns’ words. “But this time, she will tie you up between the wild horses, brother. Have you ever seen how the Dulacs use that form of torture?”

The next moment it is as if a coil jumps loose inside Teuns Stegmann. The movement of his tall, lithe body is like that of a mamba. The short jab collides with the big Fritz Mundt's chin, and at first, he staggers to the side before falling on the hot sand. His eyes are prominent in shock and astonishment. Then anger breaks out in him when the other men start to laugh uproariously.

"You damn rubbish!" the German says threateningly and jumps up from the sand.

Teuns places himself squarely in front of Fritz, but a voice cuts through the hot silence even before the German is fully upright again.

"What in the devil is going on here? Are you a bunch of thugs, or are you soldiers of the French Foreign Legion?" It is Sergeant Vermeer speaking, the short Dutchman with bald head and bow legs.

"What is going on here?" he roars again.

Fritz Mundt, respectively dusting off his clothes and touching his sore chin because that little jab of Teuns had hurt him badly, answers pleadingly.

"A small misunderstanding, *mon officier*. Everything is fine now."

Fritz looks into the blue eyes of the South African and sees the small smile forming on Teuns' attractive face. His beard is already thick and dark because they have been in the desert for a week to try and determine what the Arabs are up to.

"Put your misunderstandings away till later," says the patient Vermeer. "I have no time for nonsense right now."

“*Qui, mon Sergent,*” Fritz Mundt says submissively, but his eyes are alive with joy and mischief.

“Forward!” orders Vermeer, and the small columns start to move slowly again, up the gradually sloping dune, where the last sandstorm had made patterns in the sand. It looks like flat waves in the ocean.

Teuns looks up at Fritz.

“I am sorry, big guy, I lost my temper.”

“You hit like a Spanish mule would kick, *mon ami,*” Fritz says and touches his chin. “You are the first person who has managed to strike me down in a long time.”

The German suddenly lurches forward because Jack Ritchie, walking just behind him, had tripped him.

Fritz does not retaliate because just then, Vermeer looks back quickly to see if his small columns are marching, befitting the French Foreign Legion patrol.

“Speaking of El Karima,” says Podolski, the Pole, from behind them. “I wonder what is going on in her head. I do not trust this silence. I swear she is cooking up something again. From that day onwards, that she had slipped away from Stegmann in Dutra on her dapple-gray horse, nobody has heard anything about her again.”

Fritz Mundt, who considers himself the oracle of the garrison in Dini Salam, shrugs with his big shoulders, loosens his water flask, and takes a sip.

“I think we will hear from her again, much sooner than we imagine,” he says. “She is not the type that sits still for too long. On that day in Dutra, we killed many of the Dulacs and destroyed their armory, but where are all the