

# SECRETS ON THE PLAINS



MEIRING FOUCHE

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*by*

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and

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The cover sketch was designed using the AI-powered tool DALL-E 3 (openart.ai). This first western story book in the Pioneers series is now available for the first time in ebook format and in the English language. The translation was completed with the help of AI tools such as ChatGPT (chatgpt.com).

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## SECRETS ON THE PLAINS

by Meiring Fouche

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## SUMMARY

Here is yet another masterful story written by one of South Africa's top authors, namely F.A. Venter under the pseudonym of Meiring Fouche. This thrilling South African action-western and romance story will not disappoint, thus be sure you read it for your enjoyment.

"Secrets on the Plains" is a thrilling Wild West tale that intertwines romance and action in a vivid setting reminiscent of America's early frontier days. The story is set during a time of mineral discoveries in South Africa, featuring a captivating heroine, Miemsie Bower, and a compelling villain, Mertel Duvenage. The narrative kicks off with Miemsie racing through the plains, pursued by four relentless villains. Determined to protect a significant secret, Miemsie faces numerous challenges, including a dramatic chase that ends with her being captured and thrown into a perilous situation. Just as she seems doomed, she is rescued by Ryk Schoonraad, a rugged and mysterious hero who brings her back from the brink of death. As they form a bond, Miemsie and Ryk must navigate the dangers of the wild plains and confront the villains who seek to uncover her secret. The novel promises an exhilarating mix of danger, heroism, and romance, set against the harsh yet beautiful backdrop of the untamed wilderness in South Africa.

## EXTRACT

It all happens so quickly, and then it feels to her as if her lungs are going to burst. The air she just inhaled is nearly gone. She has reached the soft sandy bottom of the hippo hole, and around her, there's only the dim half-light of the cool water mass. There, at the bottom, she struggles and wrestles once more to try to break her bonds and reach the sunlight, but in vain. Her hair is a swinging red tangle beneath the water as she jerks her head back and forth in an attempt to shake off the rock.

Her face is twisted with naked fear. She opens her mouth to scream in blind despair and then swallows the first mouthful of water. It is then, on the brink of unconsciousness, on the black edge of death, that she sees as if in a dream the pale monster sliding toward her. On the narrow boundary between consciousness and unconsciousness, she imagines it's a nightmare in which she's trapped. A strange figure, this one, rushing toward her. Something like a monster from a storybook.

She only remembers how something grabs her by the shoulders, painfully hard and with great strength. Then she feels a floating sensation, as if she has become lighter than water and air, as if she is caught in a great wind that carries her up to the clouds. And then she knows nothing more.

# 1. SECRETS ON THE PLAINS

## Chapter 1

### FOUR VILLIANS AND A GIRL

Through the blue-green thorn veld, a single rider races, and the light-brown horse runs so fast that it seems as if its belly is touching the ground. The rider heads straight southeast through the thorny bushes, through the ripe grass, and through the gray open plains.

That rider sits forward in the saddle, just behind the saddle horn, and she keeps looking back. Then she lays into the brown horse with her whip, and it speeds up even more to close the distance ahead.

This girl sits comfortably in the saddle because she knows the back of a horse well. Her hair, long and shiny reddish-brown, is gathered under a bright sunbonnet at the back of her head, and with her wide riding skirt and all, she sits astride the saddle like a man. Her hands are small, fine, and tanned, but firmly on the reins, and in her right hand, she swings the whip of genuine hippo hide with striking skill.

She comes down a rocky slope, twisting and kicking up dust between the thorn bushes when she looks back again. A cold feeling grips her insides as she sees them appear on the horizon, the four riders who have been chasing her for almost an hour. She knows them by heart now. There are the two dark brown horses, the jet-black horse, and the light blue one. When she looks back, she sees them for a moment on the horizon, but then she sees how they spur their horses on again and come storming after her anew.

About an hour ago, they tried to ambush her in the rocky outcrops further north, but with a skillful twist of her horse down a sandy gully, she temporarily shook them off, reached the flat plain, and then began to outrun them. She got a good lead on them because she is light, and her horse is strong. But now they are relentlessly closing in on her. She saw this with shock. Apparently, her light-brown stallion does not have the stamina of the pursuers' horses.

There is a fierce determination on her beautiful face as she leans forward in the saddle again and speaks softly to her horse. Even if she dies today, she must not let herself be caught. Because if she is caught, it could mean that a great ideal of her father will be lost. Not only for him, but also for her, who has nearly grown up in this tough wilderness. A suffocating fear grips her because she knows how far Kimberley still lies. Miles and miles away across these grass plains. She will still have to race through dozens of camel thorn groves and probably hundreds of gray bush plains before she can reach the red earth and the cluster of houses of Kimberley.

But she simply must reach it, no matter what. She takes the next hill swiftly and determinedly. Her stallion's breath comes in gasps, but he now runs with a deadly rhythm and flies like a kudu over the blood-red anthills that temporarily try to obstruct his path. She climbs out of the wide open space, and when she looks back again, she sees that her pursuers are already in the riverbed of the plain. Now they are catching up with her quickly. She also sees that they are no longer chasing in a

group. They have spread out slightly, and she immediately knows what the intention is. When she suddenly wants to dart to one side or the other, one or the other of them will immediately cut her off.

The small saddlebag made of kudu leather flaps wildly as she races, and occasionally, she touches it quickly, just to make sure it's still there. Then she pushes it behind her back, where it can be safer, and focuses intently on the chase again.

The hill takes her up to a red, rough rocky area, to the crest of a plateau through which a deep fissure runs. She heads for it now. She knows this fissure through the plateau very well because she and her father once came through here. It was long ago, but she remembers it as if it were yesterday. Actually, it's a small river that flows here and has carved a path through the rocky area over the years.

In the riverbed, she knows, there is usually a long hippo hole that holds water for months. She remembers this well because she and her father once camped there. Then she washed their clothes there.

Just before she enters the pass, she looks back again and then realizes with a sharp pang of distress that she won't be able to stay ahead much longer. They have caught up with her incredibly fast in the past few minutes. So fast that it seems as if they have suddenly mounted fresh horses. She sees them leaning forward in the saddles and how they urge their horses on with their whips.

For a moment, she thinks wildly in the saddle about what she should do now.



And the next moment, she knows exactly what she has to do. Even if they shoot her out of the saddle, even if they torture her, and even if they destroy her. Her secret, she will never give up. Never, as long as she lives. She would rather die, but her secret and her father's secret, she will keep to the bitter end.

She sharply swerves to the right and then to the left and takes the sandy pass that leads to the steep, red ravine through the plateau. Likewise, she will race through the pass, past the hippo hole, and when she exits the pass on the other side, she knows, there is a thicket of wait-a-bit thorn, camel thorn, large gray bush, and sweet thorn. There, she might be able to shake them off.

But she has barely gotten her plans in order when the light-brown stallion steps into a meerkat hole. In his speed, the horse nearly does a complete somersault, and in the process, he flings her far out of the saddle. But luckily, she grew up in this world. The stars spin before her eyes as she hits the sand, but she is almost immediately back on her feet, her head singing and with a sharp pain in her forehead. When she stands up, she knows at least that she hasn't broken any bones, and though she still sways back and forth, she manages to catch her horse by the bridle. The animal is white with foam from the hard chase. His flanks heave up and down, and his nostrils are flared wide.

She soothes him, strokes his neck, and then painfully swings into the saddle because the hard fall has badly bruised her body. The brief

interruption in her flight leaves her short of breath, so she immediately digs in her spurs and races on.

She takes the narrow pass with precision and speed. The terrain here is a bit rocky, which slows her down. The brown horse, however, pushes forward bravely, and she's barely two hundred paces into the pass when it widens slightly, and she sees, with an inexplicable sense of relief, that the hippo pool is still full of water. She urges her horse on, and when they reach the flat ground within the pass, she brings him to a gallop.

A single gunshot echoes through the narrow passage, sounding insignificant at first. Then it reverberates from cliff to red cliff. In that brief moment of decision, she instinctively understands what has happened. During her delay, one of her pursuers has flanked her from above on the cliffs.

Her horse rears high, standing on its hind legs for a few moments, then collapses beneath her. This time, she falls hard. When she hits the ground, it feels as if all the life is drained from her and as though every bone in her body is broken. There's a numb daze in her head, and her eyes can't see properly.

When she manages to lift her upper body, she sees her horse lying motionless a few steps away. She's only a few feet from the edge of the water. She shakes her head vigorously, trying to clear it, and desperately moves her body to regain her strength.

Then she hears the clattering of hooves in the narrow pass. She hears someone shouting, a horse neighing, and she knows she must act, no