

Delilah Dusticle

By A. J. York

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For my Mum, my favourite feather duster.

“Delilah Dusticle blends whimsy and wonder into a story that will appeal to both young adults and the young at heart. It's a lively, ebullient adventure through and through!”

The Midwest Book Review, Small Press Bookwatch, April 2015

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“I loved Delilah, I loved Abi, I loved reading this story.”

Jalyn, jalynreads.wordpress.com

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“This story should be a classic fairytale. The writing was magical and captivating.”

Bayan Basri, Booklicker.blogspot.com

Table of Contents

[Chapter One](#)

[Chapter Two](#)

[Chapter Three](#)

[Chapter Four](#)

[Chapter Five](#)

[Chapter Six](#)

[Preview *Delilah Dusticle's Transylvanian Adventure*](#)

[Preview *Eliza Bluebell*](#)

[Preview *A Fairy Extraordinary Christmas Story*](#)

[About the Author](#)

[Other Books](#)

[Contact the Illustrator](#)

[Acknowledgement](#)

Chapter One



Delilah Dusticle began working for the Fenchurch-Whittington family at the age of sixteen. She soon made her mark with her ability to wholly and completely eradicate dust. She could run up walls, duster in hand, with great skill, reaching every nook and cranny.

On her back she wore a quiver pouch, which carried her special dusters. There was one made from purple peacock feathers, another with a white ball of fluff perched on the end that looked like a dandelion after it has bloomed, a beautiful orange feathered tulip and an ugly brown gargoyle of a sponge, which could suck up dirt on contact.

The chandeliers twinkled, the library gleamed, the silver shone and the family portraits sparkled. It took only one year for Delilah Dusticle to be promoted to Chief Dust Remover and Eradicator.

Mrs Fenchurch-Whittington was most pleased with Delilah's ability to eradicate dust. When it was her turn to host the weekly Ladies' Club card game, she would smugly brag to all the jealous ladies about her dust-free house.

The jealous ladies, who suffered badly from dust mite bites, tried to lure Delilah away. They made offers of more money, of travel around the world to far away houses in need of a clean and they even offered a team of helpers that she would be in charge of.

The ladies, in Delilah's eyes, were all very well-to-do, but would relentlessly compete with one another on anything—from who had the biggest house, to who had the most expensive shoes. Delilah even noticed that they would cheat at cards by hiding a card under a cushion or slyly retrieving a new card from their lacy sleeve.

They were always dressed in large, sweeping silk dresses and any flesh that was on show was adorned with pearls, diamonds, gold and rubies. Their large hats were decorated with feathers, silk flowers and ribbons. Yet, underneath all their finery, they were plagued with the mites that lived in their dusty houses.

Delilah was, at times, tempted to take one of the jealous ladies' offers of travel and cleaning a house in a far away country, but she always politely declined. You see, Delilah could not leave the Fenchurch-Whittington family, for she was in love, and to leave would mean never seeing Charlie Fenchurch-Whittington the Third ever again.

For as long as she could remember, Delilah had held the secret of her feelings for Charlie deep down inside. Staff were not permitted to fraternise with the family and any shenanigans would lead to instant dismissal.

"Delilah, you truly are a dusting delight. It is as if you have magically opened a hole into space, sucked out all the dust and then closed the hole again," beamed Charlie Fenchurch-Whittington the Third.

She blushed and dusted the book in his hand as he lay across the chaise lounge in front of the crackling fire, his chestnut hair reflecting the spitting flames. He then looked up from his book and gave Delilah the smile that made her knees knock together.

Even though Delilah was slight in figure, her features were striking. Her jet black hair was worn in a bob, and her large brown eyes strongly contrasted with her pale skin. Her uniform was a knee-length black dress with a white collar and white cuffs.

On her small feet she wore black buckled shoes; around her waist, a crisp white apron; and on her head, a white maid's hat that sat tied with a black ribbon between her crown and fringe. Nestled on her back was her quiver pouch of special dusters.

Charlie looked back at his book and she noticed the shadow on the wall reflecting the shapes of their bodies next to each other. Without the feather duster in her hands, they could almost be mistaken as man and wife sharing the same dustless space.

She sighed and walked to the door as Charlie peered over the chaise lounge and whispered, "You will be a delightful wife, Delilah. I have a good mind to marry you myself."

Stunned, she backed slowly out the door and only when out of sight did she allow her face to show the happiness of his words. "He feels the same," she said to herself, laughing.

A suit of armour standing beside her in the hall coughed and shot out a puff of dust from its helmet. "Staff are not permitted to fraternise with the family, and any shenanigans will lead to instant dismissal," wheezed the armour.

"Don't I know it," said Delilah, who then waved her duster at the falling dust cloud making it vanish in mid-air. For good measure, she selected her dandelion duster and polished the armour, who was very ticklish and kept giggling. She then made her way to the staff kitchen for dinner.

After dinner Delilah went up to her room, which was on the top floor and had a magnificent view over London. From her window, Delilah would watch commuters

wearing bowler hats go to work, and could hear the paperboy shouting the headline of the day. Beside her bed was a snow globe of the pier in Cockles, a seaside town where she grew up.

Delilah's parents had died when she was very small, so she and her brother were raised by Great Aunt Bertha. A shrewd woman, she had started a souvenir shop on the pier after the war.

Great Aunt Bertha also ensured that Delilah and her brother, Leon, both stayed on at school until sixteen years of age and then told them to go out in the world and do what they loved.

Leon loved to grow things and started work on a farm in a nearby village. Delilah's skill to eradicate dust, coupled with a desire to live somewhere more exciting, led her to find live-in work with the Fenchurch-Whittingtons in London.

"You are the only person I have ever met, Delilah, who has a passion for cleaning," said Great Aunt Bertha. Delilah grinned—even though she found great satisfaction in eradicating dust, she had plans to one day start a business with her own team of dust eradicators. But, for now, she was content to look out of her window and daydream about Charlie Fenchurch-Whittington the Third.