

ELIZABETH
DAISH

Out of the Dust



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Elizabeth Daish

藏书章





This edition published 1998 by Pan Books
an imprint of Macmillan Publishers Ltd,
25 Eccleston Place, London SW1W 9NF
and Basingstoke

Associated companies throughout the world

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

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First published in Great Britain in 1987 by
Century Hutchinson Ltd,
Brookmount House, 62-65 Chandos Place
London WC2N 4NW

Century Hutchinson South Africa (Pty) Ltd
PO Box 337, Bergvlei, 2012 South Africa

Century Hutchinson Australia Pty Ltd
PO Box 496, 16-22 Church Street, Hawthorn
Victoria 3122, Australia

Century Hutchinson New Zealand Ltd
PO Box 40-086, Glenfield, Auckland 10
New Zealand

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Daish, Elizabeth
Out of the dust.

I. Title

823'.914[F] PR6054.A3/

ISBN 0 330 37409 5

Printed and bound in Great Britain by
Mackays of Chatham plc, Chatham, Kent

**To DEREK, SIMON and SALLY
who encouraged me and left me to get on with it.**

Chapter I

Marian Verney put down her embroidery and walked to the open window. The delicate china bowl was half-full of water in which floated the petals of late May blossom. She rinsed her fingers in the water and dried them on the damask napkin hanging on the polished wooden rail by the small table.

‘I’ve never known such heat in May,’ she said.

Kate looked up and smiled. ‘You feel the heat more than I do, Mother,’ she said. ‘Look, my hands are quite dry and cool and I’ve been sewing for far longer than you.’

Marian Verney watched her eldest daughter with a trace of anxiety. At nineteen, she should be doing more than sitting with her mother over a tapestry frame. It was high time she was married with babies of her own and a man to care for. Marian sighed. The Navy had so much of sadness to offer to young women. Kate might have been happy with Robert now if he had come back from the last naval sortie with the Dutch, a senseless matching of strength between young hotheads that smacked of piracy as war was not yet declared.

It was barely three months since Captain Holmes had attacked the Dutch in West Africa, seizing forts and property and sending the Dutch packing back to Holland. Such masculine stupidity, thought Marian. Any excuse to get at

the Dutch, and it only needed the rumour that De Ruyter, the Dutch commander, had been guilty of atrocities against innocent English men, women and children to send men into a flurry of patriotic revenge that led to less than honourable engagement.

Kate forgot that her mother was watching her and stared out of the window. It was easier to appear contented than to bear the gentle sympathy that could be hers at the first sign of a tear. But I shall never know what happened. I shall never know if he thought of me when his ship sank under the cruel waves. Had he thought of the wedding that was to have been in June? She smiled, grimly, with a malice that was unlike her usual warmth. At least the scoundrel who had started the rumours of atrocities had been caught, a Dutchman posing as a Swede, who was sent to the Dutch Ambassador and had his ears nipped.

It didn't bring back her Robert and it did nothing to make the hot days of early summer easy to bear. What use was the investigation by the Royal African Company accusing Holmes of exceeding his instructions when nothing helped the loss of so many husbands, sons and sweethearts?

'I think I'll walk in the garden, Mother,' said Kate.

'Find Lottie and send her to me and ask Anna to bring Alice here to read her lesson,' requested Marian, and began to pack away her needles and silks.

Kate went to the kitchen but Lottie, the personal maid of Lady Marian, was not there and Kate had no wish to linger talking to Mary Creed the cook, who eyed her now with simpering servility and curiosity in the hard eyes. Next, Kate tried the bedrooms, empty and open-windowed and fresh with lavender, but Lottie didn't answer when she called.

The garden was even hotter than the house and Kate moved slowly, pausing only to call to Anna Maria Ruyter and Alice Verney who were reading under the shade of a

cedar tree. 'Mother wants you,' she said and went on through to the garden, calling for Lottie. There was silence and Kate sat on the bench that Anna had left, and wondered if Lottie was shopping.

From the loft above the stables, Lottie heard the distant calling and pushed Sam away. 'I told you they'd look for me, Sam,' she whispered, then smiled up into his eyes as he brushed aside her fair hair and bent his head to kiss her again.

'So soft,' he murmured. 'Was there any girl as soft, even in the bed of the King Himself?' His hands caressed her half-naked body and she stiffened. 'Stay a minute more,' he begged but she moved in an effort to lessen the weight of his body on hers, conscious of her taut muscles over the fullness in her pelvis and the instinctive need to protect it.

'I must go, Sam,' she whispered. 'If only I could live here and it be as it was.'

'Hush,' he said and tried to drive away the lurking dread that now spoiled their love. 'It may be nothing. It may be that you ate too much of Mary Creed's good food and it sickened you.'

'You know it's true, Sam. I was sick by the midden twice and when I saw my mother. She told you last week that I had a pinched look that meant one thing and I've missed a flux.'

'She told me all right,' he said grimly. 'Never a good word she's had for me ever since she knew we went together.'

Lottie looked at the good, strong face, now unsmiling and hard as he recalled the insults he had to bear from her parents. 'I know we can't marry,' she said. 'The master will turn me out and I shall have to go back to Cripplegate to have the baby and then be a wet-nurse or try to find a place with another family and leave the child with my mother.' She began to cry, and Sam reached out for her, holding her now with tenderness and no passion.

'Lady Marian won't let you go, sweetheart. The young ladies are fond of you and they would speak for you.' He fondled the white breasts, now slightly veined, with darkening nipples, and he knew that he had robbed Lottie of any future with the family she served and loved so well. 'I'll go too,' he said at last. 'There are others who need a good groom and it's been hinted that I could be coachman if I went into the country. We'll marry, Lottie, and live down in Surrey,' he said, impulsively.

'And you would hate it. You would blame me for making you leave and I would be unhappy in the country with all that mud and dark trees and nothing to do.' She touched his broad chest with her lips. 'What must be can never be changed,' she said. 'Now, I must go back. Miss Kate was calling and I can't stay any longer pretending to bring back the rosewater and herbs that Miss Anna wanted.'

She stood in the sunlight and stepped into her loose cotton dress that hung like a shift and hid any sign of the pregnancy. 'It doesn't show,' said Sam, hopefully. 'Maybe you'll stay small and they'll not know.'

She gave him a slow sweet smile that told him how silly men are when they want to believe something impossible.

'I'll see that there is nobody about,' he said, buttoning up his breeches, and went down the back steps from the loft to the lane beside the house.

Sam whistled softly and Lottie ran quietly along the lane before she reached the gate. She shifted the basket on to the other arm and walked slowly as if the heat was trying her and she had time to spare. Heavy footsteps hurried after her and she turned to see Joseph Creed, the coachman to the Verney family, coming up behind her. His thick livery was making him sweat and his face was red with exertion.

'Let me carry that for you, Lottie,' he said, and his eyes raked her face and body with ill-concealed lust.

'No thank you, Joseph. I have to get back. I'm late now

as I had to wait for the tincture that Miss Anna ordered,' she lied. His breath was stale and his eyes showed that he had drunk his fill while waiting for his master in the City.

Lottie quickened her steps. If Joseph was home, then Mr Verney would be here too, and she'd better make haste to be at Lady Marian's beck and call.

'I've some nice things I bought in St Paul's,' he said in a wheedling tone. 'A pair of slippers just made for your pretty feet and some beads that match those blue eyes.'

'I've told you before that I don't go with married men, Joseph. What would Mary say if she knew you chased me?'

'I don't care about her,' he said truculently, and Lottie breathed a sigh of relief as she spied Miss Anna walking towards them, and Joseph saw his wife Mary at the window.

'You have my herbs?' asked Anna. She glanced at Joseph with distaste. Such a coarse man and yet an excellent coachman who gave Mr Verney good service. He turned away and Lottie saw Mary Creed still watching from the window. What had she seen? There was nothing for her to see, but Joseph had walked beside Lottie from the gate and that would be enough to enrage the bitter-tongued harpy whom he had married years ago.

'It's so hot, Miss Anna. I hope I'm not late back,' said Lottie, innocently.

'Kate was looking for you to go to Lady Marian, but it's only to put away the tapestries,' said Anna, smiling. 'Go in now and leave me the basket. Lady Marian will want to know that they are back from the City.'

'Yes, Miss Anna.' Lottie smiled and relaxed. Maybe everything would be all right and she could marry Sam and stay with the Verneys. It was all so dear and familiar and she was treated well by all the family and every one of the other servants, except for Mary Creed who resented her youth and pretty face and almost accused Lottie of making

up to Joseph and perhaps more than just bantering and giggling behind Mary's back.

She'll never catch me with him, thought Lottie. After Sam, how could any girl think of someone like Joseph? Try as he may, I'll never go to him, she vowed and went up to the drawing room and tapped on the door.

Lady Marian looked up and gave a tired smile. 'I'm sorry I was late back, Ma'am, but I had to wait,' said Lottie, and was relieved to see that her mistress was not cross or concerned.

Marian looked at the girl in the doorway and envied the cool soft looseness of the shift she wore. Silk was far too warm and yet she couldn't change into muslin so early in the year. None of the ladies of her acquaintance would dare to flaunt such a breach of fashion. Only courtesans at the Palace of Westminster could afford to appear in the flimsy garments and not attract censure.

When Oliver Cromwell was ruling the country, between kings, rich clothes were not *de rigueur*, and the realm was grey . . . but it was like another dimension of living when the austere rules had been dashed away and England glowed again with colour and music and laughter and the dictates of high fashion once more, under the wanton eye of King Charles II.

But now, thought Marian, the King had been enthroned for long enough for the novelty of his return to have faded. In these early months of 1665, the country was prosperous but glancing sideways at a monarch whose appetite for good living, women and masques was only equalled by his need for more and more money to fill the depleted Royal Purse.

'You wanted me, my lady?' enquired Lottie.

'Is everything prepared for the master?'

Lottie nodded. 'Yes, my lady. His fresh linen is in the dressing room and the new *Intelligencer* is come. Sam fetched it when he took the bay to the farrier.' Lottie blushed, and turned half-away to tidy the pile of sewing

that Kate had left as if she might come back to it later. She dreaded the enquiring look that her employer gave her each day when she came to see to the clothes in the vast press in Marian's boudoir, and she bent slightly so that the loose shift would not cling to her figure.

'Very well, Lottie.' The girl moved towards the door but Marian called her back. 'What has been happening, Lottie?'

The girl burst into tears. 'Oh, my lady, don't send me away.' She placed a hand over the gently swelling mound in her belly. 'I'm strong and can work and when it comes I can send it to my mother until it grows older.'

'It is Samuel's child?' Marian paced the floor and tried to keep the anxiety from her voice. The heat was trying enough but this matter was something that made her head ache and her hands become moist once more.

'Yes, my lady,' whispered Lottie and failed to see the look of intense relief that made Marian look suddenly happy.

'Then he must own it,' said Marian. 'And you must wed.'

Lottie stared at her. 'But, what of the master? He will never let us live here together. Sam told me that he had refused any of the outside workers to sleep within the walls of this house, and so many had gone with their wives to other employ.'

'Yes, that is so,' said Marian. It was sad to think of losing the best personal maid that she had ever had and Edward would be furious if he had to lose Sam, the young groom who did more for their horses than any in the greater houses. It was a sobering idea that Sam could have work with many of their influential friends even if Edward refused him a good reference. Many had hinted that they would take him at a better wage than any that Edward would offer the man.

'My lady,' ventured Lottie timidly, 'if I went away when

I am confined, and came back without the child, I could stay with you, and Sam would have to live out over the stables as he does now.'

'You would do that? You would give away your child to remain here?' It was common knowledge that the lesser orders were hard and unintelligent, but surely Lottie had proved otherwise in the past? Marian saw the light blue eyes that were now dull with fear. Lottie's fair hair hung in untidy tresses and her dress was not as clean as it might have been, but the heat might have made this more apparent. 'Come now, child,' said Marian kindly. 'Do you not want an infant? I could never have given away any of mine.'

'Oh, yes!' The tears now began to fall and with them fell all pretence. 'I have not slept since I knew and I have been sorely ashamed, but I love it now, even in the womb, and when it is born, I think I shall die if I cannot be a mother.'

So Samuel *was* the father. Marian felt again the wave of relief that had restored her pride. If it had been her own son or, and this was an impossible thought, if it had been Edward, her husband, who had taken his fill of the pretty young servant, her heart would have broken.

This is not the Court at St James' and Westminster, she told herself angrily. It was common practice there for the young bloods to pleasure themselves with any good-looking serving wench they found in their own households and in those of their friends, but this was an honest household, with prayers each morning and no dalliance with the lights of love of the city. Even the servants were sober and Godly and went about their work with good hearts. True, Samuel was broad and strong and many a maid turned to look at him when he was in full livery.

But the child was his. Marian sighed. If Edward was tired, he could rage and turn them both away with no argument, losing two good workers and a lot of loyalty, but if he allowed them to marry, they would still have to

go, as he would never let the lads reeking of the stables come over the doorstep of even the back scullery, unless they carried vegetables from the gardener.

'My head aches, Lottie. Make me a tisane and bring it to the drawing room.' She watched the maid leave and felt a deep tenderness for the girl who was more than a servant and who made the house brighter with her smiling service and almost family pride. Now, she had ruined this situation. She would have to go and so would Sam and even if Edward sulked for a week, there was no other way unless he changed his rules.

'Mother!' Alice, trying to appear more grown-up than her bare fifteen years, burst into the drawing room and kissed her mother. 'I have learned another poem. Anna Maria taught it me in French and I can say it off without prompting now, or almost,' she added, with an anxious glance at the dark-haired girl who followed more slowly.

'You have learned it like a little parrot, Alice,' said Anna, laughing. 'If I asked for the last three lines, you could never say them without mouthing all the first ones, and then only if you peeped at the book.'

'You are horrid, Anna,' said Alice, without rancour. 'But I did work hard, Mother, so may I come with you to the theatre?'

'It's too hot,' began Marian, then remembered that Edward would expect her to appear with him in the box of the man who owned far too much of the City of London to be refused anything on the simple grounds of inconvenience or heat.

'It's tomorrow, Mother, and I can wear my red silk with the stomacher that Anna made for me.' Alice looked up into the serene face of her governess and friend. 'You *did* promise, when Lord Chalwood asked Father at Christmas.'

'And now we shall be expected,' said Marian. 'You will join us, Anna?' The girl inclined her head, and Marian was made aware that Anna Maria Ruyter was not just a

governess and companion but had a very satisfactory dowry of her own, invested by Edward in safe stocks, and enough means to buy her own good clothes. Now, she wore a gown of plain brown velvet that showed pale blue silk at the neck and edgings, and her bearing was of someone of rank.

‘And will Christopher come with us?’ asked Alice.

‘Your brother has no time for such frivolity,’ said Lady Marian Verney. ‘He will stay with Kate, and Lottie will serve them supper.’ She loosened the lace at her wrist, and decided that a cooler gown would be acceptable at the theatre, if this unseasonable warmth persisted. If Lottie was dismissed, who could she trust to look after her children when Edward asked her to go with him on visits to his family in the north and to her relatives in Surrey?

Alice was far too young to be trusted with the other servants and would be up to every kind of mischief even if she was nearly a woman and, as such, marriageable. My baby, thought Marian with a pang of sadness. They grew so fast and Kate could have been married and a mother by next Easter. Christopher, at eighteen, was already a man with a man’s ideas of what he wanted from life but, as yet, no sweetheart who could be accepted into the family. Young girls who flirted with him, very prettily, but who were ignored if a new horse came to the stables and Sam was there to school it with his help, came and went without making an impact on the young man’s natural yearnings. The only woman he seemed to respect apart from his mother was Anna Maria; an orphan and a distant cousin of Edward’s, she was the daughter of an English mother and a Dutch father, both dead long since of smallpox, leaving the girl of nine to be brought up within the large and elegant house outside the City of London.

The estates in Holland had been sold after the last brush with the Dutch, Edward wisely foreseeing that they would lose value or be forfeit if another Dutch war was started. So Anna had a small fortune, enough to satisfy the most

avaricious of in-laws, and a name that should have been changed long ago, to avoid embarrassment, by being similar to the notorious Dutch captain, De Ruyter. Even just 'Anna Maria Ruyter' was enough to make tongues wag whenever there was trouble with the Dutch, and with her grave dark looks, Anna appeared foreign to many who saw her against the lighter-complexioned Verney children. Kate might escape undue attention but Alice promised to be a beauty with her curling fair hair and dancing walk, the pink and white skin and delicate wrists and a figure that showed the promise of perfection. With Anna, the contrast was pronounced and men of rank eyed them both with interest.

It was too hot to think of matchmaking, but at seventeen, Anna should have suitors and must be given the advantages of soirées and visits to the Court. This, however, was difficult. Edward never admitted it but the name with which Anna was encumbered was a barrier to a good marriage while the Dutch war progressed, and national hatred against everything foreign and smacking of Free-Thinking or Papist practices brought rumblings of violence wherever they were encountered. Marian watched her ward and wondered if the old Huguenot background still had an influence on the girl. A legacy of fine sewing and lace-making was good, but anything bordering on Free-Thinking in a country sensitive to the religions imposed on it, might further impede her opportunities for marriage.

Alice turned back from the window. 'It isn't fair, Mother. Kate is wearing summer clothes while I am far too hot in this dress.'

Marian looked out. 'That flowered silk is warmer than you think, Alice,' she said. 'If you change into summer things too soon, you will take chill and have the ague.' It was an argument she used every year, but this year, with the lack of rain and the warm sunshine, it was hotter than many Julys.

'But I may wear the red silk tomorrow?' begged Alice.

'Yes,' said Marian, but longed to keep her baby for as long as possible. Surely the blossoming could wait a while?

Kate came to the doorway. 'Father is coming,' she said. Marian glanced at the ornate French ormolu clock and hurried to the front door, leaving Anna to follow, and Alice to linger in the cool room and so avoid any conflict with her father. To come home at this early hour meant that Edward Verney was out of sorts, out of temper with his clerks in the City office or had suffered a loss at the Stock Market.

The horses drooped under the shade of a tree, waiting to be taken to the stables, and Joseph Creed strode from the stable yard with Sam, to whom he flung the reins contemptuously and said nothing. The carriage that Mr Verney used each day to go to the City was dusty now. The distance from the borders of Holborn and Gray's Inn Fields to the City was not great, but the roads between, used by a huge volume of traffic in the over-crowded City, were mires of mud in bad weather and a dust-bowl in this dry spell, and so equally impossible for a gentleman to use unless he had a closed carriage.

The triple-collared cloak of the dark green livery that Joseph wore was more suited to a journey through wintry lanes and the way had been hard and filled with carts as traders went into the alleys and stews off Smithfield and St Paul's. He was hot and angry and gladly left the horses to Sam while he went to the back of the house where he shared rooms with Mary, for they were the only servants allowed to stay as a married couple that Edward Verney employed, with Joseph acting as coachman and sometimes butler and Mary as cook.

'The horses are sweating, Sam,' said Edward. Sam nodded and unharnessed the two black horses, then threw rough blankets over their withers before taking them to the stables. The carriage could wait. Horses were more

important than the tidiness of the front lawns and the empty beauty of the well-ordered flowerbeds and lawns. Marian closed her mouth without remarking on the carriage. Edward was right and so was Sam, and she must put up with the view for as long as it took Sam to bring men to manhandle the carriage into its shed.

‘You are very early, my dear,’ she ventured. Edward strode past her and into the wide hall.

‘Where is the *Intelligencer*?’ he demanded.

Kate handed the newspaper to him without a word. She knew that her father objected to anyone reading it before he came home and saw it first, so she had carefully put the pages together again after looking at it earlier. She watched his face, and wondered what interested him so much. He had news of Stock Market dealings fresh from the City, and the latest legal advice from his lawyers in Lincoln’s Inn, so he had no need of the stale news of these bits of business. Even the war news was widespread now, in various pamphlets and by word of mouth, and the doings of the Court had never interested him.

Later, Alice would devour every bit of gossip about the King, his brother the Duke of York and the various wives and mistresses on whom they lavished extravagant pleasures and elaborate entertainments, sighing that one day she might be allowed to see such wonders and even to take part if her father would only let his daughters mingle with the right people.

Edward sank into a deep cushion on a wide wooden seat by the window. His shirt was sticking to him and his hose were hot but he felt none of this as he searched the page for the Bills of Mortality that had to be published each month for the general public to see. He read and threw down the paper with a mixture of disbelief and amazement.

‘Lies,’ he muttered. ‘They are too intent on pleasing the Court and so print less than the truth.’

‘Surely if it is in the *Intelligencer*, it is the truth, Edward.’