



Below Stairs: The Classic Kitchen Maid's Memoir That Inspired "Upstairs, Downstairs" and "Downton Abbey"

Margaret Powell

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Brilliantly evoking the long-vanished world of masters and servants portrayed in *Downton Abbey* and *Upstairs, Downstairs*, Margaret Powell's classic memoir of her time in service, *Below Stairs*, is the remarkable true story of an indomitable woman who, though she served in the great houses of England, never stopped aiming high. Powell first arrived at the servants' entrance of one of those great houses in the 1920s. As a kitchen maid – the lowest of the low – she entered an entirely new world; one of stoves to be blacked, vegetables to be scrubbed, mistresses to be appeased, and bootlaces to be ironed. Work started at 5.30am and went on until after dark. It was a far cry from her childhood on the beaches of Hove, where money and food were scarce, but warmth and laughter never were. Yet from the gentleman with a penchant for stroking the housemaids' curlers, to raucous tea-dances with errand boys, to the heartbreaking story of Agnes the pregnant under-parlormaid, fired for being seduced by her mistress's nephew, Margaret's tales of her time in service are told with wit, warmth, and a sharp eye for the prejudices of her situation. Margaret Powell's true story of a life spent in service is a fascinating "downstairs" portrait of the glittering, long-gone worlds behind the closed doors of Downton Abbey and 165 Eaton Place.

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