



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

By 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' curls, 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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### Editorial Review

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The popularity of Sunday school among the working classes had less to do with religion than parents' much-needed private time, according to Margaret Powell. Such revelations are rampant in *Below Stairs*, a fascinating and feisty memoir of Powell's life as a kitchen maid and cook in 1920s England. Originally published in the UK in 1968, it's again a best-seller there after the debut of the Emmy Award-winning series, *Downton Abbey*, which, along with *Upstairs Downstairs*, took inspiration from the book. Powell writes conversationally, offering cutting and humorous insights. She piles on the details of a domestic servant's day—up at 5:30, work enough for six people, and don't forget to iron the bootlaces—but stops before she falls into self-pity. Running through it all is the divide between the servants and Them, manifesting itself in everything from the sad parade of practical Christmas gifts to the employer's order that nothing be served from a servant's bare hands. Powell reminds readers that these things shouldn't be forgotten, and she is an honest, saucy, and skilled storyteller. --Bridget Thoreson

### Review

"Anyone who enjoyed *Downton Abbey* or *Upstairs Downstairs* will relish this feisty memoir." ?*Dame Eileen Atkins, co-creator of Upstairs, Downstairs*

"Margaret Powell was the first person outside my family to introduce me to that world, so near and yet seemingly so far away, where servants and their employers would live their vividly different lives under one roof. Her memories, funny and poignant, angry and charming, haunted me until, many years later, I made my own attempts to capture those people for the camera. I certainly owe her a great debt." ?*Julian Fellowes, creator of Downton Abbey*

### About the Author

MARGARET POWELL was born in 1907 in Hove, and left school at the age of 13 to start working. At 14, she got a job in a hotel laundry room, and a year later went into service as a kitchen maid, eventually progressing to the position of cook, before marrying a milkman called Albert. In 1968 the first volume of her memoirs, *Below Stairs*, was published to instant success and turned her into a celebrity. She died in 1984.

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**Jose Enriquez:**

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