



The Maid's Tale: A Revealing Memoir of Life Below Stairs (Lives of Servants)

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Born in 1910, Rose Plummer grew up in an East End slum; she knew at first hand a soot-blackened world, lit by candles and oil lamps, where you slept in your clothes - if you hadn't already been sewn into them for the winter - and fought an unending battle with hunger and bed bugs.

At its best, life was lived on the bustling, noisy streets where fish sellers jostled with hurdy-gurdy men, organ grinders and street fighters, where children dodged between the wheels of horse-drawn carts and where money could still be made by mudlarks and the rag and bone man.

At the age of fifteen, Rose left the noise and squalor of Hoxton and started work as a live-in maid at a house in the West End. Despite the poverty of her childhood, nothing could have prepared her for the long hours, the backbreaking work and the harshness of this new world; a world in which servants were treated as if they were less than human.

It was a world in which Rose found herself working from six in the morning till nine at night in a house where the only unheated bedroom was the one she slept in. Here and in later, grander, houses Rose had to endure the strict hierarchy of the servants' world where the maid was expected to put up with sex pests, deranged employers, verbal and even physical abuse. But however difficult life became, Rose found something to laugh about, and her remarkable spirit and gift for friendship shines through in her memories of a now-vanished world.

This is upstairs downstairs as it really was.

Part of the *Lives of Servants* series. Other titles in the series are: *The Cook's Tale*, *They Also Serve* and *Cocoa at Midnight*.

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