



The Last Duchess

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Reviewer:

[Matthew Martin](#) [3]

~~Not a choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

4

Meet Pattern ? no first name, the orphanage where she grew up neglected to provide one. Thirteen years-old she is a graduate of Mrs Minchin?s Academy of Domestic Servitude and destined to go far: no-one darns like Pattern. Even so, there is great surprise when she is appointed lady?s maid to the Grand Duchess of Elffinberg, also thirteen.

Pattern?s first impressions of her new home are not good: the castle is untidy, the servants badly trained, and the Duchess herself haughty and spoiled. Then as the story unfolds, Pattern discovers there?s something really rotten in the state of Elffinberg, and that the mysterious warning given to her by the Grand Duchess?s aunt: ?Trust no-one?, is well worth heeding. When she realises her mistress is just as alone and isolated as she is, the two girls develop a real friendship. Can Pattern save the Duchess from her enemies, human, and not human, and the terrible danger that threatens her?

This story of upstairs downstairs mystery in a well-realised fairy-tale-ish world has lots goings for it. Pattern is a great heroine, quiet, overlooked by most people, but sharp as the pins she wields so neatly. There?s a great sense of the castle too, the two girls scurrying round its secret passages by night, and of the court intrigues and plotting. The story is finished in a deadly contest, that while it cleverly utilises both real magic and cleaning fluids somehow falls a bit flat, but the true satisfaction for its readers anyway is much closer to that provided by a well-folded linen drawer than a bloody fight with a dragon.

Pattern it seems will be back in more adventures ? the final scene indicates she?ll be swapping silver service for more secret service ? and that is very good news indeed.

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