

The Perfect Lady talks Lord Grantham

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Our very own Perfect Lady, Leah Morrigan, talks about one of great Fictional Gentlemen, Lord Grantham.

On the extremely popular television series, *Downton Abbey*, Robert Crawley is Lord Grantham, Earl of Grantham, steward of Downton Abbey in northern England. The wealthy, dignified aristocrat is the son of the Dowager Countess of Grantham and married to Cora (Lady Grantham) with whom he has three daughters.

Robert strikes me as a complex character who straddles the old world and the new. He must adapt to the quickly-changing social, political, and economic realities of the Edwardian age or perish along with the old ways. His Lordship struggles with change and the dismantling of the old patriarchal order, unsure of the future, and afraid to let go of the familiar past.

Through and through, his Lordship is a gentleman in his manners, his dress, and his kind and respectful regard for others. He is a dedicated father and husband, and immensely loyal to Downton. However, in Season Two, we find his Lordship kissing a house maid, but it is through his dalliance that I believe his true gentleman is portrayed.

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A recent piece of advice from the Perfect Gentleman says not to forget the *man* in gentleman.



At Downton, Robert is surrounded by very distinct women who play lead roles in his life. His larger-than-life mother, the Dowager Countess maintains the ability to scold Robert into submission; though he married his wife for her fortune, he fell deeply in love with her and grew into an attentive husband, and through his three daughters, he learns that love is about acceptance. He cherishes each of these women who feed and nourish his heart and soul.

When Season Two begins, it is 1916, and Europe is engulfed in war. Everything has been transformed at Downton--service staff are fighting overseas, the Abbey has been converted into a convalescent home for injured soldiers, and many in the house have stepped up for the war effort. Society and order are forever changed.

Throughout the season, Robert is thrown deeper into emotional turmoil that challenges his sense of identity and his sense of purpose. He is not only concerned with the war but with his non-active role within it. Deemed too old to serve and given the important but disappointing stay-at-home ceremonial position of Lord Lieutenant, he feels undervalued, without purpose, and becomes increasingly short-tempered.

“Both of my footmen have gone off to war while I cut ribbons and make speeches,” he says with scorn.

As the season progresses, the war ends but Downton is profoundly changed and will never return to its former days of glory. At the Abbey, Robert and Cora bicker over their eldest daughter’s marriage; she neglects him. He experiences much difficulty with his youngest and strong-willed daughter, Sybil, who throws the house into an upheaval when she announces her intention to marry the chauffeur and betray her title.

The man in the gentleman is threatened: he is losing control of the place and the people that he holds dearest, his self-confidence is damaged, and he’s lonely from the dissention. Then he meets Jane, the new housemaid.

Jane is a young war widow with a happy smile who acts as a sort of emotional confidante to Robert who has too much time to think about the futility of war as he watched from the sidelines. He helps Jane’s little boy into a good school and they get to know each other a little.

After an intimate conversation in the crockery cupboard one afternoon, Robert plants an unexpected smooch on Jane’s lips.



“Please try to forgive me,” the ever-polite Robert says as he hurries away.

One evening soon after, several people at the Abbey have taken ill with the Spanish flu, including Cora. Robert, wrestling with the maelstrom of emotion and loneliness, invites Jane into his room. They share a passionate kiss in his bed chamber. Had they not been interrupted by his valet who knocks on the door, who one knows how far it would have gone – or would it?

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Don’t forget the man in *human* either. I appreciate the concept of marriage, but I take a flesh-and-blood approach to infidelity. Vows and promises, yes! but sometimes, under the right circumstances with the right chemistry, kisses happen. Robert the human, is under a terrific amount of stress. Given his circumstances, I can’t blame him for turning to Jane for conversation, intimacy, and human contact.

What is important to remember here is that Robert didn’t propose to Jane, he didn’t have sex with her, he merely kissed her. In his room, he says he wants her with every fiber of his being, but tears himself away as he acknowledges the impossible situation. Robert expresses the man in his gentleman but recognizes his folly.

When Jane resigns and leaves Downton, Robert gives her a business contact for work in another town so her son has a chance at a good future. With this noble gesture and a sad farewell kiss, Robert reveals his gentlemanly worth.

Robert Crawley is a good man. He possesses self-restraint, responsibility, and a strong devotion to the people he would hurt in his transgression with the house maid. Despite his foibles, Robert does the right thing. His loyalty to Downton is unwavering; from his family to the servants and all that are associated

with his house, he never fails to protect and provide. Even when Downton itself is threatened by financial ruin in Season Three, Robert waves away the idea of his estate being broken up and sold piecemeal. "I couldn't do that. I have a duty beyond saving my own skin. The estate must be a major employer and support the house, otherwise there is no point to it," he says.

The man in his human and in his gentleman have both shared the spotlight, but when the footlights of his responsibilities come up, Robert acknowledges his foibles and does the right thing. As a true gent, Lord Grantham makes sacrifices that will ultimately see his house--and all who are in it--through to Downton's future and its next act.