

***GRANT
ALLEN***



BLOOD ROYAL

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Blood Royal

A Novel

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CHAPTER I. PERADVENTURE.

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Chiddingwick High Street is one of the quaintest and most picturesque bits of old town architecture to be found in England. Narrow at either end, it broadens suddenly near the middle, by a sweeping curve outward, just opposite the White Horse, where the weekly cattle-market is held, and where the timbered gable-ends cluster thickest round the ancient stone cross, now reduced as usual to a mere stump or relic. In addition to its High Street, Chiddingwick also possesses a Mayor, a Corporation, a town pump, an Early English church, a Baptist chapel, and abundant opportunities for alcoholic refreshment. The White Horse itself may boast, indeed, of being one of the most famous old coaching inns still remaining in our midst, in spite of railways. And by its big courtyard door, one bright morning' in early spring, Mr. Edmund Plantagenet, ever bland and self-satisfied, stood sunning his portly person, and surveying the world of the little town as it unrolled itself in changeful panorama before him.

'Who's that driving the Hector's pony, Tom?' Mr. Plantagenet asked of the hostler in a lordly voice, as a pretty girl went past in an unpretentious trap. 'She's a stranger in Chiddingwick.' For Mr. Plantagenet, as one of the oldest inhabitants, prided himself upon knowing, by sight at least, every person in the parish, from Lady Agatha herself to the workhouse children.

Tom removed the straw he was sucking from his mouth for a moment, as he answered, with the contempt of the horsy man for the inferior gentry: 'Oh, *she!* she ain't nobody, sir. That lot's the new governess.'

Mr. Plantagenet regarded the lady in the carriage with the passing interest which a gentleman of his distinction might naturally bestow upon so unimportant a personage. He was a plethoric man, of pompous aspect, and he plumed himself on being a connoisseur in female beauty.

'Not a bad-looking little girl, though, Tom,' he responded condescendingly, closing one eye and scanning her as one might scan a two-year-old filly. 'She holds herself well. I like to see a woman who can sit up straight in her place when she's driving.'

Mr. Plantagenet's opinion on all questions of deportment was much respected at Chiddingwick; so Tom made no reply save to chew a little further the meditative straw; while Mr. Plantagenet, having by this time sufficiently surveyed the street for all practical purposes, retired into the bar-parlour of the friendly White Horse for his regulation morning brandy-and-soda.

But the new governess, all unconscious of the comments she excited, drove placidly on to the principal bookseller and stationer's.

There were not many booksellers' shops in Chiddingwick; people in Surrey import their literature, if any, direct from London. But the one at whose door the pretty governess stopped was the best in the town, and would at least do well enough for the job she wanted. It bore, in fact, the proud legend, 'Wells's Select Library then by an obvious

afterthought, in smaller letters, 'In connection with Mudie's.' An obsequious small boy rushed up, as she descended, to hold the Rector's horse, almost as in the days before compulsory education, when small hoys lurked unseen, on the look-out for stray ha'pence, at every street corner. Mary accepted his proffered aid with a sunny smile, and went into the shop carrying a paper parcel.

There was nobody in the place, however, to take her order; and Mary, who was a timid girl, not too sure of her position, stood for a moment irresolute, uncertain how to call the attention of the inmates. Just as she was on the point of giving it up as useless, and retiring discomfited, the door that led into the room behind the shop opened suddenly, and a young man entered. He seemed about nineteen, and he was tall and handsome, with deep-blue eyes, and long straggling locks of delicate yellow hair, that fell picturesquely though not affectedly about his ears and shoulders. He somehow reminded Mary of a painted window. She didn't know why, but instinctively, as he entered, she felt as if there were something medieval and romantic about the good-looking shopman. His face was almost statuesquely beautiful—a fair, frank, open face, like a bonny young sailor's, and the loose curls above were thrown lightly off the tall white forehead in a singularly graceful yet unstudied fashion. He was really quite Florentine. The head altogether was the head of a gentleman, and something more than that: it had the bold and clear-cut, fearless look about it that one seldom finds among our English population, except as the badge of rank and race in the very highest classes. Mary felt half ashamed of herself, indeed,

for noting all these things immediately and instinctively about a mere ordinary shopman; for, after all, a shopman he was, and nothing more: though his head and face were the head and face of a gentleman of distinction, his dress was simply the every-day dress of his class and occupation. He was a son of the people. And as Mary was herself a daughter of the clergy, the eldest girl of a country rector, compelled by the many mouths and the narrow endowment at home to take a place as governess with a more favoured family at Chiddingwick Rectory, she knew she could have no possible right of any sort to take any personal interest in a bookseller's lad, however handsome and yellow-haired and distinguished-looking.

'I beg your pardon for not having come sooner,' the tall young man began in a very cultivated tone, which took Mary aback even more than did his singular and noteworthy appearance; 'but the fact is, you opened the door so very softly the bell didn't ring; and I didn't notice there was anybody in the shop, as I was busy cutting, till I happened to look up accidentally from my ream, and then I saw you. I hope I haven't kept you unnecessarily waiting?'

He spoke like a gentleman; and Mary observed, almost without remarking it, that he didn't call her 'miss,' though she was hardly even aware of the unusual omission, his manner and address were so perfectly those of a courteous and wellbred equal. If she had fancied the customary title was left out on purpose, as a special tribute of disrespect to her position as governess, her sensitive little soul would have been deeply hurt by the slight, even from an utter stranger; but she felt instinctively the handsome young mail

had no such intention. He didn't mean to be anything but perfectly polite, so she hardly even noticed the curious omission.

'Oh dear no,' she answered, in her timid little voice, unfolding her parcel as she spoke with a kind of shrinking fear that she must be hurting his feelings by treating him as a tradesman. 'I've only just come in; and I—well, I wanted to know whether you could bind this again for me? Or is it quite too old to be worth the trouble of binding?'

The young man took it from her hands, and looked at her as he took it. The book was a 'British Flora,' in two stout octavo volumes, and it had evidently seen wear and tear, for it was tattered and dog-eared. But he received it mechanically, without glancing at it for a moment. His eyes, in fact, were fixed hard on Mary's. A woman knows at once what a man is thinking—especially, of course, when it's herself he's thinking about; and Mary knew that minute the young man with the fine brow and the loose yellow hair was thinking in his own head how exceedingly pretty she was. That makes a girl blush under any circumstances, and all the more so when the man who thinks it is her social inferior. Now, when Mary blushed, she coloured up to her delicate shell-like ears, which made her look prettier and daintier and more charming than ever; and the young man, withdrawing his eyes guiltily and suddenly—for he, too, knew what that blush must mean—was still further confirmed in his first opinion that she was very pretty.

The young lady, however, was ashamed he should even look at her. He was accustomed to that, and yet somehow in this case it particularly hurt him. He didn't know why, but he

wanted her to like him. He look up the book to cover his confusion, and examined it carefully. 'At the time of the French Revolution,' he observed, as if to himself, in a curious, far-away tone, like one who volunteers for no particular reason a piece of general information, 'many of the refugees who came to this country were compelled to take up mechanical work of the commonest description. A Rochefoucauld mended shoes—and Talleyrand was a bookbinder.'

He said it exactly as if it was a casual remark about the volume he was holding, or the comparative merits of cloth and leather, with his eyes intently fixed on the backs of the covers, and his mind to all appearance profoundly absorbed in the alternative contemplation of morocco or russia. Mary thought him the oddest young man she had ever met in her life; she fancied he must be mad, and wondered by what chance of fate or fortune he could ever have wandered into a bookseller's shop at Chiddingwick.

The young man volunteered no more stray remarks about the French Revolution, however, but continued to inspect the backs of the books with more business-like consideration. Then he turned to her quietly: 'We could do this for you very cheap in half-calf,' he said, holding it up. 'It's not at all past mending. I see it's a favourite volume; and a book of reference of the sort you're constantly using in the open air ought to have sound, stout edges. The original binding, which was cloth, is quite unsuitable, of course, for such a purpose. If you'll leave it to me, I'll do my best to make a workman-like job of it.'

There was something in the earnest way the young man spoke that made Mary feel he took a pride in his work, simple and ordinary as it was; and his instant recognition of the needs and object of the particular volume in question, which in point of fact had been her companion in many country rambles over hill or moor, seemed to her singularly different from the perfunctory habit of most common English workmen. To them, a book is just a book to be covered. She conceived in her own mind, therefore, a vague respect at once for the young man's character. But he himself was just then looking down at the volume once more, engaged in examining the inside of the binding. As he turned to the fly-leaf he gave a sudden little start of intense surprise. 'Tudor!' he murmured—'Mary Tudor! How very curious! Did this book, then, once belong to someone named Mary Tudor?'

'It belongs to me, and that's my name,' Mary answered, a little astonished, for he was gazing fixedly at her autograph on the blank page of the first volume. Never before in her experience had any shop people anywhere showed the slightest symptom of surprise at recognition of her royal surname.

The young man made a sudden gesture of curious incredulity. 'I beg your pardon,' he said, jotting down something in pencil in the inside of the book; 'do I understand you to mean your own real name is Mary Tudor?'

'Why, yes, certainly,' Mary answered, much amused at his earnestness. 'That's my own real name—Mary Empson Tudor.'

He looked at it again. 'What a singular coincidence!' he murmured to himself half inaudibly.

'It's not an uncommon name in Wales,' Mary answered, just to cover the awkwardness, for she was surprised the young man should feel any interest at all in so abstract a subject.

'Oh, that's not it,' the yellow-haired lad replied in a hasty little way. 'The coincidence is—that *my* name happens to be Richard Plantagenet.'

As he spoke, he drew himself up, and met her gaze once more with conscious pride in his clear blue eye. For a moment their glances answered each other; then both dropped their lids together. But Richard Plantagenet's cheek had flushed crimson meanwhile, as a very fair man's often will, almost like a girl's, and a strange fluttering had seized upon his heart well-nigh before he knew it. This was not remarkable. Mary Tudor was an extremely pretty girl; and her name seemed fateful; but who was she? Who could she be? Why had she happened to come there? Richard Plantagenet determined in his own heart that moment he would surely search this out, and never rest until he had discovered the secret of their encounter.

'You shall have it on Wednesday,' he said, coming back to the book with a sudden drop from cloudland. 'Where may I send it?' This last in the common tone of business.

'To the Rectory,' Mary answered, 'addressed to Miss Tudor.' And then Richard knew at once she must be the new governess. His eye wandered to the door. He hadn't noticed till that minute the Rectory pony; but once he saw it, he understood all; for Chiddingwick was one of those *very* small

places where everyone knows everyone else's business. And Fraulein had gone back just three weeks ago to Hanover.

There was a moment's pause: then Mary said 'Good-morning,' sidling off a little awkwardly; for she thought Richard Plantagenet's manner a trifle embarrassing for a man in his position; and she didn't even feel quite sure he wasn't going to claim relationship with her on the strength of his surname. Now, a shopman may be handsome and gentlemanly, and a descendant of kings, but he mustn't aspire to acquaintance on such grounds as these with the family of a clergyman of the Church of England.

'Good-morning,' Richard replied with a courtly bow, like a gentleman of the old school, which indeed he was. 'Your books shall be covered as well as we can do them.'

Mary returned to the pony, and Richard to his ream, which he was cutting into sermon-paper. But Mary Tudor's pretty face seemed to haunt him at his work; and he thought to himself more than once, between the clips of the knife, that if ever he married at all, that was just the sort of girl a descendant of the Plantagenets would like to marry. Yet the last time one of his house had espoused a Tudor, he said to himself very gravely, the relative *roles* of man and woman were reversed; for the Tudor was Henry of Richmond, 'called Henry VII., of our younger branch and the Plantagenet was Elizabeth of York, his consort. And that was how 'the estates' went out of the family.

But 'the estates' were England, Wales, and Ireland, he often complained in the bosom of the family.

CHAPTER II. THE HEAD OF THE HOUSE

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Mr. Edmund Plantagenet residence in Chiddingwick High Street was less amply commodious, he often complained in the bosom of the family, than his ancestral home at Windsor Castle, erected by his august and famous predecessor, King Edward III. of illustrious memory. Windsor Castle is a house fit for a gentleman to live in. But as Mr. Plantagenet himself had never inhabited the home of his forefathers—owing to family differences which left it for the time being in the occupation of a Lady 'belonging to the younger branch of the house'—he felt the loss of his hereditary domains less keenly than might perhaps have been expected from so sensitive a person. Still, the cottage at Chiddingwick, judged even by the less exalted standard of Mr. Planta-genet's own early recollections, was by no means unduly luxuriant. For Edmund Plantagenet had been well brought up, and received in his day the education of a gentleman. Even now, in his dishonoured and neglected old age, abundant traces of the Charterhouse still remained to the bitter end in his voice and manner. But little else was left. The White Horse had stolen away whatever other relics of gentility Mr. Plantagenet possessed, and had reduced him in his latter days to the miserable ruin of what was once a man, and even a man of letters.

It was a sad history, and, alas! a very common one. Thirty years before, when Edmund Plan tagenet, not yet a believer in his own real or pretended royal descent, went up to London from Yorkshire to seek his fortune in literature, he

was one of the handsomest and most popular young men in his own society. His name alone succeeded in attracting attention; we are not all of us Plantagenets. The admirable Lady Postlethwaite, arbiter in her day of literary reputation, gave the man with the royal surname the run of her well-known *salon*; editors accepted readily enough his inflated prose and his affected poetry; and all the world went well with him for a time—while he remained a bachelor. But one fine day Edmund Plantagenet took it into his head, like many better men, to fall in love—we have done it ourselves, and we know how catching it is—and not only to fall in love, but also, which is worse, to give effect to his feelings by actually getting married. In after-life Mr. Plantagenet regarded that unfortunate step as the one fatal error in an otherwise blameless career. He felt that with a name and prospects like his he ought at least to have married rank, title, or money. Instead of which he just threw himself away: he married only beauty, common-sense, and goodness. The first of these fades, the second palls, and the third Mr. Plantagenet was never constructed to appreciate. But rank and money appeal to all, and persist unchanged after such skin-deep attractions as intellect or good looks have ceased to interest.

From the day of his marriage, then, Edmund Plantagenet's downward career began. As a married man, he became at once of less importance in Lady Postlethwaite's society—he was so useful for dances. Editors found out by degrees that he had only affectation and audacity in place of genius; work fell short as children increased; and evil days began to close in upon the growing

family. But what was worst of all, as money grew scarcer, a larger and larger proportion of it went each day to swell the receipts, at first of his club, and afterwards, when clubs became things of the past, of the nearest public-house. To make a long story short, before many years were over, Edmund Plantagenet, the young, the handsome, the promising, had degenerated from a dashing and well-bred fellow into a miserable sot of the sorriest description.

But just in proportion as his real position grew worse and worse did Mr. Plantagenet buoy himself up in secret with magnificent ideas about his origin and ancestry. Even in his best days, indeed, he would never consent to write under his own real name; he wouldn't draggle the honour of the Plantagenets in the dirt of the street, he said with fine contempt; so he adopted for literary purposes the high-sounding pseudonym of Barry Neville. But after he began to decline, and to give way to drink, his pretensions to royal blood became well-nigh ridiculous. Not, indeed, that anyone ever heard him boast noisily of his origin; Edmund Plantagenet was too clever a man of the world to adopt such futile and obvious tactics; he knew a plan worth two of that; he posed as a genuine descendant of the old Kings of England, more by tacit assumption than by open assertion. Silence played his game far better than speech. When people tried to question him on the delicate point of his pedigree, he evaded them neatly, but with a mysterious air which seemed to say every bit as plain as words could say it: 'I choose to waive my legitimate claim, and I won't allow any man to bully me into asserting it.' As he often implied to

his familiar friends, he was too much a gentleman to dispute the possession of the throne with a lady.

But Mr. Plantagenet's present ostensible means of gaining an honest livelihood was by no means a regal one. He kept, as he was wont to phrase it gently himself, a temple of Terpsichore. In other words, he taught the local dancing-class. In his best days in London, when fortune still smiled upon him, he had been famed as the most graceful waltzer in Lady Postlethwaite's set; and now that the jade had deserted him, at his lowest depth, he had finally settled down as the Chiddingwick dancing-master. So as he was, all Chiddingwick supported him loyally, for his name's sake; even Lady Agatha's children attended his lessons. It was a poor sort of trade, indeed, for the last of the Plantagenets; but he consoled himself under the disgrace with the cheerful reflection that he served, after all, as it were, as his own Lord Chamberlain.

On this particular night, however, of all the year, Mr. Plantagenet felt more profoundly out of humour with the world in general and his own ancestral realm of England in particular, than was at all usual with him. The fact was, his potential subjects had been treating him with marked want of consideration for his real position. Kings in exile are exposed to intolerable affronts. The landlord of the White Horse had hinted at the desirability of arrears of pay on the score of past brandies and sodas innumerable. The landlord was friendly, and proud of his guest, who 'kept the house together'; but at times he broke out in little fits of petulance. Now, Mr. Plantagenet, as it happened, had not the wherewithal to settle this little account off-hand, and he

took it ill of Barnes, who, as he justly remarked, 'had had so much out of him,' that he should endeavour to hurry a gentleman of birth in the matter of payment. He sat by his own fireside, therefore, in no very amiable humour, and watched the mother bustling about the room with her domestic preparations for the family supper.

'Clarence,' Mr. Plantagenet said, after a moment of silence, to one of the younger boys, 'have you prepared your Thucydides? It's getting very late. You seem to me to be loafing about doing nothing.'

'Oh, I know it pretty well,' Clarence answered with a nonchalant air, still whittling at a bit of stick he was engaged in transforming into a homemade whistle. 'I looked it over in class. It's not very hard. Thucydides is rot—most awful rot! It won't take five minutes.'

Mr. Plantagenet, with plump fingers, rolled himself another cigarette. He had come down in the world, and left cigars far behind, a fragrant memory of the distant past; but as a gentleman he could never descend to the level of a common clay pipe.

'Very well,' he said blandly, leaning back in his chair and beaming upon Clarence: a peculiar blandness of tone and manner formed Mr. Plantagenet's keynote. 'That may do for *me*, perhaps; but it won't do for Richard.'

After which frank admission of his own utter abdication of parental prerogatives in favour of his own son, he proceeded very deliberately to light his cigarette and stare with placid eyes at the dilatory Clarence.

There was a minute's pause; then Mr. Plantagenet began again.