

# ONE OF THE GANG || By LILLIAS CAMPBELL DAVIDSON

Author of "Second-Lieutenant Celia," "The Theft of a Heart,"

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THE village always spoke of him as the apple of his family's eye. That family was not a large one, only the old Squire, Mr. Hamilton, and his gentle, delicate wife. But from the moment when the church bells rung frantically to tell the neighborhood that there was a son and heir, Reginald had been King of the Manor, and there was no one to dispute his reign. Never had there been such a baby; never such a Winchester boy. Oxford apparently only existed to number him as one of her most distinguished offspring—not, it must be admitted, as a world-renowned scholar, but as a first-class stroke. The old people at the Manor hung breathless on his accounts of boat-races where his name figured, bought every picture paper that held his distorted portrait, lived through term times on the flattering hope of his return to them. There was nothing so good that it was good enough for him in their estimation. Nothing they would have denied him, even to the sacrifice of their own heart's blood. It is not exactly the school to turn out heroes. Reginald was perhaps a little inclined to suppose that the world was created with a special view to his satisfaction, and that he honored it by living within its limits.

People said it would be hard on the old Squire and his wife when Mr. Reginald married. It would be a tremendous wrench to have to give him up to any woman. But it was lucky they knew and liked his future wife. For nobody had any doubt who she was to be, and it pleased the entire neighborhood. Miss Mary, down at the Rectory. She was to be the Lady of the Manor when the old people went. From the days when Reginald was in Eton jackets, and she was in short skirts and flaxen pigtail tied with ribbons, there had been a boy and girl sweetheating. Skating on the Rectory pond in the winter, tennis playing on the Manor lawn in the summer, it was always Mary here, Mary there, the moment he came home from school or college. There had not been any words said, but those are sometimes not needed. Mary had certainly no thought of any other man in the world but Reginald Hamilton, even when she had come out at the Hunt Ball, and was a full-blown young lady.

He had whispered soft things in her ear, perhaps, or he had pressed her hand and held it a little longer than was actually needed. He had let her see, at all events, that she was the one woman in the world he wanted; and as for her, she would have waited for him half her life if he had only asked it.

That he was going to ask something nobody ever doubted. The old people were as pleased as possible. Mary Vyvian had been like a daughter to them all her life, and nothing could have suited them better than to have their son marry her. A girl that had grown up in the very shadow of the Manor, as it were, who had turned to Mrs. Hamilton for all the things she would have turned to her own mother for, if she had had one. One of those pretty, sweet-mannered, delightful girls that make you want to have them with you always. Good at sports and full of fun, but nothing of the boy about her. It was an arrangement that pleased everybody; and the only thing that did not give satisfaction was that the engagement was not a settled one.

For Hamilton had been abroad, and the Manor had had to do without him. Now he was coming home, and if the old people looked out for him with a flutter of satisfaction, it is probable Mary Vyvian fluttered even more in her secret heart. There was absolutely nothing to keep him from speaking. There were to be all sorts of welcomes home to him at the Manor. Invitations were out for a ball, and Mary was to stay up at the Manor for it, and for the theatricals that were to follow.

Nobody knows, nobody should ask what hopes and expectations went to the ordering of her ball frock, the choosing of the flowers he liked best, the thousand pretty little suggestions of the girl in love.

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HAMILTON had been away for three months. The moment he walked into the hall of the Manor from the station there was to be seen a curious kind of change in him. He looked oddly excited and restless, and when Mary came forward from the fire in the drawing room to meet him he was curiously conscious and constrained. It was not long before they all knew the reason.

He was engaged to be married—to a girl he had met at Nice. He told the old people his news that night, after Mary had gone to bed and left them. He dropped a half-apologetic remark to his mother, when she could not prevent her exclamations. He had never thought

he should want to marry any one but Mary, certainly. She was a dear girl, like a sister to him; but that was another kind of thing altogether. He had found the very queen of all women, the most lovely and sweet and delightful and perfect woman in existence. They must love her for his sake; but he had not any doubts about it. They could not help it, once they saw her. There was nobody like her. He was thankful he had never said anything to Mary, now that he knew what being in love was like. He was swept clean off his feet, and dear little Mary would never know. That was a comfort. His mother only looked at him without a word when he said that. She was a woman.

Well, it was a tremendous blow, of course, but they worshiped Reginald, and what he wanted he must have, if he had set his affections on the moon, and if he had cut them to the soul. The girl he was engaged to was a Miss Chavenage. She did not seem to have any one belonging to her, or to be of any family they knew anything about. That was rather a trouble. She lived with a young married friend, and even her name they had never heard. Also, there was the soreness over Mary, and the grief that she was not to be their daughter. But Reginald could do no wrong. That had always been their creed, and even now it supported them. Any woman he wanted they must make up their minds to. Their chief dread was for Mary's feelings; but Mary was as brave as the girls of her sort are.

When Mrs. Hamilton, tearful and white, crept to her room to tell her, she took it as a soldier takes his death shot, and she never staggered. She was just as white as her dressing gown for a moment, and turned away sharply to the dressing table. Then she turned round again and smiled, and kissed her mother, and said she hoped with all her heart he would be happy. She stayed on at the Manor for the ball; she would not let a living creature say she had been jilted or that she felt it.

Miss Chavenage came down for the ball too. Most of the village was lurking at its doors or windows to catch a glimpse of the future Mrs. Reginald. She was a very smart young person indeed, with a way of dressing new to the neighborhood—sables and long chains, and great feathers in her hat, high heels and pointed toes, and swinging, rustling skirts, and a walk that did not excite the country's admiration. They were not

used to paint on the face, however beautifully applied, nor to belladonna under the eyes, nor to golden hair that owed its glory to art.

It seemed to the simple-minded cottagers that she had a bad face under her smile and glittering eyes, and that she looked hard and crafty and selfish. But that may have been their partisanship of Mary. The village shook its head, and said, "Well, there! I shouldn't have believed it of Mr. Reginald."

Down at the postoffice, where he used to come to beg the gummed paper off the stamps when he was not as high as the counter, there was a dispirited comparison of opinions. Not the kind of lady they thought Mr. Reginald would have chosen.

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MARY was sitting with Mrs. Hamilton in the little blue boudoir when Miss Chavenage was shown in. Mr. Reginald had been to the station to meet her. He brought her in now, holding her by the hand, and went straight up to his mother. Mary went faintly white when she looked at her. Reginald, on the way up, had explained that Miss Vivian from the rectory was staying there.

"A tremendous pal of my people. Just like a sister to me since I was in long clothes. The jolliest girl in the world."

And it would appear that that had not prepossessed Miss Chavenage in her favor. She began, the minute after they had shaken hands, to be nasty to her. She was as sweet as possible, but under all her sweetness was a hidden sneer only a woman could have detected. She did a hundred things to try and make Mary ridiculous. But that was quite impossible. Mary was a gentlewoman, and clever enough to be Miss Chavenage's match. And she was still in love with the man who had preferred Miss Chavenage to her.

The old people said nothing. They were anxiously kind and agreeable to Reginald's fiancée. All that startled them in her they conscientiously put down to the modern habits and fashions to which they were not accustomed. Times altered, and they were old-fashioned. Reginald could do no wrong, even though he had defrauded them of the daughter they desired, and had presented them with this remarkable substitute.

The festivities at the Manor went on, just as they had been planned. The ball was a big one, and half the county was at it. It was very gay and very brilliant. Up in the long gallery at the end of the ballroom the tenants and servants were spectators. They thought Miss Chavenage dazzled their eyes with her beauty and her frock. She was in black and scarlet, and her complexion and hair was dazzling, however much they had been assisted. She danced again and again with Reginald, and he had neither eyes nor ears for any one but herself.

Late in the evening he went up to Mary. He looked a trifle sheepish. "We haven't had a dance together yet, Mary," he said. "I'm free for this one. Can I have it?"

And she just looked at him with a faint smile that had no mirth in it. "I'm afraid I have none left these last two hours," she said. "It really doesn't much matter, does it?"

He bit his mustache as he turned away. He felt as if he had not shone exactly.

But then Miss Chavenage smiled at him across the room, and beckoned with her fan, and in a moment he forgot everything. It was certainly a case of white magic, and he was in a spell of enchantment.

That black and scarlet frock was so conspicuous that the village postmistress in the gallery upstairs—she who had been used to confer the sticky stamp paper on Reginald in his early days—could not keep her eyes off it. She watched it round and round the floor, as no one who was down below in the ballroom with it could have done. It possessed a weird fascination for her. It seemed to the postmistress that it flitted perpetually to and fro, as if it knew no rest, even when Miss Chavenage was not dancing. Now it was close to one lady, just behind her, then again across the wide room, with its hundred electric candles. Always was Miss Chavenage sending Reginald on exacting little errands from her. Now it was to fetch her fan, now to get her an ice, now to carry a message to a partner.

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THE postmistress looked on her as the most fidgety young lady she had ever set eyes on. Mary, like a snowdrop in her white frock, and the pearls that had been her mother's, was as white as any snowdrop in the face, but kept smiling with undaunted



MISS CHARLESWORTH IN WELSH COSTUME.

## THE STARTLING CAREER OF VIOLET CHARLESWORTH

VIOLET GORDON CHARLESWORTH, twenty-five years of age, disappeared from her home in Wales about the first of January. Her sister said that while they were automobiling the machine skidded, throwing Violet over a steep cliff. The sister and the chauffeur escaped without injury. The story was doubted by interested people, and an investigation showed no traces of a body. Miss Charlesworth was found at Oban, Scotland.

Miss Charlesworth owed a great deal of money to various London business and society men. To one firm she was indebted for nearly \$50,000, and a well-known hotel proprietor whom she owed for board and lodging was persuaded to advance her \$2,000 on some jewelry. A few days before she disappeared the

young woman bought a \$5,000 automobile, paying a small sum on account. London jewelers succumbed to her winning ways to the extent of \$5,000 also.

Miss Charlesworth appears to have been the Cassie Chadwick of Great Britain. She was quiet and demure, always well dressed, and when engaged on a business transaction, gave her associates the impression that she was eminently unsophisticated. But letters to her brokers, which were turned over to the police, indicate a knowledge of speculative methods that would do credit to any man of long experience. From her young girlhood Miss Charlesworth developed expensive tastes. There is no hint that she was careless in her relations with the business men she met.