



*"Am I terrible?" asked Sara.
"There's a moon . . . and I
feel like being kissed."*

The Scarlet Cloak

By Dorothy Dow

When a pretty flapper has a scarlet week-end in her
Past, will it help or hinder her plans for a
Successful marriage?

LOVE can be almost anything in the world, as you find out when you are too old to be interested in it any longer. A banner, flaunting to the world with purple splendor; a secret hidden in the depths of a timid heart, like a small blue pool in the dusk of a quiet

forest. It may be a career, or it may be damnation. It may be the path to Heaven, or the ruby tinted road that is said to lead to Hell. It may be a dream that can never come true. Or it may be a scarlet cloak, worn for an evening, and then cast aside....

That was what it had been to Sara Foster—a particularly becoming cloak, that she wrapped around her slim shoulders, with that instinct for fold and drapery which some girls are born with; and which she assumed as it pleased her, and which, though it always looked the same, was not always the same ... because when one scarlet cloak became a little passe, Sara casually tossed it aside for another. One love, asserted Sara, was as dowdy as one pair of slippers. You had to have them to match your moods or your frocks. She was nineteen, and she had brown hair that grew close to her small boy's head in innumerable exasperating and adorable curls. She looked like a little Madonna gone somewhat astray.

She said to Henry Adams, who had met her for the first time two days before, with the frankness which characterizes the late teens and early twenties nowadays:

"This is the devil of a house party. Blah. Utterly and totally blah." She wriggled her creamy shoulders impatiently in the straps of her rather ingenue-ish blue frock. "I'd like to put a bomb under the whole thing!" she said.

Across the long room, beyond innumerable sofas and chairs, a couple sat. She had long, drooping lashes, red hair and a profile that invited a sonnet. She appeared thirty, and unashamed of it, quite able to hold her own with twenty-three. He appeared—and was—twenty-one; and his face was a youthful faun's, faintly sunburned, nicely ingenuous. You could see even across the room, that he thought she was the most wonderful woman in the world. Sara looked at them, and as she stared her face seemed to harden. Henry Adams following her stare, felt a faint and thwarted impulse to grin. It was all so obvious.

YOUNG Jimmy had been, at the beginning of the house party, so evidently Sara's latest, that no one had ever thought of them except as a pair. Young Jimmy had haunted Sara, danced with her, disappeared out into the grounds with her for hours on end. Looked at her, as he was now looking at Cecile Jennings. Cecile, who had appeared on the scene with the effect of lightning, blinding most of the younger men. Dazzling Jimmy completely.

It was a good joke, most of the house party agreed. Sara had never had anyone take a man away from her before. Do her good....

"Bunch of petters around here," grumbled Sara, petulantly, to Henry, who puffed a cigarette. "Darn bunch of kiddish petters. If any-thing makes me sick

... those two for instance. Not that I care. But why doesn't she make eyes at her husband. Got a perfectly good one. Cradle robbing. Makes me sick."

"Awfully stunning woman," Hen-ry murmured, laconically. He wondered why Sara was expressing her-self to him. In spite of the fact that he had only known her two days, he knew that it wasn't true to her particular type for Sara to express herself to any one at all. She was the modern, good sport, in-tensely flirtatious and intensely secretive girl that you see more and more nowadays. Girls are so frank, moan puzzled parents—and they prove how little they know or notice. Henry Adams, who belonged to the younger generation himself, though not the youngest (he was nearer thirty than twenty-five) could have told any mother that modern girls are too proud to be frank. He didn't understand, now, why Sara was letting him see that she minded. You would have expected to see Sara take another attitude. The "a man is only a man, and the world is full of them" pose. But instead....

"I like you," Sara was telling him. "You're ... well, you're not like all these other men. You don't get so darn' intimate. Sort of aloof. Why?"

"You tell me," suggested Henry Adams. He smiled at her, with a wrinkling of the skin about his brown eyes.

"I think," said Sara, slowly, some girl's done something rather low to you. Given you the double cross. Sort of hit you below the belt, you know. And so you're off all of them."

"Good guess," laughed Henry. It was, as a matter of fact, too good. Two girls had hurt him. An American girl who had wounded his vanity, and a lovely English girl who had, temporarily, broken his heart. But those were not things for Sara to know. "Only you're all wrong. I'm not off girls. I'm just waiting for a particularly nice one to notice me a little. But you're all too busy. Maybe if you paid a little attention to me for instance...."

Sara's eyes darted from him to the couple across the room. Back to him.

"Half the girls at the house party have been throwing themselves at your head," she stated, with the crudity of youth. "You know it. And you haven't done more than smile in that icy way of yours, which simply freezes them up. And now you're suggesting that we pair about a bit. Why? If you're sorry for me, because Cecile has stolen my man—"

"I'm not sorry for you," interrupted Henry. "I know you could get him back if you wanted to. And this is the idea. We're here at this house party. Everyone is

twos-ing. It's the thing to do. I'm not in love with you, you're not in love with me. But it just occurred to me that it might be jolly good fun for us to pretend that we were—make a game of it—and see how much like the real thing it was. For three days we'll be mad about each other. What do you say?"

"I'm on," said Sara. "It's going to be thrilling. What a wonderful brain you have! But when do you begin?"

"Now," said Henry. He paused for a perceptible instant. "Darling... let's get away from all these people. I want to talk to you all by yourself. I have a million things to say to you.

Sara started to laugh. Stopped. Her face took on the sentimental, pensive look that girls in love are apt to wear.

"All right, dearest," she said.

They gave the house party something to talk about, did Henry and Sara. The girls, among themselves, agreed that Sara was having her usual luck. Jimmy falling for Cecile, and then this heavenly Adams man—of course, he was the richest man in the world, almost, every one knew that, and terribly nice, too, even though he didn't seem to care for girls much—had fallen for her. Sara's astounding luck...

The men, not so garrulous on unimportant subjects, only noted that Adams, the lucky stiff, had carried off Sara. Peach, Sara was best-looking girl on the party. And a hot little playmate. The sort who'd be pretty reckless if she was sure of her man. Some men had all the luck.

Henry Adams himself, considering the matter, didn't think of it in exactly that light. He knew that almost any girl on the house party would have been glad of a large share of attention, but with an unfortunate modesty he attributed that fact to something besides his charms. And he knew that Sara was a darling, but he was quite sure she was only being sweet to him because Jimmy had deserted her. Hadn't she said so, with an adorable candor?

Just talking nonsense with Sara, who was not stupid, was fun. Dancing with her was still more fun. And after dancing, in the evening, they had gone out on the terrace, and Sara had said, in the most charming manner you could imagine:

"Am I terrible? There's a moon, and it's all silver. I feel like being kissed."

There had been a moon, a silver lady of a moon that sailed across the sky as daintily as if she had crossed a drawing room, attended by her courtier stars. And there had been the heavy sweet, sensuous smell of jasmine in the air...

"I don't think you're terrible," Henry Adams had said, just a little huskily. "I think you're highly sensible. Thank God, I'm sensible, too." And had kissed her....

WHEN ten young people, and four older people who are called chaperons, are gathered together for a period of several days, there is very little privacy in any thing that goes on. Somehow, everyone knows everything. Just as they had known that Jimmy had fallen for Cecile, so they knew that Henry had fallen for Sara. That it was really looking serious. That they were always together....

"Lucky thing," thought the other girls, jealously. "She isn't any prettier than I am, either. How does she do it?"

There was an answer to that, which Henry himself heard when he strolled along the edge of the upper terrace, alone, the third night. He was strolling to meet Sara, and he was thinking, as he strolled, that she was one of the most adorable things he had ever seen. Soft, and yet not silly. Fresh and young. And so utterly honest. That, above all was what Henry Adams required of a girl, because he was a sentimentalist. They must be honest. Truthful and brave and fair. Sara, it seemed to him, was all those. "I'm not in love with her," he thought. "Not quite. But I will be if I see her much longer. I *could* be...."

Along the edge of the upper terrace ran hedges that were six feet high. Not box, but lilac bushes, clipped so that they made a thick green wall. Below them, at the foot of the two foot slope there were marble benches. Sitting on them, one could be heard by, but could not hear, any one who walked above beyond the lilacs.

He heard some one. Sara. And another girl—the little yellow haired Lamont girl, who had made eyes at him rather cunningly and outrageously the very first day.

If he hadn't heard his own name mentioned in the very first moment, he wouldn't have listened. You will say that if he had been quite a gentleman, he wouldn't have listened any way. But no one is quite as much of a gentleman as that.

Said Sara, clearly:

"I'm meeting Henry here, and he's due any minute. Better run along This is a tête-à-tête."

"You surprise me," giggled the Lamont girl. "I thought you might like an audience. Maybe I could see how you did it."

"You couldn't guess in a year."

"Tell me—"

"Please tell me, old dear." The Lamont girl, still.

"Anyone could have done it!" Sara was arrogant.

"Yes, they could not. My child, I brought out all my prettiest tricks for him. Not a glimmer. Even Cecile smiled pretty at him, before she saw that he was made of stone."

"That's the trouble."

"What, do you mean? Stone? Or smile?"

"Smiles," said Sara. "Goodness, you idiot, you could see every girl in the place smile at him! Anyone would want Henry Adams! I didn't smile. I let him see I didn't even care about him ... much...."

"I don't see...."

"You won't tell?"

"Of course not."

"I bribed Jimmy to pay a lot of attention to Cecile. That was to make Henry sorry for me. Men like to be sorry for you. Then I made him understand that I didn't care a darn about him. That he was just nothing to me, or less. He's afraid of girls that are too nice. It got him. And now...."

"Now—" prompted the Lamont girl.

"Now, I'm waiting for him to propose to me. So you'd better run along."

"But ... Jimmy—?"

"Jimmy?" scoffed Sara. "Jimmy will be furious, of course. He thinks I'm just leading this Adams man on to throw him hard, and he thinks it's funny. Jimmy—"

"But, Sara," the Lamont girl hesitated, as if she had difficulty in wording what she was going to say. "I thought you really loved Jimmy. *Loved* him ... you know. Anyway ... I thought you'd have to marry him. That time you were supposed to come and stay with me and you ran off to Dad's cottage with him ... well...."

Said Sara, blandly:

"That's the sort of thing you'd better forget, you little idiot. Nobody knows but you, and if you forget, nobody ever will know."

"But, Jimmy—" the other girl still repeated, weakly.

"Jimmy is a gentleman," said Sara, autocratically. "And no matter how badly he feels, he'll never tell about that weekend. A really nice man never tells about weekends. After all, they're apt to happen in every life, y'know."

"Gosh," said the Lamont girl, admiringly. "You certainly have all the nerve in the world. Sara, you're a wonder!"

She had a sudden thought.

"How—how," she asked, slowly, "did you ... er ... bribe Jimmy?"

Sara laughed, a laugh that added sudden years to her age. An unseen listener could tell that she looked mocking and cynical when she laughed.

"I promised him another weekend party," she said. "After all, even if you're married, you can go on weekends."

"And now," she said, "Henry is due, and this is the time, the place and the girl. Only you're in the way. Run along. Next time I see you, I'll be announcing my engagement."

HENRY ADAMS, taking large strides, walking faster than he had walked for a long time, crossed the lawn. He could see the people in the long hall. Ruth. Cora Durr. Cecile. with Jimmy beside



her. Constance. He was thinking faster than he had ever thought before.

Women—liars, double crossers. There was something he wanted to do. Ruth was too young. Constance was dumb. You would have to explain to her. Cecile only was suitable. Cecile was sophisticated. It was true that she had a husband. But still....

"I want to see you," he said, at her side a moment later. "Very important. Just a moment."

Jimmy glared. Cecile smiled her nicest smile, which was a very nice smile indeed. "Of course," she said.

He had been right. Cecile was clever. Cecile understood.

And besides, it made her angry to know that Jimmy had been bribed. "Little devil," Cecile had said. "I'll help you...."

SARA, sitting on the marble bench, and feeling that she looked prettier than she had ever looked before, in a dress the color of yellow roses, and with pearls at her throat, wondered why Henry didn't come. It wasn't like him to be late. Inside, they were dancing. Maybe Henry had been stuck with some one, maybe he was in the middle of a dance and couldn't get away. But still, it seemed to her she had waited a long time. Looking

over the artificial lake, on which three black swans floated, she wondered how it would be to be Mrs. Henry Adams. It was fun to get married before any of your friends. A big wedding, with twelve bridesmaids, and a bishop if possible. And a trip to South America. Paris for wedding trips was getting passe.

The music was playing another tune now. They were dancing another dance. Why didn't he come? Did he think she would wait forever? And yet, if it was worth waiting for, as this was....

Twenty-five minutes later, extremely angry, and rather puzzled, Sara strolled into the ballroom. Everyone was there, dancing. Ruth, in green, whirled past her.

"Better rescue your man," giggled Ruth. "Cecile's giving him a rush, now. Saw them vanish into the library."

Sara went down the wide hall. Kerwin Lamont, sitting on the stairs with a boy, called to her, but she did not answer. The library door was closed, but Sara did not knock. She opened it, quietly.

Henry was there. Henry and Cecile. And Cecile was in his arms, and he was just about to kiss her.

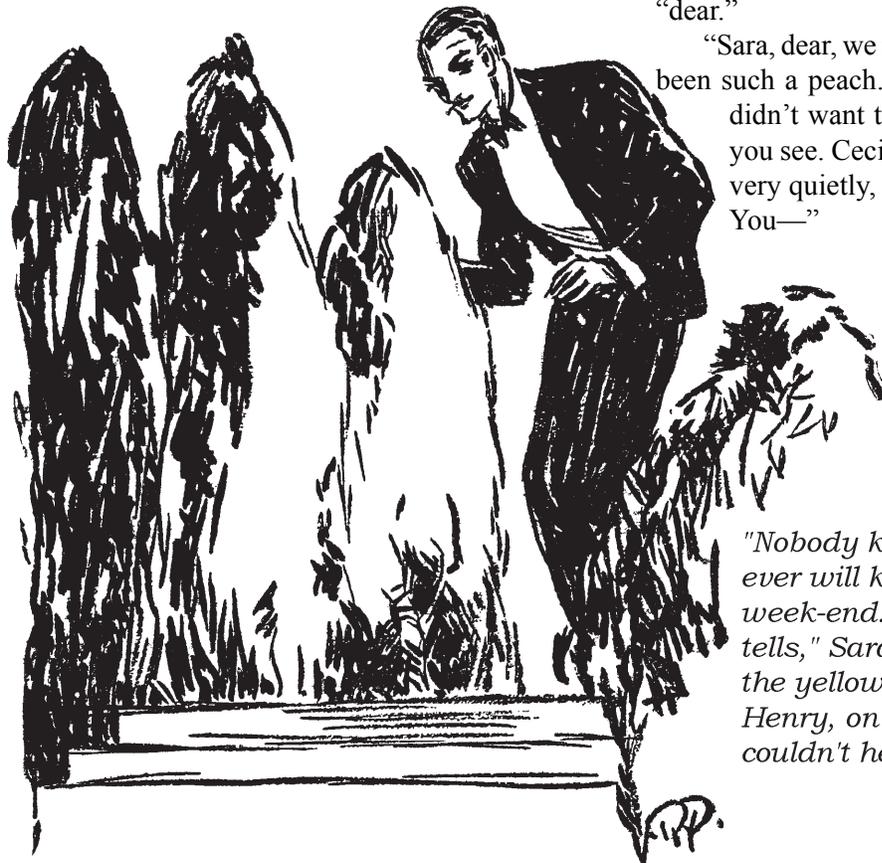
"Well," cried Sara. "I'd like to know what you think you're doing, Henry Adams. I'd like to know...."

Cecile, with a perfectly idiotic smile on her face, was talking. Henry was talking. Henry was calling her "dear."

"Sara, dear, we might as well tell you, now. You've been such a peach. Cecile and I are in love. But we didn't want to let any one know. Her husband, you see. Cecile wants to get the divorce herself, very quietly, in Paris. You've helped such a lot. You—"

"You mean," cried Sara, furiously, "that you've used me to cover up your horrid affair with a married woman? Of all the low, vulgar—"

"Nobody knows and nobody ever will know about that week-end. A gentleman never tells," Sara was boasting to the yellow-haired Lamont girl. Henry, on the upper terrace, couldn't help hearing it.



“No,” said Henry, very gently, “I didn’t use you at all, Sara. Don’t you remember? You were using me to play with, because Jimmy had deserted you. But it was Jimmy you really liked. You and I were just pretending—”

“Just, pretending,” gasped Sara. “Why, you’ve been making love to me ... kissing me ... saying...”

“Wasn’t it agreed,” asked Henry, very politely, “that it was to be just a game?”

“Oh,” cried Sara again. Anger made her almost wordless. “I hate you! I—”

She went out the door, and as she banged it behind her, Cecile’s soft voice pursued her:

“We’re both so grateful, Sara, dear...”

HENRY and Cecile, alone, faced each other. They were both smiling, but their smiles were quite different. Henry’s was a little bitter. Cecile’s was malicious.

“What,” she asked, in a soft voice, “will you do if she tells every one that absurd tale?”

“She won’t,” said Henry. “She’s too vain. The first thing she’ll do is tell them I bored her.”

“The first thing she’ll do,” said Cecile, with the higher wisdom of woman, “is to take Jimmy out on the lawn and tell him he’s the most wonderful person in the world, and that she detests you, but couldn’t get away from you—and that she just bribed him to stay away to see if he would do it.”

“And he’ll believe her?” asked Henry, incredulously.

“I’ll show you,” promised Cecile. So, an hour later, Henry and Cecile waited behind the tall lilac bushes, and for the second time that night Henry listened to a conversation that certainly was not meant for him:

“Don’t get the big idea,” Jimmy was saying, a trifle petulantly. “You did *act* as if you were crazy about him!”

“Honey, that was just to get the other girls jealous. But ... why, he sort of made me feel funny. I could never let a man do more than kiss me a little. You know I like you better than anyone else. Why, I like you so

well that I’m *foolish*. If, for instance, you suggested that we run away and get married tonight, I’d probably do it, just because you wanted me to ...”

“Say,” said Jimmy, “that’s an idea!”

THE house party had been over for three weeks. The news of the elopement of Sara and Jimmy was old news now, and no one would talk about them again until their divorce was announced. No one but a few people who were vitally interested in them. Such as the two who were having tea together in a charming apartment.

“I do think,” Cecile was saying, looking especially lovely in a black and white frock, with a touch of green on it, “that it was rather rotten to do. After all, Sara was just doing what most girls do. Picking the man she wanted for a husband, and trying to get him. Aren’t you rather cruel?”

“Have you found me so?” asked Henry, tenderly. His hand closed, for just a moment, over hers, as it rested on the table.

“I’ve found you... nice,” said Cecile. Her voice trembled just a little. Cecile was married. And she didn’t care for the mess of a divorce...

“And the girl did like you terribly,” persisted Cecile, who knew that Henry didn’t care to talk about the affair at all.

“She got over it,” said Henry, grimly. “As we all get over caring for anything ... anybody ...”

“Most times we do. Sometimes we don’t,” said Cecile wisely. She was older than he was.

Love can be almost anything in the world. A secret, a dark path, a scarlet cloak, to be worn and thrown aside. This last was in Henry’s mind when he said, lightly, but not too lightly:

“I think I’m in love with you, Cecile.”

“You’ll get over that,” she said, “too.” She had a sudden moment of that truthfulness that Henry loved in women, and had sought in vain:

“But, oh, my dear,” she said, “I wish you wouldn’t for a long, long time.”

“I won’t,” promised Henry. “Not until you hint that you want me to. At least, not until after next weekend...”

“Isn’t it fortunate,” murmured Cecile, and she never guessed that she was repeating Sara’s very words, “that even if one is married, one can still go on weekends?”