

# A WOMAN'S WAY

## A Game of Hearts and Ballots

By EDITH GWYNNE

IT was a rather cold night for the first week in October, but in Miss Higgins' parlor there was a grate fire whose radiance would have bade defiance to a January gale. It flickered on the old mahogany sofa, which had been the pride of Delia Higgins' grandmother, and it flashed mirthfully over the faces in the black-framed portraits, almost bringing a smile to the prim old features whose severity was awesome to the frivolous caller.

But the flames seemed to fall most comfortably upon a slender girlish figure in a gown of richest chestnut color, which matched the shining hair almost too wilful and fluffy to cover the wise head of Miss Louise Marshall, a graduate of Toronto University, who taught French, German, English and History in the High School of Parkersville, and who received for her faithful services the sum of six hundred dollars a year, which, as Trustee Murchison had observed, "was a handsome sum for a female to get."

Miss Marshall was entering upon her second year at the aforesaid High School, and also upon her second year of experience as a boarder in the old Higgins' homestead, where Miss Delia kept a spotless kitchen, and a table whose delicacies tempted the minister thither at least once a week.

Miss Delia was not over fond of lighting a fire in the parlor so early as October. But Louise Marshall, in spite of her University degree, had found a royal road to the excellent spinster's carefully-fenced heart, and then George Howard was calling, and Miss Delia regarded George as "the best-mannered boy that ever came out of Parkersville High School."

Their friendship dated from the day when George had rescued "Nigger," Miss Delia's favorite cat, from the rude hands of the Jones boys, and many a cookie and harvest apple had he eaten by the big stove in the Higgins' kitchen.

George had gone to the University in Toronto, three hundred miles away, which Miss Delia regarded as an ungodly town, given over to worldliness and cheap sales. At the University, Mr. Howard had become slightly acquainted with Miss Marshall, who was just commencing her course during his final year, and who was a studious young person, not desirous of being accused of taking University work for the sake of securing masculine society.

Howard did well at Osgoode Hall, and returned to Parkersville to become the partner of old Lawyer King, who was only too glad to have such a vigorous young presence in his well-known office.

The High School Board was also anxious to add Mr. George Howard, an old Parkersville boy, a B.A., and an LL.B., to its distinguished councils; and so, when Louise Marshall applied for the position of teacher of modern languages, the youngest member of the Board recalled her brown eyes, and also a dimple or two, and strenuously supported her claim with successful effect.

For a year he had shown admirable zeal as a trustee in looking after the most recent member of the High School staff, and before Miss Marshall went home to Brantley in June, he begged of her to consider the advisability of reducing her efforts to a class of one, and allowing him to absorb her future attention, with Cupid to mark the examination papers.

Louise Marshall was a young woman possessed of ambition, even though her ambition had brought her only so far as the Parkersville High School and six hundred dollars a year, and she refused to listen to Mr. Howard's eloquence on the subject of a certain white brick house on Lawrence Street, which might be transformed into a twentieth century Eden if she would only consent to take the name of Eve, alias Louise Howard.

The young man was deeply hurt, and also somewhat indignant, for most of the Parkersville girls had shown their feminine appreciation of the young lawyer's graces of intellect and person. He had made up his mind to avoid Miss Marshall on her return to Parkersville in September, but he discovered, as many a clever person has found out in previous centuries, that for a man to make up his mind in one fashion, when his heart has taken a different way, is extremely baffling to weak humanity.

After all, there was no reason why he and Miss Marshall should not be friends. She was an extremely intelligent girl, whose conversational powers were so remarkable, that the old clock in the hall could only be regarded as Ananias with a pendulum when it asthmatically struck the hour of ten.

Wherefore he had made his way to Miss Delia's every week since school had opened in September, and on this very chilly October evening had ventured once more to intimate that life and law were poor things in his eyes unless he could complete the alliteration by adding Louise and love.

"I thought I told you," said Miss Marshall sternly, "that I like you very much, except when you talk like this."

"I am sure I can't be accused of worrying you about it. This is only the second time I've referred to the subject."



As a matter of fact, Louise Marshall was on the verge of an unlearned burst of tears. From nine o'clock until four, everything had gone wrong. The boys had been noisy, the girls had giggled, and both boys and girls had been supremely stupid, without the slightest desire to write French exercises or discover the beauties of Shelley's "The Cloud."

The young teacher was feeling that her work was a failure, and she was also feeling an absurdly weak desire to lay her fluffy brown head on Mr. Howard's broad shoulder, and tell him how disgusting the day had been. Her weakness, and the choky queeriness in her throat, combined to make her thoroughly angry with the young man who persisted in standing in front of the fire, looking so strong and masterful.

"If I were a man," she flashed out contemptuously, "I should have too much pride to ask a woman such a question twice."

She was a little frightened when the words were out, for she knew, as Miss Delia had remarked, that "the Howard temper

was not to be trifled with." There was the sound of a deeply-drawn breath, and strong hands were laid upon her shoulders, forcing her to look up into a man's white face.

"I tell you this," he said very slowly, "that the third time you will do the asking."

She gasped in mingled rage and consternation. "I—Mr. Howard, you are abominably rude."

He bowed ironically, and was about to leave the parlor, when Miss Delia entered, bearing a plate filled high with gleaming, crimson apples.

"Why, you're never going yet, George Howard. Sit right down and tell me if this story's true about your running for the Conservatives in North Grant."

Now, Mr. Howard had been seriously considering the matter, and had almost decided not to stand. He was to announce his intentions to the party on the following morning. "I hear," continued Miss Delia, "that Ben Wilder is going to run on the Reform side. He'll make a strong candidate."



It happened that Mr. Benjamin Wilder was also an admirer of Miss Louise Marshall, a school trustee, and an old bachelor of considerable wealth, as Parkersville esteemed wealth.

"I'm going to run, Miss Delia," announced the young lawyer with sudden resolve.

"Well," said Miss Delia sorrowfully, "I've always been a good Grit, but I declare to goodness, George, that I hope you won't be beaten."

"Thank you," he said, with an unsteady laugh, "that's a great admission for a Higgins to make; your father was the warmest Reformer I ever knew."

"You're a Reformer, too, aren't you, Louise?" asked Miss Delia.

"Yes," said the girl, looking at Mr. Howard with her dark eyes aflame, "and I hope with all my heart that Mr. Wilder will get in."

"You are honest, at least," said Mr. Howard quietly, as Miss Delia murmured a protest at this declaration of political enmity, "it is just as well to know who one's friends are."

"Have an apple, George," urged Miss Delia, "these are the best we've had for years."

"If you'll excuse me," said Louise faintly, "I think I must go and look over some exercises for to-morrow. And I have such a headache!"

After she had disappeared, Miss Delia said with a puzzled frown, "there must be something wrong with that girl. She's usually awfully sweet-tempered, but the way she spoke to you was downright rude."

George laughed leniently, and said in reply, "These apples are all right, but they're not so good as the ones I ate fifteen years ago. Do you remember the 'water-cores' at the old farm?"

"I should think I do. Brother George has the place, and his second wife is just letting everything go to rack and ruin."

In descending on the delinquencies of the second Mrs. George Higgins, Miss Delia forgot all about Louise Marshall's headache and ill-temper, and Louise felt utterly disgusted when she heard her rejected lover's merry laugh over Miss Delia's quaint reminiscences.

"I don't believe," said the young woman wrathfully, as she pounded an unoffending pillow, "that he cares the least bit whether I like him. To think that he said I would ask him the third time! Men are hateful creatures!"

Miss Louise Marshall might be a most ambitious young person, with a strong determination that her own efforts should provide her with bread and butter, not to speak of silk blouses; but she cried herself into very disturbed slumbers, in which she had a vision of Mr. George Howard as Premier of Canada, and the husband of a stout blonde who wore black velvet and diamonds.

The following weeks were full of political disturbance, and Mr. Howard grew thin and hoarse in his efforts to keep up with the campaign, and to help his friends in adjacent ridings, for he was a good speaker, fluent and effective, and the party realized his oratorical value.

He met Miss Marshall several times in the course of the campaign, and recognized that young woman's frosty bow with correspondingly coldness. She assured herself daily that she "didn't care," and smiled upon Mr. Wilder in a way that completely bewildered that staid politician, and made him reflect on what a fine wife she would make for a Member of Parliament. "A man might be proud of her anywhere," he murmured to himself, "and she's got the prettiest eyes I ever saw. It's a shame for her to spend her time in a stuffy school-room."

Acting on this belief, Mr. Wilder invited Miss Marshall to drive behind his new bay team which had won first prize at the Western Fair in London, and political interest in the contest suddenly deepened in Parkersville. Was Cupid going to take a hand in the game and play for the Reform side? It looked as if Miss Marshall had discarded her lawyer admirer, and the women of the town hardly knew whether to condemn her for fickleness or to wonder whether she had suddenly discovered the extent of "Old Ben's" savings.

"It's my opinion," said Mrs. Pascoe to Miss Delia, "that Miss Marshall, for all her innocent looks, is a deep young woman. She thinks the Reform side is going to win, and she wants to be the wife of the Member and have Ben's money to spend in Ottawa."

So the October days passed away, and Parkersville was surrounded with woods that became a flaming crown of gold and crimson. English Devonshire may have her April, and Italy her glorious sunshine that makes summer of many months. But if ever Canada becomes a queen, it is when October scatters her glory and color in all the woodland ways, and wears a garland of scarlet maple leaves on the brown richness of her gypsy hair.

But in all this mellow loveliness, there were people in Park-

