The Tenth Mrs. Tulkington—By Ellis Parker Butler

One of the Series of Evening Public Ledger Original Short Stories on Married Life by the Best American Fiction Writers

MY ONLY excuse for throwing George Tithers into the lily pool at midnight is that I thought he was my wife Susan. As a president of a bank and a highly respected and weighty citizen, I most seriously object to being called "Baldy," and I particularly object to being slapped gayly on the top of my head with an open hand. Or any other kind of hand. And I believed this Tithers person—my wife's brother, I'm ashamed to say—was in Europe. Naturally, then, when I had been dreaming that my wife was standing above me in a divorce court, denouncing me to the Judge, and declaring that even the sight of my bald head had come to be nauseating to her, my first thought—when I felt the slap on the head and heard "What ho, Baldy!"—was that Susan was attacking me. In an instant I had leaped from the marble bench and had grappled with my attacker. George Tithers cried out a moment too late, for I had already given a mighty heave and had thrown him full length into the lily pond. As my mistake became apparent to me as I saw George Tithers coming out of the lily pond on his hands and knees, I apologized frankly.

"I beg your pardon," I said. "I thought you were my wife."

"Rather! I should think so!" George said as he emerged and shook himself like a dog. "But it's not a nice way to treat a lady, Tulky; is it, now? Wife drowning isn't done in the best circles any more, you know. But, I say! Has it come to this, really? The little gray home in the West must be off its feed, what?"

Now, my home is not gray and it is not in the West; it is white marble and on Long Island; but I let that pass. George Tithers had—in his silly way—put his finger on the exact fact; our home was "off its feed," as he chose to say, and entirely off its feed. I made George remain where he was while I explained the matter fully and to its least detail. Toward the end of the first half hour, as the night grew chilly, his teeth began to chatter and a little later he sneezed many times, with gradually increasing violence, but he listened patiently. This deepened my thought that George and his precious wife must be dead broke again, but I was glad to have even a dead-broke brother-in-law hear the truth about Susan and myself. That truth was that after twenty years of married life we hated each other. As a matter of fact, the reason I was on the marble bench by the lily pool at midnight was because I had told Susan I would never again spend an hour under the same roof with her and that tomorrow we would begin seemly but immediate preparations for a separation and divorce. I had meant to spend the night on that marble bench.

"I SAY!" George exclaimed between sneezes, when I had concluded. "The little old trouble has become quite a snorter, what? Dotty fell from the doctor was called, too? Arrived in the nick of time, didn't I, Tulky? And I say, do you mind if I encourage himself in the pool a bit? The water seems a bit warmer than the air."

The idiot. I do believe he would have gone back into the pool day that precious wife of his came out looking for him. She seemed to take his lily pool bath as a matter of course—quite as if it was a habit of his to bathe in lily pools at midnight. Silly ass! I have no doubt it is.

"Bathing, George!" she said. After she had greeted me [illegible] you!" "Be sure to have a good [illegible] fore you turn in. Are [illegible] into the house now. Augustus [illegible] has explained everything and the [illegible]

There are few people in this country who need an introduction to Ellis Parker Butler, whose first fame arrived with a little story called "Pigs is Pigs." That fame has been growing steadily ever since with his many books, short stories and moving pictures.

He has lectured, too, in all parts of the United States, and is, perhaps, best known as one of our most popular humorists, though he writes fiction of a serious and interesting nature also.

He says he is one of the few American writers who did not begin his literary training on a newspaper.

He was born in Muscatine, Iowa, and came East about twenty-three years ago. He is married and thus fully qualified to join the all-star program of American fiction has four children, two of whom are twins, and when he is not writing he would like to be fishing—either trout or bass, but trout preferred—and he is much interested in the cultivation of tulips.

AS ANYTHING seemed preferable to divorce, Susan and I, after thorough consideration of the matter in company with George Tithers and his wife, agreed to appoint George and Amelia stage managers of our married life and I allowed them a liberal compensation. After a long consultation George and Amelia decided that it would be best for George to be my personal manager while Amelia managed Susan. I agreed to everything in advance, but I was surprised when George presented me with a sheet of paper at the top of which he had written "List of Characters." On this sheet were written six varieties of husbands, all men of my acquaintance, and no two alike. At the head of the list was written "January—Self, prosperous banker." And following this was "February—H. P. Diggleton, clubman, [illegible]

When I returned from my bank and met Susan I fell into a chair and stared at her. Her gown—even Mrs. Hinterberry, who goes what is virtually the limit, would have hesitated to wear it

[illegible] fear is sleeping in the kitchen. Susan has taken his room in the garage; temporarily, I hope, but it is a very comfortable room. You do your servants well, Augustus. It is a lovely trait."

"Susan attends to the servants," I said reluctantly.

"Does she? She does everything so well, doesn't she?" said George Tithers' wife.

I might have said, in reply to that, "Too confounded well!" but I did not.

"The trouble," said George, when he had poured himself a chill-preventer, "is that Susan is a wife in a million. I'll say in eight million. You told her she was a wife in a million, didn't you, old top, when you were a newly-wed?"

"None of your business!" I growled.

"Ah! He confesses!" said George Tithers. "And now, Gussie, me lad, because she is just that—a wife in a million wives exactly like her—you are sore. What? Bored? Biting the old fingernails with ennui? Dead sick of dear old Sue, and dear old Sue dead sick of nice old Gustus? The trouble with you and Sue, me lad, is that you need a couple of stage managers. That's trouble No. 1. And trouble No. 2 hangs on it—you're both natural bigamists—"

"Stop right there!" I cried.

"Like all of us! Like all of us!" said George.

"Not another word!" I exclaimed, exceedingly angry.

"Wake up!" George said then. "Stop! Look! The boss says stop. We're through, Amelia. I only meant to tell him of Lord Algy and Lady Mercedes, but he says stop, and we stop!"

"Oh, Lord Algy and Lady Mercedes!" exclaimed George's wife. "The happiest two people! Such a happy pair!"

"Always marrying! Always merry and gay, what?"

The poor wretch laughed heartily at his miserable pun.

"So cheery and happy! Always divorcing each other and marrying somebody else, and marrying each other again so gayly!" exclaimed Amelia.

"Because a man gets tired of the dear old wife after twenty years, even if she is my sister," said George.

"And of the dear old reliable husband, even if he is the most respectable old baldy," said Amelia.

"Especially if he is the same dear old reliable husband," George corrected her. "It's the blessed routine that warps 'em, don't you think?"

"Rather!" said Amelia heartily.

"It's like being married to the lilly old Westminster Abbey, what?" said George. "Act of Parliament now! It permits even the riotous innovation of a new doorbell. Not a new hair on old baldpate in thirteen years! Not a new style bloomph out of dear old Susie since the wedding bells!"

"Stop it!" I cried irritably, for I was patting the top of my head, the silly donkey. "Leave my head alone! What about this Lord Algy and Lady Mercedes—if you must talk."

"Oh, they're just off again, or again say little marriers, Augustus!" George said. "Tired of one wife, get married; tired of one husband, get another. It's done in their circle. A man goes get tired of the same old wife. Routine stuff, if you get me. Beauty tomorrow, what? Sick of the sight of her today, here—what?"

"It's in me," said Amelia quickly. "The bigamy thing, I mean. Any one who can afford it and is not restrained by convention or the police lines about a lot, has a series. King Solomon, the Sultan, Henry VIII, Lord Byron, Aaron Burr, Jesse."

"In a way of speaking," said Tithers modestly.

"And myself, Tilly," said Amelia. "In a way of speaking, as you remark, darling. And Cleopatra, and the Queen of Sheba—by all accounts."

"NOW, stop this name-calling!" I said. "You know, both of you, that you do not run about after other men and women."

"Well, rather not!" cried George. "He don't get me, Amelia. He's a Mormon. Polygamy."

"Marriage," said Amelia, "is a most severe a failure a game of life is. Marriage is the first coming of two people together, and only start it with the getting acquainted, intimately, rather sharp points top jar and all. Something interesting of the whole, what? And then, in a few years, the novelty wears off, some rings in the routine stuff. Axial here, axial there, same old ways and everything. Nothing new! They get jolly and sick of each other, and no wonder."

"A man, in a year with a lot of [illegible] the morning, seeing the same face at breakfast every day or so," I said.

"Oh, no!" exclaimed George Tithers. "Hold be doing spoiling it, that's not the right card. The right card is to see the whole lot at the top stack off, if you get me."

"I see it," I said dryly.

"Very sick it, though," said Amelia [illegible] "Susan did it, too, at a poor sick of a woman that [illegible] women, and a poor silly [illegible] that isn't half a dozen men."

"What we mean," Tithers said, "is that you and Sue need to be [illegible] Amelia's and George's place. You go to Europe, and between you, you [illegible] but you don't change. Amelia [illegible] Lady Mercedes and Lord Algy [illegible] Palm Beach. Lord Algy [illegible] Lady Mercedes—if you must talk."

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