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Mrs. Mahaffy Goes to

WAR

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ BY W. A. S. DOUGLAS ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

MRS. MAHAFFY called me up to know if I could find her a radio repair man. She said she had advertised in our paper, but nothing had happened. There just aren't any radio repair men around Middletown or the surrounding farms these days.

Business, I told her, must be right good, what with her George trying to hire an extra hand, and then she told me that if I was to read my own newspaper I would know that George had been drafted; for three months now, she said, she had been running the store and the repair business herself. All she knows about radio, outside of selling, is finding dead tubes, taking them out and putting in live ones. I told Mrs. Mahaffy I would run out to the store.

Now I've known this girl going on eight years—since a few weeks after she left her native Holland (Michigan) and came to Middletown upon graduation from high school. She picked on our town because she had an aunt living here who has since died. Her first job was with the Middletown Hotel where she handed out mail and keys to traveling men and answered the phone. One of my jobs was to go to the hotel every day for news items, being the star reporter—and the only reporter—for the Middletown Chronicle.

I got to know Mrs. Mahaffy—she was Mary Van Dyke then—pretty well; fact is, I might as well admit I asked her to marry me about half a dozen years ago only to find that George Mahaffy had beat me to it. About three months later I was given the dubious consolation of being best man at their wedding. This Mahaffy, a long, loose-built Irishman, was general repair man at a little radio shop, getting twenty-five dollars a week—which wasn't so bad for Middletown. Mary had got to be cashier in the hotel coffee shop, drawing eighteen dollars. She kept her job and they were saving money. The general idea was to have a baby as soon as they could afford one.

Well, about a year and a half after they got married Mahaffy's boss developed a bad lung and was ordered west. He offered to sell the little business to his repair man and the Mahaffys took it on. They made their savings the down payment and figured the baby could wait; weren't they both young and isn't a business better than a job?

So, as far as I knew, everything was going all right till I got this call about a repair man. I went out to the store as soon as I cleared my desk and read copy on the Rotary luncheon. And I found that George Mahaffy, a first-class radio technician, was still, after three months, a private in an infantry outfit; they were doing about fifty a week net when George was drafted. Business was slipping and Mary was getting scared.

"Of course," she said, "if you could find me that repair man I could stay in the store all

the time and he could fix all the jobs instead of just tubes, which is all I can do till I learn more about it. You see, they took George away so quick."

"I'll start scratching around," I told her. "And is there anything else on your mind?"

Her pretty face—she's still right pretty though a trifle plumper than when I first met her—sort of crinkled up and, so help me, I couldn't tell whether she was trying to hide a smile or keep back tears.

"There's aplenty on my mind, Bill," she said at last. "I'm going to have a baby."

That knocked me.

"This is a heck of a time—" I began.

"Listen, Bill," she went on, "maybe it's the only time. George is likely to go overseas, likely to be killed. Don't let's kid ourselves. I want a baby and I'm going to have a baby—if I lose the store and if I lose George."

It took me a full week, taking time off from the paper, to dig up a repair man for Mary Mahaffy—and I wasn't any too proud of Tim Moynihan when I presented him; I whispered that to her the first chance I got.

"After all, Bill," she whispered back, "there's a war on and you've got to work with whatever tools you can get."

MRS. MAHAFFY, this sunny morning, was not in a patriotic mood; she felt that if anyone were to wave the Stars and Stripes at her she would scream. Four calls already for hurry-up radio repair jobs; looked like about twelve dollars' worth of work. And where, oh, where was that old souse, Tim Moynihan?

Mr. Moynihan was a recent gift from the lower purlieus of West Madison Street, Chicago, to Mrs. Mahaffy's little radio store in Middletown. I had journeyed to the big city and canvassed a score of ginmills in the hope that I might salvage something approaching a human being who knew enough about the inside of radios to take care of the Mahaffy repair business. And at long last I had dug out old Tim Moynihan, bathed him, shaved him, fed him, invested him in a clean shirt, and delivered him in person to Mary Mahaffy as a substitute for Husband George who had gone to war and had left his young and pretty wife to carry on.

Thinking of George Mahaffy, footslogging round in an infantry regiment when he was as good a radio technician as there was in the army, was what made his wife, this bright spring morning, more than a trifle mad at those old Stars and Stripes which had left her stuck with this drunken old man—and orders piling up.

For the first three days of his new employment old Tim had been a gem of purest ray serene. He cleaned up the pile of back orders, brought in more

[Continued on Page 22]

Here is an American "Mrs. Miniver"

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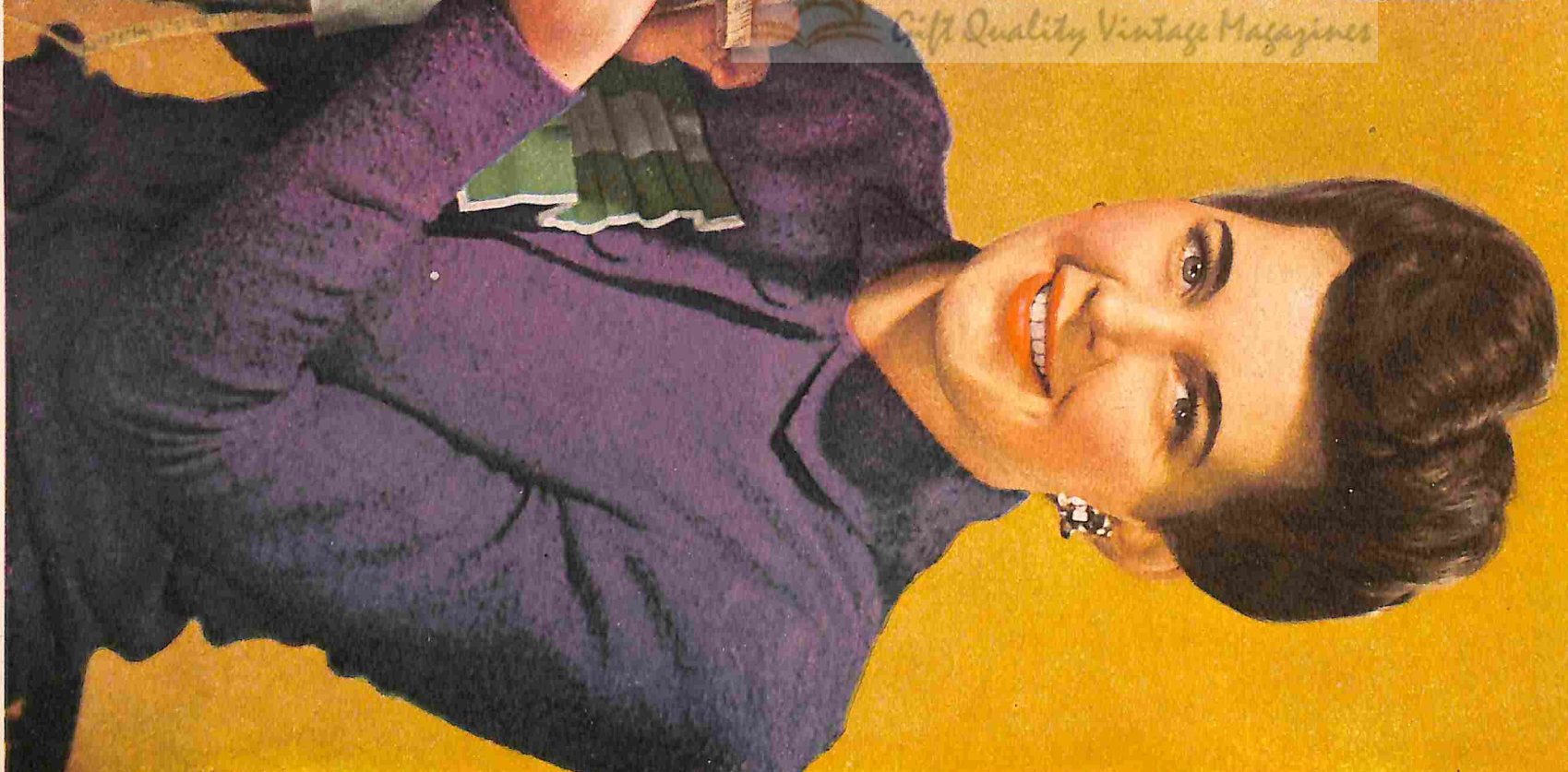
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