

**YELLOW  
BUTTERFLIES**

**BY**

Mary Raymond Shipman Andrews

**THIS STORY IS DEDICATED TO  
THOSE AMERICANS WHO GAVE  
IN THE GREAT WAR EVEN MORE  
THAN LIFE—TO THE BLINDED**

## NOTE

Throughout this story there are sentences and paragraphs quoted, taken bodily from a press account of the coming of the American Unknown Soldier. If other sentences or phrases occur for which proper credit has not been given, it is because the story-teller's mind was so saturated with the beauty of this account that its wording seemed the inevitable form.

For such borrowed grace the writer offers grateful acknowledgment to the young reporter who, given what is surely the most thrilling episode in all history to write about, has made what has been well-called "the finest bit of newspaper work ever done." Acknowledgment and thanks to Mr. Kirk Simpson.

MARY RAYMOND SHIPMAN ANDREWS.

## YELLOW BUTTERFLIES

Out from the door of the house burst the laughing, shouting little lad. He raced across the grass and halted by the tulip-bed; there, with yet more shouts of full-throated baby laughter, he turned to look back at his young mother, racing after him, standing now in the doorway. His head was yellow as a flower, almost as yellow as the tulips, and the spun-silk, glittering hair of five years old curled tight in a manner of aureole. As the girl gazed at him, glorying in him, suddenly the sun came brilliantly from under a cloud, and, as if at a signal, out of the clover-patch at the edge of the lawn stormed a myriad of butterflies and floated about the golden head.

“Oh, the butterflies take you for a flower, Dicky,” cried the girl.

The little chap stood quite still, smiling and blinking through the winged sunshine, and then, behold, three or four of the lovely things fluttered down on his head. The young woman flashed out and caught him and hugged him till he squealed lustily.

“Don’t, muvver,” remonstrated Dicky. “You’ll scare my ’ittle birds. They ’ike us, muvver.”

“It’s good luck to have a butterfly light on you,” she informed him, and then, in a flash of some unplaced memory, with the quick mysticism of her Irish blood: “A butterfly is the symbol of immortality.”

“’Esh,” agreed Dicky gravely. “’Esh a ’sympum—” and there he lost himself, and threw back his head and roared rich laughter at the droll long word.

“It must have looked pretty,” the boy’s father agreed that night. “I wonder what sort they were. I used to collect them. There’s a book—” He went to the shelves and searched. “This is it.” There were pages here and there of colored pictures. “No. 2,” he read, and pointed to a list. “The Cloudless Sulphur. Were they solid yellow?” He turned a page. ““The Cloudless Sulphur,”” he began reading aloud. ““Large, two and a half inches. Wings uniform bright canary color. Likely to light on yellow flowers; social; it flies in masses and congregates on flowers. Habit of migrating in flocks from Southeast to Northwest in the spring and from Northwest to Southeast in the autumn. Food, cassia, etc. Family, Pieridæ.’ That’s the fellow,” decided the boy’s father, learned in butterflies. “A Pierid. ‘Many butterflies hide under clover,’” he read along, ““and down in grasses—pass the nights there. Some sorts only come out freely in sunshine.’ Didn’t you say the sun came?”

“All at once. They flew up then as if at a command.” She nodded. “That’s exactly the creature. And where it says about lighting on flowers of the same color—they did take Dicky’s head for a flower, didn’t they, Tom?”

“It certainly seems as if they did.” The man smiled. “Kentucky is likely on the line of their spring migration Northwesterly. I reckon Dicky’s friends are the Cloudless Sulphur.”

Dicky’s father died when the boy was eleven. The years ran on. Life adjusted itself as life must, and the child grew, as that other Child twenty centuries back, in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man. There might have been more boys in America as upstanding in body and character, as loving and clever and strong and merry, as beautiful within and without as her boy, the

woman considered, but she had never seen one. His very faults were dear human qualities which made him more adorable. With his tenderness and his roughness, his teachableness and his stubbornness, his terror of sentiment and his gusts of heavenly sweet love-making, the boy satisfied her to the end of her soul. Buoyancy found her again, and youth, and the joy of an uphill road with this gay, strong comrade keeping step along it. Then the war came. All his life she had missed no chance to make her citizen first of all things an American. And now that carefully fed flame of patriotism flamed to cover all America.

“We must go in, mother. Gosh! it’s only decent. We could bring peace. We must go in,” he raged. He was too young to go across and he raged more at his youth. His mother gloried in and shivered at his rage. At last America was in, and the boy, who had trained in his university, could not fling himself fast enough into the service. The woman, as hundreds of thousands of other American women, was no slacker. There was a jingle in the papers:

“America, he is my only one,  
My hope, my pride, and joy;  
But if I had another  
He should march beside his brother,  
America, here’s my boy!”

The jingle hit straight at armies of women in those days.

No officers’ training-camp for Dick; he would go as an enlisted man with the rank and file of American men.

“But you’re officer material,” complained his mother. “Aren’t you wasting power that the country may need?”

“If I can win shoulder-bars, honey, hooray!” said Dick. “Otherwise, me for a dough-boy.”

So as a dough-boy he went to Camp Meade, but in three months wore the stripes of a sergeant. Radiant, he tumbled in at home a week later, such a joyful lad that he sputtered ecstasy and slang. Tremendous he looked in his uniform, fresh colored from cold barracks and constant exercise and in an undreamed pink of condition.

“I never considered you a delicate person,” the woman spoke up to the six feet two of him, “but now you’re overpowering, you’re beefy.”

“Couldn’t kill me with an axe,” assented Dick cheerfully, and back in her brain a hideous, unformed thought stirred, of things that were not axes, that could kill easily even this magnificent young strength.

They were as gay together as if all the training and the uniform and the stir and panoply of war were merely a new and rather thrilling game. She saw to it that there were theatres and dances and girls doing, and the lad threw himself into everything with, however, a delicious grumble after each party:

“I don’t get a chance to see you at all.” That was music.

And then the short, gay leave was done and Dick back at Meade again. The winter months went, with letters thickly coming and going. And late in May he wrote that he had leave once more for two days, and instantly he was there. There was no word as to what the sudden leave meant, but they knew. When it was possible our soldiers due to sail were given this short flying visit to their homes.

Transports were going all the time now; great ship followed great ship till it seemed as if the Atlantic must be brown with khaki. And not the nearest of any must know when his time was, for this was one bit of the national patriotism, to guard the knowledge of sailing ships from the enemy. So the boy told nothing, but his eyes embraced her with a burning word unspoken. And her eyes met them with certain knowledge.

“Let’s cut out the girls and balls this time,” he said. And one day, apropos of nothing: “You’re a peach.”

She smiled back cheerfully as women were smiling at boys all over the United States at that date. “I couldn’t bear it if you weren’t in the service,” she said.

In a few minutes—it appeared—the two days were over. “Run across for one second and say good-by to Lynnette,” she suggested, when the racing hours were within three of their end. Lynnette was the girl next door who had grown up in the shadow of Dick’s bigness, a little thing two years younger, shy and blunt and not just a pretty girl, but with luminous eyes and a heart of gold. Dick had to be prodded a bit to be nice to Lynnette.

“I don’t want to miss one second of you, honey,” he objected.

“Don’t you dare stay over a second. But a glimpse would mean a lot to her, and she’s a darling to me.”

“Oh, all right,” agreed Dick. “Because she’s a darling to you—” and he swung off.

“Dick—” as he sprang from the gallery. He turned. “Kiss her good-by, Dick.”



“What sort of a mother——!”

“She’ll object, but she’ll like it.”

“You little devil,” Dick chuckled, “can’t you let a fellow handle his own kissing?” And started again, easy, elastic, made of sliding muscles.

“Oh, Dick!” called his mother once more, and once more the brown figure halted. “Now, then, woman?”

“Don’t peck, Dick; kiss her a thorough one.”

Dick’s laughter rang across the little place. The echo of that big laughter in the woman was not a quickened pulse of gladness as it had been all his days; a sick aching answered the beloved sound, and the stab of a thought—would ever Dick laugh across the garden again? With that he was back, grinning.

“I did it,” stated Dick. “It’s not often a chap’s commanding officer sends him out with orders for a kissing attack, so I put my elbows into it and made a good job. She’s kissed to pieces.”

“Dick!”

“Well, now! It’ll teach you to go careful how you start a man on them tricks. Lynnette’s a worthy child, but I’d never have thought of kissing her. Yet it wasn’t so bad. Rather subtle.” He licked his lips tentatively.

“Dicky! Vulgar, vulgar boy!”

“You know, I believe she did like it,” confided Dick.

Then very soon, in the middle of the sunshiny, warm morning he went. In the hall, where they had raced and played games long ago, she told him good-by, doing a difficult best to give him cheer and courage to remember, not heart-break. Something helped her unexpectedly, reaction, maybe, of a chord overstrained; likely the good Lord ordered it; His hand reaches into queer brain-twists. She said small, silly things that made the boy laugh, till at last the towering figure was upon her and she was crushed into khaki, with his expert rifleman's badge digging into her forehead. She was glad of the hurt. The small defenses had gone down and she knew that only high Heaven could get her through the next five seconds with a proper record as a brave man's mother. In five seconds he turned and fled, and with a leap was through the door. Gone! She tossed out her arms as if shot, and fled after him. Already he was across the lawn, by the tulip-bed, and suddenly he wheeled at the patch of color and his visored cap was off, and he was kissing his hand with the deep glow in his eyes she had seen often lately. It was as if the soul of him came close to the windows and looked out at her. His blond hair in the sunlight was almost as yellow as on that other day long ago when—What was this? Up from the clover in the ditch, filling all the air with fluttering gold, stormed again a flight of yellow butterflies, the Cloudless Sulphur on their spring migration. The boy as he stood looking back at her shouted young laughter and the winged things glittered about him, and with that two lighted on his head.

“Good luck! It's for good luck, mother,” he called.

She watched, smiling determinedly, dwelling on details, the uniform, the folds of brown wool puttees, the bronze shine on his shoes, the gold spots of light flickering about his head. He wheeled, stumbling a bit, and then the light feet sprang away; there was no

Dick there now, only a glimmering, moving cloud of yellow—meaningless. The tulip-bed—sunshine—butterflies—silence. The world was empty. She clutched at her chest as if this sudden, sick, dropping away of life were physical. His triumphant last word came back to her, “It’s for good luck, mother”; then other words followed, words which she had spoken years ago.

“And for immortality.”

Immortality! She beat her hands against the wall. Not Dick—not her boy—her one thing. Not immortality for him, yet. Not for years and years—fifty—sixty. He had a right to long, sweet mortal life before that terrible immortality. She wanted him mortal, close, the flesh and blood which she knew. It was not to be borne, this sending him away to—Oh, God! The thousands on thousands of strong young things like Dick who had already passed to that horrible, unknown immortality. The word meant to her then only death, only a frantic terror; the subtle, underlying, enormous hope of it missed her in the black hour.

A letter came next day from camp, and the next, and every day for a week, and she pulled herself together and went about her busy hours minute by minute cheerfully, as one must. She disregarded the fact that inside of her an odd mental-moral-spiritual-physical arrangement which is called a heart lay quite defenseless, and that shortly a dagger was going to be struck into it. So when the dagger came, folded in a yellow Western Union envelope, it was exactly as bad as if there had been no preparation at all. Dick had sailed. She spun about and caught at a table. And then went on quietly with the five hundred little cheese-cloth “sponges” which she had promised to have at the Red Cross rooms to-morrow. Ghastly little things. So the boy went, one of two million to go, but yet, as most

of the others were, the only one. And two weeks later, it might be, came another telegram; a queerly worded thing from the war office:

“The ship on which I sailed has arrived safely in port.”

What ship? What port? After what adventures? But the great fact remained; he was, at least, overseas, beyond the first great peril. She flung herself into war work and wrote every day a letter with its vague military address ending in A. E. F. And got back many letters full of enthusiasm, of adventure, of old friends and new, of dear French people who had been good to him—but everybody was good to this boy. Of hard training, too, and a word of praise from high quarters once or twice, passed on secretly, proudly to the one person to whom a fellow could repeat such things. It was a life crowded with happiness and hardship and comradeship and worthwhile work. And then, soon, with danger. Through all sordidness and horror it was a life vitalized by enormous incentive, a life whose memory few of those who lived it would give up for everything else that any career might offer. The power of these gay, commonplace, consecrated boys’ lives reached across oceans and swung nations into consecration. Dick’s mother moved gladly in the huge orbit, for war work meant to her Dick. The days went. He was in action at times now, and wrote that his life was a charmed one, and that he walked safe through dangers; wrote also the pitiful bit of statistics which boys all told to their mothers, about the small percentage of killed and wounded; wrote as well the heroic sweet thoughts which came from depths of young souls which had never before known these depths.

“If I’m killed, darling child, honey, after all it’s not much different. It wouldn’t be really long before we’d be playing together again. And I’ve had the joy and the usefulness of fifty years of living in

these last months. What more could you ask? The best thing to do with a life is to give it away—you taught me that—and this certainly is the best way to give it, for our America. And don't worry about my suffering if I'm wounded; there's not much to that. Things hurt and you stand it—that happens in every life—and we wiggle and get through. It hurt like the dickens when I had pneumonia, don't you remember? So, behold the straight dope of the wise man Dick, and follow thereby. Nothing can happen that's unbearable; keep it in your mind, precious. Live on the surface—don't go feeling any more than you can help.”

Thousands of others found the sense of that sentence a way out of impossibility, as this woman did. She slept nights and worked days and wrote letters and rejoiced in getting them, and shunned like poison thoughts that thronged below the threshold, thoughts she dared not meet. Weeks wore on, months; the Germans were being pushed back; with a shivering joy she heard people say that the war could not last long; he might—he might come home safe. She knew as that shaft of golden hope winged across her brain, from the reeling rapture of it she knew how little hope she had ever had. But she whispered Dick's wise sentence once in a while, “Nothing can happen that's unbearable,” and she held her head high for Dick. Then the one thing which had never entered her mind happened. Dick was reported among the missing.

Missing.

Let any mother of a boy consider what that means. Anything. Everything. “Nothing can happen that's unbearable,” said Dick. But this was. A woman can't stay sane and face that word “missing”—can she? This woman gasped that question of herself. Yet she must stay sane, for Dick might come back. Oh, he might

even come back safe and sound. They did come through prison camps—sometimes—and get back to health. Prison camps. She fell to remembering about nights when she had crept into his room to see that he was covered up. Mines. But that thought she could not think. And the difficult days crawled on, and no news came and no more gay letters, with their little half-sentences of love-making, shining like jewels out of the pages, pages each one more valuable than heaps of gold. No letters; no news; swiftly and steadily her fair hair was going gray. The Armistice arrived, and then, after a while, troops were coming home. Because Dick would have wanted it, because she herself must honor these glorious lads who were, each one, somehow partly Dick, she threw herself into the greetings, and many a boy was made happy and welcome by the slim, tall, still-young woman with the startling white hair, who knew so well what to say to a chap. Outwardly all her ways stayed the same. No one of her friends noticed a difference except that sometimes one would say: “I wonder what keeps her going? Does she hope yet that Dick may come back?” Surely she hoped it. She would not wear black. Till certainty came she must hope. Still, little by little, as drop by drop her heart’s blood leaked, she was coming to believe him dead; coming nearly to hope it. At the same time in the tortured, unresting brain, the brain that held so large an area of mysticism from Irish forbears, in that cave of weaving thoughts there was still hope of a miracle. The child next door, Lynnette, not realizing to what a dangerous borderland of sanity she was urging desperate footsteps, helped her frame her vague theory of comfort.

“Nothing is sure yet. They don’t begin to know about all the missing,” argued Lynnette, dark eyes shining. “Dick may have been carried to the ends of the earth; he may not know even now

that the war is over. He's so strong, nothing could—could hurt him," stammered Lynnette, and went scarlet with a stab of knowledge of things, things that even Dick's splendid body could not weather.

"Miracles do happen. Do you know, Lynnette, it's as if somebody whispered that to me over and over. 'Miracles do happen—miracles do happen.' My brain aches with that sentence." She was still a moment. "I saw what you were thinking. Of the—otherwise. I can't face the—otherwise." Her voice thinned to a whisper. "It's worse than death, any possible otherwise, now. When all the prisoners are freed and all the soldiers are coming—home. Lynnette—I hope he's dead."

The girl tossed up a hand.

"Yes, child. But suffering—I can't have him suffering—long pain. It can't be. Oh, God, don't let it be that!"

Lynnette's brown head dropped on the woman's two hands and she kissed them with passion.

"I've got another thought, honey-child, and I'll try to tell you, but it's complicated." She was silent again, reviewing the waves of the ocean of her theory. The aching, unending thoughts had been busy with this theory. Harmlessly, unnoticed, the mind overwrought had been developing a mania. Peace. Had her boy, had all the boys, died for nothing? They went, the marching hundreds of thousands, with an ideal; no one who talked to any number of soldiers of our armies could fail to know that latent in practically all was an unashamed idealism. The roughest specimen would look you in the eye and—spitting first likely—make amazing statements about saving the world, about showing 'em if Americans would fight for

their flag, about paying our debt to France, and, yes—in a quiet, matter-of-fact way—about dying for his country.

“To every man a different meaning, yet  
Faith to the thing that set him at his best,  
Something above the blood and dirt and sweat,  
Something apart. May God forget the rest.”

The woman, appealing and winning, had seen this side of the enlisted man more than most; she had brooded over it, and over what was due to four millions of boys giving themselves to save the peace of the world. Shouldn't peace, after such sacrifice, be assured? Should the great burnt offering fail? Should the war-to-end-war lead to other wars? God forbid. By infinite little links she came to tie her boy's coming home to the coming of world peace. What more typical of America could there be than Dick? An enlisted man—she rejoiced in that now; of the educated classes, but representing the rank and file as well as the brains and gentle blood of this land; not too poor, yet not rich; in his youth and strength and forthgoing power the visible spirit of a young, strong, eager country. She put all this into halting yet clear enough words to the girl.

“I see,” Lynnette picked up the thread. “Dick is America. He's a symbol. Nobody else could combine so many elements as Dick.”

“I think you understand. It's wonderful to be able to tell it to some one who understands. It has eaten my soul.” She breathed fast. “Listen—this is what, somehow, I believe, and nothing could change my belief. Dick is going to bring peace to his country and to the world. God has chosen *him*—Dick. Alive or dead his coming will mean—peace. Peace!” The visions of many generations of



mystic Gaels were in her eyes as they lifted and gazed out at the branches which swayed slowly, hypnotically across a pale sky. The girl's twisting hands holding hers, she went on to unroll the fabric which had woven itself on the unresting loom of her brain, a fabric which was, judged by a medical standard, madness. The chain of crooked logic was after this fashion: America was the nation to bring at the last peace; Dick was the typical American; with his home-coming peace would come home to the country, and so to the world. Till Dick came home there could be no surety, no rest for the flag which he served. Other women died or went mad; this one alone, perhaps, fashioned her sorrow into a vigil for the salvation of her land.

Then one day Lynnette flew across the lawn and stood before her. "You've seen the paper?"

"I went to the Red Cross early. I haven't read it." Her pulse stopped. "Lynnette! Not—Dick?"

"Oh, no—oh, no!" Lynnette went crimson painfully. Another girl would have had her arms around the woman, but not this one. To show feeling was like pulling teeth to Lynnette. "It's not that," she said. "But—there's to be a peace conference. You know. And they want to bring back for us at that time, Armistice Day, an unknown soldier."

"The two things." Yes—the two things. What could the two things mean but her vision, her hope for the world. Dick was coming. He was to be the unknown soldier. Dick was coming, carrying peace in his dead hands. Who else could it be? People, mere people, could not see how that was fitting and inevitable; but she saw it; she knew it; God would take care of it. The unknown soldier

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