



**THE  
YELLOW  
WALLPAPER**

*CHARLOTTE PERKINS GILMAN*

RETOLD BY SARA SIMPSON

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My husband, John, and I are so lucky! We have rented a large, beautiful house in the country for the summer; hardly anyone I know can afford to do that. It's a little strange that we were able to rent the house for such a cheap price. There has to be something wrong with it. Why else would it have just been sitting there with no one living in it for so long?

John thinks I am being silly for thinking there is something wrong with the house. He is a doctor and a very practical person. I have been sick for a while now, but it's not a sickness in my body. The sickness is in my mind. I've been sad since the baby was born. Honestly, I think that the fact that John is a doctor is part of the reason I can't seem to get better more quickly. He doesn't actually believe anything is wrong with me. He tells all of our friends and family that I'm just a little depressed and it isn't a big deal. My brother is also a doctor and says the same thing. There isn't much a woman can do if two men in her family both say she's fine...even if *she* knows she isn't.

John keeps giving me different vitamins and special, healthy drinks. He tells me I just need to get outside and get some fresh air and exercise. I love to write. Writing is my passion in life. However, John says it's bad for me and will make me feel worse. Until I get better, he says I shouldn't do any writing. I also shouldn't have any friends come over. They're too exciting and will get in the way of my rest. I am supposed to spend as much time as I can lying in bed. I'm not supposed to think about all the things that upset me, but that is hard because there isn't anything else to do while I'm lying in bed all day.

Nevertheless, I try not to think about my "condition" too much because it *does* make me feel bad.

Honestly? I disagree with their ideas. I think I'd feel much better if I could do things that I enjoyed: writing and spending time with friends. Oh, well. It doesn't really matter. I don't get to decide these things; that is John's job.

Enough of that. I'm going to focus on the house!

It's a beautiful house. It sits back away from the road, which is nice because it keeps me from hearing carriages and other traffic that goes by. The house is about three miles outside of the village. This place reminds me of a fancy English manor house, with one huge house surrounded by lots of little houses where the people who worked here--gardeners, maids, cooks--would have lived. The garden is the best part. There is lots of shade, pretty paths to walk on with hedges on either side, old stone walls with locking gates, and comfortable benches to sit on.

It looks nice here, but there's something strange about the house. I told John this one night, but he just laughed and said I was feeling a draft blow in because the windows are so old. There are no ghosts.

Sometimes I get mad at John. I didn't used to get so upset over things, but I think my depression is making me yell at him. John says that my behavior isn't because I'm depressed. He says that it's because I don't want to control myself. When I'm around him, I try very hard

not to get upset and yell. Bottling up my feelings makes me feel tired.

I hate our bedroom at this house. I wanted us to stay in a bedroom I saw downstairs that had doors to the patio and a window with roses growing on it. John said “no.”

John is very loving and thoughtful. He has an hour-by-hour schedule to tell me what to do each day. He makes all the decisions so I don't have to worry. I should be more grateful for everything he does for me. He says we came to this house to help me get well. I need lots of fresh air. That's why we are staying in the old children's room at the very top of the house.

The room is huge. It has windows on every wall, so there's lots of fresh and and sunshine. I can tell this used to be a playroom for little children; there are bars on the windows to prevent children from falling out and getting hurt. There are also rings bolted into the walls, probably for attaching toys or climbing or something like that.

The children that used this room were bad. They tore the room up! All around the bed, as far as I can reach out my arms, the wallpaper is torn off in big strips. The wallpaper is also torn off across the room in another corner.

I can understand why the children did it, though. It is the ugliest wallpaper I have ever seen in my life. It has huge, ugly flowers in different ugly shades of yellow. The pattern doesn't have a nice design; when I try to follow the pattern with my eyes, it stops in strange places. The pattern doesn't line up. It is very annoying. I can see why the children hated it and tried to tear it off the walls. If I had to live here for very long, I'd do the same thing.

Here comes John! I need to put this journal away. He doesn't like it when he catches me writing.

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It has been two weeks since we came here. I haven't felt like writing since the first day.

I sit here every day, looking out the window of this ugly room. There is no reason why I couldn't spend all day writing, but I don't write very much. I feel tired all the time.

John is always working. He goes into town to see patients every day. Sometimes, he is even gone all night if someone is very sick. I'm glad that *I'm* not that sick! I still feel very sad and depressed, though. John doesn't know how bad I feel. All he knows is that there is no good reason *why* I should feel depressed, and that's good enough for him. I feel like I am a burden to him and a bad wife. I don't have enough energy to do the most basic things: getting dressed, talking to John, ordering groceries.

Our babysitter, Mary, takes care of the baby. I'm glad she is so good with him. He's such a sweet baby. I get very nervous whenever I have to take care of him. John never feels nervous about anything.

John laughs at me when I tell him how much I hate the wallpaper. When we first came here, John said we'd take down the wallpaper and put up something new. Once I started to complain about it, however, he said it would be wrong for him to give in and do what I wanted. He said that once the wallpaper was changed, I'd just find something else to be upset about--the bed, the bars on the windows, the gate at the top of the stairs, and so

on. He thinks it has been good for me to stay here, and it would be a waste of money to buy new wallpaper for a room in a house we're only staying at for three months.

I asked him to at least move our bedroom downstairs to the room I liked better. John laughed at me and called me a "blessed little goose." I guess he's right about the room. There *is* plenty of air and light. Besides, I'd feel stupid if I kept bothering him. I have started to like the room a little...except for that awful wallpaper.

I look out my window. I can see a little bit of the ocean. There is a very pretty, shady walking path. Sometimes, I think I see people taking walks out there, but John says I'm just imagining things. He says I am overly imaginative and that I have to be careful not to let my thoughts get out of control. I try to control my thoughts.

Sometimes, I think I would feel much better if I could write down all my thoughts instead of keeping them inside, but I feel so tired out whenever I think about sitting down and doing it. It's very depressing not to have anyone around to talk to about my writing. John says that once I am well enough, Cousin Henry and his wife, Julia, can come visit. Right now, he says having friends over would be as bad for me.

But enough about that.

This wallpaper looks like it *knows* how much it upsets me! There is a part of the pattern that I keep looking at. It looks like a broken neck and two, upside-down, bulging eyes that stare at you all the time. The broken necks and bulging eyes are everywhere, crawling around and not blinking. There is one place in the wallpaper where two pieces weren't matched up properly. It makes a row of eyes that go from the floor to the ceiling.

I have always been able to see the personality in non-living things around me, but this wallpaper has the strongest personality I've ever seen! When I was a little girl, I remember seeing eyes in the knobs on the old dresser in my room. There was one chair that always seemed like a strong friend.

The furniture in this room all had to be brought up from downstairs. The children who lived here before broke the furniture that was here. The room is a mess! Like I said before, the wallpaper has been torn off in places. Considering how stuck to the wall it is, it must have taken a long time and a lot of effort to get that much torn off. The wooden floor has deep gouges in it. Someone dug holes into the walls. The bed is bolted to the floor. Honestly, the mess doesn't bother me. Only the wallpaper bothers me.

Here comes John's sister, Jennie! She is so kind to me. I can't let her catch me writing!

Jennie is a perfect woman. She likes taking care of the house and the children. She thinks my writing is making me sick.

There are times when the light from the window shines on the wallpaper just right and I can see a pattern hiding *underneath* the main pattern. I see the shape of a person. She is hiding and slowly moving around inside the wallpaper.

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The Fourth of July is over! We had mother and Nellie and the children visit for a week. Even though I didn't do any of the planning or work to have them here, I feel

very tired. John is mad at me. He says if I don't start to get better, he's going to send me to see Dr. Weir Mitchell when we get home in the fall. Dr. Mitchell is a doctor with even more extreme ideas than John about making me rest in order to get better. One of my friends had to go see Dr. Mitchell; she didn't like it.

I worry and cry all the time when I am alone. When John or Jennie are here, I don't cry. I don't want them to be worried or mad at me. I am alone a lot. John is always in town working, and Jennie leaves me alone.

Sometimes I walk in the garden and sit there. I lie down in bed a lot. I've started to really like this room, in spite of the wallpaper. Maybe even *because* of the wallpaper! I think about the wallpaper all the time. I stare at the pattern for hours. It wears me out. I start in one corner of the room and try to follow the pattern to where it ends, but there isn't anything consistent about the design so I can't. It's so irritating, and it makes me tired. I think I'll take a nap.

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I don't know why I am writing this. I don't want to write. I feel so tired. I know John would think I'm crazy.

However, I have to get my thoughts and feelings out *somehow*, and writing in this journal is the only place I can do that. Every day, it gets harder and harder to find the energy to write. I lie down and sleep half of the day.

John sees how much I'm sleeping, and he keeps giving me things to eat like cod liver oil, beer, wine, and red meat. He thinks if I eat healthy food, I'll stop feeling so tired all the time. He hates seeing me sick.

I tried to have a serious talk with him the other day. I told him that I would feel better if I could go visit Cousin

Henry and his wife, Julia. He said I couldn't go. I started crying and couldn't stop, and that didn't help convince him it was a good idea. He carried me upstairs to bed and read to me until I fell asleep.

John says that I need to have better willpower and self-control over my thoughts if I want to get better and stop crying all the time.

One good thing is that the baby is safe with Mary back at our house in the city. It would have been terrible for a poor baby to have to stay in the room with this terrible wallpaper.

I know not to talk to John or Jennie about the wallpaper anymore, but I watch it all the time. I'm the only one who can see the shapes moving around inside it. I can see the shape of a woman crouching down and creeping around. I can see her more every day. I wish John would take me away from here!

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It's very hard to talk to John about my health, but I still tried to do it last night. At night, the moon shines through the windows bright as the sun. John was asleep and I hated to wake him up, so I just lay there in bed very still and watched the moonlight on the wallpaper until I started to feel weird. The person behind the wallpaper seemed to shake the pattern like she wanted to get out. I got out of bed and went over to feel the wallpaper to see if it really *did* move. That's when John woke up.

"What is it, little girl?" he asked. "Don't walk around like that in the middle of the night! You'll get cold!"

I decided it was a good time to talk to John. I told him I didn't think staying at this house was helping me get better. I told him I wanted to leave.

"Why, darling!" he said. "We've paid for three more weeks! We can't leave until then! The repairs aren't done at home, and I can't leave town right now. If I really thought you were in danger, we'd leave. But you aren't. I'm a doctor and your husband, and I know what's best. You are eating better and gaining weight, so I know you are fine."

"I'm not gaining weight," I said. "I am only eating more food when you are around in the evening. The rest of the day, when you are gone, I still don't want to eat anything."

"Bless her little heart!" he said in a baby talk voice, giving me a big hug. "She will be as sick as she wants to be! But it's late. Let's go back to sleep. We can talk more about it in the morning."

"And you won't go away once I'm sleeping?" I asked sadly.

"Of course not!" he said. "It's only three more weeks. Jennie is getting our house ready. You really *are* much better."

"Maybe my body is better," I said, "but my mind..."

"Stop saying that," he said. "You need to think about my needs and about our child's needs. You have to stop imagining things and feeling sorry for yourself."

I didn't say anything else. John went back to sleep. He thought that I was sleeping, too, but I wasn't. I lay there

for hours watching the wallpaper and trying to figure out which parts of it were moving.

\* \* \* \* \*

During the daytime, the wallpaper makes me so angry. There isn't any rhyme or reason to the pattern. Looking at it is like torture. I try to follow the pattern with my eyes, but I always lose the trail somehow. I try over and over and over again. The pattern is disgusting. It looks like a combination of mold and toadstools.

As the light in the room changes, the wallpaper looks different. At night, it doesn't look at all like it does during the day. At night, when there is a lamp or a candle or moonlight, the pattern turns into the bars of a jail cell. I can see a woman behind the bars very clearly. I wasn't sure it was a woman at first, but now I am totally sure.

During the daytime, the woman behind the wallpaper barely moves and is very quiet. I lie down a lot during the day. John says it is good for me. He started by having me lie down for an hour after each meal. I think this is a very bad habit. I don't think I need sleep. This makes me have to lie to John and Jennie; I tell them I am sleeping, even when I am not. John and Jennie have both been acting weird lately. I have seen both of them come into the room and *stare at the wallpaper*. Jennie says the yellow dye in the wallpaper gets all over my clothes and John's clothes; she wishes we would be more careful since it stains. I don't like it when they look at the wallpaper. I want to be the only own who learns all its secrets.

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Life is more exciting now than it used to be. Now that I am focused on watching the wallpaper, I eat better and am more quiet than I used to be.

John is happy to see me doing so well. He laughed and said he was glad to see that I was doing so well in spite of my wallpaper.

I laughed back at him. I didn't tell him I was doing so much better *because* of the wallpaper. He would have made fun of me. He might have wanted to make me leave. I don't want to leave now. Not until I find out all the wallpaper's secrets. We will be here for one more week. I think that will be enough time.

\* \* \* \* \*

I'm feeling so much better! I don't sleep at night because it is so interesting to watch the changes in the wallpaper, but I sleep a lot during the day. During the day, I feel tired and confused.

There are always new growths in the fungus in the wallpaper pattern. There are new shades of yellow, too--not a pretty yellow like you'd see in flowers but an old, dirty, bad yellow. There is something else about that wallpaper--the smell! I noticed it when we first moved into the room but the fresh air coming it covered it up. Now that it has been raining and foggy for a week, the smell is there.

The smell creeps all over the house.

The smell is in the dining room, the parlor, the hall, and the stairs.

The smell gets into my hair.

Even when I go out for a ride in the carriage, I turn my head and the smell is there.

It's a very strange smell. I can't figure out what it is. The smell isn't bad at first, but it's always there.

In this damp weather, it is awful. I wake up at night and the smell is all over me.

It used to bother me at first. I thought about burning the house down to make the smell go away, but now I am used to it. It smells like the color of the paper. It is a yellow smell.

There is a weird mark low on the wall near the floor. It goes all the way around the room behind every piece of furniture except for the bed. It looks like someone has rubbed the wall over and over again. I wonder who made that mark and why they did it. It goes round and round and round--round and round and round. It makes me dizzy.

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I have figured something out.

By watching the wallpaper so much at night, I have know the pattern really *does* move. It moves because the woman behind it shakes it!

Sometimes I think there are many women behind the wallpaper. Sometimes I think there is only one woman who crawls around fast and shakes the wallpaper on all the walls.

In the bright spots, she stands still. In the darker spots she grabs the bars and shakes them. She is always

trying to climb out from behind the wallpaper, but the pattern is too thick to get through. I think that is why the pattern has so many heads. A head can get through the pattern, but the pattern ends up choking the head until it is cut off. The eyes in the heads turn white. If the heads would go away, it wouldn't be so bad.

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I think that woman gets out during the daytime!

I'll tell you why I think that--I've seen her! I can see her when I look out any of the windows in the room. I know it is the same woman because of the unusual way she moves around. She creeps. She walks around all hunched over and is always looking from side to side like someone is chasing her. I see her on the shaded walking path. I see her sitting on bench in the garden. Whenever a carriage drives by, she hides in the bushes until it is gone.

I don't blame her. I'd be embarrassed to be caught creeping around, too. When I creep around during the day, I always lock the door. I can't creep around at night because John would know something was wrong.

John is acting so odd lately. I wish he'd go sleep in a different bedroom. I don't want anybody to get that woman out of the wallpaper at night besides me. I can see her out of the corner of my eye, but the minute I turn to try to see her completely, she is gone. The woman is very fast.

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If I could only get the top part of the wallpaper off, I know I could see the woman more clearly. I will peel it off a little bit at a time. I only have two more days to get the paper off, and I think John has started to notice that pieces of it are missing.

I don't like the way he has been looking at me. He has been asking Jennie lots of questions about me. Jennie has given me a good report. She told John I sleep a lot during the day. John knows I do not sleep very well at night, even though I try to be very quiet. John asked me questions, too. He was acting very loving and kind, but he didn't fool me.

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Hooray! This is our second to last day in the house! We moved all the furniture back where it belongs downstairs. The only piece of furniture left in the room is the bed. John is going to stay in town tonight, so I should have just enough time left to figure out the secrets of this wallpaper before he comes back tomorrow and we leave.

As soon as night came and the moon came shining in the windows, I got out of bed and started helping the woman behind the wallpaper, pulling off huge pieces of it. I pulled and she shook; I shook and she pulled. By morning, we had torn off a huge strip as tall as my head all the way around the room.

When the sun came up, the wallpaper started to laugh at me. I will finish it today. We will be leaving tomorrow.

When Jennie came in to check on me this morning, she looked amazed. I smiled and laughed and told her I had torn it all off because I hated it so much. Jennie laughed

and warned me not to make myself too tired. She tried to get me to leave my room, but I told her it was so clean and quiet without the wallpaper that I was going to lie down and rest all day. I told her not to come up all day; I would let her know when I was awake.

I like the room better now that it is almost empty. I still can't believe how much those children tore up this room! They even chewed up the wood on the bed!

But I need to get to work.

I locked the door and threw the key out the window. The key landed near the front path below. I do not want to leave the room, and I don't want anyone else coming in until John gets home. I want to surprise him.

I have a rope up here that Jennie didn't find. If she found it, she would take it away from me. If the woman gets out and tries to get away, I will use it to tie her up.

I wanted to move the bed so I could tear off the paper behind it. It. Would. Not. Move. I got so angry that I bit a chunk of the wood off the corner of the bed. It hurt my teeth.

I want to jump out the window, but I know I won't. The bars are too strong. I don't like to look out the windows anymore. There are so many women creeping around, and they move so fast.

I wonder if all of those women came out of the wallpaper the same way I did.

I have the rope tied around my waist. Nobody can make me leave this room.

I will have to climb back behind the wallpaper when night comes. That is hard.

I like being out in this nice, big room. It is nice to be able to creep around as much as I want. I don't want to go outside. I won't go, even if Jennie asks. Outside, you have to creep on the ground and everything is green instead of yellow.

In here, I can creep smoothly on the floor. My shoulder fits in the weird mark all along the wall just above the floor, so I can't get lost.

John is here! He is pounding on the door and yelling for someone to bring him an ax so he can get inside.

"John, dear!" I said in a gentle voice. "The key is down by the front steps. It is under a plant leaf."

John was quiet for a few minutes, then he said "Open the door, darling!"

"I can't," I said. "The key is down by the front steps. It is under a plant leaf." I said this again until he believed me. After a while, he went downstairs and got the key. John opened the door.

"What is wrong?" he cried. "What are you doing?"

I kept on creeping, but I looked at him over my shoulder.

"I finally got out!" I said. "In spite of you and Jane. I have pulled off most of the wallpaper so you can't put me back in there!"

John fainted. I don't know why, but he did. His body was in my way, so I had to creep right over him every time I went around the room.