

SEMINARIO MULTIDISCIPLINARIO
JOSE EMILIO GONZALEZ
FACULTAD DE HUMANIDADES
UNIVERSIDAD DE PUERTO RICO
RECINTO DE SAN JUAN

THE YELLOW WALLPAPER
A Dramatic Monolog

Laura Suillo

Charlotte Perkins Gilman

From a monolog that was first published in the Atlantic Monthly, and later included in a compilation by William Dean Howells.

It is seldom that ordinary people like John and myself secure ancestral halls for the summer. I would say it is a haunted house, but John laughs at me, of course.

John is a physician, and perhaps--perhaps that is one reason I do not get well faster. If one's own husband, a physician of high standing, assures friends that there is nothing the matter with one but nervous depression--a slight hysterical tendency--what is one to do?

John says the worst thing I can do is to think about my condition. So--I will talk about the house we have rented. The most beautiful place! It is quite alone, standing well back from the road. It makes me think of English places that you read about, for there are hedges and walls and gates that lock.

I don't like our room a bit. I wanted one downstairs that had pretty chintz hangings! But John said there was only one window and not enough room. He said that I was to have perfect rest and all the air I could get. So we took the nursery at the top of the house.

It is a big room, with air and sunshine galore. It was a playroom, I should judge; for the windows are barred for little children, and the paper looks as if a boys' school had used it. It is stripped off all around the head of my bed, about as far as I can reach, and in a great place on the other side of the room low down.

I never saw a worse paper in my life. The color is a smouldering unclean yellow. No wonder the children hated it!

John laughs at me about this wall paper! At first he meant to re-paper the room, but afterwards he said that nothing was worse for a nervous patient than to give way to such fancies.

"Then do let us go downstairs," I said, "there are such pretty rooms there."

Then he took me in his arms and called me a blessed little goose, and said he would go down cellar, if I wished. But it is an airy and comfortable room, and, of course, I would not be so silly as to make him uncomfortable just for a whim.

Well, the Fourth of July is over! The people are all gone and I am tired out. John thought it might do me good to see a little company, so we had mother and Nellie and the children down for a week.

Of course I didn't do a thing. Jennie sees to everything now. But it tired me all the same, and I cry at nothing, and cry most of the time, when I am alone. And I am alone a good deal now. John is kept in town very often by serious cases.

So I walk a little in the garden, or sit on the porch under the roses, and lie down up here a good deal. I'm getting really fond of the room in spite of the wall paper. Perhaps because of the wall paper I lie here and follow that pattern about by the hour, determined that I will follow that pointless pattern to some sort of conclusion.

I know a little of the principles of design, and I know this thing was not arranged on any laws that I ever heard of. The sprawling lines run off in great slanting waves of optic horror, like a lot of wallowing sea-weeds in full chase.

Of course I never mention it to them any more--I am too wise--but behind that pattern the dim shape gets clearer every day. It is always the same, like a woman stooping down and creeping about.--I wish John would take me away from here!

It is hard to talk with John about my case, because he is so wise, and because he loves me so. Last night I hated to waken him, so I watched the moonlight on that undulating wall paper. Then I got up to feel and see if the paper did move, and when I came back John was awake

"What is it, little girl?" he said. "Don't go walking about like that--you'll get cold."

I told him, then, that I was not gaining here, and that I wished he would take me away.

"Why, darling, our lease will be up in three weeks, and the repairs are not done at home now. Of course if you were in any danger, I could and would, but you really are better, dear."

"Better in body perhaps--"

"My darling, I beg of you never to let that false idea enter your mind! There is nothing so dangerous to a temperament like yours."

I said no more, but I lay there trying to decide what the thing was behind that pattern, but I am quite sure it is a woman.

Life is much more exciting since I have something to watch. John is so pleased to see me improve! He laughed a little and said I seemed to be flourishing in spite of my wall paper. I turned it off with a laugh. I had no intention of telling him it was because of the wall paper--he might take me away. I don't want to leave now until I have found it out. There is a week more, and I think that will be enough.

It is the strangest yellow, that wall paper! But there is something else about that paper--the smell! It creeps all over the house. I find it lying in wait for me on the stairs. It gets into my hair. I wake up in the night and find it hanging over me. At first I thought of burning the house--to reach the smell. But now I am used to it. The only thing I can think of that it is like is a yellow smell.

There is a funny mark on this wall, down near the mop-board. It runs round the room, a long, straight smooch, as if it had been rubbed over and over. I wonder who did it, and what they did it for. Round and round and round--round and round and round--it makes me dizzy!

I have discovered something at last. The pattern does move--and no wonder! The woman behind shakes it! She takes hold of the bars and shakes them hard. And she is all the time trying to climb through. But nobody could climb through that pattern--it strangles so.

I think that woman gets out in the daytime! And I'll tell you why--I've seen her! It is the same woman, I know, for she is always creeping. I see her in the grape arbors, and creeping all around the garden. I see her under the trees, creeping along, and when a carriage comes she hides under the vines.

I don't blame her a bit. It must be very humiliating to be caught creeping by daylight! I always lock the door when I creep by daylight. I can't do it at night, for John is so queer now that I don't want to irritate him. I wish he would take another room! Besides, I don't want anybody to get that woman out at night but myself. I mean to try it, little by little. I have found out another funny thing, but I shan't tell it this time! It does not do to trust people too much.

Hurrah! This is the last day, but it is enough. John stayed in town over night, and won't be out until this evening. But I wasn't alone a bit! As soon as it was moonlight and that poor thing began to crawl and shake the pattern, I got up and ran to help her, and before morning we had peeled a strip half around the room.

Jennie looked at the wall in amazement, but I told her merrily that

I did it out of pure spite at the vicious thing. She laughed and said she wouldn't mind doing it herself, but no one touches this paper but me--not alive! She tried to get me out of the room--But I said that I believed I would lie down again, and not to wake me--I would call when I woke.

How those children did tear about here! This bedstead is fairly gnawed! But I must get to work. I have locked the door and thrown the key down into the front path. I don't want anybody to come in, till John comes. I want to astonish him.

I've got a rope up here that even Jennie did not find. If that woman does get out, and tries to get away, I can tie her! But I forgot I could not reach far without anything to stand on! This bed will not move! I tried to lift and push it until I was lame, and then I got so angry I bit off a little piece at one corner--but it hurt my teeth.

I am getting angry enough to jump out of the window, but the bars are too strong even to try. Besides I wouldn't do it. I know well enough that a step like that is improper and might be misconstrued.

I don't like to look out of the windows even--there are so many of those creeping women, and they creep so fast. I wonder if they all come out of that wall paper as I did? But I am securely fastened now by my well-hidden rope--you don't get me out in the road there! I suppose I shall have to get back behind the pattern when it comes night; and it is so pleasant to be out in this great room and creep around as I please! Outside you have to creep on the ground, but here I can creep smoothly on the floor, and my shoulder just fits in that long smooch around the wall, so I cannot lose my way.

Why, there's John at the door! "John, dear! the key is down by the front steps, under a plantain leaf!"

"Open the door, my darling!"

"I can't. The key is down by the front door under a plantain leaf!"

And then I said it several times, so that he had to go and see, and he got it of course, and came in. He stopped short by the door.

"What is the matter? For God's sake, what are you doing?"

I kept on creeping, but I looked at him over my shoulder. "I've got out at last, in spite of you and Jennie. And I've pulled off most of the paper, so you can't put me back!"

Now why should that man have fainted? But he did, and right across my path by the wall. Now I have to creep over him every time!



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Sioux City, Iowa

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