

The Yellow Wall-paper

It is very **seldom** that mere ordinary people like John and myself secure ancestral halls for the summer. A colonial mansion, a hereditary estate, I would say a **haunted** house, and reach the height of romantic felicity—but that would be asking too much of fate! Still I will proudly declare that there is something **queer** about it. Else, why should it be let so cheaply? And why have stood so long unrented?

John laughs at me, of course, but one expects that in marriage. John is practical in the extreme. He has no patience with faith, an intense horror of superstition, and he **scoffs** openly at any talk of things not to be felt and seen and put down in figures. John is a physician, and PERHAPS—PERHAPS that is one reason I do not get well faster. You see he does not believe I am sick! And what can one do? If a physician of high standing, and one's own husband, assures friends and relatives that there is really nothing the matter with one but temporary nervous depression—a slight hysterical tendency—what is one to do?



I sometimes fancy that in my condition if I had less opposition and more society and stimulus—but John says the very worst thing I can do is to think about my condition, and I confess it always makes me feel bad. So I will let it alone and talk about the house. There was some legal trouble, I believe, something about the **heirs** and coheirs; anyhow, the place has been empty for years. There is something strange about the house—I can feel it.

We took the nursery at the top of the house. It is a big, airy room, the whole floor nearly, with windows that look all ways, and air and sunshine **galore**. It was nursery first and then playroom and gymnasium, I should judge; for the windows are barred for little children, and there are rings and things in the walls. The paint and paper look as if a boys' school had used it. It is **stripped** off—the paper—in great **patches** 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.

I wish I could get well faster.

But I must not think about that. This paper looks to me as if it KNEW what a vicious influence it had! There is a recurrent **spot** where the pattern **lolls** like a broken neck and two bulbous eyes stare at you upside down. I never saw so much expression in an inanimate thing before, and we all know how much expression they have! I used to lie awake as a child and get more entertainment and terror out of **blank** walls and **plain** furniture than most children could find in a toy store.

There are things in that paper that nobody knows but me, or ever will. Behind that outside pattern the **dim** shapes get clearer every day. It is always the same shape, only very numerous. And it is like a woman stooping down and creeping about behind that pattern. I don't like it a bit. I wonder—I begin to think—I wish John would take me away from here!

It is so hard to talk with John about my case, because he is so wise, and because he loves me so. But I tried it last night. It was moonlight. John was asleep and I hated to waken him, so I kept still and watched the moonlight on that undulating wall-paper till I felt creepy.

The faint **figure** behind seemed to shake the pattern, just as if she wanted to get out. I got up softly and went 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 thought it was a good time to talk, so I told him that I really was not gaining here, and that I wished he would take me away. "Why darling!" said he, "our **lease** will be up in three weeks, and I can't see how to leave before.[...]"

There is one marked peculiarity about this paper, a thing nobody seems to notice but myself,

and that is that it changes as the light changes. When the sun shoots in through the east window—I always watch for that first long, straight ray—it changes so quickly that I never can quite believe it. That is why I watch it always. By moonlight I wouldn't know it was the same paper. At night in any kind of light, it becomes bars! The outside pattern I mean, and the woman behind it is as plain as can be. I didn't realize for a long time what the thing was that showed behind that dim pattern but now I am quite sure it is a woman. By daylight she is **subdued**, quiet.

I fancy it is the **pattern** that keeps her so **still**. It is so **puzzling**. It keeps me quiet by the hour. I, think that woman gets out in the daytime! And I'll tell you why—privately—I've seen her! I can see her out of every one of my windows! It is the same woman, I know, for she is always **creeping**, and most women do not creep by daylight. I see her on that long shaded lane, creeping up and down. I see her in those dark grape arbors, creeping all around the garden. I see her on that long road under the trees, creeping along, and when a carriage comes she hides under the blackberry 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 I know John would suspect something at once.

And 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 often wonder if I could see her out of all the windows at once. But, turn as fast as I can, I can only see out of one at one time. And though I always see her she *may* be able to creep faster than I can turn! I have watched her sometimes away off in the open country, creeping as fast as a cloud shadow in a high wind.

I have found out another funny thing, but I shan't tell it this time! It does not do to trust people too much.

There are only two more days to get this paper off, and I believe John is beginning to notice. I don't like the look in his eyes.

And I heard him ask Jennie a lot of professional questions about me. She had a very good report to give. She said I slept a good deal in the daytime.

John knows I don't sleep very well at night!

He asked me all sorts of questions, too, and pretended to be very loving and kind.

As if I couldn't **see through him**!

Still, I don't wonder he acts so, sleeping under this paper for three months.

It only interests me, but I feel sure John and Jennie are secretly affected by it. [...]

Hurrah! This is the last day, but it is enough. John is to stay in town over night, and won't be out until this evening.

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. I pulled and she shook, I shook and she pulled, and before morning we had peeled off yards of that paper. A strip about as high as my head and half around the room.

And then when the sun came and that awful pattern began to laugh at me I declared I would finish it to-day!

We go away to-morrow, and they are moving all my furniture down again to leave things as they were before. 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 I must not get tired.

But I am here, and no person touches this paper but me—not alive!

I quite enjoy the room, now it is bare again.

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 to go out, and I don't want to have anybody 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 and then I got so angry I bit off a little piece at one corner—but it hurt my teeth.

Then I peeled off all the paper I could reach standing on the floor. It sticks horribly and the pattern just enjoys it! All those strangled heads and bulbous eyes just shriek with derision!

I am getting angry enough to do something desperate. To jump out of the window would be admirable exercise, but the bars are too strong even to try.

Besides I wouldn't do it. Of course not. I know well enough that a step like that is improper and might be misunderstood.

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 wallpaper 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 that is hard!

It is so pleasant to be out in this great room and creep around as I please!

I don't want to go outside. I won't, even if Jennie asks me to.

Why, there's John at the door!

It is no use, young man, you can't open it!

How he does call and pound!

"John dear!" said I in the gentlest voice, "the key is down by the front steps, under a plantain leaf!"

That silenced him for a few moments.

And then I said it again, several times, very gently and slowly, and said it so often 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?" he cried. "For God's sake, what are you doing!"

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

"I've got out at last," said I, "in spite of you and Jane! 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, so that I had to creep over him every time!

The Yellow Wall Paper, Charlotte Perkin Gilman, 1892 (excerpt)

Seldom: *rare* – **haunted:** *hanté* – **queer:** *bizarre*

scoffs: *se moquer*

heirs: *héritiers*

galore: *en abondance* – **stripped off:** *arrachés au mur* – **patches:** *morceau*

spot: *endroit* – **loll:** *pendre* **blank:** *vide* – **plain:** *uni, simple*

dim: *vague, sombre*

figure: *silhouette*

lease: *bail, location*

subdued: *sous contrôle, maîtrisée*

pattern: *motif* – **still:** *immobile* – **puzzling:** *surprenant*

creeping: *ramper*

queer: *bizarre*

see through him: *deviner ses intentions*

tear: *ici, déchirer* – **gnawed:** *mordre*

shriek: *cri aigüe*