

THE YELLOW WALLPAPER

ADAPTED AND DEvised BY LAURENCE STRANGIO AND ANNIE THOROLD
FROM THE NOVELLA BY CHARLOTTE PERKINS GILMAN



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THE YELLOW WALLPAPER 1

Theatre Program at the end of the playtext

The Yellow Wallpaper was first produced at La Mama Courthouse Theatre, Melbourne, on 6 November 2017, as part of La Mama's Explorations Season, with the following cast:

THE WOMAN

Annie Thorold

Director, Laurence Strangio

Set and Costume Design, Laurence Strangio and Annie Thorold

Lighting Design, Georgia Stefania Rann

Stage Manager, Meika Clarke

CHARACTER

THE WOMAN

SETTING

The late 19th century. The present.
A large heavy table in a large airy room.

A NOTE ON THE TEXT

The text is divided between THE WOMAN and the recorded voice of her journal, RECORDED WOMAN [*voiceover*].

Where text is written in **bold** it is spoken both in voiceover and by THE WOMAN—sometimes simultaneously, sometimes as an echo—with a different attitude.

Italics denote emphasis as indicated in the original novella.

Indented lines in *italics* and square brackets [] indicate original text that has become action only.

The playtext follows spelling and grammatical conventions of the original novella.

A NOTE ON THE PHYSICAL PERFORMANCE

The physical language of this adaptation is as important as the text. The actions of the performer do not conform naturalistically with the descriptions within the spoken text.

Stage directions at the start of each scene indicate initial physical actions or states but not necessarily how they develop.

This playtext went to press before the end of rehearsals and may differ from the play as performed.

SCENE ONE

Music. THE WOMAN *enters slowly.*

RECORDED WOMAN: [*voiceover*] 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—but that would be asking too much!

Still I will proudly declare that there is something queer about it.

Else, why should it have stood so long untenanted?

John laughs at me, of course, but one expects that in marriage.

John is practical in the extreme. He has no patience with 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— [THE WOMAN *joins in*] **a slight hysterical tendency**—what is one to do?

My brother is also a physician, and he says the same.

So I take phosphates or phosphites—whichever it is—and tonics, and journeys, and air, and exercise, and am absolutely forbidden to 'work' until I am well again.

Personally, I disagree with their ideas.

Personally, I believe that congenial work, with excitement and change, would do me good.

But what is one to do?

I did write for a while in spite of them; but it does exhaust me a good deal—having to be so sly about it.

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.

So I will let it alone and talk about the house.

The most beautiful place! It is quite alone, some three miles from the village. There is a *delicious* garden!—large and shady, full of box-bordered paths, lined with grape-covered arbours.

But there is something strange about the house—

THE WOMAN: I can feel it.

RECORDED WOMAN: [*voiceover*] I even said so to John one moonlight evening, but he said what I felt was a *draught*, and shut the window.

I get unreasonably angry with John sometimes. I'm sure I never used to be so sensitive.

But John says if I feel *so*, I shall neglect proper self-control; so I take pains to control myself—before him, at least—and that makes me very tired.

I don't like our room a bit. I wanted one downstairs that opened onto the piazza and had roses all over the window!—but John would not hear of it.

He said there was only one window and not room for two beds, and no near room for him if he took another.

He is very careful and loving, and hardly lets me stir without special direction.

And so I feel basely ungrateful not to value it more.

He said we came here solely on my account, 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, airy room, the whole floor nearly, with windows that look all ways, and air and sunshine galore. It was nursery first and then playroom or gymnasium; for the windows are barred for little children, and there are rings and things in the walls.

The paper is stripped off 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. One of those sprawling flamboyant patterns committing every artistic sin.

When you follow the lame uncertain curves for a little distance they suddenly commit suicide—plunge off at outrageous angles, destroy themselves!

The colour is repellent, almost revolting; a smouldering unclean yellow, strangely faded by the slow-turning sunlight.

No wonder the children hated it! I should hate it myself if I—

There comes John—I must put this away.

SCENE TWO

THE WOMAN *undoes her hair and lies on the table, her arms over her face.*

RECORDED WOMAN: [*voiceover*] We have been here two weeks, and I haven't felt like writing since that first day.

I am sitting by the window now, up in this atrocious nursery, and there is nothing to hinder my writing as much as I please, save lack of strength.

John is away all day, and even some nights when his cases are serious.

I am glad my case is not serious!

But these nervous troubles are dreadfully depressing.

John does not know how much I really suffer.

And it does weigh on me so not to do my duty in any way!

It is fortunate Mary is so good with the baby. **Such a dear baby!**

And yet **I cannot be with him**—it makes me so nervous.

John laughs at me so about this wallpaper!

At first he meant to repaper the room, but afterwards he said that I was letting it get the better of me, and cautioned me not to give way to fancy.

He said that after the wallpaper was changed it would be the heavy bedstead, and then the barred windows, and then that gate at the head of the stairs, and so on.

‘You know the place is doing you good,’ he said, ‘and really, dear, I don’t care to renovate the house just for a three months’ rental.’

‘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 to the cellar, if I wished.

But he is right enough, of course—and I would not be so silly as to make him uncomfortable just for a whim.

I’m really getting quite fond of the big room, all but that horrid paper. I think sometimes that if I were only well enough to write a little, it would relieve the press of ideas and rest me.

But I find I get pretty tired when I try.

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!

THE WOMAN: There is a recurrent spot where the pattern lolls like a broken neck and two bulbous eyes stare at you upside down.

I get positively angry with the impertinence of it.

RECORDED WOMAN: [*voiceover*] Up and down and sideways they crawl, those absurd, unblinking eyes.

I never saw such ravages as the children have made here.

The wallpaper is torn off in spots, and it sticketh fast!—they must have had perseverance as well as hatred.

Then the floor is scratched and gouged and splintered, the plaster itself is dug out here and there, and this great heavy bedstead is fairly gnawed!

But I don’t mind it a bit—**only the paper.**

There comes John’s sister. Such a dear girl as she is, and so careful of me!

She is a perfect and enthusiastic housekeeper. I believe she thinks it is the writing which made me sick!

But I can write when she is out, and see her a long way off from these windows.

THE WOMAN: This wallpaper has a kind of sub-pattern in a different shade, a particularly irritating one, for you can only see it in certain lights.

But when the sun is just so—I can see a strange, provoking, formless sort of figure, that seems to skulk about behind that silly and conspicuous front design.

RECORDED WOMAN: [*voiceover*] There's sister on the stairs!

SCENE THREE

THE WOMAN *moves to a corner of the room, her head against the wall.*

RECORDED WOMAN: [*voiceover*] Well, the Fourth of July is over! The people are gone and I am tired out.

John thought it might do me good to see a little company.

Of course I didn't do a thing. But it tired me all the same.

John says if I don't pick up faster he shall send me to Dr Mitchell in the fall.

But I don't want to go there. He is just like John, and my brother—only more so!

Besides, it is such an undertaking to go so far.

I'm getting dreadfully fretful and querulous.

I cry at nothing, and cry most of the time.

Of course I don't when John is here, or anybody else, but when I am alone.

And I am alone a good deal just now.

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 wallpaper. Perhaps *because* of the wallpaper.

It dwells in my mind so!

I lie here on this great immovable bed—**it is nailed down!**—and follow that pattern about by the hour. I start at the bottom, down in the corner over there where it has not been touched, and I determine for the thousandth time that **I will follow that pointless pattern** to some sort of a conclusion.