

A Madwoman's Appeal for Social Reform

A Translation of "The Yellow Wallpaper"



(Illustration by Gemma Luker, 2009)

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Introduction

This thesis focuses on a translation of several excerpts from Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short story "The Yellow Wallpaper". The story was first published in *The New England Magazine* in 1892 and it is based on the author's own experiences. The choice for me to do a translation thesis was an easy one because I enjoy translating and hope to start a Master's degree in Translation Studies next year. Then began the search for a text to translate. I came across this story in an American Literature course I took and it immediately spoke to me because of the interesting storyline, the diary style and the way it criticizes the medical attitudes toward women in the author's time. After reading the story I decided it was worth examining more closely and thought it would make an interesting topic for my thesis.

I have selected five excerpts from the story for my translation which demonstrate the narrator's psychological process through the story. I will start with some information about the author and an explanation of the selected passages in their context by means of a summary. After that I will discuss some interpretations of the story. This will be followed by two chapters about the genre and style of the story, in which I will also focus on translation problems that occurred during the process of writing this thesis. I will then conclude with the translation itself, accompanied by footnotes where necessary.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman

Charlotte Perkins Gilman was born in Hartford, Connecticut and she grew up with her mother Mary Perkins and brother Thomas Adie. Frederic Beecher Perkins, her father, left his family during Charlotte's infancy, forcing them to rely on their relatives for housing and support. Charlotte inherited her father's love of literature and growing up she was also influenced by her aunt Harriet Beecher Stowe, who was an author and feminism activist.

In her autobiography *The living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, Charlotte describes her early education as inadequate for she attended seven different public schools in four years (18). Despite the adversities she faced early in life, Charlotte became a student at the Rhode Island School of Design and afterwards supported herself by designing greeting cards.

In 1884 Charlotte married Charles Walter Stetson and a year later their daughter Katharine Beecher Stetson was born. After giving birth Charlotte suffered from a severe postpartum depression. She began treatment with Dr. Weir Mitchell, who prescribed a rest cure and advised her to “have but two hours’ intellectual life a day” and “never to touch pen, brush, or pencil again” (Gilman 3, par. 3). Following her doctor’s orders, Charlotte describes how she “came so near the borderline of utter mental ruin that [she] could see over” (Gilman 3, par. 4). With the help of a friend she stopped following the doctor’s advice and went to work again, which helped her regain some power. In 1888 she separated from her husband, a move she felt necessary to improve her health, and she and her daughter moved to Pasadena, California. She participated in feminist organizations and wrote “The Yellow Wallpaper” as a response to Dr. Weir Mitchell showing him that his rest cure was ineffective while at the same time hoping to change the ideas about the role of women in her time.

Besides “The Yellow Wallpaper”, Charlotte published many other literary works including novels, poems, short stories and lectures. Some of her early stories were experimental and imitated the styles of authors like Mark Twain and Edgar Allan Poe. Recurrent themes in both her fiction and non-fiction are social reform, motherhood, roles of women, and ethics.

Charlotte legally divorced her husband in 1894 and she sent her daughter to live with her ex-husband and his second wife. In 1900 she remarried her cousin Houghton Gilman, who was very supportive of her career and they lived together until Houghton’s death in 1934. In 1932 Charlotte was diagnosed with incurable breast cancer and she committed suicide in

1935. “[S]he chose not to be a burden to others. She took chloroform and died. It was her final willed choice” (Hedges 1, 59).

“The Yellow Wallpaper”

“The Yellow Wallpaper” is a short story that consists of several journal entries by a female narrator. It starts with the first excerpt I chose for my translation, in which the narrator explains the situation she and her husband John are in: they have rented a house for the summer while the narrator is trying to recover from a nervous breakdown. Her husband and brother, both physicians, have decided that the cure for her state is bed rest. While the narrator describes the house, the reader is introduced to the yellow wallpaper and the narrator’s dislike of it. In this first entry the woman’s mind seems relatively clear. She acknowledges her psychological state, even though she disagrees with the physicians’ diagnosis and treatment. The woman is suffering from a depression, possibly a postpartum psychosis, since she recently gave birth to a child, which is nowadays treated as an actual illness. However, in the nineteenth century psychosis and similar problems women suffered from were dismissed as “hysteria” and were not considered as real diseases, which the story shows as the narrator tells the reader that her husband does not believe that she is sick (1598).

In the following journal entries the woman is still struggling with her depression. All activities tire her, she finds herself crying at nothing, and she feels a burden to everyone. She explains her dislike for the wallpaper to her husband but he dismisses her, saying if it were not the wallpaper, it would be something else that she would not like. Her husband does not want her writing, so she only writes when nobody is around.

The second passage I chose for translating follows; the woman’s condition seems to have worsened. She lies down often and she is not allowed to visit her relatives. Furthermore,

her dislike for the wallpaper is transforming into an obsession as she begins to see shapes in the wallpaper.

After this she tries to explain her situation to John, asking him if they could leave the house for she is not getting better here. However, John tells her that they only have three more weeks left in the house and claims that she *is* getting better.

The third passage focuses entirely on the wallpaper; here the woman is completely obsessed with it. She dwells at length on the colour, the pattern and the way the paper changes in different kinds of light. She is also convinced there is a woman behind the paper and she hates to have anyone but herself study the paper.

In the fourth passage the narrator's spirits are up. She says she feels better and John is also happy with her improvement. However, she is still obsessed with the wallpaper. Wanting to find out what is behind the paper is what gives her energy. There is a bit of dramatic irony here because even though the narrator and her husband seem to believe that she is getting better, the reader understands that this is not the case at all. The woman herself might think that she is getting better, but her mental situation is only worsening.

In the next entries the woman continues to feel better as she spends more and more time studying the wallpaper. She does various discoveries about the movements of the pattern and the woman she still supposes is behind it. She does not share all her discoveries with the reader because she cannot trust people.

The last passage describes the woman's last day in the house. Her obsession reaches a climax as she tears the paper off the walls in order to rescue the woman behind the pattern. She has locked herself in the room and begins creeping around. At this point the narrator seems to coincide with the woman she saw behind the pattern, because she says: "I wonder if they all come out of that wall-paper as I did?", and "I suppose I shall have to get back behind the pattern when it comes night, and that is hard!". Her husband finally retrieves the key and

faints when he sees his wife creeping around the room, exclaiming that she has “got out at last”. And she creeps on. Thus this final passage of the story shows that the woman’s condition had not been improving at all and that the rest cure was ineffective. In an article Gilman explains: “[The story] was not intended to drive people crazy, but to save people from being driven crazy” (Gilman 3, par. 9).

Feminist Interpretations

As said before, Gilman was active in feminist organizations, and in her writings she addressed women’s rights, women’s subordinate status and the need for social reforms. Although the late nineteenth century brought increasingly more employment and education opportunities for women, it was still generally accepted that women were intellectually inferior to men (Lauter et al., 1332). With her work Gilman hoped to abolish “the sexual division of labor” in order to “free women to pursue work in the public world and become more productive members of society” (Hedges 2, 1597). “The Yellow Wallpaper” specifically was written to bring Dr. Mitchell’s rest cure up for discussion. Feminist critics have interpreted “The Yellow Wallpaper” with an emphasis on the socioeconomic status of women in the nineteenth century. They argue that the story shows the conditions women dealt with in that time and how these were bad enough to drive them to insanity (Treichler, 64). The socioeconomic conditions that can be found in the story are: the woman’s subordinate position in marriage (the wife has to obey her husband), her confinement to the domestic sphere (she is not allowed to work or visit her relatives) and the woman being seen as a little girl instead of an adult with an intellect equal to a man’s.

Other feminist critics focus on the narrator’s victory rather than her oppressed and mentally unstable state. They argue that “the narrator’s developing relation to the wall-paper is a process of self-recognition, one that boldly confronts reality, even though the price is

high” (Hochman, 98). In a way, discovering what the wallpaper is all about gives her a kind of power, even though this simultaneously causes her to lose her mind. The wife crawling over her fainted husband in the final journal entry can be seen as her triumph over him, finally finding her freedom. Moreover, while the narrator is presented by her husband as an emotional, unstable and childish woman, modern feminist critics see her as an educated person. When describing the summer house she says: “It makes me think of English places that you read about”, suggesting that she is not only a writer, but also a reader (Gilman 2, 1598). Furthermore, she describes the wallpaper as if it were a piece of art, with the use of appropriate vocabulary, making her educated as well (Hochman, 95-96). Thus, while the story obviously shows the narrator’s decline in mental health, in a way it also shows a woman’s road to freedom at a time when women were socially dominated by men.

Gothic Fiction

“The Yellow Wallpaper” can be classified as Gothic fiction, a literary genre which combines elements of romance and horror. According to *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, some characteristics of this genre include the setting of an “antiquated or seemingly antiquated space”, a sense of the supernatural and the presence of hidden secrets which haunt the character (Hogle, 2). Other prominent features of the genre are madness, decay, mystery and the haunted house, all of which can be found in “The Yellow Wallpaper”. The narrator literally uses “haunted house” as a description for the place they are staying in. The decay can be seen in the narrator’s mental health as well as in and around the house in the form of patches of wallpaper that are torn off the walls and the broken greenhouses. The madness is of course represented by the narrator and her declining mental health. The mystery and hidden secrets can be found in the wallpaper which constantly occupies the narrator’s mind. Lastly,

there is a sense of the supernatural in the story because the narrator is convinced that a woman lives behind the wallpaper.

Since the gothic setting plays an important role in the source text, it is important to accurately translate these features in order to achieve the same ambience in the target text. The Gothic fiction is clearly visible in, for example, the following sentence: “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!” (Gilman 2, 1597). This sentence contains elements of both romance and horror.

Furthermore, *The Cambridge Companion* also describes the different roles of men and women as a recurring theme in Gothicism:

[T]he Gothic has long confronted the cultural problem of gender distinctions, including what they mean for western structures of power and how boundaries between the genders might be questioned to undermine or reorient those structures.

[...] women are the figures most fearfully trapped between contradictory pressures and impulses (Hogle, 9).

This last part of the sentence precisely describes the fate of the story’s narrator. She feels the impulse to write, to take care of her baby, to visit her relatives and so on, but she is pressured by her husband and doctor to do the exact opposite: to do absolutely nothing. The woman has a subordinate position in her own marriage and is completely dominated by her husband. Even though he is trying to help her, he is in fact driving her into insanity by believing himself and his knowledge to be superior to his wife. He deprives her of all stimulus and work, “which is joy and growth and service, without which one is a pauper and a parasite” (Gilman 3, par. 5).

Lastly, the theme of rational versus irrational is also important in the story, a theme which is characteristic of American Gothic fiction. In this case John personifies the rational,

as he is described as “practical in the extreme”, not believing in anything that has to do with faith and superstitions (Gilman 2, 1598). He is the physician who believes in facts and science. His wife on the other hand is seen, by John at least, as an irrational being. He tells her to control herself and not let her mind be occupied by silly fantasies. She is the sensitive and emotional one and she believes in her illness, even though the doctors do not. To ensure a proper translation of the text and style of these two opposite characters, it can be useful to consider such questions as Hönig proposes for a translation-oriented text analysis, like: who is the speaker at certain points in the text and why, what is he talking about and why in that manner? (222-223). John’s role in the story is mainly to be patronizingly kind to his wife, believing he is helping her, and to keep her locked in the house. The wife’s part is to disagree with her husband’s treatment, to question everyone and everything, up to the point that she loses her mind. Defining the roles of the characters helps in finding the right tone that the translated text should have. For example, John’s speech should be kind of solemn and pompous when he gives his wife directions on how to act, as he thinks of himself as a doctor who knows best. At the same time though, his tone is childish in a way, because he sees his wife as a “blessed little goose” (1600). While the “blessed” sounds sweet enough, the “goose”, knowing John’s role in the story, immediately brings up the negative connotations of the word referring to a simpleton (*OED*).

Epistolary Narrative

“The Yellow Wallpaper” is an epistolary narrative in the form of a collection of journal entries. The epistolary narrative has been acknowledged as a literary form since the sixteenth century, when the epistolary novel was defined as a work that consisted of a dialogue between two characters through letters (Goldsmith). Since then the definition has expanded to include novels that use letters of more than two characters, letters of a single character, diary entries

and, more recently text messages and e-mails. Elizabeth C. Goldsmith describes how the epistolary narrative was a form mainly practiced by women because this form can be easily learned by women who, in that time, had less educational options than men. However, the epistolary form was also adopted by male writers, for example the English author Samuel Richardson. With his epistolary novels *Pamela: Or, Virtue Rewarded*, *Clarissa: Or the History of a Young Lady*, and *The History of Sir Charles Grandison* he contributed to the popularity of the epistolary novel in the eighteenth century.

Patricia Meyer Spacks proposes some characteristics of the epistolary novel, including recurrent themes such as the issues with the feelings and (lack of) power of women and the small opportunities for female authors. Spacks also recognizes a resentment with which the female characters in the novels accept the social norms they are expected to follow. These characteristics can be seen in “The Yellow Wallpaper” as well. The female narrator is essentially powerless against her husband. Even though she seems to feel that resting and intellectual and social deprivation are not what she needs, she is unable to convey this to her husband, who pressures her with his ideas and beliefs. While he is trying to help his wife, John is, ironically enough, actually the one driving her to madness. Furthermore, he does not want her to write. Nineteenth century America was characterized by a division of gender roles and an ideology of separate spheres: a private sphere and a public sphere. In this vision, men’s place was the public sphere of society, politics, work and culture. Women, on the other hand, were limited to the private sphere, which consisted of the family and the home. The gender division ideology was reinforced by women’s legal status of coverture after marriage. Upon marriage, the wife’s identity disappeared along with her rights of owning property, keeping her income for herself, or doing anything against her husband’s will (Lewis).

Obviously, because of the epistolary character of the story, it is written from a first-person point of view. In order to enlarge the reader's view on the situation, the author has the narrator refer to things said by other characters, for example: "John says the very worst thing I can do is to think about my condition" (Gilman 2, 1598).

The narrator is also an unreliable one. An unreliable narrator is "one whose perception, interpretation, and evaluation of the matters he or she narrates do not coincide with the opinions and norms implied by the author" (Abrams, 276). It is the active reader's job to discover what in the story is supposed to be taken as factual, and what not. In the case of "The Yellow Wallpaper" it is immediately clear that the narrator's perceptions are compromised by her mental state. Thus, the reader is faced with the challenge of not immediately accepting everything the narrator has to say. This also challenges the translator to try and make sense of the narrator's fantastical thoughts, for example in the description of the wallpaper: "All those strangled heads and bulbous eyes and waddling fungus growth just shriek with derision!" (Gilman 2, 1608). This is a source text specific problem since it is caused by using the narrative technique of an unreliable narrator (Nord, 237). Sentences like these are not necessarily clear as to what they mean and when translating you can try to make them more understandable in the target text. However, these sentences reflect the thoughts of a madwoman and are not supposed to be rational or logical. Thus a better option is to maintain the sense of confusion one gets when reading them. Therefore I have translated it as: "Al die gewurgde hoofden en uitpuilende ogen en waggelende zwamgroeisels lachen je gewoon gillend uit!".

Yet at other times the narrator's mind appears to be clear, and she even brings her story with a hint of irony. Here lies a task for the translator to make sure the irony is visible for the reader of the target text. For example, in the first passage: "John laughs at me, of course, but one expects that in marriage" (1598). The narrator knows that this is not supposed

to happen in a healthy marriage and by saying this she shows her knowledge of her subordinate position. Even more so when she is talking about suicide and says: “I know well enough that a step like that is improper and might be misconstrued” (1608). You can almost hear her tone as she is saying this, thinking of what men would say if a silly hysteric woman would commit suicide. I have translated this as: “Ik weet heel goed dat zo’n stap onfatsoenlijk is en verkeerd begrepen kan worden”.

“The Yellow Wallpaper” is closely related to a stream of consciousness narrative style: “the unbroken flow of perceptions, memories, thoughts, and feelings in the waking mind” (Abrams, 345). The story describes the mental processes of the female narrator, written from a first-person perspective. Prose in stream of consciousness can often be more difficult to follow because it is characterized by syntax and punctuation that are not necessarily correct or logical. The story can also be associated with free indirect discourse, even though this is generally written from a third-person perspective, when the narrator reports on what her husband says, does, or thinks, for example in the following sentence:

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? (Gilman 2, 1598).

Clearly, the narrator herself does not see her illness as “a slight hysterical tendency”; these words represent John’s thoughts.

In “The Yellow Wallpaper” Gilman often uses the double dash, or em dash. In English, em dashes are not often used in formal texts, but “[i]n informal writing, em dashes may replace commas, semicolons, colons, and parentheses to indicate added emphasis, an interruption or an abrupt change of thought” (Strauss). The dashes are generally not enclosed with spaces, but attached to the words it is surrounded by. As a diary is generally personal and not meant for publication, the informal use of dashes in the story is justified. Gilman most

often uses the dashes for interruptions and abrupt changes of thought, for example in the following sentence:

John is a physician, and *perhaps*—(I would not say it to a living soul, of course, but this is dead paper and a great relief to my mind—) *perhaps* that is one reason I do not get well faster (Gilman 2, 1598).

This sentence even uses dashes as well as parentheses, perhaps as a means of emphasizing the text within the parentheses; the narrator wants to make very clear that she would not tell this to any living being. Since this use of punctuation is very important to the style of the story, the translator must apply these dashes in the target text as well. This forms a translation problem on linguistic level since the em dash is commonly used in English written language, but not in Dutch (Nord, 237). The problem is easily solved with the en dash (half the length of an em dash) which Dutch uses in the same circumstances as English does with the em dash. Nowadays, the en dash in Dutch, however, is surrounded by spaces, unlike the em dash in English.

The sentence above also shows the use of italicized words, which is another repeated feature in “The Yellow Wallpaper”. Gilman uses italics to emphasize certain words, but it is uncommon to use italics in a Dutch text. In order to maintain the emphasis, I have used the acute accent mark sometimes, or added words in the case of the sentence above, which leads to the following translation:

John is dokter en heel misschien – (ik zou dat natuurlijk tegen niemand zeggen, maar dit is dood papier en dat betekent een grote opluchting –) heel misschien is dat een van de redenen dat ik niet sneller beter word.

Syntax is also affected by Gilman’s stream of consciousness. Sometimes this leads to very long sentences, which can be difficult to translate into easily comprehensible Dutch, for example:

It is dull enough to confuse the eye in following, pronounced enough to constantly irritate and provoke study, and when you follow the lame uncertain curves for a little distance they suddenly commit suicide—plunge off at outrageous angles, destroy themselves in unheard of contradictions (Gilman 2, 1599).

Chesterman proposes various syntactical strategies which could be useful in translating this sentence into readable Dutch, for example, changing the structure of the sentence (248). This can be realized by dividing the sentence into parts to make it more readable. However, that would mean a loss of style, and style is very important to this story. Thus, I have maintained the long sentence, which is still comprehensible, and came to the following translation:

Het is saai genoeg om de draad kwijt te raken wanneer je het met je oog volgt, uitgesproken genoeg om je constant te irriteren en aan te zetten het te bestuderen en als je de misvormde, wispelturige kronkels een stukje volgt, plegen ze opeens zelfmoord – storten zich in buitengewone hoeken, vernietigen zichzelf in ongekende tegenstellingen.

At other times the sentences are very short and sometimes ungrammatical, such as “And Jennie too”, which is a fragment because it lacks a verb (Gilman 2, 1605). It is also uncommon in written texts to start sentences with coordinating conjunctions like “but” or “and”, but Gilman does so all the time. Furthermore, not all of her sentences start with a capital letter, for example: “but John would not hear of it” (Gilman 2, 1599). The translator should consider if it is necessary to change the target text to become more grammatical. This is a problem brought forth by the style of the text and, thus, source text specific. However, not applying these grammar and punctuation rules actually adds to the diary style, since a diary is not expected nor supposed to be completely grammatical, thus making the story more credible. Therefore, I have opted to transfer this ungrammaticality to the target text.

Lastly, Gilman uses the conjunction “and” very often and multiple times within a sentence, for example in:

And dear John gathered me up in his arms, and just carried me upstairs and laid me on the bed, and sat by me and read to me till it tired my head. He said I was his darling and his comfort and all he had, and that I must take care of myself for his sake, and keep well.

In a non-literary text these sentences would most likely be edited. Yet in the translation I have maintained the repeated use of “and”, since it is inherent to the stream of consciousness and the flow of the sentence.

Concluding Remarks

To conclude, “The Yellow Wallpaper” is an interesting piece of writing which can be read in different ways. While some critics focus on the narrator losing her mind, others concentrate on the positive aspects of her life. The story fits perfectly in the genre of Gothic fiction and the epistolary style is an excellent way of portraying a woman’s descent into madness. The social and historical background and irony in the story challenge the translator with ensuring that the target text conveys the same message as the source text.

Het Gele Behang

Charlotte Perkins Gilman

Passage 1

Het komt zelden voor dat eenvoudige mensen als John en ik voorvaderlijke gebouwen bemachtigen om de zomer in door te brengen.

Een koloniaal herenhuis, een erfgoed, ik zou het een spookhuis kunnen noemen om het helemaal toepasselijk te maken voor de romantiek – maar dat zou te veel gevraagd zijn van het lot!

Toch beweer ik met zekerheid dat het iets vreemds heeft.

Waarom zou het anders zo goedkoop verhuurd worden? En waarom was het zo lang onbewoond?

John lacht me natuurlijk uit, maar dat kun je¹ verwachten in een huwelijk.

John is uitermate rationeel. Geloof kan hij niet verdragen, hij verafschuwt werkelijk bijgeloof en hij drijft openlijk de spot met gepraat over dingen die je niet kunt voelen en zien en in cijfers kunt weergeven.

John is dokter en heel misschien – (ik zou dat natuurlijk tegen niemand zeggen, maar dit is dood papier en dat betekent een grote opluchting) – heel misschien is dat een van de redenen dat ik niet sneller beter word.

Want kijk, hij gelooft niet dat ik ziek ben!

En wat kun je eraan doen?

¹ The source text uses “one”, however, translating this with Dutch “men” sounds formal and impersonal and, thus, not in accordance with the diary style of the text. I have used the more explicit translation “je” to capture the personal style of the diary.

Als een dokter met een goede reputatie, die tevens je eigen man is, vrienden en familieleden verzekert dat er eigenlijk niets met je aan de hand is, alleen een tijdelijke nerveuze depressie – enigszins hysterisch aangelegd – wat kun je dan nog doen?

Mijn broer is ook dokter, ook met een goede reputatie en hij zegt hetzelfde.

Dus ik slik de fosfaten of fosfieten – welke het ook is – en tonicums, ik maak tochtjes, zorg dat ik frisse lucht en lichaamsbeweging krijg en ik mag absoluut niet ‘werken’ tot ik weer beter ben.

Ik ben het zelf niet met hun eens.

Ik geloof zelf dat passend werk, met opwinding en verandering, me wel goed zou doen.

Maar wat kun je eraan doen?

Ik schreef wel een tijdje, ondanks wat ze zeiden, maar dat is behoorlijk vermoeiend – het zo in het geniep te moeten doen, of anders op hevig verzet te stuiten.

Soms stel ik me voor dat ik, in mijn toestand, als ik minder tegenstand zou hebben en meer gezelschap en aanmoediging – maar John zegt dat over mijn toestand nadenken het slechtste is wat ik kan doen en ik moet toegeven dat ik me er altijd slecht door voel.

Dus ik zal het niet meer over mijn toestand hebben, maar over het huis.

Een prachtige plek! Het is vrijstaand, op flinke afstand van de weg en zo’n vijf kilometer² verwijderd van het dorp. Het doet me denken aan die Engelse plaatsen waar je over leest, want er zijn hagen en muren en hekken die op slot kunnen en heel veel aparte huisjes voor de tuinmannen en ander personeel³.

² Using a miles to kilometers converter, I calculated that 3 miles equals 4.827 kilometers, which is roughly “vijf kilometer”.

³ The source text uses “gardeners and people”, where “people” refers to other people such as the gardeners. To translate it as “tuinmannen en mensen” sounds rather vague and unnatural in Dutch. Therefore I chose to go with a word that more concretely describes the “people” and translated it as “ander personeel”.

Er is een héérlijke tuin! Ik heb nog nooit zo'n tuin gezien – groot en schaduwrijk, vol met paden begrensd door buxushagen en lange, met druiven bedekte prieeltjes met zitjes eronder.

Er waren ook broeikassen maar die zijn nu allemaal afgebroken.

Ik geloof dat er wat juridische problemen waren, iets met erfgenamen en mede-erfgenamen; hoe dan ook, het huis stond al jaren leeg.

Dat draagt bij aan mijn spookideeën, ben ik bang, maar het maakt me niet uit – dit huis heeft iets vreemds – ik voel het.

Ik zei het zelfs nog tegen John op een avond toen de maan scheen, maar hij zei dat ik de tócht voelde en deed het raam dicht.

Soms word ik heel erg boos op John. Ik weet zeker dat ik vroeger niet zo gevoelig was. Ik denk dat het komt door mijn nerveuze conditie.

Maar volgens John verzuim ik een fatsoenlijke zelfbeheersing als ik me zo voel; dus ik doe mijn best om mezelf te beheersen – in zijn bijzijn, tenminste – en dat maakt me erg vermoeid.

Ik vind deze kamer niet bepaald aangenaam. Ik wilde er eentje beneden die uitkomt op de veranda en rozen langs het hele raam heeft en van die mooie ouderwetse bloemetjesgordijnen⁴! Maar John wilde er niks van weten.

Hij zei dat die kamer maar één raam had en niet genoeg plaats voor twee bedden. En er was ook geen andere kamer daar vlakbij die hij zou kunnen nemen⁵.

⁴ The word “chintz” sometimes remains the same in Dutch and is translated as “sits” at other times. However, this word may be relatively unknown to Dutch readers nowadays. I decided that the image of the room that is described is more important in this case and therefore translated it with the descriptive “bloemetjes”.

⁵ I divided the sentence up into two sentences and changed the structure of the second part a bit to make it more fluent in Dutch.

Hij is heel zorgzaam en liefdevol en laat me amper bewegen zonder specifieke aanwijzingen te geven.

Ik heb een voorgeschreven rooster voor elk uur van de dag; hij neemt al mijn zorgen van me weg en ik voel me dus vreselijk ondankebaar dat ik het niet méér waardeer.

Hij zei dat we hier speciaal voor mij zijn gekomen, dat ik volledige rust moet nemen en alle frisse lucht die ik kan krijgen. “Je lichaamsbeweging hangt van je kracht af, lieverd,” zei hij “en wat je eet is ietwat afhankelijk van je eetlust; maar frisse lucht kun je altijd tot je nemen.” Dus namen we de kinderkamer op de bovenste verdieping van het huis.

Het is een grote, luchtige kamer die bijna de hele verdieping beslaat, met aan alle kanten ramen en lucht en zonneschijn in overvloed. Het was eerst een kinderkamer en daarna een speelkamer en een gymzaal, denk ik, want de ramen zijn getralied voor kleine kinderen en er hangen ringen en dat soort dingen aan de muren.

De verf en het behang zien eruit alsof hier een jongensschool heeft huis gehouden. Het behang is eraf gescheurd en hangt in grote flarden rond het hoofdeinde van mijn bed, ongeveer zo ver als ik kan reiken en ook een grote plek aan de andere kant van de kamer, dichtbij de grond. Ik heb nog nooit zo’n lelijk behang gezien.

Het is zo’n grillig, opzichtig patroon dat tegen alle artistieke voorschriften zondigt.

Het is saai genoeg om de draad kwijt te raken wanneer je het met je oog volgt, uitgesproken genoeg om je constant te irriteren en aan te zetten het te bestuderen en als je de misvormde, wispelturige kronkels een stukje volgt, plegen ze opeens zelfmoord – storten zich in buitengewone hoeken, vernietigen zichzelf in ongekende tegenstellingen.

De kleur is afstotelijk, misselijk makend bijna; een gloeiend, smerig geel, eigenaardig verkleurd door het langzaam draaiende zonlicht.

Het is op sommige plekken dof maar toch fel oranje en heeft op andere plekken weer een ziekelijke zwavelint.

Vind je het gek dat de kinderen er een hekel aan hadden! Ik zou er zelf ook een hekel aan hebben als ik lang in deze kamer moest blijven.

John komt eraan en ik moet dit weggelassen – hij houdt er niet van als ik ook maar een woord schrijf.

Passage 2

Ik weet niet waarom ik dit zou schrijven.

Ik wil het niet.

Ik kan het niet.

En ik weet dat John het onzinnig zou vinden. Maar ik móét op de een of andere manier zeggen hoe ik me voel en wat ik denk – dat is zo'n opluchting!

Maar langzamerhand wordt de inspanning groter dan de opluchting.

De helft van de tijd voel ik me ontzettend loom en ik lig heel vaak in bed.

John zegt dat ik niet mag verzwakken en laat me levertraan en heel veel tonicums en andere dingen innemen, om nog maar te zwijgen van het bier, de wijn en het rode vlees.

Die lieve John! Hij houdt zielsveel van me en vindt het verschrikkelijk dat ik ziek ben. Laatst heb ik geprobeerd om een echt serieus en zinnig gesprek met hem te hebben en hem te vertellen hoe graag ik zou willen dat hij me in staat stelt neef Henry en Julia te bezoeken.

Maar volgens hem zou ik niet in staat zijn om te gaan, noch in staat het uit te houden als ik daar eenmaal was. Ik hield ook niet echt een sterk pleidooi voor mezelf, want ik huilde al voordat ik was uitgepraat.

Het kost me steeds meer moeite om helder na te denken. Dat zal wel door deze zenuwzwakte⁶ komen denk ik.

En die lieve John nam me in zijn armen en droeg me zo naar boven en legde me op bed, ging bij me zitten en las me voor tot ik er moe van werd.

⁶ The source text uses “nervous weakness” which could be translated as “nervuze zwakte”. However, in the nineteenth century it was uncommon to use “nervus” to refer to an illness such as the narrator’s. I came up with the alternatives “zenuwzwakte” or “zenuwzwakheid” both of which refer to an illness characterized by mental and physical exhaustion, which is similar to what the narrator is dealing with (GTB). According to the GTB, a dutch historical dictionary, “zwakheid” was more commonly used before the nineteenth century, but since then “zwakte” was used more and more often. This is why I finally chose for “zenuwzwakte”.

Hij zei dat ik zijn lieverd was, zijn steun en toeverlaat⁷ en alles wat hij had en dat ik omwille van hem goed voor mezelf moest zorgen en gezond moest blijven.

Hij zegt dat alleen ik mezelf er weer bovenop kan helpen en dat ik mijn zelfbeheersing en wilskracht moet gebruiken en me niet moet laten verleiden door onzinnige hersenspinsels.

Eén troost: de baby is gezond en blij en hoeft niet te verblijven in deze kinderkamer met dit akelige behang.

Als wij deze kamer niet hadden genomen had m'n arme kindje⁸ er moeten slapen! Gelukkig is mijn baby aan dat lot ontsnapt! Ik zou het nooit laten gebeuren dat een kind van mij, zo klein en vatbaar, in zo'n kamer moet verblijven.

Ik heb hier niet eerder aan gedacht, maar het is eigenlijk maar goed dat John me hier heeft gehouden, want ik kan het zo veel makkelijker verdragen dan een baby, snap je.

Natuurlijk praat ik nooit meer met hen over het behang – daarvoor ben ik veel te verstandig – maar ik houd het nog steeds in de gaten.

Er zitten dingen in dat behang waar niemand iets van weet, of ooit zal weten, behalve ik.

Achter dat buitenste patroon worden de vage vormen met de dag duidelijker.

Het is altijd dezelfde vorm, alleen komt hij heel vaak voor.

En het lijkt alsof er achter dat patroon een vrouw bukt en rondkruipt. Het staat me helemaal niet aan. Ik vraag me af – ik begin te denken – ik zou willen dat John me hier weghaalt!

⁷ I have used “steun en toeverlaat” to translate the single word “comfort” since this is a commonly used Dutch expression, which fits well in the context of the sentence.

⁸ A somewhat free translation of “that blessed child”. A construction with something like “dat kind” tends to sound rather negative in Dutch. Furthermore, replacing “that” by the possessive pronoun “m'n” adds to the personal ambiance of the story.

Passage 3

Een patroon zoals dit vertoont bij daglicht geen terugkerend motief, het gaat tegen de regels in en is een voortdurende irritatie voor de normale geest⁹.

De kleur is op zichzelf al akelig genoeg, bedrieglijk genoeg en ergerniswekkend genoeg, maar het patroon is gewoonweg een marteling.

Je denkt dat je het onder de knie hebt, maar net als je goed op weg bent met het volgen van het patroon, maakt het een achterwaartse salto en dan ben je weer terug bij af. Het geeft je een klap in je gezicht, haalt je onderuit en trapt op je. Het is net als een nare droom.

Het buitenste patroon heeft een opzichtig arabeskmotief dat doet denken aan een zwam. Als je je een paddenstoel met verbindingen kunt voorstellen, een eindeloos lange reeks paddenstoelen, die ontkiemen en uitgroeien in oneindige verwikkelingen – nou, zo ziet het er ongeveer uit.

Tenminste, zo ziet het er soms uit!

Dit behang heeft één duidelijke eigenaardigheid, iets wat niemand behalve ik lijkt door te hebben en dat is dat het behang met het licht mee verandert.

Als de zonnestralen naar binnenschieten door het raam aan de oostkant – ik zit altijd te wachten op die eerste lange, rechte straal – verandert het behang zo snel dat ik het altijd nauwelijks kan geloven.

Daarom kijk ik er altijd naar.

Bij maneschijn – als de maan schijnt, schijnt zij de hele nacht naar binnen – zou ik niet kunnen zeggen dat het hetzelfde behang is.

⁹ I have changed the sentence structure a bit to make the sentence more fluent in Dutch, without changing the style too much.

's Nachts bij welk licht dan ook, schemerlicht, kaarslicht, lamplicht en het allerergst bij maanlicht, verandert het in tralies! Het buitenste patroon, bedoel ik en de vrouw erachter is zo duidelijk als het maar kan.

Ik realiseerde me lange tijd niet wat dat ding was dat je erachter kunt zien, dat vage onderpatroon, maar nu weet ik heel zeker dat het een vrouw is.

Overdag is ze ingetogen, kalm. Ik vermoed dat het patroon haar zo rustig houdt. Het is zo raadselachtig. Het houdt mij urenlang rustig.

Ik lig nu heel vaak op bed. John zegt dat het goed voor me is en dat ik zo veel moet slapen als ik kan.

Hij is ook degene die me deze gewoonte heeft aangeleerd door me na elke maaltijd een uur te laten rusten.

Ik ben ervan overtuigd dat het een hele slechte gewoonte is, want weet je, ik slaap niet.

En dat kweekt bedrog, want ik vertel ze niet dat ik wakker ben – nee hoor!

Eerlijk gezegd begin ik een beetje bang te worden voor John.

Hij doet soms heel verdacht en zelfs Jennie heeft een onverklaarbare gelaatsuitdrukking.

Af en toe komt het bij me op, gewoon als een wetenschappelijke hypothese, dat het misschien door het behang komt!

Ik heb John in de gaten gehouden als hij niet wist dat ik keek en ik loop vaak plotseling de kamer binnen met de meest onschuldige smoesjes en ik heb hem er meerdere malen op betrapt dat hij naar het behang keek! En Jennie ook. Ik betrapte Jennie een keer met haar hand op het behang.

Ze wist niet dat ik in de kamer was en toen ik haar met een kalme, zeer kalme stem en zo beheerst mogelijk vroeg wat ze met het behang aan het doen was, draaide ze zich om alsof ze op diefstal betrapt was en keek nogal boos en vroeg me waarom ik haar zo liet schrikken!

Toen zei ze dat het behang overal op afgaf en dat ze op alle kleren van John en mij gele vlekken had gevonden en dat ze wilde dat we wat voorzichtiger zouden zijn.

Klinkt dat niet onschuldig? Maar ik weet dat ze het patroon aan het bestuderen was en ik ben vastberaden dat niemand het zal ontraadselen behalve ikzelf!

Passage 4

Het leven is nu veel opwindender dan vroeger. Want kijk, ik heb nu iets meer om te verwachten, om naar uit te kijken, om te observeren. Ik eet echt beter en ik ben rustiger dan ik voorheen was.

John vindt het zo prettig om te zien dat mijn gezondheid vooruit gaat! Hij lachte laatst wat en zei dat ik leek op te fleuren, ondanks mijn behang.

Ik lachte eroverheen. Ik was zeker niet van plan om hem te vertellen dat het dankzij het behang was – hij zou me uitlachen. Hij zou me hier misschien zelfs willen weghalen.

Ik wil nu niet vertrekken voordat ik het ontraadseld heb. Ik heb nog een week over en ik denk dat dat genoeg zal zijn.

Passage 5

Hoera! Dit is de laatste dag, maar ik heb genoeg tijd. John zal vannacht in het dorp slapen en hij komt niet vóór de avond terug.

Jennie wilde bij me slapen – die uitgekookte meid! maar ik heb haar gezegd dat ik ongetwijfeld beter zou uitrusten als ik een nacht alleen sliep. Dat was slim, want ik was helemaal niet alleen! Zodra de maan begon te schijnen en die arme vrouw begon te kruipen en het patroon te schudden, stond ik op en rende naar haar toe om haar te helpen.

Ik trok en zij schudde, ik schudde en zij trok en voordat de ochtend kwam hadden we meters behang van de muur getrokken.

Een strook ongeveer ter hoogte van mijn hoofd en half de kamer rond.

En daarna, toen de zon opkwam en dat vreselijke patroon me begon uit te lachen, nam ik me voor dat ik het vandaag zou afmaken!

We vertrekken morgen en ze verplaatsen al mijn meubels weer naar beneden, om het achter te laten zoals het eerst was.

Jennie keek verbijsterd naar de muur, maar ik vertelde haar opgewekt dat ik het uit pure haat voor dat akelige ding had gedaan.

Ze moest lachen en zei dat ze het zelf ook wel zou willen doen, maar ik moest niet moe worden.

Wat verraadde ze zichzelf toen!

Maar ik ben hier en niemand behalve ik raakt dat behang aan – niet levend!

Ze probeerde me uit de kamer te krijgen – het was overduidelijk. Maar ik zei dat het er nu zo stil en leeg en schoon was dat ik geloofde dat ik uren zou kunnen slapen en dat ze me niet mocht wakker maken, zelfs niet voor het avondeten – ik zou wel roepen als ik wakker was.

Dus nu is ze weg en de bedienden zijn weg en de spullen zijn weg en het is helemaal leeg op dat grote ledikant na, dat is vastgespijkerd aan de grond, met het canvasmatras dat we erop hadden aangetroffen¹⁰.

We zullen vannacht beneden slapen en morgen de boot naar huis nemen.

De kamer bevalt me eigenlijk wel, nu die weer leeg is.

Die kinderen hebben de boel hier wel flink vernield!

Er is behoorlijk aan het bed geknaagd!

Maar ik moet aan de slag gaan.

Ik heb de deur op slot gedaan en de sleutel uit het raam gegooid, op het pad.

Ik wil de kamer niet uit en ik wil ook niet dat er iemand binnenkomt, tot John thuiskomt.

Ik wil hem versted doen staan.

Ik heb hier een touw dat zelfs Jennie niet gevonden heeft. Als die vrouw er daadwerkelijk uitkomt en probeert te ontsnappen, dan kan ik haar vastbinden!

Maar ik was vergeten dat ik bijna nergens bij kan zonder meubels om op te staan!

Dit bed is niet in beweging te krijgen!

Ik heb geprobeerd het bed op te tillen en te duwen tot ik niet meer kon en toen werd ik zo boos dat ik een stukje van een hoek heb afgebeten – maar dat deed pijn aan mijn tanden.

Toen heb ik al het behang waar ik vanaf de vloer bij kon eraf gescheurd. Het kleeft verschrikkelijk en het patroon geniet er gewoon van! Al die gewurgde hoofden en uitpuilende ogen en waggelende zwamgroeisels lachen je gewoon gillend uit!

¹⁰ This sentence seems rather lengthy with the repeated use of “en”, but this is also the case in the source text. I have maintained the structure because it is inherent of the style of the story.

Ik begin boos genoeg te worden om iets wanhopigs te doen. Uit het raam springen zou een bewonderenswaardige oefening zijn, maar die tralies zijn te sterk om het ook maar te proberen.

En trouwens, ik zou het toch niet doen. Natuurlijk niet. Ik weet heel goed dat zo'n stap onfatsoenlijk is en verkeerd begrepen kan worden.

Ik vind het onprettig om zelfs maar uit het raam te kijken – er zijn zo veel van die rondkruipende vrouwen en ze kruipen zo snel.

Ik vraag me af of ze allemaal uit het behang komen, zoals ik.

Maar ik heb me nu veilig vastgebonden met mijn goed verstopte touw –jij krijgt mij niet daar op de weg!

Ik neem aan dat ik vannacht weer achter het patroon moet en dat valt me zwaar!

Het is zo fijn om in deze grote kamer te zijn en rond te kruipen waar ik maar wil!

Ik wil niet naar buiten gaan. Ik doe het niet, zelfs niet als Jennie het vraagt.

Want buiten moet je op de grond kruipen en daar is alles groen in plaats van geel.

Maar hier kan ik gemakkelijk op de vloer rondkruipen en mijn schouder past precies in die lange gleuf die rondom de muur gaat, dus ik kan niet verdwalen.

Hé, daar staat John, voor de deur!

Het heeft geen zin, jongeman, je kunt hem niet openmaken!

Wat roept en bonst hij toch op de deur!

Nu schreeuwt hij om een bijl.

Het zou zonde zijn om die prachtige deur kapot te slaan!

“John, lieverd!” zei ik zo zachtaardig mogelijk “de sleutel ligt beneden op de stoep, onder een weegbreeblad!”

Dat hield hem enkele ogenblikken stil.

Toen zei hij, heel zachtjes, “Doe de deur open, mijn lieveling!”

“Dat kan ik niet,” zei ik. “De sleutel ligt beneden bij de voordeur onder een weegbreeblad!”

En toen zei ik het nogmaals, meerdere keren, heel zachtvaardig en langzaam en ik zei het zo vaak dat hij wel moest gaan kijken en hij vond natuurlijk de sleutel en hij kwam binnen. Hij kwam niet verder dan de deur.

“Wat is er aan de hand?” riep hij uit. “Wat ben je in godsnaam aan het doen!”

Ik ging gewoon door met rondkruipen, maar ik keek naar hem over mijn schouder.

“Ik ben eindelijk ontsnapt,” zei ik “ondanks jou en Jane. En ik heb het behang er grotendeels afgerukt, dus je kunt me niet terugstoppen!”

Waarom zou die man nu zijn flauwgevallen? Maar dat is wat er gebeurde en precies op mijn baan langs de muur, zodat ik elke keer over hem heen moest kruipen!

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The Yellow Wall-Paper

Charlotte Perkins Gilman

Passage 1

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 untenanted?

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*—(I would not say it to a living soul, of course, but this is dead paper and a great relief to my mind)—*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?

My brother is also a physician, and also of high standing, and he says the same thing.

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, or else meet with heavy opposition.

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.

The most beautiful place! It is quite alone standing well back from the road, quite three miles from the village. It makes me think of English places that you read about, for there are hedges and walls and gates that lock, and lots of separate little houses for the gardeners and people.

There is a *delicious* garden! I never saw such a garden—large and shady, full of box-bordered paths, and lined with long grape-covered arbors with seats under them.

There were greenhouses, too, but they are all broken now.

There was some legal trouble, I believe, something about the heirs and coheirs; anyhow, the place has been empty for years.

That spoils my ghostliness, I am afraid, but I don't care—there is something strange about the house—I can feel it.

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. I

think it is due to this nervous condition.

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 on the piazza and had roses all over the window, and such pretty old-fashioned chintz hangings! 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.

I have a schedule prescription for each hour in the day; he takes all care from me, 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. "Your exercise depends on your strength, my dear," said he, "and your food somewhat on your appetite; but air you can absorb all the time." 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 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.

One of those sprawling flamboyant patterns committing every artistic sin.

It is dull enough to confuse the eye in following, pronounced enough to constantly irritate and provoke study, and when you follow the lame uncertain curves for a little distance they suddenly commit suicide—plunge off at outrageous angles, destroy themselves in

unheard of contradictions.

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

It is a dull yet lurid orange in some places, a sickly sulphur tint in others.

No wonder the children hated it! I should hate it myself if I had to live in this room long.

There comes John, and I must put this away, —he hates to have me write a word.

Passage 2

I don't know why I should write this.

I don't want to.

I don't feel able.

And I know John would think it absurd. But I must say what I feel and think in some way—it is such a relief!

But the effort is getting to be greater than the relief.

Half the time now I am awfully lazy, and lie down ever so much.

John says I mustn't lose my strength, and has me take cod liver oil and lots of tonics and things, to say nothing of ale and wine and rare meat.

Dear John! He loves me very dearly, and hates to have me sick. I tried to have a real earnest reasonable talk with him the other day, and tell him how I wish he would let me go and make a visit to Cousin Henry and Julia.

But he said I wasn't able to go, nor able to stand it after I got there; and I did not make out a very good case for myself, for I was crying before I had finished .

It is getting to be a great effort for me to think straight. Just this nervous weakness I suppose.

And dear John gathered me up in his arms, and just carried me upstairs and laid me on the bed, and sat by me and read to me till it tired my head.

He said I was his darling and his comfort and all he had, and that I must take care of myself for his sake, and keep well.

He says no one but myself can help me out of it, that I must use my will and self-control and not let any silly fancies run away with me.

There's one comfort, the baby is well and happy, and does not have to occupy this nursery with the horrid wall-paper.

If we had not used it, that blessed child would have! What a fortunate escape! Why, I wouldn't have a child of mine, an impressionable little thing, live in such a room for worlds.

I never thought of it before, but it is lucky that John kept me here after all, I can stand it so much easier than a baby, you see.

Of course I never mention it to them any more—I am too wise,—but I keep watch of it all the same.

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!

Passage 3

On a pattern like this, by daylight, there is a lack of sequence, a defiance of law, that is a constant irritant to a normal mind.

The color is hideous enough, and unreliable enough, and infuriating enough, but the pattern is torturing.

You think you have mastered it, but just as you get well underway in following, it turns a back somersault and there you are. It slaps you in the face, knocks you down, and tramples upon you. It is like a bad dream.

The outside pattern is a florid arabesque, reminding one of a fungus. If you can imagine a toadstool in joints, an interminable string of toadstools, budding and sprouting in endless convolutions—why, that is something like it.

That is, sometimes!

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—the moon shines in all night when there is a moon—I wouldn't know it was the same paper.

At night in any kind of light, in twilight, candlelight, lamplight, and worst of all by moonlight, 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 sub-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 lie down ever so much now. John says it is good for me, and to sleep all I can.

Indeed he started the habit by making me lie down for an hour after each meal.

It is a very bad habit I am convinced, for you see I don't sleep.

And that cultivates deceit, for I don't tell them I'm awake—O no!

The fact is I am getting a little afraid of John.

He seems very queer sometimes, and even Jennie has an inexplicable look.

It strikes me occasionally, just as a scientific hypothesis,—that perhaps it is the paper!

I have watched John when he did not know I was looking, and come into the room suddenly on the most innocent excuses, and I've caught him several times *looking at the paper!* And Jennie too. I caught Jennie with her hand on it once.

She didn't know I was in the room, and when I asked her in a quiet, a very quiet voice, with the most restrained manner possible, what she was doing with the paper—she turned around as if she had been caught stealing, and looked quite angry—asked me why I should frighten her so!

Then she said that the paper stained everything it touched, that she had found yellow smooches on all my clothes and John's, and she wished we would be more careful!

Did not that sound innocent? But I know she was studying that pattern, and I am determined that nobody shall find it out but myself!

Passage 4

Life is very much more exciting now than it used to be. You see I have something more to expect, to look forward to, to watch. I really do eat better, and am more quiet than I was.

John is so pleased to see me improve ! He laughed a little the other day, 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 would make fun of me. He might even want to 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.

Passage 5

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.

Jennie wanted to sleep with me—the sly thing! but I told her I should undoubtedly rest better for a night all alone.

That was clever, for really 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.

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.

How she betrayed herself that time!

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

She tried to get me out of the room—it was too patent! But I said it was so quiet and empty and clean now that I believed I would lie down again and sleep all I could; and not to wake me even for dinner—I would call when I woke.

So now she is gone, and the servants are gone, and the things are gone, and there is nothing left but that great bedstead nailed down, with the canvas mattress we found on it.

We shall sleep downstairs to-night, and take the boat home to-morrow.

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 until I was lame, 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 and waddling fungus growths 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 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 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.

For outside you have to creep on the ground, and everything is green instead of yellow.

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!

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

How he does call and pound!

Now he's crying for an axe.

It would be a shame to break down that beautiful door!

"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.

Then he said—very quietly indeed, "Open the door, my darling!"

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

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!