

The Smell of Yellow

written by

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An adaptation of *The Yellow Wallpaper*
by Charlotte Gilman

CHARACTERS

NARRATOR - An early to mid-twenties female presenting voice. While she and HER are different entities, she speaks for her.

HER/SHE - An early to mid-twenties female, with long dark hair. She is short, and struggles between exhibiting a strong physical heaviness and forced lightness. She has just had a baby, and is suffering from postpartum depression.

HIM/HE - Around the same age as Her, though we never see his face or hear his voice. He is mechanical and generally dismisses HER.

WOMAN/WOMEN - A female figure that wears a long black dress. She wears a black veil that obscures her face, and she is an ominous and mysterious figure. She is one and many entities all at once.

1. EXT. FRONT OF HOME - DAY

A pretty, soft melody begins. We see the front of an old, eccentric looking home. We cycle through the grass, trees, and flowers.

2. INT. IN THE HOME - DAY

We cycle through rooms, messy corners/baseboards, old photos on the walls, and well loved furniture throughout the house as the narration begins.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

I would say our home is like a haunted house and reach the height of romantic felicity, but that would be asking too much of fate.

(Beat)

Still, there is something queer about it.

3. INT. BEDROOM - DAY

We see the bedroom. Focusing on the natural light, windows, and large floor space.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

I think our room was a nursery. It's a big airy room with sunshine galore.

We move to the walls. Starting big, then focusing closer on the paper. Further cycling through places it is damaged.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

I never saw such ravages as the children made here. The paint and paper is stripped off in great patches all around. And no wonder! It's the worst paper I've seen in my life. The color is a repellent, revolting yellow. The pattern is sprawling and flamboyant, committing every artistic sin. It's dull, irritating, and provoking. Each curve swoops and eventually commits suicide, destroying itself as it plunges off at outrageous angles.

(Beat)

John laughs at me so about this wallpaper, but one expects that in marriage.

4. INT. BEDROOM - DAY

We cut to the chest of HIM getting ready for work. Possibly putting on a jacket or tying a tie.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

He's a physician, and perhaps, - though I would not say it to a single soul - perhaps that is why I do not get well faster.

(Beat)

You see, he does not believe that I am sick.

On "sick" cut to HER lying in bed, holding her baby. She is lethargic and disheveled. We move in on her very slowly, a voyeuristic moment. He leaves out the back door in the background.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

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?

5. INT. BEDROOM - DAY

He comes to Her, and she immediately melts with a smile into him. He manipulates her harshly and she yields.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

But he is so very loving, and hardly lets me stir without special direction. I have a scheduled prescription for every hour.

HARD CUT to Her opening different pill bottles, taking medications, getting air from the open window, and laying in bed again (in coordination with the following narration)

NARRATOR (V.O.)

I take phosphites, tonics, journey, air and exercise, and I am absolutely forbidden to work until I am better.

(Beat)

I wish I could get well faster.

HARD CUT back back to Her happily melting into Him.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

(Quickly laughing)

But I must not think about that!

6. INT. NURSERY/INTERIOR ROOM - DAY

Cuts to a crib, the baby clearly there but obscured. The nursery is colorful and filled, a stark contrast to Her barren and monotonous room.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

There is one comfort at least - the baby is well and happy, and does not have to occupy this room with the horrid wallpaper. Why, I wouldn't have a child of mine, an impressionable little thing, live in such a room for worlds.

(Beat)

I guess it is lucky that John keeps me here. I can stand it so much better than a baby.

Cut back to wallpaper, following the pattern. Starts to cut slowly between the crib and the pattern. It quickens as the NARRATOR speaks, with Her body being thrown around violently at "slaps," "knocks," and "tramples."

NARRATOR (V.O.)

I mean, you think you have mastered it, but just as you get well underway, 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.

Finishes on the crib, and She shuts the door ending the shot.

7. INT. ROOM - DAY

Cut back to Him and Her dancing again, though Her movement is heavier.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

It is so hard to talk to John about my case because he is so wise and because he loves me so.

8. INT. ROOM - DAY

Cut to Her in bed crying/holding her body/pulling her hair.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

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

(as She is "pulled" up)

NARRATOR (V.O.)

But I am glad my case is not serious!

(Beat)

John knows there is no reason to suffer, and that satisfies him.

She is against the wall, tracing the curves of the paper.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

There is one marked peculiarity about this paper, a thing that nobody seems to notice but myself: and that is that it changes as the light changes.

9. DANCE STUDIO (2.120)

Cut to DARK ROOM with yellow light on Her, dancing.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

When the sun shoots in, the outside pattern is a florid arabesque, reminding one of a fungus.

10. INTERIOR ROOM - NIGHT

Cut back to room, this time at night with white vertical lines projected over Her.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

By moonlight, it becomes bars! The outside pattern I mean...

(Beat)

...And the woman behind it is as plain as can be.

During the second part of the above narration, we slowly pan over to Woman on the other side of the room. She is wearing a long black dress and her face is covered by a black veil. She is also covered by white vertical lines, doing the same movement as Her. As we continue to pan over, more and more Women are revealed. Some are crawling around violently, and some are dancing.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Sometimes I think there are a great many women behind it, and sometimes only one; she crawls around fast and her crawling shakes it all over.

(Beat)

By daylight she is subdued, quiet. I fancy it is the pattern that keeps her so still.

11. INT. ROOM - DAY

We cut to the same camera position, just during the day - with only one Woman standing eerily still outside one of the widows.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

It keeps me quiet by the hour.

12. DANCE STUDIO (2.120)

Cut back to the dark room with yellow projections over Her. She dances in it, grabbing/manipulating her limbs.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

But there is something else about that paper - the smell.

(Beat)

It creeps all over the house. I find it hovering in the dining-room, sulking in the parlor, hiding in the hall, lying in wait for me on the stairs.

The shot begins to rotate to the side.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

I wake up in the night and find it hanging over me.

(Beat)

I thought seriously of burning the house - to reach the smell.

(Beat)

But now I am used to it. The only thing I can think of that it's like is the color of the paper.

13. INT. ROOM - DAY

Cut back to room, with Her inspecting the wallpaper once more.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

A yellow Smell.

(Beat)

It makes me think of all the yellow things I ever saw - not beautiful ones like buttercups, but old, foul, bad yellow things.

She dances in her room, this time mangling her movement more and more.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

(trailing off)

Old, foul, bad yellow things...

Cut to Her screaming (silently) in bed.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

But he says I must not think about that!

14. DANCE STUDIO (2.120)

Cut to dark room, with many Women dancing together with a lot of physical contact.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

That woman is trying all the time to climb through. But nobody could climb through that pattern - it strangles. I think that is why it has so many heads. They get through, and then the pattern strangles them off and turns them upside down, and makes their eyes white!

15. INT. ROOM - DAY

Cut to Her, holding her baby near the mirror.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Oh but I am feeling so much better, and John is pleased to see me improve.

We slowly move over, eventually revealing Woman in the mirror.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

He laughed a little the other day, and said I seem to be flourishing in spite of my wallpaper.

(Beat)

I had no intention of telling him it was because of the wallpaper.

When She looks up and notices, she turns around quickly.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

He would have made fun of me. He might even send me away.

It's just Him making the bed.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

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

16. INT. ROOM - NIGHT

Cut to Her sleeping alone, with many Women around her at night.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

I think that woman gets out in the daytime.

17. INT. ROOM - DAY

Cycle through cuts of many Women pressing up against/banging on the windows. She is screaming, though we cannot hear Her.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

I can see her out of every one of my windows!
(Beat)

She begins to frantically chase after the many Women in the windows, yet they are always gone when She reaches them.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

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 a time.

18. INT. ROOM - NIGHT

Cut to night again, with Woman dancing more violently than ever.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

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.

She begins to fight with Woman, then begins to frantically rip the paper off the wall.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

I pulled and she shook, I shook and she pulled, and before morning we had peeled off yards of that paper.

19. INT. ROOM - DAY (MORNING)

She moves even quicker in the daylight, liberating herself through fast and strong movement, screaming and running. Could also cut between Her room and the dark room.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

(Beginning to raise her voice)

And then when the sun came and that awful pattern began to laugh at me, I declared I would finish it! No person touches this paper but me - not alive!

(Shrieking)

All those strangled heads and bulbous eyes and waddling fungus growths just shriek with derision!

Woman finally walks into the room during daylight, and She runs fearfully as WOMAN walks towards her.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

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

She trips and is cornered on the floor by Woman, sobbing and writhing on the floor.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Besides I wouldn't do it. Of course not. I don't like to look out of the windows even - there are so many of those creeping women, and they creep by so fast.

Cut to Woman, from Her perspective, as the music abruptly slows and Woman lifts her veil to reveal Her.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

I wonder if they all came out of that wallpaper as I did?