CHARLOTTE PERKINS GILMAN EDITED BY AUGUST NEMIO



TACET BOOKS



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Table of Contents

<u>Title Page</u>

The Author

When I Was a Witch

The Yellow Wallpaper

<u>If I were a man</u>

The Giant Wistaria

The Boys And The Butter!

The Cottagette

A Middle-Sized Artist

About the Publisher



The Author



ne of America's first feminists, Charlotte Perkins Gilman wrote fiction and nonfiction works promoting the cause of women's rights. She was born in Hartford, Connecticut; her father left the family when she was young, and her mother and the children often lived with relatives. Gilman attended the Rhode Island School of Design and worked briefly as a commercial artist. After the birth of her first child, Gilman suffered from postpartum depression; she relocated to California in 1888, and divorced her first husband. Charles Walter Stetson, in 1894. She married her second husband, George Houghton Gilman, in 1900. In her autobiography, The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1935), Gilman described the debilitating experience of undergoing the prescribed "rest cure" for "nervous prostration" after the birth of her child. She fictionalized the experience in her most famous short story, "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892).

Gilman published a collection of poems, In This Our World, in 1893. Her poems address the issues of women's suffrage and the injustices of women's lives. She was also the author of Women and Economics (1898), Concerning Children (1900), The Home: Its Work and Influence (1903), Human Work (1904), and The Man-Made World; or, Our Androcentric Culture (1911). A prolific writer, she founded, wrote for, and edited The Forerunner, a journal published from 1909 to 1917. A utopian novel, Herland, was published in 1915.

Gilman was diagnosed with breast cancer in 1932; she died in 1935



When I Was a Witch



f I had understood the terms of that one-sided contract with Satan, the Time of Witching would have lasted longer-you may be sure of that. But how was I to tell? It just happened, and has never happened again, though I've tried the same preliminaries as far as I could control them.

The thing began all of a sudden, one October midnightthe 30th, to be exact. It had been hot, really hot, all day, and was sultry and thunderous in the evening; no air stirring, and the whole house stewing

with that ill-advised activity which always seems to move the steam radiator when it isn't wanted.

I was in a state of simmering rage-hot enough, even without the weather and the furnace-and I went up on the roof to cool off. A top-floor apartment has that advantage, among others-you can take a walk without the mediation of an elevator boy!

There are things enough in New York to lose one's temper over at the best of times, and on this particular day they seemed to all happen at once, and some fresh ones. The night before, cats and dogs had broken my rest, of course. My morning paper was more than usually mendacious; and my neighbor's morning paper-more visible than my own as I went down town-was more than usually salacious. My cream wasn't cream-my egg was a relic of the past. My "new" napkins were giving out.

Being a woman, I'm supposed not to swear; but when the motorman disregarded my plain signal, and grinned as he rushed by; when the subway guard waited till I was just about to step on board and then slammed the door in my face-standing behind it calmly for some minutes before the bell rang to warrant his closing-I desired to swear like a mule-driver.

At night it was worse. The way people paw one's back in the crowd! The cow-puncher who packs the people in or jerks them out-the men who smoke and spit, law or no lawthe women whose saw-edged cart-wheel hats, swashing feathers and deadly pins, add so to one's comfort inside.

Well, as I said, I was in a particularly bad temper, and went up on the roof to cool off. Heavy black clouds hung low overhead, and lightning flickered threateningly here and there.

A starved, black cat stole from behind a chimney and mewed dolefully. Poor thing! She had been scalded.

The street was quiet for New York. I leaned over a little and looked up and down the long parallels of twinkling lights. A belated cab drew near, the horse so tired he could hardly hold his head up.

Then the driver, with a skill born of plenteous practice, flung out his long-lashed whip and curled it under the poor beast's belly with a stinging cut that made me shudder. The horse shuddered too, poor wretch, and jingled his harness with an effort at a trot.

I leaned over the parapet and watched that man with a spirit of unmitigated ill-will.

"I wish," said I, slowly-and I did wish it with all my heart-"that every person who strikes or otherwise hurts a horse unnecessarily, shall feel the pain intended-and the horse not feel it!"

It did me good to say it, anyhow, but I never expected any result. I saw the man swing his great whip again, and-lay on heartily. I saw him throw up his hands-heard him scream-but I never thought what the matter was, even then.