

The Yellow Menace –

I knew it was wrong - but for five dollars the cheapskate in me went all-in.

It was a plastic barrel of cheap yellow mustard - about the size of a baby, which was perfect since I was balancing my newborn in a sling over my other shoulder. It was surprisingly heavy, this evil gallon, and it landed a little rough in my already overfilled grocery cart. It then began to leak a little, I should have known...

This jar of mustard would change the course of my life.

I was in what must have been an airplane hangar at some point, somehow converted to a hot Costco warehouse. At the crowded checkout, I was buying enough sauce for an elementary school and a little self-conscious about it, but the dude next in line put me to shame. He had four 12-packs of frozen pizza blocks strapped to a dolly with a second palette of 144 generic colas, so no one blinked an eye when I showed up with nearly 4 liters of a French's spicy yellow knock off.

Going to the supermarket with 'the baby' was new for me, and so was unloading a sunbaked SUV with a fussy child back at home. I began by trying to haul all the plastic grocery bags in at once for some reason, and my fingers still have scars from it. Picture a shopaholic octopus in Dad jeans trying to squeeze through the front door of a modest suburban home. Another roundtrip and I was left with the now *leaking* yellow barrel and the now *screaming* angry infant to deal with.

Gathering the crazed child in one arm and my mustard baby in the other created a strange dance ritual as I juggled to keep it all off the ground. My performance on the lawn premiered to a few bored neighbors before I finally made it to the porch to pushed inside. No encore.

I was relieved to get into the house out of the sun. Breathless, I leaned against the hall closet door to recover a bit - mentally preparing for the final push to get my kid in a high chair and my big jar on a shelf. But the reality was far different.

I was sweaty and clumsy, so I ended up putting my son on the floor (because there was no high chair) and the mustard on top of the refrigerator (because there was no more room on the counter). Still, I got it done! I brought in the high chair from the living room and got the baby settled with a snack before I put away the groceries. I was still hot and thirsty so I went for a cold Coke from the fridge.

You can predict what happened next. When I opened the fridge, the heavy door jostled the gigantic mustard and it toppled upon me, busting open like a huge egg yolk balloon. I juggled the bucket-sized container but it dropped hard against the linoleum and spat a nasty dosage of demon snot across the room hitting a wall clock. The next bounce shot another salvo which took out several cookbooks atop the microwave. Yet another spatter hit my poor kid's hair and face. He looked gob smacked and overwhelmed, but he didn't cry - yet.

As the broken jar finally settled, I tried to process what just happened when my eyes began to sting because of the napalm shampoo on my face. While squinting for a towel I caught my reflection in the patio door and I looked like a living Pompeii victim. I staggered to the sink and found the faucet knobs were also covered in bright yellow hell sauce. I had a little tantrum about this, and of course I lost my footing and slid all the way to the ground (slowly, cursing all the way) because the floor was absolutely covered in acrid yellow paint.

I was barking curses as I slowly arose like a melting zombie of mustard, which scared my kid. My ranting started the baby fussing again and I struggled against the slippery floor to get to him. I used the curtains, furniture, cabinets, drawers; anything to steady myself as I stumbled through the kitchen like a Bambi on ice.

Soon, my son began to laugh at my antics, so I clowned it up for him. Finding a dry towel, I wiped him off and after a moment of cleaning myself as I began to laugh as well. But the god-awful reality of it all was truly incredible.

It took three people literally four hours to clean up the yellow menace, and it still fucked us. I said earlier that this one jar affected my entire life. What could I possibly mean?

Well, the cursed mustard went EVERYWHERE – places you could not imagine. My ruined street clothes were coated in goo, as were the curtains, the tablecloth, the toaster and blender, the microwave cart, the bookshelf...it was all poisoned with thick, stinking piss. The worse was inside the refrigerator, which required removing every messy container, tossing out most of the dripping food and washing down the inside with a hose.

This washing submerged our linoleum tiled floor with a watery, sudsy mustard juice that seeped under the flooring. The vinegar acids and soap loosened the tile glue. Predictability, we began stumbling all in the kitchen because the tiles were giving way. Some tiles broke, others shot off and left a wall mark. Ultimately, I had to break down and replace the entire kitchen floor. It cost money that I didn't really have at the time, and combined with other factors forced me into selling the house.

Except then there was the smell. I remember the real estate lady saying something like 'most people get used to how their house smells, so you guys don't smell that weird vinegar smell in the kitchen, do you?'

Turns out prospective buyers caught wind of it as well. Who knows how many offers we lost before we addressed the little stinker? We found spatters UNDER the kitchen table. Another glob was in an electrical outlet. My ex-wife found a smear INSIDE an air conditioning vent! But eventually we found the stinky source right under our noses.

It was an undiscovered pool of warm, rotting mustard paste underneath the refrigerator, which accounted for most of the odor. It also accounted for our insect problem, which had gotten much worse over the month. The unmistakable scent had attracted critters from all around, (big and small) especially bugs.

Apparently, the thumb sized American Cockroach is a connoisseur of fine mustards, especially the savory French variety, Grey Poupon. So they showed up in droves – no reservations, no shoes, no jacket. Just dozens of dirty brown roaches from a disgusting *nouveau riche* family dining at The Mustard Trap – the soft warmth of the refrigerator coils, napkins tucked, candles lit, antennas styled with bows, and then I think - no. This was not Grey Poupon. This was shit mustard from Costco. And this teaming swarm of greasy aristocrats crawling under the fridge was my living nightmare.

A nightmare also because we were told of several buyers who did not appreciate our 5-star roach motel - so the house did not sell. This set in motion another series of unfortunate events with renters who ultimately trashed the place to the tune of over \$20,000, which compromised the purchase a new home, which caused friction with my wife which led to a divorce and so on...

Ergo, in a real way, a jar of mustard affected the course of my life and my family as well. And now it has affected you a little too. See how evil spreads? Like mustard!