

## Mr. Mustard Plaster

Mary L. Bradford

I never intended to leave Utah. In fact, I didn't leave until I was sixteen, and that was only a trip to my father's hometown in Wyoming. I didn't make it to California until I was twenty, and had only one requirement in a mate: that he never want to leave Utah either. Three months after my marriage found me going to Washington, D.C. on the arm of a rising young legislative assistant. Since then I have left Utah many times, always thinking I am finally weaned away.

The first time, however, my mother thought I was going to the hinterlands. She didn't say much when we drove off, but a couple of weeks later the desk attendant at our apartment delivered an urgent special-delivery package: a bottle of high potency vitamins which Mother was sure we would need to cope with the wickedness of the nation's capital. She was expressing a distrust of Washington Utahns have shared ever since Johnston's War. Whenever we return to Utah, we find ourselves assuring people that no, the black residents of Resurrection City did not ruin the reflecting pool so that it had to be drained and paved over; and that no, the Lincoln Monument has not sunk into the Potomac (yet). We tell them that we survived the peace marches and the burning of 14th Street the same way they did, by crouching in front of the television set. They are surprised to hear that we have never met the President nor been mugged in front of our house (though other Mormons have, of course).

We counter questions by asking why Salt Lakers are so eager to ape the problems of the Big Cities by building skyscrapers to block out the Temple and freeways to create slums. (Salt Lakers do not take kindly to the thought that they are not a big city, that they do not have overwhelming traffic problems, and that they are not among the Top Ten in the crime polls). I always soft-pedal the fear I sometimes feel in Washington, especially the chill of driving down Constitution Avenue the day it was lined with rows and rows of bayoneted soldiers. When asked about peace marches, we tell how my husband, when blocked at the bridge, simply rolled down his window so

that the marchers could dance to the strains of the Tab Choir on his stereo tape.

Even though I feign sophistication when talking with the hometown folks, I am convinced that they who leave Utah, no matter how mature they think themselves, do so with a mixture of innocence, fear and self-confidence that brings to mind the old saying, "You can take the girl out of Utah, but you can't take Utah out of the girl."

We settled first in a high-rise on the Virginia side of the Potomac. We could not quite see the spires of Georgetown on the left; on the right we could not quite see the Two Jima Monument. We did have a clear view of our neighbor's living room. The things that disturbed me most about apartment living were the necessity of having to chat through the chains on the neighbors' doors, and having to learn that people did not leap to join the Church because I refused their coffee.

But Washington is a lovely city, and I decided to apply for work at the loveliest building, the Mellon Art Gallery. When they asked me how many hours of Art History I had taken, I moved up the Mall to the Library of Congress where I got on as a Clerk-Typist GS4. They were a bit apologetic about my MA in English, but I assured them I was happy with my appointment in that old ship, green then, covered with barnacles and protected by Neptune and his lusty nymphs. Its secret warrens, unknown to the casual visitor, seemed peaceful, but who knows what explosives lined its shelves? I loved to look up at the great dome, to study the paintings in the panels, to walk slowly down the arching marble staircase. I even loved the restrooms with their giant fixtures that made even the private business of the body seem dignified.

I was in the American Law Division of the Congressional Reference Section, where my typewriter, crammed between rows of law books, was set before a window miraculously framing the Supreme Court. I had morning sickness, then, and was constantly burrowing into my soda crackers, chewing as I typed. On my relief I would go out and lie down on a bench behind one of the display cases, or repair to the restroom

to retch silently. The library hid me, and guarded me. My superiors were always understanding, but one day when I returned from sick leave (again), the second-in-command called me to his private office. "Oh, Oh," I thought, "this is the sack at last." But he smiled sympathetically. "Got the morning sickness, eh? Well, keep the tummy full!" Whereupon he gave me an assignment which he said was more in keeping with my training: some research in the main reading room.

A cohort of mine from Utah worked next door as secretary to foreign lawyers who were dealing in exciting stuff behind the Iron Curtain. These men, lined up in the hall west of ours, were all exotic and older, with degrees in several languages. Whenever I passed through, they made what I was sure were ribald remarks in Romanian. My friend and I were on the elevator with some of these men one day, when one, a man who looked pitifully elderly and broken to my eye, coughed consumptively and complained that he couldn't seem to clear up his chest condition. Said I jocularly, "What you need is an old-fashioned mustard plaster."

"What's that?"

I explained that it was an old Utah remedy. "Why not show me?" he said, and since he lived in the same apartment complex, I agreed to come over that night with a mustard plaster.

It was a mark of our innocence that my husband did not even ask where I was going as I departed the apartment at ten P.M. carrying my supplies and took the elevator to the tenth floor in the adjoining building. The lawyer opened the door, bowed elegantly in his pajamas, and locked the door behind me. I saw an apartment like ours except that he could see the Washington Monument. He clicked off the lights that I might have a better view, and

before I could mix up my mustard, had encircled me in his skinny arms, and grazed my cheek with a kiss.

I dropped my supplies and leaped backward. He was in no condition to engage me if unwilling, and I spoke sharply: "Get over on that bed and lie down. I came here to put a mustard plaster on you, and I'm going to do it." He lay back wordlessly, baring his concave chest, while I quickly spread the dull yellow stuff over a cloth I had cut in the shape of a vest. I slapped the cloth on his chest, covered it with another, insulated the whole mess with a large piece of brown paper, and buttoned his pajama top. Without further instructions, I made for the door.

He stopped me as I was leaving. Holding his plaster close, he jerked a yellow rose from a vase on a table and thrust it at me. "Please accept this," he said, coughing. "I have never met a woman like you in my whole life."

He fell back on his bed, and I let myself out, rose in hand. (What burning passions did he feel for me afterward?)

Hadn't anyone ever told me that young women, even married ones, do not visit bachelors, even elderly ones, in their apartments at night, and that elderly bachelors do not usually have mustard plasters on their minds?

Years later in a brief reunion with the friend who had worked with the lawyers, she told me of her encounter with Mr. Mustard Plaster. A single girl at the time, she had taken a drive with him one Sunday afternoon. Afterward he had invited her to his apartment to share the view. She had leapt out of his embrace with the words, "Please, I'm a Mormon!" And had added: "Besides, this is Sunday!" His laughter haunts her yet, along with the nickname he gave her: "The Never On Sunday Girl."

## *A PECULIAR PEOPLE*

### **The Little Man Who Isn't There**

*Samuel W. Taylor*

As I was going up the stair,  
I met a man who wasn't there;  
He wasn't there again today,  
I wish, I wish he'd go away.

Mormons might find particular interest in the recent defeat by the California legislature of a bill that would have repealed all laws against sexual relationships by con-