



## First it is Warm

Have you ever read James Joyce's 'Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man'? I have to confess right away that I myself only read it because it was a college English class assignment, and if I remember correctly, probably didn't read the whole thing, and almost certainly didn't read it with any inherent interest or desire to enjoy and appreciate it. But I do remember one of the sentences, as would most people who have read it - *"When you wet the bed first it is warm then it gets cold."*

I suppose that when I was very very young I knew this phenomenon from personal experience, but had certainly forgotten about it in the intervening years. Yesterday though, I learned again first hand that it is true.

Now don't go jumping to conclusions! Listen to the story first!

And actually, as soon as I start to tell you about this, you'll probably be able to guess what happened. One of the things that makes daily life here in winter a bit more bearable is my hot water bottle. During most of my adult life in Canada, I had no need for such a thing, and even after moving to Japan never considered it - the apartment in which we lived was a bit chilly, but not so bitterly cold as all that.

My home in Ome though, is different, and gets very very cold in mid-winter. Some years back, Sadako bought me a hot water bottle as a birthday present, and this has been my constant bed-time companion during the winter months ever since then. My evening routine is now pretty much automatic: sometime between ten and eleven in the evening, I put a pan of water on the stove, boil it up, and fill the bottle, which holds quite a substantial volume of water.

I take it upstairs, pull the bedding out of the closet, make up the bed, and place the bottle inside, positioned just at the location where my torso will lie. Many people seem to use hot water bottles down at the foot of the bed, but I don't care so much about having cold feet; it's my central 'core' that has to be warm!

I then return downstairs, and when bedtime rolls around an hour or so later, the bed is of course toasty-warm and ready for me.

Now my bottle is not one of those rubber ones of the classic type, but is made of a firm plastic, and I guess the constant 'stress' of the heating and cooling cycle has weakened it over the years, and last night it must have sprung a leak as I (perhaps too roughly) tossed it into place under the eiderdown. When I went upstairs to go to bed, stripped off my clothes and jumped under the covers, instead of the wonderful warmth that I usually encounter, I found myself in a pool of cold water.

The air in the room was already blue with cold, but now became blue from another source! I jumped up, and shivering as I did so, started to clean up. I opened the door to the balcony, roughly tossed the eiderdown and mattress pad over the clothesline, then dragged another mattress out of the closet and made up another bed. Of course, it was completely cold, but by then, I was shivering so much that it didn't matter.

That wasn't the end of the trials though, as come morning, I had to try and get the bedding dried properly. My upstairs balcony doesn't get much direct sunshine, so when bedding needs to be aired, I usually hang it over the expandable gate that encloses the car space at the house entrance.

But I couldn't do that this time. Hang up a mattress with a giant 'wet spot' right in the middle? Right where every passer-by would see it? No way! Would you? I don't think so ...

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I eventually got it (mostly) dried out by laying it out on the floor in a place where the sun streamed in through the window, thus keeping my 'shame' completely private.

*"When you wet the bed first it is warm then it gets cold"* I wonder when I will next be reminded of this? A long long time from now, I hope!

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