



Back in Hot Water

If you have been reading A Story A Week for more than a couple of years, you may remember when I wrote about visiting the local post office for a bath each week. Of course it wasn't the 'mail' section of the post office, but one of their resort hotels - which happens to be located very close to my home.

As the weather has turned colder over the past couple of weeks, I have been looking forward to resuming this winter 'habit', and dropped down there the other day to get information about when they will be having their 'half-price' days over the next couple of months. I was disappointed to learn that their policy has changed; instead of randomly varying the special offer among the different days of the week, it has now been 'set' - Monday is half-price day.

Having the half-price day on Monday is a problem for me because that is one of the only three days in the week when both of my two trainee printers are able to come here. Now although I do want to keep this place fairly relaxed and light-hearted, having the boss stroll out at mid-day for a leisurely soak and a slow lunch isn't exactly the best way to establish good work habits! So I guess I'll have to bite the bullet this year and pay full price for my baths. But that's 1,000 yen! Kind of steep just for a bath and access to the lounge areas. That place isn't all *that* luxurious!

Anyway, the other day (when the printers weren't here) it was quite cold and damp so I 'gave in' and went over there for a bath - my first since early last spring. Since it was a full price day, none of the usual crowd - local people who take advantage of the special offer - were there, and all the bathers must have been patrons of the hotel, and of course strangers to me. I began my usual routine of washing myself carefully before approaching the bath itself.

If you're unfamiliar with the usual practice in a Japanese public bath, it is to first use one of the 'washing stations' around the room, where you sit on a low plastic stool and at the very least rinse yourself down before getting into the bath. The idea is of course to try and keep the bath water as clean as possible. Because I am a foreigner, the other people in the room may be thinking that I am unfamiliar with the proper procedure, so I always wash myself very thoroughly in this first step, just trying to make sure everybody is at ease with the situation.

In recent years though, I have had the experience any number of times of sitting there scrubbing myself, having the door open and the next person come in, and then seeing that person head straight for the water and plop himself into the tub, no rinsing, no nothing. I'm not a particularly fastidious person, but that bothers even *me*! Of course I keep my thoughts to myself, as do the other people in the bath, but I am sure we are all thinking the same thing, "What is the world coming to these days ..."

This time though, while I was sitting there washing myself something happened that escalated this far beyond what I would have thought possible. A man came in - not particularly young, but a good beefy size - and he headed straight for the bath. I didn't think too much of this but a moment later there was a tremendous splash. I turned round to see that he had *plunged* right in, raising a tidal wave that swooshed across the entire room. Everybody looked at him in astonishment. This was incredibly bad behaviour; nobody can do

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such a thing in a public bath! A small child may perhaps splash too much, but will be immediately chastized by his parent or the other bathers.

Still, none of us said anything. In recent years we see frequent newspaper stories telling of bystanders who 'interfere' to admonish anti-social behaviour on the train or some such place, and who have been attacked in return (sometimes fatally). 'We' have learned our lesson; keep quiet and say nothing. 'It's not my problem.'

But good grief, is *nothing* sacred anymore!?

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