



Out of Sight ...

Oh, the story episodes are piling up so high! I'm working on the construction of the new shop together with son-in-law loan and staff member Lee-san, and I tell you, I could do 'A Story A Day' with no problem at all. Any readers here old enough to remember 'The Three Stooges'? If so, you can well imagine the daily scenes in our workplace ...

I'm doing electrical; Lee-san has been doing cabinetry, and loan has built the new enlarged bathroom - completely from scratch after ripping out the old tiny one. I check in with the other two now and then during the course of their work, and as problems come up, we discuss things together to come up with suitable solutions.

This is a reform job, which means that we are sometimes hamstrung in what we can do by the shapes and structures that are already in place. So it was with the plumbing of the new bathroom, with the drains and water supply located in a position unsuitable for modern appliances. But loan figured out a way to get all the new pipes fitted within the tight space, and although it wasn't very pretty, it all seemed functional.

When the time came to lay the new floor over the maze, I asked him to leave an access hole in the floor. It wasn't that I distrusted his work; it was just that I wanted a layer of insurance in case of future leaks or anomalies. He resisted. "This room is so small; an access panel right there in the middle of the space will weaken the floor and completely spoil the appearance. It's not necessary!"

Against my better judgement (I thought), I relented, and watched as he cut plywood, drilled and screwed it into place, then covered it with strong glue and laid down some thick strong floor tiles. Those pipes are buried forever!

We now skip ahead to this morning. loan had just finished installing the under-sink water heater unit, connecting it between the water supply and the hot and cold taps on the new vanity. We as yet have no electricity in the room, as the professional electrician we have hired to connect the new breaker panel will not do that work until I have finished all the interior wiring and switches.

But the heater unit also supplies the cold side of the sink taps, so we thought we would give the system its first test, and after carefully checking all the connections, opened the main water supply, and tried the tap. Water began to move through pipes, there was a steady gurgling sound as the water heater tank filled, and water then began to flow from the tap.

Trickle. Trickle. Trickle. Nothing but a feeble trickle, no matter how wide we opened the tap.

loan and I looked at each other ... and then looked down at the floor - our beautiful new floor - beneath which runs all the pipes. And whether or not *he* was remembering our previous conversation about an access panel, I certainly was.

What to do?

The first suggestion was simply to shut it off, and wait until the electrical connections were all in place, and then try again. After all, there was yet no power in the water heater, so perhaps that was the cause of the problem.

David Bull
Seseragi Studio
Nagabuchi 8-4-5 Ome City
Tokyo Japan 198-0052
<http://astoryaweek.com>

But neither of us was willing to wait that long. If there was trouble under that floor, we wanted to know about it right now. We grabbed some trays to catch the water, shut off the supply, opened the drain cock on the heater, and drained it. We then disconnected the main water supply from the heater unit, pointed the open end into our bucket, and prepared to crack the main valve open again. What would we get - a gush or a trickle? A gush would mean that our plumbing was OK, and simply the heater was not yet functional. But if we got nothing but a trickle, it would mean only one thing. The floor would have to come up. Ioan's hand was visibly shaking as he began to turn the cock with a screwdriver.

Well, I'm here telling the story, so I suppose you can guess how it turned out ... A couple of (wet) high fives later, I promised him an extra beer with tonight's dinner! We still don't know what's wrong with the water heater (if anything), but we'll sort that out in good time. We have water, plenty of water!

Now ... over on the other side of the room sits the brand new toilet, plumbed at top and bottom and waiting for *its* first test. But there's a snag here too. It's an ultra-modern toilet, and that means no electricity, no flush.

We'll just have to cross our legs and wait!

David Bull
Seseragi Studio
Nagabuchi 8-4-5 Ome City
Tokyo Japan 198-0052
<http://astoryaweek.com>