

Issun Boshi, Little One Inch
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Long ago in a small village in Honshu, Japan, there lived a humble husband and wife who had no children. They prayed every day at the shrine by their home and were soon blessed with a baby boy no bigger than your pinky finger. The couple loved him and showered him with encouragement and stories as he grew. They named him Issun Boshi, which means "Little One Inch." Even though Issun Boshi didn't grow much on the outside, he grew every moment inside by asking questions about the world around him. "Otousan (Father), when I climbed to the top of our tree, I saw a great river winding and winding away and getting smaller and smaller. Where does that river flow?" "Ah, Issun Boshi, that river flows to the other side of the mountains where Kyoto, our capitol, is," replied Otousan. "Okaasan (Mother), what is Kyoto like?" "Ah, many people live in Kyoto son. Beautiful temples and shrines, land and large homes owned by the samurai warriors – this is where they practice their skills and ready themselves to protect the good people of Japan," replied Okaasan. Issun Boshi's eyes filled with excitement and it was from that moment that he knew it would be a samurai. Time passed fast as it always does, and Issun Boshi was a strong, young man who approached his parents and stated he would be travelling to Kyoto to eventually become a samurai. His parents were saddened but understood that he too must make his way in life, even as small as he was. Issun Boshi equipped himself with a needle and straw to serve as a sword and scabbard, and his mother found a rice bowl to be used as his boat along with a chopstick as his paddle. "Remember son, no matter how small your body is, your heart is larger than most and you're clever as a badger." Issun Boshi hugged his parents, took a long, last look at his hometown, jumped in his rice bowl boat and off he flowed down that river that led to Kyoto. Now, it wasn't smooth sailing for him at all. Can you imagine being in a rice bowl on a huge, fast flowing river. Oh my – that boat slammed up against rocks, fell several times over flowing rapids and waterfalls, and was tossed about in raging storms. Issun Boshi persevered – he never gave up. In fact, his determination only grew until he finally reached his destination – Kyoto!

The capitol was spectacular – more than he had ever imagined. Issun Boshi walked until he found a grand estate belonging to Lord Sanjo, a famous samurai. The lord came to the door to greet the knocker but saw no one. He turned to close the door when he heard, "I'm down here Lord Sanjo," shouted Issun Boshi standing on one of the wooden geta sandals. Little One Inch was much smaller than the sandals but shouted with his mighty voice, "I've come to explore the world and become a samurai – I'm strong, courageous, and have a big heart. Please, may I serve you Lord?" Lord Sanjo was impressed with this little man and

was given the job as guard and playmate to Lord Sanjo's only daughter, Haruhime. Issun Boshi and Haruhime became the best of friends doing what friends do – tell stories, read books, write haiku, and play mush on drums and the koto. They would even take time to practice their sword fighting skills.

Time flew by, as it always does, and when the cherry blossoms were in full bloom, Haruhime asked Issun Boshi, friends, and seven of Lord Sanjo's strongest warriors to accompany her to worship beneath the famous blossoms at Kiyomizu Temple. It was important that those warriors were present because there had been rumors that some evil oni's (demons) were out and about kidnapping young girls. All went fine, Haruhime prayed at Kiyomizu Temple and all were heading home as the sun had set. It was dark now, and while walking down a winding mountain path, the ferocious oni suddenly stepped out of the brush and frightened the women in the group – many fell, shaking onto the group. The warriors, those strong samurai warriors – they ran for their lives in every direction, leaving the women unprotected. The demon immediately gazed upon Haruhime and growled, "I'll have this sweet morsel." Without a second thought, Issun Boshi jumped onto the creature and said "Not in your lifetime." The oni couldn't see Issun Boshi at first, but when he did, he just laughed at the sight of a little one-inch man. "What's this but a pesky little bug – I'll take care of this." And the demon grabbed Issun Boshi and tossed him into his mouth. Gulp! The Oni then redirected his attention to Haruhime to eat her when she screamed "Issun Booooooshiiiiiii!" "There's no one here to save you now – I ate your bug." At that exact moment, the Oni doubled over in pain. For you see, Issun Boshi had taken his needle sword and was stabbing the inside of this hideous demon over and over again until the Oni relented and begged "Stop. Stop!" "Open your mouth and let me out!" shouted Issun Boshi from inside the Oni's stomach. As soon as Little One Inch was spit out, that demon ran off. The princess Haruhime ran to Issun Boshi but tripped. When she turned to see what was in her way, she realized she had tripped on the demon's uchide-no-kozuchi (magic hammer). Haruhime showed this hammer to Issun Boshi and said this is your reward – wish for what you truly want. "I...I'd like to be bigger- 6 feet tall." Haruhime smiled, shook the hammer and chanted "Grow tall, Issun Boshi – six feet tall, Issun Boshi!" And with every shake of the hammer, Issun Boshi grew taller and taller until he stood a tall, lean, handsome, strong young man.

Time flew, as it always does, and a few years later Issun's dreams came true. He became a skillful samurai, conquering demons over the islands of Japan. He married the princess Haruhime and they lived in a wonderful estate Lord Sanjo gifted them both. And, of course, Issun's own parents came to live their days out with them and all lived happily ever after.