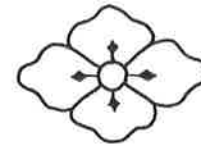


women—who died to requite past favors or lived on in sorrow after they heard the news.

Ah, what a day was that! On the Twenty-second of the Fifth Month in the third year of Genkō [1333], the prosperity of the Heike, unblemished for nine generations, was swept away in an hour; the discontent of the Genji, nursed for many years, was dispelled in a morning.



Two Companion Booklets

Like other companion booklets (*otogi zōshi*), the two short tales below are of unknown authorship and date. The first, "Little One-Inch," is usually assigned to the fifteenth or sixteenth century; the second, "Akimichi," to the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century. "Little One-Inch" follows the familiar folktale pattern of the peculiar person who performs remarkable feats; "Akimichi" is a story of revenge and feminine loyalty in the warrior class.

Little One-Inch

In the not too distant past, an old man and an old woman lived at Naniwa Village in Settsu Province. The old woman went to Sumiyoshi Shrine to pray for offspring, grieved because she was still childless at the age of forty. The god took pity on her, and she conceived at the age of forty-one, much to the old man's delight. When her time came in the tenth month, she gave birth to a pretty little boy. But the child never grew more than an inch tall, and so he came to be called Little One-Inch.

As the months and years passed, Little One-Inch reached the age of twelve or thirteen, but he was still not as big as a grown-up. His parents thought and thought about it. "This child is no ordinary human being; he's like some kind of monster. What was the sin the Sumiyoshi god was punishing us for when he gave him to us? It's a miserable piece of luck,"

they said. It was pitiful just to look at them. "If only we could send this wretched Little One-Inch off somewhere," they thought.

When Little One-Inch heard them talking, he understood the situation at once. "Alas! Nobody has any use for me, not even my parents. I'll have to go away somewhere," he thought. It seemed to him that he would need a sword, so he asked the old woman for a needle. She got one for him, and he made a hilt and scabbard out of barley straw. Then he thought, "I'd like to go to the capital, but how could I get there without a boat?" This time, he asked the old woman for a bowl and a pair of chopsticks, and she gave them to him. Saddened by the parting, the old couple tried to detain him, but he set out anyway. He got into the bowl at Sumiyoshi Beach and rowed toward the capital.

suminareshi	With what emotions
naniwa no ura o	do I set forth from the shore
tachiidete	at Naniwa,
miyako e isogu	where I have lived so long,
wa ga kokoro ka na	to hasten toward the capital!

He disembarked at Toba Harbor and proceeded to the capital to take in the sights. He was speechless with astonishment when he saw Shijō and Gojō avenues. At Sanjō Avenue, he approached the house of a certain Consultant.

"Excuse me!" he said.

"What an interesting voice!" the Consultant thought. He went to the front edge of the veranda and looked around, but nobody seemed to be there.

"At this rate, I could get trampled to death," Little One-Inch thought. He took shelter under a pair of high clogs nearby. "Excuse me!" he said.

"This is very odd," the Consultant thought. "I can't see anybody, but I hear somebody shouting in an interesting voice. I think I'll just go out and look around." To a servant, he said, "I want to put on those clogs."

A voice spoke up from under the clogs. "Please don't step on me."

Looking down in surprise, the Consultant discovered an extraordinary person. "You're certainly an interesting fellow," he said with a laugh.

Time passed and Little One-Inch turned sixteen, but he stayed the same height. Now it happened that the Consultant had a daughter who had reached the age of thirteen. The moment Little One-Inch saw that young lady, he was captivated by her beauty. "If only I could find a way to make her my wife!" he thought.

One day, Little One-Inch put some rice in a paper tea-leaf bag, smeared it on the daughter's lips as she lay sleeping, and sat wailing with the empty bag in his hand. He had his reasons for what he did.

The Consultant saw him and wanted to know what was the matter.

"Her Ladyship took away the rice I had been saving, and she ate it all up," Little One-Inch said.

The Consultant flew into a rage. Sure enough, there was rice on his daughter's lips. "It's just the way you said it was; you weren't telling a lie. We can't keep a creature like this in the capital. Find some way to get rid of her," he told Little One-Inch.

"You took what was mine, so your father has told me to do whatever I please with you," Little One-Inch said to the daughter. Inside, he was immeasurably elated.

For the young lady, it was just like a dream. She was absolutely dumbfounded. With Little One-Inch prodding her to hurry, she got ready to go from the capital wherever her feet might lead, feeling like someone beginning a long journey into the dark. We can imagine her emotions. Ah, how pitiful she was! Little One-Inch started off behind her. The Consultant had hoped that his wife would stop her, but the woman was her stepmother, so she made only a token effort. None of the ladies-in-waiting went with her.

"Now that it's come to this, it doesn't matter where I go," the daughter thought in despair. "I might as well go to Naniwa." She boarded a boat at Toba Harbor.

Just then, a violent gale blew up. It carried the boat to a queer-looking island, which seemed to be uninhabited when they disembarked and looked around. It was an ill wind that had blown them there! What were they going to do?

As Little One-Inch stood looking around, racking his brains, two demons came out of nowhere. One of them carried a wish-granting mallet. The other one said, "I'm going to eat this fellow up and take the girl."

But no sooner had the demon got Little One-Inch into his mouth than Little One-Inch came out of his eye.

"What a weird fellow! If I shut my mouth on him, he comes out of my eye," the demon said. He and his companion were terrified because Little One-Inch had come out and danced around after being swallowed.

"This is no ordinary mortal. A fight must be going on in hell," the two said. "Let's get out of here." They ran off to a very black place in the northeast, abandoning their wish-granting mallet, their staffs, their whips, and everything else.

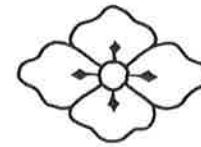
Little One-Inch's first act was to take possession of the wish-granting mallet. "Make me big," he said, giving it a bang. In no time, he grew tall. Then, faint with hunger, he tried to produce something to eat, and a delicious repast immediately appeared. What amazing good fortune!

After that, Little One-Inch produced gold and silver, went to the capital with the daughter, took lodgings in the Gojō area, and stayed there about ten days. Because such things could not remain unknown, the news reached the imperial palace, and the Emperor made haste to summon him. When he arrived at the palace, the Emperor said, "A lad that handsome can't be of base origin." He made inquiries about Little One-Inch's parentage, and it became known that the old man was the son of a person called the Horikawa Middle Counselor—a child born in the countryside after someone's slanders had driven the Middle Counselor into exile. The old woman was the daughter of a man called the Fushimi Lesser Captain. Her parents had died when she was small.

Once it was clear that Little One-Inch was not of ignoble birth, the Emperor summoned him to the Courtiers' Hall and named him the Horikawa Lesser Captain—a most splendid thing. Little One-Inch brought his parents to the capital and entertained and waited on them with extraordinary solicitude.

In time, Little One-Inch became a Middle Counselor. He had always been outstanding in feeling, appearance, and every other respect, and the reputation of his house was of the very highest. The Consultant was delighted to hear of his good fortune.

Later on, Little One-Inch fathered three children and prospered in splendid fashion. His descendants also thrived, just as the Sumiyoshi god had promised. People said there could be no more remarkable example of worldly success.



Classical Japanese Prose

An Anthology

Compiled and Edited by

Helen Craig McCullough

Stanford University Press
Stanford, California ♦ 1990