

# *Kingly the Inch Worm*

*Reg Down*  
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There was once a worm. He was just one inch long—which was a good thing, for this worm was an inch worm. He had stubby feet at the front and stubby feet at the back and no feet at all in between. If you put him on one end of your school ruler and said, “Ready? Set? Go!” he’d loop-and-stretch, loop-and-stretch along, all the while counting, “One inch! Two inch! Three inch! Four inch! Five inch! Six inch! Seven inch! Eight inch! Nine inch! Ten inch! Eleven inch! Twelve inch!” By the time he got to twelve he’d be at the end of your ruler. Always. Then he’d stop, look about importantly and shout, “FOOT!” That’s what he’d do at the end of your ruler, and that’s what he did when he was climbing the branches of his cherry tree looking for the freshest green leaves.

This inch worm called himself Kingly. He called himself Kingly because he said he was just like a ruler. Every now and then he’d climb to the highest branch of the cherry tree, look out over the lawn surrounding the tree, and cry, “*I’m the King of the Rulers, and you’re the silly schoolers,*” to anyone who happened to be listening, which was hardly anybody because he was only one inch tall no matter how high he climbed in the tree.

Kingly ate leaves—lots of green, green leaves—which is why he himself was such a delicious shade of green. Of course, cows and sheep also eat green grass all day long and they’re not green; so I don’t know how it works, but it does. It just does. Kingly was green because he ate green leaves—cherry leaves—for he lived in a cherry tree, like I told you before, which stood on a piece of lawn close to a garden and a little white house. Kingly could also hang by the slimmest silken thread like a spider. Then he’d swing back and forth in the breeze until he climbed back up again to continue eating his green leaves, which was his favorite thing to do.

One day Kingly was taking a break and hanging out on the end of his silken thread. The sun was shining, the breeze was blowing and the birds twittered in the tree tops. Suddenly,

without warning, a woodpecker flew past. He was on his way from one tree to the next. His wing cut Kingly's silken thread, and the thread stuck to the feathers and didn't let go. Away Kingly soared through the air, towed along behind the woodpecker. Before he could shout, "Hey!" or "Hi!" or "Ho, let me go!" he was whisked into a grove of fir trees and left hanging from a dead branch.

Kingly looked around. The woodpecker had already flown away and there he was in the middle of a stand of fir trees. It was dark and gloomy. The trees stood straight and close and blocked the light. Nothing grew on the forest floor. He didn't like the looks of it at all.

Kingly climbed his thread, walked along the dead branch and headed for the top of the fir tree. The fir tree's leaves were thin and spiky. They were tough and tasted bitter. He climbed to the top of the highest branch and looked around. He saw his cherry tree, far, far away in the distance—over the fir trees, past the meadow, beyond the garden and out in the lawn that lay around the little white house.

"Oh, that is such a long way to go," thought Kingly. "Such a long, long way to go."

Down the tree he climbed, inch by inch, and set off towards the cherry tree. As he inched along he counted, "One inch! Two inch! Three inch! Four inch! Five inch! Six inch! Seven inch! Eight inch! Nine inch! Ten inch! Eleven inch! Twelve inch!" Then he stopped and looked around importantly. "FOOT!" he shouted.

But he was all alone and no one was listening.

So he started off again. "One inch! Two inch! Three inch! Four inch! Five inch! Six inch! Seven inch! Eight inch! Nine inch! Ten inch! Eleven inch! Twelve inch!" he counted. "FOOT!" he shouted.

But still no one was listening.

So he started off counting again. And again. And again. Finally he reached the next tree. By now he was feeling just the tiniest bit hungry.

"Pfew," said Kingly. "This is going to take a while."

Just then a squirrel passed by.

"Hello-hello, little inch worm," said the squirrel. "How do you do and how do you do?"

"Badly and sadly," said Kingly. "I have to get back to my cherry tree. It's a long, long way to go and my tummy is the tiniest bit hungry."

"Hop on my back," said the squirrel, and Kingly inched his way onto the squirrel's back. He held on tight.

Off the squirrel scampered through the forest in leaps and bounds until they came to the edge of the meadow.

"This is as far as I go," said the squirrel. "The house cat is prowling around here somewhere and I have to stay close to the trees."

"Thank you, thank you, thank you," said Kingly as he inched off the squirrel's back and went of his way.

"One inch! Two inch! Three inch! Four inch! Five inch! Six inch! Seven inch! Eight inch! Nine inch! Ten inch! Eleven inch! Twelve inch!—FOOT!" cried Kingly as he crossed the meadow towards the garden. It was nice to be out in the sun again, even if it was a long way from home.

By and by he met a rabbit.

"Hello-hello, little inch worm green," said the rabbit. "How do you do and how do you do?"

"Badly and sadly," said Kingly. "I must get back to my cherry tree. It's a long, long way to go and my tummy is feeling peckish."

"Climb onto my fuzzy tail," said the rabbit, and Kingly inched his way onto the rabbit's round and fuzzy tail. He hung on tight.

Hop, hop, hop, hopped the rabbit across the meadow faster than Kingly could believe.

"You run so fast!" exclaimed Kingly.

"That's because of my tail," said the rabbit, whizzing along.

"Because of your tail?" said Kingly.

"Yes, my tail," said the rabbit. "My greatest great-grandmother was eating grass in this meadow, far away from her burrow. This was in the long-ago time when rabbits still had long, fuzzy tails, much longer and much fuzzier than squirrel's tails. Along came a fox and chased my great-grandmother around the meadow. Oh, how she ran, her tail streaming out behind her. But she wasn't fast enough and the fox caught up to her. 'Oh, no!' cried my great-grandmother and took a last, desperate leap just as the fox snapped at her. Off came her tail and in the fox's confusion she got away and disappeared down a rabbit hole. Ever since then we rabbits have short and fluffy tails and never go far from our burrows."

The rabbit stopped at the garden fence. "This is as far as I go," he said. "I know that the house cat is prowling around here somewhere," and Kingly climbed off.

"Thank you, thank you, thank you," called Kingly as the rabbit hopped away.

Kingly inched through the fence and into the garden. "One inch! Two inch! Three inch! Four inch! Five inch! Six inch! Seven inch! Eight inch! Nine inch! Ten inch! Eleven inch! Twelve inch!—FOOT!" he shouted over and over again as he went along. He could see the cherry tree, but it was still far, far away for an inch worm and his tummy was definitely feeling empty.

By and by along came a field mouse.

"Hello-hello, little inchy green worm," said the mouse. "How do you do and how do you do?"

"Badly and sadly," said Kingly. "I must get back to my cherry tree. It's a long way to go and my tummy is definitely feeling empty."

"Climb onto my skinny-winny tail and I will carry you," said the mouse, and Kingly inched his way onto the mouse's long and skinny tail. He hung on tight. Off the mouse scampered through the grape vines, across the bed of tomatoes and round the raspberries.

"This is as far as I go," said the field mouse. "I know that house cat is hunting around here somewhere," and Kingly climbed off the mouse's tail.

"Thank you, thank you, thank you," called Kingly as the field mouse scurried away.

"One inch! Two inch! Three inch! Four inch! Five inch! Six inch! Seven inch! Eight inch! Nine inch! Ten inch! Eleven inch! Twelve inch!—FOOT!" shouted Kingly as he inched along his way.

By and by he met a shrew with a very short tale and a very long nose.

"Hello-hello and how do you do, Mr Green Inchy Worm," said the shrew, sniffing him with his pointy nose.

"Badly and sadly," said Kingly. "I must get back to my cherry tree and my tummy is growling terribly."

"Hop onto my nose," said the shrew, and Kingly carefully climbed onto the shrew's long nose.

Off they went between the radishes, along the carrots and past the broccoli.

"Why do you have such a long and pointy nose?" asked Kingly.

"Because of the Ice Man," said the shrew.

"The Ice Man?" said Kingly.

"Yes," said the shrew. "Once upon a deepest winter, my greatest great-grandmother was sleeping and dreaming. She dreamed that the Ice Man was pinching her tail. So she pulled it in, and as she pulled it in she smelled the delicious smell of meadow grass on a summer's

day. The smell tickled her nose and made it twitch. Then the Ice Man pinched her tail again, and again she pulled it in and smelled the wonderful smells of summer and stretched and twitched her nose. This happened three times. When she awoke in springtime she found that her tail was very short and her nose very long. Ever since then we shrews are just the same. Now it's time to hop off my nose for this is as far as I go," said the shrew. "The house cat prowls the garden hereabouts and I don't want to be eaten for a snack."

"Thank you, thank you, thank you," called Kingly as the shrew disappeared back into the broccoli patch.

"One inch! Two inch! Three inch! Four inch! Five inch! Six inch! Seven inch! Eight inch! Nine inch! Ten inch! Eleven inch! Twelve inch! —FOOT!" cried Kingly as he left the vegetable garden and inched across the grassy lawn. The cherry tree was so much closer now, but still far away for an inch worm. He could see it standing in the sunlight close to the little white house.

By and by he met a snail.

"Hello-hello and how do you do, Mr Greeny Inch Worm," said the snail. "To where are you inching?"

"To the cherry tree," said Kingly. "But it's a long way to go and my tummy is shrinking by the minute."

"Sit on my shell," said the snail. "I am going that-a-way just because."

So Kingly inched onto the snail's back and watched the world pass by as the snail sailed along. Soon Kingly noticed that the snail wasn't going very fast.

"Giddy up," said Kingly. "We'll never get to my tree at this rate."

"What's the rush?" said the snail. "'Haste makes worry' —that's what my mum used to say. She was the slowest of all the snails," said the snail proudly. "She could sail so slow that she sometimes went nowhere for days at a time. You'll just have to be patient, Mr Greeny Inch Worm."

So Kingly sat still and tried to be patient.

By and by the house cat came along. She was white with a black tip on her tail. She saw Kingly and the snail and lay down on the green grass to watch them sailing past.

"Hello-hello and how do you do, Mr Slow Poke Snail and Greenest Inch Worm," said the house cat, purring loudly. "Where are you going?"

"To the cherry tree," said Kingly, "but my snaily friend is so, so slow and I am so, so hungry."

“Climb onto my whiskers,” said the house cat, and Kingly inched his way onto the cat’s long whiskers.

“Thank you, thank you, thank you,” called Kingly to the snail as the cat pounced across the grassy lawn. In a moment she was at the cherry tree. In a moment she climbed the tree. In a moment Kingly was back with his greenest friends.

“Thank you, thank you, thank you,” cried Kingly as he climbed off the cat’s whiskers and took a bite of a fresh green leaf—CRUNCH!

CRUNCH-CRUNCH-CRUNCH—this tale is lunch!