

The Nine Lives of Pinrut the Turnip Boy

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First Life

Chapter 1

There was once a turnip. He was an ordinary turnip, one you'd pass by without noticing. He grew in a row of turnips, one of many rows of turnips in a field that was one of many fields of turnips. That's how ordinary this turnip was. Neither bigger, nor smaller, nor fatter, nor skinnier, nor longer, nor sweeter, nor more peppery: that's how he was. And he had company, as you can imagine, for there were lots like him — thousands in fact.

One summer's evening this turnip up and left. He'd had enough. He pulled himself from the ground, turned upside down, and took off on his leafy stalks. He ambled along the row and out of the field.

"Hey, you can't do that!" cried the other turnips.

"Watch me," said the turnip.

He came to a road and crossed it without looking. A car missed him by inches. He twirled round and round, spun by the car-wind. After that he looked left and right before crossing a road.

On he went, shuffle-shuffle on his leafy stalks, until he came to a gate. He climbed it and entered a meadow full of sweet grass. He was half way across when a herd of cows spotted him.

"Turnip!" they moo'd, and galloped after him.

How the turnip ran! He ran and he ran, the thundering hoofs of the cows behind him. Finally he slipped under a fence and got away. After that he always looked left and right before crossing a meadow.

On he shuffle-shuffled on his leafy stalks until the light began to fade.

"I need a place to stay," said the turnip to himself, so he knocked on a farmhouse door.

"Knock, knock, knock," he hammered. He did this by banging his head on the door and it worked well enough.

The door opened.

"Oh, my heart," cried a woman, clutching her chest. "It's a turnip boy."

"I need a place to stay," said the turnip. "It's getting dark."

"Oh, I don't know, my love," said the woman. "The man of the house is right nasty."



"I'll take my chances," said the turnip. "He can't be worse than cars or cows, now can he?"

The woman looked doubtful; still, she let him in. She made him sit on a box near the fire, but he began to wilt.

"I need a moister place," said the turnip. "I'm getting thirsty."

So the woman put him on the counter by the sink and splashed water over him. That was better.

By and by the man of the house came in. He was huge, with a heavy brow, murderous hands and dark stubble on his face.

"What's for supper?" he growled. "I've been working hard. Turnips, turnips, turnips—nothing but turnips to keep me busy. I even had one run away today. Can you imagine! What if all the turnips decided to up and walk off just like that? It'd be the end of the world."

The woman said nothing, but she glanced at the turnip.

The turnip sat still and pretended to be a vegetable.

When the man had eaten his soup and was smoking a pipe by the fire, the woman hid the turnip under the bed. She thought that was the safest place. It probably was, but the farmer tossed his smelly socks under the bed and snored all night. This kept the turnip awake.

In the morning the farmer had breakfast. He slobbered at his porridge, slurped his tea and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

"I dreamed there was a turnip hiding under the bed," he grumbled. "Tossed and turned I did. I swear I could smell him."

"Ach, you have turnips on the brain," said the wife. "Why would anyone hide there? Sure, your socks smell so wicked no self-respecting creature would ever hole up beneath your snoring carcass. **Besides,**" she shouted loudly, **"you'll be collecting those smelly socks as soon as you're done eating. You can look for yourself if there's a turnip hiding under your bed."**

The turnip's eyes opened wide. He scooted out and hid behind the door.

"**Why are you yelling?**" yelled the farmer.

"**It's your snoring,**" shouted the woman again. **"It has me so deaf I can't hear myself speaking."**

The farmer finished eating and went to the bedroom. He got on his hands and knees and collected his socks. He didn't see any turnip, but he did sniff.

"Sniff-sniff, sniff-sniff—there *is* a turnip in here," he cried, looking around. "I knew it. I can smell him. Where is he? I'll smash his head if I get ahold of him."

The turnip ran out from behind the door and took off through the kitchen. In an instant the farmer was pounding at his heels. The turnip found the farmer's wife innocently holding the door open and pretending to sweep. Out he fled as shuffle-shuffle fast as his leafy stalks could carry him.

"**Where are you going without your boots on?**" shouted the farmer's wife, blocking her husband's way. **"You're not going to run about barefoot are you?"** and the farmer had to stop to put on his boots.

Shuffle-shuffle-shuffle ran the turnip down the farm lane. He hid under a bush beside the road. The farmer came looking for him but couldn't find him. At last he went away, grumbling and muttering to himself about sending the turnip seed company a letter of complaint.



By and by the turnip came out from under the bush. He stood on the edge of the road and stuck out a leafy thumb. Soon enough a car came by and stopped.

"Where are you going?" asked the driver, rolling down his window.

"Your way," said the turnip, and he hopped into the back seat.

"What's your name?" asked the man, driving off.

"Umm, umm," said the turnip, sticking his thumb into his mouth.

"You have to have a name," said the man.

"Pinrut," declared the turnip. "That's what I call myself."

"That's an odd name," said the man. "Sounds like turnip spelled backwards."

"It is," said Pinrut.

"Well, you are an odd, turnipy-looking lad," said the man, looking into the back seat as he rounded a corner.

'Crash!' went the car against a tree.

'Ouch!' said the tree.

"Now look what you've caused," cried the man, climbing out of the car.

"Me?" said Pinrut. "Who was driving?"

The towing man came and towed the car away. He gave the man and Pinrut a lift to town in his truck and Pinrut set off to explore the streets. He wandered about until he came to a greengrocer.

"I want a job," said Pinrut to the greengrocer.

"You? A job!" said the greengrocer. "You look like a turnip. What will I tell the customers?"

"That I'm an expert in vegetables," said Pinrut. "I have inside knowledge."

"You have a point," said the greengrocer, and hired him.

Pinrut was good at his job, especially in telling customers which were the best turnips. He was a genius with other vegetables, and fruit too. He sorted out the good from the bad and knew instantly when one had a rotten heart. So the greengrocer took him along to the wholesale market and let him choose which boxes to buy. Soon the greengrocer's business was thriving; he always had the best and freshest vegetables in town.

But the greengrocer's wife didn't like Pinrut. He'd taken her job.

"You stay in the kitchen and cook," said her husband, and she was not pleased.

One day Pinrut saw the greengrocer's wife eyeing him. She was cooking lunch in the back room—a stew made from old and damaged vegetables. Her knuckles had turned white as she sharpened her chopping knife on a steel.

'Swish, swish, swish,' went the knife on the steel, getting sharper and sharper.

'Stare, stare, stare,' glinted the eyes of the wife cruelly.

'Bubble, bubble, bubble,' boiled the pot on the stove.

"Time to go," thought Pinrut as she came out of the kitchen with a vegetable-chopping look in her eye.

Off Pinrut sprinted down the street, the greengrocer's wife after him, shouting and waving her knife. Luckily she was arrested by the police.

"Was she attacking you?" asked the policeman.



"Yes," said Pinrut. "She was going to add me to the stew."

"What kind of stew?" asked the policeman.

"Vegetable," said Pinrut.

"Only vegetable?" asked the policeman.

Pinrut nodded.

"That's not illegal," said the policeman.

"Why not?" asked Pinrut.

"No meat, no murder," said the policeman, letting the greengrocer's wife go.

Pinrut jumped into the police car and took off. He turned on the siren and wailed away down the street. He drove through three red lights and two green ones. The problem was the seat. It wasn't high enough for him to see out. Finally he dumped the car, lights still flashing, and took off on foot-stalk.

Swish, swish, swish, went his stalk-feet. Finally he came to a school and ran inside.

"Where have you been?" asked a teacher, sticking her head out the classroom door. "You're late," and she grabbed him by the scruff of the neck and sat him at a desk.

"What's two and two?" asked the teacher.

"Two what and two what?" asked Pinrut.

"It doesn't matter," said the teacher.

"Yes, it does," said Pinrut, "a big difference. Two elephants and two carrots makes two elephants just a little bit less hungry."

"I hadn't thought of that," said the teacher. "You're clever."

Pinrut stayed in school for the whole day. The police didn't find him and he was never bored. The children loved him. So he came back day after day and graduated with honors. He lived next door in a blind man's vegetable garden and never had any trouble staying out of his grasp.

First life ~ Epilogue

Pinrut joined an Irish Afro-Cuban folk band called Gaelic Rapa Rapa. He played the bongos and the tin whistle. He wanted to be the lead singer but didn't have any low notes and squeaked on the high ones. Finally the group found a singer called Ngiri who also played the thumb piano. She had a lovely garden behind a colorful house in Brixton and that's where Pinrut lived.

One day he didn't feel like pulling his head out of the ground.

"What's wrong?" asked Ngiri.

"Donno," said Pinrut. "I feel like I'm expanding into the light."

That was the last Pinrut said. The next day Ngiri found him bedecked with flowers. They nodded in the breeze and the bees buzzed, bringing pollen from many gardens. Now Ngiri knew what was happening.

"Goodbye, Pinrut," she said, her beautiful chocolate hands stroking his head.

Pinrut set seeds and Ngiri collected them. She planted them that winter, but before they sprouted her landlord kicked her out of the house and the garden went wild. Then the house was demolished to make way for a shopping center.