

The Nine Lives of Pinrut the Turnip Boy

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Third Life

Chapter 1

Turnips were growing in a garden behind a cottage on the cool shores of New Zealand. The cottage sat vacant. It belonged to an American sailor who'd gone out paddling one misty, moisty morning in his canoe and never came back. No one knew what happened to him; it was as if he'd been swallowed by a whale.

The garden, dug and prepared in the fall, went wild in the spring: weeds sprouted, grass grew, and the row of turnips sent up leaves and waxed healthily. The roots were white on the bottom and purple on top; then came the bouquet of dark leaves. Pinrut hovered above the row of turnips. He'd journeyed to the seven planets and out beyond to the cosmic midnight and back again. Now he was deciding which turnip he wanted to be.

*"Eeny, meeny, miny, mo,
In which turnip shall I go?
Ummmmmmmmmmmmmmmm?"*

"Umm, umm, umm," said Pinrut, not able to make up his mind. Finally, in early summer, Pinrut couldn't wait any longer. The turnips were ready and it was time to choose. He pointed his invisible finger from turnip to turnip and called out:

*"Eeny, meeny, miny, mo,
Catch a turnip by the toe,
If he hollers in you go,
Eeny, meeny, miny, mo!"*

Pinrut's finger fell on a turnip with the frilliest of leaves and a pointy root. There were bigger, fatter and rounder turnips, but this was the one his eeny-meeny-miny finger had fallen on. "Oh, well," he sighed, and pulled his head out of the ground. He stood up on his frilly leaves.

"I am Pinrut," he declared loudly.

"Big deal," said the other turnips.

"What are your names then?" asked Pinrut.

The turnips stayed silent. They didn't know.

Pinrut wandered about the garden on his leafy legs. They were so frilly they looked like a skirt. He went to the shore and gazed out to sea. He marched down the road and came across a sheep trotting along.

"Where are you going, my woolly-wooly lass?" asked Pinrut.

The sheep baa'd loudly: 'Baaaaaa!' She opened her eyes in vegetable love and came at Pinrut, her toothy mouth wide open.

Pinrut backed up.

The sheep kept coming.

Pinrut fled. Shuffle-shuffle-shuffle he ran on his frilly leafy legs, speeding away. Trit-trot trit-trot clacked the sheep's feet on the road behind him. She was faster and soon caught up. She was about to give Pinrut a great chomping kiss with her yellow teeth when he ran underneath a gate and into a field.

'Baaaaaa,' cried the sheep, unable to follow him.

"Pfew," said Pinrut, wiping his bulbous brow. "That was close."

'Baa! Baa! Baa!' cried sheep in the field behind him. Pinrut spun around. A flock of one thousand and thirteen sheep was running towards him.

Pinrut scurried up the gate and sat on the gate post. He was surrounded by a sea of sheep on one side and a single sheep on the other. They all looked at him with vegetable love in their eyes. 'Baa! Baa! Baa!' they cried over and over again.

He was stuck there until a farmer came along.

"What are you doing on my gate post?" asked the farmer.

"Avoiding the view," said Pinrut. "It wants to eat me."

"That's not surprising," said the farmer, looking him up and down. "You're definitely turnipy looking for a girl."

"I'm not a girl," said Pinrut. "I'm a boy."

"Sorry," said the farmer. "Your leaves are so frilly and skirtish. Around here men don't wear frilly skirts."

Pinrut blushed bright green. He'd never been taken for a girl before.

The farmer put the single sheep in with the rest of the flock. He picked Pinrut up and placed him on his shoulder. Off he marched down the road until they came to a tractor. He hopped on, and soon enough they arrived at a farmhouse.

"Jo! Jo! Darling! Come see what I found," called the farmer when he reached home.

Out rushed the farmer's wife.

"What's that girl doing on your shoulder, Ted?" she cried, ushering them into the kitchen. "Oh, how cute! Give her to me."

"She's not a girl," said Ted, handing Pinrut over.

"But she's adorable," said Jo, fingering Pinrut's leaves and nestling him against her breast. "Look at these frills!"

"I'm a boy," said Pinrut, struggling free and jumping to the floor.

"What a feisty little lass," exclaimed Jo. "What's your name?"

"Pinrut," said Pinrut.



"That sounds like turnip spelled backwards."

"It is, because I am," said Pinrut.

"You do look kinda turnipy," said Jo. "We love turnips!"

Pinrut wasn't sure if loving turnips was a good thing or a bad thing so he kept quiet.

"Ted, what did you bring for supper?" Jo asked.

"Oh, I forgot," said Ted, and went outside. He came back with a sack and a package.

"What's in that?" asked Jo, pointing to the sack.

"Turnips from the back of the deserted cottage. I dug them up. No point in letting them go to waste. Here's the leg of lamb you wanted," and he tossed the package onto the table. "I'm going to check the sheep pen," and out he went.

Pinrut tried to follow, but Jo pulled him back.

"You can help me," she said, handing him a knife. "Let's cut the tops off these turnips."

"No, thanks," said Pinrut, dropping the knife.

"Then what do you want to do?" asked Jo.

"Sit under your tap," said Pinrut.

Pinrut sat in the sink and watched the farmer's wife chop the leaves off the turnips. He knew each turnip very well. She tossed nine turnips into a pot of boiling water and put the rest into the fridge.

"Fire and ice," thought Pinrut. "Fire and ice."

When they sat down to supper Pinrut refused to eat the turnips. "Sorry, no stomach for it," he said. "And I don't eat sheep either. Don't you have some compost tea? Manure would do in a pinch."

Ted went out and came back with a bucket of wet compost. Pinrut stuck his head into it.

"You are a strange one," said Jo, spooning up the boiled turnips and wolfing them down.

"I suppose," said Pinrut, "but cheap to keep," and Ted agreed.

Pinrut slept in a bed of lettuce Jo made specially for him in the sink. The next day Jo tied a pink ribbon around Pinrut's neck. He didn't like it.

"But you look so much better," said Jo. "Without it you're naked."

"I like naked," said Pinrut.

After lunch, Jo sat down and started to sew. She made Pinrut a dress. It was covered with daisies. Pinrut tried to run away but she grabbed him and stuck the dress over his head.

"Oh, you look so fine! So adorable! So cute!" gushed Jo.

Pinrut was not happy. When Jo's back was turned he tried to leave the kitchen. All the doors were locked. After a while Jo left the kitchen. She unlocked the door and locked it behind her again.

"Not a good start to a life," thought Pinrut, taking off the dress.

When Jo came back she put Pinrut into the dress again. Then she started to crochet with pink wool.

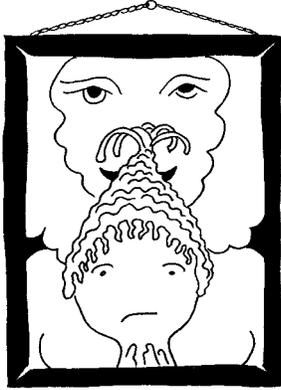
"I'm making you a hat," said Jo. "It will hide your bald and pointy head. I'll add frizzy wool around the edges so it looks like you have hair."

"I don't want a hat," said Pinrut.

"Oh, but you do," exclaimed Jo. "It'll be so feminine."

"Don't you have your own children?" asked Pinrut.





“No,” said Jo. “I always wanted a girl.”

When the hat was finished she put a fringe of soft brown hair around the edge and stuck it on Pinrut. She held him in front of a mirror. It looked awful.

“See, you’re wonderful,” said Jo, as pleased as a whale in a school of herring.

Pinrut stared at her.

“Don’t look at me like that,” said Jo. “You have no idea how crazy you get out here on the farm. There’s nothing but sheep to talk to.”

She reached into her pocket and took out red lipstick. She held Pinrut firmly and smeared his lips. Pinrut wiggled and squirmed, but it was too late. Now he looked like a doll.

Jo sat down and crocheted a bag. It wasn’t big; about the size of Pinrut’s head. Pinrut wondered what she was up to this time. Later, Ted came in for supper. He had to knock on the kitchen door for Jo to let him in.

“Ach, what a beautiful girl,” he cried when he saw Pinrut. “Good on ya, Jo,” and he slapped her back. “You always wanted a girl.”

They sat down at the table. It was turnips and lamb again. Jo put moist compost into the crocheted bag and set it on Pinrut’s head; that way he could sit at the table and talk to them while they ate and not be stuck upside down in a bucket. Pinrut had to agree it was a good idea.

That night, as Jo made a fresh bed of lettuce for Pinrut to sleep on, she told him not to leave the farm.

“I told Ted to put sheep around the house,” she said. “If you try to escape, you’ll be eaten.”

Pinrut knew he had to go. This was not the place for him. The people were mad. He waited for the house to be silent. He waited some more. He got up, rummaged under the sink and found a can of wasp spray. He read the label. It said: ‘Bug Off! — the Biggest and Best Bug Blitzer’.

“Just what I need,” said Pinrut.

He grabbed a mug with a handle, climbed up to a windowsill and peered out. By the light of the moon he saw that the house was surrounded by sheep. They glistened evilly in the moonlight.

‘CRASH!’ went the glass as Pinrut swung the mug through the window. Out he hopped, shredding a leaf in half. Luckily, Pinrut didn’t bleed and could always grow a new leaf. Off he ran on his leafy legs—shuffle-shuffle-shuffle.

‘Baa! Baa! Baa!’ cried the sheep, running after him.

‘Psssst! Psssst! Psssst!’ went the bug spray as they tried to eat him up. The sheep backed away, surprised and bleating miserably. They hated the taste of Bug Off!

Pinrut trotted down the road until dawn. There were sheep everywhere. All the fields were full of fluffy white sheep. Sheep, sheep, sheep, sheep, sheep and more sheep. Pinrut didn’t feel safe; his bug spray was running low.

Third life ~ Chapter 2

Pinrut stood despondently by the side of the road. He could hear sheep bleating in the fields all around him. A car with a long bundle on the roof passed by. Pinrut stuck out a leafy thumb. The car stopped and Pinrut jumped in.

"Where you going, love?" asked the driver.

"Wherever there aren't any sheep," said Pinrut.

"That will be a long trip," laughed the driver. "Don't you like them?"

"No," said Pinrut. "They want to eat me."

"You do look kinda turnipy for a girl," said the driver.

Pinrut sighed. He'd forgotten to take off his dress.

Aside from the sheep New Zealand was a gorgeous country, lush and green and with towering mountains. Soon they were driving up a mountain side.

"Where you going?" asked Pinrut.

"Hang gliding," said the driver.

"Are there sheep up there?" asked Pinrut.

"Not in the air," chuckled the driver. "Except for the wooly clouds."

They stopped on the edge of a steep, grassy slope and got out. It was windy and there were no sheep about. The man untied the bundle from his roof rack, and clicked and clacked his hang glider together. He picked it up, ran down the slope, and took off into the air. Pinrut thought this was wonderful. The man was flying! He was like a bird. Back and forth along the mountainside the man soared. Finally he came back and landed. That part was trickier, but he did a good job and stayed on his feet.

"Time for tea," said the man, taking out a flask and a lamb sandwich from the car.

"Oh-oh," said Pinrut, after a while.

"Why's that?" asked the man.

"Sheep," said Pinrut. "They're coming up the slope."

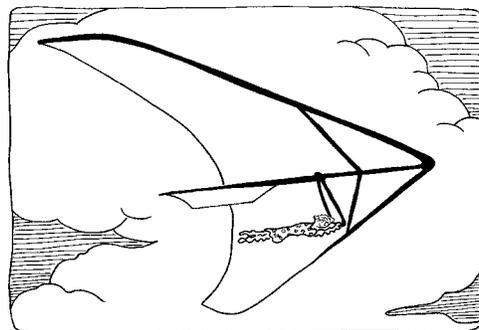
"No worries," said the man, putting the flask away. "You can sit in the car when I go flying."

But Pinrut didn't want to sit in the car surrounded by sheep. He grabbed the hang glider and ran down the slope. Away he soared into the sky, his dress flapping in the wind.

"Come back!" shouted the man, but Pinrut didn't hear; he was up and away and over the world in the wind and breeze. "Whee!" he shouted with glee ... until he realized he didn't know what he was doing. "Whoa!" he shouted after that.

But neither wheeing nor whoaing made any difference, the wind was going that-a-way and that-a-way went Pinrut, wobbling through the air like a drunken eagle. An hour later the wind dropped and down Pinrut sailed. Far below was a city. 'Welcome to Auckland' said a sign. Round and round the hang glider flew until it crashed onto a busy street. People came running.

"Are you okay, little girl?" they cried. "Are you hurt?"



Pinrut looked around. He sighed with relief. There wasn't a sheep in sight.

"You come with me, dearie," said a lady, taking Pinrut firmly by a leaf and dragging him into a hot chocolate shop. She set him down on a chair and ordered hot chocolate with whipped cream and sprinkles on top.

"What's your name, luv?" asked the lady.

"Pinrut," said Pinrut.

"What a strange name for a girl," said the lady. "It sounds like turnip spelled backwards."

"It is, because I am, and I'm not a girl," said Pinrut.

"But you're wearing lipstick," said the lady. "And what a pretty dress you have, and a nice cap too. Crocheted by hand, I see. Who made them?"

"A farmer's wife," said Pinrut. "She was nutty."

"Too many years with the sheep, I bet," laughed the lady.

Pinrut nodded. He slurped on his drink. It was tasty. He liked chocolate.

Suddenly, New Zealand hot chocolate robbers rushed into the store. There were four of them.

"Hands on your hips!" they shouted. "Now ... or in the next couple of seconds ... please."

Everyone put their hands on their hips and the hot chocolate robbers grabbed their hot chocolates and put them on trays.

"You can't have mine," said Pinrut, clutching his cup tightly.

"Give it to me," said a hot chocolate robber, grasping the cup.

"No," said Pinrut, holding on.

"Gimme now," said the hot chocolate robber.

"No," said Pinrut.

"Please," said the robber.

"Still no," said Pinrut.

The hot chocolate robber grabbed Pinrut, cup and all, and plunked him on his tray.

"Let's go! Let's go!" cried the chief hot chocolate robber and out the door they rushed. They jumped into a car and raced away.

"What kind of a turnipy girl are you?" asked the chief hot chocolate robber over his shoulder. He was sitting in the front seat. On his lap were six hot chocolates.

"I'm not a girl!" shouted Pinrut, annoyed. He was in the back with the two other hot chocolate robbers.

"Fine, fine, keep your cool," said the chief. "It's just that you look so feminine and vegetably."

'Wee-wah! Wee-wah! Wee-wah!' wailed eleven police cars behind them.

"Oh-oh," said the hot chocolate robbers. "Looks like we're lamb chops."

The cop cars surrounded the robber's car and made it stop.

"Out you get with your hands on your hips," shouted the policemen. "Please."

"We can't," said the robbers. "We have hot chocolate on our laps."

"Fine," said the policemen. "Get out of the car any way you want—just don't spill the drinks, please. And don't you dare sip those hot chocolates!"

The hot chocolate robbers carefully climbed out of the car and didn't sip or spill the drinks. They put them on the car's roof. Then they put their hands on their hips.

Pinrut didn't put his drink on the car roof. He kept it in his hands and sipped it.



“Arrest that hot chocolate robber especially, please,” shouted the police captain, pointing at Pinrut. “I saw her sipping hot chocolate.”

“I’m not a girl!” screeched Pinrut, completely fed up. He decided he really must get rid of the dress.

“You look like a girl,” said the police captain, taking the drink from Pinrut and sipping it. “Mmmm,” he said as he slapped on the handcuffs.

They tossed the hot chocolate robbers into a paddy wagon. Pinrut was tossed in last. He landed on the chief chocolate robber’s tummy.

“Ooof!” said the chief hot chocolate robber, and away the paddy wagon wailed.

They put everyone into a jail cell—except for Pinrut who was given a cell painted pink because he was a girl.

“Girls always get treated special,” jeered the hot chocolate robbers. They were jealous.

“Not true,” said Pinrut. “I was tossed onto your chief’s big belly in the paddy wagon. That was horrible.”

“I suppose,” said the hot chocolate robbers.

After a while the hot chocolate shop owner came in.

“Those are the hot chocolate robbers,” she said, pointing to the hot chocolate robbers. “But not that turnipy looking girl. She was a customer.”

The police let Pinrut out of jail. He stood on the street not knowing what to do. The hot chocolate shop owner came up to him.

“Would you like a free hot chocolate?” she asked. “You look like you’ve had a rough time.”

Pinrut nodded and away they went to the chocolate shop.

Pinrut became friends with the shop owner and lived in her garden. She didn’t mind that Pinrut was a boy, didn’t try to dress him in a flowery skirt and didn’t have sheep. She hired him to serve hot chocolate to the customers and he did a great job. After a while Pinrut noticed that the girl servers made better tips than he did. One day he wore his dress and frilly hat to work. He made twice as much money. After that he wore a dress to work every day.

The only sour spot was the owner’s son, Lionel. He was a slobbery, pimply, teenage weakling who was jealous of Pinrut and didn’t like him cross dressing. On the days when Lionel worked in the hot chocolate shop after school he made nasty comments behind Pinrut’s back. Pinrut put hot chili pepper powder into his drinks when he knew he wouldn’t get caught. After a while the hot chocolate shop owner bought a second store and put Pinrut in charge. All the servers cross dressed and the place made a fortune.

Third life ~ Epilogue

Pinrut lived until he died. He refused to eat GMOs and held protests against them every two and a half weeks. Before he passed away he gave most of his money to a farmer who was preserving heritage seeds and didn't like sheep.

When the end finally came Pinrut stuck his head into the garden in the hot chocolate shop owner's backyard, grew pretty flowers and set seeds in long, slender pods. The shop owner shed tears. She watched as the seed pods dried, checking three times a day. She was going to collect every last seed. Unfortunately, a neighbor's pet sheep got loose and broke into the garden. It trampled all the vegetables and ate the turnip stalk, seeds and all. The hot chocolate lady was beside herself. She wailed and moaned and tore her hair. She kicked the sheep in the rear. For days she searched the ground; there was nothing but a messy mix of dirt and trampled plants.

Finally she bought a garden sieve with a fine mesh and carefully, painstakingly, sorted through the dirt and broken plants. She was about to give up when a single turnip seed, or what appeared to be a turnip seed (it was very small), turned up. She put it in a tin and stored the tin in her freezer. Then she went out for a walk and accidentally got run over by a sheep truck.

