

# *The Nine Lives of Pinrut the Turnip Boy*

*Reg Down*  
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## *Fourth Life*

### *Chapter 1*

The seedling sat in a cage. The cage was a wooden frame covered with chicken wire. One side had a door. The soil inside was deep and generously dug with compost. It was carefully weeded. The weather for growing turnips was perfect: cool and sunny. The seedling was small and runty. It was a poor excuse for a turnip, to say the least. Its leaves grew long and spindly and had a yellow cast. The rounded root was puny, no bigger than a table-tennis ball.

After two months the turnip stopped growing and pulled its head out of the ground. He looked down at himself. "What have I landed into this time?" he said. Vague memories of drinking lots of hot chocolate wafted through his mind. It all seemed far away. He explored his cage. He shook the chicken wire and rattled the door. He peered out through the wiring. It was dawn and dew was on the grass. He rattled the door again and examined it carefully. He climbed up, slipped his leafy hand through the wire and lifted the hook. The door swung open.

The turnip wandered through the garden. It was a posh suburban garden with a swimming pool, a large lawn and carefully tended flowering shrubs. In the oversized house no one was stirring. He walked down the driveway and came to a road. A fancy sign said: 'Lionel's Lair'. He went back up the driveway and knocked on the house door. No one heard his leafy knuckles against the wood. He sat on the doorstep and waited.

Finally the door opened. A man stood staring.

"Pinrut? Pinrut? Is that you?"

"Who's Pinrut?" asked the turnip.

"You! You're Pinrut," said the man.

"I am?" said Pinrut.

"Yes, you're the only turnip boy I ever knew."

Pinrut looked himself up and down. "What kind of name is Pinrut? It sounds like turnip spelled backwards."

"It is, because you are," said the man. "Don't you remember?"

Pinrut shook his head.

"I'm Lionel — we met when I was a teenager. You didn't like me — remember?"

Pinrut shrugged. He couldn't remember anything.

"Never mind, come in! Come in!" said Lionel, holding the door open. "I'm glad you got out of the cage. I built it to protect you from the birds and sheep."

Pinrut stepped inside the house. A young girl about four years old appeared. Her eyes widened.

"A doll," she cried, running to Pinrut. "For me?"

"No, Serafina, this is Pinrut. He's a turnip boy."

The girl stared. She reached out and grabbed Pinrut by the throat. She clutched him to her chest.

"Mine," said Serafina.

"Gurgle, gurgle, gurgle," said Pinrut.

"No, darling," said Lionel, pulling Pinrut away. "You can't have him."

"My doll!" screamed Serafina, hanging on.

"Be reasonable, sweetheart," said Lionel tugging at Pinrut.

"He's mine," shouted Serafina, jerking Pinrut away.

A leaf tore off.

"Ouch," said Pinrut.

"Now see what you've done," said Serafina, staring at her dad.

"Lionel! Are you picking on Serafina again?" shouted a woman down the stairs. "Let her be."

Serafina stuck her tongue out at Lionel and ran off with Pinrut dangling from her pudgy hand.

"I'm sorry, Serafina, dear," said Lionel, following her. "I didn't mean to hurt him."

"But you did," said Serafina, turning on Lionel. "And you hurt my feelings too."

"Sorry, Sweetie," said Lionel. "You play nicely with Pinrut. What do you want for breakfast?"

"Ice cream with chocolate sprinkles," said Serafina.

Pinrut was left with Serafina. She took him upstairs and laid him in her play crib. He tried to get up but she pushed him down.

"You stay there," she said. "You're my baby," and she shoved a toy nursing bottle into his mouth.

"Gag, chrust patloch," said Pinrut, the bottle too far down his throat. He spat it out and leaped from the crib.

"Come back, you scallywag," cried Serafina, running after him.

Pinrut ran to the door. The knob was round and shiny. He leaped up but his leafy hands slipped off. Serafina was on top of him. He ducked and scooted through her legs. He fled under her bed. Serafina crawled after him. She had him cornered.

"It's breakfast time, Honey Buns," called the woman. "Daddy made us breakfast."

Serafina grabbed Pinrut by the head and ran downstairs to the kitchen.

"So this is Pinrut," exclaimed Serafina's mum. "It's so sweet that you two are friends. Lionel, get the highchair—I told you already."

Lionel came rushing in with a highchair. He put Serafina into it and slid her to the table. Serafina placed Pinrut beside her bowl of ice cream. "Sit," she said, and Pinrut sat. His head was spinning and his neck was sore. He desperately needed to think.

"I'm Zoe," said Serafina's mum, shaking Pinrut's leafy hand. "I read about you in the newspaper."

Pinrut was puzzled. "What did I do?"



"You managed the first cross dressing hot chocolate shop in New Zealand," said Zoe. "After Lionel's mum died the business really took off. Now we're rich."

"You really can't remember?" asked Lionel.

"No," said Pinrut. "When was that?"

"Ten years ago," said Lionel.

"Ten years!" exclaimed Pinrut.

Lionel nodded. "I was just a teen with my head in the clouds, but I remember you went to seed in Mum's garden. I was away camping on a school trip but I heard that a sheep broke into the garden and ate all your seeds. What I didn't know was that my mum found a single seed and put it into a tin in the freezer. A few months ago the freezer finally broke down and I found the tin with the seed inside. A note, in my mom's handwriting, said: 'Darling Pinrut's seed (I hope)'. So I cleared a patch in the garden and here you are!"

Pinrut nodded but he wasn't really listening. Serafina was distracted and he jumped off the table.

"Waaaa!" cried Serafina, noticing immediately.

Zoe scooped Pinrut up, put him next to Serafina's bowl again, and she stopped crying.

"I'm off to check on the latest store," said Lionel.

"I'll come too," said Pinrut eagerly.

"No, you stay," said Serafina. "You're my doll."

"And don't forget about having lunch ready for us," said Zoe to Lionel. "We girls have a hair appointment at one. Don't we, Munchkins?"

Serafina nodded.

Pinrut spent the morning with Serafina. She dressed him in doll outfits. She washed his leaves with soap. She spanked him and put him to bed. She fed him cake and marshmallows. She put makeup on his face and squeezed his leafy feet into toy high heels. She painted his green fingers with red nail polish and put on a tiara. Finally Lionel came back and prepared a meal.

"Lunchtime," called Lionel, and Serafina stuffed Pinrut into her purse and ran downstairs.

"I think Pinrut needs to come out of your purse," said Lionel, eyeing Pinrut's crushed leaves.

"No," said Serafina. "He's my money."

"Stop picking on Serafina," said Zoe.

Lionel went back to arranging the food on the plates.

After lunch Serafina and Zoe got into the car. Pinrut was put into a flowery doll's dress and strapped into a seatbelt next to Serafina. Lionel drove them to town. Pinrut was so exhausted he fell asleep while Serafina smudged his cheeks with pink lipstick. He awoke to the car doors opening and Serafina grabbing him by the neck. He wished she'd stop doing that. Lionel waited while the girls went into the hairdressers.

"Oh, what a cute doll," said Hairdresser Mitch. "She looks so animated."

"She's real," said Serafina. "He's a turnip boy. I dressed him up."

"A turnip boy," gushed Mitch. "How cute! Can I style his hair for you? Here, let me see."

Pinrut's root hairs were examined.

"I love the lipstick," said Mitch, "but I think he needs a wig. We can glue hair on."



"Yea!" shouted Serafina. "Use different kinds of hair. I want blond and brunette and ... ummm ... black and a stripe of red."

Pinrut struggled out of Mitch's hands and dropped to the floor. He tried to run but Serafina had him by the neck in a second.

"My, my, he is a lively lad," said Mitch. "Does he speak?"

"Help!" cried Pinrut.

"Yes, yes, don't worry," said Mitch, stroking his head. "We'll have you looking better in a few minutes—guaranteed."

Mitch took out a hot glue gun and fished locks of hair from the trash. He glued the locks carefully to Pinrut's head while Serafina held him firmly.

"All done, Beauty Boy," said Mitch. "Serafina, show him how cute he looks in the mirror."

Pinrut stared in horror.

"Now for your hair, my cutie-kins," said Mitch. "Do you want a dye job just like Mummy's?"

"Yes, please," said Serafina. "Here, you take Pinrut. Don't let him run away. He likes to run away."

"I'll put him on a leash," said Mitch.

Mitch set Pinrut onto the counter beside the sink and tied him with a piece of string to one of the taps. Pinrut watched as Mitch washed Serafina's hair. He laid her back in the chair, covered her eyes with a towel, and shampooed her long, golden tresses. He was rinsing them when the phone rang.

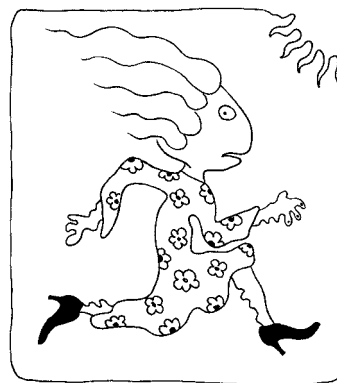
"Fancy Fashions for Genuine Women," said Mitch, picking up the phone and turning his back. "How can I help you, darling?"

Pinrut saw his chance. He grabbed a pair of scissors and snipped the string around his neck. He reached into the sink and cut great wads of golden locks out of Serafina's hair all the way down to her scalp. He leaped off the counter and fled the hairdressers. Lionel stared at him as he ran out the door. He jumped from the car.

"Pinrut? Is that you?" he called. "What's with the hair?"

But Pinrut was gone. He fled down Queen Street and into an alley. He ran like crazy until he spotted a trash can filled with food scraps behind a restaurant. He dived in and covered himself with wilted lettuce. He peered out as Zoe charged past, her hair in silver foil. Lionel followed meekly behind.

"Where's that piece of turnip?" hissed Zoe. "I'll stuff him into a garburator head first."



## *Fourth life ~ Chapter 2*

Pinrut never saw Lionel's family again. He spotted a taxi driver loading luggage into his trunk. When the driver wasn't looking Pinrut hopped in, unzipped a sports bag and slipped inside. The owner spotted the open zipper, closed it, and put a lock on. Pinrut was trapped.

The taxi went to the airport, the bags went onto the plane, and the plane flew to Québec, Canada.

"Mon Dieu!" exclaimed the customs' lady when she opened the sports bag. "Vhat is zîs?" She took Pinrut out. He was in bad shape.

"I've never seen this turnip girl in my whole life," said the owner, his eyes opening wide.

"Zîs is terribellè," said the customs' lady, examining Pinrut. "Yu cannot come to Canadà vis zîs kind of lippysteeck—or at leas' not Québec. Vat vood people sink? Here, lèt me feex it for yu," and

she took out her lipstick and touched up Pinrut's lips.

"Zehr—mooch bettër," and she put him down.

Instantly Pinrut leaped from the table and fled out of the terminal.

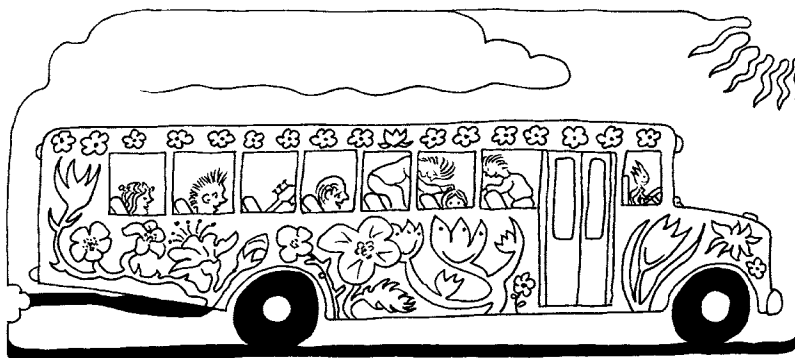
"Oi, oi, oi!" cried the French boys. "Luke at zat turneep girl rûn!"

Pinrut ran out the doors and straight into a group of aging American hippies standing around a flower-power bus.

"Oooo là là, man!" they cried when they saw Pinrut. "What's with the groovy hair job, Turnip Girl? You should join us."

"I will if you're leaving town," said Pinrut. "And I'm not a girl, I'm a boy."

"Hop aboard, Mr Fancy Hair," they all cried. "We're heading across the prairies right now."



Pinrut hopped aboard and out of Québec City they slowly roared (their exhaust was broken). The hippies treated Pinrut well. They sang him songs, gave him a necklace of plastic daisies and stopped in the next town to buy a flowerbox and organic soil so he could rest comfortably at night. A couple called Flower and Mandrake adopted him and sometimes let him drive the bus. He was too small to drive properly so Mandrake leaned a brick against the gas pedal and Pinrut stood on the seat. Across Québec and Ontario they rolled and out onto the great prairies. They crossed the provinces of Manitoba and Saskatchewan and headed into Alberta. They drove past mile after mile of GMO canola and corn fields. Pinrut looked out the window and his body shuddered.

A Mountie stopped them outside Medicine Hat.

"Your exhaust needs fixing," he said, stepping into the bus.

"Next place we stop at, officer," said Mandrake. Luckily he'd been driving and not Pinrut.

"And what's that lad doing here?" asked the Mountie. "He should be in school."

"This is my boy," said Flower, putting an arm around Pinrut. "He's being home schooled by me."

Pinrut smiled and did V signs with his leafy fingers and toes.

"He looks like a turnip," said the Mountie.

"He's my flower-power turnip baby," said Flower, grinning dreamily.

The Mountie rolled his eyes and waved them on.

They drove towards Calgary on the Trans-Canada Highway. Pinrut was driving when a thick fog rose up from the ground late in the afternoon. The light was odd and eerie. The hippies fell silent and stared out the bus windows. Mandrake started to tell tales of people entering strange fogs that twisted time; where people found themselves in the past, or the future, or in strange lands they'd never seen before. Pinrut shivered. He didn't pay attention and took a wrong turn. The fog was so

dense he could hardly see. They passed a sign. It said: 'Deadhorse Lake'. Everyone peered out but no one saw the dead horse. Night was falling when they came to a town.

'Welcome to Drumheller,' said a billboard.

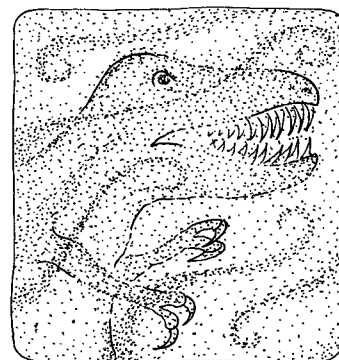
They passed through town and were turning to cross a bridge when an almighty explosion rocked the bus. The steering wheel twisted out of Pinrut's grip. The bus swerved right, tumbled down a slope and landed upside down in a park. Everyone crawled out, still alive and breathing. The front tire had blown.

Suddenly Flower and Mandrake screamed, "Run, man, run! Run for your lives!"

Everyone turned and saw the dinosaur at the same time. It loomed out of the swirling mist, massive and menacing.

"Flee!" cried Pinrut. "It's Tyrannosaurus Rex. He's not a vegetarian!"

The hippies fled, new energy pumping through their aging knees. Some headed towards town, others ran across the bridge. Pinrut swung wide of the dinosaur, followed a river downstream and was quickly swallowed up in the mist. After a while he saw lights. He wandered down 11th Street, crossed a railway line, and ended up at a boxy building. A bright green sign said: 'Greentree Elementary School: planting seeds for life.'



"Sounds like the place for me," said Pinrut.

He stuck his head into the ground under the sign and fell asleep.

### *Fourth life ~ Chapter 3*

Pinrut woke to the sounds of parents dropping their kids off at school. He pulled his head out of the ground. The principal was there, greeting the children. After a while the principal noticed him.

"What are you doing under my sign?" he said, glaring at Pinrut. "A turnip boy, eh! Turnips aren't allowed at my school—not with that kind of hair."

Pinrut fled, the principal pounding after him. Pinrut slipped past a yacking of kids, entered the school and ran down the corridor.

"Stop the turnip!" cried the principal, stumbling into the building.

Everyone turned and looked at the principal as if he had gone mad—no one noticed Pinrut at all. Pinrut snuck into an empty classroom and looked around. There was nothing but desks and chairs. There was nowhere to hide except in the cupboards on the back wall and they were too high to reach.

Suddenly the intercom came on. "Attention! Attention all students. This is your beloved principal speaking. We have an intruder in the school. He may be dangerous. He looks like a turnip but his hair is funny. Hair like that is not allowed in my school. Neither are turnips, eh. If you see him, report him immediately."

Pinrut rolled his eyes. "Dangerous?" he thought. "That's a stretch."

The classroom door flew open and a giggle of girls flounced in.

"What's wrong with Mr Connell?" asked a girl with pigtails. "First he's shouting about a turnip; now he's saying that turnip hair is against the rules."

"This time he's gone completely nuts," said a redheaded girl.  
 "Eekk!" screeched a skinny girl, jumping back and pointing.  
 Everyone froze and stared at Pinrut. He put on his best smile.  
 "Is that the turnip?" said one girl doubtfully. "He doesn't look dangerous—  
 though his hair is kinda wild."

"It's a turnip boy," said the redhead. "He's cute. I like his hair. Mr Connell's  
 being mean."

"What's your name?" asked Pigtails.

"Pinrut," said Pinrut. "How do I get out of here?"

"That sounds like turnip spelled backwards," said Pigtails, ignoring his question.

"It is, because I am," said Pinrut. "But how do I get out of here?"

"It won't be easy now," said Pigtails.

"Here, take this nose," said Redhead, pulling a large red nose out of her pocket and slipping the  
 elastic around Pinrut's head. "I got it at a party. It will help to disguise you."

"Don't be silly," said Pigtails. "That won't disguise him."

"Don't be silly yourself," said Redhead. "Every little bit helps." She  
 leaned over and squeezed the nose. "See, it lights up and everything," she  
 said proudly.

Just then the boys sauntered in. They stopped in their tracks.

"Is that the turnip?" asked a lanky boy, doubtfully.

"Course it's the turnip," said Pigtails, sticking her tongue out at Redhead.

"Anyone can see that. His name's Pinrut."

"What's with the nose?" asked a scruffy boy.

"It's a disguise," said Redhead firmly. "We're going to help him escape.

Mr Connell is chasing him. Don't you guys dare give him away."

"We're not going to give him away," said the scruffy boy. "But why is his hair so weird?"

"Shhh! Quick!" hissed someone by the classroom door. "Teacher's coming!"

Everyone rushed to their desks. Pinrut didn't know what to do but Pigtails tossed her bright  
 yellow jacket over him and told him to lie flat.

"Good morning, Class Five," said the principal, sweeping through the door in a rush.

"Oh, no," thought Pinrut under the jacket. "It's him. He's teaching the lesson!"

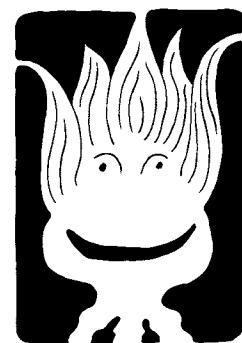
"Good morning, Mr Connell," chanted the children.

"Don't worry, Children," said Mr Connell, "the police are here. They'll find that odd looking  
 turnip that slunk into the school. They say he might be from a hippy bus that crashed last night near  
 the dinosaur statue. Them hippies, eh! No one is allowed to have hippy hair in MY school. And no  
 turnip heads allowed around here either, eh. Now, let's get on with the lesson. Take your seats."

The class sat down to a scraping of chairs. The children were on pins and needles. They were  
 trying not to look at the jacket but their curiosity was getting the better of them..

"We are studying poetry," said Mr Connell, lounging lazily in his chair behind his desk. "In  
 particular the limerick. The finest poetry ever written, in my opinion. Open your books to page sixty-  
 three and recite number three by the famous Canadian poet, Ger Dwon."

The children opened their books, found the poem, and began to recite:



*The Perils of Tourism*  
by Ger Dwon

*A flea and a fly and a gnu  
Went to France to say 'How do?'*  
*The French were amused*  
*But slightly bemused,*  
*And replied, with an accent: 'Et vous?'*

"No, no, no," shouted Mr Connell. "The French have an accent, a lovely accent. It's 'Eh voo,' not 'Ett vouzz!'"

"What a meanie," muttered Pinrut. "I thought they spoke it really well."

Pinrut loved poetry—real poetry.

"Now try number five," said Mr Connell.

So the children tried harder. It wasn't easy speaking a poem when the police could be seen wandering around in the corridors.

*The Young Poet's Flaw*  
by Erg Wond

*Young poets are terribly smart,*  
*At crafting their delicate art,*  
*Their one aberration*  
*In poetic formation*  
*Is that they never seem to be able to make the last line fit.*

Mr Connell groaned and waved his hands in the air. "You have it all wrong! With life, eh! With love! Say it again."

The children had tried to speak with more life, but the police had gone outside and were peering through the classroom windows. It was hard to concentrate.



"What a pain in the derrière that man is," thought Pinrut, and, still under the coat, began to creep his way between the desks and chairs towards Mr Connell's desk.

The children stirred restlessly. It looked like the coat was alive, like some sort of octopus that had crawled out of the sea. One girl almost laughed. She covered her mouth, but snorted through her nose. This made another girl giggle.

"Who's snorting and giggling?" demanded Mr Connell, glaring at the girls.

The girls blushed, then hung their heads to hide their grins behind their long hair. Meanwhile the yellow jacket continued to slide in fits and starts towards the front of the class.

A few boys couldn't hold back any longer and chuckled too. Their faces were so red they looked like they were about to explode.

"Why are you laughing?" shouted Mr Connell, finally sitting up properly. "What's so funny, eh?"



The class froze. Mr Connell was SERIOUS. You could hear a pin drop. The jacket was still.

"None of this silly nonsense is allowed," said Mr Connell. "One more snort or giggle and all of you will lose your recess. Got that?" He slouched in his chair again. "Now, it's time to recite the limerick you wrote for homework. Take out your notebooks. We will begin with one of the chucklers. How about you, Patrick?"

Patrick groaned as his classmates took out their notebooks and the yellow jacket slid surreptitiously under Mr Connell's desk.

"Now, Patrick—begin," said Mr Connell.

"Do I have to?" whined Patrick. He hated speaking in front of the class and Mr Connell knew it.

"Yes," said Mr Connell. "Entertain us."

Patrick took a deep breath and was about to begin when a turnipy voice called out:

*"Old Connell is definitely mad,  
His teaching is bumpy and bad —  
But put on a smile,  
Because with his guile,  
Brave Pinrut will make the kids glad!"*

"Who's that?" shouted Connell, jumping up.

Immediately he fell over with a clatter. The kids jumped up too. They gaped wild eyed at their teacher sprawled out on the floor. Pinrut boldly swaggered out from under the desk, his red nose glowing brightly.

"That was my poem," said Pinrut, proudly. "Did you like it?"

"You!" hissed Mr Connell. "The turnip."

Connell tried to get to his feet but fell again. Pinrut had tied his shoelaces.

"I'll get you," he said through gritted teeth. He stood up and hopped after Pinrut like a kangaroo.

"Oh-oh," said Pinrut, fleeing for the door.

"Run, Pinrut, run!" cried the children.

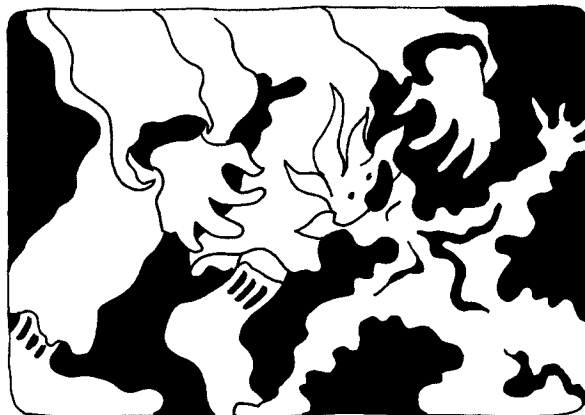
Pinrut reached the door first but couldn't open it quickly enough. "Oh, no," he cried, jumping aside as the principal lunged for him.

Connell slammed into the door, knocking his glasses askew. He kicked off his shoes, and slipping and sliding in his socks, chased Pinrut around the classroom. Desks and chairs went flying. Girls screamed. Boys yelled. It was pandemonium. Finally Connell trapped Pinrut in a corner. He reached out to grab him but Pinrut bit his hand—hard.

"Aargh!" roared Connell, leaping away.

The door flew open. Policemen charged in.

"What's happening?" they shouted, but before they could get an answer Pinrut was out the door and running down the corridor.



"The turnip! The turnip!" cried Mr Connell. "Stop him! Get him! He bit me!"

Pinrut fled out of the building and across the playground, the policemen and principal hot on his heels.

"Yay! Go, go, go, Pinrut!" yelled the grade five kids out the window.

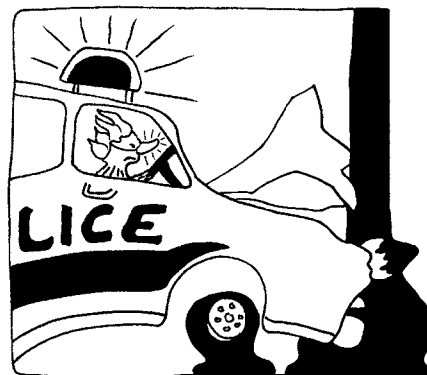
Pinrut zigged, he zagged, he doubled back and ran through legs. He jumped into a police car and drove away wailing and flashing in a cloud of burning rubber.

"Hurray!" cried Grade Five, leaping up and down. "Hurray! Hurray! Hurray!"

Downtown, Pinrut crashed the cop car into a lamppost. Everyone stopped and stared as a bright-nosed turnip got out and ran away. As soon as he was around the corner he threw away the nose and dived into a flowerbed head first. He pretended to be a plant until the cops gave up looking for him. Then he sauntered around town asking everybody whether they'd seen a flower-power hippy bus. Finally he found it sitting outside a garage.

"Pinrut!" cried Flower, running out and hugging him. "Where were you? We've been looking everywhere."

"Groovy, man! Cool, you're here," said Mandrake, sauntering out with the rest of the hippies. "The bus is bashed but ready to roll. Let's jam, Jimbo," and away they went with the flower bus belching smoke and roaring loudly.



### *Fourth life ~ Epilogue*

Pinrut stayed with the hippies and became one himself. He kept gluing new strands of hair onto his head whenever the old ones fell off. His wild styles became his trademark. They traveled up to Alaska, but it was much too cold. So they headed south and went from festival to festival and commune to commune. Pinrut had a grand time.

Crossing Nevada the bus broke down high on a mountain pass. They were beside the road for a couple of weeks. The dryness and heat became too much for Pinrut. He suddenly bolted, grew flowers and knew the end was coming. He stuck his head into the ground in the shade of a piñon tree. A bee came along carrying pollen from a wild Nevada mountain turnip and he set seeds. He began to shrivel.

"Dude, are you going to die on us?" asked the hippies.

"Just for now," said Pinrut. "Don't forget, plant my seeds in a cool place," and that was the last they heard from him.

