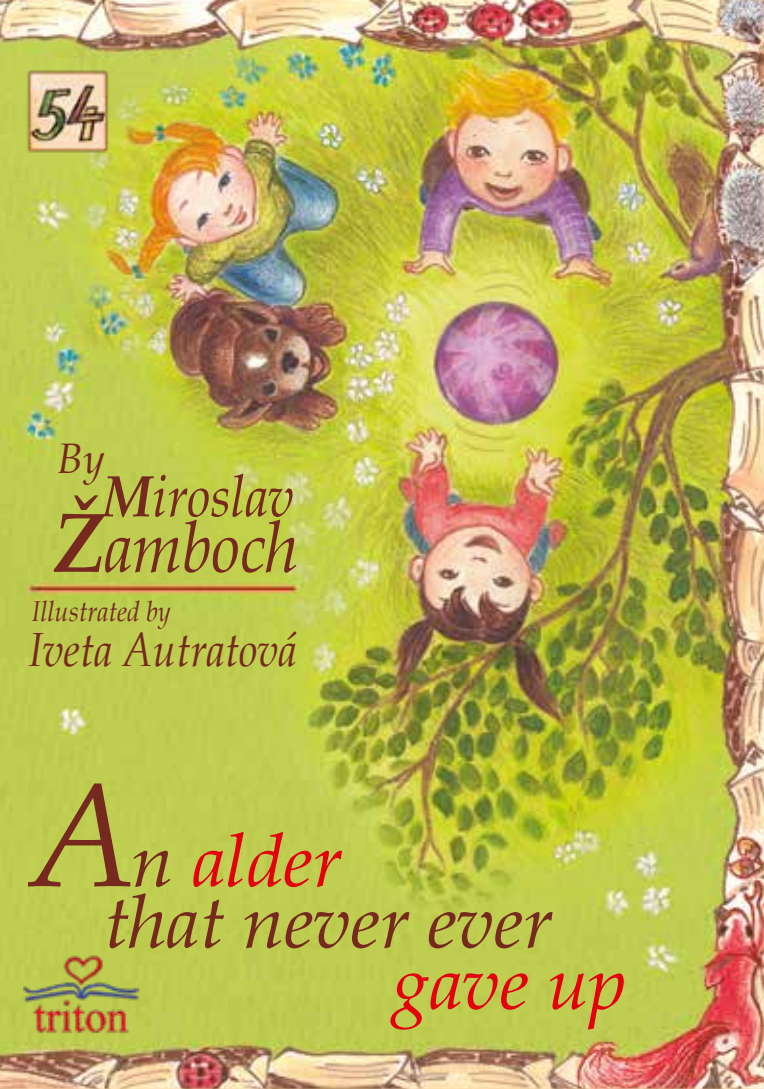


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By
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An alder
that never ever
gave up





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Once, there was an alder tree, and in one of its cones a seed was developing, waiting patiently to ripen and be ready to fly out into the world. Unlike the other seeds, which were smooth and round like a football, this seed appeared scrunched, as if someone had stepped on it first and then jumped up and down on it. His neighbors called him Scrunchy and no one was interested in him; no one talked to him.


“Jeez, it’s just my luck that I have such an ugly monster next to me. I bet it will not ripen, either,” cried out a beautiful but very snooty seed sitting just a little higher in the cone.

“I hope he tumbles out of here fast; he is a waste of space!” another seed said.


The little seed, Scrunchy, did not try to argue with them, for it was useless. They all ganged up against him and were screaming their little heads off.

At long last, the cone was ripe and the featherlight mature seeds began to drop from it. Some were taken far away by the wind; others fell directly down to the heel of their native tree.

Scrunchy got whipped up by a gust of wind, and it carried him along the riverbank where the old alder stood.



“There is no room here! Don’t even think of coming down here!”, all the little seedlings, who



were just barely rooted themselves, screamed at him.

“Out with you! You’re ugly – maybe you’re even poisonous!”, shouted the bigger trees and the flowers as they shooed him away.

The wind grew fainter and Scrunchy was ever faster approaching the ground. And then he noticed just a little way ahead of him, a stony promontory protruding above the water.

“There’s plenty of space there – fly out there!”, the surrounding smug trees and flowers instructed him.

Scrunchy inhaled and wiggled his whole body as much as he could to catch as much wind as possible. He managed to fly up to the rocky promontory. And at long last he landed there.

But ouch! – it was no bed of roses. There was precious little soil there. It was bone dry and lifeless.

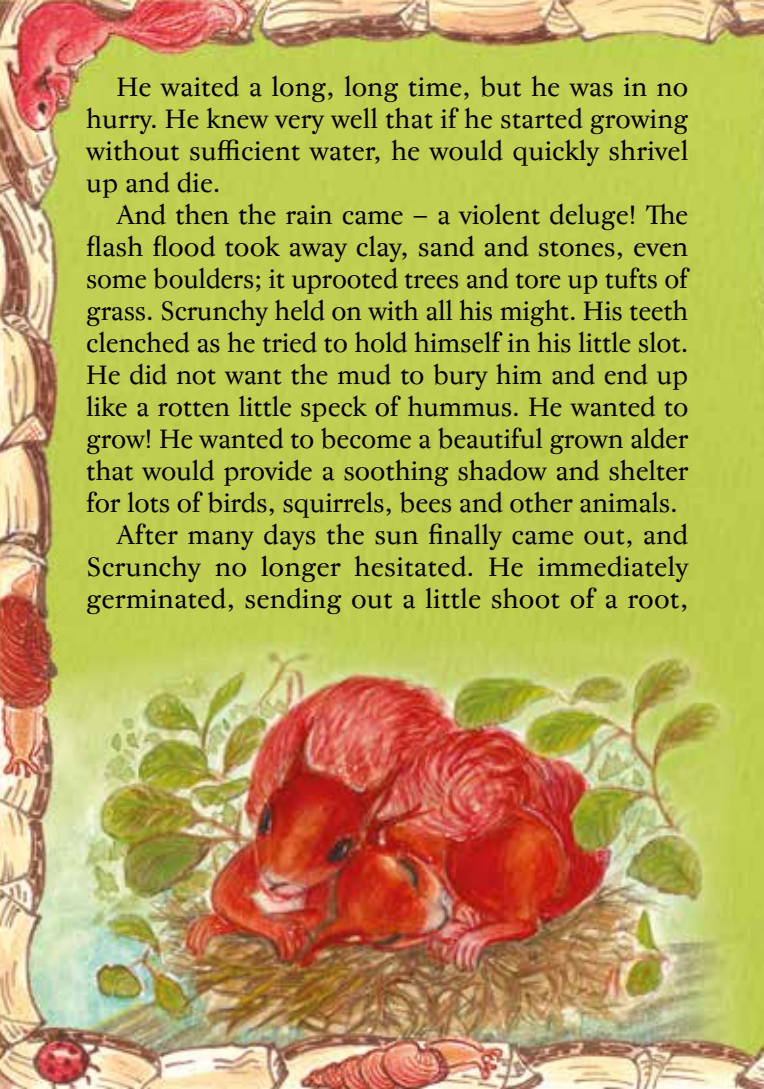




The surrounding stones were glowing with the heat from the relentless hot sun.

“Ha, ha, ha,” the other seedlings laughed. “We’ve fooled him, the ugly Scrunchy! He’ll dry out there, or he’ll be carried away by the next flash flood. Then we’ll have more room for ourselves! That revolting Scrunchy has just found the right place for himself!”

Scrunchy was silent. He looked around the desolate wasteland that was to become his home for life. He rolled a little further to a place that seemed a bit more fertile than the rest of the promontory, found a shady little crevice ... and waited... And waited... And waited... He knew he needed moisture. Without it he could not germinate.



He waited a long, long time, but he was in no hurry. He knew very well that if he started growing without sufficient water, he would quickly shrivel up and die.

And then the rain came – a violent deluge! The flash flood took away clay, sand and stones, even some boulders; it uprooted trees and tore up tufts of grass. Scrunchy held on with all his might. His teeth clenched as he tried to hold himself in his little slot. He did not want the mud to bury him and end up like a rotten little speck of hummus. He wanted to grow! He wanted to become a beautiful grown alder that would provide a soothing shadow and shelter for lots of birds, squirrels, bees and other animals.

After many days the sun finally came out, and Scrunchy no longer hesitated. He immediately germinated, sending out a little shoot of a root,






and began to grow. He was not alone; the whole world grew green.

The great storm had cleared a lot of ground, and there was a riot of plants, seedlings and seeds germinating absolutely everywhere.

“Never mind. He’s going to disappear with the first high water. It will break his trunk, and the current will carry him away!” the seedlings around him said, mocking him. They grew faster than Scrunchy because they had better soil around them with enough yummy nutrients in it. But none of them managed to obscure the sun for him; the promontory he occupied was far too high for that.

No other storm was as violent as the first. The rains that came were few and far between and water





was dwindling. And now, drought was coming. Scrunchy stood further from the water than all the others, and he had to stretch his roots painfully far. He did not have enough growth for a proud, straight trunk nor for large, thick branches. He put all his effort into his roots so that he could reach some life-giving water, and he used only the remainder of his strength for everything else. The struggle made him lean to one side, leaving him with fewer branches than the surrounding seedlings. But he survived the great drought.

“Gosh, fancy that! He is still here – he did not dry out,” sneered a small maple with a graceful slender trunk and branches covered in gorgeous green leaves.

“Well, no. But, hey, see what he looks like!”, the rowan tree smirked, rustling its leaves. “The current will wash him away, don’t worry. Just wait! And it will be as nice here again as it was before he came along. He is just an eyesore here!”

The seasons passed one after the other and Scrunchy battled winds and snowstorms, floods and also long droughts that came his way. He stood his ground, grew and grew, and ignored the bullies in the neighborhood. Over the years, he grew into a large and strong alder. It was a gnarled tree, with a twisted trunk and strong crooked branches. But it was a very tough tree with hard, knotted wood and cracked bark.

