

BJÖRGVIN GUÐJÓNSSON

THE LAVA TROLLS

THE TROLL WHO GREW MOSS



THE LAVA TROLLS

The Troll Who Grew Moss

Written and illustrated by Björgvin Guðjónsson, 2025

To My Dad - Guðjón Þorgils Kristjánsson

An Elder Logi-era tale about difference, kinship, and the green between worlds.

A prequel to the adventures of Sparky and friends.

Chapter 1:

The Odd One in the Ember

Long before Sparky ever shot up through a vent like a flaming meatball, there was another oddball troll born into the lava-lit halls. His name was Mosi, and from the moment he cracked open his hatchstone shell, everyone knew he was not quite... standard issue.

His eyes blinked not red, but a damp green. Where his siblings coughed up their first baby sparks, Mosi sneezed and made a tiny mushroom grow on his thumb.

The Lava Crones—ancient trolls who oversaw births with obsidian ladles and solemn snorts—exchanged confused glances. “The magma’s got mould,” one muttered. Another sniffed the hatchstone. “Smells like... dirt.”

Mosi’s parents, proud and blazingly traditional, tried to stay hopeful. “He’ll warm up,” his mother said, patting his damp head. “Probably just a late bloomer. Or a late boiler.”

But Mosi did not bloom like the others. Or rather, he bloomed far too literally.

Where young trolls left behind singe marks and soot, Mosi left green footprints. His crib sprouted moss. His giggles caused mushrooms to unfurl on cavern walls. The elders began laying down towels when he crawled by.

By the time he reached schooling age (measured in successful rock bites), Mosi had become something of a legend — and not in a good way.

“Oi! Watch it, Moss-Bottom!” snarled Snork, a magma-nosed brute with biceps like boulders. “Gonna grow a salad on my tail if you sit too close?”

The other trollings burst into laughter. A few threw pebbles. Mosi didn’t flinch — not anymore. He’d learned how to smile with his lips while his eyes stared at the floor.

He didn’t belong. And it wasn’t just Snork. Even the well-meaning ones struggled.

“Why don’t you try burning something?” offered Gerta, kindly but oblivious. “Maybe you’ve got it backwards. Flame first, then fungus?”

Only one troll didn't mock him: Logi, a slender, unusually thoughtful young troll with eyes like candlelight and an alarming habit of thinking before speaking.

"Maybe it's not mould," Logi said one day while the others were off belching fire at a boulder. He sat beside Mosi, picking at a piece of pumice. "Maybe it's magic."

Mosi blinked. "Magic? I made a bat sneeze mushrooms yesterday."

"That's very magical," Logi said seriously. "Also unfortunate for the bat."

Later that week, Mosi shuffled into the communal cavern where a ceremonial fire burned bright for feasts and story-telling. Several elders were gathered, their glow steady and proud. Mosi sat at the edge and listened.

He felt... useful. Maybe if he just sat still and didn't grow anything obvious—

His moss hummed. The flame dipped.

A ripple of cool ran through the hearth as if someone had opened a window to a glacier. The fire bobbed, burped, and

then slumped into a sulky simmer. Elder Morga's eyebrows extinguished with an audible pssst.

Every head turned.

Mosi's cheeks flushed a mortified green. "I— I'm sorry. I didn't mean—"

Snork pointed. "He smothered the feast fire!"

Mosi scrambled up, backing away, leaving damp footprints and a trail of tiny sprouts that had the bad manners to look cheerful about it.

A hand caught his arm. Logi. "Come on," Logi murmured, steering him away as grumbles rose. "Let the flame sulk in peace." They stopped by a quiet vent, steam puffing like a tired dragon.

Logi considered Mosi for a long moment. "If rock meant us to be the same," he said softly, "it would make only one crystal."

Mosi stared at his mossy toes. The line sank into him like warm broth. He didn't believe he was magic.

Not yet.



Chapter 2:

Whispering Stones and Wandering Roots

To escape the teasing, the stares, and the endless puffing contests he could never win, Mosi wandered where few trolls dared: into the forgotten tunnels. These were not the proud, glowing galleries of the central halls where lava flowed like song and every surface gleamed. No, these were the cool veins, shadowy, damp, and humming with the deep, old earth.

The tunnels sloped away from the fire. Their walls were cracked with green veins and softened by damp air. Mushrooms clustered in corners like gossiping hermits. Glowworms blinked lazily from the ceiling like sleepy stars.

And Mosi—he felt at home.

He began to carry bits of moss with him, trailing it behind like a scarf. It seemed to like him. It pulsed gently when he was happy and curled around his fingers when he was frightened.

He discovered that if he sat long enough, things grew.

Tiny white fungi, puffballs, and delicate curling ferns bloomed around him as if in conversation. He once dozed off on a boulder and woke up half-covered in lichen. He didn't mind. The moss always felt like company.

Sometimes, he heard whispers. Not voices. Not exactly. But a kind of feeling. Warmth when he felt cold. Calm when his thoughts tangled. Once, when he got hopelessly turned around and nearly stepped off a slick ledge into a sleeping lava pool, the moss under his feet tightened and guided him back.

He began to test it.

One day he found a hairline crack snaking across the floor of a narrow gallery. The stone creaked, complaining like an old troll getting up from a nap.

“Shh,” Mosi said, because it felt rude not to. He knelt and pressed his palms to the rock.

His moss tingled. A cool hum ran up his arms. He pictured green stitching, soft and stubborn, spanning the gap.

The crack stopped complaining. A thin mat of moss knitted itself over the fissure, drinking the seep and sealing the edge. The gallery sighed.

Mosi sat back, heart pounding with a ridiculous kind of pride—like a tiny grandparent who'd just knitted a scarf for a mountain.

That was the first time he used his gift on purpose.

He also learned something else: growing life cooled him. Properly cooled him. After the crack, he shivered so hard his teeth clacked like pebbles in a jar.

He stumbled to a vent, cradled a warm stone, and drank ladlefuls of stone-broth—that sulphurous, comforting soup only a troll could love—until the shivers retreated.

So there were rules. Grow green, lose heat. Rest by fire, regain glow. It made sense. Nature rarely hands out miracles without a receipt.

Sometimes, when he climbed toward the higher vents—the ones where light from the surface peeked through in shafts

of gold—he'd hum to himself. Nothing fancy, just wordless tunes turned gentle.

From above, things listened.

An owl peered down a vent, eyes huge and golden, and hooted once, very softly.

Another day, a fox. Then a rabbit. Then three puffins, blinking in perfect unison as if rehearsed by a mildly deranged choreographer.

Mosi laughed, and something deep inside him fluttered—a happiness that felt not just his own, but shared.

His moss glowed brighter.

He didn't just feel strange anymore.

He felt... connected.

Maybe strange wasn't less.

Maybe strange was more.

Chapter 3:

The Fox, the Flame, and the Rowan

One twilight, while the halls of the trolls echoed with rumbling snores and sulphur-sweet dreams, Mosi slipped up through a vent and emerged onto the surface.

The sky above was wide—wider than any cave ceiling could ever be—painted with soft clouds and lit by a sun that had the audacity to glow without fire. Mosi blinked. His moss curled slightly in the breeze. The air was cold, but kind.

He wandered to the edge of a lava field where the stone turned grey and pitted. Steam curled around him in gentle puffs. The world smelled of salt and lichen and a far-off promise of snow.

And there, limping from the scrub, came a fox.

Its coat was brilliant red, but matted with dust. One paw dragged behind it. It sniffed the air, looked straight at Mosi...

...and hesitated.

Mosi knelt slowly, palms open and empty, and hummed a low, steady note—the kind the moss liked. The fox's ears twitched. It crept closer, testing the sound, then collapsed beside a bubbling fissure with a weary huff.

“May I?” Mosi asked, because consent is polite even if you're talking to a fox. He waited.

The fox blinked—a long, slow blink that meant yes in fox—and lay its injured paw across his palm.

Mosi's moss prickled with urgency. He plucked a handful from his wrist, breathed warmth into it from the vent, and gently wrapped the paw. The moss shimmered faintly, pulsing with the warmth of both earth and heart.

The fox stirred. The tension left its shoulders. Its breathing smoothed out like a river quietly deciding to be a lake for a while.

It stayed with him until the moon rose. Then, with a last, frank look, it trotted away into the dwarf birch scrub, leaving a neat circle of tiny mushrooms where it had rested.

The next morning, Mosi found something else: a sapling had pushed through the thin soil beside his sleeping place. Rowan—leaves delicate and determined, berries like tiny



drops of sunset (to arrive later, of course; magic has a schedule). Rowan is a protective tree in more than one world.

Mosi touched its leaves and felt a flicker of recognition—I was helped here; I will help here.

He laughed, and the sound echoed like bells against the stone. He whispered thanks to the rowan, the vent, the fox, the sky. It seemed only polite.

From then on, he spent more time above.

Birds began to land near him without fear. A hare once hopped up, stared at him for an absurdly long moment as if reading a very small book, then circled in his lap like he was a patch of premium moss and went to sleep. He learned the

rustle of each creature—their moods, their songs, their worries.

That winter, he found the rowan bent under ice after a storm. He wrapped its trunk in his own moss and hummed until a soft heat rose from the ground. The ice cracked; the tree straightened. He shivered so hard afterward his moss rattled. Stone-broth again; lesson reinforced.

His touch wasn't just comfort.

It was life.

He didn't just speak to the moss.

He grew it. He was it.

And he was very much not alone.

Chapter 4:

Logi Listens

Mosi returned to the lava halls with leaves in his hair, mud on his boots, and lichen trailing like threads from his sleeves. The others gawked. Whispers slithered like steam through the corridors.

“Did he roll in a compost heap?”

“Is that... a pinecone?”

Even the elder trolls paused, sniffing the air. “That’s not brimstone,” one muttered. “That’s tree-smell.”

Mosi kept his head down.

Only Logi met his gaze. He was waiting at the rim of the central vent, sitting cross-legged like a statue carved out of thoughtful flame.

“You look like a forest tried to eat you,” he said dryly.

Mosi gave a weary sigh. “Maybe it did. I taste of birch sap.”

They sat and watched the lava flow lazily beneath them, crackling like warm soup.

Then Mosi spoke.

He told Logi everything. The fox. The animals. The whispers in the moss. The rowan. The feeling that he was part of something older, something green and knowing. He told him about the cost, too—the shivers, the need to rest and drink stone-broth and bake himself gently by the vents like a well-loved potato.

He waited for laughter. Or worse, pity.

But Logi didn’t laugh.

He listened.

When Mosi finished, Logi leaned back and stared at the ceiling as if trying to read answers written in steam.

“I think,” he said slowly, “you’re meant to be different.”

“That’s easy to say when you glow like a furnace and no one calls you ‘Moss-Butt.’”

Logi smirked. “Fair. But hear me out. You’re not just different for no reason. You’re like...” He struggled. “Like a



knot in wood. It looks odd, interrupts the grain, confuses carvers, starts arguments in furniture shops—”

“Logi.”

“—but hang a door on a smooth plank and see what happens.” He tapped the stone. “The knot holds. The knot is where the wood remembers its strength.”

Mosi blinked. “That might be the nicest insult I’ve ever received.”

“Not an insult,” Logi said, and his eyes glowed warmer. “Listen: We’re not all the same, nor should we be. Fire knows heat; moss knows memory. The world needs both. If rock meant us to be the same, it would make only one crystal.”

Mosi looked away quickly because sometimes a troll cry looks suspiciously like a very small steam leak.

“I don’t know what I’m for,” he admitted.

“You will,” said Logi. “But perhaps stop trying to be a better flame and start being the best moss. Go see what the green

will show you. I’ll keep telling Snork that mould isn’t contagious.”

“Appreciated.”

They sat a while longer in companionable silence.

Logi nudged Mosi’s shoulder with his own. “When you go back up, take this.” He handed over a polished pebble from the vent’s edge, warm and oddly reassuring. “A pocket-ember. For when the shivers get bossy.”

Mosi closed his fingers around it. “I’ll bring you back a story.”

“Bring me back a good story,” Logi corrected. “Preferably one with fewer near-death experiences than last time you ‘accidentally visited’ a geyser.”

Mosi grinned, sheepish. “No promises.”

And in that moment, something clicked. The teasing, the whispers, the weirdness... it wasn’t a curse.

It was a gift.

And he wasn’t alone.

Chapter 5:

The Birch Who Spoke

That night, while the fire trolls curled around their glowing hearthstones, Mosi curled into a bed of moss tucked near a trickling vent and dreamed.

He tasted ash in the air—fine, bitter, like old bread left out in a volcano. He heard the sharp crack of glacier ice, a sound like mountains learning to speak. He felt birch bark under his palm, paper-dry and smooth and peeling.

In the dream, the ground rose up in waves of ash and snow. He walked a narrow path lined with shadowed stumps and soot-covered roots.

At the crest of a wind-blasted hill stood a single white birch—tall, slender, proud, and utterly alone.

Its bark shimmered like moonlight on ice, cracked with ancient lines. When Mosi stepped close, it leaned toward him.

He reached out a hand.

The bark split. A soft light spilled out. And then—not with words, but with memory—the tree spoke.

He saw fire rain from the sky—volcanic fury blackening clouds and choking forests. He felt the terror of roots as they curled inwards, helpless. Heard the screams of the green world, silent but deafening.

But then, through the ash and ruin, came a heartbeat. Slow. Steady. Ancient.

Moss.

It spread where nothing else could. It softened the stones. It remembered. It held on stubbornly the way small things do when large things forget to be kind.

From moss, something rose: a being of root and ember, of sorrow and hope. Cloaked in green, crowned in branch. The memory-form flickered, then resolved—a shape with antlers of twisted birch and eyes like wet stone.

Out of the corner of his eye, Mosi saw a seam of black resin in the birch begin to climb upward—against gravity, against



sense—a dark thread moving like grief searching for a shape. It vanished into the cambium, leaving a stain that throbbed, a warning.

Mosi reached for the light.

He awoke with his hand pressed into real moss, breath hitching, the scent of birch still sharp in his nose. The vent steamed gently, a cradle for his shivers.

“The forest remembers me,” he whispered. “And I must remember it.”

He slipped the pocket-ember from Logi into his palm and held it until his fingers stopped shaking.

Then he packed.

Chapter 6:

Into the Wild

With Logi's blessing (and a satchel stuffed with fire-pebbles, glowshrooms, and one rather stale lava loaf), Mosi set out. Not to escape, but to seek.

He followed the dream. He followed the moss. He followed the old tunnels that remembered feet before his.

The passages turned strange. Fungi lit the path like soft lanterns—greens and blues and shy ambers. Ancient roots pushed through cracks, wriggling like forgotten fingers. He hummed and they stilled; he hushed and they moved.

He climbed fissures where old magma had cooled into brittle bridges. He crossed rivers where steam danced over ice and the water sang the kind of song you only hear when no one believes you.

Above ground, his path twisted through valleys no troll had named. The land was wild, sharp and soft all at once. Winds howled, but moss clung.

A raven followed him, black as void, offering sarcastic commentary in a language composed entirely of one syllable. ("Caw.") It woke him at dawn with a single definitive note that meant Get up; the world is happening.

A deer appeared in the mist at dusk, antlers like ancient branches. It regarded him as one might consider a poem one isn't sure one understands yet, then dipped its head and moved on. Sometimes it trotted ahead and stood at the correct turning as if to say Honestly, it's this way; keep up.

At a fjord's edge, a seal surfaced beside a crumbling boat and blinked. Then it dove, resurfacing nearer a chain of rocks perfectly spaced for a small troll with questionable balance. Mosi followed, step by suspicious step, until he reached the far shore. The seal clapped politely with its flippers. (Or maybe it had an itch. One must not anthropomorphise without evidence.)

They did not speak words. But he understood.

On the fourth day (or possibly the fortieth; moss is imprecise with calendars), he reached a place where hot vents freckled the ground and steam plumes played tag.



A geyser maze stretched before him: hissing vents, skittish pools, crusts thin as lies. He could smell the rotten-egg promise of a misplaced step. The raven landed on his shoulder, which is the raven equivalent of a hug and an insult.

Mosi closed his eyes and listened. Beneath the hiss, beneath the grumbles, there was a pattern—a beat. The geysers were not random; they breathed. He timed it. He mapped it. He cut a strip of his own moss, warmed it between his hands, and flung it out like a living rope. It landed across a fragile stretch, rooted, and thickened.

He moved forward, weaving moss-bridges and green stepping-stones between the huffs of steam, hum by hum. Each new strip pulled heat from him like a greedy aunt. By the final span he was shivering so violently he could have mixed a paint tin in his chest.

On the far side, he collapsed against a warm boulder and sipped stone-broth until the world stopped wiggling.

“Caw,” said the raven, impressed in a tone only ravens know.

Beyond the geysers, a lava bridge waited—an old tongue of rock stretched over a gorge, thin as a promise and twice as brittle. The deer appeared, shook its antlers as if rearranging a crown of thoughts, and stepped lightly across. The bridge groaned at Mosi’s first footfall.

“No sudden movements,” he told himself, and promptly made several. A slab cracked.

He threw a moss-rope. It rooted to both sides, knitted, and held. He swayed, he scuttled, he apologised to the bridge for existing, and he made it across. The deer tossed him a look that said better luck with your feet next time.

Days passed. Or weeks. Or maybe longer. The seal barked farewell at a bay; the raven collected shiny objects and terrible secrets; the deer led him through a birch thicket where the wind held its breath.

And then he found it.

A hill bare of all but wind and stone. At its peak, a single white birch stood tall, leaves whispering like old songs.

The same tree from his dream.

Still standing. Still waiting.

Chapter 7:

The Branch Folk

The grove was quiet.

Then it breathed.

The moss at Mosi's feet stirred. The birch trembled, and the ground exhaled. Shapes emerged from the underbrush—not tall, but old. Not loud, but deeply present.

Figures no higher than a goat, cloaked in shaggy moss and bark, with antlers like wind-twisted birch. Their fur shimmered like dew on stone. Their eyes reflected moonlight that wasn't there.

The Greinafólk. The Branch Folk.

Mosi didn't speak. He didn't need to.

They moved around him in slow circles, never quite touching, but close enough that he felt their presence in his bones. Their thoughts came as waves, not words—echoes of memory, flickers of grief, whispers of green things lost.

They showed him.

How they were born when ash fell on living groves—flame and seed fused into thought and shape. How they walked the land, not as rulers or warriors, but as rememberers. As menders of what had been broken.

They showed how their numbers had faded with each grove cut down. Each birch burned. Some of their kin had withered into silence. Others had twisted into rage—the Blacksap, creatures of grief turned cruel, resin that chose to move the wrong way.

A smaller Branch Folk stepped forward—crowned with a tangle of lichen and silver bark. It tapped the earth once. A flat, lichen-coated stone wriggled up from the soil like a memory embarrassed to be late.

Rite of recognition. The thought settled on Mosi's shoulders. Remember a forgotten stone.

He knelt, brushed the lichen aside, and hummed a tune that had lived in his bones since before he had bones. "You were a stepping-stone," he murmured, "for small feet and brave ones. You were a seat for the tired. You were warmed by foxes in winter. You remember. So do I."

The stone glowed faintly, then settled. Approval moved through the grove like wind through grass.

A branch cracked—soft, wrong. The raven hissed. The birch shivered. From the edge of the grove, a shape unstuck itself from shadow.

Blacksap.

It was Branch Folk that had forgotten how to be soft. Antlers like blackened claws. Moss singed to wire. Resin seeping upward, slow as misery, pooling in eyes that held too many storms.

It stepped toward Mosi.

He didn't run. He couldn't. He also didn't fight. That felt like speaking the wrong language at the top of his voice.

He lifted the spiral token the lichen-crowned one now offered—a twist of bark and obsidian bound with a single thread of luminous lichen—and held it between both hands.

He sang.

Not loudly. Not bravely. Just truly. He sang the hush of snow on ash. The stubborn green of moss on rock. The

gossip of rowan leaves in a forgiving wind. He sang of the fox's slow blink and the deer's patient turning and the seal who knows all the best stones.

The token warmed. The spiral's lichen thread pulsed, in and out, like breath.

The Blacksap shuddered. The upward resin stalled, then sagged, then settled back to the simple gravity of grief. The antlers sagged. The moss uncurled a little, as if remembering it was allowed.

Mosi stepped closer, heart loud. "You don't have to be sharp to be strong," he whispered. "You don't have to pull away from the ground to matter."

A long, thin sound leaked from the creature like a thorn being drawn from bark. It was not apology. It was not forgiveness. It was simply change.

The Branch Folk gathered, their attention like blankets placed carefully. The Blacksap—less black now, more sap—bowed its crown. Not to Mosi. To the grove.

The lichen-crowned one placed the spiral token in Mosi's palm and closed his fingers around it. A thought settled,



simple and heavy as a promise: You carry both ember and root. You are seed and stone. Flame and fern. Bridge and memory.

Mosi bowed. Not because he had to, but because it felt right.

The raven cawed. The deer snorted. Somewhere, the seal barked, although this was either dramatic timing or an echo with delusions of narrative importance.

For the first time in his life, the moss bowed back.

Chapter 8:

Mosi, Guardian of the Grove

Mosi returned underground—not hidden, not ashamed, but radiant in a quiet, root-deep way.

The other trolls still stared, of course. But now, when he passed, mushrooms sprouted from the cracks. The air smelled faintly of pine. The walls shimmered with dew.

Snork tripped over a vine that hadn't been there a moment before.

“Watch where you're growing, Moss-Face,” he muttered.

Mosi just smiled. “Always.”

He found purpose. He planted moss gardens in old halls. He taught glowworms to blink in patterns (useful for night messages and practical jokes). He mapped cracks that led to the surface and whispered to animals through them.

A fox began visiting the central vent, curling its tail around its nose as it listened to stories.

A birch sprout appeared beside Logi's bed and refused to be evicted, claiming tenancy by right of adorableness.

The raven stole Snork's favourite shard of obsidian and hid it in the communal ladle. (The soup had never looked shinier.)

The trolls began to notice things—their dreams felt cooler, their tempers shorter-lived, their fires steadier. Even Elder Morga's eyebrows reignited and stayed lit, which everyone agreed was for the best.

Not everyone changed at the same pace.

One afternoon, a ledge above the practice cavern shed a ribbon of scree. Snork—charging too fast for his own good—slid. He windmilled, grabbed air, and would have plummeted into a rock pile if Mosi's moss hadn't leapt from the wall like a green net.

Snork dangled, wheezing. Mosi hauled him in with a moss-rope and a helpful shove from Logi.

Snork sat, panting, studiously not making eye contact. “Thanks,” he grunted, which is troll for I was wrong about you and I hate that.

“Anytime,” said Mosi. “But perhaps try feet next time.”

Logi chuckled. “Try hanging a world on a smooth plank,” he told Snork, who frowned, nodded, and pretended to understand metaphors.

That evening, in the Great Cavern, Logi stood on a stone and addressed the young trolls while elders pretended not to listen and definitely listened.

“Listen up, lava tots,” he said, voice carrying with the easy authority of someone who has very many thoughts and only sometimes loses them on the way out. “No teasing for difference. Every gift has a place. Fire knows heat; moss knows memory. The world needs both. If rock meant us to be the same, it would make only one crystal. It didn’t. So neither should we.”

There was a rumble of agreement. Even Snork managed a grunt that did not sound entirely like indigestion.

Mosi hung the spiral token—bark and obsidian bound with luminous lichen—over the entrance to the central hall. Not high, not hidden. Where every troll would pass beneath it, and perhaps feel a small tug toward gentleness.

The days that followed were not perfect. (Nothing worthy is.) Mosi still shivered after great greenings and warmed himself by vents with Logi’s pocket-ember in hand. The Branch Folk still dwindled too fast for anyone’s liking. Sometimes the Blacksap whispered from the edges of memory.

But the moss spread. Quietly. Stubbornly. Joyfully.

Above ground, the deer led travellers away from sudden white-outs with the unhurried confidence of someone who has read the map and corrected the spelling errors. The seal nose-bumped fishermen toward safer coves. The raven delivered messages in exchange for shiny things and compliments phrased as insults (“You look unusually competent today”).

And deep below, Mosi laughed more often.

“Before there was Sparky,” Logi would tell wide-eyed troll-lings gathered around the now very healthy communal fire, “there was Mosi. The troll who heard the trees. The troll who grew green in fire. The troll who reminded us that not all flames burn, and not all strength shouts.”



Children who glowed too softly, or hummed when they were meant to roar, sat a little taller.

Somewhere in the far halls, a tiny vent flickered in a peculiar, excitable way, as if the rock itself had just thought of something outrageous and was about to try it. No names yet. Only a promise.

In the groves above, moss thickened. The Branch Folk watched with eyes like dusk. The rowan bore berries like small suns. The birch leaned when Mosi passed.

And Mosi, wrapped in roots and warmth, smiled.

Because even the moss remembers.

And now—so would they.

