Alva and the Bell in the Snow



Mum and Dad

This book belongs to

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Welcome to this sample book! It is made just like your own will be, using the photos and choices shown alongside, and it shows what a story from Saga to You can look like. Turn the pages, read, and imagine your child as the hero of their very own tale.

It was the night before Christmas Eve. Inside the house, there was the scent of gingerbread biscuits, saffron buns and fir branches. Alva had just placed the last candy cane on the plate when something tinkled at the window. Clink, clink, clink.

In the snow stood a little reindeer calf. It had wings, folded like two soft coats along its back, and a silver bell around its neck. It looked up at Alva, looked up at the sky, then stamped one teeny-tiny hoof. Between the clouds, a few dark specks drifted away across the moon. The calf tried to spread its wings, but folded them up again. Then Alva ran towards the hallway.





Alva pulled on her hat, gloves and boots so quickly that one glove ended up on backwards. “It’ll have to do,” she said. Cold air smelling of snow slipped in through the open door.

The reindeer calf had already found a line of tiny hoofprints. They lay in the powdery snow, pointing towards the fir forest. Alva crouched beside them. “We’ll follow the herd,” she said. “One step at a time.” She thought for a moment, then said, “One through the fir trees.” The calf took a careful step. The bell replied: clink. Alva took another, and together they followed the tracks towards the dark trees.

In the fir forest, it was quiet in a snowy sort of way. The branches hung white and round, and now and then a clump of snow fell with a little plop. Alva spotted the hoofprints first: two tiny marks, and then two more. She followed them carefully, just as she did when looking for animal tracks after fresh snowfall.

The reindeer calf hurried three steps, but a low branch caught on one wing. It gave a tug and stood still. “Wait, I can see it,” said Alva. She gently lifted the branch away. “One through the fir trees,” she reminded it. The calf walked on. Between the trunks, a great white field opened up, and far away came a deep boommm.





Beyond the last fir tree lay the lake, frozen and glossy beneath the snow. Deep inside it, the ice sang: boommm, boommm, like a giant drum far below the ground. The reindeer calf's ears flew in different directions.

But the herd's tracks shimmered across the lake. They were no longer ordinary marks. They glowed silvery white, joining the shores like a narrow winter bridge. Alva placed her boot on the first sparkling print. "One through the fir trees," she said. Then she saw the next part of the way. "And one across the ice." The reindeer calf stood still for a moment. Then the bell went clink, and it placed its little hoof beside Alva's.

In the middle of the lake, the ice sang again, longer this time: boommm-boommm-boommm. The reindeer calf gave a jump. Its bell rattled so quickly that Alva nearly lost count of the steps.

“The lake is very good at bass,” she said. “But it needs help with the rest.” Alva hummed a little tune from a Christmas song, softly and slightly out of tune. The reindeer calf listened. Then it placed its hooves in the glittering tracks, one after another. One through the fir trees, one across the ice. On the far side, little golden-yellow dots waited in the darkness. Alva squinted. “Snow lanterns!” she said, and quickened her pace.





The snow lanterns stood in a crooked line, round as snowy buns. Inside each lantern, a little flame flickered. There was a faint smell of warm candle wax, though the night was cold and clear.

Between the lanterns, Alva found more hoofprints. One had trodden right beside her old sledging slope. “They were here,” she said. She looked up. Above the lanterns rose the tall hill, white against the sky. “One through the fir trees, one across the ice, one past the lanterns.” The reindeer calf stretched its neck towards the top, but the herd was nowhere to be seen. Only the wind moved up there. Alva started walking towards the slope.

The hill looked twice as high when Alva stood at its foot. This was where she used to go sledging until her cheeks turned red and her gloves grew heavy with snow. Going down was fast. Going up was mostly puffing.

“We’ll take little steps,” she said. The reindeer calf tried to climb, slipped backwards, and suddenly sat down right in the snow. Its wings flopped sideways. Alva pressed her lips together so she would not giggle, but her shoulders shook anyway. The calf gave her a very cross look. “Sorry,” said Alva, holding out her hand. “One through the fir trees, one across the ice, one past the lanterns, one up the hill.” One more step. Then another.





Halfway up, the wind came whirling around the hill. It whipped snow across their path. First the reindeer calf's tracks became shallow. Then Alva's bootprints filled in again, until they were only soft hollows that vanished as she watched.

"Hurry a little," said Alva. She took two steps. The calf took one. She took two more, and it followed, with its bell quiet against its chest. Behind them were the fir trees, the ice and the lanterns, but the wind rubbed it all away. Alva said the route aloud, as if the words could keep it there: "One through the fir trees, one across the ice, one past the lanterns, one up the hill." The top was close now. But would the herd still be there?

At the top there were no trees, only sky, wind and snow racing sideways. Alva turned around. Their path should have been there. But there were no tracks at all, not a single one.

“Now you can fly,” she said, pointing upwards. The reindeer calf opened its wings. It crouched down, pushed off with its front hooves, and stopped. The bell dangled without a sound. “Fly!” Alva said again, louder this time. But the calf folded its wings and curled up, as small as a lost glove. Above them, the herd drifted on towards the edge of the clouds. Alva gripped her glove tightly. What did the calf have that the herd could hear?





The wind tugged at Alva’s hat. She held it on with one hand and looked at the other. Just beneath the reindeer calf’s chin sat the bell, shining despite the snow. Alva remembered the tinkling outside the window. She remembered how it had sounded among the fir trees.

“Maybe they can’t see us,” she said. “But perhaps they can hear us.” She carefully took hold of the bell and rang it: clink, clink, clink. Three clear sounds. At first, only the wind answered. Alva rang again, more firmly. Clink, clink, clink. Then one dark speck stopped above the edge of the clouds. Then came an answer, thin but clear: clink-clink-clink.

The reindeer calf's ears sprang up. In the sky, the little specks swung back around. More bells tinkled from the clouds, as if the stars were shaking pockets full of silver.

Alva looked at the sledging slope. It swept gently down from the top, smooth from many rides and wide enough for two. "You don't have to start by going straight up," she said. "When I sledge here, I lean forwards first, and then it happens all by itself." She placed her feet at the edge. "One through the fir trees, one across the ice, one past the lanterns, one up the hill..." The reindeer calf took one step forwards. Alva smiled. "...and one downhill."





Alva ran. She ran as she did when the sledge had already begun to slide and she had to catch up before it disappeared. Snow puffed around her boots. The reindeer calf ran beside her, stiffly at first, then faster.

“One downhill!” shouted Alva. The calf stretched out its wings. It made one leap. Then another. On the third leap, its hooves barely touched the snow. The bell sang so clearly that Alva laughed even as she puffed. The reindeer calf rose over the snowy edge and into the brightening sky. The herd came towards it, tinkling and sparkling, and the little calf flew straight into their midst.

On Christmas Eve morning, the house was quiet again. It smelled of coffee, gingerbread biscuits and the little fir tree in the corner. On the table lay the saffron buns beneath a striped cloth. Alva walked over to the window.

In the fresh snow was a line of tiny hoofprints, all the way to the house and back again. At the top of the tree hung a little silver bell on a dark red ribbon. Alva stood on tiptoe and gave it a gentle nudge. “Clink, clink, clink,” it said. Far above the roof, a little herd could be seen in the pink winter sky. Alva rang it once more.



Alva and the Bell in the Snow

On the night before Christmas Eve, a little flying reindeer calf lands outside Alva's window, far from its herd. Alva follows tracks through snow, across singing ice and up her own sledging slope, where a little bell must be heard all the way to the sky.

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