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, it smelled of gingerbread, saffron buns and fir branches. Alva had just placed the last candy cane on the plate when something chimed at the window. Jingle, jingle, jingle.

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





Alva pulled on her hat, mittens and boots so quickly that one mitten ended up on backwards. “That’ll 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 and pointed towards the fir woods. 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 reindeer calf took a careful step. The bell replied: jingle. Alva took another, and together they followed the tracks towards the dark trees.

In the fir woods, 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, then two more. She followed them carefully, just like when she looked for animal tracks after fresh snowfall.

The reindeer calf hurried three steps, but a low branch caught one of its wings. 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 reindeer calf went on. Between the trunks, a great white field opened up, and far out there came a deep boommm.





Beyond the last fir tree lay the lake, frozen and shining beneath the snow. Deep inside it, the ice sang: boommm, boommm, like a gigantic drum far beneath the ground. The reindeer calf's ears flicked in opposite 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 track. "One through the fir trees," she said. Then she saw the next part of the way. "And one over the ice." The reindeer calf stood still for a while. Then the bell went jingle, 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 their steps.

“The lake is good at bass,” she said. “But it needs help with the rest.” Alva hummed a little bit of a Christmas song, softly and a little 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 over the ice. On the other side, little golden dots waited in the darkness. Alva squinted. “Snow lanterns!” she said, and hurried on.





The snow lanterns stood in a crooked row, round as snow buns. In 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 hill. “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 over 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 hill.

The hill looked twice as high when Alva stood at its foot. She used to go sledging here until her cheeks turned red and her mittens were heavy with snow. Going down was fast. Going up was mostly puffing.

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





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

"Hurry a little," said Alva. She took two steps. The reindeer calf took one. She took two more, and it followed, its bell silent against its chest. Behind them were the fir trees, the ice and the lanterns, but the wind rubbed them all away. Alva said the route aloud, as if the words could hold it there: "One through the fir trees, one over 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, then stopped. The bell dangled without making a sound. “Fly!” said Alva again, louder this time. But the calf folded up its wings and curled into itself, as small as a lost mitten. Above them, the herd drifted onwards towards the edge of the clouds. Alva gripped her mitten tightly. What did it have that the herd could hear?





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

“Maybe they can’t see us,” she said. “But maybe they can hear us.” She gently took hold of the bell and rang it: jingle, jingle, jingle. Three clear sounds. At first, only the wind replied. Alva rang again, more firmly. Jingle, jingle, jingle. Then one dark dot stopped above the edge of the clouds. A reply came, thin but clear: jingle-jingle-jingle.

The reindeer calf’s ears sprang up. In the sky, the little dots wheeled back. More bells chimed from the clouds, as if the stars were shaking pockets full of silver.

Alva looked at the sledging hill. It fell gently away 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 over the ice, one past the lanterns, one up the hill…” The reindeer calf took a step forwards. Alva smiled. “…and one downhill.”





Alva ran. She ran like when the sledge has already started to slide and you have to catch up before it disappears. Snow puffed around her boots. The reindeer calf ran beside her, stiffly at first and then faster.

“One downhill!” cried 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, chiming and glittering, and the little calf flew straight in amongst them.

On Christmas Eve morning, the house was quiet again. It smelled of coffee, gingerbread and the little Christmas tree in the corner. On the table, the saffron buns lay beneath a striped cloth. Alva went 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 Christmas tree hung a little silver-coloured bell on a dark red ribbon. Alva stood on tiptoe and gave it a gentle nudge. “Jingle, jingle, jingle,” 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 hill, where a little bell must be heard all the way to the sky.

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