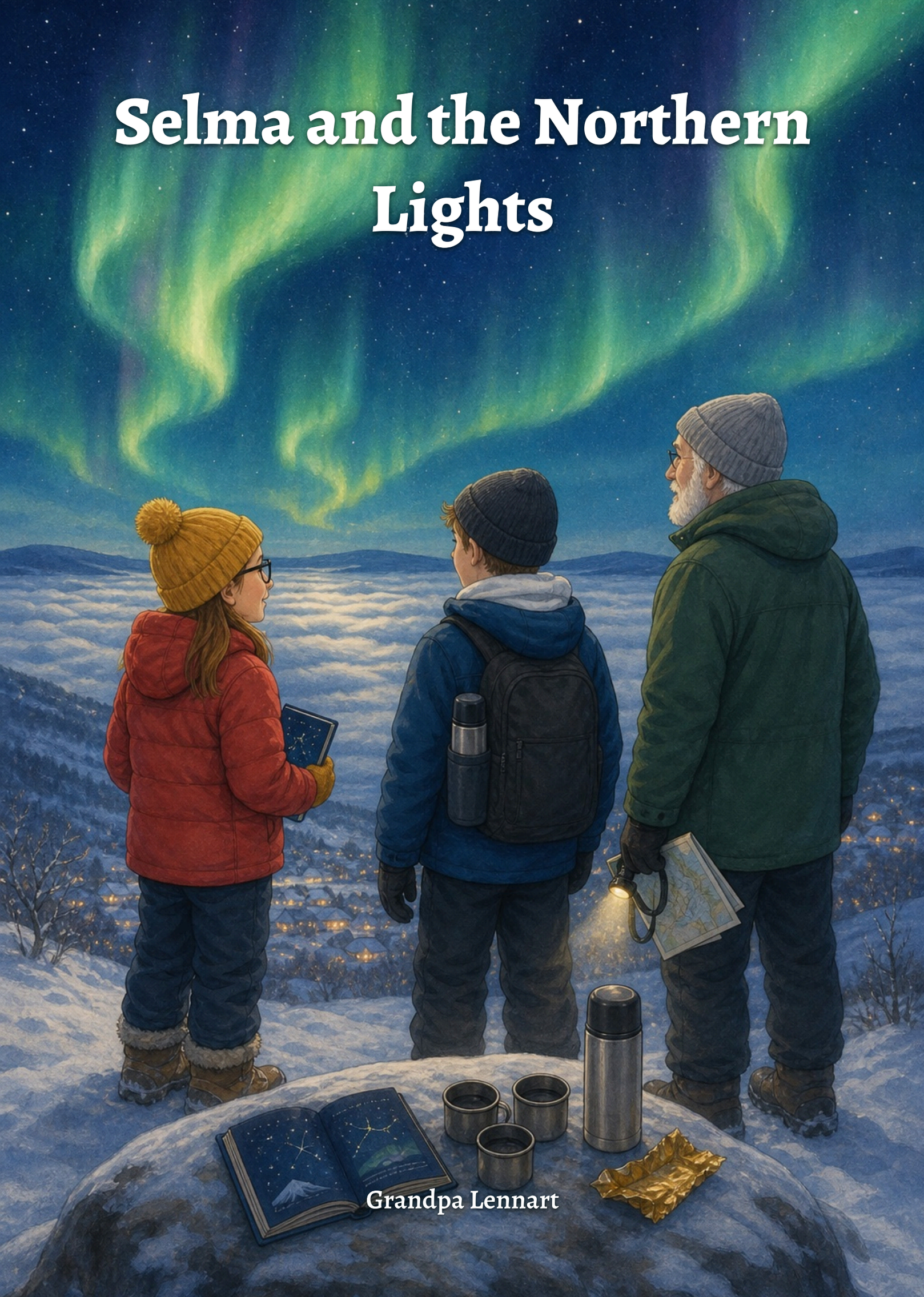
Selma and the Northern Lights



Grandpa Lennart

This book belongs to

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Welcome to this sample book! It is made just like your own will be, from the photos and choices shown alongside it, and 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.

Selma had read about the Northern Lights in almost every book she could find. In one book, green ribbons danced across a black sky. In another, it said you had to wait, wait, wait. Now she stood on the platform with her book of stars in her hand, while the night train puffed out white clouds beside her.

“What if they start dancing while we’re asleep?” said Selma.
“Then you’ll have to wake me,” said her big brother Oliver, tugging at his rucksack. Grandpa Lennart held up the tickets.
“First, we’ll find our compartment.” Selma stepped onto the train. One more night, she thought. Soon it will be here.



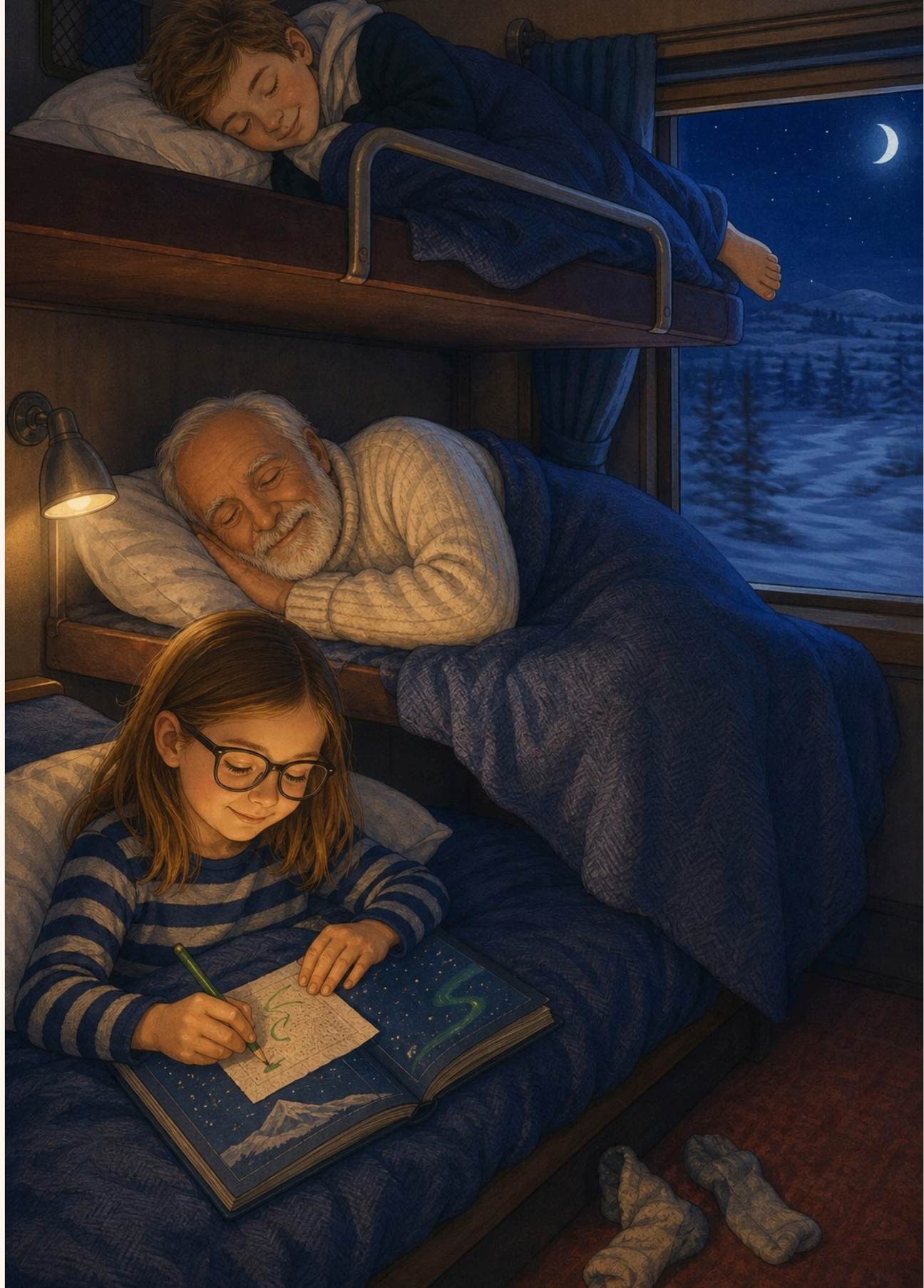


The restaurant carriage swayed gently as the train travelled north. Selma ate meatballs with lingonberries and peeped between the curtain and the window. Outside, the fir trees rushed past like black brushstrokes.

“Can you see any stars?” Oliver asked, with a potato on his fork. “Three,” said Selma. “No, four. That little one too.” Grandpa Lennart leaned forward. “The little ones show up best if you look for a long time.” Selma took a napkin and made four dots with her pen. Oliver drew a fifth, though he said it was only an accidental dot. The train rolled on and on and on.

In the compartment, the bunks were piled up like a little stack. Oliver took the top one straight away. Grandpa got the middle one. Selma climbed into the bottom bunk and found Oliver's socks on the floor: two sad sausages that had lost their feet.

When the ceiling light went out, Selma switched on her little reading lamp. In her book of stars was a picture of people, tiny beneath green swirls. Selma drew a green squiggle next to the dots on the napkin. The rails went clack-clack, clack-clack beneath her. One more night, thought Selma, holding the napkin flat against the book.



When Selma woke up, the world outside the window was white. White fir trees. White hills. White heaps on the roofs at little stations. Even the sky was pale, like a blank sheet of paper.

“Snow!” said Selma, though nobody could possibly have missed it. Oliver pressed his nose against the window. “Someone has spilled flour all over the country.” Grandpa Lennart came back with hot chocolate in paper cups. Selma drew a white peak on her napkin, next to the dots and the green squiggle. Between the trees, a sign slid past. Soon they would get off.

The village lay quiet between snowy fir trees and gentle mountain slopes. When evening came, Selma pulled on her hat, gloves and thick coat. Oliver came outside too, though he said he mostly wanted to try out his boots. Grandpa took his head torch, but left it switched off.

They looked up. Grey clouds covered everything, from the chimney smoke to the edge of the mountains. Not a single star peeped out. “First obstacle,” said Selma, and wrote CLOUDS on the napkin. Oliver pulled his scarf over his nose. “That obstacle has the whole sky inside it.” One more night, thought Selma. Tomorrow, perhaps the clouds will have moved away.





The next evening, the clouds were thinner. Selma saw a pale dot high above—perhaps a star, perhaps a little gap. But the village lights shone by the road, in the windows and along the ski trail. Above the rooftops, the sky was brownish-grey.

“Second obstacle,” said Selma. “Lights.” CLOUDS was joined by LIGHTS on the napkin. The dots, the green squiggle and the white peak were now all squashed onto the same small piece of paper. Oliver looked out and shook his head. “It’s never going to happen.” Grandpa Lennart unfolded a map of the mountains. Selma saw the round contour lines. One more night, she thought.

On the third evening, Selma packed for everything. Her book of stars. The napkin. An extra scarf. A chocolate bar. Gloves that really were hers, not Oliver's. Grandpa filled the flask, and Oliver was given the job of carrying it. "Bigger shoulders," he said, puffing out his chest so much that he nearly dropped his hat.

Outside the door, the clouds hung low over the village, like a blanket that had slipped down from the sky. Selma laid the map on top of her things. Then the book, the scarf and the napkin slid onto the floor. The chocolate bar slid under the bench. "Third obstacle," said Oliver. Selma sat in the middle of the mess. Now she had to look more carefully.





Selma gathered up her things and smoothed the napkin out on the floor. First the dots. Then the green squiggle. The white peak. CLOUDS. LIGHTS. Everything was there. She opened her book of stars at the picture of people far away from the city lights.

At the edge was a little mountain above the mist. Selma put her finger on the white peak, then on Grandpa's map. "If we walk up there," she said, "the lights will be below us. And if the clouds are low too." Grandpa Lennart studied the map for a while. "Calm weather and a marked trail. It can be done." Oliver held out the chocolate. "I'll carry the flask." One more night, thought Selma. This night.

On the final evening, snow crunched beneath three pairs of boots. Selma walked first along the marked trail, counting red crosses on the posts. One, two, three. Behind her, Grandpa's head torch cast a warm circle on the snow. Oliver carried the flask so carefully that he walked as though it were made of glass.

"Are we nearly there?" he asked after five crosses. "Not yet," said Selma. "But look. The lights are smaller." The village twinkled far below, and clouds crept along the hillside. Selma pulled her zip right up to her chin. One more night, she thought, though now it only meant a few more steps.



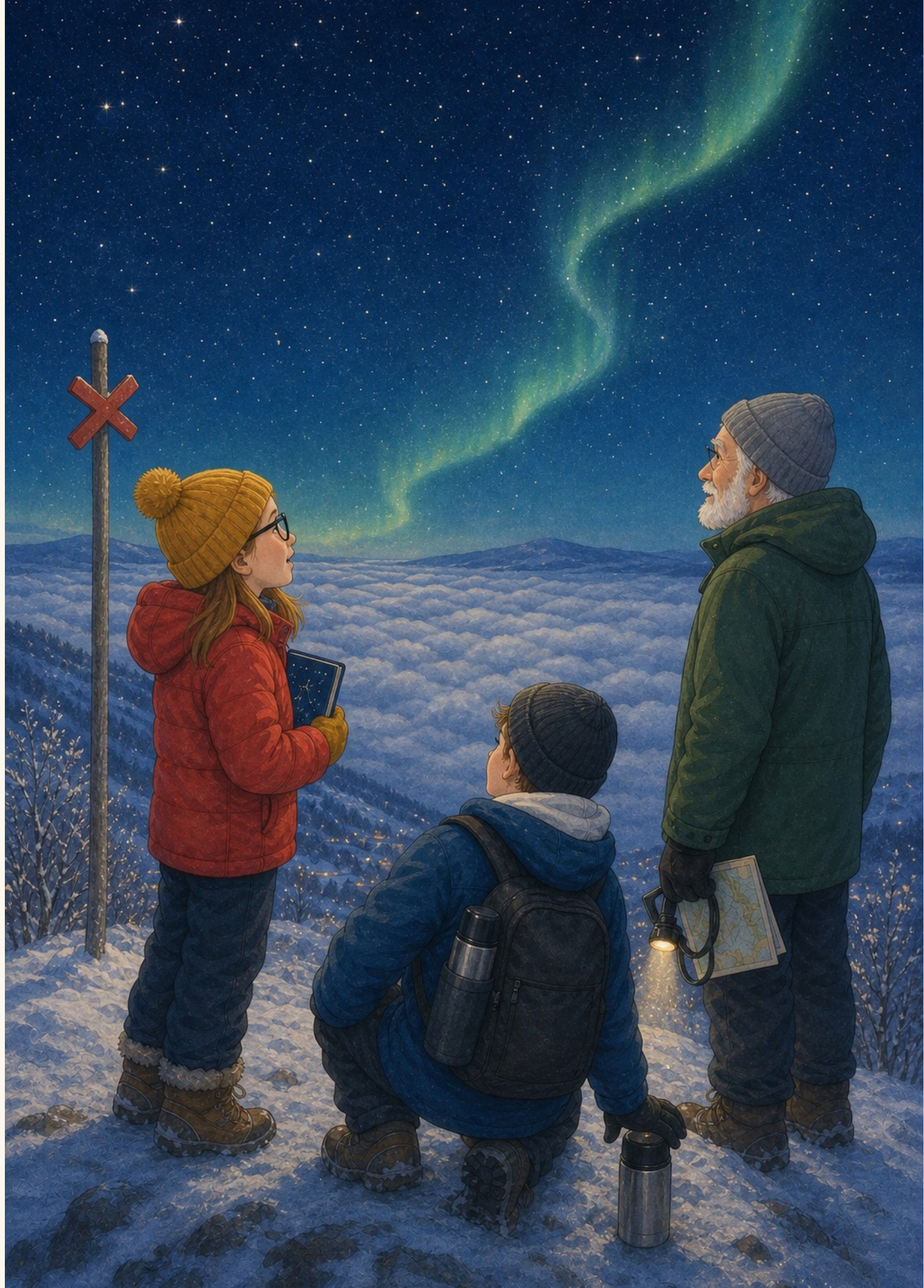


The trees grew shorter and thinner, and then they ended. Ahead of them, the bare mountain lay open in the beam of the head torch. The wind tugged at Selma's hood and tried to sniff her ears. She took three steps, then three more.

Oliver stopped beside a rock poking out of the snow. "I told you it would never happen." But he did not put down the flask. Grandpa pointed to the next gentle ridge of the mountain. "From there, we'll be able to see over the cloud cover." Selma did not look back at the long path behind them. She pointed at the next red cross. "First there," she said. "Then the next one."

At the last post, it suddenly became quieter. The clouds were still down below, soft and thick over the village. Above Selma were stars—more than the dots on her napkin, and much brighter.

Grandpa switched off his head torch. Oliver put down the flask without a clunk. “Oh,” he whispered. Selma held her breath. At first, she saw only the stars. Then a pale green streak appeared behind the mountain edge, thin as a line from her pen. It curved. It grew. “Oliver,” said Selma. “Look now.”





The green streak became a ribbon. The ribbon folded and fluttered, as if the sky were shaking out a long silk scarf. Another ribbon lit up. Then green danced across the whole sky, high above the clouds and the lights.

Nobody said anything at first. Oliver took off one glove and immediately put it back on. “It’s real,” he whispered. Grandpa poured hot chocolate into three little cups. Selma stood between them and watched the green arches until her neck grew tired. Above them, the Northern Lights folded once more, stretching even farther across the stars.

The chocolate bar grew smaller and smaller. First the corners disappeared, then the last squares. Oliver found a crumb in his glove and ate that too. The flask grew lighter, while green light continued to curl across the dark sky.

Selma took out the napkin. There were the dots, the squiggle, the white peak, CLOUDS and LIGHTS. She drew three little figures on a mountain, with a big green ribbon above them. “Can I draw one more star?” Oliver asked. Selma handed him the pen.





Selma and the Northern Lights

Selma, her big brother Oliver and Grandpa Lennart take the night train to the mountains to see the Northern Lights. Clouds, lights and an ever-growing muddle stand in their way, until Selma reads her own little clues in a new way.

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