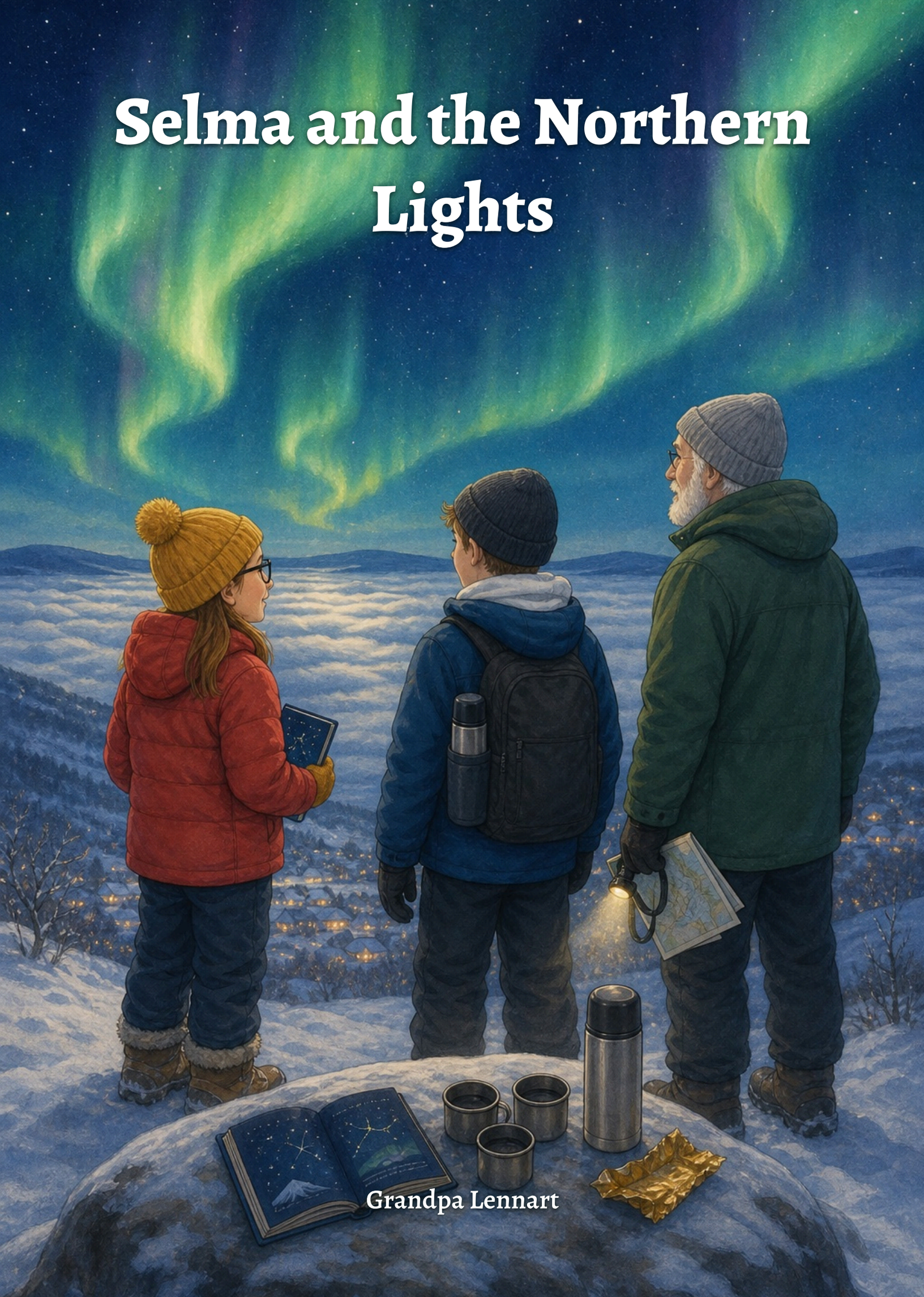
Selma and the Northern Lights



Grandpa Lennart

This book belongs to

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Welcome to this sample book! It's made just like your own book will be, using the photos and choices shown alongside it, and it shows what a story from Saga to you can look like. Flip through, 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 star book in her hand, and the night train puffed white clouds beside her.

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



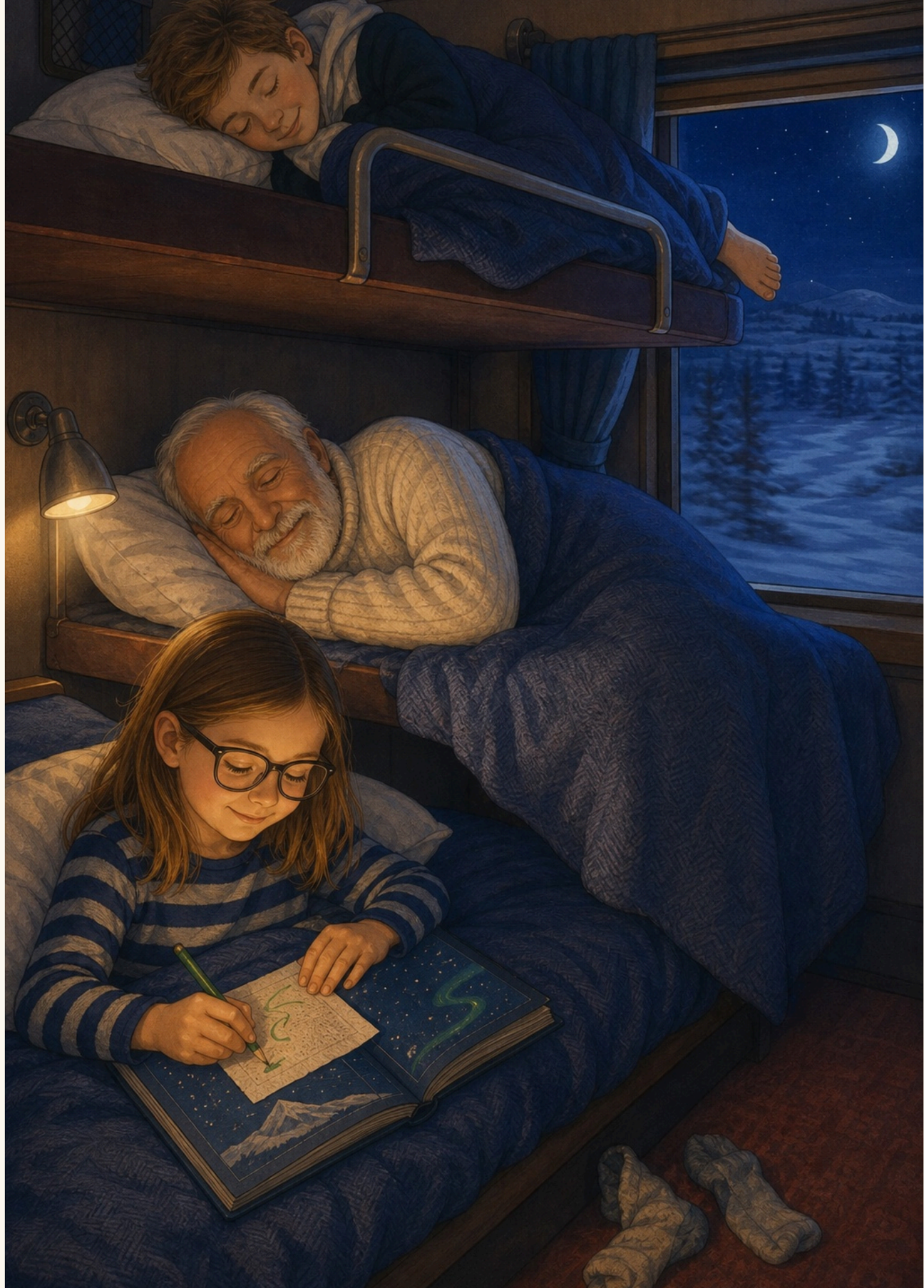


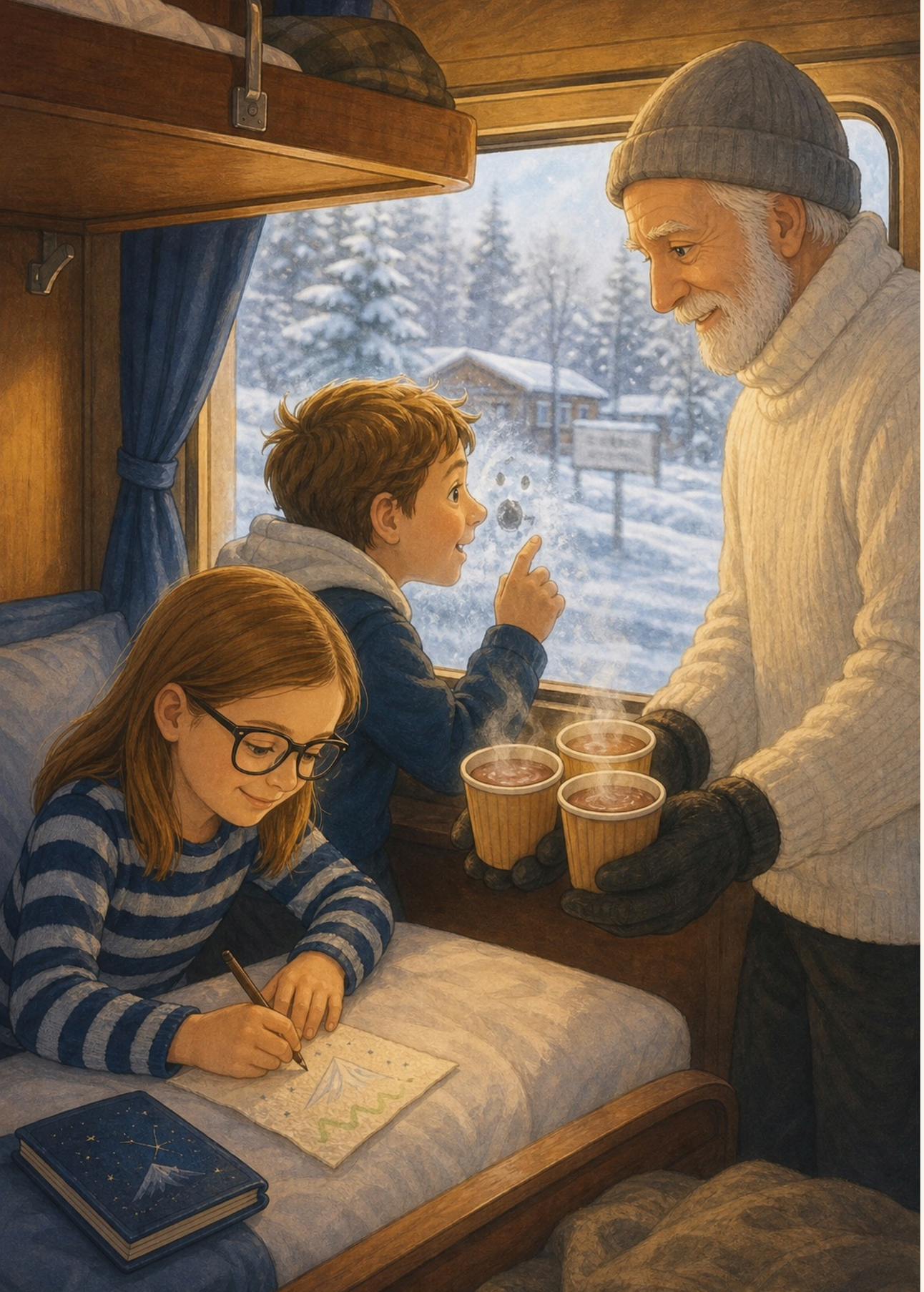
The dining car swayed gently as the train headed north. Selma ate meatballs with lingonberries and peeked through the gap between the curtain and the window. Outside, the fir trees rushed past like black brushstrokes.

“Do 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 pencil. 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 stacked like a little tower. Oliver took the top one right away. Grandpa got the middle. 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 star book, there was a picture of people, tiny beneath green swirls. Selma drew a green squiggle beside the dots on the napkin. The tracks went clickety-clack, clickety-clack beneath her. One more evening, Selma thought, holding the napkin flat against the book.





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

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

The village lay quiet between snowy fir trees and soft mountain slopes. When evening came, Selma put on her hat, mittens, and thick jacket. Oliver came outside too, though he said he mostly wanted to try out his boots. Grandpa took his headlamp, but left it switched off.

They looked up. Gray clouds covered everything, from the chimney smoke to the edge of the mountains. Not one star peeked through. “First obstacle,” said Selma, writing CLOUDS on the napkin. Oliver pulled his scarf over his nose. “That obstacle has the whole sky inside it.” One more evening, Selma thought. Maybe tomorrow the clouds will have moved away.





The next evening, the clouds were thinner. Selma saw a pale dot high up—maybe a star, maybe a tiny gap. But the village lights shone along the road, in the windows, and by the ski trail. Above the rooftops, the sky was brownish gray.

“Second obstacle,” said Selma. “Lights.” CLOUDS got company from LIGHTS on the napkin. The dots, the green squiggle, and the white peak were now crowded together on the same little piece of paper. Oliver looked out and shook his head. “Nothing’s ever going to happen.” Grandpa Lennart unfolded a map of the mountains. Selma saw the round contour lines. One more evening, she thought.

On the third evening, Selma packed for everything. Her star book. The napkin. An extra scarf. A chocolate bar. Mittens that were actually hers, not Oliver's. Grandpa filled the thermos, and Oliver got to carry it. "Bigger shoulders," he said, puffing out his chest so much that he almost lost his hat.

Outside the door, the clouds hung low over the village, like a blanket that had slipped down from the sky. Selma put 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 closely.





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 star book to the picture of people far from the city lights.

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

On the last evening, snow squeaked beneath three pairs of boots. Selma walked first along the marked trail, counting red Xs on the posts. One, two, three. Behind her, Grandpa's headlamp shone a warm circle on the snow. Oliver carried the thermos so carefully that he walked as if it were made of glass.

"Are we there yet?" he asked after five Xs. "Not yet," said Selma. "But look. The lights are smaller." The village twinkled far below, and the clouds crept along the slope. Selma pulled her zipper all the way up to her chin. One more evening, she thought, except now it only meant a few more steps.



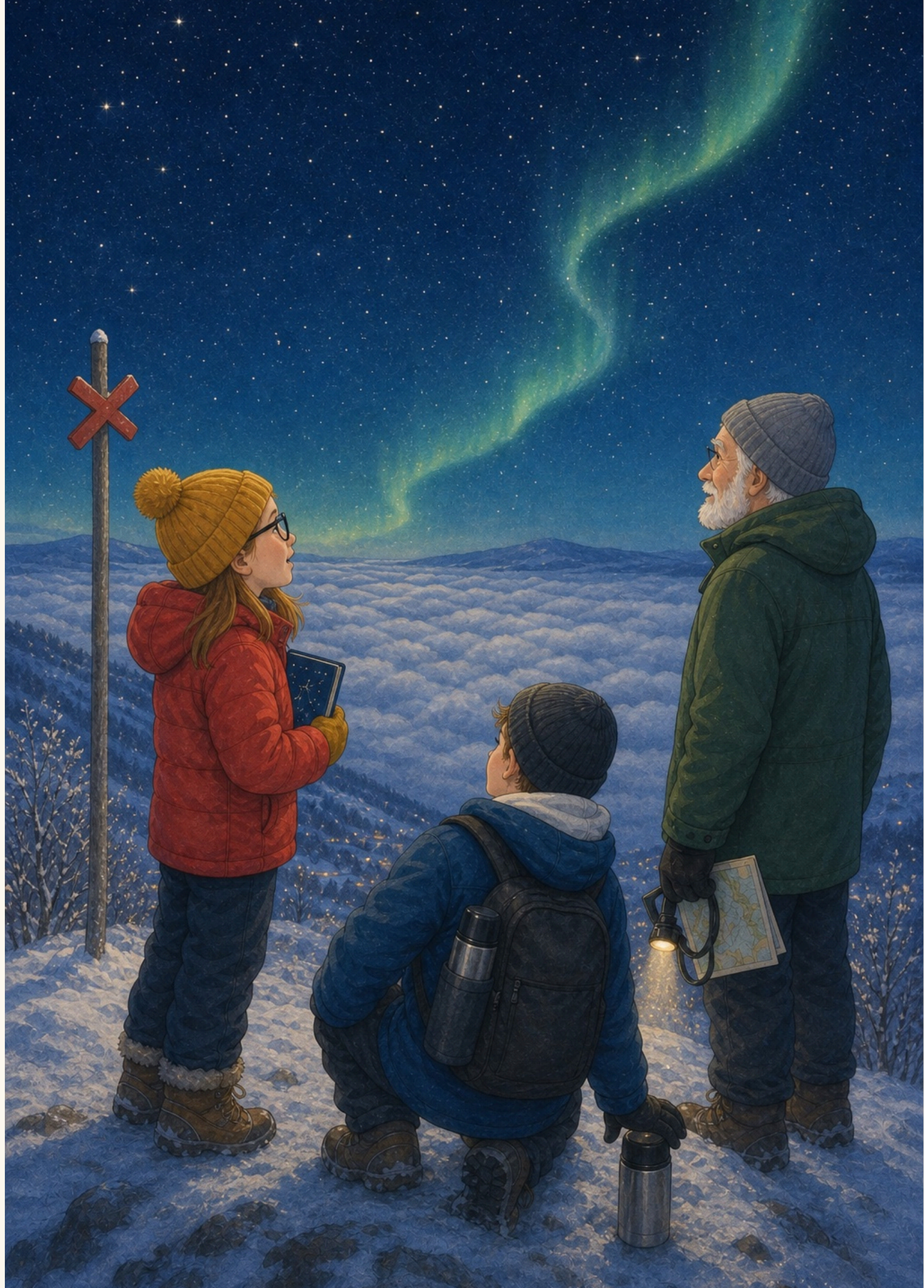


The trees grew shorter, thinner, and then they ended. Ahead of them, the bare mountain lay open in the glow of the headlamp. The wind tugged at Selma's hood and tried to sniff her ears. She took three steps, then three more.

Oliver stopped beside a rock sticking out of the snow. "I told you nothing was ever going to happen." But he didn't put down the thermos. Grandpa pointed toward the next gentle ridge of the mountain. "From there, we'll see over the cloud cover." Selma didn't look back at the long road behind them. She pointed to the next red X. "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 headlamp. Oliver set down the thermos without a clunk. “Well,” he whispered. Selma held her breath. At first, she saw only the stars. Then a pale green streak appeared behind the mountain ridge, thin as a line from her pencil. 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.

At first, nobody said anything. Oliver took off one mitten and put it right back on again. “It’s real,” he whispered. Grandpa poured hot chocolate into three little cups. Selma stood between them, following 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 mitten and ate that too. The thermos 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 people on a mountain and one big green ribbon above them. “Can I draw one more star?” Oliver asked. Selma handed him the pencil.





Selma and the Northern Lights

Selma, her big brother Oliver, and their grandpa Lennart take a night train to the mountains to see the northern lights. Clouds, lights, and a growing mess get in the way—until Selma reads her own little clues in a new way.

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