



THE NIGHT TRAIN TO ANYWHERE · BOOK 4

The Market of Marvelous Maybes

A story where YOU choose the way

STORYBRANCH

Books that branch. Minds that grow.

Meet Your Fellow Travelers

Every journey on the Night Train is better with friends. Here's who is riding with you tonight — and how each one sounds when you read them aloud:

Rowan — The hero of every journey — curious, brave, and wearing the orange coat. Rowan's choices belong to YOU.

The Conductor — Keeper of the timetable and the wisdom. Read him slow as syrup, in your deepest, sleepest rumble.

Tick the Ticket Mouse — Punches the tickets, panics the loudest. Read him fast-fast-FAST, squeaky and tremendously official — and tonight, extremely sparkly.

Fibbler — The market's most dazzling merchant, honest at heart. Read him silky and quick, like a salesman made of ribbons.

Granny Wick — The oldest stallholder and the wisest tester. Read her slow... and gravelly... with all... the time... in the world.





The Night Train had a shine on her rails and a sparkle in her windows, and Rowan knew—before even reaching the bottom stair—that tonight was going to be a busy one. The whole far valley was GLOWING!

Not with fire. With lanterns! Hundreds and hundreds of them, strung between striped tent-tops, every color a lantern can be, spilling light up into the dark like a carnival made of fireflies.

“Alllll aboard,” came the Conductor's slow voice, with—was it?—a tiny hint of hurry in it, which for the Conductor was practically a SHOUT. “The Market of Marvelous Maybes is open tonight... and I'm afraid there's a bad bottle among the wonders. Fibbler's beside himself. Well. Beside himself, and beside a bottle that's getting bigger.”

A bottle that's getting bigger? Rowan didn't wait to hear the rest. Down the stairs, out the door, and onto the platform in the time it takes to say maybe.

The train is waiting. Turn the page.



The Market of Marvelous Maybes sold exactly what its name promised: wonders in bottles, and every one of them a maybe. Bottled winter! Bottled bee-song! Bottled first-snow-smell, three for a penny! Tick tried to buy all three and had to be talked out of it.

And in the middle of it all stood Fibbler the fox—patchwork coat, tallest hat in the market—wringing his paws in a very un-Fibbler sort of way.

“Small traveler! Thank GOODNESS!” he cried, silky-quick. “I bought a crate from a traveling crow—seven bottles, magnificent bargains—and one of them is a fake. A Fizzle! It's been swelling since moonrise, and when a Fizzle pops, it pops every true bottle for three tents around!”

On the counter, a fat green-glowing bottle strained gently at its cork. Creeeeeak. The trouble was—so did the other six. Wonders glow. Fakes glow. Glowing, it turns out, proves nothing at all. Hmm.

★ **One fake, six wonders. How does Rowan find it?**

- **Test the bottles at Fibbler's stall:** *If you choose to test them, every label makes a claim, and claims can be checked in small safe ways — but testing takes time, and one of these bottles is not on your side. → turn to page 5*
- **Track down the crow who sold the crate:** *If you choose the crow, whoever packed the crate knows the fake best of all — but crows trade in maybes for a living, and finding one at night means trusting the shadowy back ways. → turn to page 19*
- **Take the bottles to Granny Wick's bench:** *If you choose Granny Wick, the oldest stallholder in the market has been testing wonders since before Fibbler had whiskers — but her ways are slow, and the bottle is swelling on its own schedule. → turn to page 33*



Up close, the seven bottles were seven small glories. Frost-blue, honey-amber, storm-grey, twilight-purple, meadow-green, ember-red—and one that outshone them all: a tall, magnificent bottle that sparkled from cork to base, gold on silver on gold, almost too dazzling to look at. Ooooh.

“THAT one,” breathed Tick, pointing with his whole arm. “Look at it SPARKLE. That's either the realest one or the fakest one, and either way we should definitely grab it.”

It was tempting logic. The sparkle practically shouted MAGIC! But each bottle also wore a label in loopy ink—This Bottle Contains: One Winter Morning. Contents: The Song of Ninety Bees.—and labels, unlike sparkles, could be checked.

Fibbler hovered, wringing his hat now instead of his paws. “Quickly, small traveler. Whichever way you choose—choose it soon!”

★ How do you spot a fake wonder?

- **Check each label's claim with a small safe test:** *If you choose to test the claims, a bottle of winter should feel cold and a bottle of bees should hum — small checks, one by one, that a fake can't pass — but it means giving every bottle its turn. → turn to page 9*
- **Trust the sparkle — grab the dazzling one:** *If you choose the sparkliest bottle, it certainly LOOKS like the most magic — or the most fake — or the most something — and grabbing it settles the matter right now, doesn't it? → turn to page 7*



— The Sparkle Test —

Rowan grabbed the dazzling bottle—heavy, cold, gorgeous—marched it to the middle of the tent, and, with the confidence of the completely mistaken, pulled the cork.

WHOOSH!

It was real. EXTREMELY real. It was a genuine Bottled Glitter-Gale, exactly as its label said—which Rowan had not read—and it redecorated the entire tent in one silver second. Glitter on the shelves! Glitter on Fibbler's hat! Glitter in Tick's ears, where it would live for a week.

The market crowd clapped and cheered. And somewhere in the shadows, fat and green and untouched, the ACTUAL fake went on quietly swelling. Creeeeak.

“Am I sparkly?” asked Tick, blinking glitter. “I feel sparkly. I feel like a very small, very confused party.”

Fibbler helped Rowan up, shedding sparkles like a snow globe. “A hard truth from a shiny teacher,” he said kindly. “Sparkle tells you a bottle is SHINY, small traveler. It doesn't tell you a bottle is TRUE. Only checking does that.”

↻ **Go back to page 6 and choose again.**



This time, Rowan read FIRST—and then tested, small and safe, one bottle at a time.

One Winter Morning: Rowan laid a hand on the frost-blue glass. Brrr! Cold as a doorknob in January, with tiny snowflakes drifting around inside when you shook it gently. True! Chalk tick.

The Song of Ninety Bees: held up to one ear, the amber bottle hummed a busy golden chord. Bzzzzzz. Tick counted along and got to ninety exactly. “NINETY,” he announced. “Ninety! I counted. Twice.” True! Chalk tick.

A Small Grey Rain went pitter-patter when tipped. A First Star twinkled in time. One Warm Argument (Resolved) muttered softly for a moment and then went quiet in a satisfied way. True, true, true!

Which left two bottles on the counter. The twilight-purple one, cool and quiet and correct... and the fat green one, whose great big label claimed it could cure hiccups, rain lemonade, AND sing three kinds of birthday song. Rowan looked at that label for a long, long time. Nothing true, Granny Wick liked to say, ever needs to promise everything.

Look closer at the braggart. Turn the page.



The green bottle did not like being looked at. That was the first thing. It sat on the counter sweating little green glimmers, straining at its cork like a dog at a gate, and every claim on its label got somehow LOUDER the longer Rowan read. MIRACULOUS! GENUINE! ASK NO QUESTIONS!

“Bottles that say ask no questions,” said Rowan slowly, “are exactly the bottles to ask questions about.”

“That’s what I’d say,” said Tick. “If I were a bottle. Which I’m not. I checked.”

Fibbler wilted into his coat like a sad umbrella. “I should have seen it. The crow sold me the crate at half price, and I was so busy being delighted with myself... A merchant who loves a bargain,” he sighed, “is the easiest fox in the world to fool.”

Above the tents, the moon slid lower. The bottle creaked. Whatever was going to be done would need to be done tonight—and first, Rowan meant to be sure.

Twice sure! A wrong guess pops just as loudly as no guess at all.

Time for proof. Turn the page.



END OF YOUR FREE SAMPLE

Which bottle is the fake?

You've reached the end of the free pages, and the biggest choice of the night is waiting on the very next page.

Chose "Track down the crow who sold the crate" or "Take the bottles to Granny Wick's bench" on page 4? Those paths are in the full book too: 9 choices, 3 friendly dead ends and 7 different endings, so it's a new adventure every time you read it.

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Next in this file: The Grown-Up's Ticket, your parent guide to Book 4.

Books that branch. Minds that grow.

Seven bottled wonders. Six are real. One is a **FAKE** — and it's swelling.

Tonight, every choice belongs to YOU. Test each bottle's grand claims at Fibbler's dazzling stall? Track down the crow who packed the crate? Learn the hundred-year-old tests at Granny Wick's bench? When the Fizzle pops, it takes every wonder with it — unless you can spot what's not true first.

Storybranch books are parent-guided choose-your-own-adventure-style stories for kids 3–8, made to be read together. You read, they choose — and every fork in the story builds the core skills of smart thinkers for the next AI revolution.

- ★ Read together · ages 3–8
- ★ 9 choices · 7 endings · a new adventure every night
- ★ Book 4 of 30 in The Night Train to Anywhere series

THE SKILLS IN THIS BOOK

Every Storybranch adventure practices two of the seven skills of smart thinkers. This book builds Spot What's Not True — sparkle proves nothing, and every claim can be checked — and Weigh the Trade-offs — once the fake is caught, every way to deal with it has a price and a prize.

Storybranch

Books that branch. Minds that grow.

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★ ADMIT ONE GROWN-UP ★

The Grown-Up's Ticket

Your guide to reading *The Market of Marvelous Maybes* together

Tonight the Night Train stops at a moonlit market where a dazzling merchant sells bottled wonders — bottled laughter, bottled lightning, bottled luck. But one "genuine" bottle is a fake, and if it pops, it could take every tent in the market with it. Your child — as Rowan — is about to learn the market's oldest rule: the shinier the promise, the harder you check.

And here's the fun part: **your job isn't to teach.** You're the Conductor — you set the pace, do the voices, and ask one good question at the forks. Your child drives. This guide gives you everything you need: the two skills hiding inside the story, two signature "parent moves," a few tricks for making every choice feel like an event, a tracker for the nights ahead, and an observation log for noticing how the thinking grows.

★ PRIMARY SKILL

Spot what's not true

Checking claims against evidence before acting on them. A confident voice and a true one are not the same thing — and the sooner kids can feel the difference, the safer every glittering promise becomes.

✦ SECONDARY SKILL

Weigh the trade-offs

Naming what each path gains *and* gives up before choosing. Anything can generate ten options in a second — choosing well among them is the human job, and it starts here.

9

CHOICES TO MAKE

7

DIFFERENT ENDINGS

3

FRIENDLY DEAD ENDS

∞

WAYS TO READ IT AGAIN



The one golden rule: never pick for them. Ask, then wait — even when the silence stretches, even when they're clearly about to pick the "wrong" one. The pause is where the thinking happens, and the wrong turns are where the learning happens. Everything in this book is safe to get wrong.



PRIMARY

Spot what's not true

The habit: confident isn't the same as correct.

Machines — like merchants — sound most certain precisely when it matters most to check. Skepticism-as-reflex is one of the kindest gifts you can hand a child: does the claim match what we've actually seen? Do two clues disagree? *Who benefits if we believe this?* In this market, sparkle is a sales tactic. Every dead end is what happens when a shiny promise gets trusted unchecked — and each one loops back for a second, sharper look. At ages 3–8 this looks wonderfully simple: *"how do we KNOW?"* asked out loud — especially when the answer is exciting.

PARENT MOVE № 1

The Unreliable Source Audit

When a character makes a claim, **put it on trial for ten seconds**. Ask: *"Hmm — how do we KNOW that? And who gets what if we believe it?"* A bottle that sparkles is a different witness than a label that can be checked, and a merchant praising his own crate is a different witness than Granny Wick, who has nothing to sell. No lecture needed — just make the two questions a reflex, and let your child deliver the verdict. (Use it at least once a night.)

✓ TRY SAYING

✗ INSTEAD OF

"Ooh. How could we check that?"

"It's probably fine — look how amazing it is."

"Does that match what we saw two pages ago?"

"It sounds so sure, it must be right."

"Who gets what if we believe this?"

"Why would anyone lie?" (in this market? oh, honey)

SECONDARY

Weigh the trade-offs

The habit: every choice buys something and costs something.

Every stall here is a trade. Spend the golden ticket on bottled lightning and it's spent — no bottled luck tonight. There is almost never a choice that costs nothing, and the market is counting on shoppers who forget that. A child who can say out loud what each option **gains** and what it **gives up** — before the sparkle decides for them — is doing something most grown-up shoppers skip.

PARENT MOVE № 2

The 15-Second Trade-Off Scan

At a fork, run the scan — one gain and one give-up per option, out loud: *"This bottle is dazzling, but it costs everything we've got. That one's plain, but we keep our ticket. Which trade are we willing to make?"* Fifteen seconds, no lecture. The magic word is **"but"** — once your child starts adding it to shiny things unprompted, this skill has moved in for good.

Showtime: making every choice a moment

THE GROWN-UP'S TICKET

A choice page is a tiny stage play, and you're the stage manager. You don't need all six of these — pick two that fit your kid and make them *yours*. Rituals are the point: by Book 3, your child will be doing them to *you*.

1 The Conductor's Whistle

When a choice is coming, give a long, low, sleepy "**whooooo...**" — the signal that a Big Decision is pulling into the station. Slow everything down. Decisions get drama; page turns don't.

2 The Finger Hover

One finger hovers over each option while you think out loud together — but **no touching until the choice is made**. The hover makes the pause physical (and very hard to rush).

3 The Ticket Punch

Decision made? Your child "punches the ticket": two firm taps on the chosen option and a squeaky "**Tickets, please!**" No punch, no page turn — Tick the Ticket Mouse insists.

4 Freeze the Picture

On each full-page painting, stop before reading on: "**What do you see? What's about to happen?**" Predict, then read, then check. Wrong guesses are cheered — that's a scientist at work.

5 Ask the Cast

Stuck between options? "**What would the Conductor do? What would Tick do?**" (Tick's plan is always "*THAT one — look how it SPARKLES!*" — which is exactly why it's useful. Even a 3-year-old can spot the difference between shiny and true when a mouse is shouting it.)

6 Swap the Chooser

On re-reads, flip the roles: you choose, your child holds **veto power** — but a veto must come with a reason. Or let a stuffed animal choose, and audit its judgment together. (Be a deliciously bad chooser. Getting overruled is the goal.)

THE VOICES — YOUR FIVE-MEMBER CAST

Rowan

Warm and wondering — but mostly, Rowan speaks with your child's voice. When Rowan decides, hand the line over: "*what do we do?*"

The Conductor

Slow as syrup, deep and sleepy, with looong pauses. The easiest voice in children's literature — and the one they'll beg for. "*No hurry... no hurry at all...*"

Tick the Ticket Mouse

Fast-fast-FAST, squeaky, tremendously official. Sit up straight when he speaks. He is very busy and everything is an emergency.

Fibbler

The market's most dazzling merchant — a fox in a patchwork coat and the tallest hat in the market, honest at heart. Read him silky and quick, like a salesman made of ribbons: "*Small traveler! Thank goodness!*"

Granny Wick

The oldest stallholder and the wisest tester — she checks, and checks again. Read her slow ... and gravelly ... with all ... the time ... in the world.

Performance note: you need exactly *one* voice you love — the Conductor is the beginner's choice — and the Train needs no voice at all: whistles, hums and rumbles are your child's job. Consistency beats talent. Nobody is grading you, and the reviews in that bedroom are already five stars.

Punch your ticket: the re-read tracker

THE GROWN-UP'S TICKET

One night is one path — but this station holds **seven endings and three secret dead ends**, and no single read finds them all. Keep this page by the bed. After each ride, check off where you landed and give the ending a name of your own invention. Completing the whole card usually takes a week or two of bedtimes ... which is rather the idea.

★ THE SEVEN ENDINGS

☐ Ending 1 _____	☐ Ending 2 _____
☐ Ending 3 _____	☐ Ending 4 _____
☐ Ending 5 _____	☐ Ending 6 _____
☐ Ending 7 _____	

Write the name YOU gave each ending on the line.

• THE THREE DEAD ENDS — A BADGE OF HONOR, NOT A RECORD OF FAILURE

☐ Wrong turn 1 _____	☐ Wrong turn 2 _____
☐ Wrong turn 3 _____	

What did each one teach you? Jot the lesson.

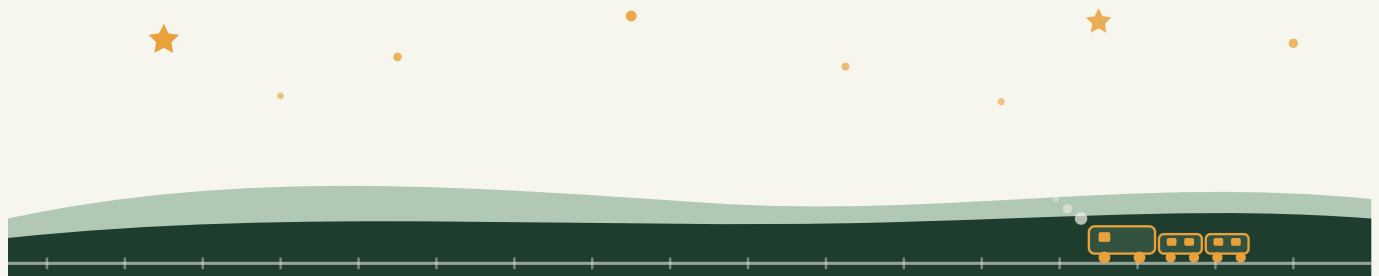
AFTER THE LAST PAGE — THREE LIGHTS-OUT QUESTIONS

1. "Which choice was the hardest tonight — and what made it hard?"
2. "What was the trickiest "maybe" tonight — and how did we check it?"
3. "Did anything sound too good to be true? Was it?"

Sixty seconds, lights low, no quiz energy. If you only have time for one, ask the second — it's the whole book in a single question.

Same station, different night.

Every reader who boards makes different choices — which means the book your child read tonight isn't quite the book they'll read tomorrow. When you've collected every ending, leave the card in the book: it's the story of how your child learned to think, one fork at a time. Next month, a new station.



The observation log: what you noticed tonight

THE GROWN-UP'S
TICKET

Page 4 tracks **where the story went**. This page tracks **how your child thought** along the way — the part that carries over to homework, playgrounds and every station still to come. After each read, take a quiet minute to score the six behaviors below. It isn't a test, and "not yet" is honest, useful information: over a few weeks, the *pattern* is what matters.

0 Not yet tonight 1 With a nudge from you 2 On their own *Write the date in the top box of each read.*

WHAT TO WATCH FOR	READ 1	READ 2	READ 3	READ 4	READ 5	READ 6
DATE						
Paused before choosing Waited, thought, or offered an idea before picking an option.						
Went back after a dead end Chose to return to the fork and try a different path.						
Named what went wrong Could say, in their own words, why a wrong turn was wrong.						
Accepted an outcome they didn't want Stayed with the story after a disappointing turn, without a meltdown or a demand to undo it.						
Kept track across pages Remembered something from earlier in the story and used it at a choice.						
Stayed with the story Attention held from the first page to the ending, without needing a break.						
Found choosing stressful tonight Tick if the forks felt like pressure rather than fun. If this gets ticked often, read one path straight through and choose only at the final fork — fewer decisions, same story.						

NOTES — ONE LINE PER NIGHT

READ 1

READ 2

READ 3

READ 4

READ 5

READ 6

Scores aren't grades, and no single night means much. What you're collecting is a picture of a growing mind at work — the same six behaviors, book after book, station after station. Keep the page with the book and compare it to next month's.

