



THE NIGHT TRAIN TO ANYWHERE · BOOK 9

The Paper Dragon Parade

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, holding on very tight in the wind.

Grandmother Quill — The heron who folds the Paper Dragon. Read her calm and unhurried, with a long pause before every answer — and a question in return.

Scramble — The goat kid who leaps first and looks later. Read him loud, bouncy, and out of breath, with a bell-jingle every time he moves.



The Night Train arrived on a night so windy that the curtains stood straight out from the window, and Rowan's hair tried to leave without the rest of Rowan!

Far off, a whole hillside was strung with lights—hundreds of red and gold paper lanterns, swinging on their strings. And above the lights, tumbling and turning like a kite that had bitten right through its string, flew something long and crimson and glowing from the inside.

“Alllll aboard,” came the Conductor's slow voice, half-lost in the wind. “No hurry... no hurry at all... but it's parade night in Lanternbridge, and I'm told the Paper Dragon has torn loose from its poles. And a paper dragon in a wind like THIS, I'm told, doesn't stay near the ground for long.”

A dragon! A loose one! Rowan buttoned the orange coat all the way up to the chin and held the door frame with both hands on the way out. WHOOOOSH.

The train is waiting. Turn the page.



Lanternbridge climbed a hill in steps, and every step was lit. Lanterns hung from every eave, every bridge lamp, every fishing boat in the harbor down below. It was the Parade of Lanterns, the biggest night of the whole year—and its dragon was in the sky.

The Paper Dragon was a hundred feet of crimson-and-gold paper stretched over bamboo hoops, with lanterns glowing in its belly and whiskers as long as oars. It was meant to be carried down the hill on twenty poles by twenty bearers. Instead it was sailing over the rooftops, and its tail rope was whipping past chimneys like a fishing line looking for a fish!

“It’s the Whistler!” panted a young goat with a red ribbon and a collar bell, skidding up—jingle-jingle-JINGLE. “The big autumn wind. It tore the rings right off the poles! I’m Scramble. I’ve tried jumping for the tail six times.” He rubbed his knee. “Seven. Anyway—what do we DO?”

Tick looked up at the dragon, then at the goat, then at Rowan. “Please don’t say jump,” he squeaked.

★ A dragon in the wind! What does Rowan do first?

- **Climb Kite Hill and watch the wind before doing anything:** *If you choose to watch first, the weather-vane tower shows the whole sky, and a wind has habits worth knowing — but watching feels like doing nothing while a dragon is getting away. → turn to page 5*
- **Find Grandmother Quill, who built the dragon:** *If you choose the dragon-maker, nobody knows better what the dragon can and can’t survive — but she’s slow, and she asks more questions than she answers, and the dragon isn’t waiting. → turn to page 19*
- **Chase it through the town with the bearers:** *If you choose the chase, twenty bearers with poles are ready to run right now — but the town is steep and crowded, and every street is a bargain between fast and safe. → turn to page 33*



Kite Hill had a weather-vane tower at its top: a wooden platform on tall legs, with a copper rooster spinning round and round on a pole. From up there you could see the whole town, the river, the harbor, and the sky—and in the sky, the Paper Dragon, sliding along in a slow, glowing curve.

As Rowan climbed onto the platform, the dragon came round. It passed SO close that its whiskers brushed the tower and its tail rope cracked past like a whip—close enough to touch. Close enough to grab!

“THERE!” yelled Scramble, hooves on the rail. “Next time it comes round, JUMP! Grab the rope! I would, but I’m—my knee—YOU do it!”

The rope had already snapped away over the rooftops. Rowan watched it go, and watched the dragon curve away over the market, and felt two things at once: an itch to leap, and a small question underneath the itch. Where, exactly, was that rope GOING?

★ **The rope is coming round again. Leap — or look?**

- **Watch the whole loop first — think before grabbing:** *If you choose to watch, a full circle of the dragon shows where the wind takes it and where it comes low — but that's one whole loop of doing nothing, with Scramble bouncing beside you. → turn to page 9*
- **Leap for the tail rope as it passes:** *If you choose to leap, the rope is right there and Rowan's hands are quick — though a rope tied to a hundred feet of flying dragon is not a rope that stays still once you've got it. → turn to page 7*



— The Leap —

The rope came round. Rowan leaped. Rowan CAUGHT it!

For one glorious second, this was a triumph. Then the Paper Dragon, which weighed almost nothing and was being pushed by a whole sky, simply carried on—and Rowan, who weighed a good deal more than paper but a good deal less than a sky, went WITH it.

Off the platform. Over the rail. Out above the rooftops—boots kicking, coat flapping, the lantern-lit town wheeling past below. Lanternbridge looked up and gasped. A duck dropped a dumpling. Tick, in the hood, said something that was mostly vowels.

The wind curved, the dragon curved, and the rope lowered Rowan—gently, as it happened—onto a chimney pot on the far side of town, where Rowan sat and watched the dragon sail away to begin its loop all over again.

It took Scramble twenty minutes to arrive with a ladder. “Seven times,” he said. “Did I mention where I landed?”

“No,” said Rowan, from the chimney. “I didn't ask. I didn't think. I just grabbed!” Far off, the dragon came round again in its big slow curve. “Next time—I watch where it goes first.”

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



So Rowan stood on the platform with one finger up in the wind and did the hardest thing on parade night: nothing. Just watched.

The dragon rose over the market, where the hill pushed the wind up. It drifted along the river, where the wind ran flat. It dipped—low, lantern-belly nearly touching the water—as it crossed the arched bridge, where the wind squeezed between the banks and dropped. Then it lifted, swung back round the hill, and came past the tower again, exactly where it had passed before.

A loop! The same loop. The Whistler wasn't tossing the dragon anywhere it liked. It was carrying it round and round the town on a track as fixed as a railway.

“It always comes back,” Rowan said slowly. “And it always comes **LOW** at the bridge.”

Scramble stopped bouncing. His bell stopped jingling. “Say that again?”

Turn the page.



Rowan chalked the loop onto the slate from Scramble's satchel: a big circle round the town, with a dip at the bridge and an X where the dip was lowest.

A grey heron landed on the tower rail—long-legged, spectacled, unhurried—and read the slate over Rowan's shoulder. “Grandmother Quill,” she said. “I fold the dragon. I have been watching it fly for an hour, and I had not seen the loop. You have been up here ten minutes!” She tapped the X with her beak. “Well? You've looked. Now what do you THINK?”

Rowan hadn't been asked that in a while. “I think—if it comes low at the bridge every time, we don't chase it. We WAIT for it. At the bridge. With something ready.”

“Yes,” said Quill. “Something ready. Which something?”

Below them, the dragon dipped over the bridge, right on the X, right on time. Tick checked his pocket watch and nodded, deeply impressed.

Two somethings. Turn the page.



END OF YOUR FREE SAMPLE

Will the dragon fly again?

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

Chose "Find Grandmother Quill, who built the dragon" or "Chase it through the town with the bearers" 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.

Start the series — \$49/month

A new adventure every month · parent guide included · shipping included (US & Canada)

Or get just Book 9 for \$59. Pause or cancel anytime.

www.storybranch.world

Next in this file: The Grown-Up's Ticket, your parent guide to Book 9.

Books that branch. Minds that grow.

The Paper Dragon has torn loose in the wind — and parade night needs it back!

Tonight, every choice belongs to YOU. Watch the wind from Kite Hill before you grab? Ask the heron who folded the dragon — or look at its parts first? Chase it over the rooftops and bargain with every street? Grabbing the tail is the obvious move. It is also the wrong one.

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 9 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 Think First, Then Ask — look, form your own idea, then ask well — and Weigh the Trade-offs — every street is a bargain, and every catch costs something.

Storybranch

Books that branch. Minds that grow.

ISBN 979-8-953259-08-8



9 798953 259088



★ ADMIT ONE GROWN-UP ★

The Grown-Up's Ticket

Your guide to reading *The Paper Dragon Parade* together

Tonight the Night Train stops at Lanternbridge on parade night, where the great Paper Dragon has torn loose in the wind and is sailing over the rooftops with its tail rope whipping past every chimney. The obvious move is to leap for the tail. It is also, as Scramble the goat has discovered seven times, the wrong one. Your child — as Rowan — is about to learn what every good sailor, builder, and question-asker knows: the best move comes after the look — and once you've looked, the asking gets short and sharp.

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

Think first, then ask

Forming your own idea *before* reaching for help — the anchor habit that keeps kids the authors of their thinking instead of passengers of whatever a tool (or a bouncy goat) suggests first.

✦ SECONDARY SKILL

Weigh the trade-offs

Naming what each option gains and what it gives up — and choosing a cost on purpose. Every street in this town is a bargain between fast and safe, and every catch costs something.

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

Think first, then ask

The habit: look, form a hunch, THEN ask — and ask about the hunch.

Machines — and eager friends — hand over answers instantly, which makes the ten seconds *before* the answer the most valuable seconds a child can own. A child who says "I think the dragon comes low at the bridge" before anyone's plan arrives has built something testable; a child who just grabs learns only that grabbing didn't work. In this story every winning path starts with a pause — watching a whole loop of the wind, holding the paper up to the light, taking one breath at a rooftop gap — and every dead end is a leap, a borrowed plan, or a shortcut nobody checked. Notice that asking isn't the villain: when Rowan brings the dragon-maker an idea, she improves it in twenty seconds. At ages 3–8 this looks wonderfully simple: "what do YOU think?" asked before the options are read.

PARENT MOVE №1

The Blind Pitch

When a problem appears, **cover the choices with your hand** before reading them aloud. Ask: "**If you were standing on that rooftop right now, what's the very first thing YOU would try?**" Let them pitch their own plan — then reveal the options and see if the book thought of it. Their idea comes first, before anyone's menu can bias it. (Use it at least once a night.)

✓ TRY SAYING

"Before we look — what do YOU think we should do?"

"What did we notice? What does that tell us?"

"Good idea. Now — who could make it even better?"

✗ INSTEAD OF

"Here are the options..." (read before they've had a thought of their own)

"Quick, just grab it!" (the goat's plan, seven times)

"Let's just ask what to do." (an ask with no idea behind it gets an hour-long answer)

SECONDARY

Weigh the trade-offs

The habit: every path costs something — say the cost out loud, then choose.

Rooftops or the lantern street. The dark shortcut or the crowd full of helpers. Cut the rope, wait for the wind, or haul and risk a tear. There is almost never a choice that costs nothing, and the chase branch of this book makes your child pay for every one. The children who thrive won't be the ones who find the cost-free option — there isn't one — but the ones who can name what each path gains and gives up, and choose a cost on purpose, out loud. Even the endings keep the bill: a shorter tail, a nervous wait, a hole in a panel. That's not failure; that's a trade-off made with open eyes.

PARENT MOVE №2

The 15-Second Trade-Off Scan

At a fork, before choosing, run the scan — one gain and one give-up per option, out loud: "**The rooftops are fast, but the tiles are wet. The street is safe, but it's slow. Which trade are we willing to make?**" Fifteen seconds, no lecture. The magic word is "**but**" — once your child starts adding it to options 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 Scramble do?**" (Scramble's plan is always "**JUMP! It's RIGHT THERE!**" — he has tried it seven times and landed on a chimney. Which is exactly why he's useful. Even a 3-year-old can spot a plan that skips the looking.)

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.

Grandmother Quill

The elderly grey heron who folds the Paper Dragon — calm, unhurried, spectacles on a string. Read her with a long pause before every answer, and a question in return: "*You've looked. Now what do you think?*"

Scramble

The goat kid who leaps first and looks later, with a red ribbon and a bell that jingles every time he moves. Read him loud, bouncy, and out of breath — and let the bell ring when he bounces.

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.

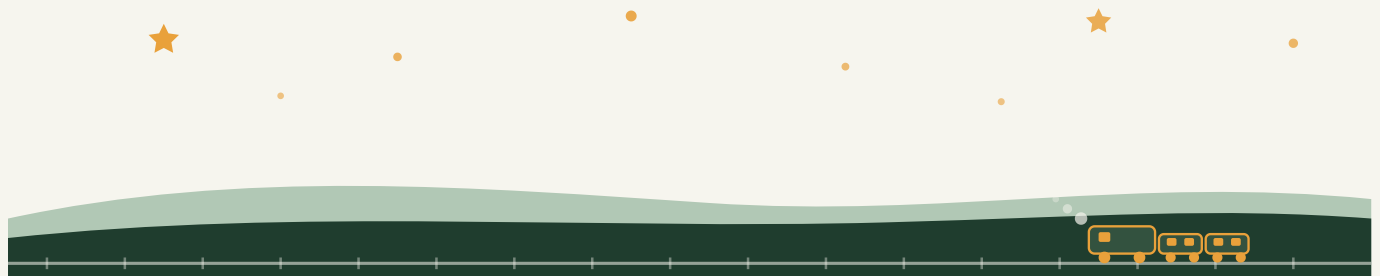
AFTER THE LAST PAGE — THREE LIGHTS-OUT QUESTIONS

1. "Which choice was the hardest tonight — and what made it hard?"
2. "What did we notice tonight **BEFORE** we made our plan — and did it change the plan?"
3. "What did our choice at the harbor cost — and would you pay it again?"

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.

