



THE NIGHT TRAIN TO ANYWHERE · BOOK 11

The Cloud Shepherd's Flock

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, counting sheep in his sleep.

Old Fennel — The Cloud Shepherd, forty years in the sky pastures, who has lost his whistle-voice. Read him in a hoarse, kindly croak — few words, and every one of them earned.

Wisp — The smallest cloud-lamb, who wants ALL of them, NOW. Read him high and breathless and bouncing, with a little bell-jingle on every 'ready?'





The Night Train came at dusk, which was early for it, and the Conductor sounded, for once, as if he were in something like a hurry.

Rowan looked out of the window and understood why. The whole evening sky was full of SHEEP! Small white woolly clouds with black faces, drifting in every direction—over the rooftops, past the church, out toward the hills—like a flock that had wandered off the edge of a field and just kept going.

“Allll aboard,” said the Conductor. “No hurry... well. A little hurry, tonight. The Cloud Shepherd's flock is out, all ninety-nine of them, scattered over every pasture in the sky. And a cloud-sheep that isn't in its fold by dawn, I'm told, wakes up as mist—and is a sheep no more.”

Ninety-nine! Rowan counted three just going past the window—baa, baa, baa—and then stopped counting, and grabbed the orange coat, and ran.

The train is waiting. Turn the page.



The Sky Pastures hung in the sunset like a chain of green islands—floating meadows, one after another, each with a drystone wall—and the nearest held a round stone fold with its gate standing wide open.

It was empty.

An elderly sheepdog in a patched waistcoat leaned on a crook beside it. “Old Fennel,” he croaked. “Cloud Shepherd. Forty years.” He touched his throat. “Lost my whistle-voice. Can't call them. And without the call, they don't come—they just DRIFT.”

All across the sky, ninety-nine cloud-sheep drifted, in seven pastures, in every direction at once. Looking at all of them together made Rowan's stomach go flip.

A tiny cloud-lamb bounced up—boing, boing, BOING—and sat on Rowan's boot. “I'm Wisp! I can run REALLY fast! Let's get ALL of them!”

Fennel shook his head slowly. “Where would you start?”

★ **Ninety-nine sheep, seven pastures, one night! Where does Rowan start?**

- **Stay at the fold and make a plan on Fennel's tally-board:** *If you choose the board, a big scattered job looks different chalked into pieces — but planning is standing still, and Wisp is already bouncing toward the nearest sheep. → turn to page 5*
- **Go up to the Windy Ridge, where most of the flock went:** *If you choose the ridge, that's where the sheep are — but a ridge in the wind is a tricky place, and there's something to work out before anyone runs at anything. → turn to page 19*
- **Head for the far pastures, where three sheep are near the edge:** *If you choose the far edge, three sheep are closest to being lost — but they're the farthest away, and everything between here and there is sheep too. → turn to page 33*



Fennel's tally-board was a slate propped on the fold wall, and on it, in chalk, was the whole problem at once: ninety-nine strokes, in a great grey cloud of strokes, with no shape to them at all.

Rowan looked at it and felt the same thing as looking at the sky: TOO MUCH.

“Right,” said Wisp, who had never felt too-much in his life. “Here's the plan! We run at ALL of them. Fast. From the middle. They'll all go the same way—toward the fold—because we'll be SO scary. It's obvious. Come ON!”

It did sound fast. It was certainly a plan. And it involved doing something right now, which was very tempting when the other choice was a slate and a piece of chalk.

Fennel said nothing, in the loud way old sheepdogs say nothing. Tick looked from the lamb to the dog and back, and quietly took one step closer to the dog.

★ **Run at the whole flock — or cut the job into pieces first?**

- **Chalk the flock into pastures and pick the first one:** *If you choose the chalk, ninety-nine sheep becomes seven small jobs, and the first small job can start tonight — but it means a minute at the slate while the sky keeps drifting. → turn to page 9*
- **Run at all of them with Wisp:** *If you choose to run, it's fast and it's now and Wisp is already halfway there — though sheep, cloud or otherwise, have opinions about being run at. → turn to page 7*



— The Whole Sky at Once —

They ran! Rowan and Wisp charged across the meadow at the middle of everything, arms out, legs out, shouting “HEY, SHEEP!”

The sheep saw them coming. And cloud-sheep, it turns out, don't bunch when they're frightened. They SCATTER. Up, sideways, over the wall, off the pasture edge into the open sky—ninety-nine sheep exploding away from the middle like a dandelion in a gale. Pfffff!

When Rowan stopped, breathless, the sky was emptier than before. Not because sheep were home. Because they'd gone FURTHER.

Fennel had not moved from the fold. He croaked something. Rowan had to walk all the way back to hear it.

“Forty years,” he said. “Never once caught a flock by running at the middle. You catch a flock by catching one pasture. Then the next.” He tapped the slate. “Ninety-nine is a number nobody can hold. Twelve, you can hold.”

Wisp, panting, lay down on Rowan's boot. “That was FAST, though,” he said. “Was it good?” “No,” said Rowan. “Let's go and look at the slate.”

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



Rowan wiped the slate and started again—not with ninety-nine strokes, but with seven boxes.

“Which pastures?” Fennel croaked the names and Rowan drew a tiny picture beside each: the Sunset Meadow, right next door. The Windy Ridge. The Star Field, biggest of all. The Rain Hollow. Three far pastures out toward the edge. Then Fennel squinted at the sky and counted, and Rowan chalked strokes into each box. Scritch, scritch, scritch.

Twelve in the Sunset Meadow. Thirty on the Ridge. Forty in the Star Field. Eleven in the Hollow. Two, three, and one in the far three.

It was the same ninety-nine sheep. But it wasn't ninety-nine anymore! It was twelve, then thirty, then forty—and twelve was a number a person could actually walk up to.

Rowan drew a circle round the smallest, nearest box. “That one first. Just that one.”

“Just TWELVE?” said Wisp, scandalized. “Just twelve,” said Rowan. “Then we'll see.”

Turn the page.



The Sunset Meadow was next door, and twelve cloud-sheep were drifting about in it like slow, woolly thoughts.

Rowan walked in—no running!—with arms held low and wide, the way Fennel showed with his crook. The sheep lifted their black faces. They didn't scatter. They bunched, a little, and drifted, a little, in the direction Rowan wasn't. Which was the direction of the gate.

It took ten minutes. Wisp, walking instead of bouncing and visibly suffering for it, took the other side. Tick sat on the gatepost and counted them through. “Ten... eleven... TWELVE! All present!”

Fennel closed the gate. Clunk. Twelve sheep in the fold. Twelve fewer in the sky. One box on the slate, crossed out.

“That's how you eat a mountain,” Fennel croaked. “One pasture.” He looked at the next box: thirty on the Ridge. “Bigger. You'll want help. And I've an idea about who.”

Turn the page.



END OF YOUR FREE SAMPLE

Will the flock come home?

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

Chose "Go up to the Windy Ridge, where most of the flock went" or "Head for the far pastures, where three sheep are near the edge" 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)
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Next in this file: The Grown-Up's Ticket, your parent guide to Book 11.

Books that branch. Minds that grow.

Ninety-nine cloud-sheep, seven sky-pastures, ne night — and a shepherd who's lost his whistle!

Tonight, every choice belongs to YOU. Chalk the flock into pieces on Fennel's tally-board? Watch the wind on the Ridge before anyone runs at anything? Walk to the edge of the sky for the three sheep closest to being lost? By dawn, every sheep outside the fold wakes up as mist.

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 11 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 Break Big Problems Down — one pasture, one ten at a time — and Think First, Then Ask — watch the sheep before you take the lamb's plan.

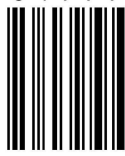
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★ ADMIT ONE GROWN-UP ★

The Grown-Up's Ticket

Your guide to reading *The Cloud Shepherd's Flock* together

Tonight the Night Train stops at the Sky Pastures — a chain of floating meadows at dusk — where ninety-nine cloud-sheep have scattered across seven pastures and the old shepherd has lost his whistle-voice. Any sheep still outside the fold at dawn wakes up as mist. Looking at all ninety-nine at once makes Rowan's stomach drop, which is exactly the point: your child — as Rowan — is about to learn that nobody gathers ninety-nine sheep. They gather twelve. Then thirty. Then the next pasture.

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

Break big problems down

Turning one daunting, impossible-looking challenge into ordered, bite-sized steps — the executive-function habit behind every project your child will ever run, with or without AI.

✦ SECONDARY SKILL

Think first, then ask

Forming your own hunch *before* taking anyone's plan — the anchor habit that keeps kids the authors of their thinking instead of passengers of whatever a tool (or a very bouncy lamb) suggests first.

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

Break big problems down

The habit: no flock gets gathered in one move — find the first pasture.

Grand goals are never won in one heroic leap; they're won in ordered, checkable pieces. That's the executive-function muscle behind every project your child will ever run — and in a world where machines happily hand over ten-step plans, the child who can *build* a plan still owns it. In this story every winning path cuts the flock into pastures, pastures into tens, and the last big field into a setup and a wait; every dead end is the whole sky at once — running at the middle, sweeping every meadow, pushing sixty sheep through one rain-hollow — and each one loops back so your child can choose again. At ages 3–8 this looks wonderfully simple: naming the first small piece out loud, doing it, and noticing the next one just got easier.

PARENT MOVE №1

The Backwards Map

When the big goal appears, **start from the ending and walk backwards**. Ask: **"We need all ninety-nine in the fold. What would have to be true FIRST? ... And what gets us that?"** Each answer becomes a step; count the steps on your fingers as they name them. Working backwards turns one big impossible wish into a little checkable plan — and fingers make the plan visible. (Use it at least once a night.)

✓ TRY SAYING

"Whoa, that's a LOT of sheep. What's the smallest pasture we could start with?"

"What has to be true before that part can work?"

"Which pastures are done? Show me on your fingers."

✗ INSTEAD OF

"Okay, here's the plan: first this, then this." (you just did the thinking for them)

"Let's just get ALL of them!" (Wisp's plan, and the sky is emptier for it)

"Hurry — we're almost there!" (rushing erases the list)

SECONDARY

Think first, then ask

The habit: my own hunch comes before anyone's plan.

On the Windy Ridge, Wisp's plan arrives before Rowan has had a single thought — and it's loud, and ready, and wrong. A child who says "I think the wind is pushing them downhill" before hearing the lamb's idea has built something testable; a child who just takes the first plan offered learns only that bouncing didn't work. Notice that asking isn't the enemy here: when Rowan finally brings Old Fennel a chalked plan, one nod and one chalk mark finish it. Think first, then ask — in that order, the asking gets short and sharp.

PARENT MOVE №2

The Blind Pitch

When a problem appears, **cover the choices with your hand** before reading them aloud. Ask: **"If you were standing on that windy ridge 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.

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 Wisp do?**" (Wisp's plan is always "**ALL of them! NOW! Ready?**" — which is exactly why he's useful. Even a 3-year-old can spot a plan that's just the whole job, shouted.)

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.

Old Fennel

The Cloud Shepherd — an elderly sheepdog in a patched waistcoat, forty years in the sky pastures, who has lost his whistle-voice. Read him in a hoarse, kindly croak: few words, and every one of them earned.

Wisp

The smallest cloud-lamb, who wants all ninety-nine sheep, right now. Read him high and breathless and bouncing, with a little bell-jingle on every "*ready?*" — and let him slow down, visibly, when he learns to think first.

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.

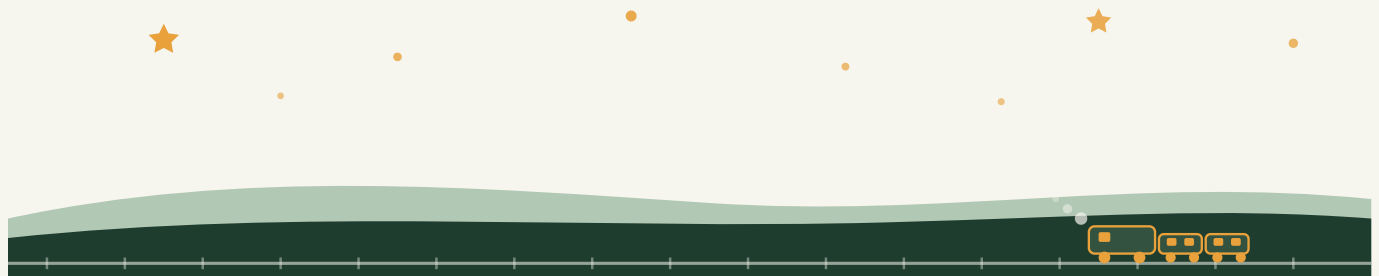
AFTER THE LAST PAGE — THREE LIGHTS-OUT QUESTIONS

1. "Which choice was the hardest tonight — and what made it hard?"
2. "What was the biggest job tonight — and what was the first small piece we did?"
3. "What did we notice about the sheep **BEFORE** anyone told us a plan?"

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.

