



THE NIGHT TRAIN TO ANYWHERE · BOOK 12

The Singing Cave Choir

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, keeping score on a slate.

Great-Aunt Rumble — The choir's bass, an enormous old bear who has lost her lowest note. Read her in the deepest, warmest voice you own — with a hole in it, until the end.

Echo — The tiny bat with enormous ears who repeats everything. Read him high, fast, and joyful — and say every last word of his twice, twice.





The Night Train came on a night so still that Rowan heard it before seeing it—and heard something else, too, underneath the hiss of the brakes. A low, sad, rumbling hum, like a mountain clearing its throat. Hrrrrmmmmmm.

Rowan opened the window. The train stood at the foot of a dark mountain, and in the mountain's side was a cave mouth as tall as a church door, glowing blue and violet from inside. The hum was coming from THERE.

“Alllll aboard,” said the Conductor softly, as if the mountain might be listening. “No hurry... no hurry at all... but tonight's the Midnight Concert at the Singing Caves, and I'm told the choir's deepest singer has lost her note. Dropped it! And a low note, you know, is a round sort of thing. It rolls.”

A note that ROLLS? Rowan pulled on the orange coat and went to find out what one looked like.

The train is waiting. Turn the page.



The Choir Hall was a cavern like a cathedral: crystals on every stalactite, a stone stage in tiers, and on it a choir of cave creatures in red robes—salamanders, snails, moths, and a whole rail of small bats.

In the middle stood an enormous old brown bear with spectacles and a lace collar, one paw at her throat. “Great-Aunt Rumble,” she said, in a voice with a hole in it. “Bass. I sing the note the whole song stands on—and an hour ago it FELL OUT. Rolled down a tunnel. Gone! Without it, the Deep Song has no floor.”

A tiny bat with enormous ears landed on Rowan's lantern. “Gone! Gone!” it squeaked. “That's Echo,” sighed Rumble. “He repeats. He also knows every tunnel—if you can get a straight answer out of him. Nobody has.”

“Nobody has! Nobody has!” agreed Echo, cheerfully. Tick eyed him with deep suspicion. The concert was at midnight. The caves went on for miles.

★ A lost note in a mountain of tunnels! Where does Rowan start?

- **Ask the choir what they heard when the note fell:** *If you choose the choir, forty singers were standing right there when it rolled — but forty singers means forty different answers, and only the right questions sort them. → turn to page 5*
- **Go to the Pool Chamber, where every sound in the mountain makes ripples:** *If you choose the pool, a still black pool shows the hum of anything humming nearby — but a pool can't tell you whose hum it is, and not every note down there is the one you want. → turn to page 19*
- **Follow Echo, who knows every tunnel:** *If you choose Echo, the one creature who knows the way is right here on your lantern — but every question you ask him comes straight back at you, and the tunnels are a maze. → turn to page 33*



The choir was still on the stage, robes rustling, and every one of them had seen the note fall. Rowan stood at the foot of the steps looking at three dark tunnel mouths leading off the hall—left, right, and down—and thought about the fastest way to find a thing that rolls.

Echo had the fastest way. “SHOUT!” he squeaked, swinging from the lantern. “Shout for it! ‘NOTE! NOOOTE!’ It’ll hear you! Then you hear it! SHOUT SHOUT SHOUT!”

It was, Rowan had to admit, the obvious thing. A cave is FOR shouting into! And a lost thing might answer.

Great-Aunt Rumble said nothing, but her ears went very, very slightly flat.

★ **Shout down the tunnels — or ask the singers one at a time?**

- **Ask each singer one small question about what they heard:** *If you choose to ask, forty witnesses each heard one true thing, and small exact questions can stitch them together — but it’s slow, and it’s a lot of salamanders. → turn to page 9*
- **Shout for the note down all three tunnels:** *If you choose to shout, it’s fast and it’s loud and the tunnels carry sound for miles — though a cave answers a shout with a shout, and a hum is a very quiet thing. → turn to page 7*



— The Big Shout —

Rowan cupped both hands and shouted into the left tunnel: “HELLO? NOTE? WHERE ARE YOU?”

The tunnel shouted BACK. HELLO—ELLO—LLO. Then the right tunnel got it, and the down tunnel, and the whole hall, until the cavern was full of Rowan's own voice bouncing off a thousand crystals—NOTE—OTE—OTE—WHERE—ARE—ARE—ARE—and every bat on the rail fell off, and every salamander covered its ears, and Echo, delighted, shouted all of it back twice as loud!

Somewhere under all that noise, far down a tunnel, a faint blue hum went unheard.

It took five whole minutes for the hall to go quiet. When it did, Great-Aunt Rumble said, very gently, “Dear. A low note HUMS. It doesn't shout. You've just filled every tunnel in the mountain with something louder than the thing you're listening for.”

Rowan's ears rang. “Then how—” “Ask,” said Rumble. “Then listen. Forty of us were here when it fell. Ask us small things. Nobody heard everything—but everybody heard something.”

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



Rowan sat on the stage steps with the notebook and started small. Not “where did it go?”—nobody knew that. SMALLER.

To the salamanders, at the left end of the stage: “When it rolled off, which way did it go—left or right?” Twelve tails pointed left.

To the bats on the rail, who feel sound in their ears: “Did it roll flat—or did it go DOWN?” Down, they all said, wings tilting. Definitely down.

To the snail, who is very slow and therefore very good at noticing: “How long did you hear it for?” The snail thought. “Three drips,” she said. “Three drips of the stalactite, and then it stopped.”

Left. Down. Three drips! Three small answers from three witnesses who each knew one thing—and together they were a MAP.

“Three drips,” repeated Echo, impressed. “Three drips three drips three—” “Yes,” said Rowan. “Thank you.” “Thank you thank you,” said Echo.

Turn the page.



The left tunnel went down. Rowan had guessed that; the notebook said it. What Rowan hadn't guessed was the STAIR.

Just inside the left tunnel, the floor became steps—a wet spiral of stone going down and down into blue dark, and from the ceiling above every third or fourth step, a stalactite dripped into a small pool. Drip. Drip. Drip.

“Three drips,” Rowan said. “The snail heard it stop after three drips. So it rolled down the stair—and stopped near the third pool!”

It was, Tick pointed out from the hood, a LONG stair. And a wet one. And dark, and there were pools all the way down, and 'the third' depended on where you started counting. “I'm just saying,” said Tick.

Echo could hear a hum from a mile off, if he'd only listen instead of repeat. Rowan looked at the stair, and then at the bat, and had two ideas.

Turn the page.



END OF YOUR FREE SAMPLE

Will the lowest note be found?

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 to the Pool Chamber, where every sound in the mountain makes ripples" or "Follow Echo, who knows every tunnel" 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 12.

Books that branch. Minds that grow.

The cave choir's deepest singer has dropped her lowest note — and a low note ROLLS!

Tonight, every choice belongs to YOU. Ask forty singers what each one heard? Read the ripples on a pool that hears everything? Follow a bat who repeats every question you ask him? The concert is at midnight, the caves go on for miles, and shouting only fills them with your own voice.

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 12 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 Ask Sharp Questions — shaped to fit what the other creature knows — and Choose What's Right — even when 'close enough' is right there.



Storybranch
Books that branch. Minds that grow.



★ ADMIT ONE GROWN-UP ★

The Grown-Up's Ticket

Your guide to reading *The Singing Cave Choir* together

Tonight the Night Train stops at the foot of a mountain that hums — and inside, in a cavern like a cathedral, the cave choir is an hour from its Midnight Concert with no bass. Great-Aunt Rumble has dropped her lowest note, and a low note, being round, rolls. Forty singers were there when it fell. Not one of them knows where it went — but every one of them heard *something*. Your child — as Rowan — is about to learn the difference between a question nobody can answer and three small ones that add up to a map.

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

Ask sharp questions

Shaping an ask to fit what the other creature actually knows — "*which way?*", "*up or down?*", "*how many drips?*" — instead of the big mushy one nobody can answer. The quality of every answer your child will ever get depends on the shape of the ask.

✦ SECONDARY SKILL

Choose what's right

Telling the right thing from the fast thing when they sit on opposite sides — a borrowed note that's "*close enough*," a nest kept warm by the very thing you came for — and naming the cost out loud before choosing.

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

Ask sharp questions

The habit: ask what they **KNOW**, not what you want — and make it small enough to answer.

Every helper your child will ever direct — a friend, a teacher, and one day the machines — runs on the same rule: vague in, vague out. In this mountain the rule is built into the rock. "Where did it go?" gets nothing; "left or right?" gets twelve salamander tails pointing left. A shout comes back as a shout. Ask a bat who repeats everything for everything, and you'll stand in a storm of every word said since sunset. Every winning path here is a chain of small, exact questions, each shaped for the one creature who was in the right place — and every dead end is a question with the wrong shape. Watch what Rowan does with Echo: not giving up on him, but redesigning the question until even an echo can answer it. One wing for yes. At ages 3–8 this looks wonderfully simple: turning one big "where?" into a "which way?", an "up or down?", and a "how long?"

PARENT MOVE №1

The "Vague vs. Specific" Upgrade

When the story offers to ask a creature something, **pause before the asking**. Try: **"Wait — if we ask the snail 'where's the note?', she'll just say she doesn't know. What's one SMALL thing she was actually there for? What did SHE hear?"** Then upgrade the ask together: a which-way, an up-or-down, a how-many. Read what the sharper version earns — and count the answers on your fingers as they stack into a map. (Use it at least once a night.)

✓ TRY SAYING

"What's one small thing this creature actually knows?"

"Could Echo answer that with one wing? How would we shrink it?"

"Whose is it — and who needs it right now?"

✗ INSTEAD OF

"Just ask where it went." (nobody in the mountain can answer that)

"Echo's useless, he just repeats." (the question was the wrong shape, not the bat)

"It's close enough, take it." (Winifred's glow goes out)

SECONDARY

Choose what's right

The habit: name the cost out loud, then choose.

Twice tonight the fast answer is right there in someone else's hands. A small violet note under a ledge is "close enough" for a concert — but it's the only one Winifred has, and Rumble won't take it. And at the bottom of the Deep Well, the lost note is warming a clutch of glow-worm eggs. Echo says *take it*. Rowan sits on the lip of the well and thinks about what's right — not just what's Rumble's. Notice that the best endings don't pretend the cost away: the concert starts late, and nobody lost anything. That sentence — *late, but nobody lost anything* — is the whole skill, said small enough for a four-year-old to keep.

PARENT MOVE №2

The Compass vs. Clock Test

When a choice is really *fast* versus *right*, **hold up two fists** — one is the clock (quick, easy, close enough), one is the compass (the right thing). Ask: **"Which fist is 'take the snail's note'? Which one is 'ask her what she heard'? ... Which one does Rowan want to be holding at the end of the night?"** Let them tap the fist. Then read on and see whether the story agrees — and whether the compass cost anything, and whether it was worth 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 Echo do?"** (Echo's answer to every question is the question, twice — and his advice is always *"close enough!"* or **"TAKE IT!"** Which is exactly why he's useful. Even a 3-year-old can hear a question bounce straight back with nothing in it, and feel the difference when one finally lands.)

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.

Great-Aunt Rumble

The choir's bass — an enormous, elderly brown bear in a red robe, lace collar and spectacles, who has lost the note the whole Deep Song stands on. Read her in the deepest, warmest voice you own, *with a hole in it* — slow and gentle, until the very end, when the hole closes.

Echo

The tiny bat with enormous ears who repeats everything he hears. Read him high, fast and delighted, and say every last word of his twice, twice — then let one clear *flap* of a wing, for yes, land like the quietest sound in the book.

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.

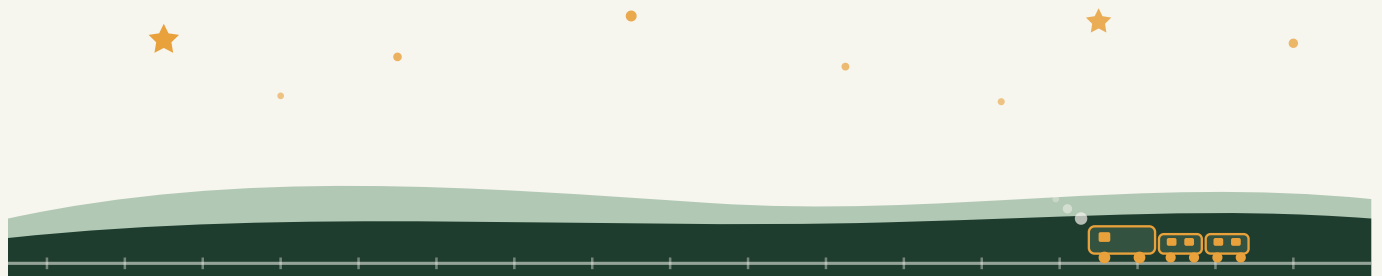
AFTER THE LAST PAGE — THREE LIGHTS-OUT QUESTIONS

1. "Which choice was the hardest tonight — and what made it hard?"
2. "What was the best question we asked tonight — and why could that creature answer it when nobody could answer 'where did it go?'"
3. "When the note was warming the eggs, what was the fast thing — and what was the right thing? What did it cost?"

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.

