

THE NIGHT TRAIN TO ANYWHERE · BOOK 22

The Ice Cream Comet

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, sleepiest rumble.

Tick the Ticket Mouse — Punches the tickets, panics the loudest. Read him fast-fast-FAST, squeaky and tremendously official — and tonight, asking for a second helping.

Grandmother Floe — Keeper of the Ice House on Comet Ridge — a huge shaggy old yak in a blue felted hat, with a wooden paddle as long as Rowan and a hundred years of patience. Read her slow, deep and breathy, like wind over snow, with a little pause before 'dear.'

Scoop — The young stoat with the red scarf and a spoon bigger than his head, who has waited his WHOLE LIFE (one year) for this. Read him quick, squeaky and thrilled — "ALL of it!" — and let him go slow and thoughtful the first time he says what a choice costs.





The Night Train came on a night that smelled of frost and cream. Rowan noticed the smell before the train—cold, sweet, like the inside of a freezer full of good things—and then the whole sky went PINK.

Rowan opened the window. Beyond the train rose a high snowy ridge, and over the ridge a comet was falling, slow and glowing and enormous, with a long pale tail. It was not made of rock. It was pink and green and cream and brown, in layers, and it was STEAMING!

“Alllll aboard,” said the Conductor. “No hurry. Well—a bit of hurry. That's the Ice Cream Comet. It falls on Comet Ridge once every hundred years, and it's ice cream all the way down to its heart, which is ice. It landed warm. Whatever isn't eaten, shared, or saved by sunrise is a puddle.”

Ice cream. From the SKY. Rowan was down the stairs so fast the orange coat was still catching up at the bottom.

The train is waiting. Turn the page.



Comet Ridge was a snow meadow above a valley; in the middle the comet stood taller than a house, layered like a cake. Beside it stood a shaggy old yak in a blue felted hat, a paddle on her back. “Grandmother Floe,” she said. “Keeper of the Ice House. I was a calf when the last one fell.”

A small white stoat in a red scarf bounced up with a spoon bigger than his head. BOING! “SCOOP!” he said. “I’ve waited my WHOLE LIFE! Which is one year. Let’s eat ALL of it!”

Grandmother Floe pointed her paddle. “Inside is the heart—blue ice, the only part that can fall again. Around it, a hundred years of ice cream. And it’s melting. Every scoop you eat, you don’t share. Every scoop you carry melts on the way. Everything costs something tonight, dear.”

“Nothing costs anything!” said Scoop. “It’s ICE CREAM!” Tick, on Rowan’s shoulder, looked at the comet, and at the spoon, and quietly agreed with the stoat.

★ **A comet made of ice cream, melting fast! What does Rowan do first?**

- **Climb up and taste it — right now:** *If you choose to taste it, it will be the best thing you have ever eaten — and Scoop will want to keep going forever. → turn to page 5*
- **Run down and wake the village in the valley:** *If you choose to share, the whole valley will come — with buckets, and opinions, and not much time. → turn to page 19*
- **Dig for the icy heart before it melts:** *If you choose the heart, the next comet depends on you — and the heart is buried under the best part. → turn to page 33*



Rowan climbed the comet's lowest slope, pressed one mitten into the pink layer, and tasted. Strawberry—cold and bright and SO good that Rowan's eyes shut all by themselves. Mmmmmm! The green was mint. The brown was chocolate, thick as a blanket. Tick, from Rowan's shoulder, said it was against several regulations and asked for a second helping.

Scoop was already in up to his chest. “Every flavor!” he yelled. “All of them! We don't have to choose ANYTHING—there's enough for everybody FOREVER!”

Rowan looked down the slope. The comet's sunny side was already going soft at the bottom, running into small pink streams across the snow. Enough for everybody—but not forever. Not even until morning.

★ **It's the best thing you've ever tasted. What now?**

- **Keep going — every flavor, as much as you can:** *If you choose to keep eating, nothing gets given up — at least, that's how it feels for the first ten minutes. → turn to page 7*
- **Put the spoon down and work out what's really here:** *If you choose to stop and think, you'll have to count the ice cream, the village, the morning — and what each choice costs. → turn to page 9*



— Every Flavor at Once —

They ate strawberry. They ate mint. They ate chocolate, vanilla, blueberry, and a gold layer nobody could name. Scoop ate lying down. Rowan ate sitting up, then lying down, then not at all. Urrrrgh.

“I can't,” said Rowan, holding a tummy that felt like a snow globe. “Not one more.” “Me neither,” said Scoop, in a small voice. “Are we keeping it all? I think we're keeping it all.”

They were NOT. While they ate, the comet had been melting—the whole sunny side had slumped into pink rivers running down toward the sleeping valley. The sky was going grey. Two full tummies, a puddle the size of a meadow, and nobody in the valley had tasted a spoonful!

Grandmother Floe leaned on her paddle. “You tried to keep every scoop, dear,” she said, “and that's what it costs. All of them.”

“Right,” said Rowan, sitting up carefully. “We didn't weigh anything. Let me think about what we get—and what we give up.”

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



Rowan put the spoon down. It was surprisingly hard. Then Rowan knelt in the snow and drew two big circles with a mitten.

“This one is what we GET,” Rowan said. “This one is what we GIVE UP.” Rowan pointed at the comet. “Eat it all: we get full. We give up the village, and most of it melts anyway. Carry it all down: we get to share—but it's melting while we carry, and the hauling takes till morning.”

Scoop stared at the empty circle. “That one's supposed to be EMPTY,” he said. “That's the whole POINT of ice cream!” “Nothing's got an empty circle,” said Rowan. “Not tonight. But some circles are smaller than others.”

Grandmother Floe said, “Hm,” in a way that sounded a great deal like “yes.”

Turn the page.



Here was the first trade Rowan made on purpose. The sunny side was going to melt no matter what—it was already running. So THAT was the side to eat from, now, one scoop of every flavor each.

They carved a neat trench along the soft side and filled two wooden bowls: pink, green, cream, brown, blue. Grandmother Floe took one careful lick. Slurp.

“What did we give up?” asked Scoop, suspicious, with mint on his nose. “Almost nothing,” said Rowan. “That side was going to be a puddle anyway. We got the taste and gave up a puddle!” Scoop thought hard. “That’s a GOOD circle,” he said finally.

The shaded side of the comet still stood tall, crisp, and cold. And the sky, just at one edge, was starting to pale.

Turn the page.



END OF YOUR FREE SAMPLE

Can the comet be saved?

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

Chose "Run down and wake the village in the valley" or "Dig for the icy heart before it melts" 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 22.

Books that branch. Minds that grow.

Once every hundred years, a comet made of ice cream falls on Comet Ridge — and it's melting fast! ★

Tonight, every choice belongs to YOU. Eat every flavor before it's gone? Carry every scoop down to the village? Cram the whole comet into the ice house with its icy blue heart? Everything costs something before sunrise — and the only way to lose it all is to try to keep it all.

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 22 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 Weigh the Trade-Offs — what do we get, what do we give up — and Think First, Then Ask.

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 Ice Cream Comet* together

Tonight the Night Train stops on Comet Ridge, where once every hundred years a comet made of ice cream falls out of the sky — five flavors deep, taller than a house, and melting from the moment it lands. Grandmother Floe, the old yak who keeps the Ice House, has room for one thing on her coldest shelf. Scoop, a young stoat with a spoon bigger than his head, wants ALL of it and is sure nothing has to be given up. Whatever isn't eaten, shared or saved by sunrise is a puddle, and your child — as Rowan — is about to learn that every scoop costs something, that the only way to lose all of it is to try to keep all of it, and that a guess made before you ask gets a better answer.

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

Weigh the trade-offs

Seeing what a choice really costs — and who pays — before making it. A scoop eaten is a scoop not shared; a scoop carried is a scoop melting; the heart is under the best layer. Every option has a price tag, and the skill is reading it out loud.

✦ SECONDARY SKILL

Think first, then ask

Forming your own idea *before* reaching for the fast fix or the loud voice — looking at the comet, guessing a better way in, and only then asking Grandmother Floe whether the guess is right.

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

Weigh the trade-offs

The habit: two circles in the snow — what we GET, what we GIVE UP — before every choice.

A comet of ice cream and one night to spend it. Rowan's two circles in the snow turn a melting mountain into choices made on purpose: eat the side that's melting anyway (a taste for the price of a puddle), sled down what fits and name what stays, let the slushy rim go so the cold middle can be carried. Every dead end is the same mistake wearing a different hat — every flavor at once, a bucket chain for every drop, everything crammed into the ice house — and every one ends in a puddle, because 'keep it all' is the one plan with nothing in the give-up circle. Watch Scoop discover, in Branch A, that some circles are almost empty and some are not. At ages 3–8 this looks wonderfully simple: "if we do this, what do we get — and what do we give up?"

PARENT MOVE № 1

The 15-Second Trade-Off Scan

At a choice page, before anyone picks, **hold up two hands**. Say: "**This hand is what we GET. This hand is what we GIVE UP. Fill them for me — what goes in each?**" Fifteen seconds, both hands, every option. Then ask which trade they'd make. Kids who can fill the 'give up' hand out loud have done the hardest part — and they notice, all by themselves, when a plan has nothing in that hand at all. (Use it at least once a night.)

✓ TRY SAYING

"If we eat it all now, what happens to the village's share?"

"What do we lose if we carry it? Is that more than we lose if we eat it here?"

"The ice house holds one thing. Which thing needs it most?"

✗ INSTEAD OF

"Every flavor! Nobody has to choose!" (two tummy aches and a meadow-sized puddle)

"Every drop down to the Hollow!" (a bucket chain that arrives as soup)

"Cram it ALL in!" (a door that won't shut, and the cold pours out)

SECONDARY

Think first, then ask

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

In Branch C, Grandmother Floe says the thing every grown-up recognizes: in a hundred years, nobody has ever asked her a question before they started digging. Rowan stands still, looks — the sunny side is melting anyway, the heart is in the middle — guesses 'sideways,' draws it in the snow, and only then asks, 'Is that right?' The answer is better for having a guess in front of it. The snowdrift ending does the same: think about what the heart actually needs (cold, not a shelf), then ask. Digging straight down because Scoop said 'fastest' is the opposite, and it costs the top.

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 next to that comet right now, what's the very first thing YOU would try? ... And what would you want to ask Grandmother Floe before you did it?**" Let them pitch their own plan — then reveal the options and see if the book (or Scoop) thought of 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 "**whoooooo...**" — 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 Scoop do?**" (Scoop's answer at every fork is the one with nothing in the give-up hand — "**ALL of it!**" "**Every drop!**" "**Nothing costs anything, it's ICE CREAM!**" — and he's quick and sure, which is exactly why he's useful. Even a 3-year-old can hear a plan that pretends nothing has to be given up. And watch him learn: by the last pages he's the one saying "we gave up ALL the buckets" — and sounding proud of 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.

Grandmother Floe

The huge shaggy old yak in the blue felted hat, keeper of the Ice House, with a wooden paddle as long as Rowan and a hundred years of patience. Read her slow, deep and breathy, like wind over snow — she never tells Rowan what to choose; she says what it costs, and waits.

Scoop

The young stoat in the red scarf with a spoon bigger than his head, who has waited his WHOLE LIFE (one year) for this. Read him quick, squeaky and thrilled — "**ALL of it!**" — and let him go slow and thoughtful the first time he says out loud what a choice costs.

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.

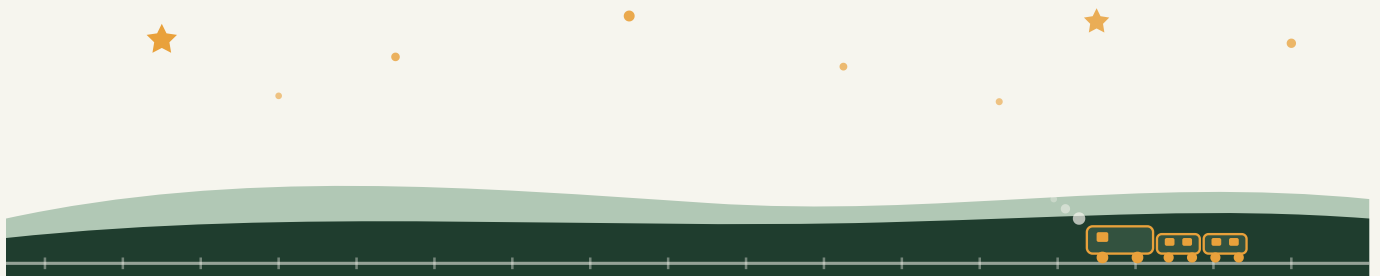
AFTER THE LAST PAGE — THREE LIGHTS-OUT QUESTIONS

1. "Which choice was the hardest tonight — and what made it hard?"
2. "Which part of the comet did we decide to let go tonight — and what did we get for it? Was that a good trade?"
3. "Before Rowan asked Grandmother Floe, what did Rowan guess? Did guessing first make the answer better?"

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.

