

Midnight and the Night Watchman



Snow falls. A thick white blanket covers the city streets. Tom the night watchman clicks open the padlock of the south truck yard. The cold metal stings his fingers. He pushes the long gate wide open for the salt trucks.

Drivers arrive and start up the engines. The salt trucks roll to a nearby mountain of salt. A loader scoops up bucketfuls and dumps them into the backs of the trucks. They rumble off to plow and salt the streets for the city's busy traffic.

The night watchman is glad his two children are asleep at home, snuggled in bed. Every hour Tom walks from one end of the truck yard to the other to make sure everything is OK.

by John Sullivan
Art by John Joven

Tom checks the west yard. Graders, sweepers, rollers, and backhoes sit as quiet as sleeping animals. Then he walks through the repair shop. Hoists, jacks, oilcans, air hoses, and tool cabinets fill the huge area.

Tom turns to walk back to the lobby, but something darts out from under a truck.

“Aw, a kitten!” he exclaims. The kitten’s fur is velvet black except for the white tip of her chin and the white tips of her paws. “What are you doing here at midnight? Come with me . . . Midnight.” And just like that, the kitten has a name.





Midnight sits on the night watchman's desk and on his shoulder. She rolls on his lap as he rubs her stomach. She looks up into his face with her glistening eyes.

Tom takes a sandwich out of his lunchbox. He offers a piece to Midnight, and she gobbles it down. He notices how skinny and dirty she is. "A truck yard is no place for a kitten," he tells her.

"That kitten came in from the cold a few days ago," one of the drivers tells Tom. "She eats whatever scraps we give her."

"Poor Midnight," Tom says to her. "Do you need a home?"

Midnight plays with Tom's cap and shoelaces. Tom crumples up a sheet of paper and rolls it on the floor. Midnight slaps and chases it. Tom thinks of his children. "I wish Rachel and Brandon could see this!" he says.

Together Tom and Midnight watch the loader and the trucks at the salt pile, their headlights burning in the gloom. “They’re like giant insects scurrying around an enormous pile of sugar, Midnight. Giant insects with glowing eyes!”



Every hour Tom must make his rounds. Each time he returns to the lobby, Midnight runs up to him. But at 5:00 A.M., she isn’t there. “Midnight,” he calls. “Midnight!” He looks under the desk. He looks down the hall. He doesn’t see her anywhere.

A driver swings the lobby door wide open on his way outside. Did Midnight follow a driver? Tom wonders. Can she find her way back through all that snow?

Rumble! A truck hurries by. Is Midnight out in the street with all those dangerous trucks?

Whoosh! The wind blows past the door as another driver walks outside.

Tom steps out into the cold and looks down to the far end of the building. A tiny dark figure stands out against the snow and slowly moves toward him. Two dots of light glow in front of it. “Midnight!” Her black fur is speckled with snowflakes. Tom picks her up and carries her inside. He pets her cold, wet fur till it’s warm and dry. Midnight falls asleep.



The eastern horizon brightens. Through a clearing in the clouds, the rising sun lights up the whole sky. “Sunrise is beautiful to everyone, Midnight, but especially to a night watchman!” Tom says.

Whishhh! The sound of tires on the wet, salted streets means the snow has been cleared.

Melvin the day watchman arrives, and Tom’s workday ends.

“Have a good one,” Tom says.

“You, too,” Melvin replies.

Tom picks up the kitten. “Bye, Midnight,” he says. “We had a good time together last night. I hope somebody will give you a good home.” He puts Midnight down, picks up his lunchbox, and walks toward the door.

Midnight follows him. Just as he reaches the door, Tom stops and scoops her up in his arms. “Come along with me, Midnight. From now on, you can watch me at home!” 🐾

