

# NIGHT GOODS

By  
Dave Chambers

His eyes came open, looked around, and settled on the curtains which were a lesser shade of dark, the faint glow of starlight being just enough to show that there really was a window in the room.

The frosty cool of the September night made the boy shiver and pull the covers tighter round him. He struggled to keep his eyes from closing and listened intently to all of the small silent noises that happen at night.

Slowly the view grew brighter as his eyes became used to what light was available. There was the shriek of an owl, a bark from a hungry fox and a slight scraping which may have been a mouse. Then there was the uneasy quiet that often came at this time.

There was a rushing, like the wind but not like the wind, faint, growing louder. It's coming, he thought. Muffled, he seemed to be hearing it through a veil, but it kept getting louder.

Suddenly the veil lifted, "One..." It became clearer, "Two... three... It's cleared the cutting. Seems to be quick." His concentration increased so that the count would not be lost as the pictures in his mind grew more vivid.

"Twenty...twenty-one..." There came an extra click-clacking. "Twenty-two to the bridge! This is a fast run." After the bridge, the surging thunder closed on the small group of cottages. Louder, the room began to shake.

"Thirty-three..." His eyes opened yet wider as the clanking, hissing, roaring, rattled past.

"Thirty-four..." The sub count, the clickety-click of the wagons, was lost at about twenty-nine, but the main count went on.

"Thirty-five..." The tone changed as the racing cavalcade swept forward. The hissing that was like a roar and the roaring that was like a hiss were blending to form an urgent onward clarion call charging away to the South.

"Forty-six..." He knew he may not be able to detect the next subtle change unless he concentrated very hard. "That could be it, fifty-seven... No, not so soon." The 'urgent onward' seemed to lose some of its urgency and he felt rather than heard that something was holding. Then he heard the extra clunk-clank of wagons coming together, each moving onto the buffers of the one in front. "Sixty one, it is. He's breaking already! He can't be there yet, something must be wrong." The count continued.

"Sixty-five..." That extra clunk-clanking, louder than usual, went on and on. "He's breaking too hard, something really must be wrong." The boy's thoughts and senses alerted.

"Seventy...seventy-one..." The long doleful wail filled the room. His eyes widened, his body tensed, his head raised off the pillow.

"SEVENTY-TWO!" he said aloud, and the sound of his own voice startled him.

He waited, held his breath for what seemed a long time, but wasn't. The 'urgent onward clarion call' went on charging away ever southwards, confirming that nothing had gone wrong.

"Seventy-two," he breathed. "It must be a record. Seventy-two seconds. It's a mile and a half from the cutting and he was breaking hard right into Whistle Bend with at least thirty wagons." A shiver went through him again, but it had nothing to do with being cold.

There was a rushing, like the wind but not like the wind, fading, whispering. The room was steady and quiet. There was a faint scraping which might have been a mouse and his eyelids became too heavy to hold up.

The sleep which now came led to a place where a child can race through the starlit dark, pulling the levers and sounding the whistle, as driver of the Night Goods Express.



[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:90074\\_West\\_Hartlepool\\_shed\\_1967.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:90074_West_Hartlepool_shed_1967.jpg)

**Description** English: 90074 at West Hartlepool shed towards the end of steam in the north-east, summer 1967.

**Date** Summer 1967                      **Source** Own work                      **Author** 8474tim

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90074 is one of nine hundred and thirty-five “War Department Austerity Heavy Freight” 2-8-0 engines built during the Second World War. There were also one hundred and fifty of these 'Austerity Engines' of 2-10-0 configuration built at this time.

In the mid nineteen fifties the Night Goods Express is likely to have been hauled by one of these engines.

The picture above, taken in 1967, shows a smoke-caked workhorse, steaming, ungroomed, grimy, still hard at work.

Many of these engines saw service with allied forces on the continent and in the Far East, so the chances are definitely a bit better than one thousand and eighty four to one against that it was 90074 passing by on that record breaking run from The Cutting to Whistle Bend ...

Thanks for the picture Tim, a thousand thousand thanks!

Dave C