It was a pleasure to burn.

It was a special pleasure to see things eaten, to see things blackened and ***changed***. With the brass nozzle in his fists, with this great python spitting its venomous kerosene upon the world, the blood pounded in his head, and his hands were the hands of some amazing conductor playing all the symphonies of blazing and burning to bring down the tatters and charcoal ruins of history. With his symbolic helmet numbered 451 on his stolid head, and his eyes all orange flame with the thought of what came next, he flicked the igniter and the house jumped up in a gorging fire that burned the evening sky red and yellow and black. He strode in a swarm of fireflies. He wanted above all, like the old joke, to shove a marshmallow on a stick in the furnace, while the flapping pigeon-winged books died on the porch and lawn of the house. While the books went up in sparkling whirls and blew away on a wind turned dark with burning.

Montag grinned the fierce grin of all men singed and driven back by flame.

He knew that when he returned to the firehouse, he might wink at himself, a minstrel man, burnt-corked, in the mirror. Later, going to sleep, he would feel the fiery smile still gripped by his face muscles, in the dark. It never went away, that smile, it never ever went away, as long as he remembered.

He hung up his black beetle-colored helmet and shined it; he hung his flameproof jacket neatly; he showered luxuriously, and then, whistling, hands in pockets, walked across the upper floor of the fire station and fell down the hole. At the last moment, when disaster seemed positive, he pulled his hands from his pockets and broke his fall by grasping the golden pole. He slid to a squeaking halt, the heels one inch from the concrete floor downstairs.

He walked out of the fire station and along the midnight street toward the subway where the silent air-propelled train slid soundlessly down its lubricated flue in the earth and let him out with a great puff of warm air onto the cream-tiled escalator rising to the suburb. […]

She gave herself time to think of it. “I don´t know.” She turned to face the sidewalk going toward their homes. “Do you mind if I walk back with you? I´m Clarisse McClellan.”

“Clarise. Guy Montag. Come along. What are you doing out so late wandering around? How old are you?”

They walked in the warm-cool blowing night on the silvered pavement and there was the faintest breath of fresh apricots and strawberries in the air, and he looked around and realized this was quite impossible, so late in the year.

There was only the girl walking with him now, her face bright as snow in the moonlight, and he knew she was working his questions around, seeking the best answers she could possibly give. […]

“Do you mind if I ask? How long´ve you worked at being a fireman?”

“Since I was twenty, ten years ago.”

“Do you ever ***read*** any of the books you burn?”

He laughed. “That´s against the law!”

“Oh. Of course.”

“It´s fine work. Monday burn Millay, Wednesday Whitman, Friday Faulkner, burn´em to ashes, then burn the ashes. That´s our official slogan.”

They walked still further and the girl said, "Is it true that long ago firemen put fires ***out***instead of going to start them?"

"No. Houses have ***always***been fireproof, take my word for it."

"Strange. I heard once that a long time ago houses used to burn by accident and they needed firemen to stop the flames."

Adapted from: Ray Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451*