

Tribute to A Black Fireman

I heard the engines' clanging gongs,
A block or two away
And then I saw the raging fire,
Dark smoke and waters' spray.

I saw the shiny ladder
As it reached up to the wall.
And then I saw him climbing,
Climbing upward, toward the call.

His black hands gripped the ladder,
Which he climbed with sure pace.
The smoke engulfed his body,
Flames danced about his face.

"I can't hold on! Please help me!"
A youthful voice, a pleading cry.
"Hold on! Hold on! I'm coming!"
Was his firm assured reply.

The roof began to crumble.
The building's end was near.
Those below began to scatter
At the sound which filled their ears.

His dark face was gripped with horror,
His mind was seized by fear.
As he reached the firey window
He heard—"Swing the ladder clear!"

In that next heroic moment
As I closed my eyes to pray,
A black hand grasped the child
And lifted him away.

There atop the ladder
Clearly seen by every eye,
Were the fireman and the child
Dark silhouettes against the sky.

He was grimey, hot and haggard
As he stepped down to the ground.
A cheer arose—he smiled,
But he never turned around.

When a reporter asked his name,
I heard him quietly say—"NO NAME PLEASE!"
Compared to bigotry and other barriers I've overcome,
This was an easy day."

James O. Rogers