I joined the excitement down the street, where crowds had gathered from a safe distance to witness the wall collapsing from the weight of the water spewing out of the fire truck’s hose. The displaced family stood apart from the rest of us, like actors on the stage at the end of the play. Indeed with the front wall of the house gone, the living room became completely exposed, the blue couch and the television like props on a set.

When the firemen finally shut off the hose, the flames completely snuffed out, there was applause and the people of the household looked confused, as if they were unsure about whether or not they should go back inside and continue living their day-to-day activities, ignoring that transparent fourth wall. They had been crying all this time, their grief so public that I imagined there was nothing else they could do in front of the neighbors that would bring them shame.

I saw myself riding my bicycle the rest of the week, passing the house in the afternoons, and catching a glimpse of the mother picking at her hangnail on the couch, the potbellied father walking around with his shirt off and farting, and the daughters arguing and pulling at each other’s hair. But no such luck. Yellow strips of plastic ribbon cut off the abandoned house from the rest of the neighborhood and the family was
fire

never seen again. I envied their exit as I mourned how the rest of us had to vanish into our homes each evening only to ascend the next morning with the same needs as the day before, no more interesting than yesterday.