

# House of the Dead

by [CS Crowe](#) (January 2025)



Fire at Sea (J.M.W. Turner, 1835)

## House of the Dead

Old burn scars mar the brick. Today,  
We scrub them with steel wool; our skin  
The only thing we manage to scour clean.

It is easy to pretend it has always been

A photograph in black and white  
Hidden in someone's wallet, but that's just it:  
Someone was there to take the picture.

The dead mattered more than the living.  
One night, the fire alarm didn't go off.  
The air inside expanded, nowhere to go.  
Strangers made this house into a memorial.

Another generation of burn scars,  
They were not the first thing to die in that house,  
Just the first to ask why we let it happen.

### **Ambient Background Smiting**

Electrons gather on the glossy faces of the flowers;  
Protons gather on the buzzing bodies of the bees.

They know when they touch, there will be a spark,  
But it is in their nature to kiss, honey and pollen.

When you rub your socks across the carpet,

When you close your car door without the handle,

When you turn the pages of the hymnal, too fast,

These things slightly increase the statistical chances  
God will roll up the heavens like a scroll and smite you.

No matter where you are, who you love, or who you fuck,  
There is a 1 in 15,300 chance that God will strike you down.

When you flip your pillow to the cold side,

When you travel by airplane instead of car,

When you caress your lover's skin beneath the sheets,

The texture of the polyester pews and the nylon carpet,  
Melted plastic after lightning struck the church steeple.

For all the sons and daughters, threatened with spittle  
It is in our nature to laugh and ask: *What are the chances?*

### **The Plywood Plant**

It does not grow native to this region.

Layer upon layer of cambium viscera  
Glued together with formaldehyde.  
They piled the sheets two-stories high;  
They dumped the chemicals into the loam.

This is where we snuck out to drink, smoke, and kiss  
We thought the signs were there to keep us out;  
Who would want to imprison an abandoned barn?  
How could anything made by God's hand be unclean?

We were young; we did not yet understand  
How chemicals could breathe inside of us,  
The red clay, the white sand, the black soil,  
They had never betrayed us before, why now?

We laid the empty bottles beside our bare feet,  
And we obeyed, we followed,

Our lips went where its lips pointed.  
When I kissed you, you broke my nose,

As if your father might smell my tongue.  
Our fathers didn't raise their sons like that.  
We were young; we did not yet understand  
That we were chemical silhouettes, breathing;

Inside of us, we carried something cancerous,  
Inherited first from the soil, then from the blood.  
If our fathers could not forgive us for being unclean,  
Could they forgive themselves for making us?

Did you hear?  
They opened a lumber mill down the road

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**CS Crowe** is a storyteller from the Southeastern United States with a love of nature and a passion for writing. He believes stories and poems are about getting there, not being there, and he enjoys those tales that take their time getting to the point.

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