

Nobody came to Burnham-on-Sea because they had dreamt of it, because there was nothing to dream of in Burnham-on-Sea unless your dreams were of wet carpets and caravan condensation and old women carrying Iceland bags through sea mist at half eight in the morning, unless your dreams were of a sea that disappeared every day as though escaping the town itself, leaving behind miles of flat brown sand ribbed with tyre tracks and dog prints and the occasional trainer sunk sole-up in the mud like a person trying to leave but changing their mind halfway through. People came because Burnham was a location that did not ask for a history, a place where your accent could soften over time into the local flatness and nobody would say hold on now where exactly are you from, because most were from somewhere else originally or claimed to be or claimed not to remember properly, and this was accepted because it was rude in Burnham to insist upon the past. And for the rest of them that were from nowhere originally, that were Burnham born and bred and dead, they stayed for reasons only known to themselves, reasons that everyone else stood to be their own and reasons not to be traded through lazy gossip.

Everything there looked maintained, in stasis, rather than started: the amusement arcades with their lights blinking all afternoon to nobody during nobody months, the peeling B&Bs, the tide forever withdrawing and returning as though trapped in indecision, so far that there were days it looked as if the sea had left for good, the caravan parks stretching out behind the dunes with their little glowing windows and their names promising golden sands and happy holidays while inside people sat under fleece blankets with televisions lighting up their faces blue, not speaking of before, never moving in any direction.

And then there was the way the seasons did not so much progress in Burnham-on-Sea as repeat themselves, as though someone somewhere had decided once upon a time that one year's weather was sufficient template and could simply be reissued, indefinitely...