

Andrea Rains Waggener Fiction Excerpt focused on Description

The commercial part of Mallard Street was only about a half a mile long. In the middle of that half mile was a “Village Green,” about 1000 square feet of grass bisected by two criss-crossing crushed-seashell-covered footpaths, dotted with a half-dozen tall, graceful Hemlock trees with clusters of salal at their bases and highlighted by the bronze statue of a stern-looking man, who, now that I thought about it, had many of Beatrice’s memorable features. The man had to be Gerald Drake. At the moment, a seagull sat on bronze Drake’s bowler hat; and fresh shiny, white bird coodle (I particularly liked this Irish slang ... so much better than “shit”) dripped off his nose. If his personality was anything like his great, great, great, great, great, or thereabouts granddaughter, he wasn’t happy about the state of his bake, as in face.

The town’s businesses nestled together along a raised white-painted wood boardwalk lined with old-fashioned ornate iron street lamps. Flower baskets hung from the lamps; the baskets currently held red poinsettias. The commercial buildings and their boardwalk encircled the Village Green and extended a block north and a block south. All of the buildings were sided in natural weathered wood or painted in sedate colors like pale gray, white, or cream. The only building that distinguished itself at all was *It’s Okay To Be Latte*; its buttery log siding stood out like a plate of donuts on a salad bar.

Mallard Street was barely wide enough for two lanes and tight parallel parking spaces on either side of the lanes in front of the businesses. The constriction created a den-like sensation, making it feel as though the town was a garret tucked under the eaves of heaven. That feeling was heightened by the ocean’s soothing and constant murmur, gulls’ frequent calls, and the

pleasing whiffs of sea air, evergreen, coffee, and food whacks from the town's one full-service restaurant, a diner, and *It's Okay To Be Latte*.

Maybe I loved Drake because it struck me as so comfortable with itself. Every street, every business, every home seemed to be settled in a way I'd never managed.

I peered at the handful of tiny businesses along Mallard as Polly and I passed them: *Rewords*, “a mostly secondhand bookstore” (that's what its sign said); *Clara's Originals*, a craft shop; *Murphy's*, the fifties style diner; *Frankly Used*, an antiques and vintage clothing store; and *The Drake Five and Ten*, an old-time department store – its sign said, “We used to be *The Drake Five and Dime*, but what with inflation and all, we thought renaming would avoid false advertising.”

False advertising.

Was that what Dory was?

Polly and I reached the end of a block and trundled across Mallard in the downtown's southern-most crosswalk. We skirted around a couple pre-teen lads doing skateboard tricks at the corner.

I hurried past the lads, and we hoofed it on down the lane, past picket fences and neat wee lawn squares in front of the cottages along Tern Street. A tinny version of Bing Crosby's “White Christmas” serenaded the street from a pale yellow house bedecked in so many Christmas lights I began calculating how big the electric bill had to be. In addition to the lights, the house was weighed down by plastic Christmas figures of Santa and his reindeer, a snowman, a red-hatted Winnie the Pooh, and as a nod to the “reason for the season,” a nativity scene that took up the whole front porch.

The home, in its overdone bedizenment, made me think of my own new adornments. Did I look any less ridiculous than the yellow house did?

Most of the side-streets in Drake had small, bungalow-style beach homes with steep roofs. The rest of the gaffs we passed sported more subdued holliers finery – some wreaths, some garland, a few of those inflatable Santas and one inflatable Grinch.

I chewed on the virtue, or lack thereof, of my disguise as Polly and I closed in the surf's shush and roar and the faint mist of a feeble fog sneaking in off the water. In just a few minutes, we reached the larger homes, which were primarily limited to Gull Street. These were the big dogs of the town, the vanguard of Drake's stand against the ocean's incursion.

We reached the end of Tern and passed between a massive weathered cedar saltbox home to the north and a Key West style home that looked like a cottage on steroids that blew away from Florida in a hurricane and landed on the Oregon coast. I let Polly off her leash, and she bounded ahead of me, slipping between graceful marram grass blades sheltering a barely passable sandy trail to the beach. She immediately disappeared from my sight, but I found her as soon as I emerged through the dunes. She had already spotted a prime stick and was barking a greeting at it.

For a moment, I stared out at the coruscated cobalt blue of the sea. Only the surf's liquid edges spilling onto the sand and the sea spray's moistness, which the wind caught and carried across the beach to my face, convinced me I was looking at water. Under the brilliant sun, the ocean resembled an endless tray of ultramarine gemstones.