

On the Eastern Edge of Town

On the eastern edge of town, hay bales, like beehives
in a new mown field, water in a ditch overgrown with new
grass, a bird, perched on a wire fence, flies away.

A tunnel under the freeway, *For farm use only - Closed to
traffic*, flooded with irrigation overflow, cars drive through,
despite the restrictions, an easy connection to the other side.

Fly Fishing, Guides Available, Boats for Rent, next to the
canyon road that parallels the river, a rustic wooden corral,
at the corner of the parking lot, of a truck stop restaurant.

Along the Main Road

Along the main road, in and out of town, three deer
and a bear, four trees and an eagle, in silver and gold,
cut from iron, atop a pine arch, a western store,
between fast food restaurants.

Signs for the traveler, high and low, large and small,
garish and plain, *Enter Here, Drive Through, Back
One Block, Exit Here, See You Along the Way*.

Under the bushes, things thrown from the road,
no longer wanted on the journey, the freeway feeds
and receives what comes and goes, here where we are.

A Bucket Handle

A bucket handle, no bucket, a lid for a cup, no cup,
clouds splash off the ridgeline, like muddy water
stomped from a puddle on the far side of the hills.

In the June wind, under a setting sun, less heat than light,
a passing freight train, rumbling energy, then the fade
of clattering wheels, a neon sign flashes, *OPEN, OPEN,*
OPEN, men from the tire store run to fix flats for free.

Outside a nursery school, seven flags of all colors,
pulled by the wind from their poles, pulled to their full size,
pulled away from home, kept home by their attachments.

In the Evening

In the evening, everything lit, is also in shadow,
red barns across green fields, gray and white roofs,
open expanse behind them, summer comes up like
a slow dawning, the wind dies down as the sun sets.

Next to a house, in the overgrown grass, an old
bicycle against a wall, a wooden ladder on its side,
a wire shelf, no merchandise on its racks.

Used farm equipment waits for sale in a gated yard,
an impromptu museum, a harrow and thresher in garish
yellow and green, a credit union's grounds, tastefully
landscaped, a white t-shirt lies crumpled by the curb,
its soiled appearance recently acquired.

Old Shopping Carts

Old shopping carts, behind the discount center,
interlocking silver baskets, worn rubber wheels, rows
of retired veterans, ready for more use, or less.

Beside the torn-up street, workers gone home,
machinery waits for tomorrow to give it back its
purpose, at night, streetlights and traffic lights,
fat, lazy stars that can barely get off the ground.

An apartment complex, circled by a black road,
ringed by garages, fifty sliding doors, storage
for the accumulation of necessary belongings,
a majestic ridge rims the horizon, above and
beyond the town, bold against the sky.

A Yield Sign

A yield sign, on the ground, a black and white cat,
its head down, slinks along, a surveyor's tripod
forgotten, a slatted fence can't stop the cat.

A basketball hoop on a pole in the center of a
cement-filled rubber tire, a TV dish on the roof
of a house, as if getting ready to take a shot.

A ceramic dog in a flowerbed stares unblinking
at the sky, a long silver horse trailer with a pointed
prow, parked in a yard, like a ship in dry dock.

In the Hospital Garden

In the hospital garden, an air conditioner rattles
in the summer quiet, crows in a tree call distress at a
man passing beneath, while other crows sit impassive
on nearby branches, a boy and girl, on bikes, shout *Hi*.

A leaf crunches underfoot, a man talks on his phone,
Emergency Vehicles Only, the air is soft in summer heat,
a healthcare truck idles, birds chirp and petals fall amid
the sweet smell of flowering bushes, a bee harvests pollen
in the bowl of a flower.

Broken cement front stoop, clay pots of bright flowers,
a birch tree in the yard, climbing vines with red blossoms,
white slat trellis over the walk, an old antenna stands
straight, a camper in the driveway, a pork-skins bag
rolls slowly in the street, crackling in a light breeze.

Plastic Picket Fence

Plastic picket fence, mud paw prints along the top,
a running dog, in a fenced yard, stops barking when
nothing happens, he circles a spot, barely reacts
to a man's irritation, calling a shout from the house.

Three small girls play in the dirt, an older girl lies on
her back, one leg up, on a green couch, on a wide
porch, on a quiet street, reading a magazine.

A Sprinkler Thwacks

A sprinkler thwacks, in its monotonous routine, a red motorcycle parked on the lawn, *For Sale* sign on the windshield, a car for sale at the corner, *Needs Tranny*.

Gravel alleys on both sides of a busy arterial, like two generations crossing each other, the traffic noise, a call to action, while peace and quiet stay in the alleys, on the tranquil side streets.

In the Town Center

In the town center at twilight, laughter and chatter from a restaurant, a motorcycle roars a block away, a converted bank building with a notice: *Office and Studio Space Available*.

A faux brick sidewalk like a red cement carpet, a passing truck sets off a car alarm, a strolling couple cover their ears.

In the restored quiet, a conversation, overheard from a passing car, like discarded pieces of privacy.

Two Picnic Tables

Two picnic tables, chained to a tree, graffiti carved in one table, *How will I move forward if I don't know which way I'm facing?* In a public pavilion, a statue of a sitting bull, one hoof across his other knee, a large cowboy hat in his lap, seems intent, not restless, as he waits, the seat next to the bull is vacant, not enough room for another bull, perhaps a cow, calf, or heifer, or some other member of the bovine family.

A Japanese Restaurant

A Japanese restaurant, in the lower corner of a mostly empty building, its main stair walls bowed out in their decay, a man sits cross-legged, reading, on the second floor fire escape, the first hot day of summer, the longest day of the year.

Steps go up to an empty lot, their stonewalls pushed out by the earth, across from the long, low, once modern, county courthouse, a newly married couple's car says "HEY" in large letters across the back window, a sign at the back entrance to the public safety building, *Stop at the camera to be identified*, tiny yellow flowers in tight tufted grass.

Green Hose Sprinklers

Green hose sprinklers pump like seven fountains to the green grass strip in front of the natural food store.

Cars and trucks for sale on the corner, STOP AND LOOK, *low mileage, 7-passenger*, a collision center beside the dealership, an empty lot across the street twelve black drums with white lids, labeled WASTE.

A stately family home, offices for an *Attorney at Law*, the block-long back-wall of a grocery store, on the main road, *WE SELL GAS*, upside down 7s for the Ls in *SELL*.

A Small Buddha

A small Buddha sits cross-legged by the back door of a home, a gray frog sits amid long grass swirls, like luxurious green hair, a woman walks an old dog panting in the heat, past a nutrition consultant's office, photographer, psychologist, savings and loan, a woman pushes a baby carriage past a movie theatre, past iron cut-outs in circular frames, *Wildflowers of the Valley*, past an open door dress shop, a soft breeze blowing.

Outside a Saloon

Outside a saloon, *Professional Comedians Every Thursday - Confident in the Grip of Hostility - You Can't Miss this Show*, an aluminum ladder, propped against the saloon wall, reaches the roof with no one around, a blue rope hangs to the ground, a blue door in the lower back corner of the long wall, an antique clock tells the right time, a hand-lettered sign, *Open-air Market Tomorrow Morning, No Parking after 6AM*, a red plastic pail, one large rock, its anchor, in the Voter Registration doorway.

Cars Parked in a Yard

Cars parked in a yard, long past being driven, a broken windmill above a small, empty office, a painted yellow café, once a church, *Espresso, Bakery, Breakfast, Lunch, and Dinner*, car wash, open bays, foam brushes on racks.

A Corner House

A corner house, surrounded by decorative art, asks itself, *What is this place?* a skateboard park on the corner across from the police station with white windows, blue windows, and red brick walls, a giant silver bell with an inoperable hammer in the fire department parking lot, ten white trucks in a row, in a closed lot behind the post office.

A Scarlet and Black Restaurant

A scarlet and black restaurant, two tables out-front, a woman with a tiny dog, drinking coffee, with one leg over the other, her hands in her lap, a commemorative red oak at the intersection of 3rd and Main, a Chinese restaurant now closed, an Asian restaurant open, a red brick building's commemorative stone: *First Store in the Valley, 1870, Welcome to Historic Downtown Ellensburg.*

A handwritten sign, *These are flowerpots, put your trash in the cans at the end of the block.* Another sign, *Writer's Club, Are you a writer? Would you like to be? Would you like to share your Masterpiece with others? This is the group for you.*

Tattoo, Massage and Body Work.

A wide street, parallel to Main, home to a shopping center, firewood sale at the pallet company, a storage lot with sheet-metal walls and razor wire, the office of aging and long-term care, a garden bookstore, an eye clinic, hand therapy, speech therapy, a flagstone walk leads to a doctor's office with a garden pagoda.

A White House

A white house, white awnings, tree stumps sawed off
at the knees, an alley like a country road, a man on a bicycle,
with a lavender bag, a lavender cap, passes a shaded yard,
a giant gnarled tree, an old picket fence on its side, a half-
hearted barking dog smells a hand and waits to be petted,
streams disappear under wide avenues with no traffic,
wind chimes hang from a tree house, wagon wheels flank
the front steps of a house, swivel chairs on the driveway.

A Pile Driver

A pile driver pounds in the distance, another building
coming down, another going up in its place, a grown man
walks at the pace of a young boy dreaming, his eyes
see with the keen vision of innocent attention.

A droopy spruce, like a hound dog's jowls, stands
next to red, white, pink, and yellow carnations, a man
digs in a yard, stripped of its sod, a tractor tire sways
at the end of a long thick rope, an old baseball lies
in the middle of the road, its hide nearly gone.

An American Flag

An American flag, in the breeze, caught up in itself,
a manicured lawn, a covered hot tub on a wooden deck,
an empty medical building for rent, unused equipment
in a second-floor operating room, a black cat with white
shanks climbs the backside of the highest hill in town.

Cars pull up to a four-way stop, a giant, red, dump truck, parked next to a small house, collecting trash that's never hauled away, an empty lot, scraped and scoured of the past, a *Like-New*, bright white truck, for sale, the new black asphalt roadway flows to the edge of the sidewalk, smooth as the hem of a dress, a long ramp to a chartreuse and avocado house.

The Librarian

The librarian checks himself out and heads home, adjusting his mirror, a man, on a bench by the library, rolls a cigarette, a sign in the window of the library announces, *Electric Door, Reading for All Ages*.

A burnt-out building, the windows replaced with textured board, the same color as the walls, an old wooden water tower, a wooden ladder bolted to its side, wide sidewalks, buckled and patched, a farm supply storage lot, rows of horse troughs, fence panels, pasture gates, wire fencing, plastic tubing, grain silos, in a row, across from a paper recycling center.

An Old Caboose

An old caboose, rusted and faded, fenced in, the old train station closed, *Remember Please*, in chalk on one wall, two sets of tracks still in use, with corroded sidings, *The bats fly out before sunset*, written on the wall with cartoon faces, one frowning figure on its side, bricks in a pile from the old platform, some with hearts on them.

The joint bone of a cow, by the tracks, near stacked pallets, worn by the weather, factory buildings with sections abandoned, painted names worn to obscurity.

A Bearded Man

A bearded man in a red car pulls his shoulder strap across his chest, the sound at the edge of town is looser, louder, faster, in empty lots with dusty gray weeds, a broken down school bus, *This vehicle stops at all RR crossings*, birds in the trees chirp their practical messages to each other.

A small house with an immaculate lawn, sculpted bushes, an oasis of flowers, bordered in stone, a newspaper boy in new white tennis shoes, a swing set in a yard, the end of the slide jammed against a chain link fence, some house numbers as big as one's head, some as small as baby fingers.

A Sailboat on the Sidewalk

A sailboat on the sidewalk, in front of what might have once been a neighborhood grocery, three trees in a yard, lean toward the south, a karate sign in a window at the corner, a car battery by the curb, an antique stove by a garage, a wishing well in an empty lot with a pan for its water, bricked-up windows like boxes of art, a doorway to nowhere, high off the ground.

A row of trees, a patch of green, a long, white wall, a low, curved roof, sleek against the clouds in the sunny sky, a woman does a crossword puzzle in her car, her pencil held aloft, wearing sunglasses, with the motor running.

A Woman Squats

A woman squats, pulling weeds and bits of glass from decorative stones, beside a row of parked cars, a newspaper by a front door, a wagon loaded with branches, a truck with household goods, sidewalks like gray tongues spread out in the heat of the day, shade trees on quiet streets, voices isolated in the viscous still, one passes through smells and aromas, like walking in a soft fog, a translucent pudding, where nothing feels separate, no matter how far away it is.

The University President's House

The university president's house on a curved driveway, one room like a great hall, a Japanese style walkway, a giant stone fireplace, next to the campus, a small city, inside the town, on the same street, a sprawling brown-shingled house with yellow trim, trees on a tightly mowed lawn, a museum of nature, a plastic bullfrog at the end of a hose, a low stone wall, a tree's branch, cut and propped like a hobby horse or a perch for pterodactyls, uncut grass in one rebellious yard, a luxurious reminder of wilder days.

An Old-Fashioned Surry

An old-fashioned surrey with red spoke wheels, a white wicker swing, a yellow house, meticulously maintained, a gray and tan rundown neglected house, an English-style bungalow, stucco walls, a long asphalt drive, a huge green container in the street for residential remodeling, rows of manicured lawns show an agreement, from house to house, owner to owner, but for one.

Upper Main Street

Upper Main Street, steady traffic, four ski-mobiles
on a flat-bed trailer, a red convertible with *collector* plates,
a pizza car pauses, its muffler rumbling, radio playing,
at the stop sign, the driver, in a baseball cap, sings along.

Crab grass, dandelions, a lawn care truck, a church, a park,
foothills of the mountains in the distance, kids with a bulldog
on a leash, a boy with turquoise hair, a girl skateboarding,
*The owner of any animal shall be responsible for any
excreta deposited by his or her animal.*

A White Picket Fence

A white picket fence, a girl walking and coughing,
past a plain house with a semi-circular gravel drive,
a six-foot section of a felled tree's roots, as big as
four men wrestling, a canvas carport over a faded blue
station wagon, a railroad-tie flower bed with no flowers,
two small dogs fight, guarding their humans from each
other, a red-sweatered arm reaches from a door
to retrieve the mail from a mailbox.

On the West Side

On the west side, a beige Quonset hut, rusted farm equipment
on display, a small bridge with no stream, a buckboard wagon
in the hot sun, a 360 degree space heater, a blue flamingo,
on one leg, next to a flowered beach umbrella, 22 bags
of grass clippings, with weeds all around them.

A Trimmed Tree

A trimmed tree, grown back like a tufted bouquet,
an orange armchair on a front porch, a white door,
a green rubber band on the ground like an emaciated
snake, a whistle blares in the background, a freight train
chugs through town, a cat lies out flat, a ramshackle
shed leans away from the dirt road alley.

A Lime Green Porta-Potty

A lime green porta-potty, next to a new foundation,
a ragged hole in the ground, next to a newly built house,
three kids, in a blue plastic swimming pool, wearing
face masks designed for deep-sea diving.

A painted metal cutout of a dog standing point on a
painted metal mailbox landscape, the low, resonant murmur
of a radio from inside a house, kids playing on a purple slide,
a park, open to playfields, where families gather at a picnic
under an open-sided pavilion, a drowsy baseball game,
parents along the base line in lawn chairs under trees,
shouting lazy cheers.

A Two-Car Garage Packed Full

A two-car garage packed full like a silent market,
a calico cat, at ease, on guard, Christmas lights, strung
across the roofline, a shiny red tractor, paw prints in
the cement, a dog barks like an engine turning over
and stalling, tall cedar and pine trees embrace
in their reach for the sun.

A Sprinkler's Spray

A sprinkler's spray swings to and fro, its rays reach
from the house to the street to the cars in the road,
a weathered chair by the walk, a dog pulls at its leash,
leaping toward two boys on bikes, a man washes his
horse trailer, the sidewalk ends at the corner, a girl's
bike, parked by the street, cobwebs in its basket
and spokes, a mailbox, open and empty,
two fat birds in the grass, fly away.

Crows in the Park

Crows in the park by the public swimming pool,
a tube slide in the deep end, *Free swim, Family swim,*
Moonlight swim, a wading pool, just outside the County Fair,
Livestock Judging, Wool Display, a painted mural on a barn
wall, barns marked *Swine, Cattle, Draft Horses, Light Horses,*
Poultry and Rabbits, trailers for loading and unloading animals,
an equestrian corral inside grandstands, display barns for arts
and goods, in front of a clay hillside, a water tower on the hill,
above and behind a replicated frontier village.

A Man Waxes His Car

A man waxes his car by the National Guard armory, a bumper
sticker, *I'm with the band*, on a car in front of a boarded-up
house, a sign on every door, KEEP OUT! Rose bushes, withered
by the sun, their petals brown and gray, a faded red laundromat,
a hamburger stand, a hole in the ground where a house once
stood, rows of potted plants on a bookshelf in the yard.

A Man Walks Down the Street

A man walks down the street, an ear infection affecting his balance, past an orange house with red trim in a shaded yard on a hot sunny day, like an ember glowing in a quiet fire, a truck pauses at the corner, accelerates, while at the curb, a sports car for sale, a window washer's truck, in front of his house, moss on the north side of a tree.

On the University Campus

On the campus, a building shaped like cubicles with portholes, stacked two stories high, enough trees to make shade almost continuous, walkers, on cell-phones, talk to others, near and far, bicycles are racked, with their front wheels up, their back wheels down, like missiles ready to launch, a five-headed fountain spouts out of the ground, in the plaza between buildings.

A Circular Smokers' Area

A circular smokers' area, a brick chimney with three benches inside, like the bottom of an elevator shaft with the door open, a butterfly garden, dedicated to a former student, a large pipe rises from the ground, goes back under, its purpose unknown, a tennis court in the middle of campus with colored streamers abandoned, after recent graduation ceremonies, a car flies through a parking lot, two jump out, and the doors slam shut.

A Walled Japanese Garden

A walled Japanese garden, curved paths, green ground cover, low trees, benches, a molded cement stream, green water, red fish, flicking its tail, as if annoyed, wooden gates open to a wide walk, a cantilevered roof, above stone obelisks, bunched in a row, a sign by a tree, *Austrian Pine, class of 1893*, a student carries books away from his body like he's holding a bag of small, dangerous animals.

A Narrow Stream

A narrow stream in a canal, runs alongside the road, cuts across the grounds, water flows against the overhanging banks, home to migrating ducks in the fall and spring, a tree-lined boulevard, a monkey house, home for the study of chimpanzees, among many examples of campus architecture, where form attempts to match or surpass function, a gymnasium, with splayed struts for roof-supporting cables, a cat's cradle against the clouds.

The Psychology Building Sign

The psychology building sign, small and low, its letters peeling, an Italian motor scooter, alone in the parking lot, the art building, with high window walls, bicycles in front in a rack like a massive collision, stop-action photograph.

Green cloth panels block the sight of ten tennis courts, sparsely populated in the summer session, rusted radiators, stacked by a cement mixer behind the music building, sidewalks cross where students walk, except for paths worn in the grass, a small patch of sunflowers, incongruous, against the wide sweep of lawns, cut and edged by skilled workers.

A Folded Quilt

A folded quilt and a box of dolls left on a high wall, two raised barbecue pits in a dormitory courtyard, another mass pile-up of bicycles, seed pods on the ground, a lone boy on a bench, his head back, he leans forward, turns and looks behind him, a squirrel stares and darts beneath some foliage.

A tarnished square sculpture rises off the ground to the height of a man, reverses itself and heads back down, turns upward, turns left, then right, then rises skyward, only to stop, mid-air, a girl walks past the opaque windows of the library with a large leather bag like the pony express used, past a man with a similar bag, past a man with a white bag, past *Black Tupelo, Class of '38*.

An Apartment Complex

An apartment complex with a fitness center, *We're pet friendly, We love our residents*, a golf cart by the office, hundreds of rental units, a row of stores, grocery, deli, *Kegs to Go*, double, triple-load laundry, then two-story balcony apartments with one old house between complexes, some like cheap motels, some semi-luxurious, rows of parked cars reflect the income level of the residents.

Willows by a house on the corner, stone slabs among the pines where the stream is wide, among apartments called estates with winding streets and an open plaza with a sandy volleyball court, *Not a Through Street, Drive Safely, We Care About You*.

New Housing Tracts

New housing tracts, variations on a common theme,
clean, with little decoration, no trash, a mock water mill,
trickling water, lovely names invented for cul de sacs and
dead-end streets, all the way to the airport, attractive
facades, sculpted lawns, curving roads, fences,
a small, original town on the scrub steppes is made
familiar to anyone who moves here from anywhere else.

A Man in His Yellow Truck

A man in his yellow truck tries to start it with the door open,
says to someone unseen, *It's not getting any gas*, overspray
from a white roof on the gray wall above it, the reverse of a
shadow, a soft tarp on a car, held down by a tire, blowing
in the wind, a two-person hammock in the yard of a tree
worker's house, a trampoline, encircled by fish netting,
holiday lights around the top.

Aspens Rustle in the Wind

Aspens rustle in the wind, above an old boat,
under a slanted roof, tall weeds pose like imposters
in a row of decorator trees, a glass globe, lodged in a
tree stump, a delivery truck speeds through quiet streets.

A multicolored backboard, above a church parking lot,
a small black dog barks, its tail wagging, next to a truck
full of dirt, a sign in the church yard, *free*, refers to bikes,
tires, a lawnmower, a garden sprayer, a large gas canister

On the Road Out of Town

On the road out of town, an auto-body shop, a motel with electric-blue doors, *Home Cooking* café closed, a snowplow behind a defunct gas station, a used car lot with a lost dog's picture in the window.

A swimming pool in a large motel parking lot, giant round flower beds, below a giant spread-wing bird, full dress Indians dance on big glass windows, across from rental apartments, a trailer park says *Welcome Overnighters, Cold Beer is Here, and the Wine is Fine*, an old western wagon, by the Interstate exchange on the edge of town, *West to Seattle, 110 miles*.