**anyone lived in a pretty how town by e.e. cummings**

This is cummings’ most famous and popular (though perhaps not best) poem, and typical in the way it takes a satirical pot-shot at American small-town attitudes. It is skewed narrative verse in cod quatrains, with jolting changes of rhythm, gleefully erratic metre and violently juxtaposed imagery, all bound together in a cheerful, surreal, jogalong style. At every turn reader expectations are confounded. Cummings, for his part, did not claim to be a poet – merely “a draughtsman of words”.

The following is the standard interpretation of the poem, as good as any.

**anyone lived in a pretty how town by ism**

E. E. Cummings’ "anyone lived in a pretty how town" tells the story of anyone. The name has a double meaning; anyone could be anyone in the dictionary definition sense, and could be seen as a singular entity, reinforcing the theme of isolation the independent individual has from the rest of society. The events all occur in a "pretty how town". "Pretty" connotes a mere façade, describing the superficiality of the town's inhabitants. "How", an adverb, is used as an adjective here. It could be describing the extent of the town’s prettiness, but a better reason is that it describes the routine humdrum of the town's activities, since "how" also means "in a method or manner".

The juxtapositions continue into the next line, "(with up so floating many bells down)". The rhythm of the line and the vowels emulate both the motion and the sounds of bells. This line occurs again later in the poem, and its function here is the same as it is there - to signify the passing of time. The next line is an ordered list of the seasons, also symbolizing the passing of time, describing anyone's activities as occurring continuously. The activities are grouped as failures (his didn't) and his successes (his did). Regardless of the outcome, anyone is singing and dancing, happily.

The women and men of the next stanza are described as "little and small", referring not to their physical size but their capacity and willingness to explore new dimensions. In the next line, "anyone" serves a double meaning. The townspeople did not care for the individual named anyone, nor do they care for any of each other. They do not attempt anything (sowed their isn't) outside their known habits (they reaped their same). The next line is a list of heavenly bodies and weather conditions, signifying the fact that the townspeople never change their standardized routines even when other things do.

The third stanza introduces characters common to Cummings' works. He viewed children as innocent, and because of their innocence, can see the love noone has for anyone's individuality. Again, noone's name has a double meaning, expressing the degree of noone's love ("more by more") as well as anyone's intense isolation from the rest of society. The children's ability to see this love fades with the passing of time as they get older, and it is interesting to note that the list of seasons this time starts with autumn. Autumn leads into winter, which is often a symbol of death and sleep. The seasons describing anyone started with spring, which is a symbol of rebirth and change, characteristic of his personality.
Noone and anyone live spontaneously for the present ("when by now"), gaining large advances from small things (tree by leaf). Cummings considers risks as tiny compared to the possibilities resulting from pushing boundaries. "Tree by leaf" could also be referring to parts as the sum of a whole, suggesting the depth of anyone and noone’s shared experiences. Noone partakes in all of anyone’s activities, laughing and crying with him. She does this through all circumstances. The symbols bird and snow describe the seasons as opposed to an obvious list, contrasting anyone’s abstract creativity with society’s literal inflexibility. "Stir by still" illustrates rest and motion, but the "by" implies that even at rest, the couple was dynamic. The next line, "anyone’s any was all to her" explains how much noone loved everything about anyone, as well as reiterating the isolation motif.

The non-specific "someones" marrying their generic "everyones" shows Cummings’ attitude towards the institute of marriage. Note that anyone and noone have love, but they are not married. Marriage is a social convention ("did their dance") that does not necessarily have anything to do with love. The next paradoxical line, "laughed their cryings", is an example of these ordinary couples’ lack of understanding of each other, implying at best, an incomplete type of love. It also suggests insensitivity, in that they laugh at other people’s cryings, and confusion about their own misfortunes, laughing at themselves.

"Did their dance" is an inversion of anyone’s "danced his did", another example contrasting anyone with everyone. The townspeople continue their cycle of sleeping, waking, and hoping, although hope achieves nothing as long as they say "their nevers”. They restrict their hopes and dreams to the realm of sleep ("slept their dream").

Stanza six describes the passage of time, as the children grow up and become everyones. The snow archetype is present here again, symbolizing the end of children’s innocence, as they "forget to remember" the happiness anyone achieves, opting for society’s mechanical activities.

The narrator tells us of anyone’s death with a resigned apathy. He knows that this event will not change the townspeople. It also evokes the unconcern the townspeople have for anyone, how they allow events to merely pass by. The double meaning of "noone" is used again to display this detachment ("noone stooped to kiss his face"). Anyone and noone are buried together, their physical bodies returning to dust ("earth by april"), but they become part of a shared dream ("dream their sleep").

The townspeople take no notice of this and continue their fruitless cycle. When they die, they achieve nothing ("reaped their sowing", when they sowed nothing in the second stanza). They merely become dust and disappear forever ("went their came"), as opposed to anyone and noone, who achieve immortality, much like the eternal sun, moon, and stars. There are very few breaks in the poem - only two periods, each occurring before "Women and men". This is a disruption in the poem, perhaps signifying the townspeople as an aberration in the order of the universe, and anyone and noone being more akin to it, blending in. The poem does not begin with a capitalized letter, nor does not end with a period, showing that the cycle begins where it left off.

The poem is a criticism of blindly following social conventions, as well as society’s intolerance of nonconformists. Cummings shows us how society is not willing
to acknowledge differences. He asks us to question traditions, and to understand them for their true intent. He is challenging anyone, meaning any one of us, to push the boundaries of our known space so that we may achieve our dreams.