

The Ghost Town of Somewhereville

Chapter One

Samantha stares out the car window at the scrolling landscape. Acres of farmland rush by in a muted palette of dead-grain yellow and 8:00 AM summer sky blue. Every now and then, she'd spot a glimpse of life. Some men rolling up hay. Horses grazing in a pasture.

There's a word for it: sonder. It's not really an emotion, or a feeling. It's a realization. Every person who exists has a life, vivid and complex beyond imagination. That's why I'm so interested in ghost towns.

The car shimmies as the road transitions from dirt to cobblestone, making Samantha jolt. Beside her in the back seat, Erik and Diane laugh hysterically as they try to catch all of the chess pieces rolling onto the floor.

"Oh, darn it. The pieces fell over. Guess that's a tie," Erik said with a goofy grin.

Diane unbuckles her seatbelt to get a black pawn under the driver's seat. "You knew I was going to win anyway. That is so a win for me." She picks it up and puts it into the cup holder. "Is that all of them?"

Samantha holds up a king and drops it into the collection. "Here's one more."

These are my friends. We met in my first year of high school. Erik's in my freshman class, but Diane is going to be senior when school starts back up again. Apparently they were friends before I came into the picture.

The kid with the scruffy brown hair is Erik. He's older than he acts. And the girl with an arm covered in friendship bracelets is Diane.

"Oh, Samantha!" Erik says. "I kind of forgot you were sitting there. You were being quiet for the whole trip."

"Thanks?"

Diane gives him a look. "Erik, you can be so rude without even realizing it. Samantha, don't mind him."

"It's fine. I'm just kind of bored."

"I really didn't mean to forget about you," Erik says. "Maybe you could play with us? We have chess, if we didn't lose any pieces, and also playing cards."

While Diane and Erik were discussing what other games they had on hand with them, Samantha thought of what to say. "My mind is really on where we're going. I'm kind of nervous, but excited at the same time."

"Well, there's not much to say about it. It's huge, and basically awesome. And it's all ours." Erik can't stop smiling.

Samantha shrugs. "And that's all I know about it. I don't even know what this place is called."

"Neither do we," Diane says. "At least, we did know, but then we started calling it Somewhereville because it sounded less boring."

Erik ponders for a moment. “Okay... so here’s the rundown. It’s a ghost town that I found one day, and—”

“Woah, slow down. I think we should save that story for Samantha for just a bit, because it looks like we’re here.”

So that’s what this town looks like.

Samantha glances out the window. A wooden arch, covered with vines from the surrounding forest, marks the entrance to the town. Somewhereville is dusty and rampant with overgrown vegetation creeping into the houses, though some bare patches and tire tracks here and there must have been the result of previous camping trips from the Sanchez family.

The buildings are made from concrete. Some of them have collapsed, and rebar is visible from the broken walls.

It would take a true photographer’s eye to capture the stories of people who once lived here.