

X AMBASSADORS

Townie



Townie

[*tou-nee*]

noun, plural *town-ies*. *Informal*.

1. a resident of a town, especially a nonstudent resident of a college town.

A gas station glows in the night, two miles from the Tompkins County line. It cuts through the bleak, winter night like a grotesque, twenty-first century lighthouse. To the east— the collegetown of Ithaca, NY. To the west, everything else. The air is cold and unforgiving. The landscape every shade of grey and brown on the color-wheel. A couple of teenagers loiter in the parking lot, plotting their escape. Most of them know they won't ever leave this town, so tonight their escape is a temporary one. Rollies and half-drunk liters of Mountain Dew. Grapefruit blunts and chapped lips. Their baggy clothes full of restlessness and longing.

This is "Townie".

From doing donuts in a Sunoco parking lot ("Sunoco"), skate-boarding under grey-skies ("No Strings"), and driving past prisons & malls built

on sacred indigenous ground ("Smoke on the Highway"); to mourning the loss of old friends & mentors ("Your Town", "Rashad"), opening up old emotional wounds and scars ("(first dam)", "women's jeans"), and re-affirming the deep, complicated bonds of family ("Follow the Sound of My Voice") the fourth X Ambassadors album finds lead singer Sam Nelson Harris struggling to reclaim a sense of identity by re-visiting the ghosts of his past. Upstate New York, home to both Sam and his brother — keyboardist Casey Harris — serves as the perfect mirror to Sam's internal struggle: a place on the way to somewhere else. Like a giant rest-stop; undefined, abandoned, and forgotten. With "Townie", Sam and the band reconcile this by crafting a heartfelt, intricate portrayal of their hometown Ithaca, NY— a college-town filled with gas stations and abandoned store-fronts, surrounded by awe-inspiring natural beauty and uniquely North Eastern American desolation. But *who* you are isn't just where you come from: it's *who* you come from, too. Songs like "Follow the Sound of My Voice" in which Sam explores the heart-breaking complexity of being a sibling with a disability (Casey, who is blind), and "Your Town" in which he grieves the loss of his mentor and early champion and who's voice lingers at the end in a recorded voicemail; remind the listener that we are all products of who we've loved and who we've lost.

A gas station glows in the night, two miles outside of *your* home-town. The neon light makes you remember who you were once— a memory so strong you can almost feel it coiling around inside your own DNA. You drive past, onto the highway and into the night; that feeling still burning on the back of your neck as you watch the light slowly fade in the rear-view mirror.

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