

The background of the image is a vibrant, colorful space scene. A large, textured planet with a reddish-brown surface is visible on the left side. The sky is filled with stars and nebulae in shades of purple, blue, and orange. In the foreground, there are dark, jagged rock formations and a sandy or rocky ground. A prominent red, diamond-shaped stamp with the word "SAMPLE" in white, bold, capital letters is overlaid on the center of the image. The text "SOME PLANETS AREN'T SO CLOSE TO EARTH" is written in a large, white, serif font at the top of the image.

SOME PLANETS
AREN'T SO CLOSE
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SAMPLE

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CHAPTER ONE



He woke up in a cold sweat. Who was she? Whoever she was, she sure was beautiful, and when she touched him, the feeling it sent through his body was invigorating, pouring some sort of energy over him and through him that he had never felt before. Yet, it was just a dream. How unfortunate and yet, so very typical that was. Was it so much to ask to find love in reality? He thought about what it would be to see her, to touch her, to be able to hold her. She was exhilarating. But she was just a dream. While it felt so very real, it was just a dream. Wasn't it?

It didn't matter anymore. He was awake now, and that was the only thing that mattered at 3:00AM on a chilly fall morning. He had a long day ahead as it was and planned to watch the meteor shower that night through his new telescope. How he would manage to stay up late enough for that at this point was beyond him, but he figured he'll do what he did every other time he had to stay awake – consume what often seemed like an ocean's worth of coffee. No cream, two

packs of sugar, lots of caffeine. That was the only way he'd pull it off, and he couldn't miss this meteor shower.

The Perseid meteor shower was beautiful last August, and the new telescope was going to make them seem as if they were lights in his backyard. He sat in bed and longed for a couple hours more of sleep, but he knew that wasn't going to happen. He had slight insomnia as it was, so getting to sleep in the first place was hard enough, but once he woke up he was doomed to be awake for the day. In fact, there had been many nights where he fell asleep at 1:30AM and woke up just half an hour later at 2:00AM. He hated time. Mainly because there never seemed to be enough of it to go around, but also because the little bit of it he actually had was often spent working. He hated working because it consumed most of the day. It felt redundant, and it was. But he didn't care. He hated work and he hated time, and that wasn't going to change anytime soon.

He poured his first cup of coffee and stared out the window at the dark sky. He glanced at the clock on the wall. 3:08 AM. He rolled his eyes and looked back out at the sky. He thought about the girl in his dream and the vision of her captured him with what could only be described as a paralyzing embrace of admiration and adoration. His head filled with thoughts of the dream.

He remembered the dream in its entirety. First, he recalled the dream opening with a large field, the stars in the sky raining their beautiful light down upon the field where he was standing. Then she showed up. A beautiful girl walks into the field and stares at him. The next thing he knows, they are dancing, laughing, enjoying the presence of one another. He remembered leaning in to kiss her as her lips glistened and pushed out slightly towards him.

That's when he woke up. He longed immensely to return to his slumber and see her beautiful face once again, but he knew it wouldn't happen. Now that the dream had come and gone, it was but a short and sweet trip down a dead-end road in a rich neighborhood. He would give anything to see her again because he has never been so close to a woman as he was with her, at least not that he could remember.

You see, he lived a life filled with very simple and typical memories, as most of us do. He had his ups and downs, his bullies and crushes, and even his battles of teenage dilemmas in which thirteen isn't just an unlucky number but is also the age in which you fully learn every possible way to defy and disappoint your parents. Top those memories off with the lack of nostalgia and truth be told, he felt as if his life was more lackluster than a 90-minute film focused on real-time fungal growth and development. His biggest accomplishment in life was the purchase of his new telescope, something he was very anxious to put to use. So, it is to no surprise that seeing her and knowing her even for just that short moment in his slumber, was more significant and real than anything else he had ever experienced in his life.

Zane Pierce was sitting at work and doing everything in his power to avoid thinking about the girl from his dream. He felt like such a fool, being infatuated with someone he had met once who, of course was not even a real person but instead was someone his mind made up completely on its own.

"How are you today, Pierce?" Asked Rowan Slater, a co-worker of Zane's who spent most of his time flirting with the females in the office. Still, Rowan was the best friend Zane had made at the office, mainly because he was one of the very few people who even acknowledged the fact that

Zane worked there. Zane worked in accounting, and while his job mostly kept the office afloat, it was not something many people cared to know existed in any way, shape or form.

“Actually, I’m having a hard time focusing today, Rowan.” Zane replied. “I can’t seem to stop thinking about a dream I had last night.”

“A dream?” Rowan laughed. “Zane, you know dreams aren’t real, right?”

“Yes, I know that.” Zane replied. “But this one was... different. Very different.”

“Alright, spill it.” Rowan said, pulling a chair close and sitting in it, intrigued by Zane’s obsession over the dream.

“No way! I’m not telling you anything more than I already have.” Zane insisted.

“And why not?” Rowan asked, grinning.

“Because you’ll tease me for a year and a half over it.” Zane answered, turning back to his desk and attempting to get back to work.

“It must have been something real special if you’re not willing to let me tease you about it.” Rowan said. “Either that, or you’re wising up to me.”

“Perhaps both.” Zane joked. Rowan grinned as he walked back over to his desk and returned to work.

The day was going way too slow. Zane was excited to try out his new telescope that night. If there was anything that could take his mind from the girl of his dreams, it was staring up into space at all the beautiful stars and planets. In fact, the only thing he could think of other than the dream he had was in fact looking through that telescope and seeing what his old

telescope couldn't see. Yet, he had about 4 hours of his work shift remaining.

"Of course, this day would drag on like this." He mumbled. "There isn't enough work in the world to speed this day up." Just at that moment, Zane's boss walked by and overheard his griping.

"Am I hearing correctly, Mr. Pierce? It sounds to me like you need more work." Zane clenched the pen in his hand. He despised his boss, Leonard Ross, intensely.

"No sir, I have plenty of work to do." He replied, forcing a calm tone upon his voice.

"It doesn't sound that way. But it's alright; I've got plenty you can do." Leonard put a file down on Zane's desk and smirked. "In this folder there are details regarding a new bank account of ours, along with instructions on the exact numbers I want you to move from our sales account over to the new one."

"What's the reason for this new account?" Zane asked, curiously.

"That's most definitely not any of your business, Pierce. Do your job and think again before you ask nose questions." Leonard demanded.

This wasn't an unusual situation for Zane. Leonard Ross spent much of his time insulting and critiquing just about every single aspect of Zane and his work. Zane was denied the privilege of knowing any details, talking to anyone ranked higher than Leonard, and of course, from leaving anything at his desk overnight that wasn't work related. Zane watched as Leonard Ross walked away and shook his head.

"What a jerk." He uttered. Leonard turned around and glared at Zane as if he had heard him, though it couldn't have been possible. Zane faked a smile and motioned the folder

towards Leonard, implying that he was going to begin working on it right away. Leonard nodded in approval and went on his way.

“Problems with the boss man again, Pierce?” Rowan asked from across the room. There was snickering from around the room.

“Of course.” Zane thought to himself. “They notice me enough to laugh when the boss gets down my throat.”

The next few hours of work seemed to drag on even slower than they did before the extra work was assigned, and Zane barely got through the day. Still, just when he had reached the point in which he was ready to get up and walk out on the job, the clock struck 5pm and it was time to go home. He stood up and grabbed his coat.

“What’re you up to tonight, Zane?” Rowan asked as he walked over from his desk.

“I’ve got my new telescope now; I’ll be spending the night looking up at the stars!” Zane said with excitement. Rowan stared at him for a moment as if he wasn’t sure if Zane was being serious.

“You’re... you’re actually excited about that?” Rowan laughed. He didn’t understand the love Zane had for the stars.

“Yes, very much.” Zane answered immediately.

“No.” Rowan insisted. “You’re not going to do that, you’re going to come and join me and these two lovely co-workers of ours, Emily and Erika. Twins, you know!”

“Rowan, it sounds nice and all, but I’ve been looking forward to setting up the new telescope all day.” Zane declined.

“You’re choosing Space over twins, Zane. Come on, Erika thinks you’re cute!” Rowan pleaded. Zane stared and thought for a moment.

“You want a date with Emily and can’t get it unless someone doubles up, so she can bring her sister?” He guessed. Rowan nodded.

“So, will you do it?”

“Rowan, I…” Before Zane could answer, he was interrupted by a soft voice behind him.

“I like stars.” Zane and Rowan turned to see Emily Watkins, the girl Rowan had finally landed a possible date with. She smiled, and Rowan knew what he was going to have to do to make this date night happen.

“Alright, so why don’t we all come to your place tonight, Zane?” He asked. Zane honestly didn’t want company at all, and had no interest in dating anyone at that point in his life, but he could tell how much Rowan wanted this date with Emily to happen.

“Okay.” Zane said. “I’ll have to set it up and get the settings right on it first, but why don’t you guys come over around 11:30?”

“That sounds perfect.” Rowan said, grinning at Emily. He moved closer to Zane. “I owe you one, buddy.” He said softly. Zane could tell he was doing the right thing. Still, all he could think about was looking at the stars, and then going to bed and, as unlikely as it was, hoping to see the girl from his dreams once again.