

Grounded

written by

Brandon Petersen

Rhino CG

bpetersen@rhinocg.com

INT. MORNING

The morning sun beams through the shades of a small, minimally furnished one-bedroom apartment-home to Owen Jackson (mid-20's).

The bedroom is barely big enough for Owen's bed. The bathroom is more like a closet; the kitchen like a narrow alleyway. A small table with two chairs sits at the end of the kitchen with a small window overlooking the city.

STATIC MONTAGE OF OWEN'S APARTMENT.

CAMERA DOLLYS IN THROUGH GALLEY KITCHEN TOWARDS KITCHEN TABLE.

Overdue bills, mostly medical, are covering the table.

The radio drones in the background. Zoned out.

RADIO HOST

I think we can all agree that this year has gone different than we planned. Despite this pandemic that's raged across the world, there has been at least one change for the better: More people are getting outside.

Who knew it would take a worldwide pandemic to get people to look up from their screens!

A notification chime on his phone interrupts his thoughts. He pulls up his email and reads:

CLOSE UPS OF SCREEN HIGHLIGHTING DIFFERENT SECTIONS TO MAKE FOR EASY SKIMMING.

MR. JACKSON,

WE REGRET TO INFORM YOU THAT DUE TO THESE UNPRECEDENTED TIMES, THE EXECUTIVE TEAM OF SOURCE BORN HAS COME TO THE DIFFICULT DECISION TO MAKE REDUCTIONS IN OUR WORKFORCE. UNFORTUNATELY, YOU ARE BEING AFFECTED BY THIS TRANSITION. AS SUCH, TODAY IS YOUR LAST DAY OF WORK.

YOU WILL RECEIVE YOUR FINAL CHECK IN
THE MAIL IN LINE WITH THE SCHEDULED
PAYROLL.

WE EXTEND OUR SINCEREST APOLOGIES AND
WISH YOU THE BEST IN YOUR FUTURE
OPPORTUNITIES.

SINCERELY,

BLAKE BASKEN

SR. HR MANAGER

SOURCE BORN, INC.

Owen has his hands on his face with his teeth grit. He's slowly rocking back and forth in his chair.

In his frustration, Owen slams his phone down onto the table and swings his arm flinging the bills across the room. The follow through of his arm, knocks a picture frame off of the kitchen counter.

WIDE FROM GROUND LOOKING UP AT OWEN'S REACTION. OTS OF PICKING IT UP.

Owen picks up the remains off of the ground. The glass is shattered, the frame split at the corners. His demeanor shifts from frustration to sadness. The picture is of Owen's late parents at their wedding.

The radio drones on, but becomes more prominent as something that's said catches his attention:

RADIO HOST

That being said, with the recent return of Bob and Doug from the International Space Station, space is trending at an all-time high. Star gazing has become a popular pastime. But don't think that you'll just be able to go outside at night and see the stars.

In fact, a new atlas of the night sky across the entire globe shows that more than 80 percent of the planet's land areas—and 99 percent of the population of the United States and Europe—live under skies so blotted with man-made light that the Milky Way has become virtually invisible.

Owen sets down the photo.

MOVE TO BEDROOM

CAMERA WITH WIDE LENS SITS ON SHELF IN CLOSET

Owen reaches into his closet and grabs an old file storage box labeled "Dad."

Radio continues to be heard from the adjacent kitchen.

RADIO HOST (CONT'D)

Can you believe that? It's right above us every night yet we're blinded by the light.

RADIO HOST (CONT'D)

Now for some classic tunes from Space Race of the 60's.

Oldies music plays in the background as Owen time travels through memories.

Sitting on the bed, Owen flips through some old photos. After a few, he gets to a funeral program: Terrance Jackson III July 20th, 1959 - November 2nd, 2019

Emotional, Owen puts the program to the side. Next in the stack is an envelope with "Owen" written in cursive. Its dated November 1st, 2019, the day before his father's passing.

Pulling out the a letter, a deep, raspy voice reads:

TERRANCE

Life has quite the sense of humor. It's important to remember that and not take it too seriously. I've thought a lot about that lately.

INT. NIGHT IN TERRANCE'S SUBURBAN HOME, NOV 1, 2019

Terrance is writing a letter while he lies in bed.

TERRANCE

Time is an interesting thing. We never know how long we'll have, yet even for me it seems like I have all the time in the world. Some days drag, and others seem to go by in an instant.

Show montage of Terrance putzing around in his home: by the window watching passersby, TV in the living room, eating dinner alone* (hospice nurse give him his pills), etc...

TERRANCE (CONT'D)

But the one thing we can all be certain of is none of us know how much time we'll have.

INT. MORNING CONT. OWEN'S APARTMENT, PRESENT DAY

CAMERA IS ON KITCHEN TABLE SHOOTING TOWARDS THE FRONT DOOR. THE BROKEN PICTURE FRAME SITS IN THE FOREGROUND AS OWEN EXITS THE APARTMENT.

TERRANCE

There's no use worrying about things you have no control over. And most certainly don't worry about me.

EXT. DAY PARKING LOT OF APARTMENT

MIXTURE OF CAR MOUNTED SHOTS

As Owen embarks on an unknown journey, we continue to hear his father's voice reading the letter.

TERRANCE

I'm at peace. I've lived a life full of ups and downs. No one escapes the downs. What makes you a man—a decent person in general—is what you do with the downs.

Owen takes a deep breath and pulls away.

EXT. DAY DRIVING DOWN THE ROAD

CAMERA HOOD-MOUNTED POINTING TOWARDS OWEN IN FRAME-LEFT.
REFLECTIONS OF BUILDINGS AND TREES RUN UP THE WIND SHEILD.

TERRANCE

With the weight of the world on
your shoulders, it's easy to get
sucked into this idea of "why me."
Well don't.

It's a vicious cycle that only
leads to hate and heartache.

INT. NIGHT IN TERRANCE'S BEDROOM, 2019

As Terrance writes, he looks up as he reflects on his life.

TERRANCE

Will your life have regrets?
Absolutely. Anyone that says they
don't is lying. We're all
imperfect, but that's not an
excuse, it's an invitation to
learn.

EXT. DAY OLD GAS STATION

Owen is pumping up his car as he is now hours into his solo
road trip.

TERRANCE

Never pass up an opportunity to
learn. Keep your eyes open. Look
around—there are always
opportunities to lift, to serve,
and to love.

A lady at the gas station comes up to Owen while he's pumping
fuel to ask for gas money. At first, he turns her away, then
remembering his father's letter, calls back to her. He pulls
out his wallet and gives her a \$10 bill—the only cash he has.

Back on the road.

Owen looks off to the horizon and the breathtaking landscape
leads him to pull over at a scenic stop. He takes a picture
with his phone and then leans against his car with his hands
in his pockets continuing to take in the view.

TERRANCE (CONT'D)

Oh to love. Son, I loved your mother from the moment I laid eyes on her.

INT. NIGHT IN TERRANCE'S BEDROOM

TERRANCE

Like the star that she was, she lit up every room she entered. Even now as I look to the sky, I can feel her warmth shine down on me. She was beautifully stubborn till the very end. It's a shame she ever had to face cancer. Only now can I truly empathize with her suffering.

Terrance looks out the window in his room towards the stars.

EXT. DUSK

Owen pulls up to a trail head where he proceeds to hike to catch the sunset at summit.

TERRANCE

Find someone to love. Cherish every moment. A person who loves, and is loved, is the richest human in the universe. It's the universal currency that perpetually pays dividends throughout your life and beyond.

SHOTS OF OWEN HIKING

TERRANCE (CONT'D)

Like all of us, I have my regrets. And I learned from each misstep I made, but sometimes there's not much you can do.

Owen meets a group of people at the summit. Per the new normal, they bump elbows as a greeting gesture.

Owen spots a particularly cute girl that catches his eye. Her smile causes a smile to pass onto Owen.

INT. NIGHT IN TERRANCE'S HOSPITAL ROOM

Terrance looks at a photo of Owen with the partially completed letter under his hands.

TERRANCE

As I sit here, I realize I spent too much time looking up at the sky versus what I had right in front of me.

EXT. NIGHT AT A CAMP FIRE

Owen joins the group from the hike for a campfire. Looking through the flames, Owen and the girl from the hike continue to exchange smiles.

After several perceived hours of conversations, Owen nods his head gesturing that they split from the fire for a more private conversation.

The night sky is crystal clear with the Milky Way beaming brilliantly.

TERRANCE

Sometimes we think we're so important—that we're so smart. As we've done more to reach further into our galaxy and beyond, I've learned this: for whatever reason life has been allowed to exist here on our blue marble.

It's important to know it's not all about you. You've got to learn to work with others. Embrace differences as they can create new strengths.

As the two gaze at the stars, the girl leans her head on Owen's shoulder. He puts his arm around her back and pulls her in as they continue to talk and look at the sky. Their silhouette is cut by the passing stars as night approaches dawn.

TERRANCE (CONT'D)

It's easy to get along with people who like what you like, and agree with you. The real challenge of life is getting along with people different from you. People who look different, who act different, who believe different.

(MORE)

TERRANCE (CONT'D)

When you do this, you'll learn this crucial lesson: beauty exists all around you—in nature, in people, in life. It's not about your situation, it's about your attitude.

EXT. MORNING

The coals of the fire give off a light smoke. The girl fell asleep leaning against Owen. Owen, looks at her as he continues to ponder his father's letter and the events of the past 24 hours.

The girl wakes up, embarrassed to have made Owen so immobile. They laugh it off. She grabs Owen's phone to put in her contact info: "Katie."

TERRANCE

So take chances. Learn from others. Do good. Be kind. Choose to be happy even when it's hard.

INT. EVENING BACK AT OWEN'S APARTMENT

OWEN ENTERS THE APARTMENT. THE CAMERA SETUP MIRRORS HIS EXIT FROM THE DAY BEFORE.

Owen walks to the table with a shopping bag in hand. He picks up the remains of the picture frame and shakes the glass into the trash can.

He pulls out a new frame and carefully restores the picture to its new home. He also places the letter from his father behind the picture as a perpetual reminder.

TERRANCE

Live every minute and find someone to love with all your heart. When you look up at the stars at night, know your mother and I are watching over you.

Owen sets the picture frame back in place. He gets a call—it's Katie.

OWEN

Hey. Ya, I just got back. How are you?

Owen steps into the other room to continues the call as he excited paces while talking.

CAMERA DOLLY IN ON PICTURE FRAME AS THE CALL IS MUFFLED FROM BEING IN THE NEXT ROOM.

OWEN (CONT'D)

I had a great time. What are you
doing this weekend?

Title card: Grounded