

GROUNDED

A Short Script
Written by

Ron Houghton

FADE IN:

INT. UPSCALE RESTAURANT - NIGHT

SUPER: Once upon a time... in the new millennium.

The room is filled with well dressed diners. We move through the room. While most people are eating or talking, we do see the occasional diner texting, talking, or checking their phones for various reasons.

We move in on a candlelit booth. STEVE (32), and TALIA (25), dressed up for their date. Large menu's propped on the table.

TALIA

All the Yelp reviews say the food here is amazing.

STEVE

Do they? Good.
(reading)
I can't decide what to order?

TALIA

I have to say I was pretty surprised when you asked me out.

STEVE

Really, why?

TALIA

I saw you checking me out last week at Beth's party. I thought if you couldn't muster the chance with a few drinks inside you then you never would.

STEVE

I guess I was just waiting for the right time.

TALIA

The right time huh? Oh, speaking of time, what time does the movie start?

STEVE

I'm not sure. I think nine-ish.

TALIA

Go ahead and look it up then.

STEVE

(pretends he missed it)
What's that?

TALIA

On your phone. See what time the show starts.

Steve looks forlorn. This is the moment he's been dreading. A long drawn beat, then mournfully.

STEVE

I uh, ...don't own a cell phone.

SOUND FX: An Earth shaking BOOM is heard.

Talia, horrified, lowers her menu.

TALIA

Excuse me?

STEVE

(spits it out)

I don't own a cell phone.

From the look on Talia's face, you might think he said he was some space alien from another planet.

TALIA

Yeah... I heard what you said. I just didn't believe it.

STEVE

It's just that over the years I guess I never found a reason for having one.

Talia is so flabbergasted she can't think straight.

TALIA

But, but what if you need to talk to someone. What if there's an emergency? What if whatever?

STEVE

There's always a phone around somewhere. I really --

TALIA

(over)

What about everything else - directions - internet - e-mail - movie listings - texting!

(epiphany)

My god, that's why you always called and never texted.

STEVE

I'm really sorry. I just never felt the need. My home phone was always -

TALIA
Stop talking.

The WAITER arrives.

WAITER
 And how are you two this evening?
 Would you like to start with some
 drinks...?

STEVE
 Yes, I think I'd like to have --

TALIA
 He doesn't have a phone.

WAITER
 I'm sorry?

TALIA
 My date here. He doesn't have a
 cell phone.

WAITER
 That can be rough. I broke my phone
 last month, and I was without --

TALIA
No. He. Doesn't. Own. One.

WAITER
 (stunned)
 At all?

Talia slowly shakes her head.

TALIA
 Uh uh.

WAITER
 (to Steve)
 How old are you?

STEVE
 Thirty, I'm thirty.

WAITER
 You know my grandmother has one. So
 does my eight year old niece. I
 mean it's 2016 - who doesn't have a
 cell phone? I mean get with the
 times already.

TALIA
Right?

STEVE
 It's really not a big deal.

WAITER
Yes, ...I see.

The waiter puts away his note-pad. Mildly coughs.

WAITER (CONT'D)
Excuse me.

The waiter walks away. Steve calls after him.

STEVE
What about our drinks?
(to Talia)
He must be really busy.

TALIA
Yeah, I'm sure that's it.

We follow the waiter into the kitchen through a swinging door. Through the swinging door we get brief glimpses of the waiter informing the other staff of this stunning revelation.

BACK AT THE TABLE

Talia stares at Steve. Studying him like some science experiment gone horribly, horribly wrong.

Steve can feel her daggers shooting right through him.

STEVE
Should I have told you?

TALIA
(immediate)
You're damn right you should have!
(leans in; whispering, but direct)
It's not the kind of thing you hide from people. Not someone you consider a friend.

STEVE
(heartfelt)
I'm really sorry.

Steve looks over to

THE KITCHEN AREA

To see the kitchen staff poking their heads out the door to get a better glance at Steve.

Talia tries to not look embarrassed.

Waiters begin checking on their respective tables.

STEVE'S POV

Each waiter whispers to their guests. Exclamatory hushed chatter sweeps across the restaurant like a brushfire. It's obvious the word is out among the diners.

The diners stare at them. A few snap pictures with their cell phones.

Talia stews in her seat.

STEVE (CONT'D)
Just ignore them.

TALIA
You're serious?

A camera flash goes off right in Talia's face.

TALIA (CONT'D)
I'm sorry, but I have to be leaving now.

Talia grabs her purse.

STEVE
No. Please. Stay. We haven't eaten yet. I'll just get the waiter.

Steve signals the passing waiter to no avail.

TALIA
You realize he's not coming back?

Talia stands. Grabs her purse.

TALIA (CONT'D)
I'll see you tomorrow.

STEVE
But what about the movie?

TALIA
I don't think it's a good idea.

Talia smiles at Steve sweetly. Cants her head. Reflects on what might have been.

TALIA (CONT'D)
See ya.

STEVE
Talia wait.

She turns in half step. Raised eyebrows.

STEVE (CONT'D)
Tomorrow, at the office. Could you not tell anyone about this?

With every ounce of sincerity.

TALIA
Get some help Steve.

Talia exits.

Steve looks at all the staring faces still directed his way.
Takes a nervous swallow from his water.

A busboy enters frame. Blows out the small candle on the
table, leaving Steve alone in darkness.

CUT TO:

INT. MEDICAL CLINIC - RECEPTION - DAY

Steve sits with several other PATIENTS. They all look
legitimately injured or sick.

An old ASIAN WOMAN has a tremendous sneeze. She blows her
nose hard and loud. The sound echoes in the room.

Another MAN, probably in construction, tends to his towel
wrapped, bleeding hand, by applying pressure with the other.

Steve nervously raps his finger tips on his chair.

RECEPTIONIST (O.S.)
Steven Oldman!

Steve walks up to the reception desk.

STEVE
Yes.

The receptionist hands him a clipboard.

RECEPTIONIST
Looks like you forgot some
information.

Steve looks at it.

INSERT: CLIPBOARD

Steve has only filled out the home phone number, leaving the
cell phone space blank.

Steve hands back the clipboard.

STEVE
It's all there.
(leans in; whispers)
I don't own a cell phone.

RECEPTIONIST
 What'chu mean you don't own no cell
 phone?!

A hushed silence overtakes the room. Even the Asian woman has
 ceased her coughing and sneezing.

STEVE
 (ashamed)
 You see that's why I'm here.

RECEPTIONIST
 Hmm hmm. I see. We better get you
 in right away.
 (off the cut bleeding man)
 Excuse me Mr. Phillips, you were
 supposed to be next, but I don't
 know if you heard, but this man -

Mr. Phillips raises his wrapped bloody stump, waves an okay.

MR. PHILLIPS
 (to Steve)
 Please.

Steve gives him a polite nod of thanks.

CUT TO:

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE

Steve sits on the bunk. Paraffin paper. Pants off. Kicking
 his heels against the bottom frame of the bed.

The DOCTOR enters. Reading his chart.

DOCTOR
 Well, Mister Oldman what seems to
 be the problem?

An awkward beat.

STEVE
 I uh,... It's just...

DOCTOR
 Come on, spit it out son.

STEVE
 (blurts it out)
 I don't own a cell phone. I never
 have.

The doctor presses the clipboard against his chest. Nods
 thoughtfully.

DOCTOR

Well, that is serious. Cell phone technology is an integral part of modern society. Today everyone has one. From Taiwanese fisherman, to Mongolian sheep herders... My goodness, a twenty-first century life without a cellular phone just isn't practical son.

(checks the chart again)

How old are you?

STEVE

Thirty.

(beat)

Thirty two.

(rushed, worked up)

God! I even started lying about my age - like that would matter somehow. You see, it's just that I never found a time when I ever needed one. Everyone around me always had one, I always thought I could just...

Steve runs out of breath.

DOCTOR

Shhh, shhh. It'll be okay.

The doctor places his hand on Steve's shoulder.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

But I do suggest we get you on a plan immediately.

STEVE

Immediately?

DOCTOR

You're way behind the rest of us. I think the right thing to do is to treat the condition aggressively. Long term options with punitive contracts.

Steve thinks hard about it; then finally.

STEVE

Okay.

The doctor smiles, pulls out his prescription pad.

DOCTOR

You've made the right choice.

The doctor writes up a scrip.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
Take this to the nearest mobility
chain. They'll know what to do.

Steve takes the scrip, marking the moment with resonance.

STEVE
Thank you Doctor.

DOCTOR
Just remember. It's never too late.
(pats his shoulder)

Steve smiles. Hopeful.

CUT TO:

INT. SHOPPING MALL - DAY

Steve slowly approaches the mobility store. He stops outside
the entrance.

INSIDE THE MOBILITY STORE

The hipster teenage staff, decked out with sleeve tats,
hooped earrings, and intricately cut facial hair, see him
standing in the doorway. They can spot his type a mile away
like some rare exotic bird. The white whale of the cellular
industry. A Newbie!

OS we hear an Angel's choir take flight.

Steve is just about to step inside the store when we hear...

VOICE (O.S.)
Hey, you, stop!

Steve turns to see

WENDY (24), a beautiful red head, walking his way. She's
wearing a button that reads "Technology's not your friend".

Steve is captivated by her.

WENDY
Are you sure you want to go in
there?

STEVE
No, not really.

WENDY
Then why are you then?

STEVE
I've been told to.

WENDY

Told by who?

STEVE

Ummm, friends, family, co-workers,
dates...

(holds up the scrip)

My doctor. Basically society as a
whole.

WENDY

Well I'm part of society, and I
don't think you should. Don't you
see how this whole culture is so
obsessed with staring at screens,
that we've forgotten how to even
relate to each other like normal
people anymore?

STEVE

That's what I've been trying to
say, but no one would ever listen.

WENDY

I'm listening.

(looks him over)

How old are you - like thirty?

STEVE

Thirty two.

WENDY

That's so hot.

STEVE

Really?

WENDY

Oh yeah. You're like a Siberian
white tiger. An endangered species.

(beat)

Listen. I'll make you a deal. You
don't walk in there and I let you
buy me a cup of coffee. I might
even write my phone number on a
napkin for you.

STEVE

Home phone?

WENDY

Of course. I'm totally grounded.

STEVE

Wireless or chord?

WENDY
Chord all the way. A twenty-footer.
Guess what else?

STEVE
What?

WENDY
It's wall mounted.

STEVE
You just blew my mind.

WENDY
My name's Wendy.

STEVE
Steve.

Wendy holds out her hand for Steve to take.

Steve crumples the scrip in his hand. Throws a perfect swish
in a nearby garbage can.

He takes Wendy's hand.

The new couple walk away happily.

IN THE MOBILITY STORE WINDOW

The staff have their faces pressed against the glass,
watching their elusive prey escape.

Steve and Wendy walk off hand in hand.

A heart balloon takes shape in the screen enveloping our
couple. OS we hear the familiar ring of our old home
telephone.

SUPER: The Beginning...

FADE TO BLACK.