GROUNDED

A Short Script
Written by

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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 fishermen, 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.