

Ear Buds

by

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DESCRIPTION

When we love our devices, and they love us back.

CHARACTERS

- JOSH
- DOCTOR

If a female is used for JOSH, her name will be JOSS. “He” is used for convenience in the script. DOCTOR can be male or female.

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SOUND: Subway train just pulling away from the station.

JOSH has an iPod in hand with the ear buds snaking into his ears. He runs on to a subway platform but just misses his train—mouthed curses, then settles back in to his music.

Something comes to mind, and he goes to pull out one of the ear buds. It won't come out. He tries the other—it won't come out. He also discovers that the iPod is stuck to his hand, and he can't loosen it. This terrifies him.

LIGHT: Abrupt shift of light to the DOCTOR's office—no need for a blackout.

DOCTOR's office.

DOCTOR

Come in, come in.

DOCTOR indicates for JOSH to sit. JOSH sits while DOCTOR looks through some paperwork. DOCTOR speaks a bit overloud.

DOCTOR
It's been a while—

JOSH
Yes—

DOCTOR
Since we've—a couple of years—

JOSH
Yes—I turned it off, so you don't have to—

DOCTOR closes the folder.

DOCTOR
So you can hear—

JOSH
Yes—a little—muffled, like, you know, with cotton stuck in—

DOCTOR
The ear canal—

JOSH
Yes—

DOCTOR
Muted—

JOSH
Yes—

DOCTOR
But you can still—

JOSH
I can still hear you. I wish I could hear you tell me everything's going to be all right. I haven't been able to change my shirt because the wires—

DOCTOR
Not to worry—let's take a look and see what we can see.

DOCTOR puts on gloves, pulls on both ear buds as if to pull them out of the ears. JOSH yells in pain.

DOCTOR
You really can't, can you?

JOSH
That hurts!

DOCTOR
Just like you said.

This intrigues DOCTOR; his interest perks up. He gets a lighting instrument, such as might be used in examining the ear canal, and a magnifying glass. DOCTOR examines the ears and JOSH's hand.

JOSH
You're mulling. You're nodding. You're "humming." This is not good, is it?

DOCTOR
On. The. Contrary.

DOCTOR finishes. He is impressed by what he thinks he's seeing.

JOSH
Well?

DOCTOR
I've never seen anything like this—

JOSH
Like what, exactly?

DOCTOR
What else can I call it? Integration—

JOSH
What?

DOCTOR

Integration—man and machine—inanimate and animate binding—
Terminator—“I’ll be back”—that sort of thing.

JOSH

That is not—

DOCTOR takes JOSH’s hand, picks up the magnifying glass.

DOCTOR

See this?

JOSH

Tell me what I’m—

DOCTOR

Those little filaments—along the edge—you’ve got them in your
ears as well.

JOSH

No I don’t!

DOCTOR

Yes you do. Like the stuff the gypsy moths—

JOSH

Stop it!

DOCTOR

Integration, the filaments of integration.

An idea is forming in DOCTOR’s mind.

DOCTOR

How much do you use this device?

JOSH

Not that much—

DOCTOR

Subways, buses—

JOSH

Well, of course—cuts down on the noise, don't have to listen to the people—

DOCTOR

And work?

JOSH

I'm a cubicle rat, in my little maze—my pictures, post-its, memos, to-do list, goddamn phone—sorry—only thing that keeps me sane.

DOCTOR

So, a lot.

JOSH tries to make a lame joke.

JOSH

Not in the shower! So, yeah, a lot. Without my music—

DOCTOR

Spend a lot of time on that.

JOSH

With downloading, rearranging, checking sites—

DOCTOR

A girlfriend? Boyfriend?

JOSH

No to both.

DOCTOR

So, a lot of time alone.

JOSH

I've got [friends]—

DOCTOR

Integration—no wonder.

JOSH

That can't happen.

DOCTOR

Has. To you. We love our devices—and they love us back.

JOSH

They can't do that—

DOCTOR

Where are the lines?

JOSH

They're not built to—

DOCTOR

Where are the lines? Is any matter really inanimate if it has electricity streaming through it, handles information, guides us along—looks like you got one that crossed the threshold, leaped the barrier, crawled out onto the land.

JOSH

It's just a mach[in]e--

But the thought settles into JOSH's mind.

JOSH

Integration? Really?

DOCTOR

Like a singer and his song.

DOCTOR opens the folder to make a note.

DOCTOR

When you do want to schedule the biopsy?

JOSH

For what?

DOCTOR

I have to know more than I know—surgery on the ear buds could be tricky—you are probably the first, you know, and with this we could be—

JOSH doesn't respond.

DOCTOR

You do want to remove it? You have to remove—

JOSH

Just wait a minute.

DOCTOR

What are you waiting for? You don't really [want]—

JOSH

Just wait.

DOCTOR

The longer I have to—I mean, the longer we have to—

JOSH gestures for DOCTOR to hold up. DOCTOR does, but he is agitated.

JOSH

I get freaked out if I can't remember where I put it down—if I think it's gone lost—the thought, you know, of—losing my—I guess that's what it is—my companion. Friend.

JOSH gazes at the device in his hand.

DOCTOR

You're still going to remove it, though, aren't you?

As if JOSH has not heard DOCTOR. DOCTOR tries a new tactic.

DOCTOR

Why that day? That morning it wasn't, apparently, and then by that afternoon it was—did you even feel it when it happened?—

The realization "why" hits JOSH.

DOCTOR

What?

JOSH

I was thinking of—

DOCTOR

Of what?

JOSH

Upgrading. Something completely new. That afternoon, actually.
I'd saved up the money, I had just missed the subway—

A momentary silence.

JOSH

Love.

DOCTOR

Total one-ness—reduction of loneliness.

JOSH

I got what I didn't have but wanted. But I don't think I wanted this.

DOCTOR

It's made you an offer. We really don't know what we want until
we're made an offer. The question is: are you going to accept?
You're not really going to accept—are you?

An anguished moment of decision.

JOSH

I—can't accept.

DOCTOR looks relieved.

DOCTOR

Your final answer?

JOSH

This isn't love.

*DOCTOR opens the folder, starts taking notes. JOSH takes no notice of what DOCTOR says;
instead, he stares at the device in his hands.*

DOCTOR

Good, good! Good decision. I'll schedule the biopsy, get the tests done—I think your insurance will cover this—no matter, we'll find a way—you're making the right decision, my friend, the right decision—

LIGHT: As DOCTOR writes in the folder, lights fade to black.

SOUND: As lights fade to black a great cacophony of daily sounds arises, a din of tremendous power and violence. It fills the theatre. It fills the heart with dread until the light bumps up.

LIGHT: Abrupt, curt, and impolite bump from darkness to light on DOCTOR as he leafs through notes in a medical folder.

JOSH stands in the doorway, wearing a new shirt, sans ear buds and iPod. On the desk is the iPod with ear buds attached.

DOCTOR paces, holding a sheaf of notes, reading, sometimes out loud.

DOCTOR

The uses for which this new tissue can be used: self-healing cosmetic surgery, medical service in the field—oh, yes, the military contracts!

JOSH's appearance startles him.

DOCTOR

What are you doing [here]—but of course, come in—

Before DOCTOR can complete his words, JOSH is already moving. He goes to pick up the iPod and earbuds, but DOCTOR pulls them just out of reach.

DOCTOR

Is something wrong? I thought we had finished up everything.

Something in JOSH's demeanor brings DOCTOR up short. Painful silence.

DOCTOR

I was just been going over my notes about the surgery—I've been asked to write a paper—deliver a presentation—it's been years since I've done that. Feels good.

JOSH doesn't answer. To fill the awkward space, DOCTOR examines him.

DOCTOR

And how are you doing? The healing looks on track—not much scarring, nothing misshapen—you still have lovely lobes! Everything looks clean and bright. I think we can call this “mission accomplished.”

JOSH

Tell me.

DOCTOR

Tell you what?

JOSH

Tell me what you found.

DOCTOR

I've told you that already.

JOSH

You didn't tell me everything.

DOCTOR

You have to get beyond—

JOSH

Everything. The tissue—

DOCTOR tries an off-handed tone.

DOCTOR

The tissue. The tissue!

JOSH

Tell me the truth.

DOCTOR

The lab found the tissue to be this hybrid, part your genetic material and part whatever the iPod casing is made out of—not one or the other but both—

JOSH

When you cut it—cut into it—

DOCTOR

It wouldn't stay cut—it would re-attach itself.

JOSH

It healed itself.

DOCTOR

You could say that.

A moment of suspension. JOSH stands, grabs the iPod and ear buds from the desk, DOCTOR a moment too slow to stop him. JOSH moves until he's behind DOCTOR.

JOSH

And what are you doing with the tissue, a self-healing tissue—made out of my body—don't bother—you are patenting it, it's all over the place that you are taking what you took from me, stole from me, and turning it into money.

JOSH, behind DOCTOR, garrotes him with the ear buds cord. DOCTOR dies. JOSH puts in the ear buds, turns on the iPod.

SOUND: Music fills the theater.

JOSH looks at the iPod lovingly.

JOSH

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Never again, I promise.

Lights to black as music builds and JOSH dances.