

MISTER MAJOR AND THE MINOR WIFE

a one act play

by

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*For Nancy*

## THE CHARACTERS

EDITH MAJOR, late 40s.

JOSEPH MAJOR, 18-20.

FOUR CIRCUS PERFORMERS, a strong man (who also serves as PETER aka MR. MAJOR), a ringmaster, her clown, and the minor wife.

**THE PLACE**

Edith and Joseph Major's small studio apartment  
in New York's Lower East Side.

A psychiatric hospital in unknown suburbia.

**THE TIME**

Spanning hallucination, memory, and reality.

## MISTER MAJOR AND THE MINOR WIFE

Music starts as the three performers take over.

This flashback travels to a 1950s circus where Mister Major and the Minor Wife, played by the male and one female performer, are performing their famous act.

The other female performer acts as the Ringmaster.

She pops up from behind the couch.

"RINGMASTER"

Ladies and Gentleman . . . the moment you've all been waiting for! Join me in welcoming . . . Mister Major and the Minor Wife!

She crosses behind the couch with an "Applause" sign as the two performers acting as "PETER" and EDITH enter in front of the couch.

"PETER"

Greetings all! I'm Mister Major to the Master, but Peter to my friends . . . This is my Minor Wife, but her name doesn't quite matter. . . She's very pretty, but she can't do much else . . .

The RINGMASTER crosses behind the couch with a "Laugh" sign.

Tonight, because you're our favorite crowd . . . we'll be performing our most impressive act . . .

My beautiful wife will saw her beloved husband in half.

The RINGMASTER crosses behind the couch with a "Gasp" sign.

Don't worry, lovely people . . . I trust her.

"EDITH" rolls out the saw box for "PETER". With her help, he places himself inside.

Thank you, darling. Saw away.

"EDITH" reveals a large saw from within the couch where EDITH lays.

"PETER" screams.

The vibrant lights begin to strobe and the music glitches until they both go out.

The RINGMASTER crosses in front of the couch with a blank sign.

The lights come back on and EDITH has sat upright.

EDITH

Dammit, Edie.

She stands, bolting into the bedroom.

The apartment is completely empty.

JOSEPH comes down the aisle.

He enters the apartment with a plastic pharmacy bag.

He closes the door and scans the room.

He goes to the table and empties out the contents of the bag, which includes

several over-the-counter pills.

He stares at them all.

He paces around the apartment until he stops at the window and looks out.

He suddenly turns around and grabs the ibuprofen, emptying out about 40.

He tosses them back and forth in his hands.

JOSEPH

Dad?

(Pause)

I don't blame you.

(Pause)

It is what's best . . . what's best for all of us.

JOSEPH lifts the pills to his mouth, pauses for one last breath, and swallows.

See you soon.

EDITH emerges from her bedroom.

JOSEPH sits on the couch.

EDITH

Joey?

JOSEPH

Don't worry, Mother, I can't see him . . . but I feel him . . . constantly.

EDITH notices the pill bottle and moves toward JOSEPH.

JOSEPH

He never leaves . . . He's never done . . . He's a part of me . . .

EDITH sits next to Joseph.

They both face forward.

Did you ever miss him?

EDITH

Are we still doing honest answers?

Once. When you graduated. It was the only time I thought for sure I'd made the right choice.

JOSEPH

But it was the wrong one.

EDITH

The selfish one. I wanted you. I needed you. So I kept you. Half to spite him.

(Pause)

I'm sorry.

JOSEPH

Please don't be.

EDITH

If it had been your choice, what would you have done?

JOSEPH

Honest answers?

They laugh.

EDITH

Honest answers.

JOSEPH

I've thought about it a lot . . . and I never know. Sometimes I don't think my life was ever meant for *me* though. I think I was born for a purpose that has nothing to do with becoming something, or doing great things. I

think I was born for you. I wonder if I were never alive, would you have ever survived?

EDITH

You have done great things, Joseph. However selfish it sounds, you did save me.

JOSEPH

It's not selfish. You wanted me, you needed me . . . and I'm glad you did. I'm glad I could help you, Mom. I'm glad I could meet you. I guess what I'm trying to say is, even though this life has been . . .difficult, I don't blame you. I don't blame anyone. Everyone wants what's best for them. That's just fine. Who else is going to look out for you?

EDITH looks at JOSEPH.

EDITH

Me leaving . . . who is it best for?

JOSEPH

I hope both of us.

EDITH leans her head on JOSEPH's shoulder. He puts his arm around her.

EDITH

I wish I could do it all over again you know.

JOSEPH

Would you really choose any differently?

EDITH

(Teasing)

When did you get so smart?

JOSEPH

I'm not smart, Mom.

EDITH

You graduated high school.

JOSEPH

(Under his breath)

I was born.

EDITH

You got into a great college.

JOSEPH

And then I killed myself.

The two look at each other.

EDITH

And what happens next?

JOSEPH

Whatever does, I'm glad we had this.

EDITH

Me too, darling, me too.

Static replaces the drone.

The scene rewinds.

The two performers that acted  
as Mister Major and the Minor  
Wife reenter.

The female will move as EDITH  
and the male will move as  
JOSEPH.

EDITH and JOSEPH will stay  
seated on the couch, speaking  
the dialogue while watching  
the two performers act out  
the scene, almost as if they  
are watching a soap opera on  
a television screen.

EDITH

Joey?

JOSEPH

(Identical to before)

Don't worry, Mother, I can't see him . . . but I feel him .  
. . constantly.

"EDITH" lunges at the half empty ibuprofen bottle.

EDITH

What is this?

"JOSEPH" nonchalantly stands, turning away.

JOSEPH

It's for headaches.

"JOSEPH" begins to pack an overnight bag.

"EDITH" follows him around as he does this.

EDITH

Joseph . . . what is this?

JOSEPH

It's what's best.

EDITH

No!

JOSEPH

It's what Dad wanted.

EDITH

No.

JOSEPH

This is how it's supposed to go.

EDITH

We never wanted this for you.

"JOSEPH" stops.

JOSEPH

Well, this is what you get.

"EDITH" notices the overnight bag.

"JOSEPH" moves toward it.

"EDITH" tries to wrestle the bag from his grasp.

You are not walking out, Joseph, not now!

"JOSEPH" pulls the bag away.

JOSEPH

Not me! . . . You.

"EDITH" stops now.

"JOSEPH" passes the bag to "EDITH".

JOSEPH

They'll be here in about a half hour . . . and I'm assuming I've only got a little bit before everything takes over.

"EDITH" refuses to accept it.

EDITH

This is all crazy talk, Joey. You've got to stop.

JOSEPH

No, you stop . . . I'm not a healer . . . I'm not healthy myself.

"JOSEPH" cannot hold back his tears.

EDITH

Oh, Joey . . .

"JOSEPH" falls into "EDITH's" arms. They place themselves in between EDITH and JOSEPH on the couch. The real mother and son now face each other, as "EDITH" and "JOSEPH" rest in their embrace.

"JOSEPH" holds out the  
overnight bag. His arm is  
limp.

JOSEPH

It's done, Mom. Would you just take this? It's done.

EDITH

Mommy's got you . . . Mommy's got you.

JOSEPH

I'm sorry . . . I'm so sorry.

EDITH

Shh, darling, shh . . .

JOSEPH

Is it going to hurt . . . when I die?

With strobe lights and a  
piercing siren, the two  
performers reenact the  
instant of PETER's death.

The male performer lays his  
head in JOSEPH's lap as the  
female performer climbs on  
top of him and places a  
pillow over his face.  
The previous scene is  
replaced in the blink of an  
eye.

EDITH

No . . . if you're lucky, it'll happen quickly . . . no  
pain . . . no feeling.

The strobe lights and sirens  
come back and the two  
performers carry out the same  
murder sequence in another  
instant.

JOSEPH

No pain . . . no feeling.

The sequence happens for a third time.

The performers move forward with the reenactment.

They roll off of JOSEPH and onto the floor, continuing the struggle as EDITH speaks.

EDITH

You'll stop breathing . . . and that will be that.

The lights fade on JOSEPH and the apartment as the struggle continues.

EDITH stands.

Looking over the performers, she watches as "PETER" dies before her on repeat.

EDITH

(Void of emotion)

Dammit, Edie.

(Pause)

Dammit Edie.

(Pause)

Dammit Edie.

The female performer stands.

She passes the pillow to EDITH and exits.

EDITH looks over "PETER's" dead body.

The regular drone fades in.

As it creeps to full volume, EDITH drops to the floor,

placing the pillow over  
"PETER's" face.

She screams and struggles as  
the drone increases in  
intensity.

Suddenly, there is silence.

EDITH's screams continue and  
eventually turn to tears. She  
hysterically sobs over  
"PETER".

The silence is replaced by  
the faint sound of rain and  
occasional crackle of  
thunder.

JOSEPH enters behind her,  
playing himself at seven  
years old.

He watches his mother.

JOSEPH

Mommy?

EDITH freezes.

EDITH

Joey . . .

JOSEPH

The thunder was loud . . . I got scared . . . I thought  
maybe I could sleep with you and daddy tonight.

EDITH climbs off of "PETER."

She goes to JOSEPH, grabbing  
his shoulders so that he  
doesn't see his father.

EDITH

Not tonight, sweetheart.

JOSEPH

But Mommy . . . Daddy, can I sleep in the big bed tonight?

EDITH

I said not tonight, Joey.

JOSEPH playfully fights her.

JOSEPH

Daddy? Daddy, please?

EDITH pushes JOSEPH beyond  
the threshold of "the door".

EDITH

Joseph! Back to sleep! Now!

EDITH pantomimes shutting  
"the door" in JOSEPH's face.

A slam is heard.

She stands with her back  
against "the door" as JOSEPH  
faces it.

The thunder cracks its  
biggest yet and scares JOSEPH  
away.

EDITH

He stopped breathing, Joey . . . and that's that.