

Most Things

A short play

By Sophia Forlenza

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CHARACTERS:

MASON — Early 20s. Heavy Italian-American accent from New York. Wise-ass control freak, suppressing his grief so much that everything comes out as anger.

COCO — Early 20s. Italian-American New Yorker. Just trying to keep it together for the rest of the family.

TOBY — 10. Old soul in a mischievous third-grader's body.

OLD FRIEND — 60s. War veteran.

FATHER JOHN — 40s. Quiet priest.

NONNO — 60s.

YOUNG MASON — 5.

SETTING:

A modest funeral home in the heart of Howard Beach's Italian-American quarter.

Setting: An open casket upstage center next to a large photo of the deceased. A small side table with various Italian-American family memorabilia: a ceramic cornicello, a crystal malocchio, a little chef figurine, a small Italian flag, and a tiny toy pig. Another side table with framed family photos delicately arranged. Beautiful tall potted flowers decorating the entire stage.

At rise:

TOBY plays with a Toy Yoda next to an open casket. MASON paces around the room with an industrial-grade clipboard. He stops at a side table with a display of photographs and points to two framed photos. COCO watches MASON with her arms crossed, waiting to be reprimanded.

MASON

(gesturing at the photos)

What the hell is this?

COCO

Are you high?

MASON

Am I high? I should be asking you that.

COCO

This is exactly like the reference Pinterest board you sent me. Which, in case you haven't caught on, super weird occasion to do that for.

MASON scoffs and swaps two photos.

MASON

There.

COCO

Congratulations. You're the first person to run a funeral home like it's Fort Knox.

MASON

Will you stop breaking my balls? You say that as if it's not exactly what he would've done.

The door blows opens.

MASON

Stupid goddamn door.

A VISITOR, expecting to be let in, smiles gently at MASON.

VISITOR

Hi there, how are y-

MASON

(callously interrupting)

Mm, yeah, thank you, we're not ready yet.

MASON closes the door in the VISITOR's face and moves a tall potted plant in front to keep the door closed.

COCO

Is it really that big of a favor to ask you to watch your mouth for one day?

TOBY walks up to MASON.

TOBY

(as Yoda, with toy)

Watch your goddamn mouth, you will.

COCO

Great. Look what you did now.

MASON

That might actually be the best thing I've done all week.

COCO

Knock it off.

MASON

I've done enough favors for this family to last a lifetime.

COCO

What's wrong with you? A eulogy isn't a favor.

MASON

You're right. It's a chore.

COCO

You're an ass.

COCO goes to move the plant from in front of the door to let visitors enter, but MASON rushes up to stop her.

MASON

Coco, please!

COCO

I can't! I just can't. It wouldn't be right. You know it has to be you.

MASON

I've done everything else.

COCO

That was all of your own volition. I tried to help.

MASON

Yes, thank you SO much for reminding me that Nonno wanted a mahogany casket.

COCO

What did you want me to say? He was a boujee son of a bitch.

MASON

Yeah, and with whose money? You cough up the cash and I'll put him in it myself.

COCO

Jesus, Mason, do you have to be so callous right now?

MASON

Yeah, I do, because I sat in his recliner and dug through his shitty chicken-scratch to find his insurance policies, which were in Italian, by the way. I ordered the hearse, I contacted that prick from QNS about the obituary...

COCO

Why has he been blowing up my phone?

MASON

I've been dodging his calls. He wants me to shorten what I wrote.

COCO

By how much?

MASON

I don't know, like... a thousand.

COCO

WORDS?!

MASON

No, colors, Coco. I wrote it in colors. I was the one who had to pick pine over mahogany. Me. All of it was me. And still, none of... this... is right.

COCO

No. But it's the way it is.

MASON

And all we have to show for it is a couple photos.

COCO

There's like ten.

MASON

Ten? There's ten photos?

COCO

Yeah. Ten.

MASON

Holy SHIT! Well thank God you can count that high.

COCO

Will you shut up? It's enough.

MASON

No, it's not enough. I couldn't find the thumb drive for the slideshow. I think Father John took it.

COCO

You're blaming the priest for theft?

MASON

Those guys got that whole book memorized. They know which sins are the best.

MASON grabs one of the photos from the table and looks at it longingly.

COCO

You guys look good in that one.

MASON

Don't lie to me. I wasn't on Accutane yet.

COCO

No. But you were good at public speaking. Just picture everyone in a G-string when you start talking.

MASON

That's not the saying, and this is family. You're fucking disturbing, you know that?

COCO

Yeah. I'm disturbing, and you're doing the eulogy.

MASON, COCO, and TOBY gather in front of the casket for a few moments of peace before they open the door to let visitors inside. TOBY sobs loudly. As he stops, MASON crouches down.

MASON

Wanna know a trick to clear your nose?

TOBY shrugs.

MASON

Pull up the tip of your nose and oink like a pig.

TOBY

No.

MASON

It's a trade secret. Just trust me.

TOBY

You're stupid.

MASON

Come on, oink for me baby.

TOBY obliges. He lifts up his nose with his fingers and oinks -- with all his snot, it's gross.

MASON

God, dude, that was disgusting, why would you do that?

TOBY punches MASON playfully but hard.

TOBY

Fuck you.

COCO

Language!

TOBY

Now my nose is as big and red as his.

COCO, MASON and TOBY all look at the open casket.

MASON

That is quite a honker, isn't it? Was it always like that?

COCO

Yeah. We just got Nonna's genes.

MASON

You know, I did an ancestry test. We're actually not fully Italian. We have a quarter Iranian in there.

TOBY puts his Toy Yoda next to the casket.

TOBY

(as Yoda)

Found the quarter, I did.

COCO

Toby, that's racist.

MASON

It's not racist if we're Iranian.

COCO

He was actually really accepting for his generation. You know he defended the only gay guy in his unit in Korea.

TOBY

Until he started rubbing up on him.

COCO

Excuse me?

TOBY

His words.

MASON

I don't know, he wasn't very fond of the Irish. He hit me with Nonna's gnocchi board for buying Kerry Gold butter.

COCO

Me too.

TOBY

Me too.

COCO

He did bag a couple Dublin baddies back in the day though.

TOBY

Maybe he was just about that corned beef.

MASON, COCO, and TOBY bend over with the bellyache kind of laughter. COCO and TOBY catch their breath, but MASON is still crouched over. We can't tell if he's crying. COCO puts her hand on MASON's shoulder, but he moves away.

COCO

C'mon. Let's get this over with.

COCO gestures at the potted plant from in front of the door.

COCO

Did you have to barricade people outside?

MASON

I wasn't ready.

COCO

Well, are you now?

In damning silence, MASON goes over to move the plant when TOBY drops his toy Yoda and runs over to do it instead. The plant is much taller than him, and TOBY struggles to get his hands around the base.

MASON

Give that to me. It's heavy.

TOBY

It's supposed to be.

MASON reaches for the plant but TOBY insists on picking it up himself.

TOBY

I don't mind. I want to.

TOBY gets it off the ground but drops it.

MASON

Will you just let me do it?

TOBY

No.

MASON

Okay. Together then. On the count of three.

TOBY and MASON pick up the plant together and move it away from the door. MASON hesitates for a moment, but then opens the door.

FATHER JOHN walks through first and smiles delicately at the family.

MASON, TOBY, and COCO move next to the casket to form the receiving line.

An OLD FRIEND enters and shakes MASON's hand.

OLD FRIEND

It's good to see you. Obviously not under these circumstances, and I know everyone always says that, but... well... you know.

MASON

Really? I kind of prefer it under these circumstances.

OLD FRIEND chuckles awkwardly.

MASON

No? Hm. I guess it's an acquired taste.

COCO

(gritting her teeth)

Play nice.

MASON

Bite me.

COCO

I might.

MASON

My apologies. Excuse me.

*MASON walks away toward the photo display.
He grabs a photo and sits down in an old chair.*

COCO and OLD FRIEND whisper to each other, and after a few moments, OLD FRIEND approaches MASON. They look at the photo together.

OLD FRIEND

I don't think there was a soul on Earth who loved fireworks more than your father.

MASON shifts in his chair uncomfortably, trying to play nice.

OLD FRIEND

It took me a while to get used to the sound when we came back to the United States. But not him.

MASON and OLD FRIEND stand in silence for a few moments.

OLD FRIEND

Fireworks and you. Nothing else even came close.

MASON

You give me too much credit.

OLD FRIEND

You're doing good, kid.

MASON

I don't have a lot in me right now, and if I'm gonna be honest, I don't wanna spend the rest of it on you.

COCO watches the interaction from afar. OLD FRIEND smiles and pats MASON gently on the shoulder before walking away.

MASON pulls out a folded piece of paper from his pocket and reads silently.

COCO approaches MASON.

COCO

Are you genetically wired to be an asshole or do you just enjoy it?

MASON

We went over this already. You guys got all the good parts. I got these ones.

COCO

Pull yourself together.

MASON

Tough love isn't your thing. Try something else.

COCO

Oh, believe me, I want to.

COCO tears up.

COCO

I need this to be over as much as you do. You don't have to make it easier. Just please... please don't make it harder.

MASON

(yelling)

This is what you get, Coco. THIS! This is the version of me that lives in a world without him. So either get used to it or don't. I don't really care either way.

FATHER JOHN notices the tension in the room and gathers everyone's attention.

FATHER JOHN

If I could just have a quick moment of your time, folks. I'd like for you all to join me in prayer.

EVERYONE begins reciting a Hail Mary except MASON. TOBY notices MASON's silence, walks over to him and sits on his lap.

TOBY

It's okay. I don't know the words either.

FATHER JOHN finishes the prayer and locks eyes with MASON.

FATHER JOHN

And now Mason has prepared a few words.

MASON pats TOBY on the back, and he jumps out of his lap so MASON can stand up. MASON stands and opens his mouth to speak, but he can't. He walks out of the room, leaving the piece of paper on the chair.

FATHER JOHN

Um, well, that's perfectly okay. We can just move on to a few passages the family has requested.

TOBY grabs the piece of paper from the chair and walks to the front of the room. He places a hand on FATHER JOHN's arm.

TOBY

Don't worry. I can take it from here Padre.

TOBY looks up and smiles.

TOBY

Hi everyone. I'm gonna sub in for Mason and read something he wrote. I hope that's okay with him, but if it's not, he's not here to hit me, so...

COCO

Toby!

TOBY

He doesn't hit me. That was a joke. Tough crowd. Okay, um...

TOBY steps forward proudly to deliver the eulogy.

A soft, separate pool of light rises on the side of the stage, illuminating YOUNG MASON and NONNO. They exist in a tender world of their own, untouched by the wake beside them.

As TOBY speaks, YOUNG MASON and NONNO begin to move.

TOBY

I'm pretty sure everyone knows me, but if you don't, the only thing that's important about me is that I had two dads. I didn't know the first one well. He passed when I was five. The second -- Mike, my Nonno -- took me in on the day of his funeral.

NONNO puts a hand on YOUNG MASON's shoulder.

TOBY

After the burial, I was too confused and sad to do anything.

YOUNG MASON struggles with a button on his coat. NONNO kneels down to help him.

TOBY

So we skipped the lunch and went back to his house. He took my coat and brought me to the guest room.

NONNO leads YOUNG MASON down an imaginary hallway and opens an imaginary door. YOUNG MASON glances up at NONNO.

TOBY

The bed was perfectly made. He told me the towels were in the closet down the hall.

NONNO points across the stage down an imaginary hallway. YOUNG MASON nods quietly.

TOBY

He opened the door for me and kept it open in case I wanted to leave. I never did.

YOUNG MASON looks up at NONNO, lost and unsure where to go from here.

TOBY

And then he... told me to do this thing with my nose. It was stupid.

YOUNG MASON pulls up his nose to oink like a pig.

TOBY

He said it would help me breathe after crying. It didn't. But I laughed, and just for a moment, I forgot.

YOUNG MASON and NONNO giggle silently.

TOBY

And that's the person Nonno is. When he's around, you forget the things that make you cry.

The light on YOUNG MASON and NONNO dims, their tender moment suspended in memory.

TOBY

But I don't think I can keep talking about him, because if I do, I'll cry, and he's not around anymore. So I'm gonna pivot and talk about oysters for a second. I taught myself how to eat them the other day at Lenny's Clam Bar. I'd never been there before, and Nonno always raved about it. But I didn't know when you order oysters that they give you this little fork to wiggle the meat around with before you slurp it up.

TOBY looks up at MASON in the doorway, pauses, and then puts down the paper. He shoots MASON a devilish grin and waves.

TOBY

It was FUCKING GROSS!!!!!!

MASON runs over to grab the paper from TOBY and takes his place.

MASON

It doesn't... it doesn't say that.

TOBY holds MASON's hand and gives him the paper.

TOBY

(whispering)

On the count of three.

MASON takes a deep breath and reads from the paper.

MASON

I put hot sauce on it like he used to. It was terrible. I ate the whole tray. I don't think I can go back there, cause I'm allergic to seafood and I threw up all over the waitress when I tried to ask her for a second order. But I guess the point is that there's so much in life that I didn't get to learn from him. What fork is for salad and what one is for oysters, what pickup line is the best to get a number from the cute waitress you just threw up on, what to do when you want a mahogany casket but you can only afford pine, what to do when people leave and how to live anyway. A part of me is afraid I'm always going to hate myself because I didn't try harder to learn it all. But the other part of me, which is...

MASON looks toward the side of the stage. The soft light rises again on YOUNG MASON and NONNO, who both meet his gaze. MASON continues the eulogy looking at them.

MASON

...somewhere, knows how to clean myself up, because I know that the towels are in the closet down the hall.

TOBY lets go of MASON's hand. MASON gives TOBY the paper. TOBY leaves to stand next to COCO.

NONNO and YOUNG MASON give MASON a gentle nod.

MASON

I'm not really sure how people finish these, which I guess is the first thing I have to learn on my own. But thank you, Nonno. Thank you for teaching me most things. I'm doing a bad job right now at figuring out the rest...

MASON looks at COCO, his eyes a hopeful apology. Her eyes accept.

MASON looks back at NONNO and YOUNG MASON, who watch him lovingly.

MASON

...but knowing you taught me how to breathe better, which is a good place, or I guess the only place, for me to start.

NONNO exits, leaving YOUNG MASON alone. The main lights dim as another soft light lands gently upon MASON, which follows him as he walks up to YOUNG MASON. They hold hands and smile.

