

THE OLD MAN AND THE TOASTER
josh belville

An empty stage, save for a white porcelain clawfoot bathtub (with water inside, up to the brim) and a short brown footstool, sitting in front of and next to the tub.

Enter OLD MAN, 60s-70s, who shuffles into the scene wearing a dirty white bathrobe, with an undershirt, boxers, and white socks underneath.

He moves barely into the light, then stops, staring at the bathtub. In his hand is a breadbag with a few slices of bread inside. He reaches into the bag, pulls out a slice, and chomps on it, chewing thoughtfully for a second. Then he angrily spits the bread out.

He shuffles in, sets the breadbag on the stool, then exits. A few moments later, he reenters with a chrome toaster, maybe from the 50s, maybe from the 80s, which he sets on the stool and plugs into [wherever you can plug it in]. He sits on the stool and puts the toaster on his lap, then takes two slices of bread from the bag, puts them into the toaster, and pushes the lever down.

He waits. And waits. And waits. And waits. In perfect calm silence. Then, suddenly, furiously:

OLD MAN

God fucking shit piece of shit toaster! God damn it! God damn you, toaster! You never worked and you never will! I hate you. I hate you, toaster! You hear me? I never want to have anything to do with you again, so help me god! If I could I would throw you out the goddamn window, but I--

(he hesitates)

I...

(slowly slumps down to the floor)

You're all I got. You and the TV, and the TV doesn't work either. Needs one of them digital conversion thingies. You know how much those cost? Too damn much. I would throw it out the window but it's too heavy, and Margaret would yell at me. "You're gonna screw your back up!" That's what she would say.

(long pause)

Now I don't have to worry about her saying anything. No more. I'm a free man. She took everything but the TV and you, toaster. And me. She didn't take me. Wouldn't be a proper leaving if she took me, right?

(beat)

Oh the hell with it.

He takes off his socks and his robe, now just wearing boxer shorts and an undershirt. He puts his foot into the bathtub.

OLD MAN

I let it sit too long! The water's cold, goddamn it. Gonna shrink my johnson down to nothing, and it's already pretty nothing already.

(lowers himself into the bath)

Margaret used to call my johnson "Bill." You ever heard of such a thing? "Bill"? Weirdest goddamn thing I ever heard. I don't think she understands how nicknames work. I said, "Why not William?" and she said, "Why?" and I said, "Cause it's longer." You know?

A beat as he waits for a response from the toaster.

OLD MAN

I knew you wouldn't get it.

(beat)

Forty years is a long time, toaster. A long time to be alive, and a long time to be with someone.

A quiet, contemplative pause.

The old man farts in the tub, bubbles plopping up to the surface.

OLD MAN

If you could be anything besides a toaster, toaster, what would you be? A blender? A juicer? One of those ... ah, you know, those goddamn things you put stuff in and it makes it into a paste. You know what I mean. Got the blades and ... oh god damn it, I know it...

You know what I'd be? I'd be the guy who takes his wife on the trip of her lifetime. Imagine: a 1957 Thunderbird convertible, mint condition, pearly white with a cherry red interior and chrome trim. Drive that -- back when gas was fifteen cents a gallon -- drive that down California One, top down, wind in my hair, oh and I have hair in this image, toaster. A nice thick flowing mane of hair, jet black, whipping in the wind. Drive from Seattle to San Diego, stop just before the Mexico border. Get ourselves a fancy motel, a nice bottle of scotch, and just ... be.

Together.

Maybe we fight about the hotel room. Too small. The ice machine is on the other side. Toilet's running. Air conditioner's broke. But we're there. Together.

Beat.

OLD MAN

Food processor. That's what it's called. You want to be a food processor?

She said, she came up to me and said, Guess what? And I said What? And she said, It's our anniversary, and I said Of course it is, I knew that, I already got your gift. I looked this stuff up, toaster. You know what's the 40th wedding anniversary gift?

(waits for the toaster to answer)

You don't know, you're a goddamn toaster. Ruby! It's ruby. So I got her a pair of ruby earrings, and she said she loved them and put them on and then they irritated her earlobes, the metal or something, made her earlobes turn green. I asked her if she was turning into a Martian and she said No. Never wore those earrings again. People are allergic to metal? Did you know that? It's absurd. No one was allergic to metal when I was a kid. No one got tetanus. I once stepped on an old rusty nail in my pop's shed when I was six, rusty as an old Indian, and I'm fine now.

He stretches his jaw as if to test. It hurts. He stops.

OLD MAN

But then she asks me about the box. What box? I ask. The one with the money to Egypt, she says, with that look in her eyes like she already knows the end of the story. And I already know it, too. The money to Egypt.

You make a lot of promises when you're young and horny, toaster. You make a lot of promises to your future wife -- you know, when I first laid eyes on Margaret, everyone else just dropped out of the world, and my eyes, they just kinda softened like in the old movies, and there she was, walking down the street like an angel, except that angels don't walk, they kinda glide, cause they're supernatural -- you get what I mean.

I knew right then I had to have her. Had to marry her.

So I courted her -- that's a thing we used to do in the 40s, toaster -- and eventually we got married, and on our honeymoon I promised her that I would put a dollar in a box every week from my pay, a dollar every week, and on our 40th anniversary I would take that money out and fly the both of us to wherever she wanted. She said Egypt, not me. I wouldn't have said Egypt. I don't know where I'd go, come to think of it. I was doing it for her, she wanted to travel, and I wanted to be where she was, all the time.

So come forty years later, and we're both a little worse for wear, and the kids are off, and she asks me about the box. And I wonder to myself, At what point ... at what point did life stop being about her, and love, and companionship, and when did it start being about me, and selfishness, and responsibilities, and salaries, and jobs and all that? At what point did I decide, in that hotel room in San Jose, to help remove that waitress's clothing and go to bed with her? At what point did Margaret decide that booze was more important than me? When did I decide that? How do these things happen? Why do we do them?

(a long pause)

Ah, toaster. I fucked it up. I fucked it all up.

He looks at the toaster for a while and then, slowly, sits up in the tub and takes the toaster in both hands. He doesn't pick it up, he just puts his hands on it.

OLD MAN

Thanks for listening.

He lifts the toaster up, over the tub. A long, tense moment.

Toast pops up. Old man stares at it in silence. He then slowly lowers the toaster back onto the stool. Takes one of the pieces of toast, examines it, then takes a big crunchy bite into it. He munches for a second, then slides back into the bathtub, munching on toast.

Lights out.