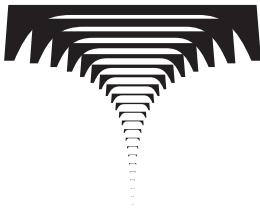


# Nobody was Tomorrow

Mariana Castillo Deball






here was once a machine that accelerated aging, there was once an abandoned Roman bath in the middle of a city, there was once a tree growing inside a modernistic building, creeping around its corners and over its walls, turning the outside into the inside.

This tale takes place after the third explosion, when the Earth looks like a vast abandoned film set, littered with artifacts made by humans but with no sign of the actors who once moved through it. Now freed from the human assumption that consciousness belongs only to humans, the artifacts and living beings remaining on Earth have started to provide their own testimony.


“I would like to welcome our guests, who want to find out why I maintain that I am *Nobody*. I shall answer twice, the first time briefly and concisely, then symphonically, with overtures.”

The hollow sound echoes through the library, vibrating along the bookshelves and laboratory showcases, thumping slowly and evenly like distant thunder. From time to time it stops for a while before resuming, booming through the quiet night, relentless and brutal. *Nobody*, the accelerating aging machine, stands alone at the entrance of the restoration laboratory at the National Library in Belgrade. Waking from an endless sleep, *Nobody* assumes that someone is listening to the speech he has been preparing for so long. The main reading room has high ceilings and the tall windows are covered with blinds that have buckled in the sunlight of thirty summers. They now allow the amber light from the street to cast odd patterns across the room. In the centre, on a raised platform, stands a piano covered with a magenta cloth. One might imagine that the readers had been entertained with daily performances, a perfect tonic for the boredom and tiredness that accompanies reading for long hours in a quiet room ñ but actually the piano is standing here by accident (or to be more precise, through indolence). A concert was arranged for the opening reception of the library some thirty years ago and there is no reason to believe that the instrument has made a sound since. Next to the




piano is a small showcase containing a black petrified object. A label inside the glass case informs us that the object is a book; the last survivor of an old library that was burnt during wartime. In truth this is not an object from the past, but from the future.

When the library opened some thirty years ago, they decided to invest in a restoration department equipped with the most up-to-date technology. One of the main items purchased was an accelerating aging machine, a device that can extrapolate the passage of time, and tell in advance how things will look in twenty, fifty or two-hundred years.



The accelerating aging machine was named *Nobody* because whilst being an inanimate object it seemed to have its own will, it functioned through heat, humidity and ultra-violet rays. Some people said that the machine made objects older with incredible speed; others that it allowed you to look into the future. But *Nobody* knew that both operations could be performed at once.



Before the official opening, the director of the library convened a meeting with the staff and explained that the new library needed a symbol, an object that would make people respect their heritage and remember the atrocities made against knowledge in the past. The

scientist in charge of the restoration department had the idea of producing a book that would look two hundred and fifty years old, the survivor of the fire of war.

Such an operation would be difficult, first to produce an object so ancient and then to simulate its violent destruction. They used the machine to achieve the required result, and what is now on display is not a product of war, but an artificial reminder of time. There were great expectations for *Nobody*, the scientist ran a series of experiments that gave increasingly strange results. Sometimes it looked like things got younger; sometimes they came out completely devastated. The scientist operating the machine assumed that *Nobody* had its own will and that it was somehow trying to send a message in the form of the transformed objects.


One day the scientist attempted the most complicated experiment to date, to age a tree by three hundred years. The experiment required the machine to work non-stop for three days. The tree just about fitted into *Nobody's* compartment.

On the third night, a hollow sound echoed through the library, vibrating along the bookshelves and laboratory showcases, thumping slowly and evenly like distant thunder. From



time to time it stopped for a while before resuming, booming through the quiet night, relentless and brutal.

The next morning, the scientist opened the door to the machine and discovered to his amazement that the tree had disappeared. All that remained was a pot full of earth and at the bottom of the pot he found a seed. He put the seed in his pocket and concluded that the plant had vanished because of the heat. The director of the library, who was growing increasingly suspicious of the infernal machine, decided to cancel any further experiments and fired the scientist, arguing that the development of such experiments was going against progress and the development of knowledge.

The scientist walked out of the building and along the outside corridor of pink sandstone. He touched the hard surface of the walls weathered by time and clutched the seed in his pocket. He continued to walk through the city, past the cars and the rush of people. He was suddenly disappointed in this national program called progress, this attempt to build an image of the future that at the moment of its birth looked so stiff, so petrified. He knew that the buildings that seemed so permanent and new would in time collapse into decay. He arrived at the highest point in the city where




he could see the river below him shining like a mirror in the afternoon sun. Next to him a man in a strange costume was trying to fly with a massive parachute. The air was capricious and couldn't decide on which direction to go. An audience had gathered, waiting for him to jump into the emptiness and the sportsman was so conscious of the onlookers that he didn't pay much attention to the wind; a blast hit him and the chords and the canvas of the parachute wrapped around him like a cocoon. It would take hours straighten the cords and make another jump. The scientist didn't want to wait and continued walking, leaving the sportsman struggling with his tangled parachute like a frustrated Houdini.



The scientist wondered what to do now that he had no job and was separated from *Nobody*. He decided to travel to his hometown and start a new life, away from this fake trial of modernity, the future should be more exiting than this boring conjunction of smoky cars and improvised streets. The problem was, he concluded, that the state had tried to achieve an image of the future that already belonged to the past. Because of this phenomenon, new buildings, streets and cars immediately started to look old, like instant contemporary ruins.







On arriving at his hometown he was amazed to find that the project of accelerated modernity had reached there too. The main square was a massive building site. All the trees and the monuments had been removed to achieve the clean and modern appearance that was so desired. Someone told him that the government was building a cultural center, with every advantage of the big city, including a theater, a library, a café and so on.

He remembered the ancient Roman baths just next to the city center. He found them nestled within a new complex of apartment blocks through a narrow corridor sprayed with graffiti. The archaeological site was completely surrounded by new buildings that were already in a very bad state of repair, it seemed that people used the area for nocturnal parties. He thought he would like to have an apartment in one of the buildings overlooking the ruins; to confirm of his theory about ancient and speeded up ruins in a single location.


He past through the complex and back into the building site of the cultural center, which was now deserted. He put his hand in his pocket and took out the seed, planted it carefully and left. This was his last public appearance.




In the meantime, strange things had started to happen in the library. Night time security were reporting noises coming from the restoration department. Maybe it was from the machine, the workers speculated, but the machine had been unplugged since the operator was fired. They wanted to get rid of it, but it was too heavy and the library didn't have the resources to put it elsewhere. They couldn't even give it away because by now the technology was so dated that no other research institute could use it.




Daily, *Nobody* the accelerating aging machine witnessed accelerated decay. *Nobody* thought that there was no necessity to accelerate aging when it was happening in front of him without any mechanical assistance. The library very quickly ran out of money and the plan to have a top end laboratory was put to one side. All the instruments were covered with dust and the machine to mix paper was now used to froth up cappuccinos. The staff waited for years for the national culture budget to arrive, but it never did.




It was thirty years since *Nobody* officially functioned for the last time, but every night *Nobody* performed a secret experiment. People never understood that he had a completely different notion of time. Accelerating time




could happen in the future, in the past and in both directions at the same time. The machine was preparing for the last proof, one that would finally show the world the perfect moment, an object that would develop at the same time, the future and the past, running non-stop in both directions. But, what would be the result of such an experiment, what would it look like? It would be an organic silent intelligence, something like a vegetable fixed to one spot but growing endlessly, covering a vast territory.




In the hometown of the scientist, the cultural center stood solid and functioned for over twenty years. It was, as promised an active part of the city. There was just one detail, a tree; a ficus started growing from inside the building. People could not locate its source, but it was certainly powerful. To begin with they tried to cut its roots, but it returned, doubling in size in the course of a day, weaving across walls and ceilings and sprawling over windows. Eventually the authorities decided to let it grow, and in time it was designated a class three monument. By night, lights illuminated its passage from the main hall through the corridor, it starts in the record shop, crosses the ceiling, running through the café and finally along the glass corridor.





People believe it is a proof of the strength of nature. They could never imagine that it is in fact the result of a time experiment, that this tree is coming from the future and slowly discovering its past and present.

One night, a hollow sound echoed through the cultural center, vibrating along the corridors and the modernistic facade, thumping slowly and evenly like distant thunder. From time to time it stopped for a while before resuming, booming through the quiet night, relentless and brutal.



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