

## ONE

Pereira maintains he met him one summer's day. A fine fresh sunny summer's day and Lisbon was sparkling. It would seem that Pereira was in his office biting his pen, the editor-in-chief was away on holiday while he himself was saddled with getting together the culture page, because the *Lisboa* was now to have a culture page and he had been given the job. But he, Pereira, was meditating on death. On that beauteous summer day, with the sun beaming away and the sea-breeze off the Atlantic kissing the treetops, and a city glittering, literally glittering beneath his window, and a sky of such a blue as never was seen, Pereira maintains, and of a clarity almost painful to the eyes, he started to think about death. Why so? Pereira cannot presume to say. Maybe because when he was little his father owned an undertaker's establishment with the

gloomy name of Pereira La Dolorosa, maybe because his wife had died of consumption some years before, maybe because he was fat and suffered from heart trouble and high blood pressure and the doctor had told him that if he went on like this he wouldn't last long. But the fact is that Pereira began dwelling on death, he maintains. And by chance, purely by chance, he started leafing through a magazine. It was a literary review, though with a section devoted to philosophy. Possibly an avant-garde review, Pereira is not definite on this point, but with a fair share of Catholic contributors. And Pereira was a Catholic, or at least at that moment he felt himself a Catholic, a good Roman Catholic, though there was one thing he could not bring himself to believe in, and that was the resurrection of the body. Of the soul yes, of course, for he was certain he had a soul; but all that flesh of his, the fat enveloping his soul, no, that would not rise again and why should it?, Pereira asked himself. All the blubber he carted around with him day in day out, and the sweat, and the struggle of climbing the stairs, why should all that rise again? No, Pereira didn't fancy it at all, in another life, for all eternity, so he had no wish to believe in the resurrection of the body. And he began to leaf through the magazine, idly, just because he was bored, he maintains, and came across an article headed: 'From a thesis delivered last month at the University of Lisbon we publish this reflection on death. The author is Francesco Monteiro Rossi, who graduated last month from the University of

Lisbon with a First in Philosophy. We here give only an excerpt from his essay, since he may well make further contributions to this publication.’

Pereira maintains that to begin with he read without paying much attention to the article, which was untitled, but then mechanically turned back and copied out a passage. What came over him? Pereira cannot presume to say. Maybe that Catholic-cum-avant-garde magazine got on his nerves, maybe that day he was fed up with Catholicism and the avant-garde in every shape and form, devout Catholic though he was, or maybe again at that particular moment of the particular summer then glittering over Lisbon, with all that bulk of his flesh weighing him down, he detested the idea of the resurrection of the body. But the fact is he set about copying out the article, possibly so as to chuck the magazine away as soon as possible.

He didn’t copy all of it, he maintains, only a few lines, which he can document and which read as follows: ‘The relationship that most profoundly and universally characterizes our sense of being is that of life with death, because the limits imposed on our existence by death are crucial to the understanding and evaluation of life.’ He then picked up the telephone directory and said to himself: Rossi, Rossi, what an unusual name, there can’t be more than one Rossi in the telephone book. He dialled a number, he remembers the number well, he maintains, and heard a voice at the other end say hullo. Hullo, said Pereira, this

is the *Lisboa* speaking. And the voice said: yes? Well, said Pereira, he maintains, the *Lisboa* is a Lisbon newspaper founded a few months ago, I don't know whether you have seen it, we are non-political and independent but we believe in the soul, that is to say we have Roman Catholic tendencies, and I would like to speak to Mr Monteiro Rossi. At the other end, Pereira maintains, there was a moment's silence, and then the voice said that it was Monteiro Rossi speaking and that he didn't give a great deal of thought to the soul. Pereira in turn was silent for a moment or two, for to him it seemed strange, he maintains, that a person who had penned such profound reflections on death should not give much thought to the soul. He therefore assumed there must be some misunderstanding, and at once his mind flew to that resurrection of the body which was a fixation of his, and he said he had read an article on death by Monteiro Rossi, adding that he too, Pereira, did not believe in the resurrection of the body, if that was what Monteiro Rossi had in mind. In a word, Pereira got flustered, and he was angry, mainly with himself, he maintains, at having gone to all this trouble of ringing up a stranger and speaking of delicate and indeed intimate matters such as the soul and the resurrection of the body. Pereira could have cursed himself, he maintains, and at first even thought of hanging up, but then for some reason he summoned the strength to continue and said his name was Pereira, Dr Pereira, that he edited the culture page of the *Lisboa*, and that

admittedly for the time being the *Lisboa* was an evening paper, and therefore not in the same league as other newspapers of the capital, but he was sure it would sooner or later make its mark, and it was true that just now the *Lisboa* devoted most of its space to society news, but in a word they had now decided to publish a culture page to come out on Saturdays, and the editorial staff was not yet complete so he needed an outside contributor to do a regular feature.

Pereira maintains that Monteiro Rossi muttered he would come to the office that very day, adding that the work interested him, that any work interested him, because yes, the fact was he badly needed work, now that he'd finished at university and had to earn his own living, but Pereira had the foresight to say no, not in the office for the moment, perhaps it was best to make an appointment to meet somewhere in town. He said this, he maintains, because he had no wish to invite a stranger to that dismal little room in Rua Rodrigo da Fonseca, with the wheeze of its asthmatic fan and the eternal smell of frying spread abroad by the caretaker, a harridan who cast everyone suspicious looks and did nothing but fry fry fry. Nor did he want a stranger to know that the culture staff of the *Lisboa* consisted solely of himself, Pereira, one man sweating with heat and discomfort in that squalid cubby-hole, and in a word, Pereira maintains, he asked if they could meet in town and he, Monteiro Rossi, said: This evening, in Praça da Alegria, there's an open-air dance

with guitars and singing, I've been invited to sing a Neapolitan song, I'm half Italian you know, though I don't speak Neapolitan, but anyway the owner of the café has reserved an outside table for me, there'll be a card on it marked Monteiro Rossi, so what about meeting there? Pereira said yes, then hung up and wiped his brow, he maintains, and just then he had the brilliant idea of publishing a short feature entitled 'Anniversaries'. He thought he'd start it the very next Saturday, so almost unthinkingly, perhaps because he had Italy in mind, he wrote the title 'Two Years Ago Died Luigi Pirandello'. Then underneath he wrote the subtitle: 'In Lisbon the great dramatist first staged his *Sogno (ma forse no)*'.

It was the twenty-fifth of July Nineteen Hundred and Thirty-Eight, and Lisbon was glittering in the azure purity of an Atlantic breeze, Pereira maintains.

## TWO

In the afternoon the weather changed, Pereira maintains. The sea-breeze suddenly lulled, in from the Atlantic rolled a dense bank of haze, and the city was soon enveloped in a shroud of heat. Before leaving his office Pereira consulted the thermometer, bought at his own expense and hanging on the back of the door. It showed thirty-eight degrees. Pereira switched off the fan, he passed the caretaker on the stairs, she said good evening Dr Pereira, once more he inhaled the stench of frying hovering on the staircase and at last emerged into the open. Directly across the road stood the public market of the neighbourhood, with two trucks of the Guarda Nacional Republicana parked outside. Pereira knew that all the markets were in a state of unrest because the day before, in Alentejo, the police had killed a carter who supplied the markets,

because he was a Socialist. This explained why the Guarda Nacional were stationed outside the market gates. But the *Lisboa* hadn't had the courage to print the news, or rather the assistant editor hadn't, because the editor-in-chief was on holiday at Buçaco, enjoying the cool air and the waters, and who could be expected to have the courage to print news of that sort, that a Socialist carter had been shot down on his wagon in Alentejo and had drenched all his melons with his blood? No one, because the country was gagged, it had no choice, and meanwhile people were dying and the police had things all their own way. Pereira broke out in sweat, he was thinking of death again. And he thought: this City reeks of death, the whole of Europe reeks of death.

He went along to the Café Orquídea, only a few steps down the road just past the kosher butcher, and sat down at a table inside, where at least there were electric fans. Outside it was quite impossible because of the heat. He ordered a lemonade, went to the gents to rinse his face and hands, ordered a cigar and an evening paper, and Manuel the waiter brought him the *Lisboa* of all things. He hadn't seen the proofs that day, so he leafed through it as if it were any other paper. The first page announced: 'World's Most Luxurious Yacht Sailed Today from New York.' Pereira stared at the headline for a long time and then looked at the photograph. It showed a group of people in straw hats and shirtsleeves opening bottles of champagne. Pereira broke out in sweat, he maintains, and his

thoughts turned again to the resurrection of the body. If I rise from the dead, he thought, will I be stuck with these people in straw hats? He really imagined himself being stuck with those yacht people in some unspecified harbour in eternity. And eternity appeared to him as an insufferable place shrouded in muggy haze, with people speaking English and proposing toasts and exclaiming: Chin chin! Pereira ordered another lemonade. He wondered whether he should go home and have a cool bath or go and call on his priest friend, Don António of the church of the Mercês, who had been his confessor some years before when his wife died, and to whom he paid a monthly visit. He thought the best thing was to go and see Don António, perhaps it would do him good.

So he went. Pereira maintains that on that occasion he forgot to pay his bill. He got to his feet in a daze, his thoughts elsewhere, and simply walked out, leaving his newspaper on the table along with his hat, maybe because it was so hot he didn't want to wear it anyway, or else because he was like that, objects didn't mean much to him.

Pereira found Father Antonio a perfect wreck, he maintains. He had great bags under his eyes and looked as if he hadn't slept for a week. Pereira asked him what was the matter and Father António said: What, haven't you heard?, they've murdered a carter on his own cart in Alentejo, and there are workers on strike, here in the city and all over the country, are you living in another world,

and you working on a newspaper?, look here, Pereira, for goodness' sake go and find out what's happening around you.

Pereira maintains that he was upset by this brief exchange and the way in which he had been sent packing. He asked himself: Am I living in another world? And he was struck by the odd notion that perhaps he was not alive at all, it was as if he were dead. Ever since his wife's death he had been living as if he were dead. Or rather, he did nothing but think of death, of the resurrection of the body which he didn't believe in and nonsense of that sort, and perhaps his life was merely a remnant and a pretence. And he felt done in, he maintains. He managed to drag himself to the nearest tram stop and board a tram that took him as far as Terreiro do Paço. Through the window he watched Lisbon gliding slowly by, his Lisbon: the Avenida da Liberdade with its fine buildings, then the English-style Praça do Rossio, and at Terreiro do Paço he got out and took another tram up the hill towards the Castle. He left it when it reached the Cathedral because he lived close by, in Rua da Saudade. He made heavy weather of it up the steep ramp to where he lived. There he rang the bell for the caretaker because he couldn't be bothered to hunt for the key of the street door, and she, who was also his daily, came to open it. Dr Pereira, said she, I've fried you a chop for supper. Pereira thanked her and toiled up the stairs, took the key from under the doormat where he

always kept it, and let himself in. In the hallway he paused in front of the bookcase, on which stood a photograph of his wife. He had taken that photo himself, in Nineteen Twenty-Seven, during a trip to Madrid, and looming in the background was the vast bulk of the Escorial. Sorry if I'm a bit late, said Pereira.

Pereira maintains that for some time past he had been in the habit of talking to this photo of his wife. He told it what he had done during the day, confided his thoughts to it, asked it for advice. It seems that I'm living in another world, said Pereira to the photograph, even Father António told me so, the problem is that all I do is think about death, it seems to me that the whole world is dead or on the point of death. And then Pereira thought about the child they hadn't had. He had longed for one, but he couldn't ask so much of that frail suffering woman who spent sleepless nights and long stretches in the sanatorium. And this grieved him. For if he'd had a son, a grown-up son to sit at table with and talk to, he would not have needed to talk to that picture taken on a trip so long ago he could scarcely remember it. And he said: Well, never mind, which was how he always took leave of his wife's photograph. Then he went into the kitchen, sat down at the table and took the cover off the pan with the fried chop in it. The chop was cold, but he couldn't be bothered to heat it up. He always ate it as it was, as the caretaker had left it for him: cold. He made quick work of it, went to the bathroom, washed under his arms, put on a

clean shirt, a black tie and a dab of the Spanish scent remaining in a flask he had bought in Madrid in Nineteen Twenty-Seven. Then he put on a grey jacket and left the flat to make his way to Praça da Alegria. It was already nine o'clock, Pereira maintains.

## THREE

Pereira maintains that the city seemed entirely in the hands of the police that evening. He ran into them everywhere. He took a taxi as far as Terreiro do Paço and there under the colonnade were truckloads of police armed with carbines. Perhaps they were controlling the strategic points of the city in fear of demonstrations or unruly crowds. He would have liked to walk the rest of the way, the cardiologist had told him he ought to take exercise, but he quailed at the thought of passing right under the noses of those sinister militiamen, so he caught the tram which ran the length of Rua dos Fanqueiros and stopped in Praça da Figueira. Here he alighted and found more police, he maintains. This time he was forced to walk past squads of them, and it made him feel pretty uncomfortable. On his way by he heard an officer say to his men: Just remember

lads, there could be a Bolshie round every corner, so keep your eyes peeled.

Pereira looked this way and that, as if the advice had been directed at him, but saw no reason to keep his eyes peeled. Avenida da Liberdade was perfectly tranquil, the ice-cream kiosk was open and there were people at the tables enjoying the cool. He strolled peacefully along the central pavement and at this point, he maintains, he first heard the music. The gentle, melancholy guitar music of Coimbra, and it seemed to him odd, that conjunction of music and armed militiamen. It seemed to be coming from Praça da Alegria, and so it proved to be, because the nearer he got the louder grew the music.

In Praça da Alegria there was no sense of being in a besieged city, Pereira maintains, because he saw no police at all, only a night watchman who appeared to be drunk, dozing on a bench. The whole place was decorated with paper festoons and coloured light bulbs, green and yellow, hanging on wires strung from window to window. There were a number of tables out in the open and several couples dancing. Then he noticed a banner stretched between two trees, and written on it in enormous letters: LONG LIVE FRANCISCO FRANCO. And beneath this, in smaller letters: LONG LIVE OUR PORTUGUESE TROOPS IN SPAIN.

Pereira maintains that only then did he realize this was a Salazarist festival, and that was why it had no need to be picketed by troops. And only then did he notice that a lot of people were wearing the green shirt and the scarf

knotted round their necks. He hung back in terror, and several different things flashed into his mind at once. It occurred to him that perhaps Monteiro Rossi was one of *them*, he thought of the Alentejan carter who had shed his blood all over his melons, he tried to imagine what Father António would have said had he seen him there. He thought of all this and flopped down on the bench where the night watchman was dozing, and let himself drift along with his thoughts. Or rather, he let himself drift with the music, because the music, in spite of all, was a pleasure to him. The players were two little old men, one on the viola and the other on the guitar, and they played the heartrending old melodies of the Coimbra of his youth, when he was a student and thought of life as a long radiant future. In those days he too used to play the viola at student parties, he had a trim figure and was athletic and had the girls falling in love with him. Any number of beautiful girls had been mad about him. But he had fallen for a frail, pallid little thing who wrote poetry and had frequent headaches. Then his thoughts turned to other things in his life, but these Pereira has no wish to mention, because he maintains they belong to him and him alone and have nothing to do with that evening and that festival where he had fetched up all unsuspecting. And then, Pereira maintains, at a certain point he saw a tall slim young man in a light-coloured shirt get up from a table and station himself between the two musicians. And for some reason his heart stood still, maybe because in that

young man he seemed to recognize himself, he seemed to rediscover himself as he was in his Coimbra days, because the young man was in some way like him, not in feature but in the way he moved, and something about the hair too, the way a lock flopped onto his forehead. And the young man started singing an Italian song, *O sole mio*, of which Pereira did not understand the words, but it was a song full of passion and vitality, limpid and beautiful, and the only words he understood were ‘*O sole mio*’ and nothing more, and all the while the young man was singing the sea-breeze was rising again from the Atlantic and the evening was cool, and everything seemed to him lovely, his past life of which he declines to speak, and Lisbon, and the vault of the sky above the coloured lights, and he felt a great nostalgia, did Pereira, but he declines to say for what. However, Pereira realized that the young man singing was the person he had spoken to on the telephone that afternoon, so when the song was over he got up from the bench, because his curiosity was stronger than his misgivings, and made his way to the table and said to the young man: Mr Monteiro Rossi, I presume. Monteiro Rossi tried to rise to his feet, bumped against the table, and the tankard of beer in front of him toppled over, sousing his pristine white trousers from top to bottom. I do apologize, mumbled Pereira. No, it was my clumsiness, said the young man, it often happens to me, you must be Dr Pereira of the *Lisboa*, please take a seat. And he held out his hand.

Pereira maintains that he sat down at the table feeling ill at ease. He thought to himself that this was not the place for him at all, that it was absurd to meet a stranger at this nationalist festival, that Father António would not have approved of his conduct, and that he wished he were already on his way home to talk to his wife's picture and ask its forgiveness. These thoughts nerved him to put a direct question, simply to start the ball rolling, and without much weighing his words he said to Monteiro Rossi: This is a Salazarist Youth festival, are you a member of the Salazarist Youth?

Monteiro Rossi brushed back his lock of hair and replied: I am a graduate in philosophy, my interests are philosophy and literature, but what has your question got to do with the *Lisboa*? It has this to do with it, replied Pereira, that we are a free and independent newspaper and don't wish to meddle in politics.

Meanwhile the two old musicians had struck up again, and from their melancholy strings they elicited a song in praise of Franco, but at that point Pereira, despite his uneasiness, realized he had let himself in for it and it was his business to take the initiative. And strangely enough he felt up to doing so, felt he had the situation in hand, simply because he was Dr Pereira of the *Lisboa* and the young man facing him was hanging on his lips. So he said: I read your article on death and found it very interesting. Yes, I did write a thesis on death, replied Monteiro Rossi, but let me say at once that it's not all my own work,

the passage they printed in the magazine was copied, I must confess, partly from Feuerbach and partly from a French spiritualist, and not even my own professor tumbled to it, teachers are more ignorant than people realize, you know. Pereira maintains that he thought twice about putting the question he'd been preparing all evening, but eventually he made up his mind, not without first ordering something to drink from the young green-shirted waiter in attendance. Forgive me, he said to Monteiro Rossi, but I never touch alcohol, only lemonade, so I'll have a lemonade. And while sipping his lemonade he asked in a low voice, as if someone might overhear and reprove him for it: But are you, please forgive me but, well, what I want to ask is, are you interested in death?

Monteiro Rossi gave a broad grin, and this, Pereira maintains, disconcerted him. What an idea, Dr Pereira, exclaimed Monteiro Rossi heartily, what I'm interested in is life. Then, more quietly: Listen, Dr Pereira, I've had quite enough of death, two years ago my mother died, she was Portuguese and a teacher and she died suddenly from an aneurism in the brain, that's a complicated way of saying a burst blood vessel, in short she died of a stroke, and last year my father died, he was Italian, a naval engineer at the Lisbon dockyard, and he left me a little something but I've already run through that, I have a grandmother still alive in Italy but I haven't seen her since I was twelve and I don't fancy going to Italy, the situation there seems even worse than ours, and I'm fed up with

death, Dr Pereira, you must excuse me for being frank with you but in any case why this question?

Pereira took a sip of his lemonade, wiped his lips with the back of his hand and said: Simply because in a newspaper one has to have memorial articles on dead writers or an obituary every time an important writer dies, and an obituary can't be written at the drop of a hat, one has to have it ready beforehand, and I'm looking for someone to write advance obituaries on the great writers of our times, imagine if Mauriac were to die tomorrow how do you think I'd manage?

Monteiro Rossi ordered another beer, Pereira maintains. Since he'd arrived the young man had drunk at least three and at that point, in Pereira's opinion, he ought to be already rather tight, or at least slightly tipsy. Monteiro Rossi swept back his lock of hair and said: Dr Pereira, I am a good linguist and I know the work of modern writers; what I love is life, but if you want me to write about death and you pay me for it, as they've paid me this evening to sing a Neapolitan song, then I can do it, for the day after tomorrow I'll write you a funeral oration for García Lorca, what d'you think of Lorca?, after all he created the avant-garde in Spain just as here in Portugal Pessoa created our modernist movement, and what's more he was an all-round artist, he was a poet, a musician and a painter too.

Pereira said Lorca didn't seem to him the ideal choice, he maintains, but he could certainly give it a try, as long as he dealt with Lorca tactfully and with due caution,

referring exclusively to his personality as an artist and without touching on other aspects which in view of the current situation might pose problems. And then, without batting an eyelid, Monteiro Rossi said: Look here, excuse my mentioning it, I'll do you this article on Lorca but d'you think you could give me something in advance?, I'll have to buy some new trousers, these are terribly stained, and tomorrow I'm going out with a girl I knew at university who's on her way here now, she's a good chum of mine and I'm very fond of her, I'd like to take her to the cinema.