

A Trovoada / The Thunderstorm

Produced by Sofia Saldanha

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Car engine starting

Sofia: Once I read an article about an American park ranger who was hit by lightning on seven different occasions and survived all of them. Since then I developed an interest in thunderstorms...

This is where my journey starts. I'll be going to Moimenta-a-Velha, in Terras de Bouro, to understand what it's like to be hit by lightning.

Countryside; birds; insects; cowbells

Ana Dias Neves: I think it was in 1985. We both took the animals out to pasture, and he was going to stay there whilst I went to plant some vegetables in a field nearby. Suddenly... we were talking to each other... and I said *Stay here for a bit...* It was drizzling...

Armando Silva: It was a very odd day... It was drizzling... there was no sign of thunder... It was raining so little that my mum kept the umbrella... If it had been really raining she would have given it to me, wouldn't she?

Ana Dias Neves: I didn't see anything, I just heard *boom...* when I heard that I didn't see anything else... I fell over on the ground... I heard *brrroom...* I think I said to him *thunder...*

[01:01:36.23]

Thunder; cowbells; birds

Ana Dias Neves: I don't know... I can't remember what we said to each other, he might remember, because he is younger... I didn't see anything else...

Armando Silva: I was a boy, I didn't know if a bomb had exploded, or what it was... I fainted. I fainted and when I woke up I remember seeing my mum on the ground looking like she was dead, literally...

Ana Dias Neves: I lost consciousness and when I woke up I thought... *What happened? It was thunder, because I heard the rumble... It was thunder...* I fainted again. When I woke up... It was as if I was coming back from another world... It felt as if I'd been away from this planet... I didn't know where my mind was... I said to myself *Where is my son?* And I looked up and I saw him sitting on top of a

wall. And I said *Armando, are you alright?* And he said *What about you mum, are you alright?* And I said *No...* Then I said *Armando, could you come here?*

Armando Silva: I got closer and she told me her shoulder was hurting, and I realised the umbrella was stuck to her skin... I still remember it very clearly.

Ana Dias Neves: And I told him, *Grab me by the legs...* I remembered to say that... *Grab me by the legs and don't touch the umbrella, it might have electricity on it... it could be dangerous...* He grabbed me by the legs and asked *Where are your wellies?*

Armando Silva: Her wellington boots had come off, they had been ripped off, and from her knees downwards her legs were bent like rubber. I never thought it was possible, it was a really traumatic image... the legs were like rubber... I grabbed them and they were floppy, she couldn't stand up... but I was able to drag her and I moved her away from the umbrella...

Ana Dias Neves: And I think I still have the scars ... where my skin was burned... My husband was away in Braga, we had only a few neighbours at the time. Our friends were away as well, so I told him *Go and ask the neighbour if she can come here.* And she did... her son came too...

Armando Silva: We put her on our shoulders, didn't we? And brought her in... Because she couldn't... her legs twisted...

Ana Dias Neves: Then I was alright. The two of us stayed at home. We cooked lunch, then my husband arrived and we were fine. That was it.

Cows mooing; cowbells

Ana Dias Neves: Oh, but while my son was away getting the neighbour, I dragged myself along the ground and I saw our four cows coming, bellowing wooooo, and when they got closer I said *Hello...* At that point I thought to myself *If they come any closer and get on top of me it's going to be a problem...* I got scared... Then I noticed thick black smoke all around... it was so smelly, so smelly... The oak tree had broken in two and some parts of it just disappeared never to be found. One of the olive trees vanished...

Armando Silva: It looked as if giant moles had been excavating the soil... Then I understood what had happened. Above the wall where I was sitting there was a wired grapevine and the wire had melted... that's why the grapevines had all fallen down. At the time there was a local newspaper in Amares and a journalist came here and interviewed us. He wrote an article about the phenomenon...

and took some pictures of the field. Unfortunately I couldn't find the newspaper... I wanted to show it to you. If I find it in the meantime I'll scan it and I'll send it... But it was a traumatising event... I was 12 years old at the time and it was not pleasant to look at my mum lying on the floor, thinking she was dead... I thought *I don't know what just happened, but she is dead*... Fortunately she wasn't...

Thunder; rain

[00:06:24.24]

Sofia: It is hard to know how many people are struck by lightning each year. Nowadays we are more protected from it, but luck also plays a role. Not long ago a lightning bolt hit the Rádio Valdevez tower.

José Rocha: An upward lightning bolt... which means it travelled upwards towards the sky... to the cloud... and it burned all the equipment on the transmitting station... The walls broke... Fortunately the 35 meter antenna tower wasn't damaged, but all the equipment was... the cables, the antenna... The Lightning rod disappeared, just melted... it turned into tiny gold looking pieces. I've never seen anything like it. Then I thought of a similar episode that happened 20, 21 years ago, exactly on same spot. I've always heard that lightning never strikes the same place

twice. In this case it did, it did strike twice in the same place and it has been proved scientifically that in the mountain where our antenna is, upward lightning can occur.

Sofia: There are about 4 million lightning strikes on planet earth everyday single day.

Distant thunder

Alexandra Vieira: There are stories of lightning storms and their consequences... Lightning strikes that kill whole flocks of sheep, people... damage trees, start wildfires, especially dry thunderstorms, thunderstorms with no rain... For a family to loose a flock of sheep, it could have disastrous consequences...

Maria Bernarda Gomes: I get anxious... I get... I don't know... I feel very respectful ... like... very respectful... And Santa Barbara comes into my mind straight away... I think of Santa Barbara straight away...

Thunder

Maria da Conceição Lopes: And in May dry thunderstorms used to break out... with no rain... And that was when we were most scared... Because at the time there were no lightning

rods or anything like that... And when lightning hit a tree, it broke it in two...

Arminda Amaral: The last one we saw... seemed as if it was right inside the kitchen and it was going to break the walls... *boooooom*... what a noise... I think a lightning bolt fell nearby...

Luis Guerra: I was thinking about my dog... she is around 12, 13 years old... she starts shaking, climbs into my lap... she gets unwell... And she feels it even before we do... She gets really shaky... and scared...

Distant thunder

João Godinho: If we didn't have the scientific knowledge we have today, it would be easy for me to believe in a superior entity that was responsible for it. It demands respect, so someone out there should be respected...

Maria Augusta Costa: I was around 5 years old... I was misbehaving and my aunt was cross with me saying *Hear that? That's the Heavenly Father cross with you*... That's what children were told...

Maria da Conceição Lopes: There was a family that used to live up the road and they had no faith in God... They were

not believers... One day a heavy thunderstorm broke out and the man of the family said *There he is throwing the chairs around...* When the thunderstorm got really bad the man didn't know what to do or say... He got really distressed and scared...

Maria da Conceição Lopes: My deceased grandmother... she died many years ago... When she saw a thunderstorm coming she would pray very loudly *Oh magnificent one, magnificent one... our souls rejoice in praising the Lord, the Holy Trinity...* the louder she prayed the more frightened we were...

Arminda Amaral: Do you know the Saint Barbara prayer? It's the simplest one... the first one I learned, my mother taught me... *Blessed Saint Barbara, accepted into heaven, with a branch and a cup of holy water, free us from this torment...* The branch was a blessed branch of rosemary, laurel and olive tree, because it was said that the smoke of it was blessed and would send the thunderstorms away...

Car door opening; water stream

[00:11:31.00]

Sofia: I came to Piodão... a village in a mountain range called Serra do Açor, and I came here because there is a

connection between this village and thunderstorms... which is... and there is one just in front of me... above some of the front doors, you can see a small cross, made of wood... I am going to try to speak to someone... I don't see any locals, it seems that there are only tourists...

Sofia: Good afternoon. Those little things above the front doors are to protect the houses from thunderstorms, aren't they?

Ilda Fontinha: She'll tell you about them...

Irene Lopes: We put them up on the 3rd of may, the day of the Holy Cross... everybody puts them on their properties and fields to bless the crops and the houses and mainly to protect them from thunderstorms. And the branches that the crosses are made from have been blessed... because on Palm Sunday we all take a branch of laurel, rosemary and olive tree to church and on the day of the Holy Cross we put the crosses up above the doors and in the fields around here...

Sofia: And do you still do that?

Irene Lopes: Yes, yes... It's tradition... We didn't do it this year, because there were no blessings... we didn't have any kind of ceremonies, because of covid...

Sofia: Are there a lot of thunderstorms around here?

Irene Lopes: Yes, Yes... On the day my cousin arrived there was one... it was really dreadful... because this village nestles right into the mountain... and with the lightning and the rumble of thunder... it's really scary...

Sofia: Thank you.

Church bell; thunder

Maria da Conceição Lopes: We would get really scared... My grandmother knew some other prayers... Virgin Barbara got up, with a branch in her hand, *Barbara tell me, Where are you going? I am going to collect the thunderstorms...*

Rain

Maria Augusta Costa: *Saint Barbara, Saint Jerome... Saint Barbara...*

Maria da Conceição Lopes: *...where there's no bread or wine, or little boy's breath, or woman in labor...*

Maria Augusta Costa: *Saint Barbara got up, took her shepherd's crook... and Saint Jerome... Saint Barbara, where are you going? I'm going to take away the thunderstorm...*

Arminda Amaral: *And the Saint Gregory one... Saint Gregory got dressed, put his shoes on and his religious habit and took his shepherd's crook, and he walked along the paths and he met Our Lord who asked him "where are you going Gregory?" "I'm going to take the thunderstorms away that are hovering above us, ready to strike... Take them far away, high up on the wasteland, where there is no bread or wine, nor olive branches, nor fig tree branches"... Oh... I forget... nor walker... nor crowing cockerel... something like that... but I can no longer remember it, no... I can't remember... I knew a lot of them, but I can no longer remember them...*

Distant thunder; rain, dog barking

Maria Bernarda Gomes: *When we were here at home, we would go out into the chapel ... open the chapel door, get the statue of Saint Barbara and put it by the door ... and we still do it...*

Maria da Conceição Lopes: *Dogs were left outside, far away... people didn't want them inside... they believed it*

could be dangerous... They said ... The old ones thought that...

Maria Augusta Costa: And I remember my great-grandmother ... My great-grandmother as soon as she started seeing the lightning, she would put on a shawl... like this, like this, a black shawl ... which was what women used to wear, wasn't it?... the widows ... she'd cover her eyes, and I remember her going inside a small room, under the stairs, so she wouldn't see the lightning or hear the thunder...

Dog barking; wind chimes

[00:15:48.03]

Maria da Conceição Lopes: At night it was even scarier... Because we couldn't go anywhere... We had to stay at home by ourselves... During the day we'd be with the neighbours, everybody would get together, so we wouldn't be so scared... I knew a lady... she was from a neighbouring parish, she was alone at home and a very strong thunderstorm came... she was afraid, so she went to her neighbours... a lightning bolt killed her, they were all together and a lightning bolt hit her... poor her, she was burned to death... I didn't go to the funeral, but a lot of people went... my mom went...

Cricket at night

Maria Augusta Costa: My mother used to say Don't stay by the window or near the door ... Because lightning could get in... and get out... because if it gets in it has to get out too...

Arminda Amaral: My mother used to say... *Cover your earrings...* because gold attracts the lightning bolts... Anyone working with metal tools, had to put them away...

Cricket at night; cowbells

Maria Augusta Costa: And the funny thing is that my father brought home a very smooth stone, it looked like a pebble stone, but it was bigger... and he told me it was the lightning bolt that turns into a stone when it touches the ground, it makes a hole on the ground and gets inside... but after a while it comes to the surface...

The sound of hoeing, cowbells, cows mooing

Alexandra Vieira: The farmers would find those objects whilst working in the fields.. since they were polished objects, in other words, they weren't just some ordinary stone, like a pebble in a normal role, so because there was

no explanation and it had come from the earth, some of them believed it was an object created when the lightning hit the earth... and that that object would then protect them from the thunderstorms. In other words, what came from a thunderstorm was going to protect them. So people would keep these stones at home to protect them from thunderstorms.

[00:18:25.18]

Announcer: Rainfall will be possible with these storms which may result in flash flooding. Additional thunderstorms will be possible monday through thursday...

Sofia: To find out how far away a thunderstorm is we count the seconds between the lightning flash and the rumble of thunder. Each second represents 343 meters.

Storm chaser: But it's coming this way...

Bruno Gonçalves: A storm chaser is someone who goes out and chases storms in order to observe them, and also take pictures, record videos and timelapse photos.

Storm chaser: Incredible structure...

Wind

Storm chaser: Look down there... It's a tornado... Down there...

Wind

Bruno Gonçalves: They also have an important role because they are on the ground observing in real time what is happening, and then they can pass this information to the United States National Weather Service, so they can issue warnings in real time to help protect local communities...

Heavy rain

Storm chaser: It's already raining and hailing together...

Bruno Gonçalves: There are dozens of companies that are specifically created to organise tours and take people from all over the world, from Europe, from Asia, to the United States, and we follow the storms as they are being formed for one, two, three or several hours until the end of the day. So while we are there we never know where we're going to sleep the next day, we never know where we're going to end the day, or where we're going to start, so we are constantly in an adrenaline-fuelled state...

Storm chaser: What's my mobile doing...?

Wind; rain

Announcer: Tornado warning in this area till 9pm central daylight savings...

Storm chaser: I can see the funnel again...

Storm chaser: It's a funnel, go, go, go...

Storm chaser: Are you filming?

Storm chaser: Yes, I am.

Bruno Gonçalves: I've got a website called ExtremaAtmosfera where I publish the photos, videos and timelapses I've been taking in the last few years. I also organise trips to the United States... and take people from Portugal, and not only from Portugal, to witness and hunt storms and we do that in safe conditions...

[00:21:18.26]

Piano

Sofia: In Portugal the interior of the country has more thunderstorms than any other area. They mainly occur in May and September. Choreographer and dancer Luís Guerra was inspired by the maritime climate of Viana do Castelo to create a dance piece called Thunderstorm.

Piano

Luís Guerra: Choreographically the piece was fast, very fast and precise, but it had an electrical quality to it... The first scene was a scene where you could see very fast hand movements, as if someone was starting a storm... I don't know ... for example someone pressing buttons on a control panel and shoot lightning bolts ... but it had a quality of lightning to it ... each member of the audience had their own interpretation... for some it even resembled Star Wars... you can interpret it in many ways ... But it is mainly a figure, a warrior or a figure that had a virile energy... but you can also see it as a matriarchal figure, when suddenly, in mythological terms... I don't know... the idea of the mother who is always silent listening and then ... Or the goddess who destroys everything ... yes ... I don't know...

Piano

Sofia: Thunderstorm is a dance piece created by Luís Guerra with music by João Godinho. Joana Gama played the piano.

João Godinho: The original musical piece was called Fogo Posto [Arson]. It was also Joana who played the piece when it premiered...

Luís Guerra: Joana showed me João's music, which I really liked, and that song seemed obvious for the theme I was researching.

João Godinho: The main tone of the piece was very frantic, very agitated, a lot of agitation, a lot of notes per second ... it felt endless, that it wouldn't end... the music felt like a thunderstorm, where we never know how long it will last or where it will go... and I also tried to create contrasts between those agitated, wild moments, with more peaceful ones...

Piano

João Godinho: We also tried a section that, from the point of view of the choreography seemed to me very fertile... it was a technique of suddenly lowering and raising the

piano's support pedal, and in the piece this section was amplified to create the feeling that there is... thunder rumbling, but still quite far away... Can I?

Sofia: Yes, yes...

Piano

Joana Gama: My posture was very contained, I was very rigid... delivering the music for Luis to dance to, but without being connected... It was very technical, very precise... And so much that I almost didn't move... But in that part that João just showed, I assumed command. I was in control... because it was a relatively free part where I would make those pedal movements... I was feeding the piano resonance as I felt it needed more... But curiously João Godinho and I participated in a Victor Hugo Pontes's play called Nocturno in which there was a representation of a huge thunderstorm... I just remembered this ... there was a huge thunderstorm on stage, and the kids in the audience would get really scared, because they'd hear thunder rumbling, super loud, and there was a huge fabric sheet waving about, and even the adults were scared...

Thunder; Thunder tube

[00:26:35.15]

Sofia: This is the sound of a thunder tube. Before the existence of sound recorders, sound effects in live shows were created by using a variety of ingenious methods.

Sofia: I am at Vila Real Theatre in the Museum of Sound and Image... and as soon as you arrive you see two sound effect machines. One is a thunderstorm car and the other one is a wind machine. The thunderstorm car is a box... a wooden box, it's quite heavy, this is very old, and it has wheels and those wheels are not smooth, they have some lumps to make the... to sound rough ... I'm going to try do it... I'll do a test ... get the machine to work ... not the machine, the thunderstorm car...

Rain; thunder

Sofia: Lightning is the symbol of something powerful, sudden. In the cinema, a stormy night is often an anticipation of something terrifying, diabolical. Harry Potter has a lightning bolt scar... a lightning bolt brought Frankenstein's monster to life. Also in the classic Tarot decks there is a card that shows lightning striking.

Maria de Fátima Afonso: When we start the tarot course we learn... the worst card in the deck is the Tower. Because it means that something very powerful is about to happen and it's always something very bad... This card has a

lightning bolt, and a full moon, which we don't actually see when there's a thunderstorm, a tower... the tower symbolises a castle, which is a symbol of nobility... And you also see people upside down, because they can't control themselves, they're out of control... And that's all you see. And this... But the tower is being struck by lightning, it is not by chance that you say "Um raio que te parta" [May a lightning bolt break you into pieces]

[00:29:41.10]

Loud thunder

Sofia: A thunderstorm can be understood as a metaphor to describe the life of human beings on earth. It is full of dangers and fascinations.

João Godinho: Nature expressing itself with no shame... getting everything out of its system... it's expressing its feelings fully... unconditionally, isn't it?

Loud thunder

Sofia: The growth of a tension and a discharge. Violence committed against someone, a stranger or someone who is intimate.

Alexandra Vieira: I think that when I feel like that, with a thunderstorm temperament... as if a thunderstorm is getting into me... I feel nervous and aggressive, because otherwise I wouldn't... I could control my emotions ... but I think it is also a storm of emotions, isn't it? I think everything is very alive, very intense...

Sofia: We can compare thunderstorms to human emotions. When we fall in love, for example, we think about electricity, our eyes shinning like sparks, the heart rumbling like thunder. It is an uncontrollable and unpredictable thing...

Joana Gama: What is fascinating about these natural phenomenona, hurricanes, wild fires, thunderstorms, heavy rains, is this idea of greatness that you cannot control... which is ... nowadays human beings are trying to control everything, and these phenomenona are mostly unpredictable, even earthquakes and tsunamis you cannot predict them ... So it is fascinating that there is so much knowledge of the world, and even then there are these powerful phenomena that have a huge impact on our lives and are indomitable... It's brilliant.

Sofia: The Thunderstorm includes the voices of Ana Dias Neves, Armando Silva, José Rocha, Alexandra Vieira, Maria Bernarda Gomes, Maria da Conceição Lopes, Arminda Amaral, Luís Guerra, João Godinho, Maria Augusta Costa, Irene Lopes, Bruno Gonçalves, Joana Gama e Maria de Fátima Afonso. My name is Sofia Saldanha.

Thunder; rain

To the memory of Arminda Amaral

Music: Trovoada by João Godinho, composed for the dance show Trovoada by Luís Guerra.

Piano: Joana Gama

Translated by Sofia Saldanha and Amanda Booth

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