Episode Title: Greeting Card

**Trigger Warning:**

Sara: Before we begin, we'd like to warn you that this episode covers sensitive topics like forced sterilization, abortion, child abuse, infant death, sexual assault and rape, suicide, and maltreatment of detainees. This episode has also cut out the names of women who were detained in New Orleans for privacy reasons.

**Artwork Introduction:**

*\*Intro music\**

Katie: Out of all the art pieces being discussed in the Fold exhibit, only one object was created by a woman. A four paneled, nine inch tall greeting card constructed of repurposed book covers. It was spirited out of Orleans Parish Prison by a sympathetic released prisoner who mailed it to Demian Yumei, a musician and supporter in York.[[1]](#footnote-0) The card's exterior features a basket of tree peonies drawn in pencil and crayon.[[2]](#footnote-1)

Demain: On, the, the left panel, if you close it, on the back, it has this beautiful Chinese calligraphy and a flower that she, it looks like it's watercolor. And on the inside, on the left panel, it says thank you for helping kindness. Three exclamation points with hearts. Love always your Chinese friends. Another heart. And in the middle it says, “To dearest my special friend, Once this simple card reaches your warmest hands, I hope it will find you in the best of health and happiness. I just want you to know you are in my thoughts and prayers always. I love you.” And also, the, the hearts. Oh, and she's got “forever” written in the middle of that heart. And the three exclamation points with the hearts. All right, and then for the right panel and inside, “Damian, thank you for everything.” Again, the exclamation point, “love always, your Chinese friends.” And then on the back she has a note. That says, she draws this heart with the flower, with the rose. You are special, written inside, and she says, “Thank you, thank you from the bottom of my heart. It's a miracle the way that you found me. How you opened my eyes and made me to see that everything's not as bad as it sometimes seems. And they can never take away a person's dreams. You filled me with a brand new hope and you give me more courage and strength to cope. You've helped my loneliness to subside. I thank you for this, and so much more. My love for you is great and pure. Love always, your Chinese friend.” And on the very back is just this beautiful, beautiful drawing of maybe that's a chrysanthemum. I'm terrible with plants. It's a beautiful flower with a bunch of other beautiful flowers.

*\*Music transition\**

Katie: She said in the interview that she was not sure what the Chinese on the card read. Here we have the translation of the Chinese calligraphy, which is a poem that reads as follows. “Thousands of colors. The Spirit Adventure. Gorgeous color and fragrance. Every color is new.”[[3]](#footnote-2)

**Host and Episode Introduction**

Katie & Sara: Welcome to another episode of Golden Dreams. I'm Katie. And I'm Sara. And today we're going to be discussing the women of the Golden Venture.

**Section 1: Women’s Experience In China During the Early 1990s**

*\*Music transition\**

Sara: Prior to their journey on the Golden Venture, the women endured their own difficulties in early 1990s China. There were a number of push and pull factors that caused these women to take the journey on the Golden Venture ship. There are two broad factors that apply specifically to the women. The one child policy and the treatment towards women in China.

Sara: So thoughts?

Katie: I definitely have a lot, um, about this sort of thing. I obviously I don't think it's right. Like at all. Like, this is not something that should ever happen, especially like back in the nineties, like it's only 30 years ago.

Sara: Yeah.

Katie: Like that's something that I would hear happened like 200 plus years ago. Like that's not. I don't like to use the word like, like medieval or even like barbaric, but that's just, it's not right. Especially like such a desire for a male heir. I don't, I don't understand it at all.

Sara: Yeah, it's definitely something interesting to take in, especially as us being from, you know, The United States, where that's very much not a thing anymore. I mean, you know, again, like you said, it's something that was like 200 years ago.

Katie: Right.

Sara: And versus now, I mean, especially in the 90s, you know, I doubt that was even like a thought that crossed parents minds. I mean, possibly, you know, maybe with like fathers being like, oh, I want a son.

Katie: Yeah.

Sara: But definitely not being like, oh, well, we had a daughter, well, you gotta, you know, take her and dump her at an orphanage or you got to dump her with her aunt and uncle or grandparents or whatever.[[4]](#footnote-3)

Katie: Right. Like, I cannot imagine how terrifying that is to be, to be a mother and already going through, like, such a tough time because you really, like, I can't imagine how, number one, stressful pregnancy is enough already, but to then be, like, hey, if I have a girl, my life is over. Like, I cannot feasibly imagine that ever happening. I cannot imagine that sense of, like, terror. Like, terror enough that people want to leave, you know? And I guess you can also, you can consider it, like, almost a little bit, like, in, like, in America, like, Roe v. Wade that just got overturned a little bit ago. That sort of reproductive fear. But this just goes to a whole other level that, I mean, like, I don't blame the women for wanting to leave in those circumstances, especially after some of the stories that I've heard. I don't, I don't blame them at all, honestly.

Sara: I think it's also appeasing a patriarchal built society in China as well.

Katie: Yeah

Sara: I think, you know, obviously these women, when they do get pregnant and find out it's a girl, I mean, if they find out early enough, you see that some of them go as far as going having an abortion, so they don't have this child, and then try again for a boy.[[5]](#footnote-4) Or, even I think too, obviously the fear that they have probably of their husbands who strongly desire to have a male child, or even the husband's family considering in a lot of these marriages they're arranged and, uh, these women have dowries and they basically never see their own families again.

Katie: Right.

Sara: And their husband's family becomes their family.

Katie: Yeah.

Sara: And they're all looking basically to this woman to bring them, I guess, a next generation of a man who's basically gonna take care of everybody and carry on the family legacy.

Katie: Right. And like, I don't even understand why the desire for a male is so strong anyways.

Sara: Um. Yeah. I mean.

Katie: Well, this is also coming from an American standpoint.

Sara: Yeah. I think just because most of it is in, um, it seems like it shifted away from urban areas and more into rural areas.

Katie: Right

Sara: I think just for sake of, like, property

Katie: Yeah

Sara: You know, owning farmland and cultivating, you know, whatever produce you have in order to survive economically. And then I guess, you know, thinking about quote unquote traditional roles.

Katie: Yeah.

*\*Music transition\**

Sara: In order for us to get a better understanding of the struggles the women of the Golden Venture faced in China that led to them taking this journey, we turn to Demian Yumei to give us a better understanding. Yumei is an artist, activist, and author of a Substack publication called Silent No More. And we turn to her to give us their perspective.

Demian: People of the Golden Vision, the grassroots group here, um, started protesting or standing outside of the prison. Um, and I read an article about them, and I thought, you know, I need, I need to check this out because I'm part Chinese. I've heard a lot of stories about China. And so I went, and that's where I met Joan Maruskin. So, you know, it, I was really impressed with the people who were there and then, and touched by the story of the detainees. And Joan had asked, You know, we'd like to gather up penpals, penpals for the guys because they're lonely and you know, they could use some, some, um, support and she asked if people would like to be angels, right for the, for the detainees. And I did not raise my hand because I was involved. I had a lot of stuff on my plate. So Joan, as you have probably figured out yourself, she's very, very, sharp. She had me pegged. And so she came up to me afterwards and she said, um, Damien, you know, there are these women who are, um, they're detained in New Orleans and there's one young, young woman. Um, and her, um, her, her family and the women, the other women are really concerned about her. They're, you know, she's very depressed and they're concerned that she might, you know. hurt herself, commit suicide. And, you know, would you be interested? I'm like, yes, sure. You know, this, you know, this, this woman all by herself, this really young person all by herself, basically, you know, in, in New Orleans and not knowing what's going on, of course, I'll write her. So I did. I sent her just this little short card, um, just telling her and I'm all about, you know, Holding a dream and keeping your dream and everything. So evidently it made a huge impact on her because I got, and I found this when I was looking for stuff for you guys. It's a copy of the very first letter she wrote me. It, it gives a human voice to the context. You know, you can hear about the conditions not being good. You can hear about them being isolated. You can hear about, you know, them being depressed. And that was the beginning of a beautiful relationship, a deep friendship.

*\*Music transition\**

Katie: After hearing how Damien has a friend who was a woman who experienced life in China and the Golden Venture, we quickly became curious to know more. We asked Damien if her friend or the other women in the prison had ever discussed the conditions they faced in China or on the Golden Venture, and this is what she had to say.

Demian: Two women, I know, um, she was, she escaped an arranged, forced marriage to someone who was much older than her and she didn't want that. You know, she didn't want that. And just because you call something marriage doesn't mean that it's not a situation where you're going to be raped on a consistent basis. Don't care what you call it. You know, it wasn't, it wasn't her free choice. And she certainly didn't want that for herself. And she broke, I guess, certain cultural whatever, right? And then she's like, I'm out of here. So that, that was her case. And, um, I know another woman, her situation was that she was actually, had a forced abortion performed on her because she became pregnant. I don't know if it was her second or third child. Um, but yeah, she had no choice. They drug her out. And, and the women do not talk about their experiences with other people. I know maybe, maybe ten percent. I know nothing about her voyage here. When they were in the ship for four months, twenty three women, I forget how many men.

**Second Trigger Warning Before Section 2**

Katie: Before we discuss what the conditions are like on the Golden Venture for the women, I'd like to give one more trigger warning, specifically about rape and sexual abuse. If you are uncomfortable with this, please feel free to skip ahead.

**Section 2: The Women of the Golden Venture and Their Journey**

*\*Music transition\**

Katie: The conditions women faced on the Golden Venture can only be described as one word. Hell. The women on board the ship were repeatedly abused and raped, being seen only as bodies for men to abuse. The Snakeheads, the criminal organization who was in charge of the Golden Venture, went as far as to hire local villagers from China that the women would have known in order to give them a false sense of security. However, when the women boarded the ship, that security was ripped away from them. The women on the Golden Venture were kept in a separate area from the rest of the ship. and forced into sexual slavery. It is said that a husband who traveled to America with his wife from the ship adamantly refused to see her afterwards. And when asked why he didn't want to see her again, it was because she, quote unquote, “came from that ship.” Conditions were even worse for the women on the boat who became pregnant from the abuse. The women who were pregnant were denied food for days at a time and some were denied food for a full week. The only way they were able to get food was if they allowed the men to use their bodies. So, when the women finally arrived in New York after four months on the Golden Venture, they expected the hell to be over. Little did they know that this was only the beginning.

Katie: So, what are your thoughts on that?

Sara: I mean, that's just awful, first of all.

Katie: Yeah.

Sara: That's so. I mean, we're gonna get into, like, the conditions of the prison and stuff, but, I mean, it's sad to say that it's, like, not surprising in that situation, but at the same time, it's just, like, God.

Katie: Like, I remember reading that on newspapers.com, and I was just, like, like, I don't get disturbed very often by stuff like that, but that made me, like, sick.

Sara: Yeah. Especially the man who, like, couldn't even look at his wife.

Katie: Oh my god, I know. Like, imagine going through all that, and you finally, like, get there. You can see your husband, and he's like, I don't want to see you after what you went through.

Sara: Especially, it's like, you act like it's her fault.

Katie: Right.

Sara: You know? Not that, like, I'm sure he couldn't have stepped in and stopped it, but it's just

Katie: Right.

Sara: I can't imagine the betrayal.

Katie: Yeah, and like, obviously we don't know the full context of it, besides him just saying, she came from that ship, so there could have been more to it, but like,

Sara: I mean, I can't, I can't imagine witnessing that.

Katie: Right.

Sara: I mean, even though they were held separately from the men, still, just.

Katie: Right, like, it's almost like, like cattle.

Sara: Yeah.

Katie: Which just, oh, that, that makes it so much worse to think about it like that.

Sara: And it was by, like, other passengers, right?

Katie: Uh, I, no, I believe it was just by, like, the people who ran the ship is who, uh, did it. The snakeheads. Yeah. Um, at least that's what I got from the article. Um, I say the source that the author was using, uh, was just someone who was on the boat. He didn't obviously want to be named or anything.

Sara: Yeah.

Katie: Um, but, uh, It's just gross.

Sara: Yeah. It's just, it's, meh.

Katie: Exactly.

Sara: You know, it just, it's another reminder of just how horrible human beings can be.

Katie: Oh yeah.

Sara: You know, you just like see like wholesome stuff and then it's just like all this horribleness. You know, especially in the case of the women versus the men. At least the men it seemed like had like more of a happier story throughout with support of the community and the women just had like nothing.

Katie: Right. And especially, like, what Demian was talking about when she said that the women came from, were escaping rape already. And this is what happened afterwards. It's just more abuse. It's vile. And as someone who has been through assault, especially, it is much more, like, personal, almost. Um, I don't know if that's the right word, but it makes me feel for them even more. And, like, the whole discussion of how women can't even go out at night by themselves for fear of that sort of thing happening.

Sara: Yeah, I know. My mom literally sends me Instagram reels of how to avoid being kidnapped.

Katie: Yeah, exactly.

Sara: Which even, I'm like, stop sending me this stuff. But even, I'm like, I'm already this paranoid. I know what I'm doing.

Katie: Right.

Sara: It's just, you know, You shouldn't even have to think about that being a reality for you, but it's just like, that's just the reality of women in general.

Katie: Right.

Sara: It's like, I would hope that there are women out there who have never, like, experienced assault, you know, like, I've had that happen. It's just, it seems like, not to say it's a part of womanhood, but, you know, in today's day and age, it sure as hell seems like it, so.

Katie: Yeah, well, I mean, I think it has gone better in recent years, especially with things like the Me Too movement.

Sara: Yeah.

Katie: But, especially, like, back then, it was so much worse, especially with the idea of, uh, marital rape now being a thing, um, that people never really discussed before as being something. And I think it was only, like, a few years ago, like, maybe in the 90s or the 2000s, when they outlawed marital rape, because it wasn't seen as rape because, you know, you're married.

Sara: And yeah, I definitely think women have become more comfortable with coming forward, even in, like, again, like, if it happens in your marriage or even in a relationship.

Katie: Yeah

Sara: Or it's, like, most of the times you don't think that it's, like, oh, you know, well, you know, I just was trying to make them happy and it's just, no, that's not.

Katie: It's just boys being boys. I hate that.

Sara: Oh my god, no.

Katie: I hate that.

Sara: Just guys being dudes.

Katie: Just guys being dudes. No.

Sara: Like, no.

Katie: Like, teach your son better.

Sara: Yeah. I don't, I don't even understand how you get of that mindset where that's acceptable.

Katie: It's disgusting, honestly. Look at that sort of thing and be like, oh, it's just boys being boys, you know, boys look, they want to touch and everything. Like, no, teach, keep your hands to yourself.

Sara: Yeah, I just, and even just the whole, like, like this story of the women being on the ship just like makes me think of sex trafficking that happens to women.

Katie: Yeah, so I did a, um, research paper on globalization and human trafficking, uh, a couple years ago, and yeah. It really reminded me of this sort of thing, where women would be promised, like, a better life, a better future in places like the United States, and that's how traffickers lure their victims in, nine times out of ten, by giving them that idea of a better life.

Sara: Or, I've even heard of women where, even women in the States, where they're just, like, teenagers who ran away from home, where they get lured in by these older men that basically take on the role as their quote unquote boyfriend. To protect them and take care of them and then there they are basically sending them out to be raped in order for them to get a profit off of them.

Katie: Right. And I do think it is very important to mention also that male sexual assault victims are still out there. That is another important thing. Not trying to diminish that at all because that is a very real thing that men also don't come out about very often.

Sara: Yeah, definitely think that while it like progressed for women to be comfortable coming out, I feel like for men, it's definitely not the same way.

Katie: Right

Sara: I think there's still like a lot of shame that is put on to men that are coerced. Especially, you know, like, if it is In a situation where it's a man and a woman and the woman assaults the man. It's just like, oh, well, you're a man. Like, why didn't you do anything about it?

Katie: The most of what I've seen is men being sexually assaulted and they're trying to talk to their guy friends. The guy friends like give him a high five or someone be like, yeah, you know, that's awesome or something like that. A girl is hitting on you or trying to be sexual with you, but like guys, this is something men go through too and.

Sara: Like no means no people. No means no.

Katie: No means no. Exactly.

Sara: It shouldn't still be said today that no means no. But there are still people that are like, well, you know.

Katie: No.

Sara: It's no.

Katie: No.

Sara: Well, what if they said yes but then they say no? No. They said no.

Katie: I will.

Sara: It stops there.

Katie: I will bring up the tea YouTube video right now.

Sara: Oh my god. I remember that.

Katie: I remember seeing that in sex ed class. The, if someone's unconscious, they don't want tea. If someone's like they say they want tea, but then decide they don't want tea anymore. Don't give them tea still. Stuff like that.

Sara: Yeah, I definitely think like, as like a high schooler, you didn't take it that serious, I think. Like, especially when it's just like, ooh, you want tea? You know, it's like, this is weird, why are they talking about tea?

Katie: Right.

Sara: Yeah, I think, not that there's anything wrong with that video, but I definitely think it could be like, more explicit?

Katie: Yeah.

Sara: A little bit? I think. Cause just, not that it's not pretty straight forward, but unfortunately for some people, it's not straight forward.

Katie: It's not straight forward.

Sara: Yeah.

Katie: I think it's evil all around. And it's unfortunate that this is a conversation we need to have.

Sara: Yeah. Rape is definitely like one of the most, like, horrible things you could ever do to another human being. You know, whether it be like, they're a complete stranger to you, or even if you know them. Like I don't understand what you gain from doing that, other than, ugh, it's just, ugh, it's disgusting. It's horrible.

Katie: It's, I, I feel so bad for, especially the women on the boat.

Sara: I mean, I can't imagine enduring that for four months.

Katie: Yeah

Sara: Four months

Katie: Yeah

Sara: Of that, especially when you just wanted food and water.

Katie: Yeah

Sara: And that coming at the price of being raped.

Katie: Your body, yeah.

Sara: Yeah, of being abused in order to survive.

*\*Music transition\**

Katie: During the detainment process, many women expected to be sent to the York County Prison along with the men on the ship. However, to their surprise, 18 of these women were instead sent to a New Orleans prison where conditions were much worse for them. The women in the New Orleans prison were, according to the York Daily Record, forced to wear leg irons to interviews with their lawyers, denied medical care in ministers visits, denied familiar food even though a local Chinese restaurant offered to send meals.These conditions were so bad that some women even attempted suicide.

Demian: People weren't allowed to come visit them. They were lucky if they could see their attorney. The only visitors they were allowed to have was someone from the evangelical church, the local church in the area. And that was like, you know, Once every so often, and these women were primarily Buddhist, you know, so, I mean, someone's better than nothing, but they weren't allowed any other visitors to come in and see them. Um, they were allowed to go out and into the, the recreation area, which was cement. Cement on the ground, cement on the walls, you know. Um, no grass, no trees, no nothing, no volleyball court. I mean, nothing, you know, for them. And if the weather was, um, permitted, they could go out maybe once or twice a week. They were able to take some English lessons, and they did have an interpreter. After two months Both of that was gone. The INS said, oh, they don't need an interpreter because we've translated everything into Mandarin. These women were from the Fujian province. Mandarin was like a second language to them.

*\*Music transition\**

The deprivation just increased over time. I know that she sent me, um, a letter and when she sent this card, I had sent her, you know, oh my gosh, thank you, you know, this letter. It got returned. The prison did not allow her to have that. And she was not able to send me this card. She couldn't mail it. They did not allow her to mail. They did not allow the women to mail cards or anything like that. God forbid that they should make connections with people outside of the detention. They were incarcerated. I know we use the word detained. But let's be real. You know, they, they were deprived of their freedom. They couldn't come and go. A serial killer gets to see their attorney. These women had a difficult time seeing their attorneys. I mean, what they ate was just appalling. They had cereal in the morning, some kind of sausage, red bean thing for lunch, and then a hamburger with lettuce. And then they were given two cartons of milk a week. And there were local Chinese restaurants who were like, hey, you know, we can make stuff for them because the appetite is very different. My mom couldn't drink milk. I, I can't for the most part. But, you know, hives, a whole line. And we just, the Asians don't have big dairy farms out there. And, and, uh, So they're not used to eating that kind of food. Many of the women, um, suffered from stomach problems and, and illnesses. They just had a difficult time.

*\*Music transition\**

Katie: So what do you think about what Demian said about the conditions at the prison?

Sara: I mean, it's, it's just crazy to me that they didn't even have like actual cells. Like there wasn't a detention wing for refugees. It was just, a hallway.

Katie: Yeah.

Sara: That they put them in. Like, there, there has to be a law or something that shouldn't be legal.

Katie: Well, I mean, was, were there any laws back then for that sort of thing?

Sara: The 90s was a crazy time, so probably not.

Katie: Yeah.

Sara: Especially prison systems in general get away with a lot of stuff..

Katie: We both watch a lot of true crime stuff and I think we both can agree what Demian said about the serial killer being able to see their attorney is 100 percent correct.

Sara: Oh yeah for sure. And even in most situations, serial killers get lined up with, like, fantastic attorneys who want the press for their name versus, like, these women. Again, another thing that should not be legal, for them to be denied access to their attorneys, you know. And, like, how are they supposed to make their case? How are they supposed to do anything? If you won't let them figure out what they're supposed to do.

Katie: Right. Yeah, especially, um, what she said about not having interpreters because they translate everything into Mandarin and not caring that that's not their language.

Sara: Yeah. It's, like, especially to the fact they had an interpreter for two months.

Katie: Yeah.

Sara: And we're just like, no. Mandarin's good enough.

Katie: Yeah.

Sara: Like, do you not understand what the word dialect is?

Katie: Right, like, I know there's definitely major differences between Mandarin and the language that they actually spoke. It's like how there's so many different types of, like, Spanish out there.

Sara: Yeah.

Katie: It's the same exact thing.

Sara: Yeah, I know that, um, because I mean, of course, there's, like, Cantonese, and then there's also, I know even Mandarin itself, there's, like, different types of Mandarin.

Katie: Right.

Sara: Like, if you live in Shanghai, you speak a different Mandarin than, like, somebody that lives like out in the countryside or something, you know, it's different depending on what region you are in. It's like here where people have southern accents in the south and have like different sayings versus like people like on the east coast.

Katie: I just, I feel so bad for the women. I keep saying this, but I just feel so bad for the women.

Sara: It's just horrible. Like I just find it insane that it's like nobody was doing like, not that the attorneys were putting in all the effort that they could.

Katie: Yeah.

Sara: And of course, obviously, Demian reaching out and speaking with these women through the pen pal program, we're doing something, but it's just like neglecting these people who came here to escape, like, especially China in the nineties, like, it's not, not that it's great now.

Katie: Yeah

Sara: But it wasn't not good in the nineties.

Katie: Yeah. It's not, not a great place to live.

Sara: No. And the fact that these women. came to America to escape that. And even seeing, like, not that it's, like, easy to be a refugee now, but it's definitely not, like, I just don't understand how you were so on top of them as an example, but not other people who came in as refugees as well, for, like, the same reasons. You know, escaping the political climate where it's like very authoritarian versus here where it's like a democracy.

Katie: I think the biggest thing for me was the fact that they took away all their art supplies. It's so important to be able to have that form of expression. And I keep going back to the whole serial killer thing.

Sara: Yeah

Katie: People like John Wayne Gacy who are allowed to do art.

Sara: Yup, allowed to even write letters to people.

Katie: Right

Sara: And get letters from people.

Katie: Charles Manson got married in prison.

Sara: Like, how many times? I'm pretty sure you got married, like, three times.

Katie: Really?

Sara: I think so. I know, like, almost like all serial killers got married at some point while they were in prison.

Katie: That's not fair.

Sara: No, it's not. Like, that's crazy.

Katie: Like, art is such a fantastic form of expression that once you take that away, they do become hopeless.

Sara: Yeah, I definitely agree with what Demian had mentioned before where it just seems like they were doing this on purpose.

Katie: Yeah

Sara: Like I definitely think they were trying to get these women to deport themselves and go back.

Katie: Right

Sara: Because they just didn't want to actually help them which again 18 people 18 people it's not like You know a million people showed up and were like, hey, can we come into the country? No 18 people like you. Why?

Katie: It's so ironic that America is the melting pot of the world.

Sara: Yeah

Katie: And then they said, actually, no, what if we don't? I mean, racism has always been like a gigantic problem in America.

Sara: Yeah

Katie: Um, especially today I was thinking about like with COVID and everything, the hate against Chinese.

Sara: Oh, yeah.

Katie: Like it's, it's sick.

Sara: And even seeing all the attacks that came from that as well.

Katie: Right. Especially against Chinese women, like the salon shooting that happened a couple years ago. And I definitely think there is, there has to be misogyny in all of this as well, with the women being treated so much different than the men were in the prisons.

Sara: Especially to such, like, a drastic extent.

Katie: Right.

Sara: Like, it would be, you know, maybe it's like, oh, the prison's just, like, more run down, or, you know, and don't have as good of food. It's like, no.

Katie: Right.

Sara: Like, this is totally a whole different thing. And it's not even, like again, they were given money to take care of these women, but were not using it like they were supposed to.

Katie: So I work at a pet store and on, on the, one of the doors we have a advertisement for a brand of food and it said, feed your pet for $1.50 a day. And I was thinking about it and I was like, they're spending less money on the women than they are for this dog food. Which makes no sense to me.

Sara: No

Katie: Like, is it really that difficult to treat people like humans?

Sara: Yeah. Like, you're really gonna take more care for a pet.

Katie:Right.

Sara: Than a person?

Katie: Yeah. Like, they came here with hope of finding a new, a new life that's better than what they were living in. And especially going back to what they experienced on the boat. Going through that four months of absolute hell.

Sara: Yeah.

Katie: Only to come here and just get their freedom stripped away even more.

Sara: Yeah. Being completely isolated, not allowed to talk to anybody, but except amongst themselves, which even that, it's like, I'm sure they were thinking about their families or if they had husbands who were in York somewhere, you know, thinking about them and not being able to talk to them. And it's like, like, how would you feel if you were put basically in isolation, not allowed to talk to anybody for months. Like, wasn't it, I think, a year? Like, over a year, I think?

Katie: Right. It was something like that. Um, and it's just, it's sad.

Sara: It's just inhumane.

Katie: Like, how much America failed them. Especially with prisons. And like, I don't know if prisons have gotten better with that sort of thing. Um, I know they're going to talk about that in the prison reform episode, which, I don't, I don't know if it's gotten any better. I hope it has, but it wouldn't shock me if it wasn't.

Sara: Yeah. Especially when you think about looking at prisons today or especially even like detention centers for people who immigrated here and just seeing how they are treated. Basically again, like animals and not like human beings seeking opportunity and seeking safety.

Katie: Yeah.

Sara: I just, it's ugh. It's so aggravating, especially seeing how the attitudes people have towards people seeking refuge or seeking a new life here have not changed. Where people are like, no, you know, we need to have like, uh, stricter laws or we shouldn't be letting these people in here. It's like, what do you mean? Why not?

Katie: I think one thing I've noticed is the racism when it comes to that sort of thing. Going to the war in Ukraine. Like, how many Ukrainian people have come over here and have been accepted versus these Chinese women who were immediately seen as almost like monsters.

Sara: And even looking at people coming in from Mexico and how they're viewed. Yeah. And it's like, what?

Katie: Like, I see it on CNN every single day.

Sara: Literally every day, the crisis at the border, and it's just like, okay, but like, our system created this crisis, and to act like these people don't have a reason to be here is crazy.

Katie: I, I don't, I don't understand. And it's something I, I'm never probably going to understand.

Sara: No. I mean, especially like, obviously we're privileged to have been born here, and have, like, the American life, and not have to experience struggle like that, where you literally have to run away from your home country.

Katie: Yeah.

Sara: But at the same time, it's like, how can you not be sympathetic? How can you not, like, relate to another person, have empathy, have understanding, not just immediately push them away. Simply because you are like, ooh, you know, you're xenophobic and you don't want them here.

Katie: Right. Like, we are both white.

Sara: Yes.

Katie: We don't understand the struggles that these people go through at all. But we could, we're still sympathetic. Yeah.

Sara: Yeah. It's just being human.

Katie: Yeah, exactly. You know, I don't understand.

*\*Music transition\**

Katie: Women in the prisons were being deprived both mentally and physically, which is evident through a letter that Demian Yumei will now read to us.

Demian: Okay, so this was written on September 8th, 94. And she writes, “Dearest Demian, I was thrilled to receive a wonderful letter from you. I was surprised when it reached me. I pondered over it for a while. Once I finished reading it, I then read your letter over and over again. At this time, I'd just like to express my thanks from the bottom of my heart. I know there are many Americans who have put in a sincere effort to help me. Thank you very much. I'm really honored to become your friend. Thank you for your encouragement and consolation. I've been trying to make myself feel better, but finally I always fail. I can't stand everything that has happened in my life. I've been very depressed. I'm really scared that I'm going to go crazy. I'm filled with sadness and my mind is full of getting out of this cruel and terrible place. I'm sorry I must talk about this. I really don't want to lie to you. With each passing day, I'm increasingly depressed. I don't know what I should do. I'm afraid I'll lose my mind. I'm so scared of this, I'd rather die than go crazy. You know I've been away from China for three years. I left China at the age of 18. I couldn't have known that life would put me down at such a good time. It was like serving time on the way to America. I thought a new and better life would begin when I arrived in America. I couldn't imagine that day not only would end life as I knew it, but also begin hell. It's so cruel. I hate this world. I'm frightened and so tired. I'd rather have died in that sea than be in despair here and now. I hope this American government no longer tries to take away my life or to make me crazy. Either death or release, I really need an exact time.” And she just expresses fear. “I always try to control myself. I'm no longer sure I can do this. Especially if they lock me up in here. I'm not sure I still could control these things that are happening. I can't imagine what will happen. Well, I'm so sorry to tell you the sad things in my first letter. I really don't want to, but I can't control myself from doing this. I've been desperately trying for a long time. I feel tired now. Please forgive me for mentioning these sad things over and over. At this time, I want to thank you again.” And then she goes on to say that and I'll never forgive you. And then I can write to her in English. It's fine. She's, she's got it. Um, and then, yeah, that's what she says. You know, “you're in my thoughts and prayers always.” And she draws this little bird with Carefree. All of her, um, Um, letters to me had like this little bird in Carefree. And the song that I wrote for her called Song of Hope has that repeating line. The, the song, it was really inspired by the letters that she wrote to me. And she did get to hear it.

Katie: Oh, that's good.

Demian: Yeah. So she ends it with saying, “Please send my heartfelt thanks to everyone who's been helping me. I'm the youngest among these Chinese women from the Golden Venture here. Um, I'm also the one who wasn't get married. Once this letter reaches your warmest hands, I hope and pray it will find you in the best of health.”

Katie: Wow.

Demian: Yeah. So, this, understandably, was the darkest letter I received from her. Now, when the women, they were woken up in the middle of the night when they were in New Orleans, put on a plane, flown to California, Bakersfield, California. No one told them where they were going. So the entire time they were on that flight, they didn't know if they were going back to China, which they feared. Because if they weren't going to get in trouble for leaving, they were certainly going to get in trouble for coming back. Not only because, I mean, there were a lot of people who leave and you know, whatever. And sometimes they wind up getting deported. But this, these guys and these women got national attention. They embarrassed China. They embarrassed the ruling party. So they were terrified. They were terrified. They didn't want to go, um, in public. They didn't want to tell people what happened. I don't know if Joan told you Oprah Winfrey had wanted to interview them when they were in Bakersfield. Yeah, she heard about them. She wanted to interview them, right? They said no. Even though if they told their story, it would help them personally, they were terrified that their families back home would get the repercussions, that they would be punished. And these women subjected themselves to silence, and more silence. of living this kind of reality rather than to put their own family in danger. You may not, you may have one opinion about immigration, but you better not disrespect the people who, who make that trip to come to this country.

*\*Music transition\**

Sara: The fact that they were going to talk to Oprah.

Katie: Oh my God.

Sara: Oprah.

Katie: Oprah.

Sara: Like, I get why they didn't, but could you imagine if they did?

Katie: Um, like, do you know how much national news that would make?

Sara: That'd be so crazy.

Katie: It would be. Like, I didn't even hear about this.

Sara: No.

Katie: Like, why was that not in the newspapers or something?

Sara: I know. Like, even, even if it is just them turning it down, how did they, like, not?

Katie: Right. My question is, how did Oprah even hear about it?

Sara: Yeah, like, cause it seemed like, By the way, Demian was saying, it was just basically them trying to, like, hide them, almost, by taking them to Bakersfield, but then it became this huge thing.

Katie: It's insane to me how much the entire story would have changed if they met fucking Oprah.

Sara: Literally. Oprah!

Katie: Oprah!

Sara: Oprah Winfrey! I know! Like, of all, all the, especially, like, in the earlier years, too, of, like, Oprah really up and coming.

Katie: Yeah.

Sara: At that point.

Katie: Yeah, like when cable television was still a thing.

Sara: I know and not just streaming services.

Katie: Yeah, that would have been crazy.

Sara: Especially even in like our research process with this episode, you know, like if we had like an actual clip.

Katie: Oh my god I know.

Sara: And seeing that and really getting to hear from these women.

Katie: Yeah. Well, I mean I read in the one newspaper, uh, article I read about, um, the women who were abused on the ship, a lot of them were, did not talk about it because they were too ashamed or embarrassed. So I feel like, even with that, we wouldn't have gotten that sort of perspective, but it still would have been, like,

Sara: Interesting.

Katie: Interesting to see what they had to say or what experiences they would talk about, but I also understand as part of that culture to not talk about anything.

Sara: Yeah, I think too, they also had a valid reason because they were thinking about their families back home and not wanting to put them in danger by coming out and speaking out basically against the Chinese government.

Katie: Right.

Sara: You know, like Demian said, you do not mess with the Chinese government.

Katie: Yeah, you don't piss off the Chinese government.

Sara: Yeah.

Katie: Well, I guess the other thing is, like, if they were on TV, then China would know where they are.

Sara: I mean, it's just kind of, I don't know. I guess you never even think of it in that way of thinking about, like, them speaking out. Like, how good that would be.

Katie: Right.

Sara: But you never think about the repercussions that come from that if they did. Like, what would happen to their families? Like, would they be put in jail for that?

Katie: Right.

Sara: You know?

Katie: Like, what, like, they already escaped so much. They already left their families behind. It still would have been so cool to see them Oprah.

Sara: I know.

Katie: I would have loved to have seen that. But also, what do you think about the fact that they just randomly took them to Bakersfield, California?

Sara: I know how they woke them up in the middle of the night.

Katie: Yeah.

Sara: And just threw them on a plane, which it's like, not something that's unheard of. But even still, just the fact, I can't imagine how terrifying that was because they were thinking they were going back to China behind that plane.

Katie: Yeah, like, I feel like that's more of that, like, mental abuse where it's make them as terrified as possible.

Sara: Yeah

Katie: Like I don't know if the um Like what kind of plane it even was like it could have been there's like a commercial pilot plane had to be something like

Sara: A smaller plane

Katie: A smaller plane but It's just it's so frustrating to hear the mental toll that is had to have taken on them.

Sara: They're already under so much stress.

Katie: Right.

Sara: And then just this on top of it thinking, Oh my God, we've been here for literally over a year and now we're getting sent back.

Katie: I feel like the biggest difference between their time on the boat and their time here is on the boat. They still had hope of coming to the country. Here, they don't have any.

Sara: No.

Katie: Like there's no hope whatsoever because the prisons completely took it away from them.

Sara: I mean, even the fact that it's just like Bakersfield is literally where they're supposed to like be forgotten.

Katie: Right

Sara: Like that was the whole point of that detention center.

Katie: It's also on the other side of the country.

Sara: Yeah.

Katie: Which, like why?

Sara: That's like such a drastic change from like New Orleans to California.

Katie: Yeah.

Sara: You know, which, who knows even like political climate wise maybe even is why there was more detention.

Katie: Yeah.

Sara: You know, there's more care out there. More of like a liberal mindset too in California versus like, obviously not in Louisiana, New Orleans.

Katie: Yeah.

Sara: So that might have been why there was more national attention, but I really do, I wonder how it was discovered that they were being transported there.

Katie: Right

Sara: Like maybe one of their attorneys reached out to the media to get some attention about it, or, like how, how do you even figure that out?

Katie: Right.

*\*Music transition\**

Katie: After being transferred to the detention center in Bakersfield, they finally received good news. In 1995, the Vatican Church had arranged asylum in Ecuador for the 15 women detained in California after a New Orleans attorney contacted the United States Catholic Convention, which is run by the Roman Catholic Church.

Demian: I was surprised. I was happy for the women. It was an option they could take. That was something, which is better than nothing, and it, which is better than not knowing. It was something, because I know that's one of the things that [name redacted] refers to in her letter. She's just like, if you could just give me a time, if you could just tell me something, I can look forward to it. I can have the courage, but it was this indefinite, we're not going to give you anything. And we're not going to tell you how long you're going to be, you could be here, you know, next week and you could be here for 10 years from now. They, the women literally had no idea and they felt they were being punished. It broke up a family. I know that there was a, a husband and a wife, a wife in New Orleans, a husband in, in York and he chose not to go and she went because their conditions were totally different. Right. Right. You know, I, I think that if the women lived under the same conditions, they would probably say, well, thank you very much. We appreciate it, but we're going to stick it out here because they would have at least something they could cling on to, but, um, the Vatican, you know, gave them a way out because there was no end in sight here.

Katie: Right.

**Conclusion**

*\*Outro music\**

Katie: After listening to Damien and the story of a woman on the Golden Venture, it is obvious that gender played an important role in the whole experience. Compared to the men, women were treated as less than human and had everything that gave them hope taken away from them. The women left China in hopes of finding more reproductive rights and freedoms in America and were instead locked up like prisoners. Their mental and physical health deteriorated and they were terrified of being sent back to China. It took a separate organization to step in and give some of the women freedom. While the story may not have a completely happy ending, it can hopefully lead to a brighter future and help carve a path towards better prison reforms and immigration policies.

**Credits**

*\*Outro music\**

Sara: This podcast is a production of the Spring 2024 Podcasting the Past class at York College of Pennsylvania. This episode was written and edited by Katie O'Neill and Sara Bokus. It was reviewed by Dr. Jacqueline Beatty, Lalia Brown, Zach Grossman, Shane Mundis, and Jeffrey Paris. Special thank you to Demian Yumei, Professor Schiffman, and the York Bar Association. Theme music and sound effects courtesy of Storyblocks.

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