Track 2: Disappearance of a Village Girl

Milla [Milla speaks with a thick Austrian accent]:

So, when I was 14, 16, 17… I didn’t want to date any village boys, ‘cuz nobody want to go anywhere. They’re still there, right now.

Helena:

Yeah.

Milla:

So, I just – I was just thinking “How am I gonna get…”

So, one day I went to town – my aunt had a little house at the river. and a change room. And, and your grandfather was the one that rented. So, when we came there, she was asking, “What are you planning?” You know, like… He said, “Yeah, I’m planning, I’m planning to go to America.”

When I heard – before, I didn’t even like him.

[Helena laughs lightly]

As soon as I heard “America” –

Helena:

Yeah

Milla:

I thought, boy, that’s it. So I started right away to be friendly and invited him to the farm on the weekend. [sniffs]. And you know, how silly? Three months later, we get married.

Helena:

Wow.

Milla:

I only seen him on the weekends.

Helena:

Yeah.

Milla:

Like, I didn’t know nothing about him. Like, he would come to visit, and you know, he never touched any alcohol. But as soon as – when we get married, next day he was drinking. Like, my father was so happy, he said “What a nice guy.”

Helena:

Hm. Did you tell your father after that he –

Milla:

No. I kept – I didn’t tell hardly anything.

I think Frank was one year old when like my husband says “We gonna go. Like to Canada or South America, whatever comes” –

Helena:

Did you have a preference?

Milla:

Like no. We found out we got a visa for Canada, so my husband went first, and I was left behind with the – Frank was one year old. And then my husband says, he said, “You come, and we gonna leave the—” your dad – “in Austria. And three years later we gonna go back. If we’ve saved enough money, we’ll build a little house.” Which my father always promised. He said, “I want you to build a – I’ll give you a piece of land.” [sniffs].

Helena:

Wow. But you didn’t end up –

Milla:

No. My husband was already here. He sent me the ticket. I had – twenty years old, taking the train to Paris. Stay overnight in Paris, and then go to Le Havre, to the ship. For me it was, everything was adventure.

Helena:

Yeah.

Milla:

I was so – I’m so adventurous.

Helena [cross-talking]:

You were so excited.

Milla:

That to me it was just – every day was something new. After a year without Frank, every time I see a little boy, I was so sick. I was, told my husband, “I can’t stand it anymore. We have to get him.” So we went to Travel Bureau, and I asked, we asked how, how could we bring a little one year – two year old boy. So they said there is ways. Like somebody will volunteer, you pay a little bit money. And you know, it was at home in the farm. My father and mother and everybody was so – crying. They loved your

Helena [cross-talking]

To say good bye

Milla:

They loved your dad so much

Helena:

Yeah

Milla:

And [*tsk* sound] I wish I could never do that. I would never do that again. But you know, I, I keep asking your dad, does he remember anything – who brought you, how he came. He said no.

Helena:

No

Milla:

He says he remembers some kind of ship on the back. Then we came to Timmins, where my husband had work. Timmins, in the mine. Then Frank came, you know – I had to – I went to Montreal to pick him up. He didn’t recognize me anymore. He was so crying. He thought the other lady was his mother. He was calling her Mama. [*Tsk* sound, sad laugh]. It’s so sad, I … But he said he does not remember anything like that. But to me, he took it quick. To me. But to my husband he didn’t, he keep calling him uncle. And then one day my husband says, “That’s enough. I’m your dad. Not uncle. I don’t want you to…” And so…

And we travelled around in Canada, everywhere. We went to Northwest, to Yellow Knife for two years. See everything was adventurous

[phone rings]

Like, you know, the cold weather and the people. And it was almost like – Yellow Knife is almost like you’re on top of the world.

Helena: I really want to go the Yukon.

Milla:

I would advise you to go.

And then we came back to here, to Langley. Like, my husband get – like, there was a job up in the Peace River. And he said – somebody said – oh yeah, he said there was a line-up. Everybody wanted to go. And he was in the middle in the line, and they picked him out. Isn’t it? But then he went up there and the first day when he walked in the mine co – somebody didn’t do a good job so it collapsed, the tunnel collapsed and killed him right way. He just walked in.

And he wrote a letter back like the first day

Helena:

Yeah

Milla:

He was really good to write letters. So he wrote a letter. He said tomorrow you’re gonna hear more about me. And when – I remember next day somebody knocked on the door and there was two policemen and my neighbour [*tsk* sound]. And I thought what happened to her, why is she crying so? I said to Frank, “You go and open the door.” And, and he opened the door. And they came in, and they said, “We want to – can we speak to your mother?”

And so I knew I had to come, you know, to the door. I came, and they told – they said, “Your husband is deceased.” And at that time, I didn’t know what it meant “deceased”. I said “Can I go to him?” And they said, “No. He – he’s dead.”

So then – I know Mitzi slept with me and George was crying all night. Frank was really stand-up. He says, “Mom don’t worry”

[Helena chuckles softly].

And he says, “Are we gonna lose the farm?” Next day I was already in the strawberry field weeding. If he wouldn’t have – if, like – in the strawberries, I couldn’t do it without him. He was part of the – he was so – you know, he was so good all the time.

Helena:

Well, he still is

Milla:

Yes.

We didn’t get paid out, but the compensation, at that time – you know how much it was for me and three kids? A hundred and sixty-five.

Helena:

A hundred and sixty-five dollars

Milla:

Every month

Helena:

Was your support. From the company or the government?

Milla:

No, the government. From company was nothing

Helena:

The company gave you nothing?

Milla:

Nothing. Just saying “Wish you all the best.” I still have the letter somewhere, I think it’s in the bank safe.

Helena:

Yeah.

Milla:

And Mitzi, she was reading in the paper and she says, “Mom, that’s the time when you, you became a widow. We have to apply it. So she applied. We ap—and, and then they came. And then they came and they gave me back all the back payment.

Helena:

So they actually were supposed to have paid you, and?

Milla:

Yeah. At the start.

Helena:

And that money really could have helped you along the way.

Milla:

But before – you know, I could have helped like Frank to send to university or you know. Yeah, three jobs. One job I had it, like, I could come when it’s raining. I could ironed – iron. All the stuff. So once a week I get there. Once a week I went to the egg farmer to candle the eggs. I could take home -- I was making pancake for the Saint Bernard, the dog. I could take home as many – ten dozen eggs. They were cr – you know, a little cracked. So I did that.

Helena:

Right and you …

Milla: So I did that. Then there was a garden – a gardener – a nursery, next road. And they asked me if I would come any time when it’s raining. It’s inside.

I had three jobs, okay. I had to do – look after my strawberries, which we – because I come from a farm. I knew how to – like, I’m a real farmer, actually. I love farming.