

A Better Life in America

by Nancy Martz

I met Ganik on an educational tour of many third world countries as I was doing post-degree studies. His story, I'm sad to tell, is not unique. So many times I heard it as I journeyed, and so many times, I was mistaken for someone who could help bring him to my country.

I walk along with Ganik to his Uncle's shop. Ganek is a beautiful boy with huge dark eyes but a gaunt face and bony limbs. It's early morning and men are squatting at the edge of the muddy walkway and brushing their teeth, storekeepers washing up for the hoped-for day's tourists, letting the washing water run into the hardpacked dirt street. A thin young man on a rickety bicycle pulls an enormous cart full of sticks and stares blankly at me as he pedals by. The uncle is outside the store, spots us and hurries along the sidewalk to greet us. An ox pulling a covered wagon ekes its way up the street, cans and bells and pots hanging from the roof, clanging and rattling. Ganik speaks rapidly to his Uncle who bows several times and takes my arm to bring us into his shop. I see ribbons and cloth and wallets and hats and tea sets and trinkets, small wood and ivory statues in stacked open boxes, sunglasses, plastic combs, necklaces on leather strings. A small table with iron legs and two chairs sit in the center. The Uncle hurries into the back room behind a curtain and returns immediately with a small glass of tea for me. He squats and beckons us to sit before him, then begins:

Ganik very smart, very good. Not bad boy, very kind. Help mother, help sisters eat, and house. He can work jobs both, can do many, but no are jobs. Please you can U.S. Ganik? His heart but wish to go in America. U.S. is the better life, the chance at school and the good job and the good house. He live with a low house, blow apart, mother and sisters. No, I shame show you. He father, no I say not please. In U.S. Ganik work all time for you, help any and every work. All jobs, Ganik can. Here he die and family.

I give Ganik and his uncle money and am loaded down with cheap goods I must take so that they will not be humiliated. I explain that I have no magic and no connections to help get Ganik to my country. Their faces are long and wretched and sickened as I try to leave. More goods are heaped for me, but I leave quickly; other countries and other boys and girls and uncles pleading to come with me are ahead.

When I fly back to New York, I bless the good fortune of my accidental birth here. I know I have nothing to do with the chances that allow me to prosper and they to suffer. I do not congratulate myself.