

I GOTTA TEACH HER SOME ENGLISH

O'KANE FOSTER

MR. CONSTANTINOPOULOS walked calmly away to his tarnished cash register, rang up 65¢ for a blue-plate special, sold a cigar, opened the transom, shook the pin-ball machine for a disappointed customer, and then remembered to return.

"No, I tell you what's the trouble, Jim," he said eagerly, when he saw I was safely lost in the beefstoo. "Chicago has got 11,000 Greek manos, and only 700 womanos not married. Figure it out. For a man like me with lotsa pep, figure it out. What kind of paia, Jim, hockleberry?"

I settled for hockleberry.

"No, figure it out, Jim. I came a young manos to Chi. Fifteen year ago. Leave wife in Athens. You know, Athens. So I write her: wait. All right, she write back, I wait. So I look around. 11,000 Greek manos and only 700 Greek womanos. Is bad. For the morals. Of course, you got the Coffee House on Polk Street. 11,000 Greeks in Coffee House on Polk Street."

He went away to another customer and left his story dangling.

Presently he came back.

"So here you are in Chi and there she is, still your wife in Athens. One year, two year, three year. 11,000 Greek manos and only 700 Greek womanos. Is bad. But then you got the Coffee House. Not the saloon. No, never! Better run into money than the saloon. Well, they say a Greek run after money. No. Is wrong. Greek just run away from all that polittle in the Old Country."

Again Mr. Constantinopoulos walked away to another customer. Again he returned.

"No, I tell you, Jim. A Greek, he like opportunity—without too much texas. A young manos go into business and texas eat him up. That's another story. They tell you the Greek is a great talker—like to tell a long story. Don't believe it. America, it's opportunity—nothing else. Well, so I cut off my name and stayed in Chi. Christides Demetrios Constantino-poulos. Sure. Now just half. Fine, eh? So I stay in Chi. One year, two year, five year. Five year, ten year, fifteen year! Money! Money! Well, you got to run into it. You're a young manos with your wife in Athens, so you shine shoes for two years in the Loop. Too slow. Money. Money. You got to run into more of it. How about selling flowers? Better! So five years a flower manos on Forty-Three Street. Not yet, I write to my wife in Athens. The Greek language is still in my way. Texas are about the same. But when you come, I write her, I gotta teach you some English. But not yet. Not yet. You understand?"

"Yes," I agreed.

Again the pin-ball machine needed attention, the transom had to be closed, the safe had to be opened and a package of cigarettes got out for a steady customer.

Eventually he returned.

"Jim, take another piece of hockleberry on the house and I will begin this story straight from the beginning."

"Thanks, Chris. I must be going," I

said reluctantly, getting down from the stool.

"That's right," said Chris. "So I thought: Money. Money! Why not a candy store on Forty-Seven Streets? The Greek language wasn't in my way any longer, you see. So 1933-1935 I gave up the flower standza for the candy. Still there were only 700 Greek womanos in Chi and I had to go to the Coffee House on Halsted and play cards when I got mad. Well, anyway: one year, two year, five year. Five year, ten year! Pretty soon I write my wife in Athens: texas should go down. In the meantime, here is \$100 for a new church bell in my memory. But still my health suffers from lack of Greek womanos in Chi. Not my morality. That can never suffer because America is just opportunity. Nothing else. Money. Money. They say a Greek is money crazy. Well, we walk into it now and then, and sooner than later, of course, a restaurante. So that was 1931-1946. But still Chicago got 11,000 more Greek manos than she got 700 womanos. The problem is just the same for a Greek bachelor if he is single. So yesterday!" he said, daringly bringing his story down to the very present, "so yesterday I got mad! Sonababitsi! One year, two year, five year. Five year, ten year, fifteen year! and all this time I got a wife of my own in Athens! So this morning—ha ha—I send her money for ticketto. I cable her seven little words under the ocean: Come over Penelope. Texas can't get worse."

"And will she come?" I asked, one hand on the door.

"Sure," said Chris, ringing up my 65¢. "When she hears Chicago has got street cars, oh my, she wants to come. But I gotta teach her here and there some English. So there's a long story short. How will I take it? You can imagine. Or what will she look like since 1931? Eh? Well, good night, Jim. Take it easy."

"You bet," I said, going out.

I did not go to the restaurant for more than a month. As soon as I sat down at the counter, Chris came running toward me with a steaming bowl of soup.

"Well, Jim," he said, greatly excited, "this time I show you the real thing. Penelope!"

A small beautiful woman came from the kitchen. She had rich black hair draped low over her ears into a swirling knot at the nape of her white neck. Her expression was shy and alien. She had aged much less than her husband.

Chris put his arm around her waist.

"Jim! One year, two year, five year. Ten year. Fifteen year! What will she look like since 1931? You can imagine? Well, here's a long story short: It's my wife in Athens."

Mrs. Constantinopoulos smiled pleasantly.

"But," said her husband, "I gotta teach her here and there some English."

His pretty wife thought this an even greater joke than his first speech. "Nai," she answered in Greek.

"H'you like that? You know what that means, nai? No is yes in Greek. Go on, say something to Jim. You gotta learn here and there English. Listen to this, Jim. Go on, say something, Penelope—"

"Oh, but what shall I say?" she laughed.

Chris stepped back dramatically to the pie counter. His sleepy eyes were wild with pride.

"So figure it out, Jim. Five year, ten year, fifteen year. And when I leave her in Athens she could speak just but the Greek. Figure it out, Jim. Now she got English. Figure it out."

"Well—" I hesitated.

"No," said Chris, "she wait and study English in Greek school behind my back. In Athens she got almost as good English as I got right here on Halsted. Figure it out, Jim. Ha ha!"

COMMON GROUND

I saw she had gambled with fifteen years of her life and won.

"Oh, yes," she laughed. "I thought he would never send for me. When he sent money for the bell and not for me, I knew it was all over." She accused and forgave in the same sweet glance.

"She use the money of the bell in my memory to buy English instead! Pretty smart, eh?"

We all laughed.

"That was a long time," I said at last.

"Too long," she said. "Too long. But now we are together and in your America. Everyone in Europe thinks of only one thing: America! America!"

"Well, I tell you, Jim, Chicago now got 701 Greek womanos to still only 11,000 Greek manos—"

"Greek men and Greek women!" corrected his wife. "Oh, your English is wretched. I shall have to teach you all

over again—"and she was charmingly indignant as she added—"the way we all speak it in Athens." She walked gracefully toward the kitchen.

"Too long," said Chris sadly, when she left. "I did not do right. It was too long. But how could I help it with Texas what they were? Still we are together now," his face lighting, "and she get along all right in America. But I gotta teach her here and there some English."

"Yes," I laughed, going out.

O'Kane Foster is the author of *In the Night Did I Sing*, a novel about the Spanish Americans caught in the rising tide of American civilization in Taos Valley. His short stories have appeared in various magazines and anthologies. He is at present at work on a novel of the modern American Indian.

RACHEL MOURNING FOR HER CHILDREN

(and would not be comforted, for they were not)

ISABEL WILLIAMS

There is a sound like soundless weeping
abroad in the air tonight,
as if a gathered grief were seeping
out of a depth or down from a height
impassable to mind or sight
and uninhabited by light.

Not like the wind though in liquid weather,
not like the rain though it swerve and blow,
more as if leaves took tongue together,
whispering sorrowfully and slow
folk-remembrances of snow,
word of the multitudes laid low.

Isabel Williams' poems have appeared in a variety of publications.