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Three Women

"I'VE just been talking to Mary O'Connor, Decimus.

She was resting her bones on a seat inside the Post Office under the clock, waiting until it was time to go to her surgeon. You never saw such wrinkles; and yellow as a guinea; though still quite spry. Last June she had a major operation and apparently they tell her she's made a remarkable recovery. You should have seen the gold chain on her hat and the new black coat she had on embossed with silver and grey flowers; and an umbrella in her hand, rolled up tight as a green bud with a long carved ivory handle, the very latest, if you please. She says it's as old as the ark, but that she dug it out to give it an airing since it's the kind 'everyone's going about with at present. Fancy her taking such an interest in her clothes, Decimus. She must be seventy-six if she's a day. Of course, she's still got those shrewd, light blue wandering Irish eyes that seem always to be looking at everyone and yet at no one. She was telling me her daughters are all married now. One of them's living up north with seven kiddies, and another on the way.

"That must be a handful, Mrs. O'Connor," I said.

"Mrs. H.," Mrs. O'Connor she said to me, 'there's nothing wrong with it except it's not fashionable any more to have so many.'

"True enough," I said, 'the world's going crazy, Mrs. O'Connor.'

"I was the eldest of thirteen myself, Mrs. H.," Mrs. O'Connor said, 'and I don't think I'm any the worse for it. How different things were then. My father had a man working for him who got twelve pounds a year and his keep, but there wasn't a thing he didn't understand about wild life and woodlands, and he was one of the happiest people I've ever known. Of course, that was in Ireland. You know, I still believe in the Irish fairies—after dark I do.' Mrs. O'Connor said, and she gave me a nudge with her elbow, 'after dark I believe in the fairies all right,' she said.

"Fancy you saying that now, Mrs. O'Connor," I said, 'you with your sons and daughters all dyed-in-the-wool New Zealanders.'

"Yes," Mrs. O'Connor said, 'Kevin's done well for himself in law, and Pat's taken up farming, and Rose—take a look at this,' she said, and she brought out a coloured photograph from the bag in her shopping basket. 'Four generations of O'Connors,' she said.

"And there they all were looking at me out of the photograph—Mrs. O'Connor with her white hair and blue eyes standing up beside her daughter Rose, and next to Rose, though looking more like a sister, was young Maureen, Rose's daughter, with a baby in her arms.

"That's Maureen's wee Merilyn. I've been a great-grandmother six months now," Mrs. O'Connor said proudly, and she stooped down and picked a thread of cotton off her stocking. 'I suppose you heard that I've sold my house?'

"Sold your house, Mrs. O'Connor?" I said. You could have knocked me over with a feather, Decimus.



by HELEN SHAW

"Yes, it was too large for me," she said. 'Too many rooms, I couldn't live in more than one room at a time,' she said. 'I sold it to Kevin and his wife, but I always liked living there, on account of it being near the church, so I've had the stables at the back converted into a cottage for myself. If ever you happen to be passing you will drop in, won't you, Mrs. H.," she said. 'But except for the big punga they've left on the front lawn I reckon you won't recognise the place. Kevin's had the macrocarpa and pines taken down, and a stone wall put up instead. Still, it means I can look out of my window and see old Rangitoto's cone covered with bush and the harbour smooth as glass and ships coming and going. Yes, Mrs. H.," she said, 'I'll let you into a secret. When I'm installed properly in my cottage I intend leaving you all one day and going for a trip.'

"A trip! And where do you plan going to, Mrs. O'Connor?" I said. I was scarcely able to believe my own ears.

"Need your ask," she said, shaking her bucket of a hat at me. 'Didn't I tell you I believe in fairies after dark—in Ireland's fairies,' she said. 'I've got the money in the bank. Kevin's promised to look after my ducks and goat when I'm gone. As soon as they find me a berth I'll start packing my bags.'

"Well, you're a marvel, Mrs. O'Connor," I said. 'And now I must run, I'm on my way to see Decimus and in a few minutes my bus is due to leave.'

"Wistfully her face lit up and she held my arm. 'Decimus,' she said. 'She'll be Decimus Grainger who embroidered my wedding trousseau. I remember her once telling me she used to give thanks to God every night for giving her her hands. A fine girl indeed. It's still a bit early, I see, for me to go to my surgeon,' Mrs. O'Connor went on, twisting round in her seat and eyeing the clock on the green wall. 'I'll just wait here a while longer,' she said. 'Remember me, please, to Miss Grainger, and the compliments of the season to you, Mrs. H.'

"I left Mary O'Connor sitting in the Post Office, looking yellow as a guinea and fingering the ivory carving on her umbrella while the crowds flocked past, though I do believe, Decimus, she's enough spirit left in her to take her three times round the world," said Mrs. Hughes.

"Lord have mercy on her, Mrs. Hughes," said old Miss Grainger.

N.Z. LISTENER, DECEMBER 17, 1954.