

The Luck of the Irish

Mairi Neil

Margaret sat at the bus shelter melting while a January sun beat down on the metal and glass structure. 'Like a baker's oven,' she announced to the elderly lady in a large brimmed straw hat who sweltered beside her.

The hat nodded slowly in agreement too hot and tired to engage in conversation with the woman stating the obvious until Margaret glanced at the pole beside the shelter and gasped.

Red digits announcing the bus schedules clicked over: **the 11.15 cancelled.**

The lady in the hat startled by Margaret's loud sigh, looked up at the outraged finger stabbing the air. 'Do you see that? 30 more minutes in this sauna - we'll be melded to these aluminium seats by then.'

'Oh, dear, I've finished my water.' The hat waggled from side to side taking in the surrounding area, 'and nowhere to buy a cool drink, or even get out of this heat.'

A trace of familiar accent in the old lady's voice, reminded Margaret of her recently deceased mother. 'Are you Irish?'

'Born there a long time ago, dear - left when a teenager.'

Margaret smiled. 'My mother was Irish and she came here as a young girl too! You've kept your accent.'

The old lady dabbed herself with a handkerchief extracted from a bulging leather handbag. Her lips moved, then closed tight as if she had thought better of continuing the conversation.

Margaret remembered her mother complaining once that complete strangers expected her to be an expert and interested on all things Irish just because she was born there.

A truck pulled up at the bus stop, the driver talking on his mobile phone while the engine rumbled and hot air from the exhaust added to the enveloping heat haze.

'We can do without the furnace,' Margaret said hoping her voice carried into the cabin of the semi as it idled and radiated heat from every inch of its huge rubber tyres and metal body. The old lady leant back and whispered, 'I must have a drink of water,' just as the truck revved to leave.

'Hey, driver,' Margaret yelled and she jumped up flapping her arms to stop the truck moving. The driver wound down his window and Margaret pointed to the old lady wilting on the bench. 'Have you any water?'

The driver's grin took Margaret by surprise and then she looked where his thumb pointed. The decal on the side of the truck advertised '*the purest spring water in the world*'. He retrieved an unopened bottle of water from the passenger seat and gave it to Margaret who thanked him profusely before passing the lifesaver to her desperate companion.

'Here you are love - talk about the luck of the Irish...'

