

## *Love and the Kitchen Sink.*

From inside the glass bowl of television land Peadar Paley, the histrionic host of *Party with Peadar*, goggled wide - eyed with hysteria at Kitty and Sandra in their sitting room.

"He must be joking!" Sandra whined.

"I'm not joking!" Peadar Paley retorted, stepping back from the camera lens. "You have won! Kitty Malone of *Tower Heights*, you are the lucky winner of our luxury twenty thousand pound kitchen - all Irish, made and assembled by loving Irish craftsmen!"

He whirled his hands about; he appealed to his audience.

"Twenty thousand pounds!" he jabbered. "Twenty thousand pounds!"

His audience, right on cue, swooned and sighed. Peadar Paley swivelled about in a bit of a jig; his audience applauded and cheered. Peadar skipped and leapt as if he had an electrical short somewhere in his circuit.

Sandra looked round despairingly at her mother.

"He must be joking, Ma! He can't mean us!"

Kitty, curled up in her armchair, shook her head with disbelief. Sandra, twelve and confident of her curses, hurled a blunt one across Kitty's bow.

"Jesus, the whole place will be talking about us!" she

said.

Undiminished by his medium, Peadar Paley uncovered a full - set of perfect teeth in an unfriendly grimace; once again he pushed his face full into the camera lens, almost thrusting his head into Kitty's sitting room.

"Go back!" Sandra yelled at him.

Peadar's voice pitched itself high and low in a frenzy of intonation.

"You lucky, lucky woman, Kitty Malone; you are! You are a lucky, lucky woman! Not only have you won our prized and coveted modern hand - crafted kitchen worth twenty thousand pounds..!"

He *ooed* and *aahed* his delirium, echoed by his audience. The idea of so much money swelled his tongue out of his mouth to roll wildly against the camera lens. He could hardly speak.

"...but, but, but... Kitty Malone, you lucky woman, you will also be receiving yours truly in your very own home, you will, you will, you will!"

"Oh no!" Kitty moaned.

"Good Christ!" Sandra hissed. "Good Jesus! Peadar Paley coming here!"

"Please God, no don't!" Kitty pleaded.

"You lucky woman, you! You lucky woman!" Peadar was saying, kissing, with his fat lips, the moist camera lens.

"Does he have to slobber all over us?" Sandra demanded virulently, as a pounding Irish dance music struck up in the background and the credits began to roll across the screen.

"Has he no manners?"

She turned her large, sad eyes towards her mother; Kitty could see the tears forming in them.

"Ma, Ma, please!" her voice begged. "Tell me it's not true! Tell me it's all a dream! Tell me when we wake up in the morning it will never have happened and we'll have forgotten all about it! Tell me quick, Ma, the suspense is killing me!"

The next morning Kitty looked down from her sixteenth story perch at the two men in blue overalls who were looking up at her. "We're here for the kitchen," she heard distantly.

"Come on up!" she summoned them reluctantly.

"The lift's not working!" she heard.

"Well, I'm not letting down my hair - if that's what you're waiting for!" Kitty shouted.

Below her a succession of heads, reminding her of Peadar Paley's, stuck themselves out of windows, twisted round to look at her, and pulled themselves back in again.

Twenty minutes later Kitty had managed to create a semblance of order in herself and in the flat before the two workmen arrived at her door. They seemed friendly enough.

"Billy and Barney!" they introduced themselves.

Billy the younger one, the good - looking one, if slightly thin on top, apologised for disturbing her.

"We just want to look at your kitchen; measure it for size, you know... They want it in by Thursday, in time for next week's programme. Peadar's coming."

"I know!" Kitty sighed, leading him towards the

kitchen.

Billy seemed in charge; Barney, overweight, breathless and sweating from the climb, plumped himself in Kitty's comfortable armchair and, using the remote control, switched the telly on. A cartoon dog chased a cartoon cat and Barney gurgled happy laughter like a baby.

When Billy saw the kitchen he staggered backwards a step into the narrow hall.

"I knew it'd be small," he said, "but..."

"You didn't know it'd be this small!" Kitty helped him.

Billy rubbed puzzled fingers across a troubled forehead.

"It's smaller than small!" he said. "There has to be another word?"

He found it.

"It's minute!"

"It's like a shoe box!" Kitty offered.

"It's smaller than a shoe box!"

Billy squeezed through the sliding door of the kitchen. He stood in the middle of the floor and stretched his arms out; without difficulty he could touch the walls on either side. It was the same in the other direction. He shook his head at Kitty. He looked like a doctor about to give her really bad news.

"Is there a room on the far side?" he asked.

"My daughter's bedroom," Kitty told him.

"It'll have to go!"

"No!" Kitty protested.

"I'm afraid so!" Billy insisted, as if he was

discussing a malignant and difficult growth.

Billy stuck his head inside the darkness of Sandra's room. There was a shadowy movement from under heaped bedclothes and a silvery object flew through the air to embed in the door at the side of his face. He plucked a dart out of the wood. A shrieked *Get Out* followed it from the disarray of the bed. With unfeigned haste, Billy beat his retreat.

"O.k.," he conceded unconditionally. "The room can stay!"

The following day Billy returned unaccompanied by Barney.

"This is a one man job," he explained.

Kitty understood: the kitchen was too small even for herself and Sandra to be in at the same time.

"Is the beast still abed?" Billy added, nodding significantly towards Sandra's room.

"She stays up all night watching videos," Kitty said. "They don't expect her in school when the lift's not working."

"Oh!" Billy said, interested. "Where does she get the videos from then - when the lift's not working?"

"From the neighbours."

Billy picked a discarded cassette up off the floor.

"*Killers Rampage!*" he read with distaste. "Do you think it's suitable for a girl of her age - with her violent tendencies?"

"It keeps her occupied," Kitty told him.

Billy began work on the kitchen. He removed the cooker, the fridge, the sink and all the shelves, leaving the kitchen walls completely bare. Sandra emerged in the early afternoon to cast an aspersion.

"Who the hell do you think you are?" she shot at Billy.

Kitty made Billy a cup of tea and a sandwich. She stood and watched him as he wriggled round the exposed plumbing from the dismantled sink. Billy was aware of her bare legs and feet fitting neatly into a pair of light blue house slippers.

"What about hubby then?" he asked with pretended indifference.

He had noticed the shining gold ring on her wedding finger.

"He died," Kitty said sadly.

"Oh, I'm sorry..." Billy apologised for asking.

Kitty knelt beside him. She had never spoken to anyone about it.

"No, it's all right! It was an accident. He was cleaning the windows..."

Billy remembered the windows and the hair - raising view from the sixteenth floor.

"He was leaning out trying to reach a spot in the corner," Kitty explained. "He stretched up too far and next thing I knew I heard him shouting for help... I ran but it was too late. It took him about five seconds to fall all the way. He never stopped roaring till he hit the ground! We weren't here long at all at the time."

Kitty's eyes were moist. Billy put his hand on hers.

"Jesus!" he said, by way of sympathy.

"Take your hands off my mother!"

Sandra stood in the doorway. Billy got to grips with his plumbing again. A laughing Kitty warned her daughter.

"Hey, listen! Your mother can take care of herself!"

Peadar Paley, excited, nervous, like a fish out of water outside his glass bowl world, paid a surprise preliminary visit. The lift was working again thanks to Peadar's television company which paid the bill for the repair. He arrived in great glory, emerging from the lift, with two secretaries carrying large bouquets of flowers for Kitty. He embraced a highly offended Sandra who answered the door: *hey you, keep your hands off me!*; embraced an astonished Kitty who could hardly believe her eyes; and embraced an even more astonished Billy whom he first presumed was Kitty's husband.

"Now, Mr. Paley it's far from finished yet," Billy said sliding the door back.

Paley blanched visibly when he saw the minuscule space available for the kitchen.

"But this isn't right at all," he said, horrified. "This just isn't right..!"

He turned to his two waiting secretaries whose funereal expressions were entirely appropriate.

"What are you doing? What are you doing?" Peadar repeated, staring blankly at Billy.

Billy shrugged his shoulders; he didn't know what to

say.

"Well," he attempted, wanting to sound positive. "The small size of the kitchen presents some problems. I've had to reduce some of the units to fit them in... It's not finished, of course!"

"Of course not! Of course not!" Peadar agreed vehemently. "But it never will be... Because this just won't do at all! Won't do at all!"

Billy hung his head.

"I thought I was getting there," he said quietly, like an admonished schoolboy.

"But you don't see! You don't see at all!" Peadar, schoolmasterly, told him. "It just won't make good telly! It has to be big! It's just not big enough for telly!"

One of his secretaries, earnestly, interrupted.

"Perhaps we could adapt one of the rooms?"

"No way, sister!" Sandra said, squeezing by.

Peadar toured briefly the two tiny bedrooms and sitting room that composed the flat. He shook his head hopelessly.

"This is a disaster," he intoned mournfully. "This is going to ruin me," he added, looking accusingly at Billy, Kitty and the two secretaries. He pointed a venomous finger at Kitty. "Does anyone belonging to you have a house?" he asked her.

Kitty shook her head, afraid to open her mouth.

"What if we lend her a house for the television shoot?" the first secretary, still eager to please, made a second effort to redeem the situation.

Peadar considered.

"That has merit," he admitted. "I like it..."

"I can lend her my house," Billy said helpfully.

"The kitchen would have to stay," Peadar's eager secretary said.

"No... no... no..." Billy protested.

"I don't mind," Kitty said. "It's too big for here anyway..."

Peadar clapped his hands together.

"That's it then," he said. "It's all settled!"

All smiled happily.

"One thing," Peadar said to Billy before leaving. "Is your house a big house?"

"It'll do," Billy said.

"Good, good!" Peadar approved. "Once it's big enough for the telly... that's all that matters! It has to be big for the telly!"

"This is your kitchen too," Billy told Kitty.

They were in Billy's house. Billy had worked night and day removing his own kitchen and installing the one made by loving Irishmen, as Peadar Paley had put it. Kitty was impressed. The kitchen surfaces, chromes, plastics, and hand-crafted burnished woods seemed to extend over a vast and unimaginable area. It embraced her. She felt as if the kitchen was a living thing, with a warm pulse of heart beat right through it, holding her in the palm of its hand. It made her feel, somehow, secure... It made her feel wanted. It made her feel at home.

"It's lovely, lovely," she repeated, causing Billy to

blush with pride.

Billy offered her a drink. She accepted a gin and tonic willingly. They sat in Billy's sitting room with a view of fields and hills through wide bay windows. Kitty laughed, explaining to Billy that, used to her sixteenth floor perch, she felt disoriented if she remained at ground level for any length of time.

"Your house is wonderful, Billy," she told him. "It's such a big house... and when you look out the window you can see trees!"

They chatted. Kitty, never very inquisitive, felt it was time to find out a little more about Billy.

"And you; you never married?" she asked after some hesitation. "You're not wearing a ring..."

"I never met the right woman," Billy said quickly. "And anyway..."

He paused.

"And anyway?" Kitty eyes examined him uncertainly from over her tilted gin and tonic glass.

"I never had time," Billy said, sitting forwards in his chair. "I was an only child of elderly parents, Kitty... My mother was in her forties when she had me. My father was older. After he died I had to look after my mother. She was never very well... Her mind began to go. She was difficult sometimes. I didn't mind for myself, but if I brought a girl home there was always trouble. I think she was afraid I'd marry and put her away..."

Billy sighed deeply, full of sad memory. Kitty, listening intently, encouraged him.

"I gave up on romance," Billy said. "I told myself, marriage was impossible. I spent the best years of my life looking after my mother... but I don't regret... I don't regret at all. She was lovely... a kind woman... If there's any good in me, I get it from her... You know, I miss her, but I want to start living for myself now."

In the bathroom Kitty looked closely at herself in the mirror and asked herself: *am I attractive?* True, her hair once a vivid and unmistakable red was now a little faded, and her eyes had lost their sparkle somewhat; and she was too thin, she could do with putting on some weight; she puffed her cheeks out slightly, yes, that was an improvement... She decided she'd have to start taking better care of herself.

The kiss, the first kiss, came when she was leaving. Kitty couldn't remember who gave or who stole it; it just happened. It was a soft, sweet kiss that lingered. On the bus home she tried to remember how long it had been since she'd been kissed like that. She was only in her mid-thirties and yet ten years of her life had gone by without a single kiss: *incredible!* And if she remembered further back to the last time she'd had a kiss like Billy's: a tender kiss, a kiss full of promise, full of yearning, reaching out of its loneliness for other kisses to follow; well, that was maybe fifteen years ago, when she first met her husband and kisses were all her girlish mind was full off... She used to say she'd die for a kiss; now, she told herself, she'd live for one.

The day of the television shoot arrived. Peadar Paley came with his secretaries and the television crew. Kitty was wired for sound. She was tutored to say: *It really is the kitchen of my dreams!*

The director directed her.

"Look into Peadar's eyes," he commanded. "Look at him as if he's the knight in shining armour you've been waiting for!"

Peadar's eager secretary noticed a problem.

"She's taller than Peadar!" she whispered, but everyone could hear.

Peadar smiled fabulously, showing all his teeth, as if being shorter than Kitty was of no concern. Sandra took the opportunity to peer into the hidden depths of his open mouth.

"There's gold in them thar hills!" she whooped with delight.

A shoe box was produced and handled as if it was some sacred object. A pair of highly - polished platform shoes were unwrapped from crisp crepe paper. Peadar slipped them on.

"It's for the camera angles," he explained. "The angles have to be just right... An inch or two out of place can cause tremendous problems later."

He stood with his arm around Kitty's shoulders looking down benignly at her. The cameras rolled.

"It's so perfect! So perfect!" the secretaries overflowed with emotion. "Peadar, it's so right!"

After the shoot they inaugurated the kitchen with a cup of tea.

"I really feel at home here," Kitty said wistfully. "I don't want to leave..."

"You don't have to leave," Billy told her.

Peadar Paley overheard. He started to jig around the floor.

"I hear wedding bells!" he lilted. "And music playing... *The Bridal March... Jesu... The Hallelujah Chorus... For she's a jolly good fellow!* We'll wear a taffeta dress of purest white with a train all the way back to the church door... with two dozen child bridesmaids in gold to carry it as we approach the altar! I, Peadar Paley, will be there, resplendent in tux, to give the bride away! *Look after her well, young man!* As the bride accepts his ring of gold on her finger and the camera moves across them I'll wipe a tear away unseen by all but the all seeing eye of television!"

He leapt up and down excitedly.

"Yes, yes! It's going to happen! In twenty years we've never had a wedding on the programme... but by God we're going to have one now! We'll move the entire church into the studio... the biggest cathedral we can find! It must be big!"

His secretaries danced around him delightedly. The camera crew, all hardened veterans, were equally moved. All knew that this was television at its best.

"Don't worry! We'll pay for everything, everything!" Peadar promised, his arms enveloping Billy and Kitty.

He rubbed his hands together till the smell of burning came from them.

"This is going to be big!" he announced. "You can't get bigger than a wedding! A war maybe..? But no! There's nothing bigger than a wedding! Weddings were made for television! Made for it! You'll see..."

Peadar left in a happy mood. Singing.

*"The bells are ringing for me and my gal..."*

Kitty fell into Billy's arms.

"Can't we have a quiet wedding?" she asked.

"Of course," Billy said. "You won't hear a mouse peep at our wedding!"

Billy invited Kitty and Sandra to watch *Party with Peadar* in their new home.

"I'm going to be your new daddy!" he told Sandra, showing her a warning finger. "And don't you forget it!"

They sat together on a sofa in front of the telly. The opening credits of *Party with Peadar* rolled and Peadar danced a manic dance towards the camera. He pushed his face against the camera lens, his mouth open, his tongue rolling.

Sandra said:

"Now that I know where it is, I can see his gold tooth!"

Peadar danced back from the camera, his arms open wide to his audience.

"I have wonderful news, friends!" he told them.

Silence filled all of television land. A void reigned until Peadar's voice rushed back in to fill it. Consummate

Peadar, his voice skipping through a thousand registers, mingled perfectly, joy, amazement, celebration, and much more besides, in a single sentence four words long.

"Cupid's arrow has struck!"

Billy slipped his hand inside Kitty's. It was a bad move.

"I'll be watching you!" Sandra growled, menacingly.  
"And don't you forget it!"

*The End.*