

A Royal Yarn

Sixty years? It didn't seem possible. Joyce recalled the event clearly – squeezed into the neighbours' front room. Her Dad had joked about playing sardines. The tiny screen of the Armitages' new acquisition was magical. The knobs and dial looked terribly modern. She didn't mind sitting cross-legged at the feet of the seated adults. Their positions were ranked in order of social importance. Her mother's folding chair had been practically in the hallway.

Joyce remembered the ladders used to string up the bunting, precariously leant against lamp-posts and trees. There was no Health and Safety legislation then. The only Brussels she knew about were the sprouts on her Sunday dinner plate. Her Mum had complained she'd buttered enough sandwiches to feed an army. Still there wasn't one left when it came to the washing up. Joyce's favourite had been the individual red and blue jellies. 'Very patriotic' was the only comment from Mrs Armitage. The young Joyce knew how to spot sarcasm at a young age. She thought they looked lovely in the little white bowls they'd borrowed from her school canteen. Even if they did wobble every time the trestle tables were moved. It wasn't her Mum's fault they hadn't all set properly.

Who had a big enough fridge in those days to hold trays of jellies to feed the whole street?

Joyce couldn't have reliably recalled what she'd consumed for breakfast this morning. But she could have picked out Mrs Armitage's shade of lipstick from any colour chart. Even though she hadn't seen it for over half a century. Just because her late husband had been on the council, she was the self-appointed overseer of all coronation festivities. She'd spearheaded a one woman campaign to rename the swimming baths after him. Joyce's Dad had roared with laughter every time he spotted one of the many letters that Mrs Armitage had penned to the local paper in support of her husband. Joyce's mother would tell him to keep the noise down as he mimicked their neighbour. She was worried that the sound would carry through the thin dividing wall.

\*\*\*\*\*

By nature, she was an obedient person. However, the letter that she'd received a couple of months ago from the council offices had triggered something in her. Joyce had lived a blameless life. Her bills were always paid in advance. A library book fine would have been an embarrassing stain on her character. Although she couldn't see the point, Joyce was fastidious in her recycling routine. The reply had taken well over a month. Joyce felt that the sloppily positioned second class stamp had not

assisted. Joyce had been informed that the council had no plans to commemorate the Diamond Jubilee. The letter stated that public finances were tight, but that individual citizens were perfectly entitled to celebrate using their own resources. Joyce had only written to find out what was being planned locally. She was horrified that such a significant event would be unmarked publicly by her town. Joyce could have just about coped with this municipal unfairness. But she was unprepared for the identity of the council employee. The lackey in question had signed her name with an illegible flourish. However, her name was clearly typed. Could it be an unfortunate coincidence or was her childhood neighbour's descendant taunting her? Sharon Armitage was the council's Resident Liaison Officer.

Joyce had never needed to acquire any IT skills when she'd worked at the local haberdashery shop. Her knowledge of tapestry kits and pros and cons of the wide array of balls of wool was a huge asset to the owner and the many regular customers. Retirement necessitated her to become computer literate.

The kind lady at the library had helped Joyce get online. She began to download knitting patterns from all over the world. She knitted blankets for premature babies. Joyce never met the recipients but she liked to have a purpose for her hobby. But for the past seven weeks she had been engaged in stockpiling red white and blue wool. She'd stumbled

onto a website that had encapsulated her two great loves; knitting and the Royal Family. She had now completed almost one hundred items. As each one was finished she laid it reverently in her rarely-used guest bedroom until she received further instructions. Tonight she would find out what where she had to take them. Joyce turned on her computer for final instructions. She had memorised her user name and log-on password but also wrote them in her diary.

Joyce was unaccustomed to the extravagance of a taxi, particularly at night. The driver was charming and assisted her with her bulging carrier bags of garments. She told him the address and she sat back and smiled about the adventure she was undertaking. The journey to the town centre only took fifteen minutes. The driver offered to wait but she assured him the others would arrive soon.

Alone on the steps of the town hall she waited. A youth in a hoodie approached her.

‘Are you *Diamondnitta*?’

‘Yes’ said Joyce. ‘You must be *Royalrunna*. Where’s your ladder?’

‘I don’t need one. Give us the gear.’

Joyce handed him a bag. He put the handles between his teeth and scaled a nearby lamppost. She looked up in awe as he wrapped her hard work around every tree and telegraph pole. Within twenty minutes the

## A Royal Yarn

town hall was framed by a tricolour royal tribute all thanks to Joyce's needles. Each Union Jack was proudly in place.

\*\*\*\*\*

The next day, Joyce sat down to enjoy the pageantry of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee celebrations on her newly-purchased plasma screen. She was tempted to sit on the floor cross-legged in remembrance but was aware she had nobody to help her up if she got stiff. The local news report of how royalist *Urban Knitters* had decorated the town hall put a smile on her face. Her handiwork was displayed on the screen. She raised a tea-cup. 'Here's to you Mrs Armitage.'