

Jennifer sipped her tea and gazed at the kitchen clock. It was 9am. She sighed, replaced her mug on its mat, and rubbed her temples.

It had seemed such a good idea. Just the thing to mark the Queen's 60 glorious years on the throne, foster community spirit and – though this was hardly the point – show the neighbours that Shona MacKay wasn't the only one capable of turning vision into a triumphant success.

And yet, Malcolm had tried to warn her.

"Are you sure about this, Jen?" he'd said. "These things can get rather..."

"I know what you're about to say, Malcolm."

"Of course you do, dear."

That had been two months ago. If only she'd heeded his unspoken words. If only she hadn't let Shona MacKay on to the committee. But the woman had skin as thick as a rhino and wouldn't take no for an answer.

Jennifer had had it all worked out. It would be like ladies' night at the golf club. Everyone could afford at least £30 a head. She'd ask the caterers they'd used for Susie's 18th to do the food – coronation chicken, queen-of-heart tarts – and they'd still have plenty of cash left for trestles, bunting and booze. They'd hire a bouncy castle for the little ones. And that would be that. Success assured. She'd be the queen bee of Waverley Road, Shona's famous millennium party consigned to history as Jennifer took on her crown.

Before Jennifer had called her first meeting to order, Shona was on to her second glass of chablis.

When Jennifer outlined her vision for the day, Shona interrupted. "That's not my idea of a street party..."

Jennifer tried to keep her voice calm. "Oh – and what might that be?"

"You can't charge for a start."

"It does seem a little steep,"

Lucy ventured.

"It's a non-runner, Jen." Shona leaned over and topped up her glass.

It might have been the rudeness of that gesture, or her overfamiliar use of "Jen". Jennifer wasn't sure, but she heard herself say, "If that's how you feel, you'll need another venue for meetings – and another chairwoman!"

Lucy stared at her in astonishment. "Then may I suggest that the two of us reconvene at mine." Shona rose to her feet.

Over the next few weeks, Jennifer suffered in silence as flyers



Jubilee Party

Jennifer had great plans for Waverley Road – so why wouldn't anyone back her up, in this exclusive story by Pippa Kelly

emblazoned in upside-down Union Jacks (what could you expect from a MacKay?) dropped on her doormat and emails detailing the latest plans pinged into her inbox. It was madness. Didn't they realise that a proper street party needed funding? She began deleting the emails, unopened.

Still, no matter. Jennifer stood up. Today Malcolm was taking her to lunch – to somewhere far removed (in style and taste) from the glorified church-hall bazaar about to lower the tone of Waverley Road.

She walked over to the window. And gasped. She couldn't believe her eyes. The road had changed. It wasn't the flags or even the cardboard cutout of HRH standing in Lucy's drive.

There were no cars.

She blinked, remembering the flyer asking her to move her BMW. She hadn't imagined the effect when every vehicle had gone.

The door to number 44 opened and a man emerged in pyjamas. He carried a ladder past a group of children chalking a hopscotch grid on the empty road.

"My God..." Malcolm had crept up behind her. "That's extraordinary..."

"I know – he's still in his pyjamas!"

The man attached some material to a lamppost. Soon, red, white and blue triangles of varying sizes fluttered jauntily over the heads of people spilling on to the street.

"Are you sure you want to go out, Jenny – wouldn't it be more fun to join in here?"

She didn't answer. She couldn't believe he'd asked, given the way she'd been treated.

The girl from number 55 appeared and tied two toy corgis to her gatepost. Shona's battered estate rounded the corner, followed by a Volvo. The two cars juddered to a halt and, to shouts and rattling wood, Shona (in a kiss-me-quick hat) and a dog-collared man began unloading trestles.

When Malcolm asked if she wanted a coffee, Jennifer didn't hear. She'd just seen Susie unwinding a roll of wallpaper the self-same crimson as Malcolm's newly decorated study over the growing line of tables.

An ancient ice-cream van trundled into view tinkling *God Save the Queen*; a handwritten sign on its roof said: "FREE JUBILEE ICE-CREAMS!"

Jennifer's eyes widened. "Free?" "Shona's dad's restored the van." "Have you been in on all this?"

"I read the emails if that's what you mean." Malcolm's eyes stayed on the street. "They've done a brilliant job without asking for a bean."

"But..." Jennifer's words were drowned out as a fire engine, lights flashing, siren blaring, rounded the corner and stopped. The children rushed over, followed by a motley group she hadn't noticed, one of whom seemed to be videoing it all. "I suppose you're in on that, too?" She turned, but her husband had gone. She heard the front door bang, saw him hurrying out of the gate. Men!

She sank down on to the sofa and picked up the remote. Perhaps there'd be something about this afternoon's Thames river pageant on the BBC. Huw Edwards beamed at her from the TV.

"This is what it's all about," he was saying. "Neighbours coming together."

Behind him, tables lined a bustling, bunting-decked street. The camera swept past a couple of firemen and settled on a row of decorated houses. One stood out. How bare it looked, thought Jennifer, and what a shame it had let the side down. She peered closer. It was strangely familiar. Inside was a figure hunched over a screen. **S**