

CELEBURBIA

by

Mikey Jackson

Novel. Romantic comedy/satire hybrid

www.mikeyjackson.com

EPISODE ONE

The very moment Sheldon Trent leapt back into her life, Daisy Thorne knew he was the man for her. The hunk was straight out of a sizzling romantic novel; a hypnotic duet of hazel eyes, a chaos of wax-messed chestnut locks and the athletic physique of a guy who knew exactly how to work himself into a hot sweat in the gym. Sure, this mere boy was barely into his twentieth year, but to Daisy – and no doubt any other woman who happened to stumble upon his heavenly form – he was all man.

Before he was famous, Sheldon chose to kiss Daisy's soft and willing lips. Before he was famous, Sheldon cocooned Daisy's petite frame within the solid warmth of his muscular arms. And before he was famous, Sheldon almost, yes, get this, he almost became her official boyfriend.

Yay!

But then she lost him.

Ouch.

Now he was famous, Sheldon Trent was no longer available. Now he was famous, the man was strictly off-limits to the heart-fluttering, bosom-heaving desires of all rival women. Now he was famous, Daisy's almost-but-not-quite boyfriend belonged to somebody else.

Melody Diamond.

Bitch.

Melody Diamond was a nobody. To be precise, Melody Diamond was the most famous nobody in the world. Never before had a nobody rocketed to such dizzy, vertigo-inducing heights of super-stardom. But she'd somehow managed it. Oh, yes, it could not be denied, this total nobody was a huge somebody.

With the proverbial world at her feet, Miss Diamond had everything. Money. Fame. A massive fan base. Oh, and she now had Sheldon Trent.

Again... bitch.

In comparison, what did Miss Thorne have?

Easy. A broken heart.

For the last three days, Daisy had shuffled around in her pyjamas like some kind of zombie hermit. She hadn't washed, she hadn't dressed, she hadn't once left her shoebox of a one-bedroom London flat. Actually, "London flat" was too kind a word for the place. "Bottom of the pile London hovel" was a far more fitting description. Still, in comparison, it was (fairly) cheap to rent, a rarity amid the city's eye-wateringly over-priced property letting market.

During these three depressing days, Daisy had couch-potatoed her way through hour upon hour of god-awful daytime television. Yes. Daytime TV. It was a wonder she hadn't gone mad. Or maybe she had, but just didn't know it yet. Furthermore, her diet had consisted of any random species of tinned goods she could forage from the deepest, darkest depths of the kitchen cupboard. And get this. She'd spoon-scooped her foraged foodstuff cold and straight from each tin can. Eeeewww! The girl had even devoured the tin of pilchards she couldn't recall purchasing. Yes. Pilchards. She detested pilchards.

This time last week, Daisy had enjoyed existence as just another average twenty-something London girl; plastic maxed to the limit, way too many shoes, chaotic cascades of flyaway hair refusing to be tamed, a waist one size socially too big, a pair of boobies two sizes socially too small and a sheer-drop canyon of an overdraft. Yet, despite all that, life was essentially good.

But now look at her. Melody Diamond had turned the lass into a hopeless feral wretch.

What was Daisy thinking?

Why had she let herself get like this?

God knows.

Huh, in Daisy's opinion, Melody was in no shape or form Sheldon's ideal match. She couldn't work it out. What the hell did he see in her?

What was Sheldon thinking?

Why had he let himself get like this?

Again... God knows.

Oh, sod this, Daisy considered hitting town and losing herself in a one-woman pub crawl. The insatiable sinking of way too many voddy and cokes seemed like the greatest idea of the century. Yes. Drown her sorrows. Drink to forget. But no. Heading out meant... well... facing the outside world, a deffo no-no. Instead, in an attempt to distract herself from the heartache, Daisy powered up the TV. Sod's law kicked in with an advert for Melody Diamond's brand new autobiography.

'Two years ago,' an uber-enthusiastic narrator boomed out to Livingroomland, 'an unknown twenty-three-year-old hairdresser from Essex stepped into the Fly On The Wall house. From that day forward, everything changed. For ever.'

The premise of Fly On The Wall (the most successful reality TV show ever in the entire known universe) was simple:

1. Bung ten ordinary people* for three months into a purpose-built house peppered with hidden cameras. Lock all doors. Offer them no TV, no radio, no internet, no mobile phones, no newspapers, no connection whatsoever with the outside world.

2. Unlike previous reality TV shows of a similar vein, DO NOT dish out tasks, contests or any form of stimulation to quash the grey onset of mind-numbing boredom.

3. Give them one luxury. Unlimited alcohol.

4. Sit back and see what happens.

*The term “ordinary people” was a phrase intended to be taken loosely. Very loosely. Without fail, every season’s ten shortlisted auditionees were a far cry from regular members of the public. They were needy, narcissistic, egotistic, self-obsessed, practically brain-dead and (most importantly) ready to blow. In other words, TV gold.

The advert went on to display a muted montage of “Melody moments” from the Fly On The Wall archives; her mega-tantrums, her riotous run-ins with fellow tenants and her (censored) flashing of body parts whenever she detected a distinct lull in her share of airtime.

The overblown narration continued. ‘Everybody remembers where they were when Melody Diamond left the Fly On The Wall house.’

Cue VT of Melody’s infamous ejection, greeted by the raucous adulation of hundreds of avid fans. Loud boos amongst the cheers were considered by the media as affectionate, for Melody Diamond was the girl everybody loved to hate.

‘She didn’t win, but my word, she certainly won the hearts of the entire nation.’

‘Not this bloody heart,’ growled Daisy to the TV, spooning the final remnants of cold baked beans straight from the tin and into her tomato-sauce-stained mouth.

A fast-paced sequence of documentary-style everyday happenings then showed the woman shopping, phoning, driving, public-appearancing, whatevering. It was a wonder they didn’t show her peeing or, God forbid, taking a number two.

‘For the last two years, we’ve seen life through a lens of this reality sensation via her ratings-busting TV shows “Melody Diamond: A Year In The Life” and “Melody Diamond: The Very Next Day.” And now, for the first time ever, everybody’s favourite celebrity opens her heart about her meteoric rise to fame, her addiction to cosmetic surgery and the reason why she bared all as a top-shelf centrefold.’

Next came a close-up still of the book's front cover, dominated by the flawless, airbrushed face of the woman in question.

'Melody Diamond: On Top. Her new autobiography.'

The advert concluded with a soft-focus shot of a seated Melody clutching her autobiography. 'In my own words, I hold nothing back,' she stated, firm and resilient in a thick Essex accent, her doleful eyes cleverly depicting the plastic cow as a hopeless victim of her own insatiable hunger for fame. 'I reveal all. And I mean all.'

Urgh, unable to take any more of this vomit-inducing pantomime, Daisy standbyed the TV. Blackness. Silence. Sure, the killing of picture and sound freed her eyes and ears from a certain nobody-turned-somebody – well, for now at least – but it failed to offer respite to her tortured memory, her fractured mind, her heartbroken mess of a life. Like the idiot tattoo of an ex-lover's name, the aforementioned nobody-turned-somebody was going nowhere.

It was then when her door intercom buzzy-buzz-buzzed again and again and again. Oh, great, the last headache she needed right now was a visitor. No, no, sod it, she'd ignore the persistent buzzy-buzz, buzzy-buzz, buzzy-buzzing. Yes, that's what she'd do. Whoever it was would soon get bored and leave the girl to fester in peace.

There followed a long, lingering silence. Had the caller taken the hint and departed?

Buzzy-buzz, buzzy-buzz, buzzy-buzz!

No. He or she hadn't.

Seconds passed. Again came the relief of silence.

A brief intermission. Then –

Buzzy-buzz, buzzy-buzz, buzzy-buzz, buzzy-buzz, buzzy-buzz, buzzy-buzz!!!

Argh, FFS, she parked her now-foodless tin can and accompanying spoon upon the coffee table, then marched into the hallway and placed the intercom handset against her ear. 'Who is this?' she barked. 'And what do you want?'

‘Daisy. It’s your mother. Let me in. Now.’

Oh, FFS revisited. Of all people, why did it have to be her?

‘Mum, I can’t. I’m...’ The hermit thumbed with haste through her mind’s book of excuses, thumb, thumb, thumb, but found nothing suitable. All she could manage was a pitiful, ‘...busy with stuff.’

‘Oh, don’t give me that old codswallop. I’m not going anywhere, young lady, so you might as well open this door.’

It was true. Mum was no quitter. The woman had once camped overnight in the doorway of a department store during a Force 9 blizzard just to bag the best bargains in an end of season clearance sale. This meant that Daisy had no choice but to receive the visitor. And so, reluctantly, she buzzed her in.

Upon entry into the property, Mum tutted at the sight of nightwear at three o’clock in the afternoon. She then marched into the lounge and was met by the sullen shadows of morose self-pity. ‘Oh, shame on you, Daisy. You haven’t even drawn your curtains.’

The disgruntled parent threw open the fabric barriers, allowing a brilliant white tsunami of sunlight to surge into the room, chasing away shadows and turning gloomy grey into vivid splashes of colour. As a result, the equally disgruntled daughter dealt a sequence of rapid blinks in a hasty attempt to adjust to the cold light of day.

Mum grimaced, taking note of the chaotic herd of empty tin cans gracing the coffee table, the carpet, both arms of the sofa, everywhere. ‘Is this what you’ve been living on?’

‘Yesssssss,’ Daisy sighed, rumbled.

‘Straight from the can?’

Daisy flopped her unpreened frame onto the sofa, the resulting tremor evicting its resident cans. ‘Guilty as charged.’

Mum rolled her eyes and sniffed the surrounding mustiness. 'What this room needs is fresh air.' She opened a window, then turned to face her feral daughter. 'How long have you been hiding away in this place?'

'Three days.'

'Three days? What about your job?'

'I phoned in and pulled a sickie.'

'Good God.'

'This is what a broken heart has done to me.'

'Oh, don't be so melodramatic. You've been dumped before. Loads of times.'

'Yeah, thanks for reminding me about my past failures in the male of the species department.'

'I'm doing this for your own good.'

'It doesn't feel that way on this side of the fence.'

'What I mean is,' her mother reiterated, indicating to her daughter's bedraggled hair, her food-stained pyjamas and dressing gown, her current wretched existence as a whole, 'you don't normally sink to this sorry state.'

'Yes. I know. My default coping mechanism usually consists of having a bloody good cry, followed by picking myself up, dusting myself off and getting on with my life.'

'Exactly. So why hasn't it worked this time?'

'Because.'

'Because what?'

Oh, great. Anybody else would process a vague utterance of this particular B-word as no longer wishing to discuss this subject. But not Mum. She clearly hadn't read life's instruction booklet.

Even so, Daisy was desperate enough to give it one more try. 'Just... because.'

Question: Would Mum take the hint this time and zip it?

‘Because what?’

Answer: No.

It didn’t matter anyway. Not wishing to discuss this very subject couldn’t be further from the truth. Of course she wanted to discuss it. ‘Because my boyfriend ran off with an airhead reality TV star,’ she blurted out. ‘There. I’ve said it.’ Daisy couldn’t help herself, she shook her head, she blew air through her nostrils, she balled both hands into tight fists, and out of her mouth poured the inevitable denial. ‘Melody Diamond doesn’t love him. Anybody can see that. I know exactly what that plastic bitch is up to. Their so-called relationship is a total sham. A pairing of convenience for the benefit of the cameras. A fit guy by her side to make her look good and match all the other beautiful things in her life. Why can’t Sheldon see that? The guy is being taken for a ride. Melody’s wearing him around her cosmetically-altered form like the latest must-have fashion accessory. He’s nothing more to her than...’ She rifled through her brain for an apt phrase. And then she found it. ‘...an amusing pet.’

Mum was having none of it. ‘Right, that’s it, young lady. It’s high time you pulled yourself together. I never brought you up to act so pathetic and weak. You’ve clearly inherited far too many of your father’s genes.’

Fists unballied, Daisy surrendered, bowing her head in shame. ‘I can’t help it, Mum. She stole Sheldon from me and it hurts.’

‘For God’s sake, he was hardy yours, Daisy. You only had one date.’

‘So what? I’m still heartbroken.’

‘There’s a cure for that. It’s called getting back out there and finding yourself somebody new.’ Her mother thought about it for a moment, then added, ‘Stephen’s still available.’

‘I don’t want Stephen, I want Sheldon.’

‘You can’t have him. He’s her boyfriend now.’

Ouch.

No reply from her daughter. Instead, the young lady buried her face in both hands and delivered the absolute boss of distressed huffs.

As a result, Mum's tone softened. 'Look. Daisy. It might seem like the end of the world right now. But time truly is a wonderful healer.'

'Yeah, so they say,' the girl mumbled through the narrow fissures between her fingers, 'but I don't have a thousand years to spare.'

'You need to realise, dear. That vile Melody wotsit is simply not worth all this pain and anguish. We all know the talentless tramp doesn't deserve somebody like Sheldon. The thing is, unless the lad works it out for himself, there's nothing anybody can do about it.'

Daisy's palms fell from her face and her eyes bulged with acute realisation. 'Mum, you are so right.' She stood bolt upright, her entire body aglow with renewed hope. 'Melody isn't worth it. She doesn't deserve him. I do.'

Mum's face dropped. 'Actually, no, that's not quite what I meant.'

Too late. Daisy was already sold. Wearing the ear-to-ear grin of steely determination, she knew exactly what she needed to do next. 'Melody Diamond,' she cried out to an imaginary figure situated at the opposite side of the room. 'The battle lines are drawn. This is it. This is war.' The girl awarded herself a firm nod of self-approval, then turned to face a second imaginary figure. 'Sheldon Trent. My new purpose in life is to help you come to your senses. And believe me, I won't rest until I've got you back in my arms.'

'Oh, dear,' groaned Mum in the background. 'Things are about to get messy.'

EPISODE TWO

FIVE DAYS AGO...

‘Have I introduced you to Stephen Baker?’

‘Yes, Mum,’ Daisy sighed, overly rolling her eyes. ‘Twice so far.’

‘He’s a self-made businessman. Started his own recruitment firm from scratch.’

‘Yes, Mum. So you’ve told me. Three times now.’

‘All right, Daisy, less of the attitude. I’m only trying to help. A girl your age shouldn’t be on your own. It’s... abnormal.’

Her parents’ infamous garden barbecues were always like this. They began with the promise of sociable drinks and chatter amid charred sausages, hard-baked burgers and incinerated chicken drumsticks, but inevitably progressed into a relentless matchmaking bonanza whenever Daisy was “devoid of boyfriend.” Without fail, the poor lass found herself paraded in front of eligible bachelors in true debutante ball fashion. Embarrassing was an understatement. This was scarlet cheeks territory. Face cheeks, that is, and not her buttocks.

‘I happen to like being single.’ It was true. She did. ‘No man means no jealousy, no arguments over stupid subjects, no morning queue for the bathroom and thankfully no banal debates about football. Oh, and to top it all off, I get to claim all-night possession of the duvet.’

‘Oh, don’t be so silly, dear. Nobody likes being left on the shelf.’

‘Left on the shelf? I’m hardly the only unsold toy in the shop.’

Huh, the cheek of it. Daisy was young, free and single by choice. Her choice. This girl’s present subscription to the world of singledom felt so liberating, so stress-busting, a well-earned break from the ever-revolving relationship waterwheel of dating, loving, fighting,

breaking up, dating, loving, fighting, breaking up, dating, loving, figh... oh, you get the picture.

Daisy considered the notion of further stating her case concerning her current unattached status, but soon decided against it. Mum had sworn lifelong allegiance to the old-school camp. While less domineering parents allowed their offspring to be themselves and make their own way in the world, Mum stood by the firm belief that a daughter's place was to make her mother proud by marrying a suitable career man, closely followed by starting a family. The prospect of her only child getting too pally with the solo life could only be compared to, ironically enough, a date... but with the Devil.

'I think you and Stephen would make a lovely couple.'

'Oh, Mum, please ration the matchmaking. Me and Stephen, no chance.'

'Give me one good reason why not.'

'Okay. One good reason coming up. The man is ancient.'

'He's only thirty-six.'

'Yes. And I'm only twenty-two. If I ever feel the need to shack up with a sugar daddy, I'll give him a call.'

The parent wasn't giving up just yet. 'Give me another good reason why not.'

'Okay. Another good reason coming up. He's got no...' Daisy struggled for a PC version of the reason she had in her head. '...no...'

'Got no what?'

'...oomph.'

'Oomph?'

Did she really need to spell it out? Yes, she guessed she did. 'He's not exciting enough.'

In response, Mum blew out the theatrical air of head-shaking disillusion. 'For the life of me, I don't know where you get that rebellious streak.'

‘Oh, really? It might have something to do with you calling me Daisy.’

‘What’s wrong with Daisy? It’s a lovely name.’

‘Not when my surname is Thorne.’

‘You should count your blessings, dear. My first choice was Rose.’

At that, Daisy lobbed her mother a shocked double take. ‘Rose? Rose Thorne?’ She’d never been told this before. ‘Like, seriously?’

The parent tipped a vague shrug. ‘Seemed like a good idea at the time. It was your father who suggested Daisy as an alternative.’

‘Oh, thank God for Dad’s input,’ phewed the young lady who could have ended up as Rose bloody Thorne. ‘Lucky escape or what?’

‘Thinking about it,’ added Mum, ‘that’s the one and only time in our marriage where he managed to get his own way.’

Sudden loud male cursing broke Daisy and Mum’s flow. The two of them looked across the garden to Dad. The aproned man loomed over the barbecue grill, tending to a lazy, semi-smoking bed of sooty charcoal which by now should have been a red-orange glow of intense heat. Behind him, a sorry parade of tall, dry and weather-worn fence panels blocked out his share of the sunlight.

Daisy winced at her father’s somewhat unnerving progress. ‘Surely it’s not safe to have a barbecue positioned so close to a wooden fence.’ Then came a wave hello to fresh buds of dread as she clocked the man putting a rather dodgy Plan B into action. ‘And should he really be squirting paraffin straight onto smouldering charcoal?’

‘Daisy, stop fretting over things you don’t fully understand. He knows what he’s doing, he’s a responsible man.’ A sneer of distaste then contorted Mum’s mouth. ‘Unlike a certain somebody from next door. You remember Sheldon Trent, don’t you? You used to play together as children.’

Daisy flicked her mother the second double take of the day, recalling a far more accurate depiction of her childhood. ‘Play together? More like you forced me to associate with him.’

‘Well, I felt sorry for the lad. He didn’t have any friends.’

‘Yes, and in the process, I lost most of mine. Do you realise how embarrassing it was, spending so much time with the porkiest kid in the universe?’

‘Don’t be so nasty, you. Some people can’t help having a weight problem. They call it big boned disorder or something like that.’

‘Mum, they could have fed the starving nations of the world with the amount of crap he chucked down his throat on a daily basis.’

‘I dare say a lot of it was comfort food,’ came Mum’s response. ‘Don’t forget, the poor soul didn’t have the happiest of childhoods, what with his parents constantly screaming blue murder at each other. No word of a lie, the whole street gave a communal sigh of relief when the pair of them finally split up. Well, apart from young Sheldon, of course. His B-word of a father suddenly upping and leaving the way he did must have scarred the boy something rotten.’

Up until that moment, Daisy had forgotten all about the infamous break-up of Sheldon’s folks. Well over a decade had passed since the episode in question. The height of summer. The hottest, stickiest day of the year. She knew this because she could clearly recollect herself and the fat kid waiting for the ice cream van to turn up and refresh their parched tongues. When it did eventually arrive, Sheldon was the happiest child alive. But not for long. In the time it took the boy to trade his pocket money for a double-headed cone, fully loaded with ice cream and smothered with a sprinkling of hundreds and thousands, a toss of chopped nuts and a liberal squirt of raspberry goo, his departing father had loaded his gear into the car and was in the process of sparking up the engine.

The last he saw of Daddy was the man jabbing an extended middle finger at Sheldon's sobbing mother through the driver's side window as he stamped hard on the accelerator pedal, leaving a swirling wisp of exhaust fumes and a thick pile of unpaid bills in his wake. All young Sheldon could do in response was stare in open-mouthed, sodden-eyed silence at the emptiness of roads while his unlicked ice-cold treat turned into white mess and cascaded down his trembling wrist. Sad, so sad.

Meanwhile, back in the present, an afterthought decided to tap Daisy on the shoulder. She turned to face her mother and asked, 'Any particular reason why you've brought up the subject of Sheldon Trent?'

'Ah, yes.' The conversation had skewed so far off the beaten track, Mum had almost forgotten to tread upon the very point she wished to make. 'He's back from wherever he's been hiding. Eight months ago, he bought a car and disappeared. Just like his father did.'

Daisy frowned. 'Has he been on the run or something?' Although Daisy couldn't imagine somebody so overweight running very far.

'No, no, nothing like that. But his mother's been worried sick. No phone calls, no letters, nothing, until last Tuesday when he turned up out of the blue on her doorstep.' Mum had hit unstoppable soapbox mode. 'Gallivanting around the world apparently. He called it education through travel. Well, I call it too bone idle to get himself a job. Honestly, Daisy, if you ever date a boy like him, I'll cut you out of my Will.'

'Oh, don't you worry, Mum. I have absolutely no intention of going there.'

Whooooosh!!!!

Screams of fright pierced the air as the barbecue surrendered to a raging fireball. Spooked guests scattered here, there and everywhere. The bottle of paraffin was lost in transit and landed upon the grass as Dad stumbled backwards and fell flat on his back, a troupe of fledgling flames dancing upon his charred apron, growing in size upon each flicker. He

yelped in alarm, thrashing his arms and legs in all directions as he rolled in the grass in a panicky attempt to extinguish himself.

A safe distance away, Stephen of “recruitment firm from scratch” fame, the only barbecue guest dressed in a suit and tie, stood frozen on the spot.

Mum looked to him for much-needed assistance. ‘Stephen! Do something!’

The horrified man dealt her a clueless shrug. ‘Such as?’

‘I don’t know! Anything!’

Stephen failed to move. It was all too much for the man.

Meanwhile, Dad’s thrashing legs met the burning barbecue, sending it keeling over and setting alight a thick tuft of dry grass. The arid vegetation crackled and snapped as the ruthless flames took hold. Then bang, the paraffin bottle exploded, painting the wooden fence with an orange-yellow sheet of blazing magma. Roaarrrrrrr!!! What was once an embarrassing no-show of smouldering nothingness was now a raging and out of control inferno.

Daisy made for the mayhem, but Mum grabbed her arm, holding her back.

‘No, Daisy! It’s too dangerous!’

The terrified daughter gawped at her mother, then back at the fiery monster. It was true. Going anywhere near such a chaotic blaze was far too risky. She looked across to Dad. He was in big trouble. No matter how much he rolled, the flames upon his apron kept on rocking.

‘Dad!’ she shrieked, distressed and helpless.

What Daisy Thorne needed more than anything right now... was a hero.

OMG, the tall figure appeared from nowhere. The young male, no more than twenty, yet boasting the wowest of physiques, leapt over a part-burning length of fencing and into the garden. He tore off his checked shirt, revealing the most delicious ripped and tanned torso Daisy had ever seen. Her breath stuck in her throat as she watched the hunk race over to Dad

and pat away the invading flames with his discarded garment. The muscles in his arms and back tensed and rippled as he dragged her parent away from the fire and to safety, sending Daisy's heart, her soul, her entire body into an involuntary shimmy.

Wow and double wow. Who was this guy?

Overwhelmed with sheer relief, Mum shook the mystery man's hand. 'Oh, thank you so much. I'd hate to imagine what would have happened if you hadn't shown up.' She then averted sour eyes from his topless state. 'But please. Cover yourself up. There are women and children present.'

The hunky Adonis grinned to himself as he searched for something suitable. Aha, a tablecloth that lay minding its own business beneath plastic plates, ketchup bottles and bread rolls would do just fine. He yanked it free from the patio table (hardly disturbing said plastic plates, ketchup bottles and bread rolls) and wrapped it around his lean, athletic frame.

Mum trotted over to where an injured Dad lay. 'Are you all right, dear?' she whimpered. 'Please tell me you're not scarred for life.'

Strange. Daisy hadn't seen so much concern for Dad spew through Mum's lips in years.

'I don't think I could bear the daily sight of major deformities,' her mother then added.

Oh. Scrub the concern. It was clearly an aesthetic agenda.

Daisy's father was clearly in a lot of pain, yet he somehow managed to quip, 'I think I'll live... but it doesn't half smart,' as he tore away from his scorched shirt the charred remnants of what was once his apron.

Stephen, meanwhile, continued to play the dumbstruck background statue, not knowing quite how to act amid all the action.

Mum took note of his lack of anything particularly useful. 'Look lively, Stephen.'

Another awkward shrug. 'What shall I do?'

‘What do you think?’ she hollered, indicating to her soot-faced husband. ‘Call a ruddy ambulance.’ She then pointed to the burning fence and surrounding area. ‘And then call the ruddy fire brigade.’

Stephen nodded, plucking a mobile from his pocket. ‘Yes, yes, of course, Mrs Thorne.’

Daisy found it impossible to tear her eyes away from the amazing hero who had leapt into her life. Her heart was a flutter, her eyes shone bright and her smile stretched so far across her face, it had very little room to manoeuvre. Oh, wow, could it be that Daisy Thorne was experiencing love at first sight? And if so, was this an opportune time to take back all that previous waffle she’d spat out about preferring the independent single life?

Hmm, knowing she had to be quick, for there were rival single ladies on today’s barbecue guest list, she marched straight over to the man in her sights. This guy was for the taking and there was no way she was willing to let anybody but herself make that take. ‘Oh, my God, you saved my dad’s life.’

‘Um, yeah, I guess I did.’ It was weird. Humble and unassuming, the man in question seemed somewhat stunned by his own startling achievement.

‘Have you been sent down to me from Heaven?’ Ouch. Sure, a miracle had occurred today, but what a dumb and numpty line. ‘Actually, forget I said that.’

‘Consider it forgotten,’ he responded with a smile.

‘So... information request. Who the hell are you?’

His brow furrowed in question. ‘Don’t you recognise me?’

‘No.’ And off her hero’s strange look, she added, ‘Should I?’

‘Daisy, it’s me. Sheldon Trent.’