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Opening Extract from...

Thinking of You

Written by Jill Mansell

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Chapter 1

If it was sympathy she was after, Ginny Holland might have known she'd come to the wrong place. Then again, it was early on a bright but blustery Saturday morning in October and her options were limited.

And it was only over the road from her own house, which was handy.

'I can't describe how I feel.' She clenched a fist, pressed it to her breastbone and shook her head in frustration. 'It's just so . . . so . . .'

'I know exactly what it is. Bird's-nest syndrome,' said Carla.

Ginny pulled a face because it was so screamingly apparent that Carla didn't have children. 'Bird's-nest syndrome would be the name for the state of my hair. I have *empty*-nest syndrome. My nest is empty, my baby has flown away and I just feel all hollow inside like . . . like a cheap Easter egg.'

'Well, I think you're mad.' Carla was busy executing Olympic-level sit-ups, her bare feet tucked under the edge of the cream leather sofa, her hair swinging glossily to and fro. 'Jem's gone off to university. You're free again. You should be out there celebrating. Plus,' she added as an afterthought, 'Cadbury's Creme Eggs aren't hollow, they're full of goo.'

'Unlike you,' Ginny pointed out. 'You're heartless.'

'And you're thirty-eight, not seventy.' Having completed her five millionth sit-up, Carla raised her legs in the air and without even pausing for breath began bicycling furiously. 'I'm a year older than you and look at me, I'm having a whale of a time! I'm in tip-top condition, men can't resist me and sex has never been better. I'm a woman in my prime,' she concluded. 'And so are you.'

Ginny knew her life wasn't really over, of course she did, but Jem's

departure had nevertheless knocked her for six. She'd always been so happy and busy before now, so endlessly occupied, that this was a whole new experience for her. Nor did it help that it was happening as winter approached. Most of the jobs here in Portsilver were seasonal and she'd just spent the last six months being rushed off her feet working in a café down on the seafront. But the tourists had gone home now, Jem was in Bristol and Ginny was finding herself faced with way more spare time than she was used to. To add insult to injury, two other female friends had separately moved in the last month, her favourite wine bar had been bought up and turned into a noisy haven for underage drinkers of alcopops, and the Latin-American dance classes she'd so enjoyed attending had come to an abrupt halt when her dance teacher had slipped doing the samba and broken his hip. All in all, it hadn't been the best October on record. And as for Carla telling her she was a woman in her prime . . . well, she could end up being done under the Trade Descriptions Act.

Glancing at her reflection in Carla's glitzy over-the-top Venetian mirror, Ginny puffed away a section of overgrown fringe that was falling into her eyes. The aforementioned bird's-nest hair was long, blonde and wavy-with-a-definite-mind-of-its-own. Sometimes it behaved, sometimes it didn't and she had no control over it either way. Facewise, it wasn't as if she was a wrinkled old prune – if anything, Ginny knew she looked young for her age – but in glossy magazine world there was still plenty of room for improvement. It would be lovely to be as chic, groomed and effortlessly femme-fatalish as Carla but, let's face it, she simply couldn't be doing with making all that effort.

'You need to get yourself together.' Carla finished bicycling in the air, miraculously not even puce in the face. 'Cheer yourself up, get out there and have an adventure.'

'I'm just saying, I miss Jem.' Ginny hated feeling like this. She had never been needy in her life; the idea was as horrifying to her as suddenly developing a penchant for wearing puffball mini skirts.

'She'd want you to have an adventure,' Carla said reasonably.

'I know.' Ginny tugged at a loose thread on her jumper sleeve. 'But I really want to *see* her.'

'Fine. Go on then, if that's what you want to do. If you think Jem won't mind.' Rising gracefully to her feet and automatically checking her

sleek, serum-fed hair in the Venetian mirror – yep, still perfect – Carla said, 'You've made a hole in that sleeve, by the way.'

Ginny didn't care; it was a manky old sweater anyway. More importantly, she'd got what she'd come for. 'Right, I will.'

'Will what?'

'Drive up to Bristol to see Jem. It's a great idea!'

'Now? Shouldn't you give her a ring first? She's eighteen,' said Carla. 'She could be getting up to any number of naughty things.'

To humour Carla, Ginny said, 'OK, I'll call her. You have a lovely weekend and I'll see you tomorrow night when I get back.'

'I always have a lovely weekend.' Carla patted her flat brown stomach. 'I'm a woman in my prime, remember?' Smugly she added, 'Besides, Robbie's coming round.'

Robbie was the latest in a series of interchangeable pretty young boys Carla favoured for their fit bodies, floppy hair and . . . well, un-floppy other bits. The last thing she was looking for was commitment.

'Right, I'm off.' Ginny gave her a hug.

'Give Jem my love. And drive carefully on the motorway.'

'I will.'

As Ginny let herself out of the house, Carla said, 'And don't forget to phone first. She might not be pleased to see you.'

God, best friends could be brutal. If Ginny hadn't been so excited she might have taken offence.

But that was Carla for you, she wasn't a mother so how could she possibly understand?

'Mum! I don't believe it – how fantastic that you're here!' Jem's face lit up as she launched herself like a missile into her mother's arms, hugging her so tightly she could hardly breathe.

Oh yes, that was a good one. Or:

'Mummy, oh my God, this is the best surprise *ever* . . . you don't know how much I've *missed* you . . .'

Whoops, mustn't make herself cry. Deliberately banishing the happy scenarios her imagination had been busily conjuring up, Ginny blinked hard in order to concentrate on the road ahead. The journey from Portsilver in north Cornwall up to Bristol took three and a half hours and so far

they were on schedule to arrive at one o'clock. Luckily Bellamy enjoyed nothing more than a nice long ride in the car and was lolling contentedly across the back seat with his eyes shut and his tongue out. Every time Ginny said in her excited voice, 'Who are we going to see, Bellamy? Hey? We're going to see *Jem*!' he opened one eye and lazily wagged his tail.

If Ginny had owned one she'd have been wagging hers too.

It was three weeks since Jem had left home. Ginny had braced herself for the worst but hadn't braced nearly hard enough; the aching void where Jem had once been was a million times worse than she'd envisaged. Her daughter was the most important person in her life, it was as simple as that.

As she drove towards Bristol, Ginny scrolled through some of her happiest memories. Marrying Gavin Holland on her eighteenth birthday . . . well, it may have been a mistake, but how could she possibly regret it when between them they had produced Jem?

Giving birth – gasping her way through ever more agonising contractions and threatening to knock Gavin's teeth down his throat when he said plaintively, 'Ouch, could you not squeeze my hand so hard, it *hurts*.'

Holding Jem at long last and sobbing uncontrollably because the rush of love was so much more overwhelming than she'd imagined, particularly when you considered that the squalling creature you were cradling in your arms was covered in blood and gunk and slime.

Then later, tiny starfish fingers grasping the air . . . the first magical smile . . . the first day at school ('Mummy, don't leeeeave meeeee!') . . . and that look of blind panic on Jem's face after posting her letter to Father Christmas because what if he got her muddled up with the other Jemima, the one with sticky-out ears and glasses in Miss Carter's class?

Oh yes, there were so many perfect moments. Ginny's smile broadened as each one in turn popped into her mind. She and Gavin had separated when Jem was nine and that had been sad, of course it was, but it truly hadn't been the end of the world. Gavin had turned out not to be the settling-down-and-staying-faithful kind. Nevertheless, he'd always been a loving father and had never once let Jem down. And Jem had come through her parents' separation and subsequent divorce wonderfully well, taking the inevitable changes in her stride.

From that time on Ginny and Jem had become truly inseparable, as close as any mother and daughter could be. Even the dreaded puberty hadn't managed to spoil their relationship and Ginny knew she'd got off lightly there; whilst other teenagers grew rebellious and sulky and slammed doors off their hinges, Jem had retained the ability to laugh at herself and hadn't lost her sparky, sunny nature. It had always been the two of them against the world.

At that moment a wet nose touched Ginny's left arm and Bellamy, his head poked between the front seats, licked her elbow.

'Oh, sorry, sweetheart, I wasn't thinking.' Concentrating on the road ahead, Ginny gave his ears an apologetic rub. 'How could I forget you, hmm? The *three* of us against the world.'

The traffic on the motorway was light and by ten to one Ginny was on the outskirts of Bristol. Jem hadn't been keen on moving into the halls of residence. Instead, she'd got on the phone to local property agents, arranged a day of viewing back in September and decided on a flat-share in Clifton with two other students. This was where Ginny had helped her to unload her belongings from the car three weeks earlier, prior to the arrival of the other flatmates.

Now she was crossing the Downs heading for Whiteladies Road, the location of Jem's flat on Pembroke Road indelibly printed in her mind and drawing her towards it like an invisible umbilical cord.

Actually, that conjured up a bit of a yukky image. Maybe not. Ooh, now that looked like an interesting Mexican restaurant over there on the left, maybe she and Jem could try it out this evening. And if Jem's flatmates wanted to join them, well, the more the merrier. As she indicated right and turned into Apsley Road, Ginny imagined them in the buzzy restaurant, all sitting and laughing together around a table bristling with plates and bottles of ice-cold beer, the others exclaiming, 'You're so lucky, Jem, I wish my mum was as much fun as yours!'

Whoops, mind that bus.

Chapter 2

The flat was situated on the first floor of what had once been a four-storey Georgian house. Ginny waited until Bellamy had discreetly relieved himself against a tree in the front garden before ringing the doorbell. This was it, they were here and Jem was about to get the surprise of her—

'Yes?'

'Oh hi! You must be Rupert!' Ginny did her best not to gush in front of the flatmate Jem had told her about. 'Um . . . is Jem here?'

'No.' Rupert paused. 'And you are?'

'Oh, I'm her mum! And this is Bellamy, Jem's dog. How silly of me not to realise she might be out. I did ring a few times but her phone was switched off and I just thought she was having a long lie-in. Er, do you know where she is?'

Rupert, who was wearing a pair of white shorts and nothing else, was lean and tanned. He shivered as a blast of cold air hit him in the chest. 'She's working a lunchtime shift in the pub. Eleven till two, something like that.'

Lunchtime shift? Pub? Ginny checked her watch and said, 'Which pub?'

'No idea.' Rupert shrugged. 'She did say, but I wasn't paying attention. Somewhere in Clifton, I think.'

Since there were about a million pubs in Clifton, that was a big help. 'Well, could I come in and wait?'

He looked less than enthusiastic but said, 'Yeah, of course. It's a bit of a mess.'

Rupert wasn't joking. Upstairs in the living room there were dirty

plates and empty cups all over the pale green carpet. An exotic-looking girl with short dark hair was sprawled on the sofa eating a bowl of CocoPops and watching a black and white film on TV.

'Hello!' Ginny beamed at her. 'You must be Lucy.'

The girl blinked. 'No, I'm Caro.'

'Caro's my girlfriend.' Rupert indicated Ginny as he headed into the kitchen. 'This is Jem's mother, come to see her.'

Ginny wondered if she was supposed to shake hands or if that would be the ultimate uncool thing to do. Caro, through a mouthful of CocoPops, mumbled, 'Hi.'

OK, probably uncool.

'And this is Bellamy.' Thank heavens for dogs, the ultimate ice-breakers.

'Right.' Caro nodded and licked her spoon.

Oh.

'So! Are you at uni too?' Nobody had offered her a seat so Ginny stayed standing.

'Yes.' Caro dumped her empty cereal bowl on the carpet, rose to her feet and headed for the kitchen.

Ginny, overhearing giggles and a muffled shriek of laughter, felt increasingly ill at ease. Moments later Rupert stuck his head round the door. 'Would you like a cup of tea?'

'Oh, thank you, that would be lovely!' OK, stop it, *stop* speaking in exclamation marks. 'White, please, one sugar.'

'Ah. Don't think we've got any sugar.'

Ginny said, 'No problem, I'll just have a glass of water instead.'

Rupert frowned and scratched his head. 'I think we've run out of water too.'

Was he serious? Or was this their way of getting rid of her?

'Unless you drink tap,' said Rupert.

Gosh he was posh.

'Tap's fine,' said Ginny.

He grimaced. 'Rather you than me.'

'Just ignore him,' said a voice behind Ginny. 'Rupes only drinks gold-plated water. Hello, I'm Lucy. And I've seen the photos in Jem's room so I know you're her mum. Nice to meet you.'

Oh, now *this* was more like it. Lucy was tall and slender, black and

beautiful. Better still, she was actually smiling. Ginny was so overcome with gratitude she almost invited her out to dinner on the spot. Within minutes Lucy had cleared away armfuls of plates, chucked a slew of magazines behind the back of the sofa and installed Ginny in the best chair like the queen.

'Jem only got the job yesterday. It's her first shift today. Still, a bit of extra cash always comes in handy, doesn't it?' Lucy was chatty and friendly, the best kind of flatmate any mother could desire for her daughter. Having made a wonderful fuss of Bellamy, she brought him a bowl of water and gravely apologised in advance for the fact that it came from a tap.

Rupert and Caro stayed in the kitchen and played music, then Rupert emerged to iron a blue shirt rather badly in the corner of the living room where the ironing board was set up.

'I could do that for you,' Ginny offered, eager to make him like her.

Rupert looked amused. 'No thanks, I can manage.'

'Jem's never been keen on ironing. I bet she's got a whole load that needs doing. Actually, while I'm here,' said Ginny, 'I could make a start on it.'

'If I asked my mother to iron anything for me,' Lucy said cheerfully, 'she'd call me a lazy toad and tell me to do it myself.'

Jem's room was untidy but clean. Ginny's heart expanded as she drank in every familiar detail, the happy family photos on the cork board up on the wall, the clothes, books and CDs littering every surface, the empty Coke cans and crisp packets spilling out of the waste-paper bin. Unable to help herself, she quickly made the bed and hung all the scattered clothes in the wardrobe. This must be the new top Jem had bought in Oasis. Oops, and there was an oily mark on the leg of her favourite jeans, they needed to be soaked if that was going to come out. And was that nail polish on—

The front door slammed and Ginny froze, realising that she was clutching her daughter's jeans like a stalker. Hastily flinging them back onto the bed she burst out of the bedroom just as Bellamy began to bark. A split second later she reached the living room in time to see Jem and Bellamy greeting each other in a frenzy of ecstasy.

'I don't believe this! Mum, what are you *doing* here?' Jem looked up as Bellamy joyfully licked her face.

'Your mother's come all this way to see you,' Rupert drawled and Ginny intercepted the look he gave Jem, clearly indicating how he felt about mad mothers who drove hundreds of miles to see their daughters on a whim.

Shocked, Jem said, 'Oh *Mum*.'

'No I haven't,' Ginny blurted out. 'Crikey, of course I haven't! We're on our way to Bath and I just thought it'd be fun to pop in and say hello.'

'Really? Well, that's great!' Letting go of Bellamy at last, Jem gave her mother a hug. Ginny in turn stroked her daughter's blonde, pink-streaked hair. It wasn't quite the reunion she had envisaged what with Rupert, Caro and Lucy looking on and her brain struggling to come up with an answer to the question Jem was about to ask, but at least she was here. It was better than nothing.

Oh, she'd missed her so much.

'Bath?' Jem stepped back, holding her at arm's length and looking baffled. 'What are you doing going to Bath?'

Aaargh, I haven't the foggiest!

'Visiting a friend,' said Ginny. *Quick, think.*

'But you don't know anyone in Bath.'

I *know*, I *know*!

'Ah, that's where you're wrong,' Ginny said gaily. 'Ever heard me talking about Theresa Trott?'

Jem shook her head. 'No. Who's she?'

'We were at school together, darling. I got onto that Friends Reunited website, left my email address and in no time at all Theresa had emailed me. She's living in Bath now. When she invited me up to stay with her, I thought I couldn't drive past and not stop off here en route, that would be rude. So here we are!'

'I'm so glad.' Jem gave her another hug. 'It's lovely to see you again. Both of you.'

'Your mother was about to start ironing your clothes,' said Rupert, his mouth twitching with amusement.

Jem laughed. 'Oh *Mum*.'

Deciding she hated him and feeling relaxed enough to retaliate now, Ginny looked Rupert in the eye and said, 'Hasn't your mum ever ironed anything for you?'

'No.' He shrugged. 'But that could be because she's dead.'

Damn, *damn*.

Dddddrrrringgg, went the doorbell.

'You may as well get that, Jem,' Rupert drawled. 'It's probably your father.'

Jem grinned and pulled a face at Rupert, then skipped downstairs to answer the door. She returned with a thin dark-eyed boy in tow.

'Lucy, it's Davy Stokes.'

Lucy was in the process of pulling her grey sweater up over her head. Tugging down the green T-shirt beneath she said, 'Hi, Davy. All right? I was just about to jump in the shower.'

Ginny heard Rupert whisper to Caro, 'I expect he'd like to jump in with her.'

'Sorry.' Davy, who had long dark hair, was clutching a book. 'It's just that I promised to lend you this so I thought I'd drop it round.'

'What is it? Oh right, John Donne's poems. Great, thanks.' Lucy took the book and flashed him a smile. 'That's really kind of you.'

Blushing, Davy said, 'You'll enjoy them. Um . . . I was wondering, there's a pub quiz on at the Bear this afternoon. I wondered if maybe you'd like to, um, come along with me.'

Rupert was smirking openly now. Ginny longed to throw something heavy at him.

'Thanks for the offer, Davy, but I can't make it. Me and Jem are off to a party. In fact we need to get our skates on or we're going to be late. We're all meeting up at three.'

Three o'clock? It was half past two already. Ginny wondered if Lucy was lying in order to spare Davy's feelings.

'OK. Well, maybe another time. Bye.' Davy glanced shyly around the room while simultaneously backing towards the door.

'Let me show you out,' said Rupert.

He returned moments later, grinning broadly. 'You've made a conquest there.'

'Don't make fun of him,' Lucy protested. 'Davy's all right.'

'Apart from the fact that he has no friends and still lives at home with his mum.'

'So, what's this party you've been invited to?' Ginny put on her bright and cheerful voice and looked at Jem, whom she'd driven for three and a half hours to see.

'It's Zelda's birthday. She's on our course,' Jem explained. 'We're starting off at this new cocktail bar on Park Street. I'd better get ready. What time do you have to be in Bath?'

'Oh, not right this minute. I can drop you off at the cocktail bar if you like.'

'Thanks, Mum, but there's no need. Lucy's driving and we're picking up a couple more friends on the way.'

'Jem?' Lucy's disembodied voice drifted through from Jem's bedroom. 'That black top you said I could borrow isn't here.'

'It is! It's on the floor next to the CD player.'

'The only thing on the floor is carpet.' Popping her head round the door, Lucy said, 'In fact all your clothes are missing.'

'They're in the wardrobe,' Ginny said apologetically. 'I hung them up.'

Rupert was highly entertained by this.

'Oh Mum.' Jem shook her head. 'You'll be making my bed next.'

Lucy grinned. 'She's done that too.'

'Checking the sheets,' Rupert murmured audibly into Caro's ear.

'Well, I think we'd better leave you to it.' Realising that the girls had less than ten minutes in which to get ready and she was only in their way, Ginny clicked her fingers at Bellamy. She enveloped Jem in a hug and made sure it wasn't a needy one. 'And you,' she added, waggling her fingers in a friendly fashion at Rupert and Caro because, like it or not, they were a part of Jem's new life.

'What rotten timing,' said Jem. 'I've only seen you for two minutes and now you're rushing off again.'

Ginny managed a carefree smile. So much for her wonderful plan to spend the weekend with the person she loved more than anyone else in the world. 'I'll give you a ring in a few days. Bye, darling. Come on, Bellamy, say goodbye to Jem.'

★ ★ ★

Outside it was starting to rain. As she drove off, waving gaily at Jem on the doorstep, Ginny felt her throat begin to tighten. By the time she'd reached Whiteladies Road the sense of disappointment and desolation was all-encompassing and she no longer trusted herself to drive. Abruptly pulling over, willing the tears not to well up, Ginny took several deep breaths and gripped the steering wheel so hard it was a wonder it didn't snap in two. It's not *fair*, it's not *fair*, it's *just not*—

With a jolt she became aware that she was being watched. She turned and met the quizzical gaze of Davy Stokes. In the split second that followed, Ginny realised she'd pulled up at a bus stop, it was a bitterly cold rainy afternoon and from the expression on Davy's face he thought she'd stopped to offer him a lift.

Oh, brilliant.

But it was too late to drive off. And at least she wasn't in floods of tears. Buzzing down the passenger window and reaching over, Ginny dredged *that* voice up again and said chirpily, 'Hello! You're getting terribly wet out there! Won't you let me give you a lift?'

He was a kind-of-friend of her daughter. She was the mother of a girl he was kind-of-friendly with. Just as she'd felt obliged to make the offer, Ginny realised, so Davy now felt compelled to accept it. Looking embarrassed he said, 'Is Henbury out of your way?'

Ginny had never heard of Henbury but after having driven two hundred miles up here and with the same again to look forward to on the return journey, what were a few more?

'No problem. You'll have to direct me, though. And don't worry if Bellamy licks your ear, he's just being friendly.'

'I like dogs. Hello, boy.' Having climbed into the car and fastened his seatbelt, Davy flicked his long dark hair out of his eyes and said, 'Can I ask you something?'

'Anything you like.' *Yerk*, so long as it's nothing to do with contraception.

'Did they talk about me after I'd gone?'

Ginny paused. 'No.'

He smiled briefly. 'Shouldn't pause. That means yes. Do they think I've got a crush on Lucy?'

'Um, possibly,' Ginny conceded with reluctance. 'Why? Don't you?'

'Of course I do. She's gorgeous. But I kind of realise nothing's ever going to come of it. I know I'm not her type.' Wistfully Davy said, 'I had hoped to win her over with my deadpan wit, kind of like Paul Merton, y'know? Trouble is, every time I see Lucy my wit goes out of the window. I turn into a gormless dork instead.'

Bless him. Ginny was touched by his frankness. 'Give yourself time,' she said soothingly. 'Everyone gets a bit tongue-tied at first.'

'To be honest, she's out of my league anyway. You won't mention any of this, will you? Can it be just between us?' asked Davy. 'I've made enough of a berk of myself as it is.'

'I won't breathe a word.'

'Promise?'

'Promise. Shall I tell you something in return? I wasn't that taken with Rupert.'

Davy's upper lip curled with derision. 'Rupert's a prat and a dickhead. Sorry, but he is. He looks down his nose at everyone. Carry straight on over this roundabout.'

'And you're still living at home, did somebody mention?' Lucky parents, thought Ginny as she followed the sign to Henbury.

'With my mother. Dad took off years ago. Mum didn't want me to move out,' said Davy, 'so I only applied to Bristol. Just as well I got a place really, otherwise I'd have been stuck.'

Lucky, lucky mother. She'd asked her son not to move out so he hadn't. So simple, thought Ginny. Now why didn't I think of that?

'She might change her mind. Maybe Rupert will move out and you could take his place.' Ginny was only joking but wouldn't it be great if that happened?

'Except Rupert's hardly likely to move out,' said Davy, 'seeing as it's his flat.'

'Is it?' She hadn't realised that. 'I thought they were all tenants.'

Davy shook his head. 'Rupert's father bought the place for him to live in while he's here at university.'

'Oh. Well, that makes sense, I suppose. If you can afford it.'

'From what I hear Rupert's father can afford anything he wants.'

'So the others are just there to help with the mortgage and keep Rupert company.'

'Turn right here. And they just happen to be taking the same course.' Davy's tone was dry. 'He'll probably have them writing his essays for him before long. Now take the next left. That's it, and ours is the one there with the blue door. That's brilliant. Thanks so much, maybe we'll see each other again some time.' Twisting round in the passenger seat, he said, 'Bye, Bellamy. Give me five.'

He waited until Bellamy had raised a paw, then solemnly shook it.

'Good luck,' said Ginny. 'And you never know, things might work out better than you expect.'

Davy climbed out of the car. 'You mean tongue-tied good guy gets the girl in the end? Maybe if this was a Richard Curtis film I'd stand a chance.' With a good-natured shrug he added, 'But I can't see it happening in real life. Oh well, at least it's character-forming. Everyone needs to have their heart broken some time.'

Ginny watched him head into the house, the kind of modest, everyday three-bed end terrace that Rupert would undoubtedly sneer at. Never mind other people having their heart broken; hers was a bit cracked right now.

'Time to go home, boy.' Patting Bellamy's rough head, Ginny said, 'All the way back to Portsilver. So much for our weekend with Jem, eh? Sorry about that.'

Bellamy licked her hand as if to let her know that he didn't mind and had already forgiven her. Ginny gazed lovingly at him. 'Oh, sweetheart, thank goodness I've got you to keep me company. Whatever would I do without you?'

Bellamy died three weeks later. The cancer that had spread so rapidly throughout his body proved to be untreatable. He was unable to walk, unable to eat, clearly in pain. The vet assured Ginny that putting Bellamy to sleep, letting him go peacefully, was the kindest thing she could do.

So she did it and felt more grief and anguish than she'd ever known before. Bellamy had been with them ever since Gavin had moved out. Someone had suggested getting a dog to cheer them up and that was it, a fortnight later Bellamy had arrived in their lives, so much better company than Gavin that Ginny wished she'd thought of it years ago. Gavin was unfaithful, a gifted liar and emotionally untrustworthy in every way.

Bellamy wasn't, he was gentle, affectionate and utterly dependable. He never fibbed to her about where he'd been. His needs were simple and his adoration unconditional.

'You love that dog more than you ever loved me,' Gavin had grumbled.

And when Ginny had replied, 'Wouldn't anyone?' she had meant it.