



# thinking of YOU

Meeting a special someone was all it took to rekindle Kate's zest for living...

By Gillian Harvey

**L**ooking at herself in the mirror, Kate couldn't help but notice the difference in her appearance. Yes, she'd had her highlights redone, and made an effort with her make-up. But it wasn't that. It was something more – a sparkle behind the eyes, a look of joy and excitement.

Could it really be that one person could make such a difference to her? She had only met him once, but she already felt different: more whole, somehow. Used to living alone, ever since Bob had left, she was happy in her own company and used to filling her time effortlessly.

But ever since that first moment, the first time she'd held him close, she'd been unable to think of anything else.

She spritzed her favourite perfume in the air and let the tiny particles drift down, dusting her hair, her neck, her jacket. Inhaling deeply, she wondered when it was she'd last used this bottle – one of the stumbling, awkward dates she'd had arranged for her when she was newly single, perhaps? Before she'd given up and decided she was better off alone.

Checking her watch again – only an hour to go – she gave herself one last smile, trying to ignore the wrinkles that creased the corners of her eyes when she did so – surely he wouldn't notice?

She skipped down the stairs, noticing as she did so that her step was lighter – even that seemed different.

The phone rang, suddenly, making her jump, and she hurried to the hall to answer it before the messaging service cut in. It was Jackie.

"Hi, Mum," she said, her voice sounding both strangely close and strangely distant at the same time. "I'm not holding you up, am I?"

"No, not at all. I'm going to see Ben in

never seemed to have any free time; Kevin's inability to plan anything – Kate had to force herself to concentrate.

But it was no use. His face kept drifting into her mind: his dark brown hair, that wonderful mouth – already so familiar – and his eyes. Those beautiful blue eyes that seemed to look into her, to really know her.

Her fingers longed to touch him; she longed to breathe in his scent.

"And then they said we can't have the chicken, unless we're having at least sixty guests!" Jackie was saying.

"How ridiculous," Kate rejoined, hoping that this was the right response. It was so hard to concentrate, which

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a little while, but the taxi isn't here yet."

"Oh bless, I bet you're looking forward to it!"

"I can't wait. I really can't."

As the conversation continued on its usual trajectory – Jackie's job, her impending marriage, the fact that she

wasn't fair at all on Jackie. Jackie who called her almost every day to make sure she was OK; Jackie, the most loyal of her two daughters, who'd put her first ever since Bob had moved in with Glynis and broken her heart.

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Even so, she was relieved when she heard the taxi pull up outside and the sound of the doorbell rang loudly through the house.

"Ooh, got to go," she exclaimed, interrupting Jackie's bemoaning the price of invitations. "Can I call you later?"

"Of course, you don't want to be late! Have a lovely time," was the response. "I'll be thinking of you, Mum."

"Thanks Jack. Have a lovely day."

She replaced the receiver feeling a little odd; she had never let her attention wander on the phone to Jackie before. In fact, her calls had been something she'd looked forward to each day.

It was understandable, she supposed; natural, almost, to be preoccupied. But she must make sure she gave Jackie her whole attention next time; must make sure she didn't keep thinking of those lovely baby-blues.

The taxi smelled of leather and the heady smell of an overpowering vanilla air freshener, hung in front of the air-vent and spilling an almost sickening aroma into the back seat.

"Alright, love?" the driver asked, looking around.

"Nineteen, Ridgeway, yes?"

"That's right."

She settled back into the slightly lumpy seat, resting her handbag on her lap, and tried to relax. When that failed, she looked out of the window, watching the familiar scenery flash past. The Indian restaurant where she and the girls met up once in a while; the launderette she'd favoured when her washing machine had given up the ghost; the park where she'd pushed the girls on the swings until her back ached.

Why did it all seem different now?

She looked down at her hands, noticing to her horror that she'd chipped her nail-polish – she wasn't used to wearing the stuff; had no idea why she'd put it on today. He wouldn't notice, wouldn't care. She knew that.

She felt worried suddenly – she'd seen her friends go through this; get completely wrapped up in a new person. Overdo it, perhaps. It had only been two days. Should she have stayed away? Was she being pushy? The last thing she wanted to do was create any problems.

But the draw to him was so strong,

there was no way she could fight it.

And it was too late now. Shops had turned into fields, the open country flashing by unappreciated, and once again houses had started to appear in her line of vision. The car slowed and the sign for Welwyn came into view. Three more streets, then two, then the sign for Ridgeway.

She'd arrived.

She passed her twenty pounds to the driver, not worrying for once about change, and smiled as he walked around and opened the door for her – old-fashioned, she liked that.

"Thanks," she said, noticing for the first time that he was only about twenty-five – a smatter of late acne still peppering his chin. A boy, really.

"Four o'clock, yes?"

"Yes, please. Thank you."

He nodded and strode back around to the driver's side, folding his long, lean body into the seat.

And then she was alone, standing at the end of the driveway, looking up at the house. A curtain flickered in one of

## She'd made herself **believe** that she **didn't** need other people

the bedrooms and for a second she thought she saw a face. Then it fell back into place.

She walked slowly up the drive, the sound of her heels clicking on its gravelled surface unfamiliar to her. She hadn't made this sort of effort for ages – would Sam laugh at her? She wondered. It did seem silly, somehow.

But at the same time, her efforts showed that she wanted to get this right, that this was important to her. That she'd made the transition, somehow, from being happy on her own to wanting to be part of something again.

That was the difference he'd made, she realised. He'd brought her back to life; he'd woken her up somehow to an existence outside the one she'd created for herself.

She realised suddenly that her existence since Bob's unexpected departure had closed down. Of course, she had work, she had one or two evenings out now and then. But she'd also put up her defences – she'd been on guard. Even with Jackie, even with Sam. She'd lost her ability to trust; and had

made herself believe she didn't need other people.

Because she'd been afraid. She'd been afraid of giving herself to someone again; afraid that it would only end in hurt.

As she raised her hand to press the bell it suddenly dawned on her. This feeling of being alive, of being excited; it was born of wonderful things happening, but also a symptom of the fear of being hurt, of realising you had something you were afraid to lose.

Had she shut out life because she'd been afraid of living it?

Well, no more.

Decisively, she pressed the bell and saw a figure move behind the bevelled glass. The lock clicked and the door slowly opened.

And there he was, his baby blues instantly fixed on her, slightly creased from the shock of the light outside; a pair of arms wrapped tightly around his little stomach.

"Hello Ben," she said, her heart skipping. "And hello, Sam."

She stepped inside and took Ben into her arms, smiling at her daughter as she did so. "You look tired."

"Just a bit!" Samantha smiled.

As she held Ben close, she felt it again – the excitement.

This wonderful little man. Her new grandson.



