

## Chapter One of *Diary of a Parent Trainer* by Jenny Smith

### CONGRATULATIONS!

You are in possession of at least one Grown-Up. You have probably had your Grown-Up for some time, possibly all of your life. Now, at last, you can discover the skills you need to operate them successfully.

This easy-to-follow User's Guide will help you to:

- \* achieve optimum performance from your Grown-Up or Grown-Ups
- \* undertake straightforward maintenance and repairs
- \* ensure smooth operation, in most situations

### CAUTION

Your Grown-Up incorporates many complex modes and functions. Familiarization with these is **ESSENTIAL** before difficult manoeuvres are attempted.

### BEFORE USING YOUR GROWN-UP

Read this guide. It contains detailed information on the operation and care of your Grown-Up. Keep it safe and easy to access for future reference.

Tuesday 28th July: 4.23 p.m.

In case you're wondering what undiscovered genius is writing this User's Guide, it's me!

My name's Katie Sutton, I'm thirteen years old and I may, quite possibly, be one of the world's leading experts in Grown-Up behaviour. For many years I've been studying their strange modes and functions – both in the wild and in captivity.

I like to think of myself as a bit like the famous wildlife expert David Attenborough – only instead of studying chimps, hyenas and fruit bats, I'm studying my mum, my nan and my Auntie Julie.

My studies of them, and of other Grown-Ups I've encountered, have led me to write this excellent guide. After all, someone needs to . . . and who better than an expert on Grown-Up behaviour like myself? You see, it's a jungle out there. One that's *full* of Grown-Ups. And according to the law of the jungle, you either eat or you get eaten. . .

In this comprehensive guide, I'm going to share with you my secret knowledge of Grown-Ups, gained from years of intensive study and experimentation.

You too can become highly skilled at:

- 1) understanding their insane behaviour
- 2) predicting their next moves
- 3) operating them to your best advantage.



With my help, I guarantee you can stay one step ahead of your Grown-Ups so you can survive their embarrassing weirdnesses. How cool is that?

You probably think an (as yet) undiscovered genius, and possible world expert, should live somewhere interesting and stimulating – in a huge exciting city or, failing that, in any town big enough to have a shopping centre. Unfortunately I'm not so lucky. I live in Brindleton, voted "The Most Boring Village in Oxfordshire" in a recent survey (conducted by me).

Brindleton's not the quiet, pretty little village you might imagine it to be. It's a sprawling sort of a place that's a mixture of little cottages, posh detached red-brick houses and millions of ex-council and council houses – like the one I live in.

I live with my mum, my older sister Mandy, who's fifteen, and my little brother Jack, who's eight. Dad's no longer around. The final member of our family is Rascal. He's a West Highland terrier and he's twelve years old, which is *eighty-four* in human years! He's a small white scruffy bundle of a dog with hilarious pointy ears, and his main hobby is licking people's faces.

As well as Mum, Mandy, Jack and Rascal, the rest of my enormous extended family also live in the village. For some reason *hardly anybody ever leaves*. Spooky, but true. On one hand, it's great for research, but on the other, I can't walk down the street without being waylaid by at least one auntie. I can't go to the allotments, the park, the local shops . . . or *anywhere*

without bumping into someone from my gene pool.

My nan (Mum's mum) works in the mini-mart. So I can't even go there without her sticking her very nosy nose in my business. Nothing's sacred, believe me.

Take this morning, for example. I went in to buy some ice cream. Nan Williams was grimly stacking loo rolls into a huge pyramid. I tried to sneak past without her noticing me, but it was no good.

"I hear your brother's got A BAD STOMACH!" she shouted at full lung capacity, so that anyone within a five-kilometre radius could hear. "Your Auntie Susan told me. How's he doing; is he getting over it?"

"Yes," I whispered, my face burning hot.

"Messy business! How about you, Katie, have YOU got the runs?"

There is no such thing as privacy when you live in Brindleton.

Still, "every cloud has a silver lining", as Nan would say. Being surrounded by so many Grown-Ups who think they have a right to broadcast the tragic details of my life, and comment on everything I do, is tough. But it's forced me to develop some vital skills and techniques – all of which I will share with you in this brilliantly useful guide.

### USEFUL HINT

One way you can stop Grown-Ups figuring out your evil master plan for Grown-Up Domination is by covering this



guide in brown paper and writing DIFFICULT MATHS EQUATIONS on the front in permanent black marker. Your Grown-Up will be delighted and proud when they see you with your nose stuck in it.

This is exactly the sort of fantastic trick that gives you the advantage when dealing with Grown-Ups.

You might be wondering why you should believe a word I say, so I should probably tell you a bit more about myself. I'm just your average teenager. I'm five feet tall, with green eyes and straight, shoulder-length black hair, which just hangs round my ears in an uninteresting way. I think my chin is slightly too pointy, which is a family trait. Brindleton's full of people with pointy chins. And I have hideously skinny legs, which have been compared to Twiglets due to my knobbly knees.

Mum says I'm "striking-looking", which is her way of avoiding saying I'm not as beautiful as my cousin Hannah – who has long blonde hair and the perfect nose – but Hannah is also my best friend in the whole world, so I don't mind.

My other best friend in the whole world is Louise (who we call Loops because she's got mad curly red hair). Hannah and Loops are both totally amazing and fab in every way. They make me laugh so hard, stuff comes out of my nose.

But now it's time for a confession. Even though I may consider myself a world expert in operating Grown-Ups (which sounds a bit big-headed, I have to admit), *I'm not*

*always an expert at operating myself.*

I'm not very coordinated. Or as Hannah would put it, I'm massively clumsy. I'm always tripping up on the school bus, or bumping into people when I'm hurrying to my next class, and dropping my books all over the floor.

And now that I'm a teenager I regularly have "curse of the giant spot" days when I have to hide my pointy chin or my nose or whichever part of my face is afflicted behind my homework folder.

Finally, there's my tendency to get myself into ridiculously embarrassing situations. For example, in my final year at primary school I turned up in fancy dress for charity . . . *one week early*. I'm still majorly traumatized by the memory of myself in that clown costume – complete with revolving bow tie and giant shoes.

But that's nothing compared with the way I seem to embarrass myself when I'm around one particular person. When he's anywhere near me, I totally malfunction.

This is because I'm Officially In Love.

The lucky person (ha ha) is the unbearably, unbelievably lush Ben Clayden, who doesn't know that I exist despite the fact that me and Hannah constantly stalk him around the village and school. Hannah's Officially In Love with him too, but we've agreed that in the – admittedly unlikely – event one of us gets him, the other will back off and become a bald, toothless nun who lives in the Himalayas.

## BEN CLAYDEN: THE FACT FILE

- Three years above us in school
- Almost sixteen
- Lives in the posh end of the village because his parents are doctors
- The most attractive person in Brindleton, and possibly the world
- Brilliant at art. Probably better than Leonardo da Vinci or Picasso
- NOT RELATED TO US!!

That last point is a huge bonus, believe me – and quite possibly a miracle considering our whole family lives here. Even if Ben Clayden had some hideous deformity we'd still have to consider him for procreation purposes because he's not a blood relation.

But he's not hideous – far from it. He's tall and sporty and has dark golden-blond hair and lovely eyes – the sort of deep blue you could get lost in. And his chin is not in the least bit pointy! If he went on X Factor, he'd win even if he sang like a cat being strangled because all the girls, mums and grannies in the whole country would vote for him.

He's *so good-looking!* When I see him I start to hyperventilate. Sometimes, when we walk past him, Hannah has to remind me to breathe.

Being in love with Ben Clayden has ruined our lives. Nobody else can ever match up to his perfection.

For example, I used to have a thing with Thomas Finch.

His mate Neil Parkhouse asked Hannah to ask me if I'd be Thomas's girlfriend and I said yes, but then *we never talked to each other* – how mad is that?? I know he liked me. One time in maths he wrote my name on his arm in biro.

Thomas Finch has lovely puppy dog chocolate-brown eyes and messy chestnut-brown hair, but as he never said a word to me the whole boyfriend thing was just too weird. I dumped him right before the summer holidays started.

It was cowardly how I did it:

ME: Hannah, will you tell Thomas Finch I'm not going out with him any more?

HANNAH: No. Tell him yourself. It's not fair to get someone else to do it. If someone dumped me, I'd want them to do it themselves, not send a friend to do their dirty work!

ME: Loops, will you tell Thomas Finch I'm not going out with him any more?

LOOPS: OK.

(Loops goes up to Thomas Finch.)

LOOPS: Katie says she isn't going out with you any more.

THOMAS FINCH: Oh.

Thomas hasn't spoken to me since (so no change there!!). I've not seen him for ages. I think he went to Spain on holiday.

Maybe I shouldn't have split up with Thomas. It's quite cool to have a boyfriend; it makes you look more popular. That sounds as if I never cared about him, which isn't true.



In actual fact I did really like Thomas but he can't have liked me back much, or he'd have found *something* to say to me. It's just my luck; I'm destined to be alone, bald and toothless. . .

It's only a few weeks into the summer holidays, so I'm having the *best* time lazing around, writing this and not having to think about homework or teachers or my evil second cousin Leanne (my Arch Enemy).

Apart from living in Brindleton *and* having about a hundred relatives watching my every move *and* my freakishly skinny legs *and* not having Ben Clayden as my boyfriend and a few other things, things are pretty OK right now.

Life is sweet when you're in control.