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Opening extract from

# How to Get What You Want by Peony Pinker

Written by

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Published by

## A&C Black Publishers Ltd

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First published 2011 by
A & C Black Publishers Ltd
36 Soho Square, London, W1D 3QY

www.acblack.com

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ISBN 978-1-4081-3287-6
A CIP catalogue for this book is available from the British Library.

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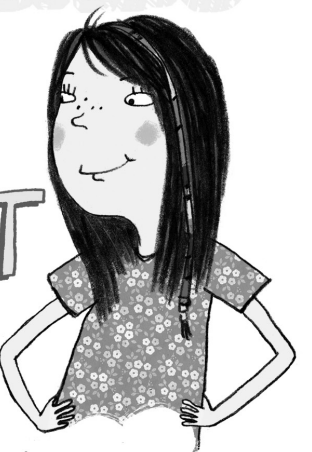
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Printed and bound in Great Britain
by CPI Cox & Wyman, Reading, RG1 8EX.

JENNY ALEXANDER

# How to Get what you WANT





By

# Peony Pinker

A & C Black • London

## Chapter 1

# The Jack Russell and the Pit Bulls



You know when something bad keeps happening such as, for example, your big sister, Primrose, brings her horrible new best friend home every single day after school?

And you've got no reason to suppose that today will be any different but you just can't help hoping that, by some kind of magic, it might be?

And then you get home and there they are – Primrose rummaging in the cupboards for something to eat and Bianca, sitting on the kitchen table swinging her feet… and your heart sinks into your boots.

Well, that's what happened to me the day I decided enough was enough.

'Look who's here,' said Bianca, as soon as I walked in the door. Primrose didn't bother to look. She went on rummaging. I felt as welcome as a slug in a welly.

I was hungry myself but I couldn't get a snack or Bianca would call me Peony Podge and say I looked like a walrus. I saw a walrus on David Attenborough the other night and it looked like a big bag of blubber.

Bianca swung her stick-thin legs. Her school skirt was nearly up to her knickers. I don't know how she gets away with it. I don't know how she gets away with wearing so much make-up either, or that red stripe in her hair. She pulled her pony-tail tighter.

'What are you staring at, Pea-brain?' she snapped. She's got lots of names for me and none of them are nice.

I went upstairs. The kitchen takes up the whole of the ground floor of our house, and the sitting room takes up the whole of the floor above. Then there's my bedroom and Primrose's above that and finally

Mum and Dad's bedroom and his study in the attic. All the houses in Harbour Row are very tall and thin.

I chucked my bag in the nearest armchair, grabbed the remote and flung myself down on the settee. With any luck, Primrose and Bianca would stay downstairs. They couldn't go out because Primrose was supposed to be looking after me until Mum or Dad got home from work.

Five measly minutes, that's all I got, and then they came crashing up the stairs.

'Bye-bye, Peony Pudding!'

Bianca yanked the cushion out from behind my back.

'We're going to play Disco Divaz.'

Primrose snatched the remote and switched on the PlayStation.

'But I'm watching the Dog Whisperer.'

'Tough,' said Primrose. 'There's two of us and only one of you.'

It obviously wasn't fair because Bianca didn't live in our house so she shouldn't count, but when I said so before it just made things fifty billion times worse. No exaggeration.

I went upstairs. Primrose's bedroom door was shut. I walked into my own room, closed the door and sat down on the edge of the bed.

*Boom badda boom badda boom badda boom badda boom…* The backing track kicked in and then Primrose and Bianca started screeching into their microphones like a couple of strangled cats in the room below.

Surely Primrose couldn't seriously think they had any chance of becoming pop stars? But you never knew. Since she had started hanging out with Bianca she hadn't just turned nasty – she had turned stupid too.

I tried to block out the noise by reading my new library book, Incredible Dogs. It was full of true stories about, well, incredible dogs. True Story Number One was called 'George, a Little Hero with a Great Big Heart'. It was about this nine-year-old Jack Russell terrier who was out for a walk with some children when a pair of Pit Bulls suddenly attacked them.

The Pit Bulls went for the smallest child, who was only four, and they would have killed him if George hadn't dived in to defend him. The Pit Bulls let go of the child and turned on George instead. He didn't have a chance. But through his incredible courage he saved the children, even though it cost him his life. The people in the town where he lived put up a statue of George to honour him and he was awarded the highest medal an animal can get for bravery.

I've always thought that if I was a dog I would be a Jack Russell terrier. 'Bold and friendly', it says they are in The Bumper Book of Dogs. Also 'intelligent and brave'. That might sound big-headed but I'm obviously not going to choose a breed that's supposed to be 'wimpy and dim'! Mentioning no names, in case you've got one.

*Boom badda boom badda boom badda boom badda boom…* The noise was so loud it was making the house shake. Three pencils rattled across my desk and threw themselves on the floor in despair. I didn't want to spoil the rest of the stories by trying to read them with bad singing battering my eardrums.

Picking up the pencils gave me an idea. I made a poster that said:

Big sister, age 15. Free to good home.

Underneath, I did a picture of Primrose.

When I had finished I sat back to admire it. Then I crossed out 'good home' and wrote 'anyone who will have her' instead. It felt good imagining someone coming to fetch her and take her away. But the good feeling didn't last because just then, Primrose and Bianca moved on from raps to power ballads.

No-one should have to hear my big sister Primrose and her horrible new best friend sing power ballads. I put my hands over my ears. The only way out of

the house was back down through the sitting room. I didn't want to go past them again, but I couldn't stand it. I was in agony! Seriously, the police could use Primrose and Bianca to force confessions out of people. 'Own up, or they do Endless Love...'

I crept down the stairs and tried to slip past without them noticing but they stopped singing and pressed Pause. They glared at me.

'Stop spying on us, Pea-brain,' said Bianca.

'I'm not spying on you. I'm not even interested in you!'

'Ooh!' They raised their eyebrows at each other. They mimicked me. 'I'm-not-even-interested!'

Then they laughed and Bianca said, 'I don't like you hanging around us all the time, and Primrose doesn't like it either.'

As if it was possible to avoid them in number 13, Harbour Row.

'Neither does Annabel!' added Primrose.

They both snorted with laughter. There was nobody except us three in the room. I couldn't help myself.

'Who's Annabel?'

'That's for us to know and you to find out,' said Bianca. 'Now go away and leave us in peace.'

Peace! That was rich. I trudged on down to the kitchen. The noise started up again. The back door

was blocked by a half-dead cheese-plant and anyway there wasn't anything out that way except the yard. The garden of our house got sold off years ago, before we even moved here. Now Mr Kaminski next door's got a big L-shaped garden he never uses and we've got the bit by the back door that hardly gets any sunshine.

I went out the front door, pulled it shut behind me and sat down on the top step in the sun. I found myself thinking about the story of George and I wondered, could I be as gutsy as him? If I was George, then my Pit Bulls would be Bianca and Primrose. They were much bigger than me, they were meaner, and also it was two against one.

The problem was, I had no more chance against Primrose and Bianca than George had against the Pit Bulls. You can be as brave as you like, but let's face it, if you're small you won't win on your own.

I would never normally tell tales – ask anyone. I didn't tell the day Primrose bunked off school or the time I saw her and Bianca smoking at the beach. But enough was enough. Something had to be done.