

# Mission: MARRIAGE

This leap year, there'll be women across the country queuing up to propose to their beloved. Here's one woman's hilarious story of how she decided to take a much sneakier approach

BY ANTONIA HOYLE

A leap year is upon us once again, bringing with it that elusive opportunity for single women to cast aside their inhibitions and propose. Come the last day of February, wannabe wives the length and breadth of Britain will be practising their poetic offerings and popping champagne corks in nervous anticipation.

I'm happy for them, I really am. We have the vote and equal pay legislation. Heck, we're even allowed to box in this year's Olympics. So a willingness to seize the reins of our romantic destiny – albeit only once every 1,460 days – should be seen as a sign of progress on the sexual equality front, right?

Well, sorry, but without wishing to offend the sisterhood, I'd rather have run naked down the aisle than have asked my husband, Chris, to marry me. To have done so would have seemed just so... anti-climactic. I wanted to feel special and sought-after. I wanted the full protestations of devotion on bended knee, and to be able to tell my grandchildren about the day Grandpa pulled a dazzling diamond ring out of his pocket. That's not to say, however, that I didn't also want a say in how and when it happened. It's just that





I bypassed convention in another way – by bullying Chris into proposing.

Before I go any further I'd like to stress that he was a willing victim. We celebrated our second wedding anniversary last summer, we have a beautiful baby daughter and, to the best of my knowledge, he hasn't suffered any lasting trauma as a result of my behaviour. The simple truth is that I had a very clear idea of the direction we were heading in and made it my mission to secure our destiny.

Chris and I met in June 2007 – at a wedding, natch. We kissed at 4am the following morning, and from the start I knew it was serious. Save for the odd ill-fated relationship, I'd been single for seven years. At 28, I had a mortgage on my London flat and a job as a journalist on a newspaper. But I wasn't getting any younger. And before I reached 30, I wanted to get my romantic affairs in order so that every aspect of my life was sorted.

Chris, a stockbroker the same age as me, fulfilled my criteria. Funny, kind and financially solvent, he seemed as patient as I was neurotic and had an impressive ability to tolerate my various foibles. It was a no-brainer.

The novelty of finally having a 'proper' boyfriend knew no bounds. I'd excitedly count our dates in a tally on the whiteboard in my kitchen. By date number 18, we'd discussed children ("I want seven," I said. He went white). On date 26, he met my parents. Watching him play air guitar with my uncle Michael at my mum's 60th only consolidated my instinct that he was a keeper. He has friends who've refused to be introduced to their in-laws until the day before they wed. If he felt awkward about meeting my family six weeks into our relationship, he kept it quiet. Besides, I was too busy plotting to worry about his trifling concerns. Date 54 was spent introducing both sets of parents, when my mother – ever an enthusiastic accomplice – invited his mum and dad for lunch. As we dined on her salmon roulade, I knew I was one step closer to clinching the deal.

Not that I was necessarily duplicitous. By the end of our third month together (I'd run out of room on the kitchen whiteboard by then), I openly revealed my hand while we were lying in bed one evening. "I'm

ready to get married now," I remember were my exact words.

There was a pause, then a nervous laugh. "There's no need to rush into anything, is there?" he asked gently. But he didn't knock me back. From then on – as he would later recall – I considered it open season.

Forget the shock proposals you see on soap operas. No man is going to ask for your hand in marriage unless he's certain you're going to accept. So isn't it up to us to give them the courage of their conviction? But weekly reminders that it was time for us to settle down were not proving enough. Nor was suggesting picturesque locations for our wedding – not even when



Chris saw Antonia at her "borderline-psychotic worse" but reader, he married her anyway

I helpfully suggested that the Sicilian chapel where we'd holidayed would be just perfect.

Sighing wistfully in his direction when yet another of our friends announced their engagement simply made him shuffle his feet nervously. No, I needed structure to our relationship, especially now that my date tally had come a cropper. So I established The Summit – a biannual conference regarding the finer points of our relationship that was, in my opinion anyway, as good as legally binding.

We were to exchange four typed pages of documents detailing our feelings for each other. I consider it testament to Chris's affection for me that, despite having to work 13 hours for an investment bank every day, he still found time to complete the paperwork.

"I bypassed convention – by bullying Chris into proposing"

My favourite clause – slipped artfully in – was entitled Future Promises. What kind of cold-hearted suitor wouldn't put in writing that a marriage proposal may be in the offing at some stage? "Something special may happen after Summit Two," he wrote. Hooray! I was inching ever closer.

It wasn't that Chris was a sap. Or that he wouldn't have asked me of his own accord eventually (I hope). But, like all men, he needed a shove in the right direction. Nonetheless, over time, he developed a degree of guile. He told me he'd decided to propose after I'd cooked him a certain number of roast dinners – conveniently refusing to tell me how many. I lost count of the number of chickens I basted before I realised I'd been duped.

He also learned to lie. As Summit Two approached, a year to the day after we met, we planned a holiday to Mexico. "I'm not going to propose while we're away," he said apologetically before we left for the airport, looking me straight in the eye. I winced. Of course, that was exactly what I had hoped he would do.

As it happened, that is what he did. We read our Summit Documents in a private pool in Acapulco. In the small print of Chris's pages, under the Amendments section at the end, he had written that I was not his wife, and that he would like to rectify that.

As he swam down on one knee, holding a pink plastic ring purchased from a local flea market, I cried. Not because I was particularly shocked. I had, after all, spent the past year masterminding this proposal. But the manner in which he did it was so tolerant of my lengthy campaign that he may as well have brandished a banner with the ring saying, "I know you're a bit bonkers, but I love you regardless." I felt accepted in a way that wouldn't have been possible had I been doing the asking. He'd seen me at my demanding, needy, borderline-psychotic worst, and he wanted to marry me anyway.

So, by all means, take the initiative on February 29. But I'm pretty sure my method is better. ■

Did you do anything extreme to get your husband to propose? Email us at [easylivingeditorial@condenast.co.uk](mailto:easylivingeditorial@condenast.co.uk)