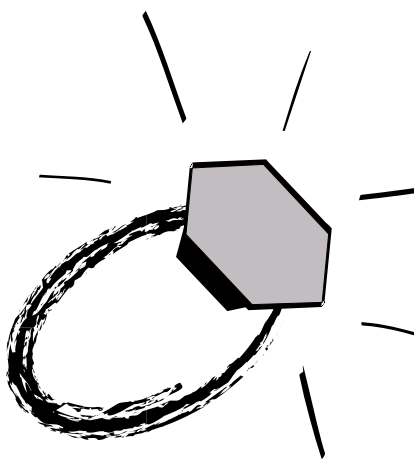


## CHAPTER ONE

# *Rules of Engagement*



## THE PROPOSAL

I won't dwell too long on the proposal, as if you've bought this book, we can assume it has already taken place. (If not, then you may have some problems I can't help you with). However, since the proposal is the spark that ignites the raging inferno of wedding plans that will quickly take over your life, it would be rude not to mention it. Also, and I think it fair to warn you about this now, the proposal may be the only scene in this play in which your man plays the leading role. Unless you have landed a truly exceptional fellow, your new fiancé is likely to assume that having popped the

question, his next job will be to get to the church on time.

Ideally, your proposal should be all you've ever dreamed of. It's a gloriously sunny/dramatically stormy/romantically snowy day, your Prince Charming whisks you off to a beautiful countryside setting/your favourite restaurant/the top of the Eiffel Tower, makes a moving speech about how much you mean to him, drops to one knee and produces a rock to rival the iceberg that hit the Titanic.

*Chris, Dublin*

We were living in New Zealand, my fiancé's home country. He took me away for the weekend on the devious premise that he had to check out the conference facilities for work. I had no idea what he had planned! He chose a resort in the Far North because it is the closest point to Ireland and he knew I was missing home. He had the ring, which he'd had designed specially, tucked away in his pocket, and a bottle of champagne chilling in the back of the car. I was getting real fidgety, so he thought I knew what he was up to and that I was feeling nervous. He suddenly said, literally as one word, 'Are-you-really-nervous-will-you-marry-me?' I hadn't had time to digest his first question when his second suddenly hit me ... like a steamroller! I was completely shocked, but managed to say yes! We toasted our engagement sitting on a bench overlooking the Tasman Sea.

But sometimes the reality can be less than ideal.

*Claire, Wexford*

Most proposal stories are so romantic – mine is just the opposite. All our friends were getting engaged and kept asking why we weren't, but I am just not that corny – or so I thought! We went out to buy some furniture for our sitting room and spent hours disagreeing in large superstores, and eventually went home, very cranky and without the furniture!

We were sitting in front of the TV with a Chinese takeaway, and I don't know if it was the money burning a hole in his pocket, but somehow he suggested that as we did not get the furniture and had the money we 'may as well' buy an engagement ring instead! I laughed and said yes.

As we live in the UK, we called Ireland with the good news and missed the best engagement party in history, which was held there and then without us! Mam still says it was the worst hangover of her life.

If your proposal didn't live up to your romantic fantasy, don't dwell on it. You are marrying the man of your dreams and that's what matters – even if your dreams have changed somewhat over the years. Move on, in the comfortable knowledge that at least your wedding day will be perfect, because you are in charge of planning that.

## Tired of waiting? The DIY proposal

We may be modern girls but most of us would hate the idea of being the one to propose. And since, as I may have mentioned earlier, the guy's helpfulness with the rest of the wedding preparations is generally minimal, it's not too much to ask that he set the ball rolling. But if you're sick and tired of waiting for him to screw up the courage, then go for it. Traditionally, women are allowed to propose during a leap year, but there's nothing to stop you doing it any old time you feel like it.

So, in case you've bought this book in advance of *The Proposal* and are planning to surprise your man, please be sure to hide it in a very safe place until he's said yes, or you risk a boyfriend-shaped hole in your front door as he runs for his life.

## THE RING

### Tradition

The engagement ring acquired its significance in AD860, when Pope Nicholas I decreed that an aspiring bridegroom should present his fiancée with a ring of gold as proof that his intentions were genuine. Diamonds came into fashion after King Maximilian of Hapsburg gave Mary of Burgundy a diamond engagement ring in 1477. Diamonds are the most enduring substance in nature, so they represent the permanence of the commitment.

The tradition of wearing engagement and wedding rings on the third finger of the left hand originated with the ancient Romans, who believed that there was a vein in that finger which was directly connected to the heart. However, in some other European countries, the wedding ring is worn on the third finger of the right hand.

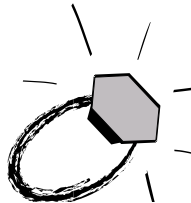
## Choosing the ring

Only the very traditional, extremely brave or downright foolish suitor will buy the engagement ring without first consulting his bride-to-be. If your fiancé has done so, chances are you will love it because of the time and thought he has taken to choose it for you. If you really hate it, however, you need to make a decision.

Will your new fiancé be devastated if you admit you don't like the ring and want to exchange it? Could you grow to love the ring in time, like that stray puppy you didn't want to adopt? Or is its presence on your finger going to be a constant cause of frustration and disappointment to you? If so, talk to your fiancé now. He wants you to be happy, and after all, it's you who's going to have to wear the damn thing.

While it may not conform to the fairytale scenario, it's far easier to choose the ring together. Some would even say it's more romantic, especially if you make a day of it. Arrange to go for lunch and have a glass of champagne to celebrate a successful purchase.

When selecting your engagement ring, don't forget to think about your wedding ring also, and how they will sit together. Both rings should be made of the same type of metal – yellow gold, white gold, platinum – and also of the same carat, otherwise the softer metal could be worn down by the other. If your engagement ring is an unusual shape, you may have to get a wedding ring specially made to match it. Check with the jeweller when you buy your engagement ring and see what they suggest.



## Diamonds are a girl's best friend

Diamonds are rated on four features: cut, clarity, colour and carat.

Cut is the most important feature. It allows light to move into the stone and reflect outwards, so a well-cut diamond will sparkle the most. Brilliant cut (old and new style), emerald, princess, oval, square, pear and heart-shaped are the most popular.

Clarity refers to the number of tiny flaws or inclusions in the stone. A completely flawless diamond is extremely rare, but the fewer flaws a stone has the more it will sparkle, and the more expensive it will be.

Colour is another feature on which a diamond is judged. The best diamonds are pure white, while less perfect stones will be tinted to a greater or lesser degree.

Carat is the weight of the diamond, and larger diamonds of more than one carat are rare.

Naturally-occurring coloured diamonds – pink, blue, yellow – are very rare, and therefore very expensive. The Hope Diamond, the largest and most famous blue diamond in the world, weighed in at a hefty 45.5 carats. Although beautiful to look at, it was said to bring its owners bad luck, so it now resides in the Smithsonian Institute in Washington.

### *Celebrity style*

Richard Burton presented Elizabeth Taylor with a 69-carat pear-shaped diamond as a token of his affection. The couple married, divorced, re-married and finally split for good. At its last recorded sale in 1979, the Taylor-Burton diamond fetched almost \$3,000,000.

Diamonds – whether solitaires, two or three stones, or a whole cluster – remain the most popular engagement stone, but you could also consider your birth stone, either alone or in combination with diamonds:

<b>MONTH</b>	<b>STONE</b>	<b>SYMBOLISING</b>
January	Garnet	Constancy
February	Amethyst	Sincerity
March	Aquamarine	Courage
April	Diamond	Innocence
May	Emerald	Success
June	Pearl	Health
July	Ruby	Contentment
August	Peridot	Happiness
September	Sapphire	Wisdom
October	Opal	Hope
November	Topaz	Fidelity
December	Turquoise	Prosperity

Don't get too bogged down in the details; the most important thing when choosing your ring, diamond or otherwise, is simply that you like it and that it suits your hand. And, as you'll find when you go shopping for your wedding dress, what actually looks good on you may be completely different from what you had in mind originally. Go with your instincts, and you're sure to find a ring you love and which makes you smile every time you glance down at your left hand; the novelty of wearing an engagement ring is a joy that lasts for quite some time.

## Other options

You've traipsed around every jewellers in Ireland or even beyond, and you haven't found anything you like – so why not design your own ring? Jewellery designers can help you turn your ideas into a ring that's really unique. Draw a picture of what you have in mind, or bring pictures cut from magazines or printed out from the internet.

The only drawback here is that you'll be committed to buying a ring before you see it, so try to find a designer who's willing to be flexible and who will alter the design until you're happy, without charging you a small fortune.

Another lovely option is to wear a ring that is a family heirloom, if one of you is lucky enough to have such an item. If you don't like the ring itself, you could get the stone reset into a design of your choosing. Alternatively, you could have a ring, or some other piece of jewellery that is special to you, melted down and transformed into a new ring – that way you have the link to your family history but in a ring that's personal to you.

### *Mary, Co Cork*

My mother had inherited a rather pretty but very old-fashioned bar brooch set with a central emerald, flanked by diamonds and seed pearls, which she gave to me when I was twenty-one. It seemed a shame to leave it, unworn, in a drawer, so when I was getting engaged, I had a jeweller take the brooch apart and he designed an engagement ring with four diamonds, a wedding ring set with seven little diamonds in a pavè style and a tear-drop pendant from the emerald. My mother was delighted, I was delighted, and it worked out at a fraction of the cost of buying the rings.

### Caring for your ring

You should have your engagement ring cleaned every six to twelve months and have the setting checked at the same time in case any stones have become loose. The jeweller where you bought your ring should provide this service free for life.

### Do I have to wear an engagement ring?

No you don't, and many modern brides are choosing not to. It's up to the bride to decide if she does or doesn't want to wear a ring, so don't be pressurised into the decision, either by your fiancé or by anyone else. If you're not really into jewellery, you won't want to wear two rings on one finger, so getting an engagement ring could be a bit of a waste. Or you might fall in love with a really distinctive, unusual ring that will be difficult to match with a second ring, in which case you'd be better off saving this to use as your wedding ring. You could, of course,

#### *Kunak, Co Louth*

When we got engaged I wasn't sure I wanted an engagement ring, but I did have my heart set on a cello, so I suggested to my fiancé that he get me an 'engagement cello' instead. Needless to say, he wasn't too impressed with the idea, pointing out that it would be quite difficult to lug a cello around to show friends and family the 'expression' of our love, although the money saved on the ring would help cover the costs of the resulting hernia!

move your engagement ring to your right hand after you are married, wearing just the wedding band on your left hand.

Having said all that, people will expect you to have a ring and will ask to see it as soon as you tell them you're engaged – so if you decide against one, be prepared for a few raised eyebrows.

### What about the groom?

You're getting a beautiful ring to mark your engagement, so maybe you'd like to buy your fiancé a present too. A watch is probably the most popular gift, and fits in nicely with the idea of your engagement ring, as it's something to wear and show off, and hopefully keep forever. Other possibilities might be a digital camera, a DVD player, a leather wallet, or something that can be engraved with the date – a signet ring, hip flask, silver/pewter drinking mug, Cross pen, cufflinks, etc. Apparently there are 'engagement rings' available for men now too – diamond optional.

However, you don't have to buy him something (sorry, guys) – it's not actually a tradition, rather something that has evolved in recent years. I'm afraid I'd never heard of the idea when we got engaged so my poor husband got nothing.

## ANNOUNCING THE NEWS

Your parents should be the first to hear your good news, unless either of you has children from a previous relationship, in which case it's their right to find out first.

Traditionally, the bride's parents are told first – possibly because the bride's father was expected to pay for the

upcoming nuptials, so it was deemed polite to alert him to the forthcoming drain on his finances as early as possible.

Of course, if you are sticking strictly to tradition, your prospective husband should ask your father's permission for your hand in marriage. Now don't all laugh at once. While most grooms balk at the idea, and most brides object to the notion of themselves as property to be passed from one man to another, there are women – and fathers – out there who like this idea. If you are one of them, talk nicely to your fiancé and explain how much it would mean to you and your father. Persuade him that this is the perfect way to begin his career as favoured son-in-law.

Once you've told both sets of parents, and, hopefully, had a positive reaction, you can set about spreading the news far and wide. This is one of the happiest pieces of news you will ever tell your friends, so make the most of it. Try not to tell people by phone or e-mail – nothing beats seeing the look of shock and delight on their faces. Make sure that those closest to you hear it from you first, and do resort to phoning if there is a risk that they will hear it from someone else.

A fun way to tell everyone at once is to throw a party for no apparent reason. Once everyone is assembled, break open the bubbly and inform your guests that they're there to celebrate your engagement. Then sit back and enjoy the squeals of delight and the experience of being hugged by seventeen people at once. Of course, the downside to this is that you may miss out on a few engagement presents, and you'll have to buy the champagne yourself.

Some people choose a more unconventional method of breaking the news:

*Rebecca, Co Meath*

My husband has always had a great imagination, so I should have known he wouldn't announce our engagement in the usual way. He had five-piece jigsaws made, and posted one piece a day for a week. It caused great excitement; our family and friends were checking TV and radio stations to see if there was some kind of prize on offer. The last piece solved the mystery, giving our names and the date of our engagement.

## ENGAGEMENT PARTY

If you're dying for an opportunity to show off your sparkler and indulge in a glass or three of champagne, an engagement party is the way to go. Do a quick once-over with a duster and invite people over to celebrate in style. Or hire a room in your local pub and let someone else worry about clearing up the mess.

Most people consider a card enough to give for an engagement, but some will bring presents, so be sure to note who gave what and send thank-you cards. This will be good practice for the wedding. If you're having the party at home, have plenty of vases in stock for the many bunches of flowers

you are sure to receive, or you'll end up cutting the tops off Coke bottles to accommodate your expanding forest of lilies, which somewhat spoils the effect.

Engagement parties are a good opportunity to introduce the two sets of parents and siblings if they haven't already met. It's a joyous occasion to celebrate the good fortune of their son and daughter in finding each other, so moods will be good. Any nerves will be calmed after a couple of champagne cocktails or glasses of their favourite tipple. And if the families dislike each other on sight, there will be plenty of other people to talk to instead.

If a party is not for you, then a meal out with family or drinks with friends is just as good a way to mark the occasion. Just be prepared for the fact that all of your friends are going to want to celebrate with you in some way. It may be easiest in the long term to celebrate with everyone at once with a big bash.

## NEWSPAPER ANNOUNCEMENT

You may like to spread your news as far and wide as possible by putting a notice in the newspaper. The most popular national paper for engagement notices is *The Irish Times*, which prints these on Saturdays on the letters page. And you don't have to have an address on the DART line or a father with an impressive title to announce your engagement there!

Give the advertising department a call and ask about their rates, guidelines on the number of words, and the deadline for submitting the announcement, and get scribbling. See examples overleaf.

If you feel it's too late to put in an engagement announcement, why not put in a marriage announcement instead? See over.

**From the bride's  
parents:**

MARY PINK – JOHN BLUE

David and Anne Pink, Rathrock, Dublin, are delighted to announce the engagement of their (eldest/second) daughter Mary to John, son of James and Patricia Blue, of Mara, Co. Galway.

**From divorced parents  
making a joint  
announcement:**

MARY PINK – JOHN BLUE

David Pink of London, and Anne Pink of Dublin, are delighted to announce the engagement of their daughter Mary to John, son of James and Patricia Blue, of Mara, Co. Galway.

**Marriage Announcement:**

**From the bride and  
groom:**

MARY PINK – JOHN BLUE

Mary and John, together with their families in Rathrock, Dublin and in Mara, Co. Galway, are delighted to announce their engagement.

**From a remarried  
mother and stepfather:**

MARY PINK – JOHN BLUE

Anne and Michael Green, Dublin, are delighted to announce the engagement of her daughter, Mary Pink, to John, son of James and Patricia Blue, of Mara, Co. Galway.

Mary Pink and John Blue, together with their families, are delighted to announce that they were married in Rome on 12 March 2005.

## *Celebrity style*

When Ryan Tubridy got engaged to Anne Marie, the announcement in *The Irish Times* was from their three-year-old daughter Ella.

### Becoming a Fiancée

So what is different now that you are engaged? The most obvious change, apart from the satisfying twinkle every time you move your left hand, is that you have been upgraded from boyfriend and girlfriend and now have full permission to call each other fiancé/fiancée. This lets the world know that not only are you lucky enough to have found your soulmate, you're currently in the process of planning the happiest day of your life. Some brides-to-be love the newfound status the use of the phrase 'my fiancé' confers. Others find the term too pretentious – if this sounds like you, feel free to continue saying boyfriend/partner/significant other. You'll have to get used to 'husband' soon enough, and too much change can be confusing.

You will notice a difference in people's attitudes. You'll find they take you more seriously as a couple, and you won't be asked the sort of questions that may have infuriated you in the past. It will now be perfectly obvious that you're not on the lookout for someone better, or that you don't want to go trekking around the Australian outback for six months, leaving your beloved at home.

As far as your parents are concerned, your impending marriage is final proof that their little girl has grown up. You may find that they regard you as more of an equal, and begin to treat your future husband as part of the family, if they didn't already do so.

And how will you feel? Well, a new sense of security will certainly take over your relationship. You'll feel free to make plans for the wedding and beyond – maybe for the dream house you will build some day, or whether you would be happy to call a boy *Zachariah* after his paternal grandfather!

On the other hand, after the first euphoria has subsided somewhat, you may panic that you're too young to be settling down, that you're missing out on the fun of singledom and that there are too many disappointed men out there who never got the opportunity to snog you. You'll probably feel like this while listening to your single friends prepare to hit the town on a Saturday night. Call them on Sunday morning instead, listen to them bemoan the fact that all the good men are taken, and count yourself lucky that you got in there on time. You may be leaving behind one way of life but another, very satisfying one, is just about to begin.