



CAROLYN HAX

No work, no wedding? Jobless guy wants to propose.

Adapted from a recent online discussion:

Hi, Carolyn:

I just want to know whether you think it's okay for me to propose to my girlfriend when I am not currently working? In other words, I can't afford a ring or a wedding right now, but I want her to know we are on the road to marriage.

USA

This is a grayer answer than I thought it was going to be.

I started out by typing that of course it's "okay" to propose. Then I started to type out the reasons it's okay — one of them being: The best time to let someone know you want to be with her for the rest of your life is when you're confident that it's true.

But then the next one stopped me. I also think it's important to share that information when you can be reasonably confident this information will be welcomed by its recipient. And if your girlfriend would be reluctant to commit to someone who is out of work, then this might put her on a spot she doesn't appreciate being on.

You could alleviate that pressure a bit by saying the engagement will be as long as it takes for you to get back on your feet — but then that raises this question: Are you proposing just to "lock her down," to make it harder for her to break up with you in case your joblessness drags on?

This might not be an issue between you two at all — she may, for example, have complete confidence that you'll be working again soon, or that you could be working if you wanted to but you have the resources and patience to wait for the right job. There are countless unemployment scenarios, especially these days.

And so the answer really hinges on this: If you're a stable, resourceful, mature person — in other words, if you're a good risk — then there's no reason you shouldn't express the love you're feeling.

But if your history says you're a bad risk, at least at the moment — lots of jobs gotten and lost, bad credit, lots of reliance on parents to help you out, etc. — then you might want to spare your girlfriend the decision. Tell her instead that you want to marry her, but you're not going to ask her to commit to you until you get your financial [stuff] together.

Re: USA's Proposing:

If it's mostly the "can't afford a ring or a wedding" part that's holding you up, go ahead and propose. Rings and weddings do not a marriage make, and if your girlfriend's answer would hinge on those things, why would you want to propose to her in the first place? You can certainly prolong the engagement until you can afford those things, but the type of girl you want to marry will say yes regardless.

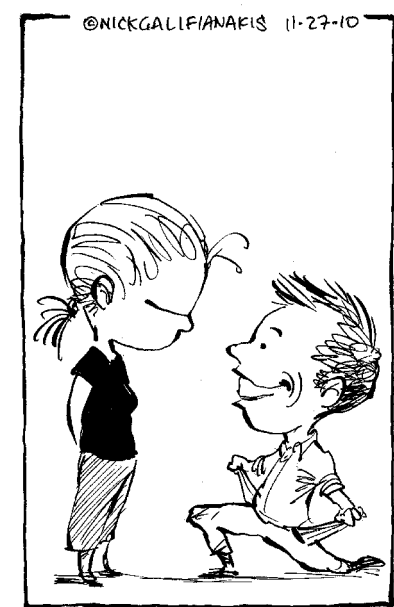
Anonymous

Right you are, thanks. There's also nothing that says he has to "propose." He can also start a conversation with his girlfriend about marriage. Considering what it takes to make marriage work, I believe a mutual decision to marry is a better start than a bended knee.

This is why I don't write for Hollywood.

Read the whole transcript or join the discussion live at noon Fridays at www.washingtonpost.com/discussions.

Write to Tell Me About It, Style, 1150 15th St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20071, or tellme@washpost.com.



NICK GALIFIANAKIS FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

THE STYLE INVITATIONAL

REPORT FROM WEEK 892

in which we asked you to suggest moving something from one location to another: This contest brought out a lot of what we call screedy entries: politically passionate and often nasty, but not very funny. Then again, they were sent during election week, a time to test even a Loser's sense of humor.



Every summer, move Abraham Lincoln's chair down the steps so he can dip his feet in the Reflecting Pool. (Drew Bennett, West Plains, Mo.)

- 2 Move the Washington Monument to Yellowstone National Park right in front of Old Faithful. (Chris Doyle, Ponder, Tex.)
- 3 Switch the Inner and Outer loops of the Beltway, so that politicians will technically be telling the truth about their "outside-the-Beltway" mentality. (Danny Bravman, Chicago)
- 4 Move down the R in the vertical NPR banner outside its D.C. offices so they can insert a letter and make it "NO PR." (Beverly Sharp, Washington)

THE SHIFT LIST: HONORABLE MENTIONS

Spin Wyoming around 180 degrees just to see how long it takes before anyone notices. (Russell Beland, Fairfax)

Install "The Awakening" in Giants Stadium, in memory of Jimmy Hoffa. (Bird Waring, Larchmont, N.Y.)

Move the White House to Kenya; then Barack Obama couldn't be president because he wasn't born there. (John Holder, Charlotte)

Reunite the Longaberger basket company headquarters with the "shopping bag building" in Tysons Corner. (Jeff Contompasis, Ashburn)

First you need one of those robot submarine things, and then go down and literally rearrange the deck chairs on the Titanic. (Russell Beland)

Move the Earth a little farther north so it won't be affected by global warming. (Edmund Conti, Raleigh, N.C.)

Redeploy U.S. forces from Afghanistan to Detroit, to build schools and provide security. (Judy Blanchard, Novi, Mich.)

I'd move our right arms to the left sockets and vice versa, so we could scratch our own backs without awkward, expensive appurtenances such as back-scratchers and spouses. (Dixon Wragg, Santa Rosa, Calif.)

Move guys' brains inside their skulls. (Kevin Dopart, Washington)

Move the location of each Metro escalator step at a steady rate — a rate that's not zero, for once. (Kevin Dopart)

Move the Angel Moroni from the Mormon Temple to the Scottish Rite Temple, and call it the Angel MacOroni. (Ann Martin, Bracknell, England)

Move the Egyptian pyramids to the U.S.-Mexico border and arrange them right side up, upside down, right side up . . . (Chuck Smith, Woodbridge)

For added irony, move the Arc de Triomphe from Paris to a country that has gone even longer without triumph — hmm, how about Carthage. (Russell Beland)

Say, is there anything left of the Berlin Wall? If so, could they please move it to Yuma? — Gov. J. Brewer (Tom Witte, Montgomery Village)

Move spy Anna Chapman back to the United States so she may be properly held. Not necessarily for questioning. (Jeff Contompasis)

Move Niagara Falls to Bethesda — no, wait, WSSC did that two years ago. (Gary Crockett, Chevy Chase)

Slide the White House 10 1/2 blocks east — to 666 Pennsylvania Ave., where it belongs. — G. Beck (Chris Doyle)

Move an Egyptian pyramid up against the Leaning Tower of Pisa. (Pie Nelsion, Silver Spring)

Switch the names and statuses of Wyoming and Washington, D.C., so that Wyoming's 544,000 residents get the great prestige of living in the nation's capital and D.C.'s 600,000 residents get two senators and a real House representative. (Michael Reinemer, Annandale)

Move Donald Trump's cheese. (Jeff Brechlin, Eagan, Minn.)

Move the Manassas battlefield to Capitol Hill, where the battles of bull run daily. (Dave Prevar, Annapolis)

Move the center of the universe to [address of arrogant, egotistical relative/co-worker]. (David D. Johnson, Alexandria)

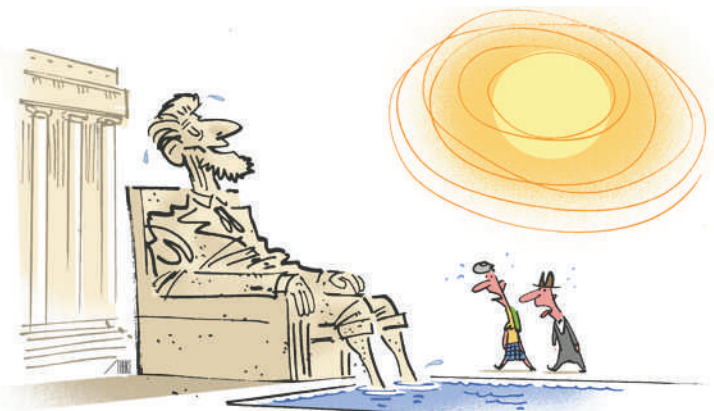
Move the Ground Zero mosque 2 1/2 blocks away so its name is like, you know, accurate. (Chris Doyle)

Move the Spy Museum to an undisclosed location. (Nan Reiner, Alexandria)

Next week: Give us a hint, or The wee-tale marketdear

Online discussion Have a question for the Empress or want to talk to some real Losers? Join the Style Conversational at washingtonpost.com/styleconversational.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Week 896: Other people's business

1. Starbucks
2. A police department
3. FedEx Field
4. A preschool
5. L'Oreal cosmetics
6. A nuclear-waste disposal site
7. An adult bookstore
8. A law firm
9. "Dancing With the Stars"
10. A street-corner hot dog vendor
11. The tea party
12. The Democratic Party

Here's a contest we debuted last year, with different elements. This week: Describe what might happen if any of the above institutions (a) were run by an institution of your choice or (b) ran an institution of your choice. Your choice may be an institution from the list, too.

Winner gets the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. Second place receives this handsome decal: the ultimate window dressing for a Style Invitational Loser's vehicle of choice — and it coordinates so well with a few loser magnets on the trunk lid. Made of vinyl and about five inches square, it goes on the outside of the glass and so can be stuck onto most other places as well. The Empressmobile is definitely going to get one of these. Donated by Craig Dykstra.

Other runners-up win their choice of a coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt or yearned-for Loser Mug. Honorable mentions get one of the lusted-after Style Invitational Loser magnets. First offenders get a smelly, tree-shaped air "freshener" (Fir Stink for their First Ink). One prize per entrant per week. Send your entries by e-mail to losers@washpost.com or by fax to 202-334-4312. Deadline is Monday, Dec. 6. Put "Week 896" in the subject line of your e-mail, or it risks being ignored as spam. Include your name, postal address and phone number with your entry. Contests are judged on the basis of humor and originality. All entries become the property of The Washington Post. Entries may be edited for taste or content. Results to be published Dec. 25, since you'll have nothing else to do that day. No purchase required for entry. Employees of The Washington Post, or their immediate relatives, are not eligible for prizes. Pseudonymous entries will be disqualified. The revised title for next week's results was submitted by Tom Witte; the honorable-mentions subhead is by Jeff Contompasis.

'Moonlight Mile': An old crime takes a new turn

BOOK WORLD FROM CI

"Since we'd reconciled, we hadn't said the names Amanda or Helene McCready in our home until three days ago. In those three days, every time one of us mentioned one of those names, it felt like someone had pulled the pin from a grenade."

But at the same time, Patrick's recent casework has left him making more distasteful compromises about right and wrong, and Amanda's disappearance offers a chance at closure, perhaps even redemption. That Patrick and Angie have a daughter of their own — the same age Amanda was in that earlier case — adds poignancy but also up the stakes. As Angie asks Patrick, "When your daughter asks what you stand for, don't you want to be able to answer her?"

The search for Amanda leads to surprising places, and dark ones as well: fraud, identity theft, drugs, kidnapping, the black market, murder. As with "Gone, Baby, Gone," questions about parenting persist: What makes a person fit or unfit for parenting? How far would a good person go to protect a child? And what does "good" mean, anyway?

Between the last Kenzie-Gennaro book and this one, Lehane has made quantum leaps as a craftsman.

Throughout, Lehane's writing mixes the streetwise and the lyrical. One mobster "posted first-quarter NBA numbers on the Breathalyzer." Another's eyes were "a liquid sapphire and reminded me of a candle flame slipping under the surface of melting wax." Elsewhere, an extended metaphor aches with confusion and loss — not just the core characters' but that of a larger community, perhaps America itself: "We no longer understood how we'd gotten here. We couldn't grasp what had happened to us. We woke up one day and all the streets signs had been stolen, all the navigation systems had shorted out. The car had no gas, the living room had no furniture, the imprint in the bed beside us had been smoothed over." In the decade between the last

Kenzie-Gennaro book and this one, Lehane has made quantum leaps as a craftsman: His breakthrough novel, "Mystic River," encompassed myriad perspectives and ultimately approached the level of Greek tragedy, and "The Given Day," an epic history of early 20th-century Boston, revealed a writer brimming with even greater ambitions. In returning to his old private eye series now, Lehane has narrowed his scope a little: The social commentary is less nuanced, more direct, and plot twists are more prominent than deep moral predicaments. Still, "Moonlight Mile" should hardly be considered a step back. Instead, Lehane is a writer bringing new confidence and an easy prowess to a new chapter in an epic story — the Kenzie-Gennaro saga.

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Taylor reviews mysteries and thrillers frequently for The Post.

'Royal Love Story' leads expected slew of books on Prince William's betrothal

BY JILL LAWLESS

LONDON — First came the royal engagement. Now, 10 days later, comes the first book.

"William and Kate: A Royal Love Story," by the Sun newspaper's royal reporter, James Clench, was published Friday in Britain, the first in a slew of new titles about the relationship between Prince William and Kate Middleton that publishers hope will set cash registers chirping in the months before the couple's April 29 wedding at Westminster Abbey.

Published by Harper Collins and the Sun — both owned by Rupert Murdoch's News Corp. — the book is scattered with photos by Arthur Edwards, the paper's long-serving royal photographer.

It is one of several books on the royal romance in the works. They include one by celebrity journalist Andrew Morton, whose 1992 book "Diana: Her True Story" rocked the royal family and punctured the image of Princess Diana and

Prince Charles's fairy-tale romance with its details of bulimia, depression and infidelity.

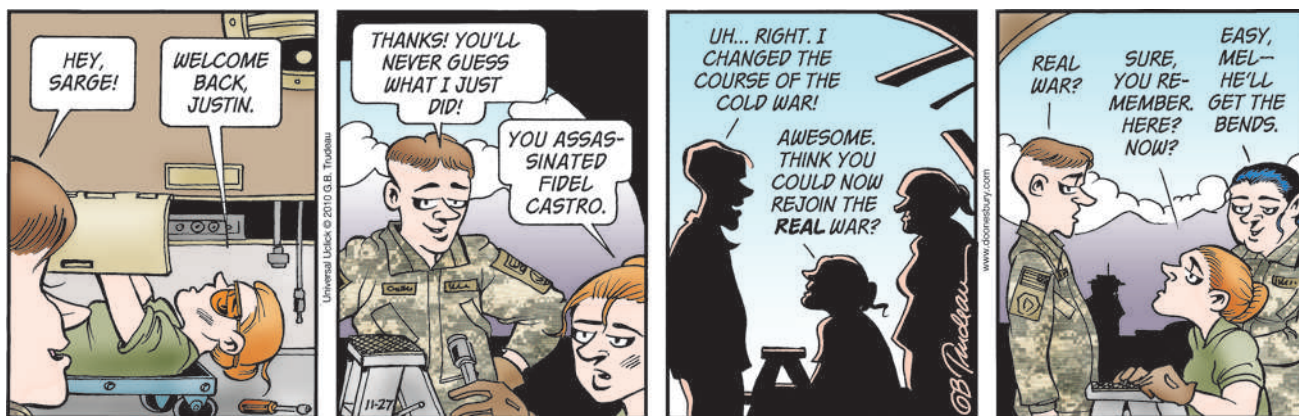
"William and Kate: A Royal Love Story" — due to be published Dec. 17 in the United States — is a more reverent affair. It charts the romance between "the boy who would one day be king" and "the middle-class girl who had harbored a crush on him since her school days." The book traces "the greatest love story of the century" from the couple's first meeting at a university in Scotland. It claims that William's nickname for Kate was "Babykins," while she called him "Big Willie."

Publication comes just days after the Nov. 16 engagement announcement — and at the start of the lucrative Christmas book-buying season. Clench had written most of the text in advance and turned out the final 4,000 words in 48 hours.

"The engagement was announced on Tuesday, and the book was at the printer on Friday," said Anna Valentine, senior nonfiction editor at Harper Collins.

— Associated Press

DOONESBURY BY GARRY TRUDEAU



CUL DE SAC BY RICHARD THOMPSON

