
OK, You Can Marry Him



... on one condition. By Katrin Babb



Jim and I had been dating for two and a half years. But I was 19—and my mom was dead set against our engagement.

“No,” she declared as soon as I showed her the ring. “You’re too young.”

She walked out back to her garden to end the discussion. I stubbornly followed. We pulled weeds and watered flowers: both upset, both silent. Wordlessly, we did what we both loved. For I

had inherited my mother's gardening gene and loved working in the beds more than anything. Even chocolate.

Finally I could take the silence no more. "You've always liked Jim. What do you have against the engagement?"

"You're too young," she said without looking up from the hosta bed.

"It doesn't mean we're going to get married right away. I'm going to finish college first."

Twenty minutes of unproductive arguing later, my mom stopped her work. Standing tall to stretch her back, she said, "Congratulations. You've finally found a way to take the fun out of gardening." She wiped her brow with a sigh. "Lord, I've let these weeds go for too long. You really love him?"

I nodded immediately.

She looked me in the eye. "I want to know that he is going to work hard to provide for his family. Prove to me that he is a hard worker and I'll give the engagement my blessing."

I raced forward, throwing my sweaty arms around my beautiful, equally sweaty mother. "Thank you!"

"OK." My mother tapped my back. "Now let me get back to work before these weeds take over what should be flowerbeds."

"How about Jim and I do it?!" I offered eagerly. "He'll be more than happy to work—*hard*."

"Fine," she huffed skeptically. "But I need it done before Friday's book club."

"We'll have it done tomorrow!"

"No," she declared as soon as I showed her the ring. "You're too young."

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TIM FOLEY



tomorrow morning came, and I quickly began doubting my brilliant plan. Jim knew what a thistle was. Well, he knew what one looked like. But he didn't know what it *was*. Grabbing the first thistle and giving it a good yank, he jumped back with a yelp.

"It stabbed me!" He stared down at his bare hands, looking for puncture wounds.

I sighed and said, "Honey, you need to put on the garden gloves I gave you first."

A minute later, I was jerked to attention by the distinct sound of garden shears in use. I looked over to find Jim, hands still bare, using shears to chop the thistles off at ground level.

"What are you doing?" I cried.

"Look at how much easier this is! I can't believe we didn't try this first."

His smile wilted when he saw the expression on my face. "What? No good?"

"They need to be pulled or they'll grow right back."

We both turned around and saw my mother standing behind us, arms crossed over her chest and an eyebrow raised at the shears in Jim's hands.

"I was just about to come looking for you," I said, trying to distract her. "I'm having trouble pulling up these grass clumps. Do you think I should use the hoe or get a shovel?"

Mom stared at Jim a minute longer. "Some of them are pretty big," she said, turning to me. "I'd recommend getting a shovel. If you need to ask me anything else, I'll be on the patio watering the pots."

"You sure you don't want me to try pulling them?" Jim called as I ran to get the shovel. "I bet I could pull up the big clumps."

"Oh, that's OK," I called back.

I returned a minute later to find Jim practically skipping in my direction. In his hands was a large—a very large—clump of greenery. He lifted the clump up to my face with pride. All I saw were the bulbs dangling on the ends.

"Hon, look what I just pulled!"

"Oh, no!"

My mom had seen the clump at the exact same moment I had—her precious daffodils, the ones that had been passed down in her family for three generations, in his hands. She staggered backwards.

I ran to steady her.

"Fine! Fine!" she exclaimed after I got her settled in a chair. "You can marry him. Just keep him out of my flowerbeds!" ❖