

In Other Words, Love

SHIRLEY JUMP

TRENT STEPPED UP ONTO A high rocky ledge. A couple of pebbles skittered past them. He turned, put out his hand and hoisted Kate onto the same ledge. “He has never said that to me. All he talks about is how I disappointed him.”

“Because you didn’t come back to work in the nursery?” She glanced back, decided that was a bad decision because everything looked so far away and the world below so small. If she concentrated on Trent, and only Trent, the hike was almost...fun.

“I guess it was always assumed,” Trent said. He moved through some brush and between two towering trees. “I’d go to college, and then take over for him when he retired. I had told him a hundred times that I didn’t want to be chained down to one location, one small business for the rest of my life.”

“And yet, aren’t you sort of that way now? You love your company, like your dad loves his, and because of that, you’ve devoted your life to it.” He held out a reusable water bottle, and she took a long drink before continuing. “I don’t think your dad feels chained down, any more than you do. He loves his work, and when you love your work, it’s not a burden.”

Trent thought about that for a moment. “I’ve never looked at it like that. To me, the nursery was suffocating. Like living in a tiny house with eleven other

people. This town, my life, all of it felt that way. It's why I come to places like this." He spread his hand, indicating the beautiful vista ahead of them. A small lake punctuated the lush valley below them, its dark waters still and deep. Tall pine trees dotted the landscape, a stark, rich green against the rocky face of the mountain. "Out here, there are no constraints. No deadlines. No phone calls or appointments or demands for my time."

"I'm going to go out on a limb here, though, and argue that maybe, just maybe, that's what your dad feels when he's puttering around in the greenhouse?" She bent down and cupped the leaves of a seedling a few inches high, struggling to reach its own patch of sunlight among the towering trees and expanding ferns. She thought of the tomato plant Grandma Wanda had given her, the plant that tried so hard despite impossible odds. "A seed is like its own little world. Like *Horton Hears a Who*, you know?"

He chuckled. "So gardening is like Dr. Seuss?"

"What I mean is that when you plant a seed, it's almost so tiny you can't see it. But it's in there, and it's determined to become something more. In a greenhouse, that seed is almost entirely dependent on you to feed it, water it, make sure the sunlight hits it at just the right time and angle. A million things can go wrong, but a million things can also go right." Now she was sounding like her grandmother, but that was okay. Grandma Wanda was full of wonderful wisdom. "You love and live in a broad world, Trent, full of mountains and lakes. Your father's world is smaller, but just as big and just as important to him. You reach the top of a mountain and feel a huge

sense of accomplishment. He takes a seed and turns it from something like this—” she pointed to the seedling, then rose and pressed a hand to the bark of the maple tree beside them, “—to this, and it’s just as big of a deal to him.”

Sort of like when an author wrote a book under someone else’s name. Kate had put the same loving care and attention into her ghostwritten books as Loretta and Penny put into their own books. Just because her name wasn’t on the cover didn’t make the work mean less. It was simply a different route for the seeds of her words to climb out of nothing.

“I never thought of it that way,” Trent said.

She shrugged. “Maybe it’s time you saw things from his perspective. Your book is about being true to your nature, and just like this seedling, your father is part of that nature, part of your nature. That’s why I need the backstory, the fertilizer and water and sunlight, that brought you from there to here.” Kate chuckled. “Okay, that was totally corny and overdone, but you get the point.”

“I do.” A smile curved across his face and he shook his head. “You are brilliant, KitKat.”

“Well, I don’t know about that.” She looked away, suddenly shy and unsure.

“I do.” He shifted closer to her, so close the heat from his body mingled with hers. He reached up and cupped her cheek, his thumb brushing a lazy curve across her skin. Every nerve ending inside her roared to attention. Her heart thudded in her chest, so hard and loud, she was sure people could hear it for miles.

“You are brilliant,” he said again, softer this time, “and breathtaking and captivating.” He shifted closer,

so close his lips nearly brushed hers, and Kate's breath caught just as Trent leaned in and—

“Hey! Are you Trent MacMillan?”