

In Other Words, Love

SHIRLEY JUMP

KATE CLICKED OVER TO HER documents tab and searched for the file of the novel she'd started back in college. It had been two months since she'd opened it, even longer since she'd written anything. She had a handful of chapters and a vague outline. Not exactly a finished product.

Loretta's smiling, slightly condescending look came back to her. *Call me when your book comes out, and I'll be first in line to get a copy!* Loretta had done it, and Kate had been a better writer than her in college. Maybe Kate should try her hand at fiction again.

"Charlie, want to listen to the opening of my book?" The cat raised his head, then settled back into his favorite sleeping position. "Okay, so maybe I have read that to you a hundred times. Way to be supportive of the person who fills your bowl."

Charlie ignored her. Kate started reading, poring over the first few pages of the women's fiction novel she'd been working on for so long, she knew every word by heart. A story of four sisters, their intrusive but loving mother, and a stray dog who disrupted everyone's lives. Every page gave her that feeling in her gut, that little tingle, that told her this was good, and if she could finish it, this book could be something.

Write a hundred words, she told herself. Just a hundred. Something. Anything. She set her fingers on

the keyboard, telling herself that any words would be fine. The second Kate began to type, her cell phone dinged.

Got a new deal offer to discuss, Kate's agent, Angie Greenfield, had typed. Want to stop by and we can go over the details?

Just in time. Whatever the deal was, Kate vowed to agree. She needed the money and the work. Taking on a new ghostwriting job meant she wasn't going to have to make that blue-vest greeter job change.

At least, not yet.

Absolutely! On my way. Kate scrambled out of the chair, ran a brush through her damp hair and repaired her smeared makeup. She changed into a clean shirt and a pair of dark jeans, then grabbed her phone and car keys.

Just before she headed out the door, she caught a glimpse of the determined tomato seedling, still yearning for bigger skies. Maybe she was going to get out of the weeds herself too.

Outside, the rain had stopped, the clouds parting for a brief moment of sun. Kate decided to take that as a good sign of what was to come. She got in her car and headed across town. Kate's apartment was far from the water, and visiting Angie always gave her an excuse to see the Sound and sometimes get in a walk along the shore.

Angie's office was in an attached mother-in-law apartment at the end of her one-story ranch on the curve of hilly cul-de-sac, with a partial view of Puget Sound. Kate's agent was petite but brassy, with hair that was a different color every month and a fondness for Grateful Dead T-shirts. As far as publish-

ing agents went, Angie was far outside the expected norm. Which was exactly why Kate loved her. Angie was the queen of the creative deal.

Angie's office faced the partial water view and had a small desk in the corner that she never used. Instead, she favored the twin armchairs and small table where she also held any in-person meetings, as casual as meeting a friend for coffee. Today, Angie's hair was a deep purple, the perfect offset for her normal ebony locks. "Glad you could come in. Have a seat."

That was the other thing Kate liked about working with Angie instead of another agent—the in-person meetings. There was something about the face-to-face interactions that made it feel like they were on the same team.

"I can't wait to hear what you have for me. It's been a long time between contracts."

"I know. I'm sorry about that." Angie tugged a blue sheet of paper out of the folder on the little table. A deal sheet, with numbers on it that could make a big difference for Kate. "Royalties are down, too, which stinks for everyone. But this deal...you're going to like it. Lots of money."

Kate arched a brow. She liked the financial part, but what cost would she pay? "Lots of money usually means a diva client or a tight deadline. Which is it?"

"Pretty tight deadline." Angie slid the offer across the table. "Memoir of a CEO, all about his travels and eco-friendly approach to life, blah-blah. The kicker is that you have five weeks to produce the book."

Kate didn't hear any of Angie's words, not the money, not the deadline, none of it. Instead, she stared at the name of the author she would be ghost-

writing for, and a hundred emotions tumbled inside her.

Trent MacMillan. Of all the people in the world she could end up working for, how had she ended up with the man who'd broke her heart?

"I know him," Kate said, thinking it was sad she could boil a year-long relationship down to three words.

"Oh great, that should make it easier. So if you sign that—"

"No, I mean I used to date him, back in college, before he became this big CEO. He broke up with me."