The Good Life

by thatfangirl

Summary

"Life is like playing a violin in public and learning the instrument as one goes on." — Samuel Butler

Notes

As may be inferred from the presence of one Murphy Brown, this is a work of fiction and does not purport to be a factual representation of Rachel Maddow's life. Murphy, meanwhile, was created by Diane English.

Avery called Rachel right before she went on the air. "I'm sorry," he said. "I know you have to work. But we're flying to Chicago first thing in the morning. I reserved adjoining rooms at the Drake; I'll take yours."

That night, she had on Ana as her guest, and each attempt at banter fell like a pebble into the well of Rachel's silence. Ana was in-studio for once, and she pulled Rachel aside as soon as the cocktail moment ended.

"Are you okay?"

"Yeah." Immediately, Rachel knew that wasn't going to work. "No. Murphy's dad died."

"Wait, whose dad?"
"My—shit." She really wasn't okay. "Look, I have to call the airline."

Ana unclipped the microphone from Rachel's lapel. "All right, calm down. We can do that. And then you can fill me in."

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Rachel had almost convinced the swarm of bellhops that she could handle her own bag when Avery intercepted her. He tried to guide her to the elevator, but she wrapped him in a hug. "I am so sorry."

"Thank you, but it's fine." He even smiled as she pulled away. "We weren't—he had his own life. For instance, my uncle Will, who's a year older than I am."

"Oh." Murphy had hardly spoken of her father, and Rachel had never pushed her to. "Well. Upstairs?"

Upstairs, Avery knocked on an anonymous wood door, and then unlocked his own.

With one hand, Murphy pulled Rachel into her arms, and with the other, she pulled the door shut. They stood in the foyer, entwined into one silhouette, until Murphy said, "I don't even know why I'm so upset."

"Murphy," Rachel whispered sorrowfully, "he was your dad."

"He was my father," Murphy corrected as she led Rachel to the king-sized bed. They settled onto the down comforter. "He tried, for awhile, after Mom died, but he wasn't good at anything but newspapers." She sighed at the ceiling. "The people you need—Mom, Eldin—they die. But the ones you can't stand—my father, Margaret Thatcher—they hang on so long you start to wonder how many virgins they had to sacrifice, and to which god." Murphy turned to regard Rachel thoughtfully. "Mom was only six years older than me when her heart gave out."

"Let's not be morbid. Your doctors just cleared you."

"We're talking about death; of course we're being morbid." Murphy's face softened. "Almost ten years before we met, I dated, very briefly, someone else much younger than me. And one of the reasons it was briefly, was that I didn't see how our lives could fit together. Now, you and me, we have, miraculously, made things work. While we have our own lives, we also have"—she took a deep breath, and then finished in a rush—"a life together?"

Rachel heard the question in her tone. She tugged Murphy closer. "Yes."

"But I still don't see an endgame."

"An endgame?"

"You know, the part where you grow old together. That is one of the parts, right?"

"Murphy." Rachel had been alternately bemused and amazed by the way that her time with Murphy had piled up, first into months and then into years, and had purposefully never turned her analytical mind toward just where those years would take them. "Someone always dies first. Your mom may have gone in her sixties, but your father certainly didn't, so if you have to think about this at all, please try to remember that you have half of his genes, too. Plus"—her eyes danced impishly—"you're really stubborn."

"You—!" Murphy grabbed one of the many pillows and brought it down on Rachel's head.
Rachel retaliated in kind, and soon they were kneeling in the center of the bed, enthusiastically beating the stuffing out of the pillows if not each other, and squealing like they were both much younger.

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Bill Brown's second ex-wife had made the funeral arrangements, and she had asked Murphy to say a few words. Rachel and Avery had gone wandering down the Magnificent Mile while Murphy had curled up in an armchair with a legal pad. Now, looking between the sheet of pale yellow paper and the black-clad mourners, Murphy wondered if her eulogy had gotten away from her again.

"Life is long," she began haltingly, "if you know how to use it.' Seneca. My father had a good long life. He had just celebrated eighty-seven years. Enough time to love two women and have, if I may be so humble, two wonderful children. Enough time to become, at the risk of insulting his colleagues here today, the best damn newspaperman in Chicago.

"My father inspired me to go into journalism, for which I will always be grateful to him. I am sure he has, in his own way, inspired many of you. In his death, let us continue to be inspired by his life, and"—she dropped her eyes from the crowd—"try to make our own lives long."

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Paparazzi were waiting outside the chapel. Ensconced between Rachel and Avery, Murphy found it the tiniest bit gratifying that people were still being obnoxious about her private life.

"Murphy, who's your friend?" one photographer called.

Rachel was shielding Murphy with her height. "Just ignore them," she urged.

"I've been doing this a little longer than you, thanks," Murphy snapped, then winced. "I'm sorry." She pulled Rachel to a halt. "I am sorry."

The opportunity to study the tall figure in the black slacks and black glasses sparked memories. An excited whisper of Rachel Maddow swept through the crush.

Rachel tried to nudge Murphy toward the Town Car. "It's okay."

"No," she said, "it's never okay. You know what? Fuck it." Murphy pushed in front of Rachel. "Hey," she called to the paparazzi, "watch this." And then she pulled Rachel into a kiss.

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Without knowing why, Miles Silverberg reached for his antacid.

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"From NPR News, this is All Things Considered. I'm Robert Siegel. In downtown Chicago today, longtime FYI anchor Murphy Brown said farewell to her father, and then made an unexpected revelation about her friendship with fellow television host Rachel Maddow..." 

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Jim Dial was shocked.
"Murphy! Rachel! FYI's Murphy Brown lays one on MSNBC's Rachel Maddow. How did this cougar capture her prey? And since when does she prefer the fairer sex? Hello, everybody, I'm Mary Hart."

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Corky Sherwood wasn't surprised. She knew you couldn't tell just by looking, but why else had Murphy occasionally come to work in a flannel shirt?

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"Now, here's the one thing that everyone else seems to be missing: Murphy Brown has never needed a man in her life. We are completely, totally dispensable to her! Always have been! She made that clear all the way back in 1992, when she chose to raise her son without his father..."

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Jerry Gold was a little surprised, but when he thought about it, he really wasn't. They never had been able to make it work, after all.

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"This summer should be interesting," Rachel commented sleepily. She and Murphy were once again lying in the king-sized bed, only this time the comforter was rucked around their bare legs.

"I know I didn't exactly consult you—"

"Hey, no. I was glad to be not-consulted. I'm just...glad. Closets suck."

"They actually pay you to speak on television? Unreal."

"Sorry, I'm still searching for the top of my head, here." Blindly, Rachel patted the pillows and headboard.

Murphy preened. "Not bad for an older lady."

"My old lady?"

"I will smother you in your sleep."

Rachel kissed her apologetically. "Good night. I leave my life in your hands."

"Good night." Murphy pulled the comforter over their bodies, but was not quite ready to sleep. "Rest in peace, you son of a bitch," she whispered.

"Hmm?"

"Nothing. Just talking to my dad."

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