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Thomas Murphy

Roger Rosenblatt

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The acclaimed, award-winning essayist and memoirist returns to fiction with this reflective, bittersweet tale that introduces the irrepressible aging poet Thomas Murphy—a paean to the mystery, tragedy and wonder of life.

Trying his best to weasel out of an appointment with the neurologist his only child, Máire, has cornered him into, the poet Thomas Murphy—singer of the oldies, friend of the down-and-out, card sharp, raconteur, piano bar player, bon vivant, tough and honest and all-around good guy—contemplates his sunset years. Máire worries that Murph is losing his memory. Murph wonders what to do with the rest of his life. The older mind is at issue, and Murph's jumps from fact to memory to fancy, conjuring the islands that have shaped him—Inishmaan, a rocky gumdrop off the Irish coast where he was born, and New York, his longtime home. He muses on the living, his daughter and precocious grandson William, and on the dead, his dear wife Oona, and Greenberg, his best friend. Now, into Murphy's world comes the lovely Sarah, a blind woman less than half his age, who sees into his heart, as he sees into hers. Brought together under the most unlikely circumstance, Murph and Sarah begin in friendship and wind up in impossible possible love.

An Irishman, a dreamer, a poet, Murph, like Whitman, sings lustily of himself and of everyone. Through his often-extravagant behavior and observations, both hilarious and profound, we see the world in all its strange glory, equally beautiful and ridiculous. With memory at the center of his thoughts, he contemplates its power and accuracy and meaning. Our life begins in dreams, but does not stay with them, Murph reminds us. What use shall we make of the past? Ultimately, he asks, are relationships our noblest reason for living?

Behold the charming, wistful, vibrant, aging Thomas Murphy, whose story celebrates the ageless confusion that is this dreadful, gorgeous life.

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