Neighbour Rosicky

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF WILLA CATHER

Willa Cather was born on her grandmother's farm in Virginia's Back Creek Valley in 1873. Cather was the first-born in a family of seven children. When Cather was nine years old, her family relocated to Nebraska both to avoid the tuberculosis outbreaks in Virginia at the time, and so that her father could access farmland. After a year of unsuccessful farming, Cather's father once again relocated the family to the small Nebraskan town of Red Cloud. There, Cather's father left farming and opened a real estate and insurance business. Growing up in Nebraska, which was then considered a frontier state, Cather was exposed to immigrant families of different geographic and cultural backgrounds as well as Native American families. The local community's diversity would inform her writing later on in life, as would the natural beauty of the rural environment. Cather went on to study at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln. She intended to study medical science and become a doctor, but she switched to become an English major, write pieces that were published in local journals, and eventually work as a journalist. In 1896, she accepted a job in journalism in Pittsburgh, and she stayed working in Pennsylvania for several years, until she moved to New York City in 1906 to work as an editor at McClure's Magazine. Cather's writing often concerns the recent historical past and pioneering American characters. Her first book of poetry, *April Twilights*, was published in 1903, and her first book of fiction, *The Troll Garden*, was published in 1905. She is best known for her "Prairie Trilogy" of novels set in the Great Plains: *O Pioneers!* (1913), *The Song of the Lark* (1915), and *My Ántonia* (1918), and for her Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *One of Ours* (1923). Cather's final book of short fiction, *Obscure Destinies*, was published in 1932 and contained "Neighbour Rosicky," one of her more famous stories. Cather and the writer and editor Edith Lewis lived together in New York until Cather's death from breast cancer in 1947, at the age of 73.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Cather wrote "Neighbour Rosicky" during a period of time when income inequality in the United States was becoming unavoidably visible. Though the story was published in the midst of the Great Depression, it was written in 1928, just before the 1929 stock market crash. The story also concerns widening economic disparity between people living in rural America and urban America, and specifically between farmers and businessmen. And it subtly contends with the politics of immigration and an immigrant life, as Anton and Mary Rosicky are an immigrant couple from Bohemia, a region of what is know today as the Czech Republic. Bohemia itself underwent a transformation in 1918—while it had been a region of what was then known as Great Moravia, it became a part of the newly independent and newly formed state Czechoslovakia in the aftermath of World War I. Rosicky, then, is not just an immigrant to America, he is an immigrant with an unstable native land, which has itself undergone significant political change in decades leading up to the events of "Neighbour Rosicky."

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Cather wrote during the Modernist period of American literature, but her literary style differs from her Modernist contemporaries. She chose to work in a realist genre, keeping her prose historically faithful to the time period and place about which was writing, and avoiding more experimental techniques. Cather wrote largely with a sense of place in mind, and she wrote often about characters seeking freedom in the American West and Midwest. In this way, "Neighbour Rosicky" can be likened to other frontier and pioneer texts, like Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House on the Prairie* or Mark Twain's *Roughing It* or even Cather's own famous *My Ántonia*. "Neighbor Rosicky" was also published in *Obscure Destinies*, Cather's trilogy of stories which also included "Old Mrs. Harris" and "Two Friends," all of which were stories concerning the value of (and beauty to be found in) a modest life.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Neighbour Rosicky
- **When Written:** 1930
- **Where Written:** New York City
- **When Published:** 1930 in Woman's Home Companion Magazine and 1932 in *Obscure Destinies*
- **Literary Period:** Realism
- **Genre:** Short story
- **Setting:** Nebraska prarie, New York City, and London
- **Climax:** Rosicky dies of heart failure
- **Antagonist:** The need to earn money and the cruelty and coldness of a modern, industrializing society
- **Point of View:** Third person omniscient

EXTRA CREDIT

Seventeen Again: Cather notoriously lied about her birth year throughout her life; the current scholarly consensus (based off historical records and documents) is that she was born in 1873,

although her gravestone says she was born in 1875.

The Big Apple. Despite the fact that much of Cather's most famous writing is set in the Midwest (and specifically Nebraska), she lived the last forty years of her life in New York City, which is where she eventually died.

PLOT SUMMARY

In 1920s rural Nebraska, 65-year-old Anton Rosicky has a check-up with Doctor Ed Burleigh. Burleigh tells Rosicky that he has **heart** failure and that, to take care of himself, he will need to do less physical labor in the fields. Instead, Burleigh encourages Rosicky to work more in the home and enjoy spending time with his wife and six children, all of whom are a remarkably happy and generous family. Rosicky playfully resists Burleigh's diagnosis.

After Rosicky leaves his office, Burleigh reflects sadly on the diagnosis, wishing it were someone else besides Rosicky who was in failing health. He cares deeply for Rosicky and his entire family, whom he has known since he was a poor boy growing up in the country. He remembers a time the previous winter when he had come to have breakfast at the Rosickys' home after spending a night delivering a neighbor's baby. He was struck then by the differences between the Rosickys and other neighboring farm families: the Rosickys are all remarkably warm and hospitable, while other families are cold and overworked, pushing to make as much money as possible. The Rosickys are mostly comfortable financially, but their home is humble and they do not strive for more than they have. Burleigh considers whether it is impossible to both enjoy life and achieve financial success.

After Rosicky leaves Doctor Burleigh's, he goes to the general store, buys some candy for his wife, and lingers to chat with Miss Pearl, a girl who works there. On the way home, he stops and fondly observes the beautiful **graveyard**. It begins to snow as he arrives home. At home, Rosicky's wife, Mary, asks him about the check-up, choosing to speak to him in English instead of their first language, Czech, to communicate the seriousness of the matter. Rosicky tells her that Burleigh told him to take better care of his heart and work less, although he still feels resistant to the idea.

Soon enough, though, the entire Rosicky family is trying to help their father, and his five sons have taken on more of the physical labor on the farm. Despite his wishes to work in the field, Rosicky mostly stays indoors now. He tailors for his family—a job he had done when he lived in London and New York, decades earlier—and while he sews, Rosicky thinks back to his time in New York, where he had been poor, young, and happy for a time. In New York, he had lived with friends and spent his limited funds freely, going out for drinks and to the opera. Still, he grew restless after a while and eventually decided to move to Nebraska out of a desire for more open space, connection to nature, and land of his own.

On a Saturday night, Rosicky goes to his oldest son Rudolph's house to offer him and his wife, Polly, the family car so that they can go into town for a night. Rosicky is worried that Polly, an American girl who did not grow up in a rural environment, will be so dissatisfied with country living that she and Rudolph will move away to a city. While Rudolph and Polly initially refuse Rosicky's offer to do their dishes while they take the car into town, they eventually concede.

On Christmas Eve at the Rosickys' house, the entire family and Rudolph and Polly have dinner together and talk about their fear of crop failure this year, since it has not snowed. Rosicky insists that, even if the crop does fail, things will be all right; his sons, he claims, do not know real hard times. Mary agrees with her husband, telling her sons that Rosicky has always kept a good attitude even when times have been difficult on the farm. Once, when they suffered corn crop failure, he responded by giving them a picnic to celebrate what they *did* have, instead of fixating on what they lacked.

Rosicky then tells his children about his time as a young man in London, where he had lived with the family of a poor tailor, Lifschnitz, and one other boarder, a violin player. One Christmas Eve, Rosicky was so poor and hungry that he ate a goose that Mrs. Lifschnitz was saving for Christmas dinner. Feeling guilty, he went into town and begged four Czech people for money, which they gave him. He was able to use the money to bring back a bountiful meal to the Lifschnitz family, and a few days later, the same Czech men offered to pay for his passage to New York where he could get better work. He accepted their offer and left for New York shortly thereafter. After he finishes the story, Polly seems notably more affectionate towards the Rosicky family.

In the springtime, Rosicky goes to help rake weeds on Rudolph and Polly's land, even though he is not supposed to because of his heart condition. While he rakes, his heart starts to hurt and he nearly collapses, but Polly saves him. She calls him "father" and cares for him for an hour afterwards. Still, the next day, Rosicky dies, though just before he passes, he reflects gratefully on having seen Polly's kindness in his final days of life.

Several weeks after Rosicky's death, Doctor Burleigh goes to see the family and offer his condolences. On the way to their house, he stops and overlooks the graveyard where Rosicky now rests, thinking to himself that it is a beautiful place, much more beautiful than the oppressive graveyards in cities. He concludes that Rosicky's life was "complete and beautiful."

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Anton Rosicky – Anton Rosicky is the protagonist of the story, a 65-year-old Czech immigrant to Nebraska who lives on his farm with his wife, Mary, and their children. Rosicky has lived all over the world—in Bohemia, London, New York, and now, Nebraska—and he is by far happiest when he's in the country, where he has his own land, works for himself, and is able to spend time in nature and with his family. After Doctor Burleigh diagnoses him with **heart** failure, Rosicky is forced to do less physical labor than he likes, and instead he spends many days reflecting back on his life. Time and again, he realizes that he is happiest in Nebraska, where he has been able to feel more connected to earth and to the people he loves. His life philosophy seems to be to appreciate the small pleasures of life, find joy even in struggle, and to focus on living in the moment rather than accumulating money or prestige. By the time of Rosicky's death, at the ends of the story, it is clear that he, more than any other character, has lived a good life.

Mary Rosicky – Mary Rosicky is Anton Rosicky's wife and the mother of their six children. Like Rosicky, she is Czech, and like him, she is kind, generous, playful, and appreciative of life's small pleasures. Mary Rosicky stands out for being quite capable in her role as a homemaker, and Doctor Burleigh notes that she creates a household that is far more warm, supportive, and hospitable than any other neighboring family's. Mary, like her husband, lives a happy life, and she thinks much of that is because of the security of their marriage and their strong connection and shared value system—they both prioritize a strong family life over making money.

Doctor Burleigh – Doctor Burleigh is Rosicky's doctor. He has known the Rosicky family since he was a little boy, since he grew up near them in rural Nebraska before going to the city to get a medical degree. At the beginning of the story, he gives Rosicky the diagnosis of **heart** failure and is saddened that Rosicky, of all people, is the one to get sick, since Burleigh has always felt such fondness for him and his family. Burleigh realizes, by the end of the story, the extent to which Rosicky's choices have made his life so satisfying and happy.

Rudolph Rosicky – Rudolph is Anton and Mary's oldest son. He has recently married Polly, a woman who grew up in town and whose parents are American-born, in contrast to Rudolph's immigrant parents. Rudolph's perspective on life in the country contrasts with his father's. Rudolph worries that he will not make enough money to live a secure, happy life with Polly in the country, although Rosicky works to change his son's perspective. By the end of the story, it seems that Rudolph and Polly will remain happily in the country, just as Rosicky would have wanted.

Polly Rosicky – Polly is Rudolph's wife, a girl with American-born parents who grew up going to school with Rudolph. Polly is initially cold to Rosicky and Mary and seems to find their immigrant status alienating. She also is worried about life in the country and longs to go to back the city where there's more to do. Over the course of the story, she starts to warm to the Rosickys and to life in the country, and she eventually helps care for Rosicky after he collapses from **heart** failure. By the end of the story, she feels loving toward and grateful for the family she has married into and seems happy in the country with Rudolph.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Miss Pearl – Pearl is a woman who works at the general store. Rosicky goes out of his way to visit and talk to her.

The Rosicky Children – There are six Rosicky children, including the oldest, Rudolph. The other Rosicky children include four other sons and one daughter, Josephine. They are all warm, well-mannered, and kind people who care deeply for their family.

The Lifschnitzes – The Lifschnitz family is comprised of a German tailor, his wife, and their children. Rosicky works for them in London.

Violin Player – The violin player is the impoverished boarder living with the Lifschnitz family while Rosicky is there.

Zichec – Zichec is Rosicky's closest friend in New York, a cabinet maker who is also Czech. Rosicky lives with Zichec and their friendship is close and at times resembles a marriage.

Loeffler – Loeffler is an Austrian furniture maker who rents Zichec and Rosicky a room in New York.

The Marshalls and the Fasslers – The Marshalls and the Fasslers are two families who live in Nebraska and have more money and more profitable land than the Rosickys. They both stand in contrast to the Rosicky family—while both are richer, their homes are less happy and their children less healthy.

The Creamery Agent – The creamery agent tries to convince Rosicky and Mary to sell their cream for extra money, but they refuse, choosing instead to give their extra cream to their children.

Methodist Preacher – The Methodist preacher comes to the Rosickys to pray for them after they suffer corn crop failure—but Rosicky is too busy playing in the horse water tank with his children.

The Four Bohemians – The four Czech people—two men and two women—save Rosicky in London by giving him food and money, and eventually paying for his passage to New York.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

THE GOOD LIFE

"Neighbour Rosicky" is about the quest for a good life. Various characters in the story live with different value systems and in different circumstances—in cities or in the country, with or without money, with or without families—but the story portrays Anton Rosicky as the happiest character of all. Rosicky searches for the good life on two different continents and in several different cities, eventually settling in rural Nebraska and becoming a farmer. Here, he comes to find what the story suggests are the most meaningful aspects of life: freedom, self-reliance, family, generosity, community, and beauty. None of these things are particularly extravagant or complicated, and so Rosicky's journey demonstrates that a happy, fulfilling life can be based on gratitude for simple things.

The central concern of the story is what makes a good life. It's this good life that Rosicky is searching for throughout his life, seeking happiness and fulfillment in different cities, countries, and lifestyles. At the start of the story, Doctor Burleigh considers what, exactly, makes the Rosickys so uniquely happy. He knows that even though they are not wealthy, the Rosickys are a happy family that is "free and easy" and "comfortable." He even ponders if having a happy life is incompatible with acquiring a lot of money. Burleigh's pondering establishes how to live the good life as the story's central question, and it begins to suggest that a happy, fulfilling life is about more than just material success.

Rosicky's own trajectory embodies the quest for a good life. Before settling in Nebraska, he traveled extensively, living in both the U.K. and the U.S. in an attempt to establish a fulfilling life. But as he chased money and exciting experiences in cities like London and New York, he found himself dissatisfied with his work, alienated from other people, and cut off from the beauty of the natural world. This taught him that wealth and happiness aren't necessarily linked, and that a good life can be simpler and humbler than people may assume. His unhappiness in the city eventually leads him to settle in a small town in the Nebraskan countryside, where he hopes to build a life that's more meaningful.

In Nebraska, Rosicky realizes that owning his own land, connecting to nature, focusing on his family and community, and finding joy in life's simple pleasures are the pillars of a good life. A great deal of Rosicky's happiness has to do with the freedom and self-sufficiency that comes with finally owning his own land (as opposed to renting from a landlord). Moreover, he's now surrounded by nature, something that he finds deeply enjoyable and fulfilling. He takes time to drive home and admire the farms in the High Prairie; rather than envying this land that other farmers own, he enjoys just getting to look at nature's beauty.

Rosicky also finds deep fulfillment in providing for and spending time with his family. Rosicky's wife, Mary Rosicky, believes that "life [has] gone well" for her and her husband because they both believe that it's better to enjoy life's simple pleasures than to be preoccupied with building wealth or chasing fleeting moments of excitement. They're both happy to make certain "sacrifices" as long as they can spend time together and with their children, which suggests that these sorts of connections are what make life worthwhile. Rosicky is similarly happy when he's socializing with members of his community, and he appreciates simple moments like getting to talk to the pretty girl who works at the town's general store. Rosicky's happiness with this lifestyle is evident in his outwardly peaceful and content disposition. Even though he's aging and experiencing heart failure throughout the story, he does "not look like a sick man." While he is older, his hair has barely any grey in it, and he appears "reflective" but in a "gay" (happy) way. His internal happiness is visible externally.

Consequently, it's important for Rosicky to pass on what he has learned about the good life to his children, especially to his eldest son, Rudolph. Rudolph and his new wife, Polly, are initially wary of Rosicky's way of life. Polly finds the countryside lonely, and Rudolph worries that he will not make enough money to survive. But Rosicky, drawing on his own experiences, teaches them that city living is only enjoyable if one is already rich—otherwise, it's incredibly difficult and unfulfilling. Rosicky is successful in his efforts, as Polly (who had initially been distant and cold) eventually warms up to Rosicky and realizes that he's led a modest yet enviable life. Indeed, when she looks at Rosicky's well-worn hands, she sees them as a symbol of a life well-lived through hard work and gratitude. In this way, Rosicky impresses on Polly—and, by extension, on Rudolph—that meaningful work and an appreciation of simple pleasures (like nature's beauty) are what make for a good life.

Most importantly, Rosicky doesn't want his children to experience "the cruelty of human beings." Given that Rosicky experienced this cruelty when he lived in cities, he believes that a well-rounded life spent outdoors, surrounded by loving family and a tight-knit community, is the most fulfilling path. However, the story is also careful to show that Rosicky's life isn't all good—the work he does is physically strenuous, and he often faces financial hardship. Yet this only makes Rosicky more grateful for what he has: for instance, when a corn crop fails, he throws a picnic to celebrate the good aspects of his life rather than focusing on the bad.

At the end of the story, after Rosicky has died, Doctor Burleigh reflects again on the question of the good life, just as he did at the beginning of the story. He concludes that Rosicky's life—which consisted of struggling before finally living happily and freely in the country—was "complete and beautiful." Ending the story in this way makes it clear that while Rosicky's life wasn't perfect, it was the good life in the sense that it was happy, fulfilling, and meaningful.

THE CITY VS. THE COUNTRY

"Neighbour Rosicky" narrates Anton Rosicky's journey from living a difficult life in various cities to finding beauty and fulfillment as a farmer in rural Nebraska. Overall, the story depicts urban life—particularly for poor and working-class people—as unforgiving. City dwellers are mostly cruel and crooked, the work is hard, the environment is alienating, and there are few opportunities for freedom or joy. By contrast, the story depicts rural life as full of beauty, self-reliance, kindness, and small pleasures. The story is careful not to imply that the city is entirely bad and that the country is entirely good—Rosicky does enjoy various aspects of New York City, and his rural life comes with all kinds of hardships, from crop failure to backbreaking work. Nevertheless, the story does suggest that rural places give people the best chance to live free and fulfilling lives.

Rosicky's memories of living in New York and London depict city life as mostly unforgiving. When Rosicky lives in London, he is impoverished and alone, separated by a language barrier and incapable of finding real connection with other people. Even his boss in London, a German tailor, is poor. The city's conditions and job market are so difficult that everyone struggles to survive. Rosicky thinks back on living in London as a time when he was cold, hungry, and without resources or basic living necessities, like food and clean clothes.

In addition, the people in cities seem cruel and hard to Rosicky—most city-dwellers he encounters are mean. And because cities are so crowded, Rosicky cannot avoid this meanness. The design of cities, too, is unappealing to Rosicky, even without the hordes of people typically filling the streets. When he walks through an empty New York on the Fourth of July, sees the city streets, architecture, and industrial machinery on its own and finds it "unnatural," like "empty jails." The city seems grotesque and suffocating, even without people in it.

Rosicky is, however, temporarily happy living in New York, where he learns English, makes friends, enjoys the attractions of the city, and has enough money to live a relatively comfortable life. But after living in the city for five years, he develops a drinking problem and grows "restless." Rosicky's restlessness is linked to the seasons changing, as it becomes springtime in New York. He finds springtime incompatible with the harshness of the city, and it makes him eager to get away to somewhere else.

In contrast to the unrewarding hardships of city life, the story paints country life as being meaningful and fulfilling. Rosicky first wants to move to the country from the city because he believes that living on his own land will make him happier than being a tenant. He turns out to be correct in this assumption and tries to pass this value down to his children—he finds a sense of liberty from knowing that his farmland is his own, and that he is not at the mercy of a boss or landlord.

Additionally, Rosicky finds the work he does on the farm meaningful. He likes cultivating his own land and getting to do physical labor that benefits others—and he also likes being able to determine his own schedule, to feel like his personhood is not ruled by his labor. Along with that, Rosicky finds that working on the farm gives him a closer connection to nature than he had living in cities, and he finds the proximity to nature itself to be beautiful and rewarding. But rural life is also difficult and at times uncontrollable—Rosicky and his son Rudolph both struggle financially when there is crop failure or when winter comes. Even so, Rosicky often chooses to see these moments as a reason to be grateful for extra rest and leisure. For Rosicky, the worst parts of a country life are still better than the best parts of a city life.

In the story, the city and the country are not just different locations—they represent entirely different beliefs about life. For Rosicky, the city signifies ambition without real hope, a fruitless struggle for economic advancement that strips a person of their ability to live as they choose. The city is, for Rosicky, a place without real humanity or connection to the rest of the world. In the country, he must physically labor, and his income largely depends on factors outside his control, like the weather. Nevertheless, Rosicky feels happier there because he's actually able to do fulfilling work and provide for himself and his family. Rosicky would rather be at the whim of the elements than at the whim of an employer. Most importantly, even when Rosicky is happy living in New York, he still develops a restlessness and a "desire to run away." The story thus suggests that the freedom, peacefulness, and connection to nature that a rural setting offers are key to Rosicky's happiness—and potentially to human happiness more generally.

FAMILY, COMMUNITY, AND KINDNESS

Much of "Neighbour Rosicky" is about how living a meaningful life is connected to being generous and being surrounded by people who are generous in return. Rosicky is a happy person because his family is kind, loving, and supportive of one another. All of his children are polite and generous, and they genuinely enjoy spending time as a family. In addition, his wife Mary is a warm and pleasant person, and she and Rosicky enjoy a happy marriage. Rosicky partially sought out his present life of working for himself on a rural farm because he never wanted to be forced into stinginess or unkindness; he wants to be able to give to others and never take money from people who are struggling. In this way, a major reason for his happiness is his ability to give to his community and also provide his family with an enjoyable and fulfilling life. As such, the story suggests that true, lasting happiness isn't found in selfish pursuits—rather, it comes from being kind and generous to other people.

Rosicky has cultivated a value system for his wife and children

that's based on kindness, and his family's love and warmth make him happy in return. Doctor Burleigh, an outsider to the Rosickys, praises their family and even feels at home when with them, telling Rosicky that he is "one of the few men [...] who has a family he can get some comfort out of." Rosicky has cultivated an environment in which his children and wife are genuinely happy, in a way that is visible to other people. And, in turn, Rosicky is able to "get some comfort out of" his family, something that Burleigh suggests other men aren't able to do.

Doctor Burleigh also points out that all the Rosicky sons have "good manners" and lack the self-consciousness that he finds typical of adolescent boys. The way the Rosickys have raised their children sticks out (in a positive way) from their neighbors. Burleigh is also very fond of Mrs. Rosicky. He thinks that Mary Rosicky's warm, caring nature is unique among other wives in town. Her demeanor stands out to Burleigh as indicative of the loving home environment Rosicky has built, and Mary Rosicky credits their happy home to her husband's personality. She remembers him playing naked in the water tank with his children on a hot summer day. While this is behavior is unconventional for the time, Mary knows that Rosicky's playfulness and kindness is what has made their home's atmosphere feel so free and loving.

Indeed, although the Rosickys aren't the richest or most successful family in town, they do seem to be the happiest. Burleigh compares the Rosickys to other nearby families, including the Marshalls. The Marshalls have an extremely profitable farm and a great deal of expensive, high-tech machinery, but Burleigh is quick to note that they also possess "no comfort whatsoever." Their financial success and abundance have not made them happier people, and Burleigh dislikes the environment of their home so much that he is quick to leave there as soon as he can. While Doctor Burleigh and Rosicky's son, Rudolph, can think of many other families who own land and are wealthier or more "ahead," they cannot say that these families are happier or more pleasant to be around. In fact, it's quite the opposite—these other families seem to have chosen financial advancement at the cost of interpersonal connections built on love and generosity.

Rosicky's generosity extends beyond his family—he is kind to his entire community, and it's clear that this, too, is part of what makes him happy. Rosicky enjoys interacting with the townspeople. He looks forward to going into town to talk to the shop girl he likes or to see Doctor Burleigh, which shows that he values connecting with his community. Rosicky thinks of other people in the town with kindness as well, even people he does not know well. For example, he thinks of Mr. Haycock, the undertaker (a character otherwise not mentioned in the story), as "the kindest man in the world." This passing thought makes it clear that Rosicky treasures *all* people, not just those in his immediate family.

Rudolph's wife Polly is initially distant and cold to the Rosickys, but even she, by the end of the story, calls Rosicky "father" and cares for him when he gets sick. Through her time spent with Rosicky, Polly learns that even if she does not know him well and even if she is only part of his family through marriage, she *is* still part of his family, and that he will treat her with unconditional love. This love and generosity move her to care for him, and to become a warmer, more empathetic person.

The high value that Rosicky places on family and community is not just one of his character traits—it provides an answer to the story's question of what makes a person happy. By showing that Rosicky is not only happy but also loved by everyone around him, the story suggests that choosing to be kind, generous, and loving to others can make a person happier overall. Moreover, Rosicky's pleasant personality and expressions of love influence other people—like Polly, and Doctor Burleigh, and all of Rosicky's children—to behave similarly. Through Rosicky's value system, the story demonstrates how being kind and generous can make a person, as well as everyone around them, happier.

MONEY VS. HAPPINESS

Financial instability affects everyone in "Neighbour Rosicky," and while Rosicky himself is not wealthy, he seems to be the happiest character in the story. Notably, Rosicky chooses to spend his money as he pleases and as he feels best serves his family, instead of saving it or trying to push himself to advance economically. While his health suffers from the physical labor of his work as a farmer, he still remains grateful and prefers to not prioritize earning and saving money over using his time as he likes. His contentment with this choice contrasts with his other families in the town, like the Marshalls, who are eager to make as much money as possible. Ultimately, it seems that Rosicky's laidback attitude toward his work and his money is part of what makes him the happiest character in the story.

The Rosickys' financial choices differ dramatically from their neighbors, but the Rosickys are the happiest family in the town. Doctor Burleigh explicitly prefers being in the Rosicky household, which he finds comforting and loving, in contrast to other households that seem cold and overly concerned with financial gain. Bureligh's reverence for the Rosicky household reveals how financial success does not determine the overall quality of life within a family—in fact, the Rosickys' willingness to be hospitable, to take their time with things, to spend time together rather than overworking themselves, is part of what makes them a happier family.

While other neighbors are devastated by crop failure, Rosicky always responds with gratitude and chooses not to let what is out of his control (nature) prevent him from being happy and making his family happy. Rosicky's willingness to relax and not be pushed by an unrelenting desire to earn money is what gives him the time to attend to the feelings and needs of his loved

ones—and what makes his life a happier one than his neighbors, who view the uncontrollable parts of being a farmer, like crop failure, as tragedies. Indeed, Rosicky spends his money freely rather than hoarding it, and it seems that he and his family are happier for it.

Although Rosicky is ultimately unhappy living in New York, for the brief time he is happy, he chooses to spend all of his money rather than save it. He goes out at night with his friends—to bars or to the opera—and is more content because he gets to do this. While he could have been saving money for a hypothetical future life, Rosicky would rather enjoy his life as it is in the present. As a farmer in Nebraska, Rosicky knows that he could find ways to make more money—he could sell their cream, for example, for extra cash—but Rosicky chooses not to do this. Instead, the Rosickys use their cream to feed their own children, which Mary Rosicky justifies by arguing that she would rather "put some colour into [her] children's faces than put money into the bank." For the Rosickys, it's more important to have a well-fed, comfortable family than to make as much money as possible.

But even though Rosicky is happy to spend money on things for himself and his family, he also is very content living simply, without a lot of wealth or material possessions. Rosicky always chooses to eat lunch at home rather than in town. He finds the food in town too "extravagant" and prefers his simple and loving home environment to any of the more ostentatious pleasures of spending money in town. At one point in the story, Mary Rosicky shares a memory with her children about when Rosicky learned that there had been corn crop failure. While their other neighbors were devastated by the loss of income and the waste of hard work, Rosicky chose to throw a picnic, preferring to be grateful for what they had instead of disappointed in what they lost. This shows that Rosicky's relaxed attitude toward money makes him happy and stable, regardless of the instability going on around him.

Rosicky's decision to prioritize his everyday happiness and his family's wellbeing over money becomes one of his central virtues as a character, and it provides insight into the wider significance of the story. Rosicky does, at times in his life, suffer from poverty, but this is always when he is living in a city, without other comforts to make him happy. Living in the Nebraska countryside, on his own land, he is nearly always happy, even when crop failure leads to hard times. For Rosicky, money does not buy happiness—there is a certain necessity to possessing money, but Rosicky is not interested in having more money than he requires to provide for his family. By the end of the story, he has achieved a happier life by choosing to enjoy life's pleasures (and the pleasure of nature) without trying to "get ahead."

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

ROSICKY'S HEART AND HANDS

Anton Rosicky's heart and hands symbolize the idea that his hardworking lifestyle as a farmer is both taxing and deeply fulfilling. At the beginning of the story, Doctor Burleigh diagnoses Rosicky with heart failure, a condition that's aggravated by (and perhaps even directly caused by) the hard labor Rosicky does on his family's farm. Though Rosicky initially brushes off the diagnosis, it nevertheless makes him reflect on his life and the choices he's made over the years. For instance, he's chosen backbreaking work over comfort, a rural lifestyle over an urban one, self-sufficiency and risk over stable employment, and simplicity over affluence. In this sense, his heart condition represents the risk and hardship associated with the intentionally difficult way of life that Rosicky has chosen.

Throughout the story, however, it becomes clear that on a figurative level, Rosicky's heart is anything but bad. While Rosicky has a "weak" heart medically speaking, his heart is emotionally strong in that it's unendingly kind and generous to everyone he knows. And the story implies that the inner peace, freedom, and beauty of his life as a farmer is what allows him to radiate love and kindness to everyone around him. So, while the literal weakness of Rosicky's heart suggests that living such a free and fulfilling life may have its limitations, his heart's figurative strength suggests that such a life also has immense benefits. Thus, even though Rosicky's life is perhaps cut shorter than it would have been if he'd chosen an easier path in life (his heart is weakened to the point that he dies at the end of the story), it's implied that this more difficult path is meaningful and worthwhile.

This idea is also evident in Rosicky's hands. Although Rosicky is 65 years old, and his hands have "deep, deep creases" from years of farming, his daughter-in-law Polly notices that they still look relatively young and smooth. Most farmers have "huge lumps of fists […] with stiff fingers," but Rosicky's hands seem to convey "cleverness" and "generosity." In this way, Rosicky's hands are a lot like his heart: they represent the physical toll that his life of hard labor has taken on him, but also and the freedom, contentment, and generous spirit that this lifestyle has facilitated. Thus, although Rosicky endures years of strenuous labor and intermittent struggle due to unpredictable crop failures, his heart remains kind and his hands remain "nimble and lively" right up to the end of his life—suggesting that the positives aspects of his lifestyle outweigh the negatives.

THE GRAVEYARD

The graveyard in the rural Nebraskan town where the Rosickys live has multiple layers of symbolism. It reflects the idea that death can be natural and beautiful rather than scary if one has led a meaningful life; it also represents the difference between a free, meaningful, rich life and an unnatural, constricted, superficial life. The graveyard first appears at the start of the story, when Anton Rosicky is riding his wagon home and stops to admire the beauty of it. At this point, Rosicky has reason to think about his own death, since Doctor Burleigh has just diagnosed him with a failing **heart**. Looking at the graveyard—which is expansive, beautiful, and close to his home—Rosicky finds a sense of comfort even though he isn't ready to die yet. He realizes that the graveyard is full of deceased friends whom he cares about, and he's content with the idea that he'll one day rest here himself. This suggests that Rosicky feels unafraid and unashamed of dying specifically because his life up until this point has been so rich, fulfilling, and full of meaningful relationships. The place of death itself—the rural graveyard—appears beautiful rather than frightening to Rosicky because he's lived a happy and well-rounded life, free of regrets.

Near the end of the story, after Rosicky has died of heart failure, Doctor Burleigh stops by the graveyard on his way to give his condolences to the rest of the Rosicky family. Doctor Burleigh, like Rosicky himself, looks at the graveyard and admires its beauty. Burleigh, in fact, thinks about this particular graveyard in contrast to city graveyards, which are industrial, compact, and oppressive. His reflection on the differences between city and country graveyards illustrates the story's wider suggestion about urban and rural living—namely, that the latter offers more opportunity for freedom and joy than the former. Burleigh admiration for the country graveyard—and his belief that it is a fitting resting place for Rosicky at the end of his "complete and beautiful" life—suggests that the passage of time, and death itself, are not things to fear. If one lives such a grounded, fulfilling, loving life as Rosicky has, these things don't have to be scary. In a way, then, the graveyard comes to signify the good life itself, the dream that Rosicky ended up living.

Related Characters: The Marshalls and the Fasslers, The Rosicky Children, Mary Rosicky, Anton Rosicky, Doctor Burleigh

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 236

Explanation and Analysis

Doctor Burleigh reflects on the "generous and warm-hearted and affectionate" Rosicky family, who differ from other families in town. Specifically, he thinks about two ways the Rosickys stand apart: they are both poorer and happier than other families. Burleigh's musing gets to the heart of the story's central question: what is a good life, and how does one live it?

Superficially, it seems as though wealth and financial advancement should lead to happiness. This is certainly what the other families in town (like the Marshalls and the Fasslers) think, and they are all wealthier than the Rosickys. But Burleigh, an outside observer to these families, knows that the Rosickys are the best family to spend time with. This is so true that he even remembers refusing breakfast at the Marshall family's house once and instead quickly rushing over to the Rosickys for a more comforting, enjoyable breakfast there. The Rosickys do not have a lavish home, but they do have a warm household that's full of good conversation, good food, and genuine care for one another.

Burleigh's reflection even suggests that the Rosickys are so happy and kind *because* they are unconcerned with financial gain. They are able to be generous, providing a warm, bountiful meal for Burleigh, because they do not hoard their possessions and money. They eat their own high-quality food and welcome others to their table, rather than selling their resources and eating cheaply as a way to save more money. Consequently, all the Rosicky children seem to genuinely enjoy spending time in their home, and they exemplify the same kindness and generosity as their parents. All of this leads Burleigh to question whether what makes the Rosickys happy (and such great company) is in direct opposition to making and saving a lot of money.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Vintage edition of *Collected Stories* published in 2013.

Part 1 Quotes

❝ Maybe, Doctor Burleigh reflected, people as generous and warm-hearted and affectionate as the Rosickys never got ahead much; maybe you couldn't enjoy your life and put it in the bank, too.

Part 2 Quotes

Over there across the cornstalks his own roof and windmill looked so good to him that he promised himself to mind the Doctor and take care of himself. He was awful fond of his place, he admitted. He wasn't anxious to leave it. And it was a comfort to think that he would never have to go farther than the edge of his own hayfield. The snow, falling over his barnyard and the graveyard, seemed to draw things together like. And they were all old neighbours in the graveyard, most of them friends; there was nothing to feel awkward or embarrassed about.

Related Characters: Doctor Burleigh, Anton Rosicky

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 237-238

Explanation and Analysis

After Doctor Burleigh diagnoses Rosicky with heart failure and advises him to cut back on physical labor, Rosicky travels in his wagon to the graveyard close to his farm. Rosicky is initially resistant to Burleigh's advice—he loves working on his farm and doesn't want to give it up—but in this moment, he accepts the diagnosis and decides to take care of his health.

Rosicky changes his mind not out of a fear of death, but instead because he is so appreciative of what he has in life. The graveyard itself is not portrayed as a scary, oppressive place; instead, it is beautiful and natural, made up mostly of earth itself. Rosicky finds the falling snow beautiful, and he sees how this natural phenomenon connects the barnyard—the place that represents his life—with the graveyard—the place that represents his death. In this way, Rosicky can see how life and death are complementary; death does not scare him because he has lived a deeply fulfilling life without regrets. He also sees death as an extension of what he values in life. In his life, he wants to be close to his family and to nature—and looking out at the graveyard, he sees that when he dies, he will indeed remain close to both of these things.

They had been at one accord not to hurry through life, not to be always skimping and saving. They saw their neighbours buy more land and feed more stock than they did, without discontent. Once when the creamery agent came to the Rosickys to persuade them to sell him their cream, he told them how much money the Fasslers, their nearest neighbours, had made on their cream last year.

"Yes," said Mary, "and look at them Fassler children! Pale, pinched little things, they look like skimmed milk. I'd rather put some colour into my children's faces than put money into the bank."

The agent shrugged and turned to Anton.

"I guess we'll do like she says," said Rosicky.

Related Characters: Anton Rosicky, Mary Rosicky (speaker), Doctor Burleigh, The Rosicky Children, The Marshalls and the Fasslers, The Creamery Agent

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 240

Explanation and Analysis

Mary Rosicky has just learned that her husband, Anton, was diagnosed with heart failure, and she is now reflecting on their life together. Specifically, she's thinking of what has made them so happy over the years. She knows that they have always had a shared value system of prioritizing time with family over earning and saving a lot of money. While neighbors gossip about the Rosickys' lack of ambition, the Rosickys are unbothered—their neighbors' financial success doesn't make them feel envious or insecure.

In this passage, Mary recalls a creamery agent who came to the Rosickys' home to encourage them to sell their cream—an offer that they refused. Mary's specific wording to the creamery agent echoes Doctor Burleigh's private thoughts earlier in the story. She says that she would rather give her children enough food than "put money into the bank," and earlier, Burleigh had pondered if it's possible to enjoy life while putting money in the bank. Mary's refusal of the creamery agent's offer suggests that Burleigh's earlier philosophizing was based in truth. She knows that refusing to sell her cream will mean less money, but it's more important to use the cream to provide for her children, making sure they are cared for, well-fed, and happy.

Moreover, this passage illustrates the intimacy and unity in Rosicky and Mary's relationship. The creamery agent turns to Rosicky after Mary says no, seemingly to see if her husband will decide otherwise, but Rosicky stands by his

wife. Mary attributes their marital success and happiness to this kind of shared decision-making, when it's clear that they have the same value system.

Part 3 Quotes

He often did over-time work and was well paid for it, but somehow he never saved anything. He couldn't refuse a loan to a friend, and he was self-indulgent. He liked a good dinner, and a little went for beer, a little for tobacco, a good deal went to the girls. He often stood through an opera on Saturday nights; he could get standing-room for a dollar.

Related Characters: Mary Rosicky, Rudolph Rosicky, Zichec, Anton Rosicky

Related Themes:

Page Number: 241-242

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Rosicky thinks back to his time living in New York, when he was briefly happy in the city while living with his friend, the Czech cabinet-maker Zichec. Though Rosicky works constantly, he doesn't save his money, instead spending it on himself and other people. This is also how Rosicky is in his life after he leaves New York and moves to Nebraska: while his life is very different in the city and the country, in both places he prioritizes enjoying his life and giving himself experiences over saving up money.

Rosicky also notably prioritizes being a generous person over saving his own money. He is generous with his funds to friends, giving away money whenever they ask, even when it costs him his own financial security. He is the same way in the present, as a father and husband—for instance, he is quick to give money away to his son Rudolph, or to buy his wife, Mary, an extra piece of candy. For Rosicky, money is only worth the experiences it can give him and his family—it loses its value if it costs him his happiness.

Those blank buildings, without the stream of life pouring through them, were like empty jails. It struck young Rosicky that this was the trouble with big cities; they built you in from the earth itself, cemented you away from any contact with the ground. You lived in an unnatural world, like the fish in an aquarium, who were probably much more comfortable than they ever were in the sea.

Related Characters: Anton Rosicky

Related Themes:

Page Number: 243

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs when Rosicky realizes that he must leave New York City and move to a more rural place. While he had been happy living there for quite a while, he realizes one Fourth of July that the city itself can feel oppressively removed from nature. He begins to feel restless as the seasons change and he longs to be outside, connected to the earth in the spring. While he has enjoyed his social life in the city, as well as the pleasures of city night life, he misses having a relationship to nature. The industrial, man-made architecture and layout of the city blocks him from the actual earth.

Rosicky likens a human city-dweller to a fish in an aquarium, which has two implications. Firstly, it suggests that city dwellers are essentially trapped—that while cities are made to look large and spacious, they are actually claustrophobic environments. Secondly, it suggests that being stuck in the "aquarium" (the city) can actually be comfortable—it can be less arduous, tiring, and difficult than living in a rural, natural environment. However, Rosicky believes that even if living in an industrialized world is more "comfortable," it is not as fulfilling as feeling fully alive, which can only happen in a wide-open, natural space. The fish-aquarium metaphor, then, speaks to the story's larger question of what makes a life well-lived—it suggests that the freedom and connection to nature that a rural lifestyle offers are more valuable than relative comfort or ease.

Part 4 Quotes

Rosicky was a little anxious about this pair. He was afraid Polly would grow so discontented that Rudy would quit the farm and take a factory job in Omaha. He had worked for a winter up there, two years ago, to get money to marry on. He had done very well, and they would always take him back at the stockyards. But to Rosicky that meant the end of everything for his son. To be a landless man was to be a wage-earner, a slave, all your life; to have nothing, to be nothing.

Related Characters: Polly Rosicky, Rudolph Rosicky, Anton Rosicky

Related Themes:

Page Number: 247

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Rosicky worries that his eldest son, Rudolph, will end up moving to a city, away from their rented farm in rural Nebraska, to please his new wife, Polly. This shows Rosicky's concern for what he passes down to his children, especially as he gets older and closer to death. While Rosicky is almost entirely happy about his life, he's nervous about what will happen to Rudolph. This is because Rosicky's happiness is not only dependent on himself—it's dependent on his children, and whether he feels that they will live good, fulfilling lives.

Rosicky's negative feelings about city living and factory work come from one of his core beliefs about life: he thinks it is far more important to be have a sense of independence, space, and freedom, than to earn money. And, importantly, he believes that it's much easier to find these things in the countryside than in the city, where a person is confined to being a "wage-earner" (which he equates to being a "slave") rather than a landowner. As an older man now, Rosicky has life experience to draw from that inform his belief—he didn't fulfill his dream of owning land until he was 35, and he looks back on the time he spent in cities (particularly London) and thinks that he would never wish those experiences on his sons.

Part 5 Quotes

"'We ain't got an ear,' he says, 'nor nobody else ain't got none. All the corn in the country was cooked by three o'clock today, like you'd roasted it in an oven.'

"'You mean you won't get no crop at all?' I asked him. I couldn't believe it, after he'd worked so hard.

"'No crop this year,' he says. 'That's why we're havin' a picnic. We might as well enjoy what we got.'

"An' that's how your father behaved, when all the neighbours was so discouraged they couldn't look you in the face. An' we enjoyed ourselves that year, poor as we was, an' our neighbours wasn't a bit better off for bein' miserable. Some of 'em grieved till they got poor digestions and couldn't relish what they did have.'"

Related Characters: Mary Rosicky (speaker), The Rosicky Children, Anton Rosicky

Related Themes:

Page Number: 251

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Mary Rosicky tells her children a story about how their father, Anton Rosicky, reacted when they faced corn crop failure one year. Rosicky felt that rather than mourning their loss, it was important to appreciate what they *did* have. So, after learning about the failed crop, he had Mary organized a picnic for the whole family, and they had a lovely, celebratory meal outside.

Mary tells this story to show her children their father's relentless optimism, generosity, and gratitude. Because of all these traits, Rosicky actually suffers far less than many others in the same situation, even though he has less money. Once again, the Rosicky family is juxtaposed with the neighboring farming families, all of whom grieve the crop failure, making themselves sick with worry and sadness. The Rosickys contrast with this attitude: while they, too, have lost their hard work to the elements and suffer financially as a consequence, their positive attitudes make the negative turns of life hurt less. Rosicky's unwavering commitment to enjoying life is one of the key values he passes onto his family, as he shows them that money is not the reason for a happy life—in fact, in some cases, focusing on money can work against happiness.

"Well, when I come to realize what I done, of course, I felt terrible. I felt better in de stomach, but very bad in de heart. I set on my bed wid dat platter on my knees, an' it all come to me; how hard dat poor woman save to buy dat goose, and how she get some neighbour to cook it dat got more fire, an' how she put it in my corner to keep it away from dem hungry children. Dey was a old carpet hung up to shut my corner off, an' de children wasn't allowed to go in dere. An' I know she put it in my corner because she trust me more'n she did de violin boy. I can't stand it to face her after I spoil de Christmas. So I put on my shoes and go out into de city. I tell myself I better throw myself in de river; but I guess I ain't dat kind of a boy.

Related Characters: Anton Rosicky (speaker), Rudolph Rosicky, Polly Rosicky, Mary Rosicky, The Rosicky Children, Violin Player , The Lifschnitzes

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 253

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Rosicky tells his family and Polly the story of his Christmas with the Lifschnitz family in London. At just

18, he was impoverished and very hungry while living as a boarder in the Lifschnitzes' London home, as was the rest of the family and their other guests. So when Mrs. Lifschnitz hid a roast goose for Christmas dinner close to Rosicky's bed, he smelled it and lost control of himself, eating half of the goose. Immediately, he felt so guilty and ashamed that he left the house to roam the streets of London.

Rosicky tells this story to Polly and his children (specifically Rudolph) so that they can have a better sense of how difficult his life actually was in London—and, by extension, how difficult city life is if you do not have money. His behavior in this memory is almost unrecognizable to how he behaves in the present. The older Rosicky is generous, patient, and content—he doesn't seem to feel shame or yearn for things he doesn't have, and he would never steal. But when Rosicky was poor and hungry in London, he had few options and was pushed to desperate extremes. What really hurts Rosicky, though, is not even the material discomfort of being hungry, but the fact that he betrayed Mrs. Lifschnitz's trust when she'd tried to provide for him. The guilt he felt is one of the reasons that now, as an older man, it's important to him to live in the country, where he can have more stability and security and therefore be a kinder person to others.

Part 6 Quotes

❝ It wasn't nervous, it wasn't a stupid lump; it was a warm brown human hand, with some cleverness in it, a great deal of generosity, and something else which Polly could only call "gypsy-like,"—something nimble and lively and sure, in the way that animals are.

Polly remembered that hour long afterwards; it had been like an awakening to her. It seemed to her that she had never learned so much about life from anything as from old Rosicky's hand. It brought her to herself; it communicated some direct and untranslatable message.

Related Characters: Polly Rosicky, Anton Rosicky

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 259

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs after Rosicky collapses (seemingly due to a minor heart attack), and Polly (the only person around when this happens) comes to his rescue and tends to him for an hour after. As they sit and talk, Rosicky confesses that he is sick and near death, and Polly, feeling strong affection and love, admires her father-in-law's hand.

Polly observes a greater meaning in Rosicky's hands—they seem to her like extensions of his heart, and she sees them as representative of Rosicky's inner kindness. In particular, she notices that although Rosicky's hands are worn and creased from years of farming, they aren't rough, "stupid lump[s]" like other famers' hands. Instead, they seem to convey "cleverness," "generosity," and "something nimble and lively." This suggests that although Rosicky has led a difficult life of hard labor and intermittent poverty, the sense of fulfillment, generosity, and beauty that this life has afforded him is what shines through. Thus, as Polly offers up her own kindness and generosity to Rosicky, she sees Rosicky's love reflected back to her. But for Polly, this encounter with Rosicky does more than make her appreciate and love him—it is "an awakening" for her that makes her see *herself* more clearly.

By caring for Rosicky, Polly has an almost transcendent moment, as she begins to see kindness to others and connection to the natural world (the things that Rosicky values most) as important. Polly also describes Rosicky's hands as being somewhat animal-like, suggesting that Rosicky himself is closer to nature than most other people, and that this proximity to the natural world is part of what makes him such a compelling, kind, loving person.

❝ He was thinking, indeed, about Polly, and how he might never have known what a tender heart she had if he hadn't got sick over there.

Related Characters: The Rosicky Children, Mary Rosicky, Polly Rosicky, Anton Rosicky

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 260

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs right before Rosicky collapses again and finally dies. Just before he dies, Rosicky does the things he loves, rather than convalescing in bed as one may expect. He smokes a pipe, does some tailoring for his son, and feels grateful despite being severely ill. He is close to death,

having almost died when he collapsed the other day, but he reflects back on this experience with joy rather than fear—the moment allowed him to see Polly's generosity and "tender heart" when she cared for him at his bedside.

Up until the very moment he dies, Rosicky is happy. This is seemingly because rather than focusing on what he does not have, or on what has gone wrong for him, he chooses to see the kindness and beauty surrounding him. Moreover, as he approaches death, he now knows that his one concern is unwarranted—he had worried about Rudolph and Polly's marriage, but now that he had an opportunity to see Polly's true kindness, he can rest easy. In this way, the story suggests that a meaningful, fulfilling life doesn't need to be extravagant or complicated—instead, a good life is defined by gratitude for small, meaningful moments with loved ones.

> He thought of city cemeteries; acres of shrubbery and heavy stone, so arranged and lonely and unlike anything in the living world. Cities of the dead, indeed; cities of the forgotten, of the "put away." But this was open and free, this little square of long grass which the wind for ever stirred. Nothing but the sky overhead, and the many-coloured fields running on until they met that sky. The horses worked here in the summer; the neighbours passed on their way to town; and over yonder, in the cornfield, Rosicky's own cattle would be eating fodder as winter came on. Nothing could be more undeathlike than this place; nothing could be more right for a man who had helped to do the work of great cities and had always longed for the open country and had got to it at last. Rosicky's life seemed to him complete and beautiful.

Related Characters: Anton Rosicky, Doctor Burleigh

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 261

Explanation and Analysis

This is the final passage of the story, after Rosicky has died and been buried in the graveyard near his home. Doctor Burleigh, who was out of town when Rosicky collapsed and could not save him, stops by this graveyard on his way to give his condolences to the Rosickys. He admires the graveyard, mirroring Rosicky himself, who did the same thing at the beginning of the story.

Burleigh does more than just mirror Rosicky's actions—his private thoughts are also similar to Rosicky's. Burleigh, too, sees that while this graveyard holds dead people, it is not a deathly place. Instead, its notably "undeathlike," as its beautiful landscape and openness give the place a feeling of liveliness: the earth, after all, remains alive, even as people die and are buried beneath it. Death, in this way, is part of the natural cycle of life rather than something to be feared or embarrassed about—and Rosicky, too, realized this when he gazed out at the graveyard.

Moreover, Burleigh contrasts the beauty of this rural graveyard with what graveyards in city typically look like: oppressive, claustrophobic, and depressing. This dichotomy between country and city graveyards signifies the larger difference between the two environments—the difference that made Rosicky leave city life behind and live the rest of his years in rural Nebraska. With this, the story suggests that the countryside offers a sense of freedom, self-sufficiency, and happiness that the city doesn't—and that these qualities are conducive to a good life.

The final moments of the story take place with an outsider to the Rosicky family, and this gives the story's central questions more weight. It's not just Rosicky himself who sees the good life as one connected to family, unconcerned with monetary gain, and surrounded by nature. Burleigh, too, agrees with Rosicky's views on life, and it's this epiphany that allows him to see Rosicky's death not as sad, but as symbolic of his "complete and beautiful" life.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PART 1

During a check-up, Doctor Ed Burleigh tells Anton Rosicky that he has a bad **heart**. But Rosicky insists that he's fine—maybe it's asthma, but he certainly doesn't have any heart problems. Burleigh jokes that if Rosicky knows so much about medicine, why bother seeing a doctor? And he insists that Rosicky, who is 65, do less heavy labor on his land and instead delegate the work to his five sons.

Rosicky reacts to Burleigh's diagnosis with dismay rather than concern, indicating that he's not prone to anxiety. The fact that Burleigh advises Rosicky to avoid doing manual labor on his land to protect his heart implies that Rosicky's lifestyle (presumably as a farmer) is what caused or exacerbated his heart condition. In this way, the story immediately ties the diagnosis to Rosicky's hard work. For the first time, the weight of Rosicky's years is coming down on him, affecting him physically.

Seeming a little amused, Rosicky looks up at Burleigh. He doesn't appear sick: his cheeks have good color, his skin isn't very wrinkled, and his hair is barely grey. Rosicky's face reveals his disposition, which is "contented" and "reflective," happy rather than somber. When Rosicky jokes that he'd like to get a new **heart**, Burleigh frowns and tells him to take care of the old one—Rosicky must cut back on his work on the farm.

Despite the fact that Rosicky is well into middle age and his health is comprised, he looks relatively youthful and healthy. While his body is feeling the affects of age and years of hard labor, his inner contentedness and kindness seem to radiate outward. Rosicky even jokes about his heart—he is unwilling to cause a fuss and would rather make light of the situation and maintain a good attitude, despite Burleigh's concern. This begins to hint that Rosicky has uncovered the secret to a "contented" life and a positive attitude, and that this inner happiness is obvious everyone around him.

Burleigh thinks that Rosicky's **heart** could last five or six more years if he takes care of it. To do so, Burleigh suggests that instead of working in the fields, Rosicky should spend more time around the house, helping his wife, Mary. But Rosicky laughs and dismisses the idea, insisting that the kitchen isn't the place for a man and that Mary works hard enough not to need his help. Burleigh exclaims that Rosicky is one of the few people he knows who has a loving and happy family. They don't fight and they're kind to each other, so Burleigh wants Rosicky to live longer and enjoy the company of his wife and kids.

Rosicky dismisses Burleigh's advice that he do more work around the house (rather than in the field) both because it contradicts his beliefs about gender roles and because this is not how he and Mary personally operate as a couple. On the one hand, Rosicky's attitude reflects the strict gender roles that most people in the early 20th century abided by. Namely, domestic work was considered feminine, while work done outside the home (particularly manual labor) was considered masculine. On the other hand, Rosicky does appreciate how hard Mary works in the home and doesn't seem to think that her role is any less important than his. In this way, Rosicky and his wife have a mutually respectful and deeply fulfilling relationship. Indeed, Burleigh's praise for Rosicky's wife and children indicate that the whole Rosicky family stands out in town. The Rosickys, according to Burleigh, are uniquely happy, loving, and kind.

As Burleigh writes Rosicky a prescription, he asks about Rosicky's oldest son, Rudolph, who was recently married. Burleigh wonders how Mary likes Rudolph's wife, Polly—he worries that Mary might not want "an American daughter-in-law," given that Anton and Mary are Bohemian (Czech). But Rosicky, smiling with genuine affection, says that Polly is a nice girl. Since there's going to be a storm, Burleigh encourages Rosicky to head home and urges him, due to his **heart**, to avoid the wagon. But Rosicky is using the wagon to return home. His five sons usually get the car instead of him, but he doesn't mind because he dislikes cars.

Burleigh's comment about Polly establishes what will become a bigger issue in the story: Polly's differences from the Rosicky family and her dissatisfaction with country life. His comment also draws attention to Anton and Mary's status as Czech-born immigrants who have come to the U.S. seeking a better life. But Rosicky's resistance to driving a car shows that he's resistant to certain American norms—he prioritizes a traditional, rural way of life over a modern, urban lifestyle. However, Rosicky's choice to ride in a wagon could also endanger his health, presumably because the bumpy ride and physical exertion of holding the horse's reins could strain his heart. Rosicky's decision to continue doing what he prefers, even if it could harm him, brings up the question of what constitutes happiness and fulfillment—and whether or not it's worth sacrificing one's long-term well-being to continue living that good life.

After Rosicky puts Burleigh's fee on his desk and leaves, Burleigh thinks forlornly about Rosicky's **heart** troubles, wishing that it were someone else—someone he does not love and care about as much as Rosicky. Burleigh has known the Rosickys since he was young, back when he was a lower-class country boy, and he has great affection for them.

Burleigh does not think of Rosicky as just another patient. He loves him as a friend, having grown up knowing him and seeing how remarkably kind and the Rosickys are. Burleigh's love for Rosicky also seems tinged with empathy. Since he himself was a lower-class country boy before becoming a wealthier doctor, he has a personal connection to the rural, laborious life that the Rosicky's live.

Last winter, Burleigh had a beautiful breakfast at the Rosickys' home after a night spent delivering a baby at a neighboring family's farm. That family, the Marshalls, are unpleasant. Despite having a very large, profitable farm, they are overworked, harried, and messy—their home has "no comfort whatever." Once the baby was born, Burleigh refused breakfast and rushed out of the Marshall home as quickly as possible to go have breakfast with the Rosickys instead. He knew there was no other place where he could be welcomed so warmly and have coffee with such good cream.

The Marshalls are both wealthier and more stressed than the Rosickys, and these two qualities seem linked. The Marshalls overwork themselves for financial gain on their farm, and this ironically seems to cost them their happiness. Their family dynamic is so uncomfortable and unpleasant that Burleigh rushes out of their house, instead seeking comfort in the Rosickys' warm and loving household. The good cream that the Rosickys have in their home is also indicative of their overall worldview as a family—rather than choosing to sell their cream, they hold onto it and offer it to their children and guests. In essence, they choose to nourish those closest to them and create a warm atmosphere instead of focusing on making money.

When Burleigh arrived at the Rosicky household, the well-mannered children helped him inside and set him an extra place at their humble table. Mary was delighted to have him for breakfast—feeding people is how she expresses affection, and she'd always been as proud of Burleigh as she would be of her own son. She was bursting with happiness just to have him there.

Every member of the Rosicky family takes after Anton. They are all exceedingly kind, loving, respectful people, in a way that makes the Rosickys stand out from other families in town. They even make Doctor Burleigh feel like an extended member of their family, and consequently, Burleigh's sense of what makes a good family is almost entirely modeled after the Rosickys. Even though the Rosickys are not wealthy, their home feels abundant and welcoming because of their happiness and positive outlook on life.

Once Burleigh finished eating, he told everyone about the Marshalls. When Mary criticized them for letting Burleigh leave without breakfast, one of the Rosicky sons reminded her to be grateful for that, since Burleigh wouldn't have eaten with them otherwise. Burleigh marveled that the geraniums in the window were blooming, even though it was winter, and Mary clipped a blossom for him. She told Burleigh that he needed a wife to prevent his hair from greying and explained that, in the meantime, brushing black tea into his hair would help.

The Marshalls are a foil for the Rosickys. While both families are in the same line of work, the latter family is significantly happier—so much so that Doctor Burleigh, an outsider to both households, will always choose to spend time with the Rosickys over the Marshalls. Mary's geraniums blooming even in winter represent the Rosicky family spirit. Even when the Rosickys are in difficult circumstances, they're able to create beauty and meaning simply by remaining optimistic, generous, and grateful for what they have. And Mary's comment to Burleigh about his needing a wife shows that her loving nature extends beyond her own family—she will tend to Burleigh in the same way that she would any of her own sons.

Sometimes Doctor Burleigh hears townspeople gossip that the Rosickys don't push themselves enough to earn more money. Despite being hard workers, the Rosickys are "free and easy"—they're comfortable, and they don't strive for more than they already have. But Burleigh thinks fondly of how warm and kind the family is, concluding that perhaps one cannot "enjoy your life and put it in the bank, too."

Burleigh's reflection that a person may not be able to "enjoy your life and put it in the bank, too" introduces one of the story's key questions: is focusing on making and saving money antithetical to true happiness? The Rosickys are not a wealthy family, and they are not interested in advancing financially like their neighbors are. Still, the Rosickys are far happier and more enjoyable to be around, perhaps because they are so unconcerned with financial gain—they can actually enjoy life rather than worrying about getting ahead. The story's portrayal of the Rosickys as a happy family, unhindered by financial stress, challenges the traditional "American Dream" that is centered around improving one's social class. Instead, it seems that this quest to make more money, to rise through the ranks in society, actually makes people unhappy.

PART 2

Rosicky heads to the general store to pick groceries off a list from Mary. He waits around until Miss Pearl, a pretty girl who works there, comes to help—he always likes to talk to her. She has plucked, painted-on eyebrows, which amuses Rosicky because her eyebrows used to be long. Pearl knows that Rosicky has a harmless crush on her, and she likes to chat with him anyway. She comments that he's always buying ticking (a fabric that covers pillows and mattresses), and Rosicky tells her it's for all the loose goose feathers in his home—Mary loves to make pillows. Pearl playfully teases him when he buys candy for Mary, saying that the treats will make her fat. But Rosicky responds good-naturedly, saying that he likes his wife plump, not skinny like is currently fashionable for women.

Rosicky likes to savor life rather than rush through it, which is another quality that contributes to his happy, likeable demeanor. He could treat grocery shopping as a mundane chore, but instead he chooses to take his time and enjoy the simple pleasure of chatting with Miss Pearl. Pearl's comment about Rosicky's spending habits shows again how Rosicky stands apart from others: he feels no need to hoard his limited funds and is instead eager to spend his money on his wife. Additionally, Miss Pearl's youth contrasts with Rosicky's age here, as he makes a pointed and playful comment about trends for young women like Pearl. While she keeps herself skinny and plucks her eyebrows—as is in fashion—Rosicky knows that these are just trends, hand e's resistant to the more superficial fads of youth. He would rather his wife be well-fed, comfortable, and provided for than fit in with the current style.

Rosicky gets to his wagon just as it's beginning to snow. He drives out of town and into the High Prairie—a big stretch of rich farmland. Rosicky's own farm is on less productive land (there's clay in the soil that can damage the crop), farther off from the High Prairie. But he doesn't mind; he was grateful to buy affordable land when he could, and to be able to pass the land down to his sons. He rides to the **graveyard** that neighbors his farm. Pausing at the graveyard as snow falls, he is struck by how beautiful the land is.

Yet again, Rosicky is grateful for what others may label as misfortune. While his farm is less productive and profitable than the High Prairie farmland, Rosicky sees its weaknesses as gifts. If the land were more fertile, he would otherwise not have been able to buy the land in the first place, nor would he be able to pass it down to his sons. In this way, creating a meaningful family legacy is more important to Rosicky than having an easy, affluent lifestyle. He also sees the graveyard as beautiful rather than frightening, which is perhaps surprising given his recent diagnosis of heart failure.

As Rosicky contentedly looks at the **graveyard** surrounding him, he feels happy with his life. Looking over at the roof of his own house, he decides to take Doctor Burleigh's advice after all—he will work less to take care of his **heart**. He isn't ready to die yet, but it comforts him to know that the graveyard is so close to the home he loves. Many neighbors and friends have died and now rest in this same graveyard, and Rosicky knows that there is nothing embarrassing or awkward about death—not when it is in such a beautiful place and so close to his family. He admires the falling snow, which it offers rest and leisure for "men and beasts" whose work must pause during the winter.

Although Rosicky feels inspired to look after his health, seeing the graveyard doesn't seem to make him anxious. In fact, the prospect of death brings a certain comfort to him, since he realizes that he will be safe and close to home when he does eventually die. Therefore, his desire to take care of his health comes not out of a fear of death, but rather his love of life. Rosicky also sees the snow as a symbol of the need for rest rather than a foreboding sign of a difficult winter. In this way, he feels an interconnectedness to the changing seasons. Instead of being concerned about the hardships that winter can bring for farmers, Rosicky appreciates nature's rhythm, which binds animals, humans, and the earth itself together. For Rosicky, nature is more valuable than anything that is man-made—although this is a value that puts him in direct opposition to the increasingly industrialized times he is living in.

Arriving home, Rosicky is warmly greeted by his son, John, who puts away his horses, and his wife, Mary, who has made him lunch. Rosicky considers eating in town too extravagant, so Mary always has food ready for him when he comes home. Presently, Rosicky tries to talk to Mary in their native language, Czech, but Mary responds in English to ask about his appointment with Doctor Burleigh. Rosicky playfully dodges the topic, but after some prodding, he admits that Burleigh warned him to watch his **heart**. Mary is alarmed, but Rosicky tells her to quiet down, reminding her that he prefers for women to speak softly. Despite her concern, Mary admires Rosicky's ever-present calm demeanor. She attributes this trait to his city upbringing and hopes their sons to take after him.

Rosicky's entire family takes care of him without asking, showing once more how loving and supportive they are. Mary's choice to speak to Rosicky about his doctor's visit in English rather than Czech shows the severity of the question, as discussing Rosicky's health seems to merit more formality. Even though the concerning news could erupt into an argument, Rosicky's patient, level-headed demeanor persists in a way that both impresses and soothes Mary. Even Rosicky's comment about wanting women to speak quietly, which could be read as sexist, seems to be a way of keeping Mary calm and happy rather than a way of putting her down.

Mary thinks that Rosicky looks healthy, but she does trust Burleigh's judgment. She decides that she will go into town to talk to him about his diagnosis of Rosicky's **heart**. She tries to see signs of declining health in her husband but struggles to do so. While he is 15 years her senior, she rarely notices this. Their lives as poor Czech immigrants in America have been difficult and required sacrifice, but the two of them have ultimately been happy because they are unified in their beliefs and values. Mary thinks fondly of the differences in their upbringings: he has been "city-bred," while she has only lived in the country. She believes that just as rural living has made her rough, urban living has made Rosicky endlessly gentle.

Even though Rosicky has been diagnosed with a failing heart, nothing about his outside appearance would indicate as much. His literal heart may be weakened, but his emotional heart—his love, kindness, and generosity—is still strong, so much so that Rosicky being sick seems almost inconceivable to Mary. Mary, like Rosicky, sees their lives as happy and fulfilling. While immigrating to the U.S., managing a farm, and earning little money are all challenges, the couple has been happy throughout all of this because their worldviews are compatible, and they support each other. Mary's thinking also highlights a key difference between city and country living: she believes that the countryside has made her tougher, while the city made Rosicky more compassionate.

Mary thinks that she and Rosicky have been happy because they have not prioritized making and saving money over enjoying life. Once, a creamery agent tried to convince them to sell their cream instead of keeping it for their own children. The agent tried to persuade them by mentioning the neighboring Fassler family, who made a successful profit from selling their cream. But Mary rejected his offer, knowing that the Fassler children looked pale and unhealthy, not robust like her own children. She told the agent that she would rather "put some colour into [her] children's faces" than save up money, and Rosicky sided with his wife.

The creamery agent and the Fasslers represent a fundamentally different value system than the Rosickys'. Rather than selling resources like cream for profit, Rosicky and Mary would rather use what they have to take care of their own children and create a healthy home environment. This is another way that the Rosickys set themselves apart from the American Dream that's centered on industriousness and upward mobility (increased wealth and social status). Moreover, the incident with the creamery agent illustrates Mary and Anton's close partnership: they respect each other and make decisions as a team.

PART 3

After Mary meets with Doctor Burleigh, she and her sons work together to reduce Rosicky's physical labor, for the sake of his **heart**'s health. Her sons help Rosicky with any strenuous tasks, although Rosicky stubbornly jokes that they're treating him like an old woman. Still, throughout the winter, Rosicky mostly stays in the house and even adopts his own spot for working in the home, which the family affectionately labels "Father's corner." In the corner, he does tailors his children's clothing—he worked as a tailor in his youth and still considers it a man's job.

Rosicky's entire family is quick to tend to their father's needs, showing once again the family's deep support system and how much Rosicky's children value him. Rosicky's gendered worldview reappears here as he dislikes working in the house, considering it the more feminine sphere.

While Rosicky sews, he reflects back on his life, having lived in three different countries. The only part of his life that he does not think fondly of is his time in London, when he was impoverished and working for a poor German tailor. He thinks back to moving to New York City when he was 20. In New York, he worked for a tailor shop and learned English. He worked constantly but hardly saved any money because he loaned it to friends, went out to dinner, and bought standing-room tickets to the opera. He was, for a time, very happy in New York, and thought that it was the best city in the world.

Rosicky's newfound inclination to reflect on his past is indicative of his aging—the diagnosis of heart failure has reminded him that his life is winding down. But even as an elderly man, some memories—like his time in London—still feel too emotionally fraught to think about in great detail. Rosicky's positive memories of New York, though, contrast with his overall negative perception of cities and show that he is not entirely biased against urban living. At one point, he enjoyed the city life—and it's clear the reason he enjoyed it is because he did not prioritize saving money, instead choosing to give himself experiences and to be generous with his friends. Not coincidentally, these are values he still holds.

Rosicky was happy in New York because he had a strong community made up of intimate relationships with other immigrants. He befriended another Czech cabinet-maker, Zichec, and the two of them rented a room together from Zichec's Austrian employer, Loeffler. Zichec and Rosicky were as close as a "bridal pair" and had a happy domestic life of shared responsibilities and activities, like attending the opera together.

In certain ways, Rosicky's relationship with Zichec is a precursor to his relationship with Mary. While Zichec and Rosicky are not actually a couple, their dynamic resembles a marriage, as they make choices for the benefit of each other and even share a certain intimacy, being two Czech immigrants who are both new to the U.S. This dynamic is also true of Rosicky and Mary's marriage. For Rosicky, happiness is often tethered to positive, supportive relationships with other people, much more so than his individual success or identity.

But even though Rosicky started out happy in New York, as time passed, he started to get restless. When springtime came, he felt weary of city life and developed a drinking habit. Watching nature bloom in spring, Rosicky was overcome with an itch to go somewhere else. One Fourth of July, he wandered New York and saw the city empty, without people filling the streets. He suddenly felt that the industrial landscape was oppressive and unnatural, disconnected from the earth, which felt more real to him. He decided that day to make a plan to leave, drawing inspiration from local Bohemian-run papers that advertised the opportunities for purchasing farmland in the West.

Rosicky's love of the changing seasons arises again here; even though he is happy in New York, the city's lack of natural beauty is hard on him. He feel happier and more alive and satisfied when he can feel connected to nature's rhythm. While Rosicky's social needs can be met in New York, his larger, more spiritual needs cannot be satisfied in the city.

Buying his own farm was a dream for Rosicky—no one in his family had owned land before. He remembered a brief period in his childhood, after his mother died, when he went to live with her parents on their rented farm. He attributed his lifelong love of the natural world to his time on this farm. When Rosicky was 12, his grandfather died, and he went back to live with his father and stepmother, which was difficult for him. In New York, Rosicky spent the next several years preparing to leave the city with a single-minded dream of getting to country land—and he eventually did so when he moved to Nebraska at age 35.

Rosicky first came to New York with a typical American Dream of thriving in the city. But it becomes clear to him that his real dream is slightly different, as city life doesn't offer him the level of freedom he wants—he would rather have true independence by possessing his own land and having unlimited access to nature. Furthermore, Rosicky does not want to simply recreate his positive childhood memories of living on a rented farm—he wants to surpass this by buying land rather than renting from a landlord. Rosicky's patience becomes apparent here too, as he works for over a decade to achieve his dream.

PART 4

Rosicky's own childhood ended early, and this is perhaps this is why he's so fond of his sons. Back in the present, he worries about his eldest son, Rudolph. Every Saturday, Rosicky's sons and daughter, Josephine, drive their Ford into town to go to the movies and look at the shops. But this Saturday morning, Rosicky asks them to give the car to Rudolph and his new wife, Polly, instead. Rosicky's sons are disappointed, but Rosicky tells them that he is concerned that Polly, a girl who grew up in town, is disappointed with her new country life. He wants to give them the car every Saturday through New Year's, to try to make her happy. Before their sons can complain, Mary cuts in to say that it's a good idea—she, too, feels worried about Polly and Rudolph's marriage.

Polly and Rudolph's different upbringings parallel the wider differences between urban and rural living that recur throughout the story. Their different opinions about how to live again raise the question of what constitutes a good life. Polly grew up in a town, not a city, but it is still a struggle for her to adjust to rural living. Rosicky, on the other hand, actually experienced city life, and he knows that it's perhaps overrated given that country life offers greater freedom and a close connection to nature. Rosicky's desire to make every effort to help Rudolph and Polly's marriage again shows how deeply he values family.

That night, Rosicky drives to Rudolph and Polly's new house, which is small and bare. Polly is slim, with blonde hair and blue eyes, and has plucked and painted-on eyebrows like Pearl. Polly greets him coldly, referring to him as "Mr. Rosicky," which Rosicky takes as evidence that she feels ashamed of marrying into their first-generation immigrant family—even though she has known and loved Rudolph since high school. Rosicky offers her the car to go to a movie, and initially, Polly says no because she has too much work to do inside the house. But Rosicky insists that they go, offering to do their dishes himself. Polly tries to protest but eventually agrees, touched by his gesture of kindness and generosity.

Polly does not come from a first-generation immigrant family like Rudolph does, and Rosicky even thinks that she's ashamed of associating with them. Polly's initial coldness to Rosicky contrasts with how every other character in the story views him—with love and affection. But Polly seems to associate Rosicky with the rural lifestyle as a whole; she's hesitant to warm up to him, just as she's hesitant to embrace the Rosickys' way of life.

Polly asks Rosicky what it was like living in the city, and if he gets lonely living in the country. Rosicky knowingly explains that cities are only a good place to live if you're rich, but not if you're poor. But Polly still wishes to move to New York one day, and she wants to one day hear about Rosicky's time there and in London. But Rosicky simply tells her to get ready to go—and just then, Rudolph arrives home. Rosicky gives Rudolph the car and some money to spend on Polly in town. Rudolph feels embarrassed to take the cash from the father, even though he needs it—there was crop failure this year, and he and Polly are struggling with their finances (as well as their marriage).

Polly's fantasy of moving to the city contrasts with Rosicky's lived experience of its difficulties. While Rosicky was neither rich in the city nor the country, he is much happier in rural Nebraska than he was in New York or London, and he tries to pass this lesson onto Polly and Rudolph. Still, Rudolph grew up in the country, so he has nothing to compare it to. And now that he is married, life is becoming increasingly more expensive and difficult to navigate. Rosicky displays his generosity again as he gives a reluctant Rudolph money. Rosicky is not much better off than his son, but for him, money is not nearly as important as his family's happiness.

After Rudolph and Polly have left, Rosicky does their dishes and thinks about the couple. He knows that living in the country is difficult for Polly, an all-American girl who grew up in town. Polly isn't enthusiastic about doing housework, and she misses the social element of working as a shop clerk in town. Rosicky worries that Rudolph will take a factory job in Omaha so that he and Polly can move to the city. Having worked in factories before, Rosicky believes that the only way to be truly free and happy is to own land, to work for no one but yourself. Rosicky plans to do some carpentry work for Polly to make her feel cared for. He thinks how much happier and at-peace he fills in the country, rather than the city.

Rosicky's concern about Rudolph and Polly's marriage is more than just a desire for their happiness. Much of Rosicky's dream of moving to Nebraska in the first place was tethered to a desire for freedom in nature—and freedom from the constrictive, oppressive nature of being an employee rather than a landowner. Rosicky feels greater liberty and happiness owning land and relying on himself for work, and he wants the same for Rudolph, whom he fears will be lured to the city by job opportunities. The enticing nature of the city, then, is connected to a youthful fantasy. Rosicky, now older and wiser, and having lived in cities in his own youth, believes that this fantasy is nothing more than a mirage.

PART 5

It's Christmas Eve, and the Rosicky family is all together, Mary baking and Rosicky tailoring. Rosicky thinks back to his time living in London, many years before. He was 18 and poor, and he didn't speak English. He moved hoping to live with a cousin, but the cousin had moved to the U.S. by the time Rosicky got there. He met Lifschnitz, a poor German tailor, and got work from him—although it seemed that Lifschnitz only hired him out of pity. Lifschnitz also offered him a room to sleep in, and so Rosicky shared a room with another lodger—a poor violin player—while Lifschnitz and his wife and children slept upstairs. The entire home was very dirty, bug-infested, crowded, and noisy. Rosicky felt hopeless.

Rosicky was initially resistant to even privately think back to his difficult life in London. But as the story progresses, he becomes more capable of remembering and sharing his experiences with his family—perhaps because he realizes that he's growing old and has a limited time to share his experiences with his loved ones. Rosicky's life in London—alienated from other people and stuck in an unpleasant environment—gives insight into why he is so much happier now. Living in the country, he has his own his own land, his own livelihood, and a large circle of loving family and friends.

Back in the present, Polly and Rudolph come over to the Rosicky home for dinner. At dinner, Rosicky's children complain about the lack of snow that day and worry that it will lead to crop failure and struggle. Rosicky retorts that the children have never suffered *real* hard times and never will, because they have their own land, warm food, clothes, and shelter. But Rudolph argues that he needs more than just those things—he needs more money, or else he will need to quit farming for a better-paying job in a city.

Rosicky's retort about hard times makes it clear that this topic is a charged one for him. He is still a gentle, patient man who does not berate his children but rather asserts his viewpoint—that their life in Nebraska is far better than any other life in a city. Still, Rudolph's weariness of farm work and temptation to move to the city shows that financial insecurity is a pervasive concern for everyone; it isn't easy to have Rosicky's contented point of view.

Mary sits down at the table and tells Rudolph that she isn't scared of struggling financially, because Rosicky has always pulled them through. She remembers a hot Fourth of July several years before, when Rosicky had abruptly stopped working. He asked Mary to prepare a big, delicious dinner for them and decided to go play in the horse tank's water with his children. He hopped in naked and splashed in the water with his kids. While they played, a Methodist preacher showed up to pray for rain for the crop, and he was shocked to see Rosicky playing naked in the horse tank with his kids. Mary watched from the kitchen and laughed at the preacher's astonishment.

Rosicky's ability to appreciate life is clear in this memory, as is the sense of freedom he feels on his own land. In contrast to Rosicky's cramped, uncomfortable life in London, the family's life on their farm is liberating and fun. Once again, Rosicky's playful, carefree disposition clearly contrasts with most other people, as the Methodist preacher is surprised to see a grown man playing in the water with his children. But Rosicky likes to live life joyfully, even if it makes him stand out.

Later, the Rosickys had their picnic in the orchard, and Rosicky revealed there has been corn crop failure throughout the county. Mary was shocked—this meant that they won't see any profits for their hard work. But Rosicky responded that this is exactly *why* they had to have a celebratory picnic—to enjoy what they *did* have, instead of what they didn't. In the present, as Mary tells this story to her children, she says that this is what makes Rosicky so special. All the other neighbors take crop failure as a horrific tragedy, but Rosicky always enjoys life and appreciates what he has, even in difficult times.

Rosicky's happy disposition doesn't just happen naturally—he makes choices to respond to life with joy rather than sorrow, even when things don't go exactly as planned. This value, in turn, is part of what makes his life enjoyable and fulfilling. Consequently, even though he has limited financial resources to offer to his family, he has an abundance of love and emotional care that he can give to them instead. Based off the family's happiness, these things seem more valuable and long-lasting than material goods.

After Mary's story, Rudolph privately thinks that even if their neighbors were unhappy, at least they achieved more financial success. He wonders what Polly thinks of his family and worries that she finds them to be embarrassing, lower class people, separated from her by their immigrant status.

Rudolph's concern about letting Polly down prevents him from fully understanding his parents' stories. He is so insecure about his first-generation immigrant upbringing, and his family's lack of money, that he doesn't internalize the life lessons in his mother's story about Rosicky.

Rosicky decides to tell everyone about his hard times living in London. He decides to tell the story in English, rather than Czech (even though this is harder for him), because he wants Polly to understand the story too. He talks about being poor and working for the tailor shop at Christmastime. On Christmas Eve, Mrs. Lifschnitz barely fed him because she was saving food for Christmas dinner. Rosicky tried to sleep through the night and ignore his hunger, but he smelled food and discovered a roast goose hidden away for dinner the next day. He tried to take just a small bite of it but was so hungry that he ate half the goose. Ashamed, he walked into the streets, trying to figure out how he could face Mrs. Lifschnitz after ruining her work.

Rosicky wants Polly to hear the story because, despite her coldness to him, he considers her part of the family. Just as he wants his sons to take after his value system, he wants the same for Polly. Rosicky's moment of crisis, when he eats Mrs. Lifschnitz's roast goose, reveals that his patience depends on having his basic needs met. In this way, having his own farm and being able to provide for himself and his family (as opposed to depending on other people) is what allows Rosicky to be the contented, even-tempered person he is in his old age.

Rosicky walked the streets of London, his **heart** hurting with guilt, and ran into four Bohemians—two men and two women—whom he heard speaking Czech. He was so desperate that he begged them for money to buy a new goose. The Bohemians were kind to him—they got him something to eat and drink, as well as money. Rosicky used the money to buy a new goose and extra food for the Lifschnitz family and surprised the whole family and the violin player with it the next day, giving them an unexpected, bountiful meal.

Throughout the story, Rosicky's emotional heart has remained strong, even as his physical heart is failing. This memory of being ashamed of eating Mrs. Lifschnitz's goose, then, contrasts with the rest of the story, as Rosicky's internal guilt over betraying her trust causes him to feel actual pain. Rosicky's wounded heart can then only be healed after he receives kindness from other people—the other Czech immigrants who charitable to him. Their generosity is what, in turn, allows Rosicky himself to be generous to others, buying food for the Lifschnitz family and the violin player also boarding with them. This shows how kindness is something that is paid forward and passed on, a value that Rosicky clearly still holds in the present.

A few days after that Christmas, Rosicky ran into the Bohemian men, and they offered to pay for his travel to New York, where they thought he would have better luck. He agreed to go and left for New York shortly thereafter. Back in the present, after the Rosickys have finished dinner, Rudolph leaves happily with Polly. She seems to have a newfound appreciation for his family and even wants to invite them over for New Year's Eve.

The other Czech immigrants look out for Rosicky, helping him leave London and go to the U.S. Now, the older Rosicky looks out for others in this same way. His story makes a strong impression on Polly, showing that Rosicky's effort to include her made a difference after all—she seems more eager to be part of the family after he's finished telling his story.

PART 6

The winter is a difficult one for the crops, but Rosicky does not worry for himself or his family—he knows that they'll get through the hard times, just as they have before. Instead, he worries for his children, especially newlywed Rudolph. Still, Rosicky wishes more than anything that his children will stay farmers. In his opinion, it is far harder to be an employee than to have the privilege of working for yourself.

Having suffered and seen the worst of life in his youth in London, Rosicky does not fear life—age and life experience have taught him that he can get through anything. Any concern he has, then, is selfless. He worries not about himself, but instead about whether or not his children with take after him and stay farmers, continuing to live on the land that he cultivated for their family. This line of thinking also indicates Rosicky's growing acceptance of his aging—he knows that he is reaching the end of his life, and now he mostly thinks about what he will leave behind.

Rosicky thinks about the difference in people in the city and country—in the former, he often found people to be untrustworthy, competitive, and money-hungry. In the city, if you don't get along with someone, there's no space to be apart from them. Rosicky hopes that his sons will keep living in the country, where he believes they will not see other people's cruelty. Rosicky feels grateful for his rural life, where he has not had to cheat or swindle his way into money—all his income has come from his own hard work, and he feels glad for his close proximity to nature.

Rosicky only wants to earn money in a way that feels honest and not hurtful to other people, and it's important to him to pass down this value to his children. Money means nothing to him if it comes at the cost of his independence and his access to nature, or if it comes from manipulating other people.

That spring, Rosicky starts doing physical labor again, wanting to rake out some Russian thistles that may disrupt the alfalfa crop. He goes to Rudolph's one morning (when Doctor Burleigh happens to be out of town) to rake, and he gets short of breath. While he is running out of breath, he stumbles as he tries to get the horses into their stalls. His chest cramps, and he nearly collapses.

Rosicky's desire to help his children is so strong that even though he knows he should not be out working in the fields, he does so anyway, because he cannot resist helping. In this way, Rosicky's ends up straining his heart, suggesting that living a meaningful life and providing for one's family require some degree of self-sacrifice.

Polly runs to Rosicky just in time and catches his shoulder. She calls him "Father" and asks her to lean on him, so that she can walk him back into the house. Polly cares for him while he continues to writhe in pain, putting hot bath towels on him for an hour until he feels better. Even after, Polly continues to dote on him, calling him "Father" and saying that it "broke [her] heart to see [him] suffer."

Polly transforms fully here from a cold, distant daughter-in-law to Rosicky's companion and caregiver. It's clear, however, that this did not happen all at once. Polly was moved earlier by Rosicky's story of his time in London, and she had already been eager to spend more time with him and the rest of the Rosicky family. Still, seeing Rosicky in physical danger is what causes her to fully transition into a caring daughter figure, selflessly tending to him after he falls. It seems that Rosicky's own warmth and generosity has unlocked a kindness in Polly that she didn't previously show.

Rosicky confesses to Polly that he may die soon and thanks her for caring for him. He tells her that he hopes to live to see her and Rudolph have a child together and rests his eyes. Polly suddenly decides that no one has ever loved her as much as Rosicky does, believing that he has a unique ability to love people. She stares at his **hands** and admires how well-worn they look, without appearing aged and hard the way most farmers' hands do. Rosicky's hands somehow convey "cleverness" and "generosity," and Polly feels that she has learned something important about life just by looking at his hands. Shortly after, Rudolph arrives home, and Polly tells him about his father's near-death experience.

Polly is finally moved to see Rosicky's way of life as beautiful rather than peculiar. She realizes that Rosicky's love and generosity are unique, and by staring at his hands, she has an epiphany that what makes life worth living can be seen in Rosicky himself. Rosicky is a person who's more connected to nature and to uncomplicated, simple joy than most other people are. For the first time, then, Polly is able to forget her own troubles and see that Rosicky's way of life is perhaps more meaningful than the city life she has long idolized.

The next day, Rosicky returns to his home to have breakfast with his family. While his family worries about him, Rosicky thinks fondly of Polly and is grateful to know what a "tender heart" she has, having seen how she cared for him when he was sick. As he smokes his pipe and stitches overalls for his son, his chest starts to cramp again. He gets up to walk to his bed but collapses at the door. By the time Mary finds him, he has died.

Rosicky dies as he wished to live—in his own home, thinking of the people he loves and doing things he enjoys. Rather than spending his final days sequestered to his room, anxious about dying, Rosicky continues to find pleasure and gratitude in being alive. He smokes his pipe (something he loves to do), tailors for his son (an act of service for another person), and thinks about Polly with gratitude. He is even grateful for his near-death experience, as this allowed him to grow momentarily closer to Polly and to see the good in her. Until the very end, Rosicky sees the good in life, and consequently, he dies happy.

Several weeks after Rosicky's death, Doctor Burleigh still regrets not being there. He drives to see the family and stops at the **graveyard**, realizing that Rosicky is now one of the bodies resting there. Burleigh is struck by the natural beauty of the graveyard, and of how it contrasts with the enclosed, oppressive design of graveyards in cities. In the country, even the graveyard as an aura of freedom, and Burleigh thinks to himself that the land is, ironically, "undeathlike." He decides it is a fitting resting place for Rosicky, whose life seems "complete and beautiful."

Doctor Burleigh's visit to the graveyard parallels Rosicky's own visit to the graveyard at the start of the story. Just as Rosicky knew would happen, he has joined the community of deceased loved ones who all rest in the graveyard together. Burleigh, too, is able to see the graveyard as a beautiful and even joyful place rather than an oppressive, morose one. Even though it holds dead bodies, it feels "undeathlike" to him. Nature itself—the wide-open space and the beauty of the land—gives the place a feeling of liveliness, because the earth itself is alive. Burleigh can imagine how different this country graveyard is from a city graveyard, and this allows him to fully understand the arc of Rosicky's life and the set of values that his friend died with. Rosicky lived and worked in cities, seeing them at their best and worst. But ultimately, he believed that people can only feel truly free and fulfilled in the countryside, where they're connected to nature and have control over their lives. Burleigh concludes that Rosicky's life was "complete and beautiful," even though he perhaps could have prolonged his life if he'd settled down and gave up the manual labor that he so enjoyed. The story thus suggests that life is "complete and beautiful" not when it's when it's easy and comfortable, but when it's fulfilling—that is, full of satisfying work, meaningful relationships, and gratitude for small moments of beauty.

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