How Much Land Does a Man Need?

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF LEO TOLSTOY

Tolstoy was born the fourth of five children to wealthy Russian aristocrats. Both of Tolstoy's parents died early in his childhood, and he and his siblings were subsequently raised by relatives on Yasnaya Polyana, the family's estate. As a young man, Tolstoy studied law at Kazan University; however, he was a poor student and quickly dropped out. As a young aristocrat, Tolstoy worked for the betterment of serfs and was an outspoken proponent for their freedom. Tolstoy soon joined the army and began to write, publishing his first novel, *Childhood*, in 1852. He later served as an artillery officer during the Crimean War, where he gained a reputation for bravery and courage, rising to the rank of second lieutenant. After the war, Tolstoy traveled Europe extensively before returning to Yasnaya Polyana to marry Sophia Andreevna Behrs in 1862. Tolstoy and Behrs had thirteen children between 1863 and 1888, and Tolstoy wrote most of his major works, including *War and Peace*, during this time. In the 1870s, Tolstoy endured a moral crisis and subsequent spiritual awakening, after which he declared himself a Christian anarchist and pacifist, rejected all material wealth, and dedicated his life to the nonviolent resistance of the State and Russian autocracy. Tolstoy's radical and outspoken views, along with his desire to give away all his money and inheritance, had a negative effect on his marriage. Behrs objected to many of Tolstoy's religious and political views, and she grew tired of the many spiritual followers Tolstoy had taken in on their estate. Estranged from his wife, he embarked on a journey with his daughter, Aleksandra, in 1910. Elderly and already ill, the journey proved too much for Tolstoy and he died of pneumonia in Astapovo, Russia at the age of 82.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Tolstoy wrote and published "How Much Land Does a Man Need?" 25 years after Alexander II abolished serfdom throughout the Russian Empire in 1861, effectively freeing more than 23 million slaves. The effects of Alexander's reform reverberated for generations, impacting the rich and poor alike, and Tolstoy's story is an example of the hardships resulting from this seemingly good deed. While the serfs gained their freedom, they received little else, and survival was a constant struggle. Good, available land was in short supply and freed serfs had to pay high redemption taxes that often took their entire income. Alexander's reform forced wealthy landowners to sell land to the newly-freed serfs, leaving even the rich with nearly nothing. Landowners were paid by the government in the form of bonds, which after a large tax deduction, quickly fell in value and became worthless. In the years following the emancipation, Russia's economic and social structures were on the constant verge of collapse, leading to peasant uprisings and significant civil unrest and social inequality.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Tolstoy was part of the artistic movement known as realism, which originated in 19th-century French and Russian literature. Other realist works such as Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* and Ivan Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons* sought to represent life as it happened, paying close attention to familiar settings and mundane occurrences. Tolstoy's work similarly depicts these common observations and engages in subjects that are easily relatable. Tolstoy was consumed with thoughts about the meaning of life and death for most of his career, if not his life, and this is a frequent theme in his writing. Tolstoy's greatest works, such as *War and Peace*, *Anna Karenina*, and *The Death of Ivan Ilych* all revolve around the meaning of life and death, and "How Much Land Does a Man Need?" is no different. Tolstoy's works often serve as moral guidebooks, promoting social justice, tolerance, and equality, and his principles of nonviolent resistance have influenced other writers, most notably Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi. Tolstoy himself was greatly influenced by Henry George, an American economist and journalist, who argued that land and all other natural resources should be collectively owned by society; this influence is clearly reflected in "How Much Land Does a Man Need?". Other works that explore the private ownership of land include Jean-Jacques Rousseau's 1754 *Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality Among Men*, in which Rousseau questions the origins of social inequality among men and considers whether that inequality is a natural occurrence. Ultimately Rousseau argues, much like Tolstoy, that social inequality is the product of civilized society, due specifically to the private ownership of land.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** "How Much Land Does a Man Need?"
- **When Written:** 1886
- **Where Written:** Yasnaya Polyana, Tula province, Russia
- **When Published:** 1886
- **Literary Period:** Realism
- **Genre:** Short story
- **Setting:** An unnamed village in 19th-century rural Russia
- **Climax:** Upon reaching the bottom of a hill while circumambulating the Bashkirs' land, Pakhom realizes that

that the sun only appears to have set from his position. At the top of the hill, where the Bashkirs stand waiting, the sun has not yet set. Seeing that he still has more time to return to his starting point and claim his land, Pakhom pushes himself to his death.

- **Antagonist:** The Devil
- **Point of View:** Third-person omniscient

EXTRA CREDIT

Tolstoy's wife transcribed many of his works. Despite their rocky relationship, Tolstoy's wife was a vital part of his early writing career. He began writing *War and Peace* soon after his marriage to Behrs, completing the first draft in 1865. Several revisions followed, and Tolstoy's wife was responsible for deciphering his many annotations and notes, transcribing the entire novel—over 1,200 pages—nearly ten times over a period of seven years.

Tolstoy corresponded with Gandhi. Tolstoy did more than simply influence Mahatma Gandhi, he served as Gandhi's personal mentor. Tolstoy's work and message of nonviolent resistance had inspired Gandhi as a young man, and in 1909 he wrote Tolstoy a letter detailing the struggles of Indian people, sparking a correspondence and friendship that lasted until Tolstoy's death.

PLOT SUMMARY

Pakhom, a poor peasant, and his wife after visited by latter's elder sister. The wife of a merchant, the elder sister brags about her glamourous life in the city and insults her sister's modest country existence. The younger sister defends her lifestyle, claiming self-sufficiency and simplicity is the road to the moral high ground. Pakhom joins in, saying that with enough land he would have nothing to fear—including "the Devil himself." The Devil overhears Pakhom's claim and vows to tempt him with land.

When a local lady landowner suddenly decides to part with her property, Pakhom convinces her to sell him thirty acres. At first, Pakhom seems happy with his purchase. It would be perfect, he thinks, if not for the constant trespassing of local peasants. Pakhom repeatedly fines these peasants and takes them to court, causing tensions to escalate to the point that his neighbors threaten to burn down his house.

Pakhom has grown resentful of his "cramped life" when a traveling peasant tells him of a village south of the Volga river, where families are allotted twenty-five acres of farmland per person upon settling. Pakhom and his family travel to the commune, where they are welcomed and allotted land totaling three times the amount they left behind. Nevertheless, Pakhom wants more, convinced that freehold land—in contrast to leased—is the way to truly become wealthy.

Just as Pakhom is about to purchase some freehold land from a bankrupt peasant, a passing merchant distracts him with stories of plentiful land in the far-away region of the Bashkirs. Over tea, the merchant says that after gifting the Bashkirs a few presents, he was able to secure thirteen thousand acres for a mere twenty copecks apiece.

Pakhom leaves his family behind and travels to the land of the Bashkirs. Upon his arrival, they prove to be friendly yet strange people and offer Pakhom **kumiss** to drink. Pakhom gives the Bashkirs several gifts, as instructed by the passing merchant, and they eagerly look to repay his kindness. Pakhom requests the opportunity to purchase some of their land. The Bashkir elder soon arrives and agrees to sell Pakhom as much land as he can circumnavigate in one day for the price of a thousand roubles, provided Pakhom returns to his starting point by sunset. Pakhom readily agrees.

That night Pakhom experiences a strange dream, in which the Bashkir elder, the passing merchant, and the traveling peasant each transform into the Devil, who then laughs at a dead and nearly-naked figure at his feet. Pakhom realizes that the dead figure is in fact himself. Upon waking, however, he brushes off the dream. He sets his eyes on the land waiting to be claimed, grabs his **spade**, and begins his walk.

Despite the growing heat of the sun, Pakhom easily covers approximately six miles of land, marking his way with the spade and shedding his clothing to keep cool. By midday, Pakhom has grown uncomfortable under the relentless sun, but he pushes on. After having walked ten miles, he realizes must hasten his pace to ensure that he returns by sundown. Pakhom rushes back and arrives at his starting point just as the setting sun crosses the horizon. He then promptly drops dead from exhaustion. His workman uses the spade to dig Pakhom's grave, answering the story's title question. In the end, a man needs only enough land to bury him.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Pakhom – The protagonist of the story, Pakhom is a peasant farmer turned landowner. Pakhom is at first depicted as a hard-working husband and family man, barely getting by according to society's standards. Motivated by the elder sister's criticism of country life and guided by the Devil, however, Pakhom progresses from a poor, yet happy, peasant to a greedy and prideful landowner. As Pakhom gains land and wealth, he becomes increasingly unhappy and, just as his wife predicts, increasingly fearful of losing it all. Although Pakhom claims that with enough land he would "fear no one – not even the Devil himself," this proves untrue, as his greed is fueled by constant anxiety about returning to peasantry. The character of Pakhom

illustrates the social and personal consequences of greed and pride, while simultaneously exposing the dangers of private landownership. He buys more land than he needs and proves unsympathetic to neighboring peasants left with insufficient property to farm and survive; he even fines them for trespassing. Pakhom's character is largely allegorical, embodying many of the traits and behaviors that lead to the civil unrest and social inequality that plagued nineteenth-century Russia.

The Devil – The Devil makes frequent appearances in Tolstoy's story and requires little in the form of introduction. He is eavesdropping during Pakhom's debate over the merits of peasant life with his wife and her elder sister, and he takes Pakhom's claim that enough land would protect him from the Devil as a personal affront. The Devil proclaims, "I shall see that you have plenty of land and that way I'll get you in my clutches," thus beginning Pakhom's quest. The Devil disguises himself as the Bashkir elder, the traveling peasant, and the passing merchant, inserting himself into Pakhom's life at key points during the story and tempting Pakhom to give in to his greedy impulses. Each time Pakhom acquires a new piece of property, the Devil is behind the transaction. Ultimately, the Devil's attempts are successful in bringing about Pakhom's demise, as he lures Pakhom to his death and ostensibly to Hell.

The Younger Sister/Pakhom's Wife – Pakhom's unnamed wife, and sister of the elder sister. The younger sister is proud of her simple life as a peasant, vastly preferring country living to the more complicated city life her sister leads. Believing that "Loss is Gain's elder brother," she alludes to the notion that loss is inevitable whenever wealth is obtained. She openly disapproves of her elder sister's more luxurious lifestyle and considers hard work a staple of morality. The younger sister claims that, as peasants, her family is "afraid of no one," and rely only upon themselves to survive. Her defense in the face of her sister's insults encourages Pakhom to dare the Devil. Pakhom consults his wife in his early attempts to buy land. However, as Pakhom gains more wealth, he interacts with his wife less and less, until she is left behind altogether when he travels to the Bashkirs' land.

The Elder Sister/Merchant's Wife – The wife of a merchant and Pakhom's sister-in-law. The elder sister lives a wealthy and cosmopolitan lifestyle in an unnamed town, and she is judgmental about her younger sister's life as a peasant. Her character serves as a personification of high society and the upper class, and she is thoroughly unpleasant. Her criticism of her sister and brother-in-law's lifestyle sets off the chain of events that results in Pakhom's death.

The Traveling Peasant – An unnamed stranger who passes through Pakhom's village, implied to be the Devil in disguise. Pakhom offers the traveling peasant food and lodging for the night, at which point the peasant tells Pakhom about his experiences working south of the Volga river. He claims the land there is fertile, and that upon joining the village commune, a person is allotted twenty-acres of prime farmland. The traveling peasant tempts Pakhom with promises of cheap land and a good life, and he later transforms into the Devil during Pakhom's ominous dream the night before he walks the Bashkirs' land. This suggests that the Devil has disguised himself as the traveling peasant to fuel Pakhom's greed for land, and Pakhom takes the bait.

The Passing Merchant – An unnamed merchant implied to be the Devil in disguise. The passing merchant distracts Pakhom and prevents him from buying the bankrupt peasant's land with his stories about "the far-off land of the Bashkirs'." According to the merchant, thousands of acres of land can be purchased from the Bashkirs' for much less than the bankrupt peasant's land. Just like the traveling peasant, the passing merchant transforms into the Devil in Pakhom's dream, suggesting he initially appeared only to further tempt Pakhom and fuel his greedy behavior.

The Bashkir Elder – The leader of the Bashkirs and implied to be the Devil in disguise. The Bashkirs are unable to give Pakhom any amount of land without the elder's permission, and he is the only Bashkir who can speak Russian. The Bashkir elder offers Pakhom as much land as he can circumnavigate in one day for a set price of one thousand roubles. He further insists that Pakhom carry a **spade** with him, marking his perimeter as he goes. The Bashkir elder transforms into the Devil in Pakhom's strange dream and encourages Pakhom's greed in the real world, cheering him on until he falls to his death.

The Lady Landowner – An unnamed female landowner of a small estate just outside Pakhom's village. A kind woman, the landowner "had always been on good terms with the peasants and had never ill-treated them," until her newly-hired manager, the old soldier, begins to impose petty fines on Pakhom and the other peasants. When she decides to sell her land, she agrees to sell it to the local peasants based on what they can individually afford.

Semyon – A local peasant and one of only three named characters in the story. When Pakhom discovers that someone has stolen the trees from his land, he is convinced, without proof, that Semyon is the culprit. Pakhom's case against Semyon is quickly dismissed by the District Court due to lack of evidence.

MINOR CHARACTERS

The Bashkirs – An ethnic group indigenous to the areas bordering Northern Asia and Eastern Europe. The Bashkirs have much land to sell. The passing merchant describes them as simple people who "are as stupid as sheep" and ignorant of the Russian language. The Bashkirs prove to be friendly and accommodating.

The Old Soldier – The newly-hired manager of the local lady

landowner's estate. The old soldier repeatedly fines Pakhom and the other peasants for trespassing on the lady's land.

The Bankrupt Peasant – An unnamed peasant who goes broke after buying several hundred acres of land. He is forced to sell his property cheaply, and Pakhom is set to purchase his land when he is distracted by the passing merchant.

The Workman – Pakhom's hired help and his only companion on his trip to the Bashkirs' land. The workman is present when Pakhom drops dead at the end of his walk, and he attempts to revive his employer to no avail. He uses Pakhom's **spade** to dig his grave.

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 CORRUPTING NATURE OF GREED

Leo Tolstoy's 1886 short story "How Much Land Does a Man Need?" centers on Pakhom, a peasant farmer whose insatiable desire for land brings about his downfall. The story begins when Pakhom unwittingly extends a dare to the Devil, claiming that with enough land he would have nothing to fear. Pakhom's subsequent, insatiable pursuit of land leads him down a path of increasing selfishness and avarice, until he ultimately drops dead in his frantic search for more. A cautionary tale and lesson in morality, Tolstoy's story highlights the corruptive nature of greed and the dangers of assigning too much value to material possessions.

Pakhom views land as a source of comfort and security, and he will stop at nothing to obtain as much of it as he can. Rather than satisfaction, however, all this excess land really brings him is the desire for more. In order to buy his first piece of land, Pakhom must sell everything he owns, secure a loan from his merchant brother-in-law, and hire out the labor of his children. Even then, it still takes Pakhom over two years to finish paying for the property. Pakhom's desire to own land is so strong that he is willing to go into debt and exploit his children and family to satisfy his greed.

Pakhom tells his wife, "We must get ahold of twenty acres, or thereabouts. If we don't, we won't be able to live." Despite estimating his needs at roughly twenty acres, Pakhom goes on to buy "about thirty acres of partly wooded land." Pakhom himself has admitted that he does not require that amount of land to survive, and thus selects a parcel that exceeds his need. Pakhom later sells this newly-obtained land for a profit, which he then uses to secure even more property.

Although he now possesses more than three times the amount of land he needs "to live," Pakhom's greed only continues to grow. When the Bashkirs, distant landowners, say he can have as much land as he can circumnavigate on foot in one day, Pakhom pushes himself to the point that he dies of exhaustion. So blinded is Pakhom by his greed that he literally walks to his own death and damnation.

Of course, greed within Tolstoy's story is not limited to Pakhom, but also manifests in the fines larger landowners impose on local peasants. Pakhom's desire to own land is intensified when a neighboring landowner hires an old soldier to manage her estate. A tenant farmer, Pakhom's own small patch of rented land sits near that of the unnamed woman, whom he describes as kind and on good terms with her peasant neighbors. Her newly-hired manager, however, quickly begins to leverage impossible fines on Pakhom and the other peasants for minor infractions, such as wandering horses and stray cows, stressing Pakhom's pocketbook to its breaking point.

When Pakhom becomes a more powerful landowner himself, he similarly imposes fines on the peasants for trespassing. He teaches "them a lesson in court, then another, making several of them pay fines," despite his knowledge that "the peasants weren't doing it deliberately but because they were short of land." Indeed, land shortage was a major problem in 19th-century Russia after serfdom was outlawed in 1861. Although the emancipated serfs could legally own land, there was not enough of it to go around, and that which was available was over-farmed and of poor quality. This shortage of farmland leads to the peasants trespassing on Pakhom's property, and even though he has experienced their plight first-hand, Pakhom still demands payment. In fact, Pakhom seeks fines so frequently and aggressively that he falls "out with the magistrates as well as his neighbors, who threaten to burn his cottage down." Pakhom's attempts to exploit money from peasants prove too much for even the Russian courts to tolerate, and the peaceful farmers, once only mildly irritated, now threaten arson in revenge. Pakhom's blind pursuit for more land thus upends his moral compass and strips him of empathy for his fellow man, resulting in animosity and social unrest.

"How Much Land Does a Man Need?" ultimately argues that greed begets only more greed. Pakhom is continually in search of more land and power throughout the story, often at the expense of others, and he pays the ultimate price for his avarice. As Pakhom gains land and security, he loses basic human decency, and is *still* never able to satisfy his ever-expanding desire. What's more, Pakhom's behavior not only isolates him within his community, but also within his own family; Pakhom relies upon his family to secure his first piece of land, but increasingly neglects them with each new piece of property until they are completely left behind when Pakhom travels far away to buy the Bashkirs' land. By focusing on the

effects that Pakhom's excessive greed has on his family and neighbors, Tolstoy further suggests that the real tragedy is not Pakhom's own untimely death, but the negative impact of his greed on the world around him.

CLASS AND SOCIETY

In "How Much Land Does a Man Need?" Tolstoy places a critical lens on the social hierarchy of Russian society, in which the poor are routinely deprived to ensure that the rich remain wealthy. Peasants in the story are depicted as second-class citizens, and Pakhom's desire for more land stems in large part from a desire for upward mobility. Although Pakhom is overcome by his greed, Russian society is structed in such a way that it is difficult to find comfort and security as a peasant, and, as such, provides the kindling for Pakhom's initial wish to experience the life of the higher class. Ironically, Tolstoy's story suggests that landownership is responsible for the social inequality within Russian society—and, it follows, perpetuates the very injustice that Pakhom attempts to escape.

From the outset of the story, society is portrayed as consisting of two very separate entities: the urban and the rural, or the haves and the have nots. These class differences are exemplified by Pakhom's sister-in-law, the merchant's wife, comes from a nameless town to visit her younger sister in the country. The sister-in-law clearly believes her comparatively cosmopolitan lifestyle to be better than her younger sister's rural existence. Tolstoy writes, "The two sisters sat down for a talk over a cup of tea and the elder started boasting about the superiority of town life, with all its comforts, the fine clothes her children wore, the exquisite food and drink, the skating, parties and visits to the theatre."

The merchant's wife not only prefers her urban life, but also believes that people living in town are inherently better than those in the country. "What do you know about nice clothes and good manners!" she says. "However hard your good husband slaves away you'll spend your lives in the muck and that's where you'll die. And the same goes for your children." In the opinion of the merchant's wife, her sister's poverty is a personal failing that will inevitably be passed down from one generation to the next, underscoring the difficulty of raising one's social status in this world.

While the merchant's wife finds value in material objects and a full social calendar, Pakhom's wife is content with simpler things. According to her, "One day you are rich and the next you might find yourself out in the streets. Here in the country we don't have those ups and downs." The peasant's wife believes that material wealth only leads to complications. The more one person has, the more they stand to lose, and city living is full of temptations. As such, Pakhom's wife considers her rural life a much safer alternative to city living. Each sister is ultimately judgmental of the other, and while the merchant's wife accuses her sister of living in "muck," Pakhom's wife questions her sister's morals due her indulgent lifestyle. Through these two very different sisters, Tolstoy clearly sets up the dichotomy and resentment between the rich and the poor that will serve as the backdrop to Pakhom's landowning ambitions.

Despite his wife's contentment with a simple life, the boastfulness of the merchant's wife causes Pakhom to reflect on his status as a peasant. He claims that he doesn't resent the hard work his life entails, yet his sister-in-law's argument for the value of material objects leads Pakhom to regret that he doesn't have enough land to live as comfortably as she does. He believes that, in addition to his upward mobility, landownership will make his life easier.

Of course, this is not the case, and owning land only brings Pakhom frustration and grief. Just as Pakhom's wife predicts, material wealth is not a genuine indicator of a successful and fulfilled life. In fact, landownership turns Pakhom into an ugly person who beats his wife, mistreats the local peasants, and accuses his neighbors of theft with little proof. Tolstoy thus implies a moral decay associated with placing too much value on material objects and excessive wealth.

What's more, each time the Devil makes an appearance in Tolstoy's story, it is in related in some way to landownership. It is the Devil who influences Pakhom's greed and desire for more land, and when the local peasants quarrel about land, the Devil turns them into "loggerheads" who are unable to get along. The Devil is also at the center of Pakhom's ominous dream the night before he walks the Bashkirs' land, in which he envisions his own dead body at the Devil's feet. Through these references Tolstoy draws a direct parallel between the Devil and landownership, implying an inherent evil in the buying and selling of natural resources.

"How Much Land Does a Man Need?" ultimately serves as a harsh critique of 19th-century Russian society, in which possessions and material wealth define social class and personal worth. Throughout the story, the private ownership of land is continually associated with the Devil and is often the cause of social inequality and unrest. The negative representation of Pakhom's experiences with landownership even suggests that the buying and selling of land is ultimately not in the best interest of a just society; Pakhom's land enables him to exploit more money from the local peasants in the form of fines, effectively keeping them poor and maintaining an unequal social order. Without denying the corrosive nature of greed, then, Tolstoy also critiques the highly-stratified nature of Russian society that contributes to the desire for more wealth in the first place.

GOD, THE DEVIL, AND FREE WILL

As one of only three named characters in "How Much Land Does a Man Need?", the Devil plays a

crucial role in Tolstoy's story. Early on Pakhom declares that with enough land, he would "fear no one–not even the Devil himself!" The Devil, eavesdropping nearby, receives this statement as a personal dare and sets the events of the story in motion. Even as the Devil tempts Pakhom, however, it is Pakhom himself who takes the bait each step of the way. Pakhom's resistance to the Devil's temptations proves insufficient, and he is easily led away from righteousness until he presumably ends up Hell. Even as Tolstoy's story suggests that Pakhom has free will, however, in the sense that he could deny the Devil if he wished, the author also presents God as wielding ultimate power over man. Pakhom may be free to decide how he will live his life; however, it is God's will that decides his fate.

Tolstoy's repeated references to the Devil imply that evil is a constant presence in life. The Devil makes his first appearance when Pakhom boasts to the merchant's wife that with enough land he would not fear the Devil. Tolstoy writes, "the Devil had been sitting behind the stove heard everything." The Devil is not called upon or summoned in any way; on the contrary, he is quietly lying in wait for the perfect time to strike. Later, when the local peasants attempt to buy land in the name of a village commune, they are unable to arrive at a consensus. "They met once, they met twice," Tolstoy writes, "but no progress was made: the Devil had set them at loggerheads and there was nothing they could agree upon." The peasants behave foolishly and are unable to work together, and it is again because of the Devil.

The night before Pakhom circumnavigates the Bashkirs' land, he has a strange dream in which he encounters each of the men involved in his prior attempts to buy land. First, Pakhom sees the Bashkir elder who has the final authority in selling the land; he then sees the traveling peasant who informed him about the commune south of the Volga; and finally, he sees the passing merchant who first told him of the Bashkirs' land. Pakhom soon realizes that the figures he sees are not actually these men, "but the Devil himself, with hoofs and horns, sitting there laughing his head off." The transformation of the men suggests not only the hand of the Devil pushing Pakhom forward every step of the way, but also that all men have the capacity to behave in evil ways.

In contrast to the Devil, God is mentioned very little in Tolstoy's story. Nevertheless, he is an exceedingly powerful force. For example, when Pakhom begins to negotiate with the Bashkirs, he becomes nervous about the validity of their deal. He insists on a contract to legally secure the land, arguing that future generations of Bashkirs may want the property back. After all, Pakhom says, their "lives are in God's hands." Tolstoy implies that the future is out of their control, and only God has can know how their present actions will be received in years to come.

Despite his negotiations, the walk around the Bashkirs' land proves too much for Pakhom. As his body begins to deteriorate, he fears he will not make it back to his starting point, and, as such, will have to forfeit all his land. As Pakhom reaches the end of his walk he states, "I've plenty of land now, but will God let me live to enjoy it?" As Pakhom begins to die, Tolstoy suggests that even though Pakhom has the power to simply sit down and stop following the Devil, it is God, and not the peasant himself, who ultimately dictates if he will live or die. Indeed, each time Tolstoy mentions God in "How Much Land Does a Man Need?" he speaks of God's will; only God has the power to decide if Pakhom survives, and only God knows if the Bashkirs' children will someday want their land back. In both instances, Pakhom and the Bashkirs are ultimately at the mercy of God, whose will decides their fate.

Even though the Devil is a continuous presence who undeniably influences Pakhom, he only provides the *opportunity* for Pakhom to stray from good. Pakhom has free will to resist the Devil at any time yet proves too blinded by his greed to do so. Pakhom is not required by law to fine the local peasants for trespassing on his property, for example, nor is he forced to expend so much energy to obtain such a large piece of the Bashkirs' land; Pakhom makes these decisions freely and follows the Devil willingly, albeit unknowingly. Though Pakhom is free to resist the Devil's evil bait, his will is limited when compared to God's. God, the story argues, holds absolute power over men. If Pakhom has the power to deny the Devil's evil intentions, it is only because God has given it to him. When Pakhom neglects to use this power, he secures his place in Hell.

DEATH AND PRIDE

Tolstoy's portrayal of death in "How Much Land Does a Man Need?" is powerful and absolute, and no amount of land or material wealth can protect Pakhom from its reach. Yet when death comes for Pakhom during his attempt to walk the Bashkirs' land, he repeatedly disregards it and shows surprisingly little fear. It is not simply greed that blinds Pakhom to the danger he is in, however, but also his own pride. Pakhom refuses to heed warnings of death and seems to fear the shame of losing his new-found material wealth and social standing more than his own wellbeing. By linking pride and death, Tolstoy suggests that the former, like greed, is a corrupting influence that leads only to ruin and moral decay. What's more, the finality of death becomes the ultimate insult to Pakhom's pride, as it renders all of his efforts toward obtaining and flaunting wealth meaningless.

Death first appears in the form of an omen in Pakhom's dream the night before he walks the Bashkirs' land. Pakhom sees himself in his dream, wearing only a shirt and trousers, dead on the ground at the foot of the Devil. He wakes in a cold sweat, yet his only response to this disturbing imagery is to note, "The things one dreams about!" Pakhom is too consumed by his greed and excitement about securing as much land as possible

to pay attention to what his dream may actually mean.

As Pakhom walks the perimeter of land he hopes to purchase from the Bashkirs', he sheds his outer coats, shoes, and excess clothing under the strain of the sun. He walks until the "heat had exhausted him, his bare feet were cut and bruised, and his legs were giving way." Even as Pakhom begins to physically resemble the dead version of himself from his dream, he still does not heed its warning. By the time Pakhom finally makes the connection between his dream and his greedy behavior, it is too late. As he reaches the top of the hill where his cap marks his starting point, Pakhom "remembered the dream and he groaned. His legs gave way, he fell forward and managed to reach the cap with his hands." Pakhom's ominous dream is his last thought before he dies, reinforcing its importance. Pakhom's foolishness suggests the depth of his pride, as he fails to grant any weight to this clear omen of his own doom.

It is in large part this pride that keeps Pakhom from forfeiting the Bashkirs' land. Pakhom's initial fears as his body begins to deteriorate are focused on losing the valuable land, rather than on death. Pakhom's "fear made him only more breathless," Tolstoy writes. "On he ran…" To Pakhom, it seems, returning to the village commune to live among the other peasants is a fate worse than death. Even when Pakhom finally does admit the fear that death is upon him, this proves no match for his fear of being made a fool. Pakhom states, "If I stop now, after coming all this way–well, they'd call me an idiot!" He knows that his body cannot possibly take much more abuse, yet he continues to push himself past the breaking point, worrying he will lose face with the other villagers.

At the moment Pakhom realizes that he is most definitely dying, he does not scream or cry. Instead, as he collapses, his behavior is controlled and composed. At this point, Pakhom knows that he has secured his land; as such, his extreme fear of living the life of a peasant fades, and along with it his earlier panic and breathlessness subside. He is left with only his lesser fear of death, which he meets with a mere groan. Through Pakhom, then, Tolstoy highlights the short-sighted futility of pride.

Pride, much like greed, is at the root of Pakhom's problems. Pakhom's pride is wounded when his sister-in-law insults his life as a peasant, and his fear of returning to such an allegedly shameful life after obtaining land only serves to fuel his greedy behavior. By focusing at the end of his life on what other villagers will think, rather than the reality of his desperate situation, Pakhom privileges pride above the finality of death. To do so, Tolstoy's story argues, is deeply foolish. "How Much Land Does a Man Need?" thus also suggests the ultimate triviality of human being's material concerns in the face of their inevitable loss.

SYMBOLS

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

KUMISS

In Tolstoy's story, the beverage named kumiss is used to represent an appreciation of life's pleasures, in contrast with a constant striving for more. Kumiss is mildly alcoholic and holds much cultural significance. Consumed during certain times of the year and during celebrations, the Bashkirs consider kumiss, made from the milk of mares, to be a magical cure-all, and they eagerly offer some to Pakhom upon his arrival in a gesture of friendship and good will. Upon observing the Bakshirs, however, Pakhom notes that "all the men seemed concerned with was drinking kumiss and tea, eating mutton and playing their pipes." The Bashkirs lack Pakhom's greedy ambition, and in fact don't seem compelled to work their land at all; on the contrary, they are content to enjoy the simple things in life—such as kumiss, music, and the company of neighbors. After Pakhom negotiates the land deal with the elder Bashkir, he offers Pakhom more kumiss, tea, and mutton, which they which they happily consume together, suggesting a celebratory atmosphere following their agreement. In the morning before Pakhom's walk, the Bashkirs offer him yet more kumiss, but this time he declines. He is eager to start walking—and, it follows, to secure his land. This last offer of kumiss represents a test of sorts, a final chance for Pakhom to savor the pleasures of the world in front of him rather than reject them in favor of the promise of wealth. Pakhom's rejection of the kumiss foretells his failure, and he dies as he circumnavigates the Bashkirs' land.

PAKHOM'S SPADE

Pakhom's spade symbolizes his greed in "How Much Land Does a Man Need?" A common tool, the elder Bashkir insists that Pakhom take the spade to mark his progress throughout his walk of the Bashkirs' land—essential mapping out the extent of his greed. Pakhom uses the spade to dig hole after hole as he goes, claiming his new land. Even as Pakhom's body begins to deteriorate under the stress of the walk and the heat of the sun, and he fears he will not make it back to his starting point before the sun sets, he refuses to drop the spade, instead clinging to this physical symbol of his potential wealth. Growing further concerned he will lose his land, Pakhom starts running, tossing away his clothing but notably "keeping only the spade which he used for leaning on." His greed, here, is propping him up and propelling him toward his dark end. When Pakhom immediately dies of exhaustion after returning to the starting point, the workman digs his grave with the spade, further reflecting its position as a marker

of the destructive force of greed. Pakhom's greed is what has buried him.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin edition of *How Much Land Does a Man Need? and Other Stories* published in 1994.

Chapter 1 Quotes

"I wouldn't care to change my life for yours," she said. "I admit mine is dull, but at least we have no worries. You live in grander style, but you must do a great deal of business or you'll be ruined. You know the proverb, 'Loss is Gain's elder brother.' One day you are rich and the next you might find yourself out in the street."

Related Characters: The Younger Sister/Pakhom's Wife (speaker), Pakhom, The Elder Sister/Merchant's Wife

Related Themes:

Page Number: 96

Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears in response to the elder sister's criticism of her younger sister's life as a peasant. The elder sister brags about her urban life, insinuating that she is a better person because of her wealth and access to other luxuries. From the younger sister's perspective, however, the wealthy must work constantly to ensure their way of life, and they could easily lose it all, quickly becoming poor. This is a moment of foreshadowing that gestures to Pakhom's eventual fate. The younger sister highlights the precarious nature of wealth, while also drawing attention to the social differences between the upper and lower class, including their deep-seated resentment of each other.

Furthermore, the younger sister's use of the proverb, "Loss is Gain's elder brother," carries a religious connotation. As proverbs are often associated with the bible, they call to mind Tolstoy's own Christian faith. This also points to the story's religious underpinnings, as Pakhom struggles under the weight of his own greed and the Devil's influence.

"It's true what you say," he said. "Take me. Ever since I was a youngster I've been too busy tilling the soil to let that kind of nonsense enter my head. My only grievance is that I don't have enough land. Give me enough of that and I'd fear no one—not even the Devil himself!"

Related Characters: Pakhom (speaker), The Devil, The Elder Sister/Merchant's Wife, The Younger Sister/Pakhom's Wife

Related Themes:

Page Number: 97

Explanation and Analysis

This is Pakhom's own response to the elder sister's criticism of his peasant life. Pakhom's wife, the younger sister, maintains that city life is little more than the Devil's playground, tempting husbands left and right with drink and women. Pakhom agrees with his wife, and his own life is proof of the comparative safety of country living. Pakhom does not regret his simple life of hard work; however, he is too proud to allow his sister-in-law's insults go unchallenged. This pride causes Pakhom to boast that enough land would protect him from evil, and it sets off the chain of events that drives the story's plot and results in Pakhom's death and damnation. Pakhom's boastfulness ultimately leads to his downfall and draws the reader's attention to the dangers of pride. In doing so, Tolstoy suggests that humility—in this instance and throughout the story as a whole—would have been a better course of action for Pakhom.

"Good," he thought. "I'll have a little game with you. I shall see that you have plenty of land and that way I'll get you in my clutches!"

Related Characters: The Devil (speaker), Pakhom

Related Themes:

Page Number: 97

Explanation and Analysis

When Pakhom claims that enough land would protect him from all evil, including the Devil himself, the Devil receives this sweeping declaration as a personal dare. While he is surely insulted, he welcomes the chance to interfere in Pakhom's life. The Devil vows to tempt him with land, preying on Pakhom's vulnerability to the common human condition of always wanting more. The Devil banks on the self-perpetuating nature of Pakhom's greediness—in other words, the Devil knows that Pakhom's greed will only lead to more greed, and that he can thus entice Pakhom with more and more land.

This quote illustrates how the Devil is able lure Pakhom to

sin, and ultimately to Hell, by providing him with multiple *opportunities* to sin. In other words, the Devil doesn't force Pakhom to sin—he simply opens up opportunities for Pakhom to behave sinfully. Although Pakhom has free will and thus the power to resist the evil of the Devil, he ultimately chooses to give into his boundless greed and pride.

Chapter 2 Quotes

❝ They met once, they met twice, but no progress was made: the Devil had set them at loggerheads and there was nothing they could agree upon. In the end they decided to buy the land in separate lots, each according to what he could afford.

Related Characters: The Devil, The Lady Landowner, Pakhom

Related Themes:

Page Number: 98

Explanation and Analysis

When the local lady landowner suddenly decides to sell her small estate, Pakhom and the other peasants, having grown tired of her hired manager's fines, convince her to sell them her land to be used as a village commune. With more land, it is less likely they will be fined if their cattle and other livestock have more room to roam. Unfortunately, they are unable to come to a consensus over how much each will pay, and they cannot buy the land in the name of the commune. Tolstoy writes that Devil made them foolish, halting their progress. Just as the Devil promised, he is actively working to get Pakhom in his "clutches." If Pakhom and the other peasants collectively buy the property, his problems with excessive fines will be resolved, and he may stop looking for more land. To ensure that Pakhom buys his own land, thus beginning his cycle of greed, the Devil turns the peasants into "loggerheads," so that they must each buy a section of land individually. Additionally, this quote highlights the presence of evil in everyday life. The Devil is present at every turn and must be resisted constantly.

Chapter 3 Quotes

❝ "The land is so fertile," he said, "that rye grows as high as a horse and it's so thick you can make a whole sheaf from only five handfuls! One peasant arrived with a copeck and only his bare hands to work with and now he has six horses and two cows."

Related Characters: The Traveling Peasant (speaker), The Devil, Pakhom

Related Themes:

Page Number: 100

Explanation and Analysis

Once Pakhom secures thirty acres of property from the landowner near the village, he lives happily on his land. However, his happiness is short-lived when the local peasants begin trespassing on his land and all Pakhom's efforts to keep them off his property only make matters worse. A traveling peasant, who arrives just as Pakhom is feeling cramped and in need of more land, tells Pakhom about a much larger commune, just south of the Volga river. However, unbeknownst to Pakhom, the traveling peasant is the Devil in disguise, influencing Pakhom's actions and enticing him with more land.

Unlike the barren and over-farmed property typically available to peasants, the land near the Volga river is rich and fertile. The traveling peasant quickly targets Pakhom's most urgent needs. Poor, infertile farmland often left peasants without crops, and they were still responsible to pay taxes on land that yielded little to no profit. The land near the Volga promises much return, so Pakhom is immediately interested. This quote underscores the social and economic hardships of the peasants, along with appealing to Pakhom's greedy nature. To Pakhom, more land is more money, and with it comes higher social standing.

Chapter 5 Quotes

❝ Then they conferred again and started arguing about something. Pakhom asked what it was and the interpreter told him, "Some of them are saying they should first consult the elder about the land. They can't do anything without his permission, but some of the others say it's not necessary."

Related Characters: The Bashkir Elder, Pakhom, The Bashkirs

Related Themes:

Page Number: 104

Explanation and Analysis

Overworked from farming on the commune near the Volga river and renting additional wheat fields, Pakhom travels seven long days to the land of the Bashkirs in hopes of buying some cheap land, He arrives with his workman and

gifts for the locals and asks about obtaining some property. The Bashkirs do not speak Russian, and Pakhom requires an interpreter to understand their language and strange customs.

The Bashkirs tell Pakhom he can have as much land as he wants. Since he has been kind and brought them gifts, it is their custom to return the favor. However, some of the Bashkirs believe that they have spoken too soon. The consent of the elder Bashkir is needed for them to sell any land. It is interesting that some Bashkirs claim his consent is not necessary, especially since Pakhom is lured to their land by the Devil in disguise. This quote serves to foreshadow Pakhom's failure to secure the Bashkirs' land. The Bashkirs know that Pakhom will never buy their land, and he is only there because of his greed and the Devil's meddling. The elder Bashkir's permission is not necessary because Pakhom's greed will never allow him to settle for "enough" land.

Chapter 6 Quotes

"Thank you for your kind words. Yes, you do have a great deal of land, but I need only a little. However, I would like to be sure which will be mine, so couldn't it be measured and made over to me by some sort of contract? Our lives are in God's hands and although you good people are willing to give me the land now, it's possible your children might want it back again."

Related Characters: Pakhom (speaker), The Bashkir Elder

Related Themes:

Page Number: 104

Explanation and Analysis

As Pakhom begins to negotiate with the elder Bashkir regarding some of their property, he doubts the validity of their deal. The elder Bashkir informs Pakhom that he can have any parcel of land he chooses, and as much as he wants. This is quite unbelievable to Pakhom, and he insists on a formal contract, much like the passing merchant had been issued, to legalize the transaction.

Pakhom argues that he can not possibly see the future. Who is to say that future generations of Bashkirs will not dispute his ownership? This quote implies that while the elder Bashkir may have good intentions in selling the land to Pakhom now, only God, as the ultimate authority, knows how those actions may be received in the future. In this way, along with displaying the awesome power of God, the passage highlights the negative aspects of landownership.

Future generations of Bashkirs will most likely feel some sort of connection to their native land, and they will be unable to freely access it if it is owned by Pakhom. The Bashkirs' connection to their land is not severed with the signing of an arbitrary contract.

Chapter 7 Quotes

And then Pakhom saw that it wasn't the peasant, but the Devil himself, with horns and hoofs, sitting there laughing his head off, while before him lay a barefoot man wearing only shirt and trousers. When Pakhom took a closer look he saw that the man was dead and that it was himself.

Related Characters: The Passing Merchant, The Traveling Peasant, Pakhom, The Devil

Related Themes:

Page Number: 106

Explanation and Analysis

The night before Pakhom walks the Bashkirs' land to secure his new property, he has a terrible and ominous dream. In it, the elder Bashkir transforms into the passing merchant who first told Pakhom of the Bashkirs' land, who then suddenly turns into the peasant, who proves to really be the Devil in disguise.

Each of the men the Devil masquerades as have a hand in providing land to Pakhom in some way, just as the Devil had sworn to do early in the story. Through these characters, the Devil tempts Pakhom with more and more land, providing plenty of opportunities for Pakhom to feed his blind greed. However, each opportunity is also a chance for Pakhom to respond humbly and be content with what he has. Unfortunately, Pakhom repeatedly chooses wealth and greed instead, and this quote describing his dream serves as a warning of what will come to if he continues to indulge the Devil. Moreover, by connecting the Devil so closely with landownership, Tolstoy emphasizes the inherent evil associated with the buying and selling of natural resources.

Chapter 8 Quotes

On and on he went—but there was still a long way to go. He started running and threw away his coat, boots, flask, cap, keeping only the spade which he used for leaning on. "Oh dear," he thought, "I've been too greedy. Now I've ruined it. I'll never get back by sunset."

Related Characters: Pakhom (speaker), The Bashkirs

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 109

Explanation and Analysis

As the sun begins to set on the day that Pakhom circumnavigates the Bashkirs' land, he begins to fade under the stress of his exhaustion. As he begins to fear that he has been too greedy and will not make it back to the starting point in time, he removes his excess clothes and supplies to speed up his pace. Pakhom now physically mirrors the dead Pakhom of his dream. By removing his coat, boots, and cap, Pakhom's shirt and trousers are all that remain, and this is exactly how he is dressed when he sees himself dead at the foot of the Devil.

Pakhom discards his flask of water and keeps the spade, which is a significant choice. The spade, given to him by the elder Bashkir to mark his land along the way, serves as a symbol throughout the story of Pakhom's impending death. He keeps it close during his walk to mark his territory, and now, as he begins to fade, he uses it to lean on. Each time Pakhom uses the spade, he digs himself deeper into greed and closer to his death.

Chapter 9 Quotes

❝ Although he feared death, he could not stop. "If I stopped now, after coming all this way—well, they'd call me an idiot!" So on he ran until he was close enough to hear the Bashkirs yelling and cheering him on.

Related Characters: Pakhom (speaker), The Bashkirs

Related Themes:

Page Number: 109

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Pakhom begins to fear that he will die from exhaustion, but he refuses to stop. If he rests, he will not make it back to his starting point by sunset, and he will forfeit all the land—plus, the Bashkirs will brand him a fool. This quote illustrates how desperate Pakhom's situation is. He would rather die trying to get more land than live without it as a peasant. Russian society is such that Pakhom fears he won't be able to live without adequate land, and this social injustice, at least in part, fuels Pakhom's deadly greed and unfortunate pride. This quote also underscores the undue attention Pakhom gives the Bashkirs and what they think about him, even though he considers them ignorant and lesser than him. In this way, Pakhom serves his pride over his certain death.

❝ Pakhom's workman picked up the spade, dug a grave for his master—six feet from head to heel, which was exactly the right length—and buried him.

Related Characters: The Bashkirs, The Workman, Pakhom

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 110

Explanation and Analysis

Just before this passage, Pakhom drops dead from exhaustion, bleeding from his mouth. He had refused to stop and rest, and he insisted on walking the largest piece of land. As Pakhom dies, alone in the Bashkirs' field with only his workman, he still carries his spade. The elder Bashkir had given it to him and instructed Pakhom to mark his land along the way. By sunset, Pakhom had removed most of his clothing and discarded his supplies, keeping only the spade, which serves as a symbol of his looming death. Appropriately, the workman uses the same spade that Pakhom had designated his land with to dig his grave. This last passage answers the title question of Tolstoy's story. A man only needs enough land to be buried on, and Pakhom had secured enough land long ago. With this quote, Tolstoy stresses the uselessness of greed and pride when faced with the finality of death.

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.

CHAPTER 1

An elder sister from an unnamed town visits her younger sister in the country. The elder sister boasts about her city life, finding it superior to county life. She believes that people living in town are simply better than peasants.

The contrast between the elder sister and the younger sister is an illustration of the social hierarchy of nineteenth-century Russia, where material possessions and wealth determine individual worth. The elder sister embodies the characteristics and traits commonly associated with higher social standing, including resentment of the lower class.

The younger sister adamantly defends her life as a peasant. Believing that loss always follows gain, she prefers a simple life without the temptations of the city. She equates hard work with morality and insists that the self-sufficiency of farming means that "we don't have to crawl to anyone and we're afraid of no one."

The younger sister is equally resentful of the elder sister, and she believes her life as a peasant is morally *superior. The younger sister is portrayed as a better person compared to the elder sister because she works harder and avoids the evil vices frequently found in the city, such as drinking and gambling. Additionally, her subsistence lifestyle ensures she is beholden to no one, unlike her sister, the wife of a merchant, who undoubtedly must answer to some authority.*

Pakhom, the younger sister's husband, soon joins the debate. He values his life as a peasant and does not regret all his hard work. However, he does wish he had more land, claiming that with enough land he would "fear no one—not even the Devil himself!"

Pakhom is too proud to listen to the women debate without defending his peasant lifestyle. Ironically, in his defense of peasantry, Pakhom wishes for social mobility into a higher social class, believing that more land, and therefore more money, will somehow protect him from evil.

Nearby, the Devil sits listening to the family's conversation. He receives Pakhom's claim as a personal dare and vows to tempt Pakhom with "plenty of land" so that he may get him in his "clutches."

The Devil's presence in Pakhom's home demonstrates the continual threat of evil in everyday life, which must be resisted constantly. Pakhom's prideful behavior directly draws the ire of the Devil, who hopes to lure Pakhom to Hell by enticing him with land. Pakhom may have escaped the Devil's attention had he behaved more humbly in response to the elder sister's argument.

CHAPTER 2

A nearby lady landowner of a small estate hires an old soldier to manage her land. While the landowner had always treated the peasants well, her newly hired manager begins to impose fines on Pakhom and the other peasants for minor infractions, such as wandering livestock.

The lady landowner's estate is already established, so her hiring of the old soldier appears quite out of the blue. She does not have a history of imposing fines, which implies that the old soldier fines the peasants out of spite, rather than out of need. The old soldier's sudden appearance is suspicious, and his sinful behavior is a sign of evil, and by extension, the Devil.

Pakhom is repeatedly fined by the old soldier until he is nearly broke and so stressed that he beats and swears at his family. He longs for winter when he can keep his livestock in a shed, eliminating the risk of them wandering onto the lady landowner's estate and angering the old soldier.

The old soldier is relentless in fining Pakhom, making his life as a peasant miserable. The old soldier's behavior fuels Pakhom's desire to have more land, just as promised by the Devil. Pakhom simply does not have enough land to keep his livestock reasonably contained.

The lady landowner suddenly decides to sell her estate and the local peasants fear the innkeeper will buy her land, imposing even more fines on them. Pakhom fears that his family will not survive if he continues to be fined.

The lady landowner's decision to sell her land comes about as unexpectedly as her hiring of the old soldier, and this too suggests the evil influence of the Devil. Furthermore, Pakhom's fear that the innkeeper—someone of higher social standing—will continue to fine the peasants points to widespread moral deficiency within the upper class.

The local peasants convince the lady landowner to sell her property to them in the name of a village commune. However, the Devil turns them into "loggerheads," and they are unable to agree upon a price. As a result, the peasants are forced to buy the land individually, based on what they can afford.

Just when it appears that the peasants will be able to own the land collectively, they begin to quarrel and bicker. Again, the Devil complicates Pakhom's life by interfering with the deal and making the peasants behave foolishly.

Pakhom manages to buy thirty acres of the lady landowner's estate after securing a personal loan, selling his possessions, and hiring out the labor of his children. Even then, Pakhom only has enough for a down payment, and he must make a promise to pay the remaining cost over the next two years.

Pakhom is so blinded by his greed and the efforts of the Devil that he exploits his family and goes into debt just to satisfy his desire for more land.

CHAPTER 3

Pakhom lives happily as a landowner until the peasants begin trespassing in his meadows and cornfields. He tries to politely ask the peasants to keep off his land but is unsuccessful. He understands that the peasants only trespass because they are short on land of their own, but he fears they will deplete his resources, and he will be left with nothing. Frustrated, Pakhom contacts the District Court

When serfdom was outlawed in Russia in 1861, and millions of slaves were granted their freedom, the number of serfs who were legally entitled to own property greatly exceeded the amount of available land. This creates economic and social hardships that were felt for generations. The peasants must trespass on Pakhom's land out of necessity, not malice. However, despite his own experiences with poverty and insufficient land, Pakhom is greedy and unsympathetic.

Pakhom repeatedly fines the local peasants, and they become so angry that they begin to purposefully trespass on his land. One day, Pakhom discovers that many of his trees have been cut down and stolen. He is convinced that Semyon, a local peasant, is responsible. Pakhom accuses Semyon without proof, and the magistrates quickly dismiss his case. Pakhom's neighbors are so angry with his numerous fines that they threaten to burn down his house

Pakhom's legal actions cause him to lose more in terms of land and natural resources, and his greed causes the ordinarily peaceful peasants to respond violently. Moreover, Pakhom's greed leads to additional moral decay, as he begins to behave like the old soldier he once hated. He accuses Semyon of stealing, simply because he is a peasant. Pakhom has no tangible proof, but to him, the fact Semyon is a peasant is proof enough that he has stolen the trees.

Although Pakhom has plenty of land, he begins to feel cramped on the commune. He hears rumors that many of the peasants are considering relocating to a different village. Pakhom relishes the opportunity to buy their land, making his estate bigger.

Pakhom's greed intensifies. He owns more than enough land to live comfortably, yet he still desires more, suggesting that his wants will never be satiated. The peasants want to relocate because he has made them miserable, but instead of recognizing this, Pakhom considers their misfortune another chance to satisfy his greed.

In the meantime, a traveling peasant seeks food and lodging at Pakhom's cottage. The peasant tells Pakhom about a village commune south of the Volga river where families are given twenty-five acres of land per person at no charge. In addition, each member of the commune is also able to purchase more land for three roubles per acre.

Disguised as the traveling peasant, the Devil further complicates Pakhom's life. He encourages Pakhom to leave his village for the commune by appealing to his seemingly endless greed.

Pakhom sells his land, home, and cattle for a profit and moves his entire family to the large village commune south of the Volga river. He is convinced that he will face less trespassing and less aggravation if he has more land.

The fact that Pakhom sells his property for a profit also has a negative connotation when it comes to his ethics and morality. A profit suggests that Pakhom either underpaid the initial seller or overcharged the buyer. Either way, Pakhom's profit seems like a form of theft itself.

CHAPTER 4

At the new commune, Pakhom is allotted one hundred acres of land, twenty-five acres for each member of his family. He is also granted use of the communal pasture and finally has plenty of good, arable farmland. He begins to grow corn and wheat.

Initially, Pakhom's new commune is described in nearly utopic terms. Pakhom has over three times the amount of land he owned in the village, and in addition to wheat, a common farm staple, he can now grow corn. The new commune provides Pakhom with increased social mobility.

It is not long before Pakhom begins to feel cramped at this commune as well. He wants to grow more wheat but does not have enough suitable land. The commune proves to be short on land and the poorest peasants must mortgage their wheat to merchants to pay their taxes. Pakhom rents additional land to sow more wheat, but this land is far from the village and inconvenient.

Pakhom's greed makes his happiness impossible. He has more than enough land to live comfortably, but he is only happy if he turns a profit as well. There is not enough land on the commune to meet the basic needs of all the peasants, and while the poor mortgage their wheat to get by, Pakhom secures extra land to make more money. It seems Pakhom embodies the age-old adage, "the grass is always greener on the other side," as he's never satisfied with what he has.

Pakhom soon grows tired of renting land. He is convinced that owning "freehold" land (property that is not rented or part of a commune) will be more convenient and profitable. However, since land is in such high demand, Pakhom has a difficult time finding suitable land to buy.

Pakhom does not want to work all that hard to make a living—a stark contrast to the hardworking Pakhom introduced in the beginning of the story. Now, he believes that by avoiding rent and communal living through private landownership, his life will be easier, and he will make even more money.

A bankrupt peasant agrees to sell Pakhom thirteen hundred acres of land for a fair price. However, a passing merchant suddenly appears looking for a place to water his horses.

The Devil once again inserts himself into Pakhom's life, this time disguised as a passing merchant. Considering the pattern the story has taken thus far, the Devil will likely provide another opportunity for Pakhom to sin.

The merchant tells Pakhom that he has just returned from the far-away land of the Bashkirs, where he had purchased thirteen thousand acres of land for one thousand roubles. In addition to a few presents for the Bashkirs, the land had only cost him twenty copecks per acre. The merchant says the Bashkirs are "as stupid as sheep and you can get land off them for practically nothing." Pakhom quickly forgets about the bankrupt peasant and decides to travel to the Bashkirs.

The property that the merchant tells Pakhom about is far from the commune, creating distance from the complicated hierarchy of Russian society and drawing increased attention to its flaws. However, the Bashkirs are still described as less than the Russians. Where the Russians are smart, the Bashkirs are stupid and easily taken advantage of, and Pakhom has no objection to taking advantage of them, underscoring his moral decay and greed.

CHAPTER 5

Pakhom sets off for the land of the Bashkirs immediately, leaving behind his family and taking only a workman with him. They stop to purchase tea, vodka, and other small presents for the Bashkirs along the way. They travel for a full seven days before arriving on the Bashkirs' settlement.

Pakhom's greed and desire for more land has isolated him completely from his family, particularly from his wife, whose presence in the story decreases with each new land purchase, until she is left behind all together.

Strangely, the Bashkirs don't appear to work very much, don't plough their fields, and allow their livestock to wander freely. They happily sit drinking **kumiss**, simply enjoying each other's company. Pakhom describes them as kind, ignorant, and speaking no Russian.

The Bashkirs are portrayed as the other to Pakhom and the Russians. Pakhom considers them ignorant simply because they are different. They frequently drink kumiss, an alcoholic drink made from fermented mare's milk, culturally known for its healing properties.

Through an interpreter, the Bashkirs warmly welcome Pakhom, providing him with a luxurious tent and plenty of **kumiss**. They slaughter a sheep to feed him, and Pakhom presents them with his gifts. Per their custom, the Bashkirs offer Pakhom a gift of his choosing as repayment for his kindness and presents. Wasting little time, Pakhom immediately requests land.

The Bashkirs are exceedingly kind to Pakhom, even though he hopes to gain from their perceived ignorance. Within the Bashkir culture, kumiss is often consumed during times of celebration, and Pakhom's arrival is a cause to celebrate. Their kindness is genuine, unlike Pakhom's. Pakhom only presents gifts to the Bashkirs hoping for land in return.

The Bashkirs become visibly excited when Pakhom requests land. They claim that Pakhom can have as much land as he would like, all he must do is pick out a parcel. The Bashkirs begin to argue. According to custom, the Bashkirs can do nothing without the consent of the elder Bashkir; however, many of the Bashkirs claim his consent is not necessary.

The Bashkirs' excitement over Pakhom's request for land is suspicious, and their bizarre behavior implies a desire to give their land away. Their disagreement over the necessity of the elder Bashkir's consent suggests that they have some inside knowledge of Pakhom's greediness and the way it will affect his ability to purchase their land.

CHAPTER 6

While the Bashkirs continue to argue, the elder Bashkir suddenly appears. They all stand at attention as he enters, and Pakhom presents him with five pounds of tea and his best robe. Unlike the other Bashkirs, the elder speaks to Pakhom in Russian.

The elder Bashkir commands respect and, speaking Russian, is less ignorant than the others in Pakhom's eyes. Once again, the Devil has disguised himself—posing as the elder, he directly inserts himself into Pakhom's life to further influence his sinful behavior.

The elder Bashkir confirms that Pakhom may have his pick of as much land as he wants, yet Pakhom is dubious. Without a formal contract, Pakhom fears that the Bashkirs may dispute his ownership later, since their lives are, after all, "in God's hands." The elder agrees to provide Pakhom with a contract to ensure ownership.

Pakhom can hardly believe his luck, and he questions the validity of the deal, thinking it too good to be true. How can he be sure that future generations of Bashkirs won't want the land back? According to Pakhom, the future is out of their hands, and God has complete control.

The elder Bashkir informs Pakhom that there is a set rate for their land, one thousand roubles per day. The Bashkirs sell land based on how much ground a buyer can cover in one day. The amount of land Pakhom can walk around in one day is his for the price of one thousand roubles.

The Bashkirs' method of selling land exacerbates Pakhom's greed—he likely believes that he will be able to cover a large amount of land and buy even more property than he imagined.

The elder Bashkir informs Pakhom that he must return to his starting point by sunset, or he will forfeit all the land. He also insists that Pakhom carry a **spade** to mark his perimeter along the way. Pakhom instantly agrees to the terms and they celebrate with more **kumiss**, tea, and mutton.

The Bashkirs' land deal is a test of Pakhom's greed. If he attempts to take too much, he will end up with nothing. The elder Bashkir wishes Pakhom luck and good health in the form of more kumiss and also introduces the spade, which later becomes a symbol of Pakhom's death.

CHAPTER 7

Pakhom returns to his comfortable tent for the night, excited for his walk the next day and is unable to sleep. Just before dawn, Pakhom drifts off and has a strange and ominous dream.

Pakhom experiences his dream just before dawn, the time of night typically considered to be the darkest. This is a perfect time for evil to appear.

Pakhom dreams that he is awake in his tent and hears the Bashkirs laughing. He goes outside and sees the Bashkir elder, holding his side and laughing hysterically. On closer inspection, Pakhom realizes that it is not the elder at all, but the passing merchant who had told him about the Bashkir land. Suddenly, the merchant turns into the traveling peasant who informed Pakhom of the commune south of the Volga river.

Each of the three men Pakhom sees in his dream are connected in some way to his past land transactions—and, as the reader knows, are all different embodiments of the Devil. The fact that the Bashkirs are laughing hysterically implies that Pakhom is unknowingly the center of an ongoing joke.

Pakhom's dream soon takes an even stranger turn, and the traveling peasant transforms into the Devil himself, complete with horns and hoofs, laughing. Pakhom discovers that his own dead body is at the foot of the devil, wearing only shirt and trousers, without shoes.

The Devil reveals his identity to Pakhom in his dream. As each of the Devil's disguises led Pakhom to purchase land, Tolstoy draws a direct parallel between evil and land ownership.

Pakhom is startled awake and quickly shakes off the dream. It is nearly sunrise, and he goes to wake the Bashkirs. They assemble and offer Pakhom more **kumiss**, but he declines, anxious to start his walk.

Despite serving as an explicit warning of his own death, Pakhom ignores his dream. He is impatient to begin his walk and secure more land, suggesting that his greed outpaces all other desires and concerns—even for his own safety. Significantly, Pakhom refuses offers of kumiss, a symbol of good health and life.

CHAPTER 8

Pakhom and the Bashkirs gather on small hill and survey the land. Beautiful farmland stretches as far as the eye can see, and the elder Bashkir confirms that Pakhom may have as much of it as he likes. The elder marks the starting point with his fox-fur cap, and Pakhom places one thousand roubles on the cap. He removes his outer coat, packs a small sack of bread, and secures a flask to his belt. He makes sure to grab the **spade** before setting off in the direction of the rising sun.

As Pakhom considers where to begin his walk, he removes his outer clothing in preparation. He begins to physically resemble the dead Pakhom in his dream (who was barefoot and wore only a hat and trousers), yet he still does not heed the warning. Again, attention is drawn to the spade, the tool that Pakhom will mark his land with.

Pakhom walks a steady pace and digs his first hole after three quarters of a mile. He continues, digging more and more holes to mark his land. After several miles, he removes his overcoat under the heat of the sun. It is now past breakfast, and Pakhom removes his shoes to keep cool.

With each new hole Pakhom digs to denote his property, his greed carries him further away from the fur cap and his starting point, increasing his exhaustion. As he removes his shoes, he even more closely resembles his dream, though he doesn't internalize this.

Pakhom makes a sharp left turn and continues walking in a new direction. He stops for water and bread and becomes tired, wanting to sleep. Eager to get as much land as he possibly can, though, Pakhom pushes on and refuses to rest.

Pakhom's body is failing, yet his greed drives him on. He could simply stop and rest (and settle for a little less land), he refuses. Once again, his greed is overpowering and threatens his own well-being.

Pakhom continues to walk, and just as he is about to turn left again to begin making his way back to his starting point, he spots a lush hollow perfect for growing flax. He continues through the hollow, making his way with the **spade**.

Pakhom has grown only wheat and corn in the past, yet he suddenly desires flax. He must go out of his way to navigate the hollow, increasing the unlikelihood of him not returning by sundown. He continues to dig with the spade, each hole adding to his exhaustion and driving him further from his starting point—and, unbeknownst to him, closer to death.

By now, Pakhom has walked over ten miles and marked two of the three sides of his property. He must walk quickly down the third side, making it considerably shorter and lopsided to walk the ten miles back to the Bashkirs and the elder Bashkir's fox-fur cap.

Pakhom has been too greedy. He has attempted to take too much, and his chances of returning by sundown are growing slim. The parcel of land he's claimed is now lopsided and thin, suggesting that he could have actually claimed more land had he been more reasonable and moderate.

CHAPTER 9

Pakhom finds walking the third side considerably difficult. The sun is high and hot, and his bare feet are cut and bruised. He is exhausted, but the waning sun reminds him that there is no time to rest.

Pakhom's body continues to deteriorate, yet his greed and the approaching deadline spur him on. He is willing to risk death to secure more land.

Pakhom worries that he has been too greedy. Making it back in time seems impossible, and he throws off his excess clothes, including his boots, flask, and cap. He grabs the **spade** and begins to run back to his starting point.

For the first time, Pakhom acknowledges his greed, yet it makes little difference in his behavior. He removes the last of his clothes, now appearing exactly has he had in his dream, but he still does not stop. Strangely, as he lightens his load, he leaves behind his water and keeps the spade. In this way, Pakhom's greed causes him to choose death over life, as the spade enables him to mark more land along the way, compounding his exhaustion and leading to his death.

Pakhom worries that he may die from exhaustion, but he fears that the Bashkirs will laugh and call him foolish for taking so much land if he is unable to complete his walk. He can hear the Bashkirs cheering him on from the starting point, and their yells give him additional strength. Running on, Pakhom still fears he will not make it in time.

Pakhom's greed is further fueled by his pride. Even as he is faced with death, he cannot bring himself to stop and face the Bashkirs as a failure, and a peasant. As the Bashkirs cheer him on, Pakhom is more focused on them than he is on his own desperate situation and his impending death.

As Pakhom reaches the bottom of the hill from where he began, it suddenly becomes dark. From his position at the foot of the hill, it appears that the sun has set. He considers stopping, but he hears the continued cheers of the Bashkirs from the top of the hill. The sun has not yet set on the Bashkirs.

Even when Pakhom believes he has lost the land and the sun has set, he still refuses to stop and rest. Pakhom's pride and the cheers of the Bashkirs drive him up the hill, even though it seems unlikely that he can outrun the setting sun.

At the top of the hill, the elder Bashkir sits by his fox-fur cap, laughing. Suddenly, Pakhom remembers his strange dream from the night before, and just as he reaches the cap, his legs give way. Pakhom drops dead from exhaustion, blood dripping from his mouth. His workman runs to his body, and realizing that Pakhom is dead, he buries him using the **spade**.

Pakhom finally realizes his dream was a warning, but it's too late. Overwhelmed by his greed and pride, Pakhom is blind to the efforts of the Devil, and he pays with his life. Having left his family behind, only the workman is with Pakhom when he dies, who uses the spade to dig one last hole. Pakhom's untimely death underscores the grave consequences of pride and greed.

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