

How Much Land Does a Man Need?

LEO TOLSTOY

Presented with opportunities, we choose our destinies, thinking that we choose of our own free will. But — speaking through an idle conversation with some stranger, or maybe in the form of an old man holding his sides in laughter even as he promises us everything we want — is it fate that chooses for us?

1

An older sister from town came to visit her younger sister in the country. The elder had married a merchant in town; the younger a peasant in the country. Drinking tea, the sisters chatted. The elder began to brag — to boast of her life in town; how spacioously and comfortably she lived, how she dressed the children, how nicely ate and drank, and how she went for drives, excursions, and to the theater.

The younger sister became offended and began disparaging the merchant's life and exalting her peasant life.

"I wouldn't trade my life for yours," she said. "Our life is rough, I grant you, but we haven't a worry. You may live more neatly, and, perhaps, earn a lot at your trade, but you may lose it all. Remember the proverb: loss is gain's big brother. It often goes like that: one day you're rich and the day after, you're begging in the streets. But our peasant life is more stable: a meager life, but a long one. We won't be rich, but we'll always eat."

The old sister began to speak:

"Eat — like the pigs and calves! No elegance, no manners! No matter how hard your man works, you'll live and die in manure and so will your children!"

"What of it," said the younger; "that's our way. Our life may be hard, but we bow to no one, are afraid of no one, while you in town are surrounded by temptations. It's all right now, but tomorrow it may turn ugly — suddenly you'll find your man tempted by cards, or wine, or some young charmer, and everything will turn to ashes. That's what often happens, doesn't it?"

Pakhom, lying on top the stove, listened to the women babbling.

"It's the absolute truth," he said. "We're so busy tilling mother earth from infancy, we don't get such nonsense in our heads. There's just one trouble — too little land! If I had all the land I wanted, I wouldn't fear the Devil himself!"

The women finished their tea, chatted some more about dresses, cleared the dishes, and went to bed. But the Devil sitting behind the stove had heard everything. He was delighted that the peasant wife had induced her husband to boast and, particularly, to boast that if he had enough land even the Devil could not get him.

"All right," he thought, "we'll have a tussle, you and I; I'll give you plenty of land. And then I'll get you through your land."

2

Next to the peasants there lived a small landowner. She had three hundred and

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twenty-five acres of land. And she had always lived in peace with the peasants — never abusing them. Then she hired as overseer a retired soldier who began to harass the peasants with fines. No matter how careful Pakhom was, either his horses wandered into her oats, or his cattle got into her garden, or his calves strayed onto her meadow — and there was a fine for everything.

Pakhom would pay up and then curse and beat his family. Many were the difficulties Pakhom suffered all summer because of that overseer. Come winter, he was glad to stable the cattle — he begrudged them the fodder, but at least he was free from worry.

It was rumored that winter that the lady was selling her land, and that the innkeeper on the main road was arranging to buy it. The peasants heard this and groaned. "Well," they thought, "if the innkeeper gets the land, he'll pester us with worse fines than the lady. We can't get along without this land; we live too close."

A delegation of peasants representing the commune came to ask the lady not to sell

the land to the innkeeper, but to give it to them. They promised to pay more. The lady agreed. The peasants started making arrangements for the commune to buy the land; they held one meeting and another meeting — but the matter was still unsettled. The Evil One divided them, and they were completely unable to agree. Then the peasants decided that each would buy individually as much as he could. To this, also, the lady agreed. Pakhom heard that his neighbor had bought fifty-five acres from the lady, and that she had loaned him half the money for a year. Pakhom became envious. "They're buying up all the land," he thought, "and I'll be left with nothing." He consulted his wife.

"People are buying," he said, "so we must buy about twenty-five acres, too. Otherwise we can't exist — the overseer is crushing us with fines."

They figured out how they could buy. They had one hundred rubles¹ put aside, and they sold the colt and half the bee swarm, hired out their son as a worker,

¹ rubles: Russian coins, each now worth about a dollar in American money.



Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910) is known both as Russia's greatest novelist and as a social and moral philosopher devoted to the alleviation of human suffering. Born the heir of wealthy landowners, Tolstoy served with distinction in the Russian army, retired to manage his family estates, and wrote *Anna Karenina*, the monumental *War and Peace*, and other shorter works. During those years he became acutely aware of questions regarding the meaning and purpose of life and created for himself a version of

Christianity that answered his questions. He freed the serfs on his estates, worked in the fields with the peasants, and tried to live as simply as they did. In 1890 he gave away his lands to his wife and children and renounced all income from his writings so that he would own nothing. Twenty years later he left his home to seek freedom from all worldly attachments and to come closer to God. On his way to a monastery, he was taken ill and died in a small railway station.

borrowed from their brother-in-law, and raised half the money.

Pakhom gathered up the money, chose his land — forty acres including a little woods — and went to bargain with the lady. He drove a bargain for his forty acres, and sealed it with his hand and a deposit. They went to town and signed the deed with half the money paid down and the rest due in two years.

So Pakhom had his own land. He borrowed seed, sowed the land he had bought: it produced well. In a year, he had settled his debts with both the lady and his brother-in-law. And so Pakhom became a landowner: he plowed and sowed his own land, mowed hay on his own land, cut timber from his own land, and pastured his herd on his own land. When Pakhom went out to plow the land which he now owned forever, or when he happened to glance over the sprouting fields and meadows, he could not rejoice enough. It seemed to him that the grass grew and the flowers flowered in a new way. When he had walked across this land before, it had been land like any land; now it had become completely exceptional.

3

So Pakhom lived and was pleased. Everything would have been fine, had the peasants not begun trespassing on his fields and meadows. He begged them politely to stop, but the trespassing continued. Either the cowherds let the cattle into the meadows, or the horses got into the wheat while grazing at night. Time after time, Pakhom chased them out and forgave without pressing charges; then he became tired of it and started to complain to the district court. And he knew the peasants did not do these things deliberately, but only because they were crowded, yet he thought: "One still mustn't let them or they'll ravage everything. They must be taught."

To teach them, he sued once, and then again; one was fined, then another. Pakhom's neighbors began to hold a grudge against him; they started to trespass on purpose from time to time. One went to the grove at night and cut down a dozen linden trees for bast.¹ When Pakhom walked through the woods, he looked and saw a white glimmer. He approached — there lay the discarded peelings, and there stood the little stumps. If the villain had only cut the edges of the bush, or left one standing, but he had razed them all, one after the other. Pakhom was enraged. He thought and thought: "It must be Semon," he thought. He went to search Semon's farm, found nothing, and quarreled with him. And Pakhom was even more certain Semon had done it. He filed a petition. Semon was called into court. The case dragged on and on; the peasant was acquitted for lack of evidence. Pakhom felt even more wronged, and abused the elder and the judges.

"You're hand and hand with thieves," he said. "If you led honest lives, you wouldn't let thieves go free."

Pakhom quarreled with both the judges and his neighbors. The peasants started threatening to set fire to his place. Although Pakhom had more land than before, his neighbors were closing in on him.

Just then, there was a rumor that people were moving to new places. And Pakhom thought: "I have no reason to leave my land, but if some of us go, there'll be more space. I could take their land, add it to my place; life would be better. It's too crowded now."

Once when Pakhom was sitting at home, a peasant passing through dropped in. Pakhom put him up for the night, fed him, talked to him, and asked him where, pray, he came from. The peasant said he came from below, beyond the Volga, where he

¹ bast: woody fiber used in making rope and matting.

had been working. One thing led to another and the peasant gradually started telling how people were going there to settle. He told how his own people had gone there, joined the community, and divided off twenty-five acres a man.

"And the land is so good," he said, "that they sowed rye, and you couldn't see a horse in the stalks, it was so high; and so thick, that five handfuls make a sheaf. One peasant," he said, "who hadn't a thing but his bare hands, came there and now has six horses, two cows."

Pakhom's heart took fire. He was thinking: "Why be poor and crowded here if one can live well there? We'll sell the house and land here; with this money, I'll build myself a house there and set up a whole establishment. There's only trouble in this crowded place. But I had better make the trip and look into it myself."

That summer he got ready and went. He sailed down the Volga to Samara in a steamer, then walked four hundred versts¹ on foot. When he arrived, everything was just as described. The peasants were living amply on twenty-five acres per head, and they participated willingly in the activities of the community. And whoever had money could buy, in addition to his share, as much of the very best land as he wanted at a ruble an acre; you could buy as much as you wanted!

After finding out everything, Pakhom returned home and began selling all he owned. He sold the land at a profit, sold his own farm, sold his entire herd, resigned from the community, waited for spring, and set off with his family for the new place.

4

Pakhom arrived at the settlement with his family, and joined the community. He

¹ versts: Russian units of distance, each about two thirds of a mile.

stood the elders drinks and put all the papers in order. They accepted Pakhom, divided off one hundred and twenty-five acres of land in various fields as his portion for his family of five—in addition to the use of the pasture. Pakhom built himself a farm and acquired a herd. His part of the common land alone was three times as large as before. And the land was fertile. He lived ten times better than in the past. You had arable land and fodder at will. And you could keep as many cattle as you wanted.

At first, while he was busy building and settling himself, he was content; but after he became used to it, he felt crowded on this land, too. The first year, Pakhom sowed wheat on his share of the common land—it grew well. He wanted to sow wheat again, but there was not enough common land. And what there was, was not suitable. In that region, wheat is sown only on grassland or wasteland. They sow the land for a year or two, then leave it fallow until the grass grows back again. And there are many wanting that kind of land, and not enough of it for all. There were disputes over it, too; the richer peasants wanted to sow it themselves, while the poor people wanted to rent it to dealers to raise tax money. Pakhom wanted to sow more. The following year, he went to a dealer and rented land from him for a year. He sowed more—it grew well; but it was far from the village—you had to cart it about fifteen versts. He saw the peasant-dealers living in farmhouses and growing rich. "That's the thing," thought Pakhom; "if only I could buy land permanently for myself and build a farmhouse on my land. Everything would be at hand." And Pakhom began pondering over how he could buy freehold land.

So Pakhom lived for three years. He rented land and sowed wheat on it. The years were good ones, and the wheat grew

well, and the surplus money accumulated. But Pakhom found it annoying to rent land from people every year and to have to move from place to place. Whenever there was a good piece of land, the peasants immediately rushed to divide up everything; if Pakhom did not hurry to buy, he had no land to sow. The third year, he and a dealer rented part of the common pasture from some peasants; he had already plowed when the peasants sued and the work was wasted. "If it had been my own land," he thought, "I'd bow to no one and there'd be no trouble."

And Pakhom began to inquire where land could be bought permanently. And he came across a peasant. The peasant had bought one thousand three hundred and fifty acres, then gone bankrupt, and was selling cheaply. Pakhom began talking terms with him. They haggled and haggled and agreed on fifteen hundred rubles, half of it payable later. They had just reached an agreement when a traveling merchant stopped at the farm for something to eat. They drank and talked. The merchant said he was returning from the far-off Bashkir country.¹ There, he said, he bought thirteen thousand five hundred acres of land from the Bashkirs. And all for one thousand rubles. Pakhom began asking questions. The merchant recounted.

"You just have to be nice to the old men," he said. "I distributed about a hundred rubles' worth of oriental robes and carpets and a case of tea, and gave wine to whoever wanted it. And I got the land for less than ten kopecks² an acre." He showed Pakhom the deed. "The land," it read, "lies along a river, and the steppe is all grassland."

Pakhom began asking him how, where, and what.

"The land there —" said the merchant,

¹ Bashkir country: area between the Volga River and Ural Mountains, settled by a Turkish people.

² kopecks: Russian coins, each equal to a hundredth of a ruble.

When the gods wish to punish us they
answer our prayers.

— Oscar Wilde

"you couldn't walk around it in a year. The Bashkirs own it all. And the people are as silly as sheep. You can almost get it free."

"Well," Pakhom thought, "why should I buy thirteen hundred and fifty acres for my thousand rubles and saddle myself with a debt as well, when I can really get something for a thousand rubles."

5

Pakhom asked the way to the Bashkirs and as soon as he had escorted the merchant to the door, he began getting ready to go himself. He left the house in his wife's charge, made preparations, and set off with his hired hand. They went to town, bought a case of tea, gifts, wine — everything just as the merchant had said. They traveled and traveled, traversing five hundred versts. The seventh fortnight, they arrived at a Bashkir camp. Everything was just as the merchant had said. They all lived in felt tents on the steppe³ near a stream. They themselves neither plowed nor ate bread, but their cattle and horses wandered over the steppes in herds. Twice a day they drove the mares to the colts tethered behind the huts; they milked the mares and made kumiss⁴ out of it. The women beat the kumiss and made cheese, while all the men did was drink tea and kumiss and eat mutton and play reed pipes. They were all polite and jolly and they made merry all summer. A completely backward people, with no knowledge of Russian, but friendly.

³ steppe: vast level and treeless plain.

⁴ kumiss: drink made from mare's fermented milk.

As soon as the Bashkirs saw Pakhom, they came out of their tents and surrounded their guest. An interpreter was found; Pakhom told him he had come for land. The Bashkirs were delighted, seized Pakhom, conducted him to one of the best tents, placed him on a carpet, put feather pillows under him, sat down in a circle around him, and began serving him tea and kumiss. They slaughtered a sheep and fed him mutton. Pakhom fetched his gifts from the wagon and began distributing them among the Bashkirs. When Pakhom finished presenting his gifts to them, he divided up the tea. The Bashkirs were delighted. They jabbered and jabbered among themselves, then asked the interpreter to speak.

"They ask me to tell you that they like you," said the interpreter, "and that it is our custom to give a guest every satisfaction, and to render gifts in kind. You have presented us with gifts; now tell us what we have that you like, so we can give a gift to you."

"What I like most of all," said Pakhom, "is your land. Our land is crowded, and, furthermore, all of it has been tilled, while your land is plentiful and good. I've never seen the like."

The interpreter translated. The Bashkirs talked and talked among themselves. Pakhom did not understand what they were saying, but he saw that they were merry, were shouting something, and laughing. Then they became silent, turned to Pakhom, and the interpreter said, "They asked me to tell you that in return for your kindness they will be glad to give you as much land as you want. Just point it out and it will be yours."

They started to talk again and began to quarrel about something. Pakhom asked what the quarrel was about. And the interpreter said, "Some say the elder must be consulted about the land, that it can't be done without him. But others say it can be done."

The Bashkirs were still quarreling when, suddenly, out came a man in a fox fur cap. Everyone fell silent and stood up. And the interpreter said:

"That's the elder himself."

Pakhom immediately fetched the best robe and brought it to the elder along with five pounds of tea. The elder accepted and sat down in a seat of honor. And the Bashkirs immediately started telling him something. The elder listened and listened, requested silence with a nod, and said to Pakhom in Russian:

"Well," he said. "It can be done. Choose whatever you like. Land's plentiful."

"What does that mean: take what I want," thought Pakhom. "It has to be secured somehow. Or they'll say it's yours, then take it away."

"Thank you," he said, "for your kind words. You do have a lot of land, and I need only a little. But I'd like to know which is mine. It must be measured off somehow, and secured as mine. Our lives and deaths are in God's hands. What you, good people, are giving, your children may take back."

"You're right," said the elder; "it can be secured."

Pakhom said:

"I heard there was a merchant here. You gave him a little piece of land too, and made a deed. I should have the same thing."

The elder understood.

"It can all be done," he said. "We have a scribe, and we'll go to the town to affix the seals."

"And what is the price?" said Pakhom.

"We've only one price: a thousand rubles a day."

Pakhom did not understand.

"What kind of measure is that — a day? How many acres does it have?"

"That," he said, "we don't know. But we sell by the day; as much as you can walk

around in a day is yours, and the price is a thousand rubles a day."

Pakhom was astonished.

"But look," he said, "a day's walking is a lot of land."

The elder laughed.

"It's all yours!" he said. "There's just one condition: if you're not back where you started in a day, your money is lost."

"And how," Pakhom said, "will you mark where I go?"

"Well, we'll stand on the spot you choose, and stay there while you walk off a circle; and you'll take a spade with you and, where convenient, dig holes to mark your path and pile the dirt up high; then we'll drive a plow from pit to pit. Make your circle wherever you want. What you walk around is all yours, as long as you're back where you started by sundown."

Pakhom was delighted. They decided to start off early. They chatted, drank more kumiss, ate mutton, drank tea again; night came on. They laid down a feather bed for Pakhom, and the Bashkirs dispersed, promising to assemble the next day at dawn to set out for the starting point before sunrise.

7

Pakhom lay on the feather bed, unable to sleep for thinking about the land. "I'll grab off a big piece of my own," he thought. "I can walk fifty versts in a day. The days are long now; there'll be quite a bit of land in fifty versts. What's poorest, I'll sell or let to the peasants, and I'll pick out the best to settle on myself. I'll get a plow and two oxen, and hire two laborers; I'll plow over a hundred acres and put cattle to graze on the rest."

All night Pakhom lay awake, drifting off to sleep only just before dawn. No sooner had he fallen asleep than he started to dream. He saw himself lying in the same hut and heard someone chuckling outside. And he wanted to see who was laughing, got up,

went out of the hut, and there sat the Bashkir elder himself in front of the hut with both hands holding his sides, rocking back and forth, laughing at something.

Pakhom approached him and asked: "What are you laughing at?" Then he saw that it was not the Bashkir elder, but the merchant of the other day who had come to him and told him about the land. And he had barely asked the merchant, "Have you been here long?" — when it was no longer the merchant, but the peasant who had come on foot from the south long ago. Then Pakhom saw that it was not the peasant, but the Devil himself, laughing, horns, hoofs, and all; and in front of him lay a barefoot man in shirt and trousers. And Pakhom looked closer to see what sort of man he was. He saw it was a corpse and that it was — he himself. Horrified, Pakhom woke up. "The things one dreams," he thought. He looked around; through the open door he saw the dawn; it was already turning white. "Must rouse the people," he thought; "time to go." Pakhom got up, woke his hired hand who was asleep in the wagon, ordered the horses harnessed, and went to wake the Bashkirs.

"It's time," he said, "to go to the steppe to measure off the land."

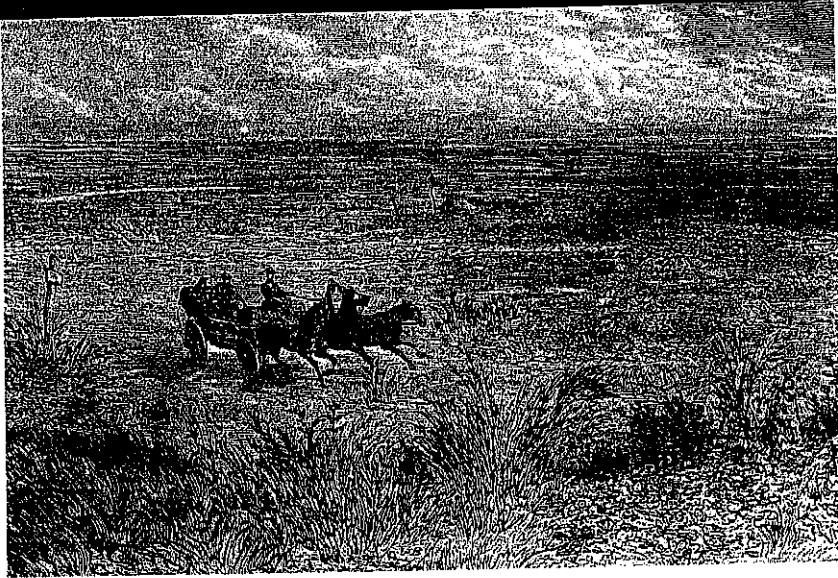
The Bashkirs got up, assembled everything, and the elder arrived. The Bashkirs began drinking kumiss again, and offered Pakhom tea, but he did not want to linger.

"If we're going, let's go," he said. "It's time."

8

The Bashkirs assembled, climbed on horseback and in wagons and set off. Meanwhile, Pakhom took a spade and set off with his laborer in his own wagon. They arrived at the steppe just as day was breaking. They went up a hillock¹ (known as a *shikhan* in Bashkir). The Bashkirs climbed out of their

¹ hillock: small hill.



"It was all grassland, level as the palm of the hand, black as a poppy seed. . . ." A nineteenth-century print of the Russian Steppes.

wagons, slid down from their horses, and gathered in a group. The elder went to Pakhom and pointed.

"There," he said; "everything the eye encompasses is ours. Take your pick."

Pakhom's eyes glowed. It was all grassland, level as the palm of the hand, black as a poppy seed, and wherever there was a hollow, there was grass growing chest-high.

The elder took off his fox cap and put it on the ground.

"That," he said, "will be the marker. Leave from here; return here. Whatever you walk around will be yours."

Pakhom drew out his money, placed it on the cap, unfastened his belt, took off his outer coat, girded his belt tightly over his stomach again, put a bag of bread inside his jacket, tied a flask of water to his belt, drew his bootlegs tight, took the spade from his laborer, and got set to go. He pondered and pondered over which direction to take — it was good everywhere. He was thinking: "It's all the same: I'll head toward the sunrise." He turned to face the sun and paced restlessly, waiting for it to appear over the horizon. He was thinking: "I must lose no time. And walking's easier while it's still cold." As soon as the sun's rays spurted over the horizon, Pakhom flung the spade over his shoulder and started off across the steppe.

He walked neither quickly nor slowly. He covered a verst; stopped, dug out a hole, and piled the turf up so it could be seen. He walked further. He loosened up and lengthened his stride. He covered still more ground; dug still another pit.

Pakhom glanced back. The *shikhan* was clearly visible in the sun, and the people stood there, and the hoops of the cart wheels glittered. Pakhom guessed that he had covered about five versts. It was getting warmer; he took off his jacket, flung it over his shoulder, and went on. He covered another five versts. It was warm. He glanced at the sun — already breakfast time.

"One lap finished," thought Pakhom. "But there are four in a day; it's too early to turn around yet. I'll just take my boots off." He sat down, took them off, stuck them in his belt, and went on. Walking became easier. He thought, "I'll just cover about five more versts, then start veering left. This is a very nice spot, too good to leave out. The farther away it is, the better it gets." He walked straight on. When he glanced around, the *shikhan* was barely visible, the people looked like black ants, and there was something faintly glistening on it.

"Well," thought Pakhom, "I've taken enough on this side; I must turn. Besides, I've been sweating — I'm thirsty." He stopped, dug a bigger hole, stacked the turf,

untied his flask, and drank. Then he veered sharply to the left. On and on he went; the grass grew taller and it became hot.

Pakhom began to feel tired; he glanced at the sun — it was already lunch time. He stopped; sat on the ground; ate bread and drank water, but did not lie down. "Lie down and you'll fall asleep," he thought. After a while, he walked on. Walking was easy at first. Eating had increased his strength. But it had gotten very hot and he was becoming sleepy. Still he pressed on, thinking — an hour of suffering for a lifetime of living.

He walked a long way in this direction too, and when he was about to turn left, he came to a damp hollow, too nice to overlook. "Flax¹ will grow well there," he thought. Again he went straight on. He took possession of the hollow, dug a hole beyond it, and turned the second corner. Pakhom glanced back at the *shikhan*: it was hazy from the heat, something seemed to be wavering in the air, and through the haze the people barely visible on top of the *shikhan* — fifteen versts away. "Well," thought Pakhom, "I've taken long sides, I must take this one shorter." As he walked the third side, he increased his stride. He looked at the sun — it was already approaching tea-time, and he had only covered two versts on the third side. And it was still fifteen versts to the starting point. "No," he thought, "I'll have a lopsided place, but I must go straight back so I'll arrive in time. And not take any more. There's lots of land already." Pakhom shoveled out a hole as quickly as he could and turned straight toward the *shikhan*.

9

As Pakhom walked straight toward the *shikhan*, he began having difficulties. He

¹ flax: plant from which linen thread and linseed oil are made.

was perspiring, and his bare legs were cut and bruised and were beginning to fail him. He wanted to rest but could not — otherwise he would not arrive before sunset. The sun would not wait; it continued sinking, sinking. "Ah," he thought, "if only I haven't made a mistake and taken too much! What if I don't make it?" He glanced ahead at the *shikhan*, looked at the sun: the starting point was far away, and the sun was nearing the horizon.

So Pakhom went on with difficulty; he kept increasing and increasing his stride. He walked, walked — and was still far away; he broke into a trot. He threw off his jacket, dropped his boots and flask; he threw off his cap, keeping only his spade to lean on. "Ah," he thought, "I've been too greedy, I've ruined the whole thing, I won't get there by sundown." And fear shortened his breath even more. Pakhom ran; his shirt and trousers clung to his body with sweat; his mouth was parched. His chest felt as though it had been inflated by the blacksmith's bellows; a hammer beat in his heart; and his legs no longer seemed to belong to his body — they were collapsing under him. Pakhom began to worry about dying of strain.

He was afraid of dying, but unable to stop. "I've run so far," he thought. "I'd be a fool to stop now." He ran and ran, and was very close when he heard a screeching — the Bashkirs shrieking at him — and his heart became even more inflamed by their cries. Pakhom pressed forward with his remaining strength, but the sun was already reaching the horizon; and, slipping behind a cloud, it became large, red, and bloody. Now it was beginning to go down. Although the sun was close to setting, Pakhom was no longer far from the starting point either. He could already see the people on the *shikhan* waving their arms at him, urging him on. He saw the fox cap on the ground and the money on it; and he saw the elder sitting on the ground, holding his sides with his hands. And Pakhom remembered his

dream. "There is plenty of land," he thought, "if it please God to let me live on it. Oh, I've ruined myself," he thought. "I won't make it."

Pakhom glanced at the sun, but it had touched the earth and had already begun to slip behind the horizon which cut it into an arc. Pakhom overreached his remaining strength, driving his body forward so that his legs could barely move fast enough to keep him from falling. Just as Pakhom ran up to the base of the *shikhan*, it suddenly became dark. He glanced around — the sun had already set. Pakhom sighed. "My work has fallen through," he thought. He was about to stop when he heard the Bashkirs still shrieking. And he remembered that though it seemed below that the sun had set, it would still be shining on the top of the *shikhan*. Pakhom took a deep breath and ran up the *shikhan*. It was still light there. As Pakhom reached the top, he saw the elder sitting in front of the cap, chuckling, holding his sides with his hands. Pakhom remembered his dream and groaned; his legs gave way, and he fell forward, his hands touching the cap.

"Aiee, good man!" cried the elder. "You have acquired plenty of land!"

Pakhom's laborer ran to lift him, but the blood was flowing from his mouth and he lay dead.

The Bashkirs clicked their tongues in commiseration.

The laborer took up the spade, dug Pakhom a grave just long enough to reach from his feet to his head — six feet in all — and buried him.

For Discussion

1. The night before the most important day of his life, Pakhom has a ghastly dream. What does he dream? How does it happen that the dream comes true? To what extent is Pakhom

himself responsible for what happens the following day?

2. Life is filled with accidents and temptations. "The instruments of darkness tell us truths," says Banquo in *Macbeth*, "Win us with honest trifles, to betray's In deepest consequence." Evil, in other words, lures us by means of innocuous and appealing gifts, only to betray us later, when it matters most. Discuss to what extent Banquo's thought is illustrated by what happens in Tolstoy's story.

3. The structure of "How Much Land Does a Man Need?" is based on the repetition of a pattern in Pakhom's life. Describe that pattern with reference to the following questions: what motivates Pakhom to want to move on? Should he, at any one time, have been happy with his present situation? What, specifically, leads him to want to improve that situation? How many times is the pattern repeated?

4. What is it that makes Pakhom overextend himself in the pacing off of the land that will be his? If you were to respond to the question of the title, how would you answer it ultimately? By contrast, how much land in life did Pakhom really need?

5. The style in which this story is told is one of extreme simplicity, making use of a great many concrete nouns and verbs, with the minimum of qualifying adjectives and adverbs. Point out examples to support that assertion. The effect of such a style is almost biblical, as though there is a truth embodied in Pakhom's experience that applies to all of us. How would you state that truth? Do you agree with it, as applied to lives in America in the second half of the twentieth century?

For Composition

We have been considering numerous ways to develop an initial statement into a paragraph or essay — by using examples, description, analysis, comparison and contrast, narrative, or definition. But in whatever way a composition is developed, it should have *unity*; that is, if it is to be effective, all the details it contains must be related to the overriding idea being communicated. For instance, if you are