

How much land does a man require

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The protagonist of the story is a peasant named Pakhom, whose wife at the beginning can be heard complaining that they do not own enough land to satisfy them. He states that " if I had plenty of land, I shouldn't fear the Devil himself! ". Unbeknownst to him, Satan is present sitting behind the stove and listening. Satan abruptly accepts his challenge and also tells that he would give Pakhom more land and then snatch everything from him.

A short amount of time later, a landlady in the village decides to sell her estate, and the peasants of the village buy as much of that land as they can. Pakhom himself purchases some land, and by working off the extra land is able to repay his debts and live a more comfortable life. However, Pakhom then becomes very possessive of his land, and this causes arguments with his neighbours. " Threats to burn his building began to be uttered. " Later, he moves to a larger area of land at another Commune.

Here, he can grow even more crops and amass a small fortune, but he has to grow the crops on rented land, which irritates him. Finally, after buying and selling a lot of fertile and good land, he is introduced to the Bashkirs, and is told that they are simple-minded people who own a huge amount of land. Pakhom goes to them to take as much of their land for as low a price as he can negotiate. Their offer is very unusual: for a sum of one thousand rubles, Pakhom can walk around as large an area as he wants, starting at daybreak, marking his route with a spade along the way.

If he reaches his starting point by sunset that day, the entire area of land his route encloses will be his, but if he does not reach his starting point he will lose his money and receive no land. He is delighted as he believes that he

can cover a great distance and has chanced upon the bargain of a lifetime. That night, Pakhom experiences a surreal dream in which he sees himself lying dead by the feet of the Devil, who is laughing.

He stays out as late as possible, marking out land until just before the sun sets. Toward the end, he realizes he is far from the starting point and runs back as fast as he can to the waiting Bashkirs. He finally arrives at the starting point just as the sun sets. The Bashkirs cheer his good fortune, but exhausted from the run, Pakhom drops dead. His servant buries him in an ordinary grave only six feet long, thus ironically answering the question posed in the title of the story.