

# How Much Land Does a Man Need ? Leo Tolstoy



Since-1981

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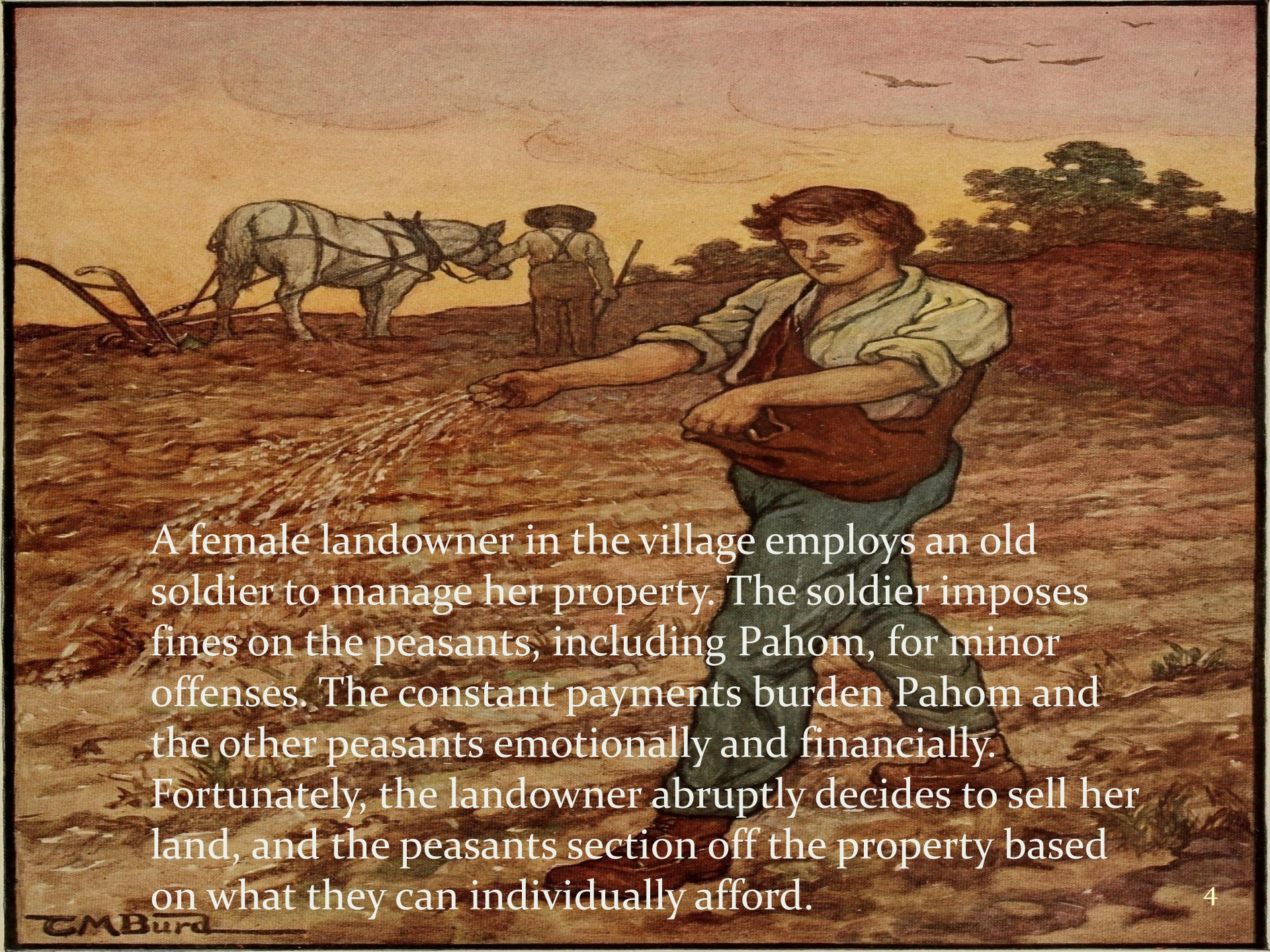
HOW MUCH  
LAND DOES A  
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LEO TOLSTOY

## Summary

“How Much Land Does a Man Need?” opens with a conversation between two sisters. One sister is married to a merchant and gloats about the luxuries of city life. The younger sister—married to Pahom, a peasant—defends her humble, independent life in the countryside. She additionally declares that wealthier people are more at risk of losing everything in their lives without notice. Pahom eavesdrops on the conversation and considers the advantages of owning an expansive estate, determining, "If I had plenty of land, I shouldn't fear the Devil himself!" (5). Overhearing Pahom's thoughts, the Devil vows to grant Pahom land, at the cost of coaxing him into a life of greed and moral indecency.




A female landowner in the village employs an old soldier to manage her property. The soldier imposes fines on the peasants, including Pahom, for minor offenses. The constant payments burden Pahom and the other peasants emotionally and financially. Fortunately, the landowner abruptly decides to sell her land, and the peasants section off the property based on what they can individually afford.




Pahom sells his belongings, labors out his son, and takes out several loans to purchase a 40-acre property. After a successful harvest, Pahom pays off his debts and feels immense pride toward his estate.



However, when peasants begin trespassing his land, Pahom fears for the condition of his property. He complains to the local courts, despite knowing of the peasants' good intentions. Like the soldier, Pahom levies ruthless fines on the peasants, who begin to resent Pahom; some even threaten to burn his homestead.


A close-up, slightly low-angle shot of a red devil's head. The devil has two prominent, curved horns and a long, pointed tail extending upwards and to the right. His face is a deep red color, with a slight smile and a look of contemplation or concern. The background is a textured, reddish-brown surface, possibly a wall or a piece of fabric. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the contours of his face and the texture of his skin.

Meanwhile, Pahom complains that he feels too cramped at his property, and a traveling peasant notifies him of a village past the Volga River, where families are immediately granted 25 acres of fertile land for free.

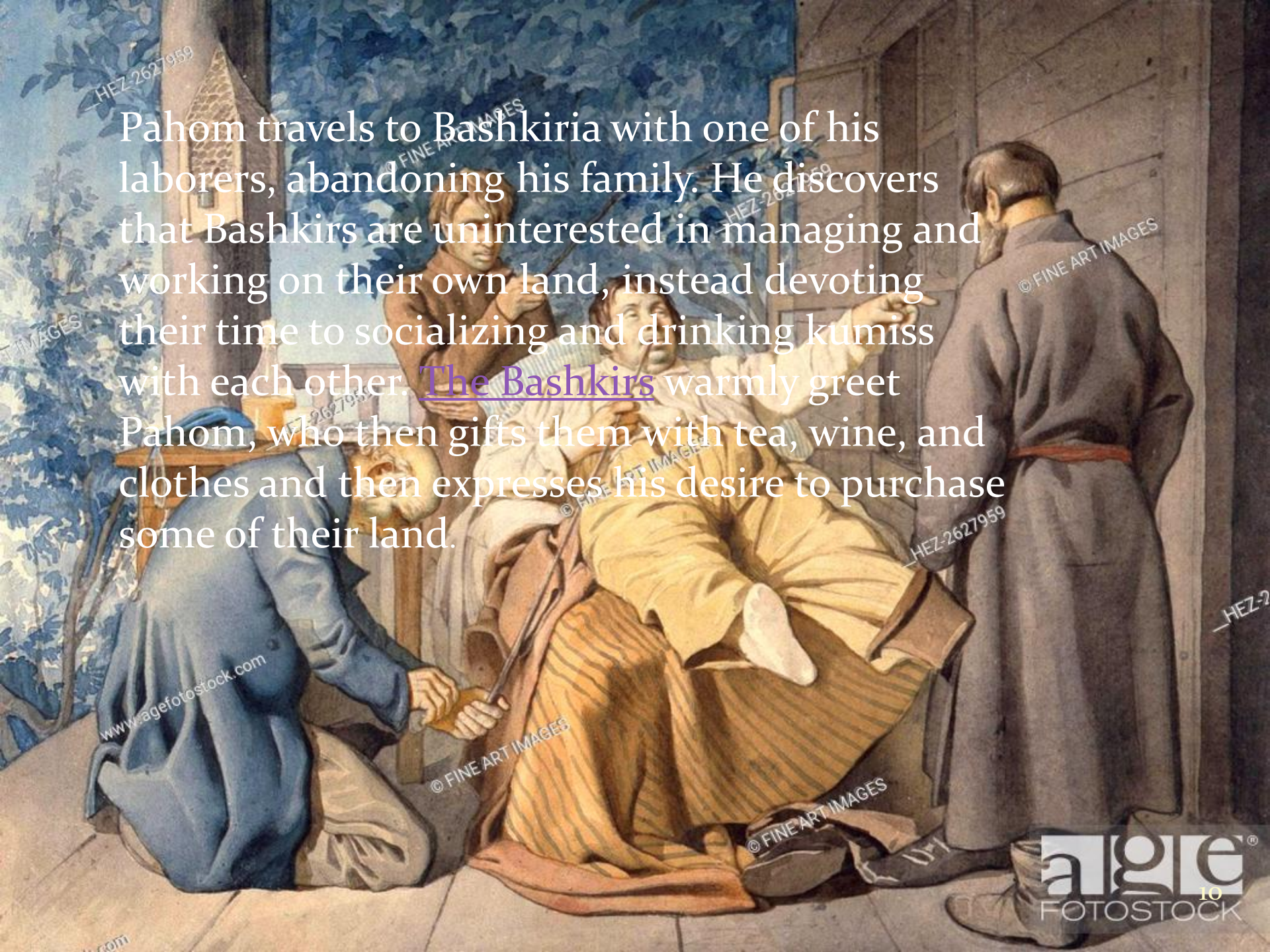


Intrigued, Pahom and his family move to the village, where they experience upward mobility, or the ascension to a wealthier economic class. Pahom now owns three times as much arable land, shares communal pasture, and can purchase as much cattle as he wants. However, he soon feels constrained by the size of his property again. Wanting to own freehold land separate from a commune, Pahom soon encounters a passing peasant who offers him freehold





A merchant then interrupts Pahom from finalizing the deal, informing him of the distant region of the Bashkirs, a group of Turkish people occupying the Ural Mountains. The dealer claims that as long as Pahom offers gifts to the Bashkirs, he can purchase fertile land for less than two cents an acre.



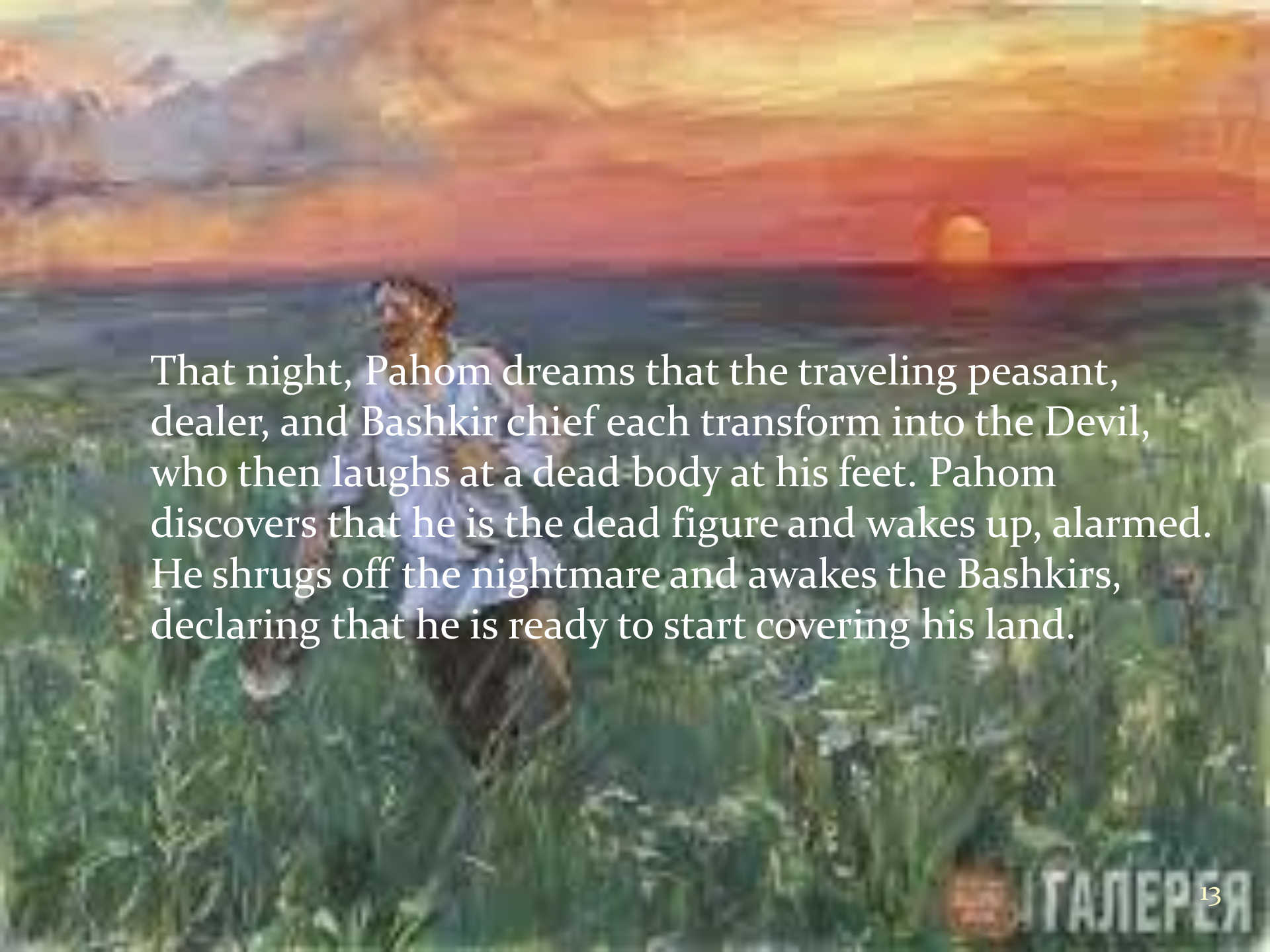
Pahom travels to Bashkiria with one of his laborers, abandoning his family. He discovers that Bashkirs are uninterested in managing and working on their own land, instead devoting their time to socializing and drinking kumiss with each other. [The Bashkirs](#) warmly greet Pahom, who then gifts them with tea, wine, and clothes and then expresses his desire to purchase some of their land.




The Bashkir chief explains that he can claim as much land as he wants for 1,000 roubles a day; however, he must section off land by foot, mark his spots with a spade, and return to his starting point by sunset. Convinced that he will be able to claim as much land as he could ever

"You pauper! You are that they overest"  
Or out upon the world thou goest.

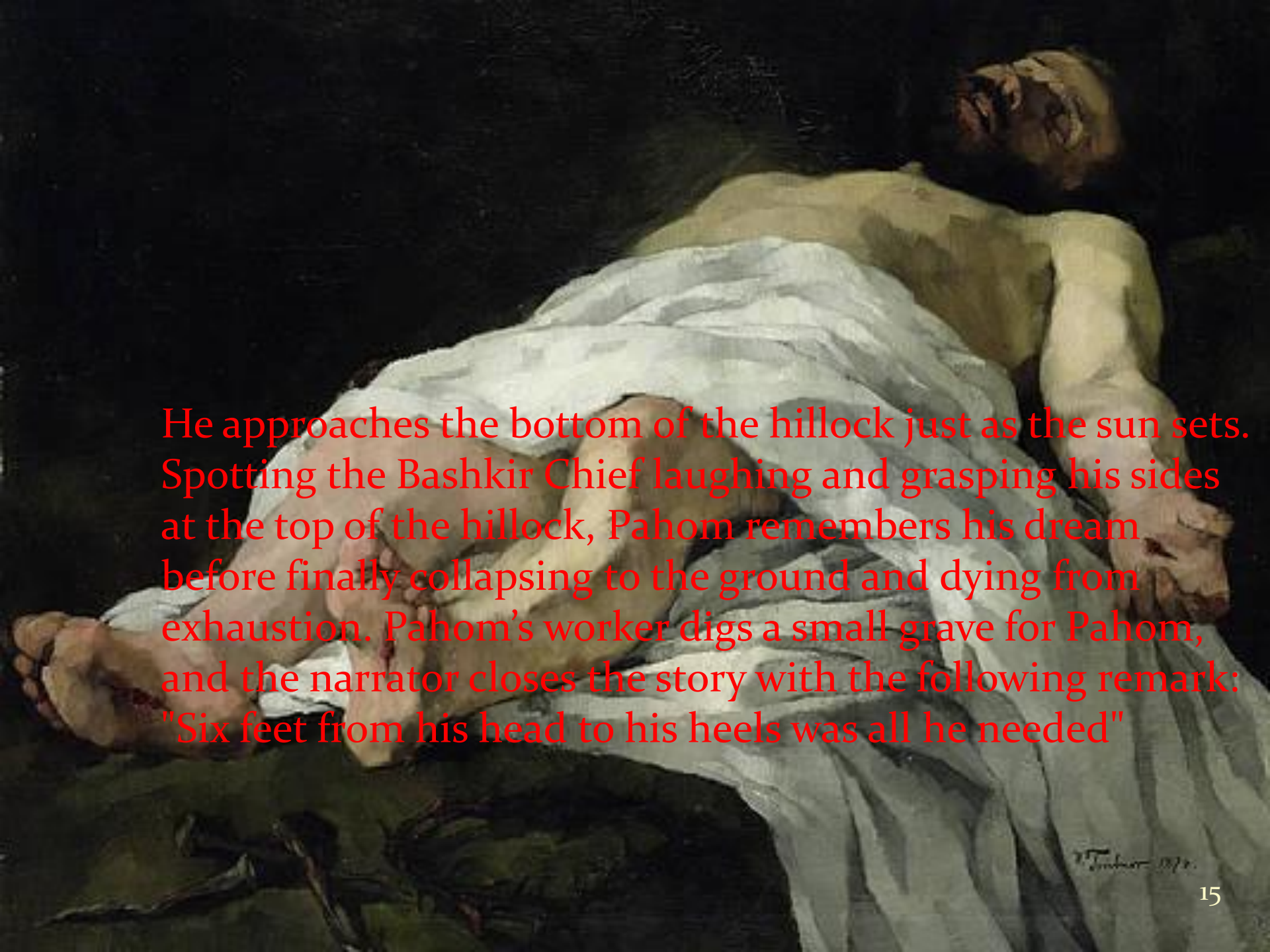


A painting depicting a man in a blue coat running through a field of tall grass. The background shows a sunset with a large orange sun low on the horizon, casting a warm glow over the scene. The man is running towards the left, looking back over his shoulder.

That night, Pahom dreams that the traveling peasant, dealer, and Bashkir chief each transform into the Devil, who then laughs at a dead body at his feet. Pahom discovers that he is the dead figure and wakes up, alarmed. He shrugs off the nightmare and awakes the Bashkirs, declaring that he is ready to start covering his land.

A cartoon illustration of a red devil with horns and a mischievous grin, surrounded by flames and smoke. The devil has a large, red, rounded head with two pointed horns. He has a wide, toothy grin and is looking towards the viewer. The background is dark with bright yellow and orange flames and blue smoke rising from the bottom. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

Equipped with a spade, some bread, and a flask of water, Pahom begins his walk at the top of a small hillock and covers several miles of land despite the fierce heat. Around noon, he temporarily rests to have a small lunch, but continues walking at a rushed pace thereafter. With ten miles left in his journey, Pahom becomes exhausted. He starts running, fearing that he will not return to the hillock before sunset.



He approaches the bottom of the hillock just as the sun sets. Spotting the Bashkir Chief laughing and grasping his sides at the top of the hillock, Pahom remembers his dream before finally collapsing to the ground and dying from exhaustion. Pahom's worker digs a small grave for Pahom, and the narrator closes the story with the following remark: "Six feet from his head to his heels was all he needed"

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