

Rose Planting

By Jerry Peterson

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Jake Sterns, ancient, arthritic, gardener extra ordinaire, hefted a bag of lime into his wheelbarrow, then a sack of fertilizer. He wheeled them out, slowly, ever-so-slowly, from the garage around back to a patch of lawn beside the speckled half-shell bird bath. Over the past two days, he had removed the sod from an area four feet wide by six feet long, for a new rose garden he told Dib Reynolds, his neighbor of thirty years, who had come over to superintend.

“Tea roses,” Jake said as he spaded the soil up onto a tarp. “Gonna be beauties.”

“But such a big hole.” Reynolds gazed down into a pit more than knee deep.

The old gardener took a break. He leaned on his spade’s handle. “Ya dumbhead, you don’t know nothing about gardening.”

“Do to. Grow the best ’maters in the county.”

“Just dumb luck. Look, when you’re startin’ a new flower bed, you gotta dig all that old, hard-packed soil out. You got to work in a whole lot of rotted leaves and grass – humus, you know – so the worms can get in there an do their thing, aerating soil, or your deep-rooted plants, they just aren’t going to thrive. Trust me.”

Reynolds shook his head. “That sour wife of yours here-about, to see the mess you’re making of her yard?”

“Aw, she’s off at her sister’s. Don’t know when she’ll be back.”

“Hope she likes roses.”

“That she does. They’re her favorite.”

“You want me to help? I can get my shovel.”

“Dib, I’m fine. I’ll do my garden, you do yours.”

“Well, don’t say I didn’t offer.”

When Jake did not answer, but went back to pitching dirt, Reynolds shrugged. He headed for home. There he dragged a lawn chair out, got himself comfortable with a longneck and watched his neighbor work into the night, mixing and spading. Reynolds did admire the roses Jake had gotten from the garden center, all in bloom – peaches and ambers, two yellows as brilliant as the morning sun, and a purplish black, the color of warm night. Shame, he thought, that teas didn’t have any smell to them.

Reynolds retired while his neighbor yet worked, so he didn’t see Jake bring a bundle from the house and place it with great care in the hole.

Now he cut the top away from the lime bag and dumped the contents in. After he folded the bag and laid it in the wheelbarrow, he picked up his spade, ready to shovel the humus-rich soil back into the hole, the soil in which he would plant his one-dozen rose bushes. Jake threw an easy salute to the bundle.

“Rose,” he said, “you’re gonna love your new flower garden.”