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Planting an Apple Tree

Dwarf breeds of apple trees. They take up less space, and they match my height. They bloom and smell wonderful in the spring, when I can approach them and smell their blossoms without climbing up on a ladder. In the fall I will collect their sweet fruits. Sources on the internet say the trees will bear fruit in the third year after the seedlings are planted. I'll wait. The main thing is to talk with my neighbor. He has a tractor, and we have abandoned overgrown land. We recently bought a house with land in a village. We threw all our efforts into remodelling the house but never touched the land. We spent a long time thinking about what would grow here.

The distance between trees should be three meters, the depth of the planting hole seventy centimetres.

Can you imagine, says my husband, they are just children playing war. We stand calmly on this starry night, and suddenly hear sirens – an air-raid alarm. "Drones, drones," men shouted and began running to their cars all over the village. I say, "People, those are stars, twinkling stars." The boys correct me, "Drones, drones, they're moving." I found an article on Wikipedia for them about the twinkling of stars, and I dropped it in the general chat of the territorial defense. We'll see what they write now. My husband laughs and hands me a phone with a chat open in Viber, where the men from territorial defense check their duty time, their team, and share the news.

In fact, I'm ashamed to go to our neighbor and ask point blank: Will you plow our land? Of course I'll pay you. Those who sold us the house, the former owners, said you always helped. Please help us. I didn't dare even when my three-year-old granddaughter and I saw him as we passed by his hut and tractor. I just said hello. People greet each other in this village with such affection. Children say, "Happiness and health" instead of hello, or good afternoon. Adults add, "God grant you health." I still say, "Good afternoon," or "Good evening." But I will learn. My Varya and I were out for a walk, and we came upon a neighbor, said hello, and encountered a worm. A

long, fat one crawling across the road. My daughter decided it was in danger because cars were driving past, and we watched for almost an hour as the worm slowly squirmed along, and we asked cars to go around it. Finally the worm got to the other side of the road and climbed under a leaf. Varya happily continued our walk. She is very smart for her age. She is capable of saying marvelous things.

“Where is your mommy?” she asks me,

“She died,” I answer.

“Then, who is going to hug you and pity you?”

Then she said she remembered what it was like to be dead. Varya says she was dead, she couldn't move her legs and arms. And she saw nothing.

I don't cry, no tears flow, I just feel a fierce anger. My imagination paints a picture of a cluster bomb flying into the high-rise building where my children live, and killing my son-in-law, daughter, my Varya and my little Orchik, who is less than a year old.

Discard the top layer of soil separately, then mix the soil with peat and humus, add to the mixture some superphosphate and wood ash. Hammer a peg into the middle of the hole, then add the soil mixture. Over that sprinkle earth from the topsoil. Place a seedling in the center of the hole and separate its roots. It is very important that the roots do not touch the fertilizer, for it can burn the tree's delicate roots.

And, my husband says, rumors reached his soldiers that a party of Russians had landed. There was general excitement as plans were made to neutralize it. Then came the realization that they did not even have guns. They began thinking about what to do. I offered to stick a pitchfork upside down the ground, pointing upwards. Let the assholes plant themselves on that.

I will come to you on a tank, says my uncle from Moscow, you are fascists and Nazis. You must be destroyed. Oh, yes, Uncle Sasha, women with babies in the maternity ward in Mariupol are your greatest enemy. You have destroyed the heart of fascism and Nazism in our country. And the grandmothers who sit in the basements of Okhtyrka, and the small children you killed, and people with disabilities who do not have access to medicine.

I don't cry. They say it's easier when tears flow, even more useful.

We have a quiet region, periodic sirens do sound, but we haven't been bombed yet. I even feel guilty that my sister is being bombed in Kharkiv, and my family is being bombed in Kyiv. I try not to think about the many places where people are on the verge of a humanitarian catastrophe, without water, food, medicine, and where children die of dehydration. I take in refugees almost every day. Tired people with frightened eyes. A five-year-old boy asked to watch cartoons. He sat quietly, watching, suddenly the cartoon's music imitated the sound of a siren, and the child jumped up and scrambled under the bed. "Mommy," he cried plaintively. Later there were many other such children and adults. I do not have time to air out the bed, I never finish the process of cooking. I am running out of internal resources.

Fatigue. I don't cry. No tears flow.

After planting it in the ground, you tamp down the soil around the seedling, and at a distance of half a meter from the trunk, you build a hill fifteen centimeters high. In the resulting depression you pour in twenty-five to thirty liters of water.

I'm ashamed to admit it, but on the first day of the war I had diarrhoea and was sick to my stomach. I thought I had been poisoned by something. I thought if a bomb flew into the house, I would die clumsily, pants down on the toilet. A silly death. The days go by like years, it seems like a peaceful life is something distant and unattainable. But I have an abundance of patience and anger. I also have an abundant supply of pills that I cannot live without. If they run out, I will die a nasty death over a period of three months. The Internet says I eventually will just fall asleep. At least I'll finally get some sleep. I don't want to cause problems that might make my relatives worry. I do not want to be a weak link, a burden, if our city is surrounded. I do not know how people live with my diagnosis and without pills when surrounded. Be patient, my dears. Be patient, we will win. I try not to think about those who need insulin. Their situation is much worse than mine. They don't have three months left.

Since the root system in this kind of apple tree clings to the surface... Today, again, diarrhoea and nausea. I just went to vomit. But what about the apple trees? Aha, we must not let the roots dry out. Constant watering and mulching. I need to note everything down in writing. It will be my witness when I forget.

My nephew in Moscow, five-year-old Andryusha, stayed with his nanny, found a portrait of Putin, took scissors, cut it into small pieces and said, "Die, scum!" The

nanny was frightened, scolded her parents, and warned him not to do that in kindergarten.

One needs love and humanity in these days of rage and hatred.