

Melon Mischief

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It was a bright and sunny day at the Rype & Readi Farm Market... aaaaand honestly, that was it.

The sun was shining warmly, there was an even enough mix of clouds and wind in the air so as to keep the day from swinging to either the sweltering or torrential ends of the weather spectrum, and there weren't any immediately outstanding or attention-grabbing events going on whatsoever.

It was, in short, an Average, Normal, Perfectly Fine, Very Boring Day.

...and that was *exactly* why Paprika was out patrolling the market, keeping a keen eye for trouble. For after all, boredom was a terrible, *devilish* affliction that seemed to bring out the mischief in all beings, human and animal alike. 'Idle paws (or wings or hooves or what have you) are the Devil's puppy's chew toys and all that, so better to be safe than sorry.

And so Paprika maintained her vigil, eyes peeled in order to catch sight of any miscreants, and beak ready to dress down any hoodlums. It was a painstaking duty; some troublemaker could be shockingly subtle in their schemes, and maintaining a highly trained eye was *vital* in order to catch sight of that *one* out-of-place detail that indicated that mischief was afoot.

"MAKE WAY!"

"BUCK-ACK!" Paprika squawked and jumped to the side in panic as a voice called out behind her. And it was a good thing she did, because moments later the space she previously occupied was run down by... Henny log-rolling on top of a watermelon!?

Addendum to the above: sometimes mischief is discreet... other times it blares at you with a foghorn.

And oftentimes it is not a singular event either, as was made evident by Paprika snapping her gaze back the way Henny had come from and finding the three other members of her coven rolling watermelons of their own. Acting fast, Paprika leapt to her talons, marched in front of the melon-mounted procession, and affixed them all with a *glare*.

The effect was rather spectacular as the hens all tried and failed to grind to a halt, their leftover momentum knocking their rides into each other. Henrietta was bounced forwards onto Henily's melon, which bounced Henily forwards into Hendra... who was, herself, deposited square at Paprika's talons. The dislodged hens were all disoriented for a bit and, once they realized that Paprika was glaring barbeque forks at them, *terrified*.

“Dare I even *ask*,” the elderly hen clucked with her full authority.

“W-w-we weren’t up to anything hinky, Paprika, we swear!” Hendra hastily stammered out. “W-we were just trying to do something *nice!*”

“By rolling melons around and almost running poor, unsuspecting animals over,” Paprika deadpanned.

“Rolling them to where everyone can have them!” Hendra clarified desperately.

Paprika paused at that little revelation, before slowly gesturing for the other fowl to continue.

“Well, as you probably noticed, it’s *really* slow today, and we noticed that there are a *lot* of watermelons in stock right now, so we thought we’d get them so that, well... everyone could... share?” Hendra trailed off quietly as she shrank under Paprika’s stare.

Paprika continued to observe her fellow coven-mate silently for what felt like an eternity... before adopting a bright and sunny smile. “That’s a wonderful idea! Good thinking, I’m so proud of you!”

All three of the hens sagged in relief. “Really? You think so?” Hendra clucked happily, an eager smile on her beak.

“Of course!” Paprika nodded proudly. “This idea is thoughtful, it’s kind, and you were obviously smart enough to pay for the melons before you took them, otherwise you wouldn’t be rolling them around like this!”

Hendra’s expression didn’t shift an inch as she nodded, while her sisters behind her both tensed up. “Of course we did! We’d be stupid *not* to pay for them!”

“Ah, so nice to finally have a day without nonsense!” Paprika all but crowed joyously. “Alright, you go and move those melons out back, while I work on gathering everyone up! Toodle-oo!” And with that, she trotted off with an eager skip in her every step.

Henrietta and Henily both watched her leave in silence for a bit until she was out of sight, at which point Henily leaned forwards to poke the yet-still Hendra’s shoulder. “Um... dear?”

“One of you go and stick some of the money we were saving up for our trip to Animal Kingdom into the register,” Hendra gritted out through the rictus smile she had plastered on her beak. “Before Paprika finds out the truth and *plucks us all nude.*”

Suffice to say that the chickens moved *very* fast.

A scant few minutes later, the whole of the Farm Market's community of animals were having a grand old time, splitting the watermelon's juicy contents between themselves with pomp and good cheer.

Everyone was enjoying a perfect get-together: The hens were all pecking away at their slices eagerly, clucking among themselves about matters of no importance with great enthusiasm, the sheep were chowing down and large chunks of watermelon at a time, rinds and all, and the goats were so enamored with their own shares that they either didn't notice when someone spit a seed through their horns or they simply couldn't be brought to care.

Still, even in the midst of all this revelry, Paprika still managed to notice one spot of trouble, and thus acted swiftly to rectify it.

Thus, she found herself trotting up to Drake, who was sitting before his untouched melon with his head bowed and a look of intense concentration on his bill. "Something the matter?"

"Hm?" Drake perked up in surprise for a moment before waving her off. "Ah, no no, nothing critical. Just... wondering is all."

"About?"

"Weeell..." Drake tilted his head thoughtfully. "It's just that whenever something occurs around here, there's usually some sort of lesson or other to be learnt from it. But, for the life of me, I can't find the lesson for today's events! Any ideas?"

"Actually... yes."

"Oh? Splendid! What is it?"

Paprika chuckled heartily as she swept her wing out at the other happy animals. "Learn to take happy moments at face value, lest you miss the while searching for a deeper meaning that's just not there."

Drake blinked as he processed that before rubbing his bill with a sheepish smile. "Heheh, I see! Well, that's certainly me told, isn't it? Then, if that's the case, care to split this melon with me?"

Paprika nodded happily. "That sounds like it would be delightful."

And it was.