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Purple Wonders

It was a beautiful morning, a good one for two brothers. Morton and Skiddly lived next door to each other, and they were busy in their gardens, cutting melons from the vines growing there. These would be the very first of the season and everyone in town had been eagerly waiting for them to ripen. Other people grew melons, but there was something special about those grown by the brothers. They were not particularly bigger, but they were always far sweeter; and once they were ready to be sold, the town folk couldn't get enough of them. Skiddly gave his brother a wave. "Good morning, Morton. How are things with you this bright, sunny day?"

"Never better," Morton called back, "How about you?"

"Fine," replied Skiddly. He finished loading his wheelbarrow and pushed it through the garden gate and out to the street in front of his house. Sitting just by the fence was what looked like an ordinary shed; but it was more than that. Undoing the clips that held it in place, Skiddly lifted up the top part of the front wall to reveal a counter set inside. It was, in fact, a little road-side shop. As Skiddly was starting to put the new-season's melons on the counter, Morton came out with his wheelbarrow full of melons and set it down near his own road-side shop. Skiddly walked over to take a closer look at the fruit in his brother's barrow. "My, your melons are looking really good, Morton. I think they are even better than last year's."

"I've been trying out some special feed for them," explained Morton. "I would have told you, but I wanted to make sure it worked first."

"Well, it certainly seems to have," said Skiddly.

"Yes, it does; and it's made them even sweeter" replied Morton, "Once I knew it was okay I was going to give you some, but I've run out."

"I'm off to the farmer's store this afternoon," said Skiddly, "If you tell me what to ask for, I'll get some for both of us."

"That's very kind of you," said Morton, "Thank you. And while you're there, I could do with some more melon seeds. I've run out of them too."

"Not a problem," said Skiddly, "Glad to do it."

This was how the brothers were, always helping one another. Even when one sold more melons than the other, there was never any bad feeling. Mind you, once word got around that Morton had grown some melons that were sweeter than Skiddly's, these were the ones the customers would be buying. Because of it, Morton sold his melons faster. At first, Skiddly was a bit jealous; but once Morton had sold out of his special, really sweet melons, people had no choice but to buy what was left. Then it didn't matter which brother they bought from, and both were happy again.

That afternoon, Skiddly was in his truck ready to set off for the farmer's store when Morton rushed over. "Don't forget my seed," he reminded his brother.

"Don't worry, I won't," Skiddly assured him. "I might get some more for myself while I'm there."

The farmer's store was in the next town. Skiddly wasn't too keen on the person who ran it. He seemed shifty somehow, and not all that trustworthy. "Are you sure that's the right feed?" Skiddly questioned, "The special kind you sold my brother?"

"Oh, yes," replied the man, "And as he wants more, I'm guessing it must have worked well."

"No doubt about it," said Skiddly, "His melons were much better and sweeter than mine; and he sold them in no time, so his customers must have thought so too."

"I'll bet you weren't pleased about that," said the man, and his lip curled up in a kind-of sneer. "How would you like to go one better?"

Skiddly frowned. "I'm not sure what you mean."

"Well..." The man pause to glance around the store as if checking that nobody was close enough to hear what he was about to say. When he started speaking again, it was almost in a whisper. "Using the special feed, your melons will be as sweet as your brother's, but that will take time. However, I can sell you some seeds that will grow melons much faster and far sweeter than your brother's. Then, yours will be the ones people will buy, and not his."

At first Skiddly didn't like the idea. In a way, it was sneaky. Then again, he reasoned, Morton hadn't told him about the special feed until after the melons had been grown and sold. So, Skiddly figured that he could do the same as his brother and try the new seeds out first; then, if they worked as the man said, he could give some to Morton and all would be well.

When he arrived home, Skiddly was unloading his own melon feed, making sure he kept the special seeds separate from the ones he had bought for Morton. He hadn't noticed before, but on looking closer, the packet of special seeds didn't feel to have many in it. In fact, when he opened it, there were only two. Considering how much they had cost, he only hoped he hadn't wasted his money. He also had another thought - if

he shared them with Morton, he would only have one; and, despite what the man had said about them growing extra fast, would just one seed grow enough melons to cover what he had paid for two?

Skiddly parked his truck at the front of his house and was about to go and fetch the wheelbarrow when Morton came out to meet him. "How did it go?" he asked Skiddly, "Did you remember my seed?"

"Of course," replied Skiddly, and he thought he sounded a bit snappy. When Morton asked him if he'd bought some seed for himself, he realised the problem - he was feeling guilty, and this was obvious from his answer: "Just the usual. Why do you ask?"

Morton was puzzled. It was a strange question, and his brother seemed a little edgy. Thinking Skiddly might just be tired after the drive, Morton shrugged. "No reason. Do you fancy coming over later for a cup of tea?"

Skiddly tried to sound normal. "Probably. I've got a bit of work to do first. I'll see how I go."

Once the truck was unloaded and he had given Morton his melon feed and seeds, Skiddly went to his own garden to look for a suitable spot where he could plant the special seeds. He was thinking it might be best if they were in the middle of the other vines, that way, if they appeared different to the normal ones, they wouldn't be quite so obvious; at least not while they were growing. Once they had it would be a different story, but he could worry about that when the time came. He was so deep in thought that he didn't notice Morton looking at him over the fence that divided their gardens; and when his brother spoke it startled him and made him jump. "Is everything okay?" asked Morton, "You seem a bit peaky."

"No, er... no, no," replied Skiddly, trying to sound natural, even though his heart was beating really fast. "I was er..." and he paused to think of something to say that wouldn't make Morton start asking awkward questions, "I was just trying to decide whether to put the new melon feed on now, or leave it till tomorrow."

"I'd leave it," said Morton positively, "Tomorrow's soon enough. Come over and we'll have that cup of tea. I think we've both done enough for one day, don't you?"

Skiddly couldn't have agreed more, but his tiredness was less to do with actual work than it was the worry of keeping secrets from his brother and not feeling right about it. There was also the concern that he was becoming as shifty as the man in the farmer's store, and that was definitely a bad thing. While they were having their tea and chatting, he almost told his brother about the seeds; but when Morton said: "Once you use that special feed, in a few weeks your melons will taste as sweet as mine." That caused Skiddly to change his mind and he kept quiet.

Later on, he was still a little angry at Morton over the special feed business; but even more so with himself for what he was about to do. It was the middle of the night and he was creeping through his melon patch to a particular spot he'd noticed earlier which seemed ideal for his purpose. And here was where he planted one of the new seeds. He was thinking that maybe he would give the second one to Morton; even though it would not be known for a while whether they were any good. Then his brother's words came to him again: "...*in a few weeks your melons will taste as sweet as mine...*" and that decided it for him. Finding another bare patch of soil, Skiddly made a small hole, put the second seed in and covered it over. "In a few weeks, Dear Brother," he whispered to himself, "We'll see whose melons are sweeter."

Two weeks later, Skiddly was less angry than he was excited. The new melon seeds had not only sprouted much quicker than ordinary ones; but the vines had grown amazingly fast. They were also so long that they had started to take over the melon patch. Flowers had already appeared which was also unusual; but perhaps the strangest thing was their colour. Instead of being yellow, these ones were bright purple. Needless to say, Morton couldn't fail to notice. "What *are* you growing, Skiddly?" he asked his brother over the fence, "Have you given up on the melons?"

Skiddly almost didn't answer, but he couldn't help himself. "Far from it, Brother," he growled, "And in a week or two I'll be the one everyone buys their melons from; not you!" With that, he turned and stomped back into his house.

Morton was left standing, scratching his head. "What is the matter with Skiddly?" he said to himself, "He's been very peculiar lately, and I was beginning to wonder if I'd done or said something to upset him, but I can't imagine what. It must have something to do with this new crop he's growing, whatever it is. I suppose I'll just have to wait and see."

The new special melons were ready and ripening much quicker than Skiddly imagined and he soon had a pile of them on the counter of his road-side shop. Because they were bright purple like the flowers and looked quite different to ordinary melons, the customers were uncertain about them and obviously decided not to risk buying them. So, they went to Morton's shop and bought his melons. In a short space of time, he'd sold out, whereas Skiddly hadn't sold a single one. "Maybe you're charging too much," suggested Morton, "Perhaps you should drop the price. And it might be an idea to cut a couple up and let people try them."

"What, for *free*?" growled Skiddly, "I can't afford to do that - the seeds cost me a fortune! I'll never get my money back if I start giving melons away!"

"Well," said Morton, "They won't make you any money at all if nobody wants to buy them."

Skiddly supposed his brother was right; so he reluctantly cut a melon open. Trying it himself, he had to admit it tasted really sweet, much more so than ordinary melons. When Morton asked if he could try a bit, Skiddly passed him a slice. Morton's face lit up at the first bite. "This is great, Skiddly! Once people try some, everyone will want them. You'll be hard pushed to grow enough."

Morton was right. Word spread fast about Skiddly's free melon tasting, and before long he had sold them all. The fact that the idea came from Morton caused Skiddly to think very seriously about the way he had been behaving to his brother recently. He felt really bad about that and went over to talk with Morton. "Look, I'm truly sorry about the way I've been lately," he said apologetically. "I've been sneaky and mean, while you've just carried on being kind as usual. I'm really ashamed of myself, and I'd like to make it up to you somehow. Come with me," he said, and walked through the gate into the back garden with Morton following.

Treading carefully through the vines, he found a melon that looked just right. Cutting it, he handed it to his brother. "I don't have any more seeds, but there will be some in this, more than enough for you to plant. Then you'll be able to grow your own special melons like mine. We'll be the only ones selling extra special melons. We could call them er... Purple Wonders, and..."

Morton just listened as Skiddly went on and on, getting more excited about what they were going to do together, and how marvelous it would be; but when he said that they could grow so many melons between them that no other growers would be able to sell theirs, Morton decided to cut in: "I'm sorry, Skiddly, but I couldn't do that. These people are our friends. It simply wouldn't be fair. I'd rather stick to growing ordinary melons the way we always used to."

Skiddly seemed speechless. He gazed first into his brother's eyes, then up into the sky, and finally down at the tangle of vines in which he was standing. Eventually he declared: "You are so right, Morton. I have become greedy and selfish and thoughtless; and it's time to stop." Snatching the melon he had given to his brother, he threw it into the wheelbarrow, then bent down and began pulling up the vines, fruit and all, and tossing those into the barrow. Morton was just standing in amazement until Skiddly said: "Come on, Morton, give me a hand. This lot has to go, and we'll build a big bonfire to burn the lot; then there'll be no more Purple Wonders, and no seeds to grow them; and we can go back to being what we have always been - true brothers and the best of friends."

They built the bonfire on the patch where Skiddly had planted the new special seeds, and sat drinking tea, watching the Purple Wonders going up in smoke. For the

first time in a long while, Skiddly felt warm inside, and it had nothing to do with the fire. "I'm really lucky to have a brother like you Morton," he said, "And I've been thinking - I reckon we need to find another farmer's store."

"I believe that's a good idea, a brilliant one, actually, Skiddly."

Skiddly laughed. "The fact that I came up with it all on my own is more than brilliant - it's a Purple Wonder! Fancy another cup of tea?" and he laughed again.

"Do you know," replied Morton, starting to laugh himself, "I don't mind if I do."