

“Apple Bloom, get back here!”

Apple Bloom galloped through the orchard with purpose, slipping around the trees in an intricate slalom. She had to lose Applejack, and fast. Up the hill, her friends waited anxiously for her. Scootaloo was aboard her vehicle of choice, ready to get moving, and Sweetie Belle was in the red wagon hitched to the back.

She approached the hill with a few lengths between her and her older sister. Carrying two saddlebags full of Appleoosan apples didn’t make her go any faster. She strode up the hill and hopped into the Cruiser. Scootaloo floored it and got away with not a moment to spare. Applejack cried in the distance, “Get back here, you rascals! Big Macintosh will have your tails for this!”

“Sorry, Applejack!” was Sweetie Belle’s only reply.

Scootaloo kept up the pace as best she could until they reached the outskirts of Ponyville. After she caught her breath, she began, “Alright girls, Phase One, complete. Next step, Fluttershy’s!”

“Cutie Mark Crusaders, move out!” they said in unison, speeding down the hill. They sped through town, turning quite a few heads. They ran clear through a crowd of ponies.

“Sorry, everypony!” shouted the Crusaders, as they made a beeline to the outskirts of town.

The CMC Cruiser came to a screeching halt on the edge of Fluttershy’s property. Scootaloo peered around the tree, looking for the inhabitants of the cottage.

“The coast is clear,” she muttered to the other two. Quickly, they slithered from one tree to the next, finally reaching the chicken coop in the back of the property. For a brief moment, they paused and remembered the events from last time they were here. Hopefully they wouldn’t tear the property apart again.

Apple Bloom made a few quick hoof-signals to the other two, and they moved into position. Scootaloo squatted down at the entrance to the hen house, while Sweetie Belle opened the empty apple sack they had snatched a few days back. Finally, Apple Bloom pounced, slamming the side of the hen house.

The chickens erupted into a frenzy of clucks and feathers. The chickens made their way out of the coop, and Scootaloo shot in. She grabbed as many eggs as her hooves could hold, and rushed out. She ran to Sweetie Belle and deposited them into the sack. Sweetie closed it off and Scootaloo took the helm, turning the Cruiser around and rushing off as fast as they came. Applebloom shouted over the ruckus,

“Tomorrow, we’ll pay Fluttershy for these eggs, right?”

"Of course we will! That'd just be mean if we didn't!" Sweetie Belle called back. "Anyway, Phase Two is complete. Off to Sugarcube Corner!"

"Sugarcube Corner?"

"Of course," shouted Scootaloo, "we still need to do Phase Thr- wait, who was that?"

"It's me, silly!" said Pinkie Pie. She must have hopped on when they weren't looking.... again.

"Why do you need to go to Sugarcube Corner? I mean, besides the fact that Sugarcube Corner is the most magical awesome amazing place in all of Ponyville!"

"We need to borrow some supplies, and we need to use the ovens," Apple Bloom stated. "We're running a Cutie Mark Crusaders Apple Tart Bake Sale!"

"OOH, that sounds FUN! Maybe I should help you with the baked goods because I remember the last time you and I worked in the kitchen and I'm not trying to be mean but your cooking really wasn't the best so I'd like to help the Cutie Mark-"

"OK, OK, you can help!"

"OOH, Yay!"

They had reached the local bakery at this point, and Pinkie hopped off and pranced inside, with the Crusaders in tow. They immediately got to work, mixing together the ingredients they collected with some flour from the shop, among other things. Forty-five minutes and four batches later, the trio had three heaping trays full of apple tarts. They loaded up their loot in the Cruiser (minus a few tarts, a "tip" for Pinkie Pie) and headed to the center of town.

They managed to sell half of the tarts before Applejack showed up. "Now what in the hey is going on here??" she questioned.

Apple Bloom dropped a few bits into their money jar, then turned to her big sister. "Look sis, I'm really sorry. See, our Cutie Mark Crusades have been really underfunded, and we really need the money. We still owe the Quills & Sofas shop for the whole Cutie Mark Crusader Couch Potato incident, and everypony loves apple tarts, so we--"

"Then why did you take our last bags of Appleoosan apples?"

"Everypony knows those are the best around for tarts, and we needed to sell these real bad. And Fluttershy's chickens make the best eggs for baking-"

"Apple Bloom, that's no excuse. You need to learn respect for your elders and for other ponies!"

Now Ah'm gonna have to run out to Appleoosa to get another batch while they're still in season."

The little filly thought about it for a moment, then turned back to her sister. "Look Applejack, I feel mighty foalish right now. I'd like to make it up to you. Let me go out and get the apples. Before you ask, I'll find someone to come with me. I know you don't think I'm mature enough to handle it on my own."

Applejack was a bit surprised. She thought for a moment, then said, "Fine. Maybe it'll teach you something about honesty..." She dropped a few bits into the jar and walked away with a handful of tarts, grumbling as she trotted back to Sweet Apple Acres.

A while later, Fluttershy showed up. She took a look at the situation from a distance, then waited a bit. Once the crowd cleared out a bit, she walked up to the trio. "Um, girls?" she whispered. "Girls?" she said a little louder. Still no answer. "Girls!" she yelled. (as loud as Fluttershy yells, that is) Sweetie Belle turned to her, then nudged the other two.

Scootaloo was the first to pipe up. "So, Fluttershy, how's it going?"

"Well, um, there's been some trouble with the chickens," she said, with the slightest hint of anger. "Do you know anything about it?"

The three looked toward each other. Finally, Scootaloo piped up. "We're awful sorry, Fluttershy. We'll close up the sale for the day and come take care of the chickens."

Fluttershy didn't expect that from Scootaloo. Nevertheless, ten minutes later they were at her cottage, wrangling the chickens... again. Once the job was done, Apple Bloom turned to the nature-loving mare and began,

"Once again, we're just terribly sorry about all this. Here, take these, for your trouble." She turned and grabbed the last few tarts from the tray. "I'm sure Angel will love them!" She smiled and set the tray down.

"I'm sure he will. Um, thanks for, for your help. You three are really maturing." She took the tray with a grin and trotted back to her humble abode.

Apple Bloom was beaming when they turned to head back to town. Their next stop was Quills and Sofas. Since the idea was hers, Sweetie Belle headed in to repay the shopkeeper. While she was gone, Scootaloo turned to Apple Bloom, bearing the jar with what money they had left. "It's a little less than we expected, huh."

"It looks that way."

"Here, you need to go to Appleoosa, right? It's too bad there isn't enough here for three tickets," she said with a smile.

Apple Bloom paused for a moment, then said, "You're right. Besides, I need to find someone to 'chaperone' me. I just wish Applejack would recognize that I'm -- we're - maturing, like Fluttershy does."

Sweetie Belle re-emerged from the little shop. "It's getting late," she said, "I'm going to head home. Good night!"

Scootaloo took the Cruiser, and Apple Bloom took the money and the burlap sacks. Today was Thursday, and the next train to Appleoosa left on Friday, Apple Bloom thought. Who am I going to take with me? Applejack will have to agree, so that narrows it down a bit. I need someone who can afford to take a week off. That rules out Pinkie Pie, Rarity, and Fluttershy. Rainbow Dash was an option, but Scootaloo would never forgive me for taking a week with Dash without her. Twilight could come, but she has her studies to worry about. What's a filly to do?

The sun went down just as she passed the library. Suddenly, a whisper jolted her back to reality. "Apple Bloom! Psst! Apple Bloom!" It was Spike. She looked at him funny as he beckoned her behind the shrub. She followed him back.

"Whatcha' up to, Spike?"

"Twilight fell asleep on her books again, and I don't want to wake her up. Can you give me a boost to the window?"

"Sure thing, Spike!" She followed him over to the kitchen window. He hopped up on her back and up to the windowsill. He was a tad heavy on her back, but she wasn't about to complain about it. It felt good to help someone, after everything she had messed up today.

"Thanks, Apple Bloom. I owe you one." He smiled at her. "Good night!" He began to close the window.

"Wait," Apple Bloom said, just a tad too loud. "Spike, I need someone to go to Appleoosa with me to get a batch of apples. Long story, really. If you're not busy, would you... be willing to go with me.. this Friday?" She clammed up ever so slightly. *Why am I acting like this?* she thought to herself.

"Well, sure! I'm sure Owlowiscious can pick up for me in the meantime. I'll meet you at the train station on Friday afternoon. Sound good?"

Apple Bloom blanked for a moment. She snapped back, stating "Y-yeah. I mean, if it's O.K. with Applejack. S-see you then?"

“See you then.” He smiled, bid her good night, and closed the window. She sat there for a moment, contemplating what just happened. *What’s causing me to act this way?* She shook it off and trotted back to Sweet Apple Acres.

See you then...