MLP:FiM; Lower Deck Chronicles

Part 3: Trixie's Tribulation

“How come we can never travel straight to where we're going?” asked a somewhat perplexed Apple Bloom as Scootaloo veered the scooter.

“Trust me on this one,” replied Scootaloo. “I just saw someone that we need to have a little chat with.”

While travelling through Ponyville, the Cutie Mark Crusaders often found themselves distracted by everything that crossed their path. This time was no exception, as Scootaloo had managed to demonstrate. While whizzing through the streets, she caught a glimpse of someone through the crowd. A powder blue unicorn with a glossy, pale blue mane. She had turned away from the crusaders with the rest of the crowd, allowing Scootaloo a glimpse of the wand and stardust adorning her flank.

Scootaloo recognized that cutie mark, and knew that the other crusaders would as well if they had seen it. In fact, there wasn't a single pony in Ponyville who wouldn't recognize that mark given a clear glimpse at it. She had immediately steered the scooter and waggon to follow the unicorn in question. She seemed to be heading in the direction of the library where Twilight Sparkle, a much more well liked unicorn, lived.

As the unicorn turned down a side street, Scootaloo sped after her. She pulled ahead of the unicorn and turned the scooter and waggon to the side, blocking the narrow street. The unicorn was rather startled and stepped a few paces back. The three fillies dismounted from their ride and looked upon the unicorn sternly. Upon getting a good look at her, Apple Bloom and Sweetie Belle recognized the unicorn just as Scootaloo had.

“Well looky here,” remarked Apple Bloom. “If'n it ain't the so called Great and Powerful Trixie.”

“Wait, you know who I am?” came the reply for a rather confused Trixie.

“Um, duh,” replied Scootaloo. “I doubt there's anypony in town who wouldn't remember your lousy showboating.”

“My concealing spell is perfect! No pony who's seen my face or cutie mark should be able to recognize me here in Ponyville.”

“Um, we never actually saw you before,” corrected Sweetie Belle. “I heard about you from my sister. She cried for hours about what you did to her hair.”

“The fashionista unicorn was your sister?”

“You were right nasty to mah sister too. If she weren't busy apple bucking, I'd call her over here to buck you!”

Trixie seemed surprised at the identities of the Cutie Mark Crusaders. She then addressed Scootaloo: “I guess that makes you Rainbow Dash's sister then?”

“Well; no actually. But doesn't mean I won't give you what you've got coming for making a foal out of her.”

“What a bother,” muttered Trixie. “This is exactly the kind of thing I was trying to avoid.”

The Cutie Mark Crusaders looked at each other, all of them puzzled by the same thing. Everypony in town had told them that Trixie was a loud, boisterous and obnoxious showoff. However; Trixie was presently trying rather hard to go unnoticed. This made a certain amount of sense when considering the reputation she had garnered for herself. That being the case though, why would she

return to Ponyville at all?

"So Trixie," demanded Scootaloo. "What's your game?"

"I beg your pardon?" replied the pale blue unicorn, offended by the way she was being addressed.

"Why did you come back to Ponyville?" asked Sweetie Belle.

"Ah reckon she's up to no good," cut in Apple Bloom. "Why else would she be sneakin' around with that concealin' thingy she mentioned?"

"For your information, I wasn't sneaking. I simply did not wish to attract attention to myself when not properly dressed for the stage. As for my reason for coming back, that's hardly any of your business."

"Yeah well, we're making it our business. Just like you made humiliating Rainbow Dash and the others yours."

Trixie let out a frustrated grunt. "You three are almost as bad as those oddball unicorn colts. If it will get you out of my mane, I shall tell you why I am here."

"Alright, we're listening."

"As the Great and Powerful Trixie, I have my reputation to consider and uphold. As such, it is sometimes necessary for me to hone my awesome magical talents. The best way to do this is by working with other unicorns of... reasonable talent. Twilight Sparkle demonstrated that she knows her way around a spell or two, so I have been working with her to enhance my repertoire."

"In other words, you've been learning magic from Twilight."

"You make it sound as though I have nothing to contribute."

"Well..."

"The nerve! My experience with magic has proved vital for some of Twilight's research."

"Alright, you've got a reason for being here. That still don't excuse how y'all humiliated mah sister."

"Like I said, I have my reputation to consider."

"What reputation? We'd never heard of you before our sisters told us about you. They'd never heard of you before you came to town for that matter."

"You're persistent little foals. Very well, I shall tell you of the Great and Powerful reputation, and why I have to uphold it."

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"Part of the story I told when I first came to Ponyville was true. My magic and reputation hold their beginnings in Hoofington. It is a town not unlike Ponyville, albeit a bit less central. It was there that I was born and raised. It was also where I met the previous Great and Powerful unicorn."

Young Trixie wandered aimlessly through the streets of Hoofington. She had just gotten out of school, and was heading in the general direction of her home. However, she was taking her time in the trip. The other day her teacher had given a lesson regarding cutie marks, and she was mulling the topic over in her mind. While she was not the only filly in her class yet to discover hers, she had spent the past couple days contemplating what she might find.

While lost in thought, Trixie suddenly felt her horn flicker to life. She had learned some rudimentary magic, but this was entirely involuntary. Surprised and curious, Trixie turned all of her attention to her horn, wondering what kind of magic was flaring up. No longer paying any attention to where she was walking, Trixie's fascination with her horn served only to run her into a wall. Her horn sputtered out on impact.

Trixie stumbled away from the wall, momentarily stunned by the impact. She shook her head to bring herself back to her senses, then turned her attention back to the wall in time for something to fall onto her face. It was a large poster of some sort, but she couldn't make out the details with it sitting on her head. She removed the poster and laid it out on the pavement in front of her.

Depicted on the poster was a brown unicorn stallion wearing a top hat and black cape. It was advertising a large magic performance by 'The Great and Powerful Maximilian'. Maximilian was one of the most well known magicians in all of Equestria, his feats on stage on the brink of becoming legendary. Being a unicorn meant that his magic on stage was no trick, it was the real deal.

"Clearly, finding that poster was no accident. It was a sign, meant to show me the first steps of my journey to greatness. I took the poster itself home and showed it my parents. Though they were at first sceptical, I told them of how my horn had magically reacted right before the encounter. Intrigued, they gave me permission to attend the Great and Powerful Maximilian's show."

Unlike most stage magicians, the Great and Powerful Maximilian didn't use arenas or auditoriums to put on his shows. Instead, he had a waggon that opened out into a travelling stage and doubled as his mobile home. He travelled around Equestria putting on shows like the one in Hoofington. This waggon was currently parked in the town square with a massive crowd of ponies surrounding it.

Trixie nudged and bumped her way through the crowd, trying to get a better view of the waggon. There was a flash and a burst of smoke on the stage, which was met with shock and awe from the audience. When the smoke billowed away, the Great and Powerful Maximilian stood in the direct centre of the stage, spreading his front hooves wide towards the crowd.

"Fillies and gentlecolts," called Maximilian in a voice that brought a hush over the crowd. It reached all through the town square, amplified magically. "Prepare yourselves, for you are about to witness the Great and Powerful Maximilian! My feats are not for the faint of heart, so those of weak constitution are advised to leave immediately."

The crowd let out a variety of 'oohs' and 'ahs', while Trixie remained silent in her awe of the unicorn on stage. The crowd fell silent as he began his show, opening with several smaller scale tricks. He conjured flowers and balloons, unleashed a flock of birds from within his hat and levitated off the stage, doing a loop of the town square before setting back down. There was much cheering and stamping of hooves from the crowd, Trixie remaining enraptured.

"Now that I have your attention," called Maximilian in his magically amplified voice. "Perhaps it is time I gave you a real show!"

The crowd fell deathly silent yet again as Maximilian's horn lit up brighter than it had for any of his previous tricks. There was a bright flash that faded to reveal an empty stage. The crowd looked around frantically for him and had their attention drawn upwards when his voice called down to them. Maximilian had transported himself several hundred feet above the stage, and was now diving straight down towards the cart. A collective gasp was heard as the entire crowd held their breath. Maximilian plummeted with increasing speed, but just as he was about to collide with the stage he stopped dead, hovering mere inches above the platform.

The crowd was silent for a moment before erupting into hooting, hollering and stamping that drowned out even Maximilian's voice. Trixie's heart had nearly stopped when Maximilian had been plummeting, and his sudden stop had caused her jaw to drop to the ground. After nearly a minute of stunned silence, Trixie leapt into the air in excitement, her brays joining the rest of the crowd.

Maximilian took a bow and waited for the crowd to quiet down before continuing his show.

"Maximilian's feats were the most amazing things I had ever witnessed. However, I was not satisfied with just witnessing them. I wanted to understand them, to duplicate them. I was a unicorn too after all, so recreating his feats was just a matter of figuring out the magic that he used. Or so I thought. A proper magician never reveals his secrets, so I had to figure a few things out for myself. I studied a variety of magical techniques, as well as Maximilian's biography and other accounts of his tricks. But..."

Trixie looked over the books spread out on the table in front of her. Books on a wide variety of simple magic such as telekinesis, teleportation and conjuring. Among the books was also Maximilian's biography. She grunted in frustration as she flipped through page after page. The fundamentals of the magic itself were simple enough, but there were still things that she found she couldn't make sense of.

While conjuring small objects and levitating were simply acts of teleporting and telekinesis, Maximilian's biggest trick seemed to be missing something. The death defying dive he had performed boggled her mind in more ways than just its spectacle. Although it seemed to be a simple matter of teleportation and levitation, stopping so suddenly after such a drop would have surely caused injury to anypony who wasn't an experienced flier. However; what perplexed Trixe was that she could find no magical solution to his apparent invulnerability.

Trixie had exhausted her limited resources, and came to the conclusion that the only way to figure out the magic she was missing was to watch Maximilian perform the trick again. Luckily for her, Maximilian had remained in Hoofington for the past few days, repeating his performance. However, he was planning on leaving today, so this would be her last chance to see the trick performed and satisfy her curiosity.

With her new found knowledge of magic, Trixie had a better understanding of the way in which Maximilian performed his tricks. However, she had a nagging feeling that something was out of place, but could not put her hoof on it. She looked on as he performed many of the same tricks he had done before, as well as a few variations. When it came time for his death defying dive, Trixie watched every motion Maximilian made with excruciating attentiveness.

He began with teleporting above the stage, as before. Trixie again noticed that something was odd; the magic somehow 'felt' different from what she had experienced when attempting it herself. She watched as he plummeted, but felt no new magic coming from him. She could see nothing going on to suggest he might have magically protected himself, even when he came to a stop.

Trixie's eyes were not the problem though; it was her horn telling her that something was amiss. While the rest of the crowd was stamping and cheering, she was trying to deduce what felt odd about the magic. Her horn beat her to the punch as it lip up with magical energy of its own. What happened then was completely unexpected; Maximilian flickered and wavered, before seeming to wink out of existence.

The crowd fell silent immediately, thinking another trick was being performed. Then, from the side of the stage, an older brown unicorn resembling Maximilian without his stage clothes ran onto the platform. His cutie mark was three wisps of smoke, and he seemed rather confused. It took the crowd a moment to figure out that he was in fact Maximilian, and that everything they had seen was a magical projection of great realism. It had all been an illusion.

The crowd, disgruntled and upset to learn that everything they had witnessed was fake,

dispersed quickly, grumbling about being deceived. Only Trixie remained, shocked that not only had Maximilian been creating illusions the whole time, but also that she had disgraced him by revealing his secret. Maximilian trudged off stage, hanging his head in defeat. As he left, the stage compacted itself back into the waggon.

Horrified at what she had done, Trixie made her way around to the side of the waggon. She pounded on the door, but was met with no response. She nudged at the door, which she found to be unlocked, and slipped inside. The interior of the waggon was fairly sparse, with only a few necessities present, as well as some of Maximilian's own paraphernalia. The once Great and Powerful Maximilian himself was slouched over on a seat, sighing to himself.

Trixie approached him cautiously. “Um, Maximilian sir...” she began.

“It's all over now,” he muttered. “By tomorrow everyone in Hoofington will know it was all a deception. By the next day, all of Equestria.”

“Great and Powerful Maximilian,” said Trixie, raising her voice a bit. He looked up at the small, powder blue unicorn as she addressed him. “I was watching your show and...”

“Were you now? Come to laugh at the hack? A unicorn so bad at magic that the only thing he can do is fake it?”

“Hardly,” replied Trixie. “Although they were in fact projections, the amount of magical talent required to lend them such realism speaks for itself. I only came here to tell you that I was the one who messed it up.”

Maximilian shot Trixie a stern look. “That was you?”

“I didn't mean to, it just sort of happened. I really am sorry.”

“Young filly, do you have any idea how intricate my projections are? How complex?”

“No, I only glanced over projection magic when I was looking into your tricks. I was trying to learn how to do them myself.”

“Is that so? Young filly, the intricacy of my projections was designed to prevent anypony from discovering they were illusions. To unravel them, even by mistake, would have required a great amount of magical dexterity.”

“Huh?”

“I think you might just be cut out for the stage young filly.”

“Huh?!”

“Stage magic is a fine art, but one that is dying out. For the longest time I feared that I would not be able to find someone from the next generation to pass the tradition on to. What is your name, young filly?”

“Trixie.”

“Trixie eh? Now that the truth has been revealed, I doubt very much that my reputation will remain untarnished. However, you may truly become the Great and Powerful Trixie.”

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“It was the most exciting thing I could have hoped for,” stated Trixie, gesturing to her flank. “So much so that the instant he added my title, this appeared.”

“Wait,” cut in Scootaloo, “you make it sound like the kind of magic you do is different from regular magic.”

“There is a rather large difference, my little ponies; PRESENTATION!” As she emphasized the last word, a shower of sparks erupted behind Trixie. “Regular magic is used for a myriad of purposes, most of them mundane. Stage magic is meant to astound, to amaze, to outshine the mundane.”

“That still don't make it okay to go around humiliatin' other ponies,” said Apple Bloom.

“The Great and Powerful Trixie makes no excuses. If you want an apology for my previous actions then...”

Before Trixie could finish, there was a loud popping noise and a bright flash. When it subsided, the Crusaders found themselves joined by none other than Twilight Sparkle. “Trixie,” she said, turning to the other unicorn. “I've been waiting for you, what kept you?”

“These little fillies. They held me up and I ended up sharing my origins with them.”

“Oh. So you three are out hunting for cutie mark stories are you?”

“Yes Twilight,” replied Sweetie Belle. “We also wanted to talk to Trixie about how she embarrassed my sister and the others.”

“I thought that might be the case. Well, Trixie did apologize to the others when she came back to study magic with me. I guess they just never told you. Now if you'll excuse us, we're behind on what I had scheduled for today.”

The Cutie Mark Crusaders watched as Twilight and Trixie turned away from them and headed towards the library. The three of them took their places on the scooter and waggon once more, again resuming their trek to town hall. With any luck, there would be no further diversions.

Author’s Note: Since people keep asking, let’s say that Trixie is the 5th Great and Powerful Magician. However, since Maximilian suffered his accidental disgrace before the CMC were born, it stands to reason that they’d have never heard of him.