



The Invisible Hairless Ape.

A My Little Pony: Friendship Is Magic fanfic.

BY McPOODLE.

THE Great and Powerful Trixie is the greatest unicorn to have ever lived. She told me this herself, and I have no reason to disbelieve her.

I am a writer, a teller of true tales of wonder and mystery. Perhaps you have read the account I penned of Trixie's encounter with the Ursa Major. I have written many others, and as soon as my publisher completes what she assures me is a "routine fact check", you will be able to read of Trixie's other adventures as well. Nevertheless, I believe the story you hold in your hooves to be the greatest of all of her incredible run-ins with the supernatural.

The Great and Powerful One has graciously allowed me to accompany her on her travels. When she is in the mood, she shares her stories with me. I have high hopes of one day getting her to tell me of the "Purple Loudmouth", a creature apparently so terrifying that she does not think my constitution strong enough to hear it, as she always changes the subject when I press her on the matter.

But you are here for the story of the Invisible Hairless Ape. One night after a show, Trixie and I were sitting in her caravan,

dining on salted crackers while she entered her profits in a ledger with a mathematical ease I have never before encountered in a performer. I gently pressed her for one of her incredible stories, but Trixie demurred, claiming she had told all of the good stories that she could recall. She suggested that I look through a nearby box of mementos to see if I could find something to jog her memory. The box was mostly full of posters and press clippings, but I finally managed to find something that attracted my attention.

What I found was a collection of photographs, all of the same pegasus colt at the end of his adolescent years. A rather handsome specimen, I thought, with bright eyes and a somewhat nervous disposition. As I proceeded through the collection, it dawned on me that the photographs were not in fact pictures of him, but of his surroundings, the interior of a very old mountain estate. In some photographs, only a single hoof of the colt might be visible, or the corner of an ear. This was curious, but not particularly noteworthy. At least until I reached the last photograph of the collection.

This picture was taken in the dark, and was illuminated by the light of a single flash, presumably held in the mouth of the earth pony photographer. The colt was in the center of the image, caught in the act of turning his

head upwards to look at something. And what he was about to see, half-formed and coming out of the shadows, was the form of an enormous paw.

No, in fact it was not a paw; it was unlike anything I have ever seen. The paw of a southern ape comes closest, but this was an exaggeration of that paw, the phalanges even longer and spread far apart like a starburst.

I eagerly showed my find to the magician / monster-hunter. Her first reaction was to push them away from me in shock. "Where did you find those?!" she demanded.

"Where did you take these?" I pleaded. "Please, you must tell the tale of how you defeated this monster!"

"How I..." Trixie thought for a bit. "Yes, yes of course it was I, The Great and Powerful Trixie, who defeated the invisible hairless ape. And I shall tell you all about it..."

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YEARS before I took up magic as a career, the Great and Powerful Trixie was a consulting detective. Trixie was known in certain circles as Car...Trixie the Ghost-Finder. It was a most curious business: Trixie fought valiantly against several actual ghosts, but more often she found that these ghosts were fakes—ponies with sheets over their heads. As I, the Great and Powerful Trixie, have often remarked, we are living in very credulous times.

One afternoon, The Great and Powerful Trixie was approached in her ornate but tasteful Canterlot office by a certain respected pegasus...let us call her "Captain Staples", to protect her privacy. The Captain was a retired member of the Royal Guards, and had seen service during the Draconian Crisis of a generation ago. I knew her better, though, as the author of a privately-circulated manuscript describing the Staples Family curse.

The story goes that at least since the early 68th Century, any time the heir of the family was to be a colt instead of a filly, he would be haunted by an invisible hairless ape as soon as

he started courting a potential bride. This ghost could be detected by three means: the sound of its untrimmed nails scratching on the floorboards, the horrific stench of its breath (a breath that made abundantly clear its carnivorous appetite), and the screams of its inequine voice. In the period recorded by Captain Staples' book, there had been five colt heirs to the Staples estate. Two of those colts had been so shaken by the hauntings that they had fled their family lands, never to be seen again; the other three had been abandoned by their unnerved fiancés and had then signed over the right of inheritance to their next-oldest sister.

For the last century and a half, the eldest child of each Staples generation had been a filly, and the family had come to consider the curse a quaint, and fairly ridiculous, fairy tale, until the current generation. Young Staples had been teased from an early age to prepare himself for "the paw" by his joking younger sisters. He had otherwise grown up to become a stunningly-handsome young stallion, and gained his open-book cutie mark through his studies of the past, which he shared with any who were willing to hear him. It was obvious to me that it was he who wrote the manuscript about the family curse, but as we all know few male authors are taken seriously, which is why I think he had his mother circulate the manuscript with her name instead of his.

The trouble began when he brought his *fiancé* home to officially announce the engagement. Bobble (also not her real name) was a young midshipmare pegasus in the Royal Navy, and head-over-hooves in love with Young Staples. The first incident occurred as the family's servants were lighting the oil lamps for the night. In the gloom was suddenly heard an inequine screech, followed by the scampering of claws on the hardwood floor, both sounds converging on the young couple as they stood shocked next to the front door. Bobble stepped forward to protect her husband-to-be from the unseen assailant, but was struck down by a slap across her face. At this point the Captain and servants converged

on the noise. No trace of an ape, invisible or otherwise, was found. No scratches in the polished floor, and no way for a corporeal creature to have escaped. The old Captain, as a result of her years of service, was able to detect the residue left by the magic of not only dragons but most other magical creatures, including unicorns; she detected no such residue here. In short, there was no visible evidence in the hall that anything unusual had occurred. But the welt raised on the face of poor Bobble was certainly visible, and there was no denying that it had the rough shape of an ape's paw. There was only one thing to do under the circumstances: to call for the expert in all things supernatural, and by that I mean me, The Great and Powerful Trixie, to bust the ghost.

Like many military pegasi families, the Staples did not live in a cloud city, but rather on an estate built into the northern mountains. This was one of the oldest parts of Equestria, the core of the Old Kingdom. The wooden building stood upon a stone foundation so old that it appeared that the individual stones were crumbling into dust.

"Oh yes," said the Captain when the Great and Powerful Trixie brought this to her attention. "The home was built on the remains of a most unusual ruin, built for a most unusual and long-extinct breed of pony. The windows were all set too high in the walls to see through, and the doorways were all uncomfortably narrow. My son is currently doing his Master's Thesis on them."

We had arrived at the great mountain estate, just as Celestia's sun was setting. The Captain and I left the carriage, and the servants set to work moving all of the ghost-busting equipment into a room befitting the Great and Powerful Trixie. Once I had arranged the equipment to my satisfaction, the Great and Powerful Trixie went in search of the two young lovers. I found them playing billiards in the game room on the ground floor. Bobble was wearing a bandage on her

face to cover up the mark of her encounter two nightsearlier.

Did you ever notice that only pegasi play billiards? Ground ponies can't play it because they have trouble balancing on their hind legs, and most unicorn magic is too specialized to be able to manipulate the cue and stand upright at the same time, but pegasi have their wings for balance, so they have made the sport their own. And the way those two played billiards, it looked like an act of courtship all by itself. The two of them welcomed the Great and Powerful Trixie into their company, confident that I would be able to dispel whatever it was that was haunting them. Trixie learned that Bobble didn't yet have a Best Mare picked for the wedding ceremony; as the most-brilliant pony within a one billion pony-length radius, I nominated myself for the position.

I asked them if they had had any encounters during the two nights between the Captain's departure from the estate and our return. The answer to this was a resounding "Yes". The first night, Young Staples had been awakened by a terrible scratching outside his bedroom door. The door burst open and he had screamed, awakening the household. As before, no trace of the intruder was found.

The second night was far more interesting, although for the Great and Powerful Trixie it was just another event. Young Staples and Bobble had been sitting in the living room, with the Captain's father, Old Staples, as chaperone. The two of them probably whispered all sorts of naughty things to each other, because Old Staples was quite deaf without his ear trumpet. A few hours after sunset, they heard the noise of some creature pawing the soil outside the window. Bobble got up to investigate, but saw nothing. Just to be sure, though, she opened the front door of the mansion to take a closer look. As soon as she had stepped away from the door, it had slammed shut, and she found that she could not open it. It's a pity the Great and Powerful Trixie wasn't there at the time; I could have opened it without a second thought. Bobble,

however, said she had a feeling as if she was trapped by something in the narrow confines of the front porch, before finally getting the door latch to work and rushing inside. Just as she did so, she heard the furious sounds of a creature tearing through the soil and pebbles of the front drive, with the sound then stopping before reaching the door. Looking through the window beside the door once again revealed nothing.

The Great and Powerful Trixie asked many questions. Only Bobble was witness to the events on the porch, as Young Staples had stayed with his chaperone. Old Staples had heard absolutely nothing, and was more interested in knowing the score of the most recent Canterlot Senators ballgame than in the safety of his charges. At this point, Trixie's mind was not yet made up. I could easily imagine ways that the sounds being heard were the result of the natural sounds of the house and its surroundings, transformed by minds willing to believe into signs of the supernatural. Doors do manage to get themselves stuck from time to time, after all.

The Great and Powerful Trixie failed, however, to convince the couple of the truth of this, so they agreed to sleep on it. We extinguished the lamps in the game room and exited it. Just as we were heading for the stairs, we heard the distinct sound of a scratch of nails on the floorboard. It was coming from the recently-vacated room. All the hairs on even The Great and Powerful Trixie's mane stood straight up. I felt a cold wind from my fetlocks to my withers, even though all the windows were closed and twin fireplaces blazed behind me. In a fright, Young Staples raced up the stairs to his room, passing his mother on the way. Bobble went to the sideboard, and removed a sheaved sword with her teeth.

The sounds of the scratches continued, as the creature inside could be clearly discerned pacing its way around the billiard table, over and over again. Finally, the Great and Powerful Trixie resolved to confront the specter.

She stepped up to the door, and began to turn the handle.

Immediately, the door shook on its hinges, and the scratches were transferred to the body of the door itself. It was trying to get out! Bobble pushed me aside, and plunged her blade between the boards of the door several times, crying out "I am not afraid! Do you hear me, ghost? I am not like those other suitors, and you will never get me to leave. Never!"

The sounds inside immediately ceased. We opened the door and relit the lamps. As Trixie imagines you're expecting to hear by now, the only sign that the room was any different from when we had left it was the damage caused to the door by Bobble's sword.

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THE night that followed was uneventful. In the morning Trixie had a hearty breakfast, to make up for missing dinner the night before. She then asked the Captain to join her in the billiard room for a private conversation.

"Trixie wishes for you to be truthful with her," the Great and Powerful Trixie said. "Do you approve of your son's marriage?"

"What an impertinent question!" the Captain blustered, ruffling her feathers and pacing back and forth in front of Trixie.

"Is it?" Trixie replied. "Your son will be leaving the mansion to live with Bobble after the marriage. Your daughters have moved out or are being educated abroad. It will be very lonely here after he leaves. And then there's the matter of Bobble: a sailor. You know what *they're* like. Are you sure you trust her to take care of your flesh and blood?"

"I do not appreciate the tone you are using," Captain Staples warned in a low voice. "Bobble is an honorable pony, and I am proud to make her my daughter-in-law. Now I think you owe me an explanation for this base accusation."

"But of course," I said, completely changing my tone. "This haunting, and it is

indeed a haunting, is quite unlike any of the ones that preceded it in this house. For one thing, the ghost has always targeted the heir before, never the bride-to-be. For this and other reasons, The Great and Powerful Trixie believes that we are dealing with an 'induced haunting'."

"What is that?"

"The Great and Powerful Trixie doubts that she could make you understand the concept completely with only a brief explanation. In short, there are circumstances when a spirit might be roused and directed by the strong emotions of a living pony, one who might be completely unaware of what they are doing."

The Captain nodded. "So if I was silently opposed to Bobble marrying my son, I might be responsible for awakening the family curse and directing it against her, without even knowing it?"

"Exactly," replied Trixie. "Also, if you were responsible for awakening the ghost, there is a good chance that this confrontation we just had would have turned its wrath against you. The Great and Powerful Trixie, as the greatest ghost-hunter in the history of Equestria, is going to uncover who is controlling this ghost, no matter what happens, but there is one thing you can do to take Bobble and your son out of danger immediately: have the marriage tomorrow."

"Tomorrow? I doubt that my son will so easily give up his plans for an elaborate wedding. He was going to re-create the ceremony as it was practiced by our ancestors four millennia ago."

The Great and Powerful Trixie then remembered that the pegasus ceremony being referred to involved the couple reciting their vows with forelegs interlocked while the entire party was plummeting in free fall from 80,000 pony-heights above Mounts Fold, Spindle and Mutilate; and none of them allowed to break out of the fall until the union had been sealed with a kiss. It wasn't precisely easy for the Best Mare to be an earth pony or unicorn under the circumstances; nevertheless it was purely in regards to the

loving couple that The Great and Powerful Trixie gave the following words of wisdom: "Trixie would advise you to persuade your son to give up those plans, Captain. Regardless of who is controlling the ghost, its primary purpose is to prevent a wedding, so the haunting will end the instant they say 'I do'."

The Captain once again nodded in agreement. "So goes the legend, and I can't just send my son away. Two of the historical victims of the hauntings tried to run before getting married, and the ghost followed them until they renounced their names."

Trixie and the Captain were about to leave the game room when they heard a sudden crash coming from the front door. The two of them raced out to investigate, only to find that a clumsy unicorn filly had managed to trip over a huge pile of luggage and pull them all down upon her head. As the servants dug the newcomer out, the Captain introduced her as Dribble (once again not her real name), a foundling that the Staples had taken in and raised from a young age. From the way that Young Staples treated "Cousin Dribble", Trixie deduced that she was something of the family pet. This was reinforced by the fact that despite being the same age as the Staples heir, she was still lacking a cutie mark. She was training to be an accountant, and had received "time off for good behavior", as she put it.

"You're late," Young Staples said with a pout. "You were supposed to arrive days ago!"

"There was a mix-up with the trains," Dribble said meekly.

"More like you got lost at the station!" the Captain proclaimed in disgust, swatting one hoof upside Dribble's head so hard that she nearly lost her balance.

"After you clean up, would you like to join us for billiards?" asked the colt.

"Um, I can't really play that well, Cousin," answered Dribble.

Young Staples, who was flying in lazy laps over Dribble's head, giggled. "Oh that's

right,” he said, “you’re not a pegasus! I keep forgetting that.”

Dribble walked over to greet Bobble, but changed her course upon recognizing Trixie. “The Great and Powerful Trixie!” she gushed with a cracking voice. “I’ve read all of your papers! It’s such an honor to meet you!”

“Always good to meet the fans,” Trixie murmured. As a matter of fact, she took an instant dislike to the clumsy unicorn. Dribble’s grooming was atrocious, she was distracted by every little noise around her, and her eyes were clearly those of a thief. Trixie resolved to have her room locked every time she left it from that moment onwards.

Dribble put down the hoof Trixie had been ignoring. “I hope this doesn’t offend,” she told her, “but I’ve wondered why your works are always mislabeled. They *are* works of fiction, yes?”

“No, they are not,” the Greatly-Offended Trixie told her coldly. “As a matter of fact, the Great and Powerful Trixie is here to investigate the haunting of this very house.”

“Th...this house! Get out of town!”

“If you are not interested in assisting in Trixie’s investigation, Miss Dribble, then Trixie kindly asks that you stay out of my way.”

“Oh, are you beginning your investigation now, Great and Powerful Trixie?” asked Young Staples. “I was wondering when I’d get to see some of your amazing ghost-busting equipment.”

“How are you going to bust ghosts with a camera?” the heir asked ten minutes later.

The Great and Powerful Trixie ignored the note of contempt in his voice. Besides, it would make the inevitable adulation once Trixie had proved herself as the Greatest Wrangler of Supernatural Monstrosities Since the Dawn of Time that much better. “The camera can see things that the pony eye cannot,” she carefully explained to the poor foals. “This haunting is centered upon you, Young Staples, so Trixie is going to take some

pictures of you, to see if anything unusual turns up in your immediate vicinity.”

“I can certainly help in that respect,” said Dribble. “I’ve dabbled quite a bit in amateur photography, and I’ve brought my own equipment.” She left the front hall for a few moments, returning with a quite respectable camera. “With two of us taking pictures, we should be able to cover the entire estate twice as fast.”

The Great and Powerful Trixie nodded reluctantly in agreement, without for a moment admitting that she hadn’t really brought enough film anyway.

“And I can be here to lend moral support,” Bobble proudly proclaimed. “Since it works so well at motivating the menials to work faster, it surely will have a positive effect upon you two!”

Dribble and Trixie both stared at her coldly.

With the two of them taking turns, Dribble and Trixie were able to photograph Young Staples in a variety of surroundings, including each of the locations where the invisible ape made its “appearances”, if that word is even applicable for an entity that cannot be seen. Dribble for the most part proved her competence with her equipment, although Trixie believes her horn flash was quite a bit brighter than it needed to be—what a show-off!

The Great and Powerful Trixie finished the shoot feeling somewhat underwhelmed. Not once had she felt the same mane-raising feeling that would have shown that they were in the presence of the supernatural. Trixie looked up at the sun-filled windows as the truth dawned on her. “Is there any way we could go down into the basement?” Trixie asked.

Dribble and Young Staples both got a frightened look into their eyes. “The basement?” the colt finally asked in reply.

“Yes,” Trixie replied. “It’s the one part of this house with artificial darkness, and therefore the best chance of seeing a result on

film. But it is up to you. The Graceful and Magnanimous Trixie would never ask a gentlecolt to go somewhere where he is afraid to go.”

Young Staples shook himself out of a reverie. “Those stories are all very old,” he said, “and I’m quite willing to face my fears...if Bobble will be there with me.”

“But of course,” she said, rushing to his side.

“And I’m not afraid of any long-legged ghosties,” said Dribble, rushing to his other side. “Although I hope you don’t mind if I try to stay away from the long-legged spidies.”

The basement was very full of abandoned equipment and mementos, some of them several generations old by the layers of dust and cobwebs. The space stretched out further than Trixie could see, although most of it was inaccessible thanks to the mountains of stuff in the way. Closing the door for maximum effect, we made our way down the circular stair and to a spot far from the light let in by the occasional crack in the ceiling. The Great and Powerful Trixie had Bobble and Dribble hold up a specially-prepared background fabric as she shot a picture, the very picture you hold in your hooves. At the time she *saw* nothing unusual, but Trixie *felt* a sudden overwhelming feeling of dread, and it was this same feeling which caused Young Staples to let out a cry of pure fear. Bobble was all for fighting the phantasm with her sabre, but Dribble and Trixie agreed that discretion was the better part of valor, and the two ponies got the couple out of there with no further incident.

Later Dribble and Trixie developed the photographs together, and they saw the paw on the basement picture.

“Do you believe The Great and Powerful Trixie now?” she asked.

“Well, I certainly disbelieve a lot less,” Dribble confided, considerably shaken by the entire incident.

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DINNER that night was rather tense. Young Staples refused to speak, lost in his own thoughts. Bobble spent her time trying to comfort her fiancé, largely in vain. Old Staples spent his time staring indignantly at the couple, and refusing to use his ear trumpet to hear anything we had to say to him.

In the silence, the Great and Powerful Trixie had a chance to look around her. Painted on the walls were dozens of tall bipedal creatures in cloaks, sneaking around a landscape of large rocks and hills, obviously somepony’s conception of the strange creatures that lived in this place long before the ponies were created. The artwork looked fairly new. Trixie wondered if Young Staples had created it in his earlier years.

Dribble, thinking it up to her to lighten the mood, proclaimed that she had the entire mystery figured out. “There’s no ghost at all, it’s just a trick with mirrors and rapping hooves, kind of like the shows I used to put on as a little filly. You remember those mind-reading shows, don’t you, Cousin?” She attempted to put on a little magic show to demonstrate, but she made an utter foal of herself. “I’ve been practicing, honest!”

“Nopony wants to see your pathetic displays, Dribble,” the Captain said in annoyance as she stood up. “I believe under the circumstances we have no choice but to move the date of the wedding up to tomorrow. I’ll send word around to the judge.”

Young Staples opened his mouth as if to say something, but then he closed it.

Bobble also stood. “I totally agree, Mother, if I may call you ‘Mother’...”

“But of course...Daughter,” said the Captain.

Dribble, having a healthy disdain for mawkishness, looked sick to her stomach.

Bobble grinned briefly before resuming her usual serious look. “At the same time, I refuse to let this ghost think that it has power over our actions. Tonight, my husband-to-be and myself will survey the bounds of the

estate, on our hooves. We will not bow our heads to fear, not tonight, not any night.”

“We agreed it would be for the best,” Young Staples said. “Please don’t follow us.”

“The Great and Powerful Trixie does not think this to be a very wise course of action...”

“Perhaps not,” said the Captain, “but I fully approve! Go out there and maintain the family honor!”

“Yes, Ma’am!” proclaimed the soon-to-be Bobble Staples, before excusing herself and her fiancé for their walk.

Trixie looked upon the three of them in shock. Dribble meanwhile resumed eating.

A few hours later, a servant rushed into the living room where the Captain and Trixie had been sitting, to inform them that she had heard the sounds of something large scabbling its way through the undergrowth. This had been followed by a scream.

The Great and Powerful Trixie had the Captain assemble a search party and headed out into a windy night. After a while they were joined by Dribble, who had quietly armed herself with a golf club after dinner and had been trying to follow the couple without being seen. Not surprisingly, she had then proceeded to get herself lost.

Eventually they heard the sound of sobbing, and followed it to a large tree. There they found a near-hysterical Young Staples cradling the form of Bobble, with a nasty gash across her forehead. We carefully picked up the unconscious pegasus and carried her into the house. I, Trixie, used my amazing knowledge of pony medicine to determine that Bobble had what is formally known as a “bump on the head”, and just needed a lie-down.

After the others calmed Young Staples down, I asked for his story. “We heard the invisible ape coming towards us,” he began. “Bobble turned back to make a final stand against the source of the sounds. I’m ashamed to say that I started to run, too scared to even fly, which forced Bobble to call off

confronting the ghost to follow me. And then suddenly the thing appeared right in front of us, all while the sounds continued from behind us.”

“Did you say ‘appeared’?” Trixie asked.

“Yes, it became visible, or at least its upper half did. It was two pony-heights high, with a great broad chest, long muscular arms ending in enormous paws, and a bloated, muzzle-less head full of sharp teeth. It ambushed Bobble while she was still looking over her shoulder at the sounds, and back-handed her into the tree. Actually come to think of it, I think the gash was more caused by the bark of the tree than the paw of the beast.”

“The Great and Powerful Trixie finds this to be very interesting!” she remarked. “A ghost that is not only able to make itself visible, but to separate its sound from its appearance!”

“But what are we going to do?” the Staples heir asked. “How will we survive until the morning?”

“Just leave everything to Trixie.”

The Great and Powerful Trixie has been a long-time student of the twin fields of the occult and the technological. Trixie’s method for protecting the young couple therefore combined the best of ancient knowledge with cutting-edge 71st Century discoveries in the realm of physics. She placed a mystical circle of protection around Young Staples’ bed, an arrangement of glowing gems powered by electromagical batteries and connected together by copper wire.

“Now it is essential that nopony cross this barrier before the morning,” Trixie loudly informed Old Staples via his ear trumpet. “Lives may depend upon it.” By this point she had eliminated Old Staples as a suspect: his crankiness was caused by money lost gambling on the Canterlot Senators, not the upcoming departure of his grandson.

“What about Bobble?” Young Staples asked anxiously from within the circle,

looking around carefully to make sure that his wings and tail did not wander out of bounds.

“She’ll be outside the door with Dribble and Trixie, keeping watch, and one of us will remain awake with your beloved at all times. Although may Trixie just put it on the record that this whole business would have been a lot easier if she had just agreed to the mystical circle treatment as well. Are you sure you want to marry that stubborn ox?”

“Bobbie is the only pony who has ever been able to turn my head,” Young Staples said shyly. “I’d do anything for her.”

“And, evidently, she feels the same for you,” Trixie added reluctantly. “Try to get some sleep. After all, you two are getting married tomorrow.”

Trixie opened the door to find Captain Staples waiting. She was armed with a nasty pair of spiked greaves covering her forelegs. “I shall be taking watch in the bedroom,” she informed Trixie. Trixie was not at all intimidated by the Captain’s “take no prisoners” expression, and the board The Great and Powerful One tripped over on the way out of the room was totally caused by a floorboard popping up at that precise instant.. “Be sure to keep...” Trixie began before the Captain slammed the door in her face and shoved several knobs home. “...the doors locked.”

Trixie turned to find Bobbie and Dribble waiting for her. “Now then,” she began, “the Great and Powerful Trixie intends to hold off the ghost with three defenses.

“First, the locked door. This ghost appears to have a problem with them. At least some of the time.

“Second, lights. The ghost has only been encountered in darkness, and it has always fled from the light. This hallway is well-lit, and the servants are waiting downstairs with all of the other oil lamps that the family possesses. Trixie has hung up ropes along all of the walls of the mansion, each of which is connected to a bell. If at any time anypony discovers the presence of the ghost, they are to pull on the rope until the bell rings, at the

sound of which everypony will converge on the noise with their lights. If that system fails then Trixie has the whistle that you can see tied around her neck.

“Finally, emotion. Ghosts feed on negative emotions, especially hatred and fear. This group will use its confidence to fight back against this monster. Dawn is only six hours away, so it is only necessary to keep our spirits high for that long and then the ghost will be beaten, for the lifetimes of everypony present. Now, mares, to your stations!”

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THE hours passed quickly enough. The trio spent the time telling wild stories of their past adventures, none of which Trixie expects were in fact true. Except for Trixie’s stories, each of which was completely true and many of which resulted in the creation of entirely new scientific laws. By acting out these stories, the three ponies chased sleep away from their minds, and several times Trixie was forced to catch a small vase that tended to tumble from its stand any time anypony started pounding the floor from laughing too hard. From time to time one of the group would knock on the nearby door, to ensure that the Captain was still awake. They would also take turns going down to check on the servants, huddled together in the kitchen around a pair of oil lamps while saving the rest for their eventual assault on the ghost. And one by one, the oil lamps that surrounded our brave heroes, The Great and Powerful Trixie and those other two, exhausted their fuel supplies and sputtered out, until there was left just two. The hallways around the three were not pitch black, but they were more than dark enough to hide anypony, or anything, approaching until they were right on top of them.

Dribble was telling a riotous story about how she had accidentally sabotaged a circus of evil clowns by ordering cotton candy from precisely the wrong pony at the wrong time, when she tripped on her own hooves and fell

against the wall, pulling the rope down with her.

Trixie got up in preparation of telling the "Kitchen Brigade" that the bell they heard was a false alarm, when she suddenly realized there was no bell.

"The rope must have gotten caught on something," said Dribble as she put it back on its hooks. "I'll go find the snag." She picked up one of the two remaining lamps and looked to Trixie with uncertainty. "I don't suppose you have a spare weapon as well?"

The Great and Powerful Trixie is the greatest swordsmare in all Equestria, able to simultaneously swing swords in all four hooves, her mouth, *and* her tail, with all six blades capable of slicing through a hoof-width of solid steel like it was made out of butter. But unfortunately, Trixie had *just happened* to have sent all six of them to the shop to be waxed (or whatever it is you do to a sword to make it even *more* swashbuckling). Under no circumstances was she unarmed because she couldn't tell at sight a Mauser rifle from a javelin.

"Well I won't ask to borrow Bobble's sword, even though I am a coward," Dribble said, trotting off into the darkness. Her light could be seen turning a corner, and then it rapidly faded from sight. From time to time we could see the rope tugging slightly as the unicorn tried it out.

Bobble got up, adjusted the bandages on her face, and sighed. "That pony is no coward, if she's willing to spend the night with us after what she's experienced. You've got your whistle, Trixie, so I think it's alright if I accompany Dribble, at least to the staircase." Nerving herself, she rapidly trotted off to follow the path of Dribble's lamp.

And so she left the Great and Powerful and Not-at-all Scared Trixie all alone, in the small pool of light left by the last oil lamp. Trixie checked on the Captain once again, and set herself to watch the two corridors that met next to Young Staple's bedroom. Her ears were alert for any sound out of the ordinary, but she heard nothing.

A few agonizing minutes later, Trixie heard one set of hoofsteps returning, but no light to accompany it. She strained my eyes to the utmost, and finally made out the form of an approaching pegasus, which resolved itself into Bobble. "We couldn't find the fault on this floor," Bobble said, "so Dribble is going downstairs. I insisted that she keep the sword with her." And indeed, Bobble had returned defenseless. Trixie looked to the lamp, and saw that it was mere minutes away from going out. She decided that this was a good time to ask the Captain if she could borrow one of her greaves.

Trixie started knocking on the door, when her hoof was suddenly pulled away by Bobble. "Look, this had better not be some of your 'tough pony' nonsense again!" Trixie exclaimed. "Because if it is, the Great and Powerful Trixie..."

"Listen!" hissed Bobble.

Trixie stopped talking, and immediately heard the sound of untrimmed nails, making their way down the hallway towards us. *I also noticed that the lamp had gone out.*

And then I heard a second sound, an inequine scream that seemed to come from within our own heads. Immediately my hair stood on end and I felt the cold wind in my bones. From the opposite corridor, the gleaming white hairless ape described by Young Staples materialized, and made a beeline for Bobble. Instinctually, I reached for the rope, but of course no bells sounded. As a result, I was crucial seconds late in blowing my whistle. The floating torso screamed yet again, and began savagely beating upon the pony, knocking her to the ground. It occurred to me that the ghost ape seemed remarkably clumsy, missing its blows at least as often as it succeeded.

I looked wildly about me. I could hear the servants approaching, but they appeared to be getting in each other's way, and were still wasting precious time trying to light all of their lamps. The Captain meanwhile had heard the commotion and was trying to come

outside to help, but found that the doorknob refused to turn, and started to use her body to try to break down the door. Bobble had lost consciousness. Under the circumstances, I did the only thing I could: I bumped the stand to make the vase drop, and bucked the falling projectile towards the ghost. I was aiming for the head, in hopes of disorienting it, but circumstances were less than ideal, so I had to settle for a gut shot.

To my great surprise, the vase did not pass through the ghost's stomach, but rather impacted with it, causing a strangely-familiar groan to emerge from it. Heartened by this experience, the Great and Powerful Trixie jumped forward to tackle the creature, and give it some of the medicine it had been giving to poor Bobble. After a few such blows, the form suddenly flickered a few times before disappearing, revealing the battered form of...

"...Dribble?" Bobble asked incredulously, cracking open one swelling eyelid to look upon the face of her attacker before falling back into unconsciousness.

"I told you I was practicing," the unicorn answered grimly.

The confrontation was interrupted at that point by the sound of the bedroom door being bashed open. Captain Staples charged out into the hallway, but unfortunately her body was not ready for all of this strain after so many years of retirement. A moment of inattention caused one leg to turn awkwardly, and before she knew it, her head had stumbled hard into the wall, knocking herself unconscious.

"Mother? Are you alright?" asked the voice of Young Staples.

"Don't step outside of the circle!" Trixie cried, but I knew from a sudden inequine cry of triumph that my advice had not been heeded.

Trixie looked to her captive to ask how she made that sound. "It's not me! It's not me!" yelled Dribble in a tone that was more terror than the protestation of innocence.

The hall was suddenly filled with a feeling of dread and the stench of a meat-eater's

breath, and the sound of a running biped could be heard accelerating from our position towards the open bedroom door. Young Staples screamed in terror.

"Cousin!" cried Dribble, scrambling to her hooves and madly rushing for the door, with me hot on her heels.

As we crowded the doorway, we saw the colt being bodily lifted by an invisible force, and then thrown against one wall after another.

Dribble set herself in the center of the room. "This ends now!" she screamed. "You are not to hurt him! Not now, not ever!" It was her proudest moment.

The form of the unconscious colt was unceremoniously dropped upon the bed, and Dribble suddenly looked up. All the hairs of her mane stood on end, and her eyes went wide as she felt the full psychic force of the ghost upon her. With a sudden turn, she leapt through the second-story window...

...and at that instant, the feeling of dread in the room ceased, along with that awful smell.

The very next day The Graceful and Always Stunning Trixie was Best Mare to the couple's wedding (in a thoroughly-modern and safe ceremony), the couple looking more battered and bruised than Trixie had ever seen a pair of ponies. Conscious ones, that is. And the invisible hairless ape never returned to Staple Manor.

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“SO there was both a real and a fake ghost?” I asked my gracious storyteller.

“That is correct,” she answered. “Dribble had fallen in love with Young Staples at a very young age, but he never returned her love. When she learned that he was getting married, she decided to use what she considered to be the ‘myth’ of the Staples Family curse to scare Bobble away, a curse she

learned about as a result of Young Staples' extensive research.

"The Great and Powerful Trixie searched the basement the day of the wedding, and found the metal claws and poles that Dribble had used to scratch on the underside of the floors during the early attacks. The unicorn had used secret passageways to perform the physical assaults. A check of train records confirmed that she did arrive at the local station on time, so she obviously had been hiding out in the area. She was only forced out of that hiding with the arrival of Trixie and the failure of the game room attack in frightening Bobble away. From that point she began to let her obsession get the better of her.

"What she did not suspect was that her intense hatred for Bobble made the real Staples Family ghost more and more powerful, and unlike Dribble, its primary focus was

always on the young heir. The remaining attacks can be divided into Dribble's fakes, Dribble using her magic to create the white ape, and the actual ghost. The Great and Powerful Trixie believes that should answer all of your questions."

"All but one, if you don't mind."

"The Great and Powerful Trixie does not mind." And as she said this, she used her levitation magic to collect the photographs of Young Staples. She looked them over with what looked like a wistful sigh, and then carefully put them away in another trunk.

"Whatever happened to Dribble?"

Trixie looked me sadly in the eye. "Her fate matches that of two of the colts in the old stories. She abandoned her former identity and ran. And she has never stopped running...ever."

~ ~ ~

My Little Pony: Friendship Is Magic is copyright Hasbro, with due respects to Laurel Faust for her brilliant re-imagining of the franchise. All characters other than The Great and Powerful Trixie (and the brief reference to Princess Celestia) are my own creations.

The illustration to this story is a photo-collage constructed from the following elements:

- The sky is from a photograph of night skies above Mount Everest, near Namche Bazar, Nepal, by Babak Tafreshi.
- The mansion is a photograph of Baskerville Hall Hotel in South Wales, U.K., from Random Ramblings: Just another WordPress weblog, April 21, 2008.
- The vector art of Trixie is "The Great and Naked Trixie", by Durpy.
- The Sherlock Holmes-style deerstalker cap and Inverness cape, as well as the shadow are from screenshots of the Chip 'n' Dale Rescue Rangers episode "Pound of the Baskervilles". This program is copyright Disney.

The moment that I learned that there was a supernatural mystery with the title "The Horse of the Invisible" (a *Carnacki the Ghost-Finder* story written by William Hope Hodgson in 1910), I knew that I had to turn it into a My Little Pony parody starring Trixie. Once I had actually read the story, and watched a 1971 BBC adaptation of it (starring Donald Pleasance as the spiritual detective), I realized that I had to take the story in the direction it finally ended up going. As I believe should be the usual procedure in most *MLP:FIM* adaptations, the genders of all characters in the story have been switched.