## Chapter 1

## In which we determine the losers

Starry knew that his ears glowed when he used magic, but he'd hoped no one would be watching his ears since his cousin had control of the ball, and his older sister had broken her leg sliding into a Farmer boy last year. And all he wanted, was a little extra cushion between his leg and Rake's chest, currently barreling towards Marble Rocksmith.

Not surprisingly Rake Farmer still bowled through Starry, who was almost on the ground, on his side, when Marble, of all ponies, shouted out "Hey! No magikeeeeef" Despite having been cut off by the blow, followed by the ground, followed by Hoe & Corn dogpiling on the much smaller filly, her cry did not go unnoticed.

"Y'all think those ears make you something special?" grumbled the eldest player on Farmer clan's team, Butternut. "You don't want to play by pony rules you can just sit out."

"I might, but our side is already outnumbered because no one else wants you to break their legs." Starry Skies replied, trying to stay calm.

And suddenly the whole field was filled with yelling. The Farmer ponies saying things like "Are you **still** all riled up about that?" and Marble trying to say "That was a freak accident" And Starry's other teammate, Damp Skies offering a snarky "They did pay restitution."

It was Starry's cousin Damp, that ramped things up though, pushing against Rake's rump saying "It's not like their clan can't afford to pay that again, though. And hey, your sister can nearly walk now, can't she?"

Each Farmer pony launched off into some angry angle about having only paid for a year's lost work, having paid at least a year's wages, or that none of the Farmer clan were weak boned enough to not have recovered already, or that if magic was used on the field before any legs were broken than clearly the freak was the cause of any miscalculation. The logic of Starry using his magic to somehow break his own leg during a game of mudball was daunting enough he didn't say more. Starry did levitate Rake and Corn away from his cousin who, while definitely escalating this rapidly towards violence, was his relative, and the Farmer boys were more like clients.

Starry prepared to levitate all the Farmer players as the two combatants were forcibly removed from the theatre, by about four hooves back and not quite one hoof off the ground leading to squealing that would shame any pig as their legs pumped through a full gallop pace at wild speeds. But instead of cries of battle, Butternut Farmer's face turned cold, hard, unforgiving ... and silent.

The remaining players also fell silent, with Marble Rocksmith quickly glancing back and forth between Butternut and Starry. After a breath, The two rambuctious Farmer colts realized what was going on, and they settled down. Starry lowered them to the ground, but never looked away from Butternut, who looked like he wanted Starry dead right about now. All Butternut said, however, also not looking away from Starry, and shouting as if the teams were scattered across the whole field, was "The games are over! There are no worthy opponents here!"

The Farmer clan backed away, not looking away from the disgraced runty player who didn't want his leg broken and had the magic to up his chances at a critical moment. Marble squinted at him, clearly disappointed but not sure how to say it. After a breath she grimaced, and turned to walk back to her tent, on the far side of the impromptu and currently empty food court.

Starry's cousin damp eyed him with more open disapproval. "That all seemed ... " She looked back at the finally turned away Farmer team before making eye contact again. "needlessly harsh. On both sides of the argument."

Starry nodded, and turned to gauge where his parents might be now. Walking back approximately towards the Rocksmith tent-town, he swerved instead to drop suddenly to the ground, and curl up next to an oak tree at the edge of the picnic table region. Starry was too caught up in his own pain to notice if his whimpering was leaving his head or not.

After an interminible moment, Rustling Skies' husky voice rang out from what sounded like about fifty hooves away. "Lost the game of tagball, or game of life?" Her sister was three inches, fully half a hoof taller than her older brother. Her leg still in a cast, she hobbled somewhat noisily once you knew what sort of swishing sounds to listen for. Her hooves visible within his blurred vision, Starry heard her say to some nearby pony "Are you going to be around a few minutes? I won't be able to get back up and we won't know how soon the special unicorn will be down until it's too late." A pause, no voices heard so the socially functioning ponies must be making head motions to indicate the answer. "I can't bend this leg or pull on it so I'll be stuck. Okay, thanks though."

Having no promise of help unless she pulled the "special unicorn" out of his morass, Rustling Skies nevertheless positioned herself to where she'd be able to make eye contact with the curled up psuedo-foal. Her right shoulder loudly splatted into the mud as she dropped gracelessly onto her side, cast held mostly off the wet mud by being on the leg more nearly away from the ground.