

**The Four Brothers and the Second Sun: A Retelling of the Koch Brothers' American
Legacy**

By Hannah Wilson-Black

My child, I have told you the stories of the world's creation. Almost as numerous as these are the stories of its destruction, though they don't have an end yet, just a long, elastic middle. But if you'll bear with me, I will tell you one.

Before you were here and before I was here, from a field of golden wheat bordered by four long dirt roads, grew four brothers. They were born of the Sun itself. All were pale as a bird's egg and with temperaments as different as the four cardinal winds. Four always means trouble, sometimes good trouble and sometimes bad.

The oldest, Frederick, liked to read, as well as imagine his own stories. Most days he could be found contemplating the drama of the sunset or building figures of sticks and stone with which to act out the great battles of his imagination. Perhaps he was always different from his brothers, always destined to leave the place of his birth. In any case, the weather of the wheat plains was not kind to him — the wind stung his eyes and, in winter, sleet bit his ankles. The Sun gradually became, in his eyes, less brilliant and more oppressive. Sometimes its heat was so unbearable on his shining forehead that Frederick felt as if he alone was being punished. Unlike his brothers, he knew early that the plains of their birth were not for him. He felt out of place, like a rejected stepchild, and had no need for the greatness for which his brothers felt themselves destined, being children of the Sun itself. In the Sun, Frederick's brothers saw brilliance and warm attention where Frederick saw only oppressive heat and a harsh glare. Earth had not rounded the Sun thirteen times before he rode a passing storm east to a shining city built by those long dead. In doing so, he escaped the memory of the world, which can be very harsh indeed, or

very forgiving. It is best not to gamble with the world's memory, better to be forgotten than lauded or loathed, he decided, and left his three brothers to fend for themselves.

The next oldest brother, Charles, was wild, like something was chasing its tail inside him. He was smart—but reckless—and caused all sorts of mischief to his fellow creatures until the Sun itself decided enough was enough, and punished him by following him relentlessly and burning his skin. Charles was strong and spirited, as well as clever, and at first he attempted to hide from the burning light. But beams of its fire seemed to creep into every hole, every cave, every dark place he might have thought to shelter himself. He had wanted the Sun's attention, but not like this. This punishment was more than he had bargained for and hurt even more badly than being ignored. Eventually Charles lay still, defeated and blistering — until, after ten days and ten nights had passed, the sun relented. Finally his blisters and burns could heal, but they became white scars that stretched across his skin like spiderwebs. He was different now, walked quietly and slowly like a kicked dog, but a playful, trapped spirit still roamed the passages of his body like a whining wolf.

Then there were the twins, David and William, and though they were made of the very same grassland soil, they were different as night and day. David carried himself with confidence and a level head as he strode across the wide golden plains. He had a great loud laugh that shook the pebbles on the side of the four dirt roads, but it was amiable and not intimidating. He made friends with everything that breathed -- he could carry on a conversation with a rabbit if it sat still long enough. If the boys' elder brother, Charles, could behave like a bully at times, David was his milder shadow, though no less fun-loving. Like Charles, he also had the strength of a great oak. David and Charles amused one another, tackling each other in the wheat fields from

the time they were small and racing each other farther and farther until they thought they could see the glittering teeth of the city to which Frederick had disappeared years before.

The other twin, William, wished fiercely to be considered a playmate by Charles as well, but he moved awkwardly and lost every game he played with Charles and David. He was stubborn, a sore loser. He hung on Charles' every word and action with the loyalty of a hunting dog to a hunter, but he could never quite catch his older brother's eye the way David did. William was curious and would spend days quietly observing the movements of a deer or studying the delicate underside of a flower's petals, but he was not always so gentle. When he was angry, with his brothers or with himself, the tornados themselves took shelter. The cries of his rage at being excluded by Charles and David would shake the heads of the wheat and cause the ground to rumble and crack. During William's fits of emotion, his brothers went indifferently about their business, perhaps exchanging looks of amusement or concern. Meanwhile, William's angry tears hit the cool earth with a hiss and his attachment to Charles only grew stronger for want of its reciprocation.

With the exception of Frederick, perhaps, the brothers of the golden plains wanted nothing more than to feel the Sun's warmth and its love for them. It was beautiful and radiant, so astonishing that when you looked directly at it you could not bear it. I know you do not see the sun often because of the constant haze, but I can tell you that when I was young, I saw it myself. So brilliant up against the blue of the sky that its light seemed to have no beginning nor end. But this story is not about me.

The brothers feared and loved their creator the Sun so profoundly that for each of their first nights on Earth they wept for loss of it. They hated the cold, feeble, sterile light of the moon, which seemed a poor, mocking substitute. To the brothers of the golden plains, the night was a

sign of the Sun's disapproval. But by the time they were young men, all of whom had both bathed in the Sun's arms and been burned by its temper, the brothers had learned, if not accepted, that the night was inevitable. They could never be beautiful or strong or impressive enough for the Sun, and yet they each harbored a fierce desire for an eternal day. For the Sun's praise. It is the worst feeling to know that something is impossible yet feel inexplicably that if only there was some secret key and if only you devoted your life to finding that key, it might be achievable. And the brothers felt that nagging attachment to the Sun's attention, if not every day, then every month or every year, and they never could get rid of it, not a single one of them. It seems some things live forever.

When the four brothers had all become men, tall like the heads of wheat and their skin just as golden, the Sun decided to give them each a gift with which to begin their lives. Each brother received a droplet of sun in an acorn shell, a piece of liquid light that could illuminate any patch of darkness indefinitely. Frederick, who had received his gift while walking down a city sidewalk on a rainy afternoon, put the sun-filled acorn on a table in his study and used it to light his work, his life. He was keeping it, he told himself, for practical reasons, though he could not help but notice that its presence made him more uneasy with each passing day. Sometimes he found his eyes lingering on the small cup of light and remembered the punishing Sun, his brothers in their innocent days, the smell of a prairie storm. In those moments, he felt a sadness without a bottom, about which he told no one. Charles and David, however, upon receiving their pieces of sun wondered how they might stand to gain, and fast, from their new possessions. One cold and moonless night in the grassland they hit upon an idea. The brothers had always wanted a way to feel the Sun's presence constantly, an eternal day. Though it seemed the Sun would always leave them alone and cold at day's end, they suddenly had the power to permanently

secure the feeling of warmth, of care and attention, that they wanted from the fickle Sun. They had in their hands, they realized, the seeds of a new sun, a second sun that could illuminate the sky when the first sun left on whatever mysterious business occupied it during the nighttime. But how do you grow a sun? Watering it like a plant would extinguish it altogether, and it had no mouth to eat bread or drink milk like a child. Perhaps, Charles and David reasoned, they could join their drops of sun and feed it like a fire with everything on Earth that could burn.

...

At first they fed their second sun with the long prairie grasses and the ball of molten fire and ever-fusing energy began to grow in tiny increments. It was still no bigger than a small stone. Charles and David hid it in a cave, nestled away from prying eyes in the safe underground darkness, and continued to grow their precious possession. Day by day they tossed handfuls of wheat, grasses, berries, and animal bones into the fiery and brilliant glowing mass, but it reached only the size of a plum after many, many weeks and the brothers were growing frustrated.

Thinking perhaps lumber would fuel the second sun's growth much faster, the two brothers painstakingly fashioned tools of stone and began hacking away at nearby saplings — sycamores, sugar maples, and oaks. As they fed these small trees into their second sun, they saw it growing faster indeed. So they worked quicker and longer, forging larger and larger axes for cutting larger and larger trees until they were clearing whole forests. Still their stubborn sun was smaller than they'd hoped, the size of a small boulder and not nearly large enough to raise into the sky. They thought long and hard, looking out onto the barren grasslands around them, cleared of trees for miles around. It seemed they had nothing else to turn to. They would have to keep swinging away at the forests for years.

But one evening as David came back from the forests dragging his axe and a sled full of timber and wiping the sweat from his brow, he noticed a crack in the ground not far from the cave where the second sun was kept. From the jagged crack in the dusty earth of the plains leaked a thick dark brown liquid which shone even in the dim light of dusk. He called Charles over to see the new substance. It was thick and smelled sickly sweet, like it was made of all the dead and dying things of the world. The brothers had never seen anything like it, but because they were desperate and because it smelled like death and the brothers had been feeding their sun dead things, they decided to bring some of it back to their cave in a wooden bucket.

Much to the brothers' great joy and astonishment, their sun drank up the dark sludge like a hungry child and expanded before their very eyes. They had hit upon something marvelous indeed.

All this time, William had been busy investigating the properties of his drop of sun, studying it as he had studied many things as a child. It was warm from a few feet away, but burned the skin if you drew too close. It illuminated any room into which it was placed. But beyond these discoveries William had not considered what he might do with his drop of sun. When he finally heard of his brothers' plan to create an eternal day, he was intrigued — and angry at having been left out. Perhaps by joining Charles and David he could finally create the bond that had never manifested between himself and his brothers in earlier years. He offered his help and his piece of the sun, and the three brothers hatched a plan, though William could not help but hear every time Charles laughed at a joke David made, every whisper between the two of them. As the dark shining sludge brewed deep in the earth, a resentment began brewing in William's breast.

In the meantime, David and William dug in the earth around the crack from which they'd first drawn the death-smelling liquid and a well of the stuff formed. Charles took the bucket and fed the sun for days and then weeks on end while his brothers continued digging. The new sun had started to produce a thick trail of smog with every bucket of the death-smelling liquid that Charles poured onto its broiling surface. It puffed out dark currents of soot into the air, but the brothers paid that no mind. Their thoughts were elsewhere — their sun was growing, but not fast enough.

So the three brothers designed another plan. Through a cow's horn they boomed a message to every far-away town: anyone who was willing to help them transport the dark liquid and lumber to their second sun could have a piece of this sun themselves at the end of their work. A drop of sun would eliminate a lifetime's need for candles and in some instances, firewood as well. Many people flocked to the brothers and offered their help in exchange for a precious drop of sun. Tens, then hundreds, then thousands and tens of thousands of people.

The workers brought axes and struck down trees, first to make buckets for the ones carrying the death-smelling liquid back and forth to the second sun, then to make sun-fuel itself in the form of logs piled high on wooden sleds. They walked for miles and miles, swinging their axes. They took down young saplings and old giants alike. After all, what did one hundred years of wooden growth mean to them in the grand scheme of things? They lived for themselves and their families. What was before or after their lifetimes paled in the face of the pains and joys they were met with from day to day. Survival was now, and they had before them a chance to gain a piece of ever-living sun. No more candle wax to be bought, no more wolves pacing outside the dark windows of their children's rooms. Months passed quickly and years slowly. The wood-choppers swarmed over the Earth.

The workers who dredged up the death-smelling liquid, too, had expanded their reach. The two brothers had instructed them to find other sources of the earth-born fuel, so they walked for miles and miles, swinging their shovels and seeking out places where the Earth had come apart. Where they found the dark liquid, they dug, despite objections from the people living in those places, both people who had lived on the land since human time began and newcomers who had stolen land for themselves. The deep-rooted people especially pleaded the shovel-swingers to leave the land undisturbed. They were angry. The dark shining liquid had leaked into their streams and rivers since the shovel-swingers had arrived, and recent deaths among them could often be traced back to the brothers' treasured sun-fuel -- its gradual buildup and its transportation resulted in darkened water, spoiled earth, and heavy gray air. *We are sorry*, the strangers said as they plunged their buckets into the earth, *but our orders come from three strange men, born of the Sun itself and tall as the wheat stalks on the plains. They have promised us a piece of a second sun in exchange for our work, and when they become angry the tornadoes themselves hide.* And so they continued to dig.

After several years, the second sun grew so large that no one could see the top of it. It was several times bigger than the largest house for miles around, and had long since been dragged out of its cave to sit in the very field where the brothers had emerged at the beginning of their lives. The field was now barren, as its wheat had been fed to the second sun years before. The brothers looked much older now, older even than the passing years themselves would suggest. Their skin had grown leathery, their hair thinned and bleached to a pale yellow color by the original Sun overhead. The three of them oversaw the feeding of the second sun by the hurrying workers but themselves sat in fine wooden chairs and ate roasted venison. From their

decaying lungs, poisoned by the vapors of the dark shining liquid, they coughed out reassurances that the workers would each get their promised piece of sun if they worked hard and diligently.

...

One afternoon, David, Charles, and William were greeted by a large gray owl carrying on its leg an acorn with a tattered note attached. The brothers knew what it was even before looking inside the acorn shell.

I have heard of your plan, read the note. I cannot for my life understand its worth, but I have long since stopped trying. Here is my piece of the sun. It is dazzling, to be sure, but it reminds me of how lonely I once thought the night to be, how harsh the prairie winds are, and how I hated to see you fight. And so it has brought me only pain.

- F

Silently, the brothers carried Frederick's drop of sun to their yowling, churning creation and poured it in. They had not been speaking much of Frederick before, but now they omitted his name from their conversations entirely. He had momentarily cast doubt on their pursuit of an eternal day, and this was unforgivable.

For decades the three brothers' operation went on this way, with the lumber and the buckets and the death-smelling liquid. Of course their activities caused concern all the land over, and many people came shaking fists or brandishing weapons at the brothers, vowing revenge for a destroyed forest, the new, browner color of the sky, or a river whose fish had been turned belly-up by the death-smelling liquid's leakage. In some cases they came weeping for the loss of a family member or friend who had drunk brown water or breathed brown air and become very ill or died. In each case they returned home silently, placated, with their very own drop of sun, their eyes only dry from a shortage of tears. There would be more tomorrow.

By now, William's frustration with his brothers had bubbled to the surface. He accused them of excluding him from their talks, laughing at him when his back was turned, and treating too cruelly those who came seeking answers for the damage the brothers had done to their lives. Charles and David, despite their seeming nonchalance, were at times also caught off-guard by the drastic effects of their own work, like growing children recoiling in confusion at their new strength. The long fingers of their wide-reaching operation were often out of sight and out of mind, after all. However much this disturbed David and Charles at first, they only had to catch sight of their beautiful, radiant, warm new sun to forget these concerns. For William, however, a mix of jealousy and concern overshadowed the comfort that seemed to radiate from the second sun. One day, his anger finally boiled over.

As if he was pantomiming the tantrums of his younger days, William raged at his brothers with the kind of acidic yet childlike fury wielded by the excluded sibling. He demanded that he be given more authority over the brothers' operation. Charles and David, he should have known, would never give him that. And rather than walking away and ignoring his admonitions, this time they fought back. They told William he was childish, neurotic, too focused on details, not to mention hopelessly emotional. If he wanted to play with the real men, they told him, he would need to take direction from them. If not, he would be forced out of their project. And if he tried to gain power by force, they would take him, two on one, and win. And they swore to turn the workers on him. This threat was impossible to ignore. William knew the axe- and shovel-swingers feared Charles and David more than him. They would follow orders, and he would be beaten to a pulp and rejected by everyone within miles of his birthplace.

So he left. *Good luck*, he said to his brothers with a sneer. *You can have my piece of the sun.*

Charles and David watched him walk across the dusty, cracked ground that had once been the wheat fields and out of their sight. Perhaps he was walking to the city which Frederick left for all those years ago. It had always seemed like more of a mirage on the horizon than a real place.

Charles sighed. *Let's get back to work.*

...

Day by day, week by week, month by month, and year by year the second sun grew, fueled by logs from the forests of the world and the death-smelling liquid. Until one day, the second sun was so massive its weight began to split the ground beneath it. Then Charles and David knew it was time to send it into the sky. As each of their employees delivered their last bucket of the death-smelling liquid, they received their promised golden droplet, hardly significant enough to make the second sun smaller. The bodies of the workers ached and their strong hands were stained black. They looked up at Charles and David and took what was owed to them, though the hollowness in their eyes must have betrayed their hunger for more.

Then, with a heave, the brothers catapulted their newly minted sun into the great hazy sky. It stuck, lodged right in the place where Orion's Belt sits during the peak of summer. It smiled down at the brothers, and they smiled up at it. This sun would never abandon them. There would be no more distinction between night and day. They would always be warm, they would always be paid attention to, they would always be loved. The night no longer stopped them from harvesting crops or hunting. They could always see and they could move as they pleased without fearing anything lurking in the darkness with hungry, hollow eyes.

Then, almost as if they were waking from a dream, the brothers looked around and jumped a little in surprise at the stark barrenness of the treeless, grassless land and the choked

yellow-brown sky. The only thing that moved on the prairie was the swirling dust eddies which hovered over the cracked and displaced earth. Every green thing as far as the eye could see was gone, and the people who had swarmed around the brothers and their small empire were nowhere to be seen. Also to their surprise, the brothers found that they were ancient. They stared with unfamiliarity at their sagging skin, their bodies grown soft and pale with the luxury of being attended to by servants in the shade of their cave.

But in a matter of days the new world became familiar and the unsettling emptiness of the landscape faded into the background of the brothers' lives. They marveled aloud to each other about their great accomplishment, the eternal day. It was undeniably hotter now, sometimes uncomfortably so, since their second sun had entered the sky. But even through their sweat they smiled magnificently. They would not acknowledge to each other the dry sadness of the land nor the streams that ran muddy and smelled like death nor the unusual heat. Never under any circumstances would they ask the question *and for what?* To do so would be to nullify the work of their lives.

I can see the question in your eyes — you're wondering how it is that we only have one sun today. Well, the brothers' second sun had developed quite the appetite in its time on Earth and old habits are hard to kill. Like the brothers themselves, the second sun had a hunger, a void in the bottom of its being that had never been satisfied and needed bigger, better, faster, and brighter. So over the course of several months, the second sun made its way across the sky with one aim. As the brothers watched below in confusion and distress, their creation began to engulf the first sun, the Sun which had frustrated them with its sudden callousness at night and burned them for their misbehavior. Even given the longing and pain the original sun had cultivated in them, the brothers found themselves strangely horrified at seeing it swallowed by their own

work. They watched, awestruck, as the two suns became one bright behemoth in a burst of wild energy. Blindingly bright, the new massive sun would prove loyal -- much to the brothers' delight, it remained in the sky at all hours. Charles and David were rattled, and still they walked around sweating like rain clouds because of the new heat. But they continued to find comfort in the knowledge that this newly fortified sun would never leave them. They still had what they wanted, and that was the point of all this, was it not?

But, as you may have guessed, they were wrong about the permanence of their eternal day. The overgrown sun left them too, decided it would like to see the other side of the world for a change when the brothers were in the last years of their lives. And as the emptiness and coldness of the night overtook them, they found themselves just as hurt as they had been when they were boys. And only in this moment did they realize, Charles and David, and William and Frederick too, as they watched the sun fade beyond the horizon for the first time in years, that they had never once turned to each other for the remedy to the ache within them. If they ever did act on this epiphany, no one knows.

...

Within a few years, they had all left this world. They took much from you, my child, and you must try to take it back. But begin with this lesson from their story; consider it a gift we wrenched from their hands, you and I together: do not build a second sun. Sometimes we are left with a hole in our gut, a hole where something used to be or never was. What comes to fit in that space later is never made of the stuff that was once there. And it is never wrested from the universe by sheer force. The approval we seek hopelessly and the arbitrary goals we strive for will never satiate us, and indeed we dry ourselves up searching for them. You will come to find that the lasting remedy for such a hole is made of ourselves or other people, whose hands we

grasp as we walk through the night. And it never smells like death. Promise — *promise me* —
you will remember that.