

A Drop of Sunlight:
The Becoming of Sun Brandisher
Autumn Wind



Long before the coming of the Princesses and the Modern Age, long before the coming of Discord and the Chaotic Age, and long even before the three breeds moved apart, the Age of Separation, there was the first age: The Age of Grazing.

The Age of Grazing was the birth and childhood of the world, where ponies made many discoveries that would one day shape the future of Equestria and its sister lands. Behind every great discovery was a bewildered pony, marveling at a mystery of the world.

This is the tale of one such pony. From mouth to mouth and quill to quill, from whinny to word and from neigh to notes, his name has been transformed and altered, but today, now that his tale has been immortalized in a thousand history books, he is known as Sun Brandisher.

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The wild herbs blew gently in the summer wind as the day came to a close. The sun slowly dipped below the horizon, bathing the land in a golden light. All over the Great Prairie, ponies galloped freely, in search of food and shelter for the night. Together, earth pony, pegasus and unicorn traveled in united herds.

Far from the modern equine, however, these were wild and free ponies. They lived a nomadic lifestyle, galloping from place to place every day in search of greener pastures where they could give their foals the care they needed. Because of this lifetime of simple survival, none of them knew of, let alone bore, cutie marks.

These ponies were taller, yet slimmer, built for long days of running. Their muzzles were longer, as well, for they often bent down to graze from the fields or drink from the streams. There was little variation in their colors; whites and blacks, blondes and browns were present in vast numbers, and the notion of a pink or blue pony was completely nonsensical.

One such group of ponies was still navigating the great hills, pressing on through the final stretch of their path despite their growing fatigue. They had seen a river in the distance, with the lushest of grasses growing nearby; a perfect place to spend the night and be refreshed for their next day of searching for an even greater pasture.

The leader, a black behemoth of an earth pony, whinnied loudly, signaling for the herd to slow to a trot. They had arrived at their home for the night. The pegasi gently glided down to join their ground bound brethren, and all watched as he lowered his head to the ground, taking the first mouthful of grass of the evening. Reassured, the others followed,

relishing their feast of fresh plants and spring water, feeling the evening repast wash their exhaustion away.

Slowly over the evening, the stallions and mares spread apart over their temporary territory, covering more ground to better watch for predators overnight. The parents watched over their young foals, feeding, teaching, and comforting, all at once. Older fillies and colts trotted about, playing and chasing one another amongst amused ponies.

Groups of earth ponies set off to search the perimeter of the territory, soon bringing back the best of nature's bounty they could find. Those reserves would be used the next day as the herd ran. Above, pegasi fluttered contently, basking in the freedom of flight. Each of them kept an eye open for any approaching predators so that they may warn the herd should any approach. Finally, a smattering of unicorn stallions and mares were speckled about the territory, preparing to stand guard overnight, sharpening their horns to be ready should any predators arrived.

Amongst the latter group, having chosen a more secluded area in order to get some peace, was our protagonist, Sun Brandisher. He was short of stature and slim of body, and his coat was of a brown redder than anypony had ever seen before. Brandisher was not held in very high regards by the herd. He was easily scared by predators, and was always seen hesitating for far longer than was normal before charging into the fray to try and fend them off. The females of the herd paid him little to no heed, though he had had the occasional mate, attracted by his unique coloring and deep blue eyes.

The young stallion shook a few dark brown locks of his unkempt mane out of his face as he energetically scraped his horn against the edge of a rock, preparing it for whatever beast was sure to sneak up on the herd that night. It was a routine task which he'd done for every day of his life since his father had taught him the same, and yet, today felt different. Brandisher felt a strange tingle in his heart, an energy he could not explain.

The evening air felt cold on his fur and skin, and he shivered, longing for heat. How he missed the sun and its bright gifts. The stallion closed his eyes, silently hoping for relief from the night's chills.

As the unicorn struck his weapon against the stone once more, he was overcome by a shudder. A surge of heat coursed through his body, rushing from the tip of his tail, down his legs and back up, and finally up to the tip of his horn. He felt as though the latter had been ripped through, as though, like fragile flesh, it had suffered a cruel gash. Feeling his head spin, Sun Brandisher stumbled back, cringing in pain.

Before his confused eyes, a small speck of orange light manifested upon a tuft of dried-out grass that stood at the base of the rock. It expanded slowly, reaching for the herbs around it with small tendrils, dancing erratically in the wind. The mysterious light shone brightly through the night, its reflections dancing amongst the field.

The phenomenon was one Sun Brandisher could only identify as a puddle of sun. Much like the large mass of it in the sky, it was accompanied by clouds, though they quickly rose back up to the sky in thin strings. Perhaps it was eager to give the land more rain.

The puddle of sun crackled soothingly as it grazed upon the herb beneath it. Brandisher brought his muzzle close, feeling its comforting warmth. He attentively took in its scent. The odor was unlike anything he had ever smelled, exotic and energizing. It reminded him of galloping through dry lands and the thick clouds of dust that followed the herd as it did, though at the same time, it felt... alive.

There was only one possibility. Somehow, he had plucked a drop of the sun and set it upon the ground as he did. Perhaps if he consumed it, he could gain its power for himself and guard his tribe better. As he lowered his muzzle close to the puddle, a vivid flash of pain forced him back painfully. That was a warning, he reasoned. It was not a plant, but very much a living creature. It would not be right to kill and consume it. Furthermore, seeing how fiercely it could defend itself, it would have been foolish to attempt to do so.

Intrigued by his new companion, which did not seem fazed by his sudden assault, Sun Brandisher plucked a tall weed from the ground nearby and extended it towards the puddle of sun, which began to graze on it. Perhaps if he kept it fed, he could make it his companion so that it would help him later on. What would the rest of the herd think? Would they accept the strange creature?

Before the stallion could decide what to do, a chilly drop of water fell on his head. A rainstorm was coming, the pegasi had warned earlier. There were plenty of trees for cover, so the herd would not be troubled by the elements.

Sun Brandisher sought refuge below a tall oak, beckoning for his new companion to follow, though it did not listen. As the precipitation grew louder, so did his whinnies. He implored for his new friend to take refuge, lest it catch cold and become ill, but his shouts fell on deaf ears.

Small clouds formed around the shining light, and then the puddle of sun was no more. However, Sun Brandisher did not mourn its death. After all, parts of the sun were just as immortal as their whole, ever present in the sky. Clearly, the being of warmth and light

had simply ridden the clouds and rejoined its own kind. It would rise with the sun again on the next day.

However, the stallion was not satisfied. He had plucked a drop of the sun today, and he had seen what it could do for him and the herd. It was a wonderful source of warmth, and would surely be a valiant ally in the fight against predators if he could get it to obey. Sun Brandisher made a decision: He would learn to bring drops of the sun down when he needed them. He would learn to harness their power and call upon them, so that the light and the warmth always remain with the herds of the Great Prairie.

Would such a thing harm the balance of nature, Brandisher pondered? If he plucked from the sun too often, would he one day drain it? Rationalizing that the droplet of sun had ridden back on a cloud to return to the sky, he was reassured that such calls were temporary, and that there was no risk of losing their source.

Exhausted, Sun Brandisher stood straight and closed his eyes, listening to falling rain and the rustling of the leaves in the wind. Eventually, he found slumber and drifted off, resting for the upcoming day. Perhaps tomorrow, he would bring forth a drop of the sun again.

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The next weeks saw the herd perplexed by Sun Brandisher's actions. As they ran, he had difficulty following, often having to be bumped to the side and reminded to pick up the pace. He would look into the sky for much longer than was normal, and often almost directly at the sun.

At night, he would sharpen his horn far more than necessary, scraping and striking it against any sharp rock he could find. Even as its tip snapped off, leaving an uneven stump completely worthless for defense, he kept on forcefully grinding it, a wince of pain obvious in his eyes.

He must have been ill, the herd reasoned. He was no longer able to pull his own weight. He would hold the herd back, put them in danger.

Something had to be done.

That night, as Sun Brandisher was abusing his horn once more, the herd leader approached him, calling for his attention with a loud stomp of his forehoof.

The young unicorn bowed his head in respect to his superior, confused at being approached by such a high standing member of the herd.

The black stallion kept a somber air, and gave a disdainful snort. He turned his back to the unicorn and, bringing up one of his enormous rear hooves, traced a line in the dirt between Sun Brandisher and the rest of the herd. Silently, his own head hanging low, the chief walked away in silence.

The meaning of such a gesture was one known amongst every single pony in the herd: "You will not follow."

The herd looked on with sorrowful eyes, pained to abandon the unicorn to his fate. However, they all knew it was for the best. In his ill state of mind, Sun Brandisher was a threat to the herd, a weight they simply could not risk to bear.

Sun Brandisher glared in anger as the leader departed. The herd was rejecting him, abandoning a pony who had sought out the best for them. He recalled looking on as other ponies were similarly cast away, and how he had simply been acceptant of the fact. Today, now that he was on the other side of the line, it suddenly seemed cruel.

He was on his own now, and he knew it. So be it. He would show them. He would bring forth the bright warmth once more, and he would bring it back to the herd as proof of his value. They would accept him anew once he came back with a drop of sunlight; it was the only possibility.

Turning away from the herd, Sun Brandisher reared up, whinnying loud and clear to draw the herd's full attention to himself. With his hind hoof, he traced a short line across the leader's own.

"I will return."

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Sun Brandisher spent the next few days following the herd's tracks from afar, not wanting to lose them, but never coming too close, lest they see him following. He tried to understand how to call forth drops of the sun again, but inspecting the source as best as he could yielded nothing more than sore eyes. At night, he would try everything he could to force his horn to do the summoning again, scraping and striking it against rocks to no avail. He refused to give up, persisting despite the pain.

Tonight, the prairie at the edge of the forest felt dark and cold as Sun Brandisher wandered alone. Without the herd to guide him, he didn't know where to go. Night had snuck up on him, and he had yet to find a good place to spend it. He was very close to the forest. Perhaps too close.

Shadows seemed to dance around him as he grazed, exhausted, hoping to regain some strength to better flee this place. He longed for the sun's protective light, and rued his inability to bring forth its power again.

As Sun Brandisher was swallowing another mouthful of fresh grass, a rustle of leaves startled him. He immediately turned to gallop away from the forest and into the prairie, only to fall face to face with a horrible, horrible sight.

A timberwolf, almost as tall as he was, was sitting on its haunches, eyeing him greedily. The beast bared vicious wooden fangs, sharp as thorns, but far deadlier. Seeking a safe fleeing path, Sun Brandisher turned to the right, only for a second wolf to burst out of the woods and stand in his way.

When a third beast appeared behind him, Sun Brandisher did the only thing he could, and foolishly galloped off into the forest, the three beasts giving chase.

Thanks to his strong legs, Sun Brandisher could easily keep ahead of the beasts of bark, but he was outnumbered by far. Whenever he left his pursuers in the dust, another wolf would leap out of the darkness, barring his path or appearing to his side, forcing him into a clumsy turn and causing him to lose some of his lead.

Low branches whipped at his body as he just barely avoided the predators' cruel jaws, but Sun Brandisher continued to flee for his life. Eventually a light of hope shone to him as the moonlight revealed that the forest gave way once more to the prairie.

The unicorn emerged triumphantly from the darkness of the forest, only to find that he had been led into a trap. In his haste, he tripped over the trunk of a fallen tree, and found himself lying on the ground. He looked around frantically as he struggled to stand. This was no prairie, he understood. He had stumbled upon a simple clearing in the forest. He was surrounded. Before him, a timberwolf. Behind him, to his right, a timberwolf. Also behind him, to his left, a third. There was no way out. The circle slowly closed on him, the predators maneuvering expertly to block any hopes of escape.

Crawling clumsily, Sun Brandisher found himself backed up against the fallen trunk. He closed his eyes, expecting the impending agony of being torn apart by claws and teeth. Was this the end? Was there any hope of saving himself? If only he had some way...

Sun Brandisher's eyes shot open as a loud sound caught his ears. It sounded like the wings of a phoenix the herd had seen soaring above them long ago. The wolves took an unsure step back, a baffled, frightened look on their glowing eyes.

Lights were dancing around Sun Brandisher, and he slowly rose to his hooves, feeling a strong, soothing warmth emanating from the tree's fallen body. Amazed, he blinked a few times, taking in the miraculous sight.

The top of the trunk was ablaze with a puddle of sunlight as tall as he was, shining brightly through the darkness. The timberwolves eyed the new force with apprehension and terror. Soon, they fled into the woods, abandoning their prey to save their lives.

The stallion stood silently, in shock. He was safe. The bright warmth had finally come for him. He hadn't struck his horn or scraped it: he had simply desired hard enough for a drop of sunlight to come. Could it truly be so simple?

Sun Brandisher seized a small branch of the tree and tore it off, setting it on the ground and focusing on one of its leaves. He focused on it as deeply as he could, and desired for heat and light. Sure enough, a shining orange speck manifested upon the leaf and soon grew to cover the end of the branch, blazing with that power he had so long sought.

The night was torn apart by Sun Brandisher's frenzied whinnies of joy as he trotted in circles around the clearing, bringing about a myriad of sun drops, lighting the clearing nearly as bright as day. Many did not remain burning long, and soon he found that dry wood and dead grass sated the puddles' hunger far more than fresh, damp grass. This was strange, he reasoned: Why would it not prefer the tastier, fresh grass.

Thankful for his life, the unicorn seized a short branch from its unlit edge and trotted off into the forest, carrying a drop of the sun with himself. The wolves did not dare approach him, and soon, he found himself safely back on the prairie, where he settled for a good night's sleep.

Tomorrow, he reasoned, he would seek his herd out again and share his newfound gift with them. Hopefully, they would accept him again.

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The herd had stopped to graze and rest for the night by a small thicket of thin-leaved trees. Once more, everypony was busying themselves with their usual tasks, until a loud whinny of alert from one of the pegasus scouts sounded the alarm.

Somepony, not something, was approaching.

Flanked by two fierce unicorns, the leader stepped to meet the newcomer. He frowned severely as he recognized who the intruder was. Sun Brandisher had just brazenly walked back into herd territory, a thick, leafy branch seized in his jaws.

With a snort, the leader traced a line on the ground, stomping his hoof angrily at the end.

Sun Brandisher eyed the leader for a moment, bowing his head politely in respect. He set down the branch on the ground, and focused on it for a moment, desiring to show the herd the light and warmth that his newfound power could offer them.

Almost immediately, the soothing crackle of the drop of sunlight made itself heard, and the crowd looked on in awe as light emerged from the lifeless branch. The leader motioned for them to stay put and approached the mysterious light. Sun Brandisher stepped aside, letting him through.

Slowly, the black stallion's frown of anger melted away into a look of awe as he discovered the mysterious force's heat for himself. He looked to Sun Brandisher, nodding in respect and offering the younger stallion a smile, before stepping over to the line and scuffing it out with a single stroke of his hoof. With a smile of approval, he led the unicorn back amongst the numbers of the herd, eliciting whinnies of celebration from the gathered ponies.

That evening, with the help of the pack leader and a small number of the earth pony gatherers, Sun Brandisher gathered a few decently-sized piles of wood and distributed them across the territory, lighting each ablaze. The ponies of the herd soon gathered around the soothing glows, and for all, it felt like a miracle.

Sun Brandisher beamed with pride. He belonged amongst the herd once more, and he now had a special job all his own: To call forth drops of the sun at night and keep his companions warm and safe. As he observed his herdmates from atop a small hill, another light surprised him, for it emanated from his own body. A burst of light had emanated from his flanks, which now bore a pair of identical symbols: A short tree branch, shining bright with a drop of sunlight feeding on its leaves.

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Thanks to the magic of Sun Brandisher and that of the half-dozen other unicorns he managed to teach the same, this special herd now had the power of the sun to help them. Warding off predators and offering them warmth at night, such a boon allowed them to finally settle upon a territory, to abandon their nomadic routines.

Generations passed, and Sun Brandisher's descendents spread far and wide across the Great Prairie, passing on his gift and their own to the other herds. As they settled, ponies would make new discoveries, finding their increasingly complex lives filled with wonders. The earth ponies learned how to grow plants that would offer them food every day without the need to forage. The unicorns discovered the gift of magic, and the power to craft tools to make everyday life that much easier. The pegasi mastered the clouds and the winds, ensuring the herd would never need to weather through a storm they were not ready for.

Through the centuries, history went through twists and turns of all kinds: wars, famines, and droughts, but also periods of tranquility, wonder and abundance. The herds separated in the throes of conflict, but found themselves reunited in friendship and love. Discord made his name known through a regimen of chaos and terror, and later the Sisters did the same, but through harmony and peace. Throughout the years, ponies invented thousands upon thousands of amazing items. Wheels, fabrics, scrolls and engines followed one another in a storm of progress, all of it thanks to that one fateful day.

All because of a single unicorn and his drops of sunlight.