

## Never

Once upon a time, Not fell in love with Ever.  
Not married Ever and they had a son.  
The boy favored Not with his pair of raven-black wings and dark eyes.  
When his mother, Ever, spoke her voice was like a wedding vow  
cast over the ocean, all horizon and promise.  
Never inherited her expansive nature, in reverse.  
Not married Ever and they had a child.  
A boy that could, if necessary,  
play alone for long periods of time, quietly.  
Eventually, Never made a few, very loyal friends

On the wrong side of Never is pain untold.  
"Never contact me again."  
"Never tell anyone about this."  
Some words are so strong they should be handled like snakes,  
meaning rarely and then with gloves or a lunatic faith.  
One should carry Never like a loaded gun, safety on.  
Watch where you point that thing, it's dangerous.  
He told her, "You can't leave. You'll never make it on your own."  
They told him, "You're so stupid, you'll never amount to anything."  
She told him, "You will never be loved again."

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My mother was told she could never have children. So she went out in the world, pulled two daughters from the bulrushes near a bay in Texas and took them home. My mama was told she would never bear a child, but she did. Three days after he was born, my brother was left by the doctors for dead. They dropped their instruments and left the confusion of his body on the table behind them.  
"He'll never..."  
They didn't even finish the sentence.

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When Never was a child, the other kids  
would stretch him out long-ways in their arms,  
use him as the line in Red Rover.  
He didn't mind. He lay there, unflinching  
as a boy charged from the other side and thudded into his body.  
His team won every time.  
Never is nothing if not certain.  
And patient. ....  
Which is the source of his power.

Never is big medicine, heavy mojo,  
the obsidian door between you and the thing  
you don't want to experience again ever.  
*Not ever. At no time. Not in any degree. Not under any condition.*

Not married Ever and Never was their child.  
He smelled like smoke from the fiery sword  
raised by the angel at Eden's door.

There's something I forgot to mention.  
He had a face only a mother could love.  
She used to sing into it the story of his name:  
*"Sweet child. Not ever. At no time. Not in any degree. Not under any condition."*

Now, he raises his gaze like a sunflower,  
waiting for someone else to love him like that.  
He looks up, a slow smile cracking through a face sewn  
with stitches over a Rand McNally's worth of lines,  
each road a wound, each wound a road he traveled alone.

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There are places on my brother's arms that look like melted wax  
from the scar tissue of dialysis sticks.  
Three times a week,  
times years,  
times Time bought from a specter.  
My brother doesn't talk like this, but I imagine him saying. "Those are not scars.  
That's from when Death visited me in the hospital and signed my cast.  
You think I look bad? Shoulda seen him."

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Never is misunderstood for a curse.  
But it can be a promise worn inside out, where everyone can see.  
A headstone for a mistake.  
A flag to mark the place of no return.  
"I will never again let anyone touch me like that."  
"Never will I offer myself as a burnt offering  
for someone else to get warm by."  
"I will never pour my heart into a dry well again."

This Never is a caterwaul, a breath-bound power chord  
rattling the glass of your voicebox.  
The glass that's marked "break in case of emergency."

But it can be quiet, too.  
Never can be a tattoo on the cheek  
to remind you of who you are, never to be lost.  
Never's spirit animal is a mule.

\* \* \*

Beyond being the nuclear option of all negations,  
Never's secret gift is this:  
Some folks need a finish line, others need a fence.  
No, some folks need a finish line others need a fortified wall,  
complete with a sniper and razor wire.  
Say "You will never..." to some of us  
and you have marked the target with day-glo paint and a spotlight.  
Say "You will never..." and you have pronounced  
the mother of all dares.  
"Have you Ever?"  
"No. But hide and watch."

\* \* \*

Never grew up, outgrew his awkward phase.  
His scars shine like the interior skin of a shell.  
He is still patient, still turns his face up  
like a dark sunflower toward anyone who will look at him directly.  
He is, in fact, beautiful.

\* \* \*

My brother has outlived several death sentences,  
although the doctors kept reading edicts of Never over him.  
It's a good thing he is hard of hearing.  
A good thing he has a few, loyal friends.  
Tomorrow I drive home to see him  
and kiss and wish his daughter  
her first happy birthday,  
which was Never supposed to happen.