

Unfurl

Survivals,
Sorrows, and
Dreaming

Eli Clare

Unfurl



BUY



Unfurl

Survivals,
Sorrows, and
Dreaming

DUKE

Duke University Press
Durham & London 2025

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Eli Clare

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Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper ∞

Project Editor: Liz Smith

Designed by Courtney Leigh Richardson

Typeset in Garamond Premier Pro

by Copperline Book Services

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Clare, Eli, author.

Title: *Unfurl* : survivals, sorrows, and dreaming / Eli Clare.

Description: Durham : Duke University Press, 2025. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2024057288 (print)

LCCN 2024057289 (ebook)

ISBN 9781478032410 (paperback)

ISBN 9781478029045 (hardcover)

ISBN 9781478061267 (ebook)

Subjects: LCGFT: Poetry. | Prose poems.

Classification: LCC PS3603.L352 U548 2025 (print) |

LCC PS3603.L352 (ebook) | DDC 811/.6—dc23/eng/20250528

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2024057288>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2024057289>

Cover art: *Emerging*. © Jacks McNamara, www.jacksmcnamara.net.

Cover description: A portion of Jacks McNamara's circular piece

Emerging, originally painted on a round of basswood, fills the book

cover of *Unfurl* from edge to edge. Vibrant bands of color curve

inward, forming a partial circle, the outer edges starting in the upper

and lower right corners, first with layers of maroon, red, and yellow.

Then shades of blue, infused with sunlight, bend across the cover, a

meandering river. In the lower left corner, nestled inside the blue curve,

sits a heart of roots and tendrils in green, tan, light gray, and rust red.

The book's title, *Unfurl*, printed in a large white font, floats on top of

the bands of color, intertwined with fans of what might be seeds or

stones, teardrop shaped and delicate. Underneath the book title hangs

the subtitle, *Survivals, Sorrows, and Dreaming*, and beneath those

words, the author's name, Eli Clare.

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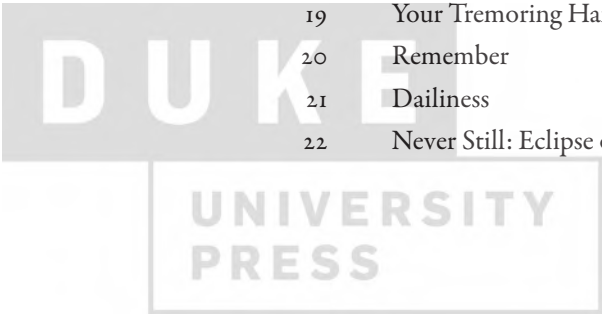
To the white pines and stones who steady me.

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Acknowledgments

In these catastrophic and genocidal times, I am filled with gratitude for all the beings—nonsentient and sentient, more-than-human and human, dead and living—who make my words possible.

First and always, the land and waters, sky and stars. I wrote big chunks of this book while living outside at Ricker Pond and Mt. Philo in unceded ancestral Abenaki territory and while preoccupied by the ocean, tides, horseshoe crabs, and wind at Cherry Grove in Secatogue homeland. As a white settler and uninvited guest living on stolen Indigenous land, let me be clear: LandBack now!

In serious and ongoing collaboration, I cocreated *Unfurl* with the following rock stars: Joe Kadi, who for more than thirty years has nudged, encouraged, and supported me and my words in every way imaginable. Susan Burch, who with generosity and brilliance has read and reread many, many drafts, co-authored the index, helped me reach deep into a tangle of ideas and histories, and believed unwaveringly in my voice. Alice Sheppard and Kinetic Light, whose invitation to write for their dance performance *DESCENT* sparked this book and whose disability art, kindness, and rigor reverberate on every page. And Samuel Lurie, who wakes up with me every morning, holds me through the easy bits and the tough bits, and loves me so well. Gratitudes beyond gratitude.

As I wrote, death swirled close; almost two dozen people in my life—some of them close, others farther away, and all of them influential in one way or another—died. I miss many of them beyond words. Their presence is folded into these pages. I call their names. I send unending gratitude into the cosmos particularly to Amber Hollibaugh, Carrie Ann Lucas, Laura Hershey, Laura Rauscher, PJ Redbird Two Ravens, and Stacey Park Milbern.

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And the living, oh, the living. Gratitude to the elders in my life: Suzanne Pharr, who has known me since I was six months old; Corbett O'Toole; and Aurora Levins Morales.

Gratitude to the people who read drafts and whose feedback strengthened my ideas and stories and how I thought about access: Susan Raffo, Curtis Walker, Cal Montgomery, Alison Kafer, Julia Watts Belser, Rebecca Denison, Kevin Gotkin, Georgina Kleege, Catherine Kudlick, Ian Sutherland, and all the folks at Duke University Press, particularly Elizabeth Ault.

Gratitude to the people whose lives, work, and friendship make my life more possible: Adrienne Neff, Akemi Nishida, Alison Kafer, Annette Marcus, Carla Grayson, Deirdre Kelly, Ellen Samuels, Gabriel Arkles, Heba Nimr, Leslie Frye, Loree Erickson, Lynne Whitney, Margaret Price, Mel Chen, Merri Rose, Patricia Fontaine, Rebecca Widom, Sarah Paige, Sebastian Margaret, Sunaura Taylor, Susan Raffo, Susan Stinson, Syrus Marcus Ware, Tammie Johnson, and Tracy Bartlett.

And finally, gratitude to the BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and other people of color) Disability Justice activists and cultural workers whose art, organizing, and thinking make so much survival and dreaming possible, both in my world and on my bookshelves. Among many others, let me name Alice Wong, Anita Cameron, Emi Koyama, JJJJJerome Ellis, Jen Deerinwater, Jina Kim, Lateef McLeod, Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, Ly Xīnzhèn Zhǎngsūn, Patricia Berne, Sami Schalk, Sandie (Chun Shan) Yi, Sandy Ho, and Talila A. Lewis.

.....

In different forms, earlier versions of some of the pieces in this volume appeared in a variety of anthologies, journals, periodicals, and websites:

“Kisses, Fists, and Underground Rivers” and “Lake Champlain at Flood Level” in *Troubling the Line: Trans and Genderqueer Poetry and Poetics*, edited by TC Tolbert and Trace Peterson (Nightboat, 2013)

“Dailiness” and “Sugar Maple” in *Strange Mutualisms*, edited by Corinne Teed (Vernal Pond Press, 2024)

“Moving Close to the Ground: A Messy Love Song” in *Moving Mountains: Writing Nature Through Illness and Disability*, edited by Louise Kenward (Footnote, 2023)

“The Art of Disassociation” in *Split This Rock's Poem of the Week* series, <https://www.splitthisrock.org/poetry-database/poem/the-art-of-disassociation>

- “Creating Categories” in *Narrative Art and the Politics of Health*, edited by Neil Brooks and Sarah Blanchette (Anthem, 2021)
- “A Great Flock of Stories (1977, 504 Sit-In)” in the exhibit *Patient No More: People with Disabilities Securing Civil Rights*, <https://longmoreinstitute.sfsu.edu/patient-no-more/we-need-great-flock-stories>
- “May Day (2020)” in the *South Atlantic Quarterly* 120, no. 2 (2021): 255–56
- “Bear” in the *Writer’s Chronicle* 53, no. 4 (2021): 43

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Practice: A routine. A repetition. A learning. A commitment. A deepening. A cluster of practices shapes *Unfurl: Survivals, Sorrows, and Dreaming*.

.....

a practice of remembering:

Time loops and swirls through these pages. Memory unfurls into the past-present-future, a phrase I use with great intention. In this practice of remembering, time does not travel in straight lines. Instead it swings wide. Arcs, twists, folds into itself. Wails long notes and short, an accordion gathering and releasing their breath.

I remember tremors as old as dolomite scraping over shale. Remember history as sweeping as the US Homestead Act of 1862. As personal as the federal government giving my great-granduncle 160 acres of stolen Sisseton-Wahpeton Dakota land. I remember white pine and sugar maple as kin. Remember rebellion and love.

This practice expands to the Milky Way. Contracts to my trembling hands smeared with muck. Functions on many different scales and scopes. Idiosyncratic and incomplete. Full of absence as well as presence.

.....

a practice of survival and sorrow:

Survival and sorrow crouch in every corner of *Unfurl*. These pieces emerged during a time of ongoing upheaval. Bees and bears live on the edge of extinction. Refugees trudge through the snow. Many of us navigate the everyday aftermaths of violence and death.

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As I wrote, my words looped me back into old survivals and sorrows, past-present-future pouring into each other. I returned to the early years of the AIDS epidemic (1981–83) as I was coming out. Until effective life-saving drugs became available fifteen years later, that disease killed people of all genders by the thousands—particularly, in my world, gay and bi men. I remember my young queer self surrounded by unrelenting funerals.

In that decade and a half, death cascading around us, we sat in community and called the names of people lost to AIDS. Wave after wave—ten minutes, a half hour, sometimes an hour before we'd fall silent—the space flooding with an ocean of names.

AIDS to COVID-19, epidemic to epidemic, war to war, hurricane to fire: The dead keep piling up. Living with a broken heart has become familiar and common, a long-haul reality, not a temporary condition. This book is a calling of the names, a practice of survival and sorrow.

.....

a practice of porousness:

My broken heart, skin, words practice porousness. Boundaries between human and more-than-human dissolve. Granite and aspen, pelican and beaver become kin. Sentient and nonsentient merge.

This practice blurs prose and poetry. Blends emotion, analysis, story. Uses citations to interlace different kinds of knowledge—kitchen table conversations, academically published histories, gratitudes to white pine and full moon.

Categories collapse and fail. Portals open into unclassifiable futures. I unfurl myself and invite you to join me in this endeavor, by turns demanding and joyful, unexpected and risky.

.....

a practice of dreaming:

I dream and dream and dream in these pages, tapping into multiple modes of imagining—tasting, smelling, tactile sensing, intuiting, listening, moving. I practice dreaming as survival, pleasure, and rebellion. Claim as essential both the quirky ephemeral currents of sleep time and the rebellious utopian desires of waking time.

Many of us practice dreaming in the quiet of our slumber. But this work, particularly daytime justice dreaming, is also collective and communal. A skill we teach each other. A practice we cultivate together.

.....

Writing this book over the last seven years has nourished me. Invited me to live more fully in my broken heart. Encouraged me to slip more often into rocks and trees. Enticed me to dream ferocious and tender rebellions.

May these words also nourish you.

June 2024

Basin of Lake Champlain, unceded ancestral Abenaki territory

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A CLUSTER OF PRACTICES xvii

Access Practices

Access practices ground *Unfurl*. When I tell you about access, I'm turning toward the logistics of reading/listening to/absorbing this book. But even more crucially, I'm telling you about the bedrock. The communal practices of accessible language, multiple formats, content notes, pauses, and more shape every page. They influence my words. They inform my ideas. They structure my stanzas and paragraphs. And they may determine how (or if) you read this book.

These practices are collective processes (not items on a checklist), guided by general principles, and manifested in hundreds of details. We learn them from each other.

Accessible Language

Decades ago I committed myself to accessible language—words that hold the front door wide open. I started learning this practice not in cross-disability spaces but from community-based feminist writers, many of them lesbians of color, in the 1980s and early '90s. Through their work, they showed me the possibilities of mixing genres with wild abandon and using unadorned language in nuanced ways. Over time I came to know that accessible language also works in tandem with the disability access practices of live/open/closed captions, written and spoken materials made available in multiple formats, and signed language interpretation.

My commitment to using unadorned language in nuanced ways has led me to story-based critical analysis, a reliance on metaphor, and an insistence on sensory bodymind-based experience. I intentionally avoid academic jargon. Those words, arising from specialized areas of study, often have convoluted meanings and function to shut many people out. I can never remember their definitions. Trying to read them feels like running into a brick wall.

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The poetry in *Unfurl* may feel, to some readers, the same way—a headlong crash into some unyielding barrier. If that reality is true for you, try reading or listening to the poems as if they were unfamiliar foods or dance moves that leave you confused, skeptical, and curious all at the same time. Give yourself space; experiment: They might spark (or not). Maybe you’ll catch the feelings and miss the meanings or wrestle with both. However you absorb this book, you are neither wrong nor “stupid”—that word itself, a tool of ableist-sexist-antipoor white supremacy. The poems here are not puzzles with one correct solution and many incorrect ones. Instead they are practices of dreaming and porousness—idiosyncratic, full of kinships, structured not by logic but by rhythm, sound, sensation, emotion.

Gratitudes, Citations, and Other Notes

I want to fling the front door of *Unfurl* wide open. To this end, I’ve written several kinds of notes.

FORMAT NOTES: Some of my poems (and occasionally my prose) swirl across the page in ways readers may not expect or find visually accessible. Lines cascade, rupture, hug the right margin rather than the left. I’ve included “format notes” underneath the titles of these pieces. Think of them as maps or verbal descriptions of the shapes the poems make. I wrote these notes into the main body of *Unfurl* (rather than as alt text, which is available only to people using screen readers) in order to create more access for a variety of readers. They are experiments in an access practice I’ve not encountered before. As such, I know they’re messy, rudimentary, and incomplete. Of course I hope they’ll be useful to readers. But I also hope they will encourage other writers to adopt and further develop this access practice.

HISTORICAL NOTES: Sometimes I reference events or histories that I don’t explain in the text and that readers may be unfamiliar with. In these cases, I include “historical notes” (located again underneath individual titles) to provide some context for my stories and images.

DEFINITIONS: In many ways, the practice of accessible language revolves around definitions. Which ones open the door, and which slam it tight? These questions become tricky in this genre-bending book. I choose not to define *ableism*, *settler colonialism*, *white supremacy*, *capitalism*, *patriarchy*,

transphobia, homophobia, and more in the main body of the text. I want them to be understood and felt not through sharp, crisp definition but in story, experience, and accumulated community wisdom. Yet I know definitions create more access for some readers. To this end, I place a handful of definitions in the unnumbered endnotes at the back of the book.

CITATIONS: Academic writers and scholars come from traditions that expect notes at the bottoms of pages and ends of books (otherwise known as citations) to map out scholarly sources, origins, influences, and tangents to their arguments/ideas/histories/analyses/theories/data. These notes are often used to build academic credibility and authority. I, on the other hand, come from writing traditions that don't consider citations, beyond crediting direct quotes, important at all.

But in this book, I use endnotes widely. I braid together the largely land-, community-, and activist-based webs of relationships (both human and more-than-human) that pull my words into existence. I define; I thank; I cite art, conversations, ecosystems, rocks, trees, books, zines, websites, films, social media threads, articles, and more. I'm not joining an academic tradition but instead claiming citations as a community-based practice of interdependence, gratitude, and access.

CONTENT NOTES (AKA CONTENT OR TRIGGER WARNINGS): See below for details.

Access Practices Are Never Complete

Access practices—these communal skills we're teaching each other—are almost always incomplete and flawed. For example, as deeply as I've committed to and practiced accessible language, I don't, in these pages, embrace the specific standards of plain language. Defined by guidelines about word choice, sentence and paragraph structure, and document design, plain language creates communication access for many different groups of people. Originally developed in a variety of contexts, including manufacturing and government work, these standards have, more recently, been adopted and further developed as disability access by intellectually/developmentally disabled people, autistic people, self-advocates, and allies.

Simply put, plain language is structured, specific, and rigorous in ways that my current practice of accessible language is not. It holds the front door open

even further. I want to begin leaning in to this rigor. What poems, ideas, relationships, and activist strategies might I find through using plain language standards to shape my words?

For now, I imagine *Unfurl* as a hard-copy book printed in a sans-serif font alongside a plain language edition; an audiobook; a braille version; a screen-readable e-book; a free-of-charge, fully searchable PDF; and an ASL (American Sign Language) video. Some of these editions exist, but others do not. Not yet, that is. I dream of a not-so-distant past-present-future when all of these formats are published simultaneously as a matter of course.

Not Complete but Still Necessary

Sometimes I watch people use the frequent incompleteness of access practices as an excuse not to engage in access work at all. But our routines don't need to be complete or perfect to be useful. Instead we need to keep creating, hacking, problem solving, and being accountable as we center access.

Every time I use or create content notes, I think about prioritizing usefulness. The practice of content notes, naming potential triggers, not as a way of trying to control impact but as an act of collective care, will always be vexingly incomplete. We can never comprehensively predict and name everyone's triggers.

But at the same time, this practice is so useful. I started learning about it decades ago as an activist in the feminist antiviolence movement. Trigger warnings (also known now as content notes or content warnings) gave me as a survivor just enough access to stay present and engaged when our work turned to graphic details of sexual assault and domestic violence. Today I regularly both create and use content notes in a variety of contexts, working in the spirit of useful and incomplete.

Content Notes and Care

Writing content notes for *Unfurl* has been particularly confounding. These pages place daily interpersonal ableism next to flashbacks of childhood abuse, rebellion next to joy, community connection next to climate chaos. Accounts and analysis of ableism, racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, capitalism, settler colonialism, and environmental destruction appear throughout the book. In other words, I could tag almost every piece here with a content note.

None of what I've written contains extended descriptions of—or gratuitous details about—trauma, violence, or death. But I do directly and vividly

name these experiences alongside survival, community, kinship, joy, beauty, resistance, rebellion, dreaming of liberation, and releasing of past trauma.

After hours of thinking and conversation with other writers and activists, I still have not successfully answered the question of what to tag and how. My desire is, of course, to provide useful prompts toward self- and collective care. But tagging every piece simply wouldn't help us know how and when to take care of ourselves and each other.

In writing this book, I leaned hard into self-care. The themes of trauma, violence, and death rumbled in my bones 24/7. Time often wavered and cracked. I paused again and again, making space to walk, drink water, cook, curl into a tree, breathe, nap.

And so, I weave my practice of pauses into these pages. Specifically, I punctuate section II, which is focused on grief and trauma, with short poem-reminders that begin with “pause pause.” Consider them poetic access breaks. Please put the book down, dog-ear or bookmark pages to return to, skip what feels like too much. In other words, I'm encouraging you to develop your own practice of pauses.

In the end, I decided not to tag individual pieces. Instead, I include general content notes at the bottom of each section's title page (pages 1, 17, 33, 61, 81, and 105). In these notes, I pay particular attention to the naming of significant trauma, violence, and death. I hope they are useful both as flags and as prompts toward self- and collective care.

.....

Practice: A routine. A repetition. A learning. A commitment. A deepening.

I dream of a world where practices of access, interdependence, and collective care are so common, so at the center of everything, so woven into every day that we frequently have no need to even name them. In the meantime, let's keep practicing.

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Prelude

CONTENT NOTES: This section interweaves belonging and connection with references to death, COVID-19 pandemic conditions, and a body-bruising fall.

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Kisses, Fists, and Underground Rivers

HISTORICAL NOTE: The fourth part of this poem centers on the 1986 Great Peace March. Over the course of eight and a half months, I walked, along with hundreds of other people, across the United States for global nuclear disarmament. In the 1980s, the Cold War seemed endless. The federal government exploded a nuclear weapon at the Nevada Test Site once every three weeks. Missile silos, staffed twenty-four hours a day, ready to launch nuclear warheads aimed at the Soviet Union, dotted the Great Plains. We talked peace, taught peace, tried to live peace with each other in our mobile tent city. Not simply an absence of war in a world long steeped in armed conflict, massacre, and genocide, peace with justice was, and still is, both a radical imagining of the future and a daily practice in the present.

Because poems live in cracks, crevices, fissures.

Take root after landslides and wildfires—pale green of huckleberry already unfurling.

Because they churn upstream to their spawning beds.

Dapple the ground with sunlight.

Roll in the surf, grip the rocks, hunker over coffee at 4 a.m. before another fourteen-hour day.

.....

1979: I sat in sixth-period study hall, bored out of my mind. The only alternative—Mr. Beckman's poetry class—held no appeal. But restless and desperate, I decided to take a chance.

We scribbled poems in spiral-bound notebooks. Sent them out for publication. Collected rejection letters.

Read William Carlos Williams and Emily Dickinson but not June Jordan or Lucille Clifton.

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In that tiny backwoods high school, no one studied AP English or received a National Merit Scholarship. We ended up single mothers and grocery store clerks, gas station attendants and regulars at Pitch's Tavern.

We organized fieldtrips. Drove hundreds of miles. Heard Carolyn Kizer, Galway Kinnell, Gary Snyder read their poems. Saved our pocket change to buy their books.

Poetry grabbed me by the collar, whispered in my ear, "You're comin' with me." I followed willingly, destination unknown.

.....

Because poems are kisses, fists, and underground rivers.

.....

1986: Twenty-two years old and unsure whether my poet-activist voice would ever be of use, I joined the Great Peace March: Los Angeles to Washington, DC, 3,700 miles for global nuclear disarmament.

I dreamed, walked, woke up with poems. Wrote about the Nevada Test Site and the Seneca Army Depot, meltdowns at Chernobyl and Three Mile Island. Words clamoring and insistent.

We read poems at peace rallies. Sang songs in church basements. Told stories in greasy spoon cafés.

Mojave blooming yellow in April, cornfields growing lush and tasseled in August: I memorized my poems. Stepped up to the microphone. Didn't feel bold.

At those rallies and coffeehouses, my voice stumbled and cracked, sometimes beginning to carry.

.....

Because poems stitch and restitch themselves across the decades. Refuse Wall Street.

Stand in line at the welfare office. Gossip, laugh, pass the word, "Don't let 'em get you down."

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Because they drool, dream, panic, stim. Link arms with riotous graffiti and old protest songs.

Groan and thud, float in the dark, late at night in detention centers and psych wards.

Shout into the cosmos and keep us alive as surely as warm oatmeal in the morning.



Heart

heart of lake at flood level, heart of stone, heart of pine, heart
of glacier collapsing, heart of spasm and stim, heart of river
no longer reaching estuary, heart of scientist working
to create a vaccine for which the whole world awaits,
heart of hummingbird–hive–hay barn, heart of octopus
and damselfly, heart of ER nurse after a sixteen-hour shift,
heart of thunderhead, heart of apple tree, heart of janitor
cleaning rooms of the newly dead, heart of queerness,
heart of kindness, heart of gender rebellion, heart of falcon
nesting atop skyscraper, heart of raven, heart of tightrope
walker at 2 a.m., heart of dance floor–disco ball–drag queen
after one too many whiskey sours, heart of no justice
no peace, heart of snake–mouse–owl, heart of bedrock,
heart of treehouse, heart of grief, heart of jet stream,
heart of Milky Way, heart of sandhill crane, heart of rumble,
heart of rage, heart of hallucination, heart of hardness, heart
of slowness, heart of worry, heart of orgasm, heart of gasping
for breath, heart of ventilator, heart twitching, heart stumbling,
heart beginning to stop, beginning to break, beginning to rise.

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Unfurl: An Invitation

FORMAT NOTE: *Short questions anchored to the right margin amplify the poem's invitation.*

become
stars
shadows
flickers
of light

a prowling
and tender
melody

fingertips
gripping the edge

call it home
call it desire
call it a need
to never
let go

what do we wail into the world?

.....

unfurl your heart
your belly
your vertebrae
one by one

slide
into your skin

a spider
poised

.....

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between crests
enter the trough

fill yourself
with sunlight
and smoke

.....

unfurl
your featherless
wings

brush the skin
of belly
and sternum

.....

but no:

draw knees
to chest

rest bone
upon bone

how do we unlearn desperation?

.....

become
a single
piercing
bell

raindrops
plucked
from a cello

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stars
shadows
flickers
of light

.....

learn
to slide
crouch
crawl

flat
of hand
curve of
kneecap

bone
uncushioned

.....

grasp
wrench
pull

become predator
become prey

become both
or neither
a shiver of pain

do not
let go
of tenderness

.....

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oh, yes:
the muscle
softened breath
deepened throat
opened

but do not
ignore

the unfurling
itself

that arch arc
momentum
of a full turn

.....

poise
on the edge

body
leaning in

push
and descend
push
and descend

a raptor riding
the thermals

neither hunting
nor hunted

.....

the moment
after gravity
takes hold

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that rupture
revelation
release

what does the unfurling demand of us?

lunge

and lunge again

.....

unfurl
your fingertips
your knuckles
your wrists

bend
and caress
bend
and caress

then
flick away

.....

lean
into a cradle
made of wheelchair
and flesh

star
stone
feather
suspended

.....

accept her invitation—
straddle her lap
become the gliding
of her wheels

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the hands
twined through
her hair

.....

slide into
the underworld

do not
leave

limbs writhe
bodies tangle
shadows multiply

.....

wander through
a forest
of bull kelp

brush against
tongue
and tooth

whisper
whisper

history splinters

.....

but no:

draw knees
to chest

rest bone
upon bone

who do we touch and how?

.....

become
a fault line
fissure
fulcrum

balance on
the earth

pause
pause

star
stone
feather
unfurling

.....

you plummet
body careening

earth
no longer
steady

pretend
it does not
matter

.....

hit ground

crack
bruise
brace
gravity
swells

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.....

unfurl disgust
despair
the shame
that will not
leave

descend
and collapse
descend
and collapse

.....

become
a vortex

do not
relent

.....

which stories do we hide away?

an aching joint
a gasping muscle

pause
pause

become tremor
become tension

become both
or neither
a shiver of light

and which stories do we brandish?

.....

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unfurl yourself
into wheel
and axle

body barely
touching earth

nerves registering
pressure
pain
danger

collide
and descend
collide
and descend

.....

back arched
arms splayed

history
prowls
and flickers

.....

bone becomes
metal becomes
skin becomes
spoke becomes
slope becomes
splinters become
stories become
sternum becomes
moan becomes
fingertip becomes
ache becomes you

do not
let go

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Notes

A Cluster of Practices

- xvi *Sentient and nonsentient merge* For more about objects, humanness, and personhood, see Kim, “Unbecoming Human.”
- xvi *justice dreaming, is also collective and communal* My use of *justice dreaming* spins off from historian Robin D. G. Kelley’s phrase *freedom dreams*. See Kelley, *Freedom Dreams*.

Access Practices

- xix *We learn them from each other* I have been taught access practices by dozens of people in cross-disability communities. Gratitude particularly to Robin Stephens and Corbett O’Toole. I’ve learned much from them as they have created access over the decades at cross-disability gatherings, large and small. For more about access practices, see Dolmage, *Academic Ableism*; Hamraie, *Building Access*.
- xix *accessible language also works in tandem with the disability access practices* Many gratitudes to this lesbian-feminist tradition of accessible language. Of particular importance for me as a writer, reader, and student of accessible language is the work of Paula Gunn Allen, Dorothy Allison, Gloria Anzaldúa, Beth Brant, Chrystos, Judy Grahn, June Jordan, Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz, Irena Klepfisz, Audre Lorde, Cherríe Moraga, Pat Parker, Minnie Bruce Pratt, Kate Rushin, and Nelle Wong. It’s important to note that disability rarely shows up, at least explicitly, in their writings, either as named identity, content, or access practice.

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Accessible language is also part of Language Justice. For a concise explanation of how Language Justice and Disability Justice are connected, see Sins Invalid, “Language Justice Is Disability Justice.” For important thinking about speech, communication, language, and disability access, see Baggs, “Up in the Clouds and Down in the Valley”; Sequenzia and Grace, *Typed Words, Loud Hands*.

- xix *an insistence on sensory bodymind-based experience* The word *bodymind* resists the white Western categorization of body as separate from mind. This classification scheme prioritizes minds and establishes them as a defining characteristic of personhood. *Bodymind* declares that our bodies always include our minds and our minds in turn shape our embodied experiences in thousands of ways. I use *bodymind* and *body* somewhat idiosyncratically throughout the book. I often choose the former when the entangled nature of body and mind is particularly apparent or pertinent. For more, see Price, “Bodymind Problem and the Possibilities of Pain”; Raffo, *Liberated to the Bone*.
- xx *that word itself, a tool of ableist-sexist-antipoor white supremacy* For more about how the word *stupid* is used as a weapon against poor and working-class people, particularly in higher education, see Kadi, “Stupidity ‘Deconstructed.’”
- xx *an access practice I’ve not encountered before* Gratitude to everyone who helped me think about the access practice of format notes and shape the notes themselves into useful tools: Catherine Kudlick, Elizabeth Ault, Georgina Kleege, Ian Sutherland, Kevin Gotkin, and Susan Burch. All the mistakes and the ways in which the notes may not live up to their intent are fully my responsibility.
- xxi *citations as a community-based practice of interdependence, gratitude, and access* Many gratitudes to the framework of Disability Justice for centering the importance of interdependence. For more on this subject, see Kafai, *Crip Kinship*; Levins Morales, *Kindling*; Nishida, *Just Care*; Piepzna-Samarasinha, *Care Work*; Erickson, “Thinking About and with Collective Care.”
- xxi *these standards have, more recently* For more details, see Autistic Self Advocacy Network, “One Idea per Line”; Acton, “Plain Language for Disability Culture.”
- xxii *using plain language standards to shape my words* For important reflections on and critiques of accessible language

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and plain language, see Chen, “Chronic Illness, Slowness, and the Time of Writing.” In the current world, where English is a dominant language and a tool/weapon of past and present colonization and coerced assimilation, how we practice accessible language/communication needs to take multiple forms, shaped by readers’ and writers’ languages (signed, spoken, and/or written), cultures, communities, education, class, and disability.

At the same time, Alice Wong provides a powerful model for leaning in to plain language. After she edited the anthology *Disability Visibility*, she commissioned Sara Luterman to translate the book into plain language, making it available as a free download (Luterman, “Plain Language Translation of *Disability Visibility*”).

- xxii *an act of collective care* At its most basic, *collective care* refers to mutual care given and received within community, often intentionally outside the institutional structures of the medical-industrial complex, charity, and state-funded social safety nets. Both the framework and practices of *collective care* are being developed and nuanced within the context of Disability Justice in tandem with practices of interdependence. Gratitude to Loree Erickson for many kitchen table conversations about her care collective.
- xxii *useful and incomplete* Gratitude to the feminist antiviolence activists who have developed powerful trigger-warning practices over the decades. For more about content notes/trigger warnings and disability access, see Kafer, “Un/Safe Disclosures”; Carter, “Teaching with Trauma.”
- xxiii *I paused again and again* For a deep dive into self-care framed by both politics and lived experience, see Ortiz, *Sustaining Spirit*; Kim and Schalk, “Reclaiming the Radical Politics of Self-Care.”

Prelude

Kisses, Fists, and Underground Rivers

- 3 *I decided to take a chance* Gratitude to Bill Beckman, who taught English, journalism, and poetry at Pacific High School, for nourishing me and making his classroom a lunchtime refuge; to Barbara Drake, the first poet I knew personally who wrote books and published poems; and to

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my poetry classmates for every single mediocre and enthusiastic poem we wrote and shared with each other.

- 4 *underground rivers* Gratitude to Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha and their poem “dirty river girl,” where underground rivers are both very literal and powerfully metaphorical (Piepzna-Samarasinha, *Bodysmap*, 29–34).
- 4 *Didn't feel bold* Gratitude to Wild Wimmin for Peace, an ensemble group on the Great Peace March—eighteen of us writing songs, changing lyrics, reciting poetry, making art out of feminist rage and grief. I can still feel the tingle of adrenaline as I held a mic close, reciting my poem about the Seneca Army Depot. As soon as I finished, Trish Flynn's voice would rise in the dark, singing Judy Small's antiwar song “Bridget Evans.”

Heart

- 6 *Heart* Gratitude to Stacey Park Milbern (1997–2020) and PJ Redbird Two Ravens (1965–2022). I began writing this poem during the early COVID-19 pandemic before and after Stacey's death. I finished the poem for PJ's memorial service.

A Korean queer Disability Justice activist, Stacey wrote, organized, and loved disabled people, particularly disabled Black, Indigenous, and other people of color (BIPOC). Stacey and I followed each other's work from afar and saw each other whenever and wherever we could. For a sampling of Stacey's work, see Piepzna-Samarasinha and Wong, “#StaceyTaughtUs Syllabus.”

A gender and sex outlaw, social worker, and queer/trans organizer, PJ held space for hundreds, if not thousands, of trans people to come out in Michigan in the 1990s and early 2000s. He facilitated the trans/gender-nonconforming support group Gender Explorers that I attended in the late 1990s. That space made my trans coming out more possible. I could not have written these words without Stacey's and PJ's presence in my heart. I send both of them big love.

Unfurl: An Invitation

- 7 *Unfurl: An Invitation* This poem (and really this whole book) started with an invitation from Alice Sheppard of the disability arts ensemble Kinetic Light. She, Laurel Lawson,

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and Michael Maag (along with an unforgiving and revelatory ramp/stage set) were in the midst of creating *DESCENT*, a disabled, queer, multiracial love story told in dance. Alice asked me to write a poem for the performance to be used as part of sonic access for blind, low vision, and nonvisual audience members. Out of her request emerged “Unfurl: An Invitation.” Bodyminds in motion—unfolding to music, light, rhythm—totally shaped my words, and in turn my stanzas sometimes informed Kinetic Light’s choreography. Unfurling was never solely conceptual or metaphorical in our collaboration but actual, held in muscle, emotion, and story. Many gratitudes for this collaboration. Alice, thank you for inviting me into this disability art and access making.

- 11 *become the gliding / of her wheels* Gratitude to power chair—using poet, Green Party member and one-time political candidate, journalist, and ADAPT activist Martina Robinson. I learned about the joy of this particular kind of invitation to dance from her. At one of the Society for Disability Studies dances, she invited me onto her lap and swooped us around the perimeter of the dance floor.

I. Tremors

Your Tremoring Hands and Mine

- 19 *of politeness* Gratitude to the many queer/trans disabled people who have taught me how to unlearn compliance and embrace fierce gimpy noncompliance. MaryFrances Platt and Sebastian Margaret have repeatedly revealed the power of snarky humor to me.

Remember

- 20 *a dailiness of tremors* Gratitude to all the beings that tremor—ranging from the planet to quaking aspen to the human bodyminds who reflect, hold, love my shakiness. Without all of you, I could never have reimagined tremoring from a shameful experience to a common one.

- 20 *dolomite scraping / over shale* Gratitude to the thrust fault along Lake Champlain, unceded ancestral Abenaki territory, for the strong yellow-gold rock overlaying flaky gray-black stone and for the eons of tremors.

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