COLD JOY

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Experience the Wondrous Power of Cold Water

Libby DeLana
Illustrations by Tjasa Owen

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This book provides content related to physical and mental well-being. The information contained in this book is presented for educational purposes only. This book is in no way intended as a substitute for the medical advice of physicians. If you seek to use cold plunging to treat a physical and/or mental condition, please consult with your physician or a licensed health-care provider first.

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WELCOME

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This morning the water felt as though it were reaching for my hand and asking me to dance. The invitation was made with so much kindness and care, I was almost too bashful to accept it. Steam curled from the water's surface in long, elegant fingers, and the sun glanced from the tops of the waves, flickering silver. The night heron, hunched over but glorious, watched from the reeds, which chattered with morning breeze, one of the last warm winds of the year.

"Won't you come in?" the water said, rolling onto the beach, depositing vacant shells and pebbles—strange but perfect gifts—at my toes.

I waited for a moment. She reached for me again, and this time, I reached back, walking in up to my middle, letting her hold me, move me, love me.

For the past five years, I have started most of my days dancing this dance with the cold water. It is ritually significant to me, an expression of self-love, earth-love, spirit-love, people-love. The water is my partner, my guide, my classroom, and my playground. It is truly a comfort to me.

But cold water is *un*comfortable, isn't it?

Just the thought of an icy river or unheated swimming pool elicits a physical reaction—shivers, cringes, walls going up, alarms going off, held breath. I have richly painted childhood memories of this feeling, standing on an old gray dock with a Speedo-clad gaggle, our toes curled around the precipice, bargaining with one another, "You go first," "No, you go first." All of us tense, our hands balled into fists and our faces crumpled.

Eventually someone—usually not me—would jump in. There would be shrieks and splashes, then joy and fun. The rest of us would follow. The first several seconds were indeed uncomfortable, but on the other side was jubilation. To me, cold-water immersion is about making jubilation into a habit. It is about cold joy, champagne sparkles, and the feeling of spinning—dancing a dance that, over time, we've forgotten we know. So, every morning, when the water asks, I walk into her arms and let her lead.

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Cold Joy is about accepting invitations, staying open to change, allowing our stories as humans to unfold slowly, and finding the courage to question false narratives. Like many devotees, when I first saw people online sinking chin deep into their icy tubs, I said, "Never."

But over time a quieter, wiser, more-curious voice has emerged, asking *"Why not?"*

This book is my journey to that question and many, many more beyond it. It is a record of what cold immersion can reveal in us, how it can teach us, guiding us to lessons about ourselves and the world that we may not find otherwise, huddled so close to the cozy hearth of daily life. I take you from the initial wonderings about cold dipping, into the water, and on to a deeper practice, sharing the challenges that have come up for me along the way and the tools that have helped me nourish and sustain the best damn habit I've ever had. Together, we'll go to wild places. Sometimes, they'll be swirling rivers that lead to the ocean, other times they'll be eddying pools inside us. Some days, we'll climb unclimbable walls, other days we'll smile and wave to the harbor seals.

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If you're looking for a medical argument for cold immersion, or any argument really, you won't find it in these pages. This is cold immersion through a loving, heart-forward lens, centered on my own experience, our relationship with water through history, and the stories generously shared with me by others. I am not a doctor, and even if I were, data on the long-term effects of cold exposure is still very much emerging. Many of the possible benefits are overstated by enthusiasts, while the very real risks don't make the highlight reels. It is important

for every person interested in the practice to consult with a trusted medical provider.

Also—and I know this may disappoint some—I won't be spouting definitive instructions. The best version of this practice for me might not be the best for you, and that's perfectly fine! What I can and will extend to you is an invitation—to personal growth, deeper inquiry, joy, and learning to dance your dance all over again.

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Let's get in the water.
What's the best
that could happen?

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