

A teal-colored circular graphic with irregular, hand-cut edges, centered on a dark grey background. The text is overlaid on this graphic.

BATH POEMS

DARA CERV

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by Dara Cerv

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FIRST EDITION

Cover art by Dara Cerv

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for SP

BATH EXERCISE

Stand in front of the mirror
Inspect your skin's small diamonds of age
In the interest of striking out
Against patterns
Angle yourself the opposite way
Sit in the hottest water
Until the vein in your forehead
Buoys your fingers
Make a teenager-style wish
Not that one
You don't get to save a person
Think about the people who surround you
But you are alone in the tub
You are alone
Pull the plug
Before the tubful drains
You have to decide what single thing
You would change
What single thing
I always chicken out
And turn on the water
At the last minute add
A little more
This is not how
Dying works

BATH EXERCISE

The dull kitchen knife is the heaviest thing
I'll ever hold
It drags me toward
The center of the Earth
Each slice
A purgatorial ring
Use the bath as a way to
Stage a drama
I feel death's film on me
I batter-ram each day
The bathtub is a portal
On the other side I own a home
I stick all my fingers in all
The holes of a rotary phone
A dog licks my knees
While I eat chicken wings
With a husband
This is a drama without risk
What if I told you
All that waits on the other side
Is what's under
The washcloth that floats
Above my thighs

BATH EXERCISE

Scoop up that bumblebee
From the back stairwell
You're in your 30s now
Time to get over it
Build a raft out of toothpicks and Crazy Glue
Blow into the dead bee
Everything you need to say goodbye to
Your father
Your uncle who was a father
His face cracked open by pain
Wiped clean when he died
Remember before Pornhub
You came more readily
Remember before iPhones
Remember memory
Pick a memory
Early that morning
The way he breathed in his sleep
How it sounded like water
Was filling his lungs
I gathered him in and pressed
Slowly on his chest
Remember
You were a child once
Wheel of Fortune didn't produce
A cruise for you

But you still watched it
Pat Sajak's father-voice
A god
You landed on

BATH EXERCISE

Outside the high
Bathroom window I float
The trees against a gross sky
I am the trees
It doesn't get much better than that
At the outset of the day I was just
A grocery store loiterer
Giving up bread once and for all
Did you feel it
The moment I released it
We all struggle with how
Much to give and when
In the bathtub
An army of instruments waits to
Knell a song
Piano my trunk in
Drum my head under
Choose things to drown to music
Release the digital creation
Of pink noise
Rainstorm and train
Cradling the pristine ceramic
Lion in the passenger seat
On the way back from Queens
Nothing to put in my coffee
A small bottle of lotion

Tangled projector cords

Release

I love how you look in this bed

Your back

Your lips

And those legs

Release winter soup

The soft-lit poodle and the candle

Release

The morning we were

A lush fastened garment

The hook of your body

Unclicked from the eyelet of mine

BATH POEM

There is a couple on the train
Man with his hand at
The woman's lower back
Ruddering her through the car
I squint and she looks like a beautiful ship
I squint and he looks like a man
If I were the woman I would say
We have so little time
Here
It's not you
It's how tired I am of your
Habits
I compose this OK CUPID profile
Must be willing to die for me
I know 27 techniques for that
I feel death on me
Like a film when
In the bedroom I shift
Onto my shoulders
The red terrycloth robe

BATH EXERCISE

This is a meditation on conclusions
Drawn about the dream that I am dying
On the outside of the inside of the dream
A head in a teleprompter says
We are *all* dying
And I don't hate him for it
This is a meditation with your knees
Above the waterline
Body like a flag
Staked in ambiguous territory
Elect which patterns
You must purge
Press your fingertips to
The back of the throat
When the cloth comes
Catch it
Like a magician you can pull out
Fistfuls of knots
Wrestle and unfasten them
Spread the blanket over the water's surface
Safety-tanked in your motives
That's when you pull the plug
To the great suck
Touch yourself
To the great suck and the air whittling
Warmth from your skin

Touch yourself

Like the bulb above the tub

The future is a bright place

We reach for

Sometimes wrap our arms around

If I dream again

It will be to this sound

BATH POEM

I was a little sad
When you finally scraped
The dried cum off the sofa cushion
I think I remember thinking
Freedom is a fiction
Take only calculated risks
I was almost jarred loose enough
That month I was almost
Flamingo status with a leg up
On the bed frame
I would go home and read
Horoscopes in the tub
Your slow and steady approach
Needs a sharp kick in the pants
Today Cancer
Reclined in my mother's lesson
I tore off the doll's arm
And she just left the doll
Armless
Stretch Cancer but don't snap
The quality of being armless
Makes you hold on harder with the lungs
Each day a golden thread
One breath ends and another
Begins I was a little sad
Lost in the eye of

The big pearly beholder
Reclined in the hot tear in
The corner of a marble
Giant's eye

BATH EXERCISE

Close your eyes
Where's your crown chakra
If you see lavender
You are prophetic
Let's be straight and say
You're just a duck
Navigating a tiny fake lake
Not an egret
Flying a wide sea
I wonder how many
Ideas in the tub
I've opened the veins of
In the echo I am free to
Bounce around with certainty
Immortality
Imperfect ass
I think I hate puppies
I watched you not deal
With your anger for years
I'm sorry I pushed us off
A cliff I'm sorry
There wasn't the safety of
Waves but instead
A sea of faltering trees

BATH POEM

-after Oliver Laric

The artist in the office window
Across from my bathroom window
Is just trying to stay alive
In her chair each night extracting life
From her body
Each brush stroke a palm tree
Against a snow bank in New England
Each seized knuckle a fair start
Grips the end of a rope
Ultimately we look across a room for a person
With whom to dance ultimately
We look across an alleyway for a person
Who represents a last chance
I attempt assembly of the person
I would wrap with damp blotched arms
And pull into the bath with me
A stranger seems best
If the heat of my body would unfold
In them a reason to
Put down the brush the pen
Begin again
I climb up to your windows
On scaffolding when I can't sleep
Scaffolding is a symbol of something
Built or destroyed

I want to collect
Your neck in my two hands
And float our sorrows
Down drains
Down contained rivers into
Borderless harbors

BATH EXERCISE

On the walk home I saw the end
Of a third floor fire
Flat hoses snaked around cars
Fire engines pressed
Against the cars parked against
The curb I think people
Flood out of their homes
And stand in the flashing lights
To study tragedy
So that they can rest
Unblemished in their beds
Able to touch themselves
And each other with clarity
I wonder where I'll be when I hear
About how you die
I get in a bath so hot my aorta
Guns blood at my brain
I sink tragic feelings
But they eventually wend
Their way into the drinking water
I do not possess the brainwaves for
Deep dreamless sleep
Those spikes are out of my reach
I get in a bath so cold
My sex organs will never work
Again get in a bath with a gun

And a gimlet thank god
This isn't the last act
Two men walk into a bar
I wish the tub large enough
To hold all the bodies or just
Me and my love
I wonder where we will be I wonder
Will we lift our chins
Our skin broken open
Will sweat even reach our brows
Will we look skyward
When the world is dry
When there is no water left

BATH EXERCISE

You can cut a person out of
The scenery with the right scissors
You can paste over it another
Person or slip into it
A compact mirror
In place of the person
The mouth ajar or the eye
Blinks absence
The compact mirror fogs recurrently
When clutched in the bathtub
Consider your image the struggle
To clear it with thumbs
An endless video game
The compact mirror as a submarine
In search of your genitals
The root of a human being
Find your underwater genitals
With this wavering eye
The door to
A great chamber in which
Dozens of people hold compact
Mirrors in front of their mouths
Pant and fog the glass
You can cut a person out of
The scenery you can cut
A million people out of the scenery

Paste over them or into them wisdom
That someone out in the big world
Will crush your face against
A mirror without question

BATH EXERCISE

-after Oliver Laric

An axe that has had its head
Replaced four times
And its handle five times
Ceases being a trustworthy axe
Revise axe
A misshapen axe with no replacements
This is the body
Underwater the body
Takes the shape of an axe
Or at least acts misshapen
Refraction likens us
To our modern art selves
In the bath I stood
Gathering water in my arms
All right it was the shower
I put the shower on while the tub was still full
Make yourself a fountain of youth
Make yourself the ladle
That brings the world to their lips

BATH EXERCISE

Go to the bathtub like you would

An oracle

In this divine eye socket unfold

Your palms

As if you have vision

As if you have futures to choose

From the slow migration

Toward a people

Who filter like relief

Unfold your palms and wait for

The reading

The line-up of planets

And full moons

Divoted in the pruned flesh

Like you hold pearls

Fold your oyster shell palms

Slow iris dilates

Unfold

Your palms

It's not the world you find

Soak them

Until the valleys and

Mountains level

Until cells swell

Your future sloughs

Your future

A smooth glove
That grips a ceramic bone

BATH POEM

I remember the particular
Golden light that repeatedly
Sliced a woman
On the train she dropped
Breakfast into her cleavage
Habit dictates repetition of the word
Sexy I look at the specific
Curlicue of my pubes
Underwater
What the word replaces
Which emotion denied air
It is difficult to give a little
Never mind at all
Does it matter if we don't say
What we mean
It matters if we do
A small god stands on the towel bar
Taunts me
We are dust in
The scheme of things after all
How not to float
How not to
Just let the water in
Every orifice and just stay wet

BATH POEM

Sometimes I burst
Into tears when I see
A slow old dog on the street
When insomnia shuttles me
Up and down the concrete
In the bath I sit on
The pinkish mind beach
In a temp the sea
Will eventually reach
In front of the ocean
I work into an inner monologue
I'm a sailor or
A mermaid
Something that blinks
Phosphorescent in the parts
Where that slow underwater
Pulse doesn't quicken
When the ocean
No longer exists
I will fill my tub with tears
You better believe I will
Wring out my eyes over it
Talent lies in recovery of
Water in a drought

BATH POEM

There is something behind
Every veneer inevitably
Deteriorating the system
Pipes rust
Bones Swiss cheese
Drains fill with hair
And skin and skin
And hair eat away
The riverbanks and shores
All of our hair and skin
Human algae
Clogs the fishes' guts
Stops up the blowholes
Coats the coral
I sit in the tub while
The world corrodes
What is the weight of another
Human being
What will I coat with
Bits of my flesh
What will wear my face
And walk in the world
And say my name
When I am a sliver of light
By a wave
Pushed under the sand

BATH EXERCISE

Think of something
Your mother might write
The passing taxi of life keeps
Splashing the hem of my skirt
Some lucky couple in
The backseat pressing their lips
Together always
For her it happened to some
Others always for her
Romance was just beyond
Reach
If you just get hot
And heavy enough
You're finally here
In the bath each limb
Barnacles underwater
By hot I mean steam-filled
By heavy I mean drunk
By here I mean anchored
To the moment
By gone I mean
Carelessly exist
I don't recommend sailing
A half eggshell
Down the body
Toward the feet

Its walls are low
In some places
If you shift you sink

BATH POEM

My body the dark lake
Into which you stuck your
Finger nothing disturbed
Nothing arrived
To the surface
I watched you settle your eyes on
The underside of another woman's
Wrist and nothing disturbed
My lips
Nothing arrived
To the surface
Steeped in the tub
I thought of the car wreck
My cab pulled up next to
The morning I left
Silence
Then the tow chain
An amplification of a thousand
Metal bangles dropping
Onto a wrist
So easy to move the wreckage
A chain and a clamp
Heaves out the rattling can
From a person's chest
It comes to rest
Like coins in a pocket

When the legs stop moving

When a person stands still

BATH EXERCISE

Write with your childhood finger
On the fogged shower door
No no no no no
Yes yes yes yes yes
Sometimes write
Sometimes re-write
Sometimes re-childhood your fingers
Sometimes re-hand
Sometimes travel
Back in time and announce
I will bridle myself today
Become a bridge instead
Walk over yourself
And we all
Walked over you
You did not marry
Your hegemonic family wonders
What will become of you
Sometimes bridge
With your childhood
Hand words over water
That leads to a righteous place
That leads to a window
Out of which you sanctimoniously
Toss a fictitious wedding
Dress into which a moon drops

Drapes over a bush

From under the skirt of which

A moon arrives

BATH EXERCISE

Go get flooded go get
Filled go get
Flooded
Go get voided
Get emptied
Your body is a series of
Electrically wired rooms
Amp up your electrons
All the way then
Hose down the circuitry
You've fried the system but
Go get
Flooded get full-brimmed
Allow a whole body into
Your body
Liquefy a whole person
Don't even swallow
Just open the throat
You are a well a basin
The sloshing makes you
Sick
Void a body
Into a curbside trashcan
Each time a little more of your
Wiring works loose
The frayed copper strands wave

And cut up your insides
It vibrates the loss
Of possessions
Furnish your home again your body
Then get burgled then fix it
Rewire the whole thing
Then let someone demolish
Each room but let the bathtub
Always stand there are mornings
I pass just looking at the upside
Down cups of my knees for hours
And lightly spider
Fingers along the waterline
Islands inside of me
Never last

BATH POEM

I fall asleep in the tub I slip under
The sound of one thousand hotel toilets
Flushed in other rooms
The sound of a vase swatted off a desk
A rose punctuating a wall
The sound of love made the
Sound of conception
What is said to me in a dream
Folded under this is
Luck pure luck
And I don't breathe
In it's hard not to
Slide into yourself
The notion of genuflection

BATH POEM

Sometimes I see my tub body
From the living room or
Farther
Like I'm in a meadow
Beyond a fence
From atop a hill
Over a landmass
Across an ocean
A continent of resentment
A gale of love
And a gift horse who follows
Me in a mirror state
Versions of my face
Swim to twin themselves
Virgins recline on battle
Scarred shores
Tub edges of the Atlantic
What god slipped into this ocean
What larger thing reclines
With its feet in my life
My body seen across
The world
When magnified by cloud's eye
Is a minute gouge
In a brain fold
I am gliding toward you

I am swimming toward you

I am gliding toward you

BATH EXERCISE

Use science
In the freezer and weld
Together a bunch of ice
Cubes into one hulking floe
Weld into that a squeezed out
Tear weld into that
Complaints about ill-fitting
Panties and tights twisting
While you walk
How ice cream makes you thirsty
How being thirsty
Can seem like the end
Of your body
Weld into that
The sorrows of making
Only a small dent on the Internet
Grab someone you love
Or think you might want
To suspend a succinct moment with
Bring the finest salt machine
Bring fine china
Bring finery
Drop the floe
Carve titanic emoticons
Into your small capsized boat

BATH EXERCISE

There are days out
Of the year I don't take
A bath
Water is saved in
The hollowed out days
But the gulp of dropped limbs
Into the tub holds
This religion just like
The rhythm of words is
More healing than their meaning
At times
It slows the world
My greatest fear was that I would wake up
Next to you dead
You dead
Not me dead
My greatest fear was really
I would wake up
Next to you for the rest of my life
This religion has teeth
Clenching a zipper that
Pushes into the world
Depending on the horizon
Everything ahead of me either
Opens or
Closes

BATH EXERCISE

Take a person into the tub
Have him or her
Hold up a small mirror
And you hold up a small mirror
So you have infinite eyes on each other
You'll get sick of this
Quickly and if you can't get a person
Into the tub with you build
A small sailboat with mirrors for sails
Stick to the genius of your own gaze
The face cranes endlessly into
And away from the body
Forget you dump the same face
Into the bathroom mirror
Each morning revel
In self-multiplication
The genius of my own gaze lives in
Doorways and doesn't suffer
Fools and doesn't weaken
And puts its pants on one leg at a time
At the edges of mirrors I can see
Blurs in room corners I can see
What I think is a blush of cremation ash
In the shape of my dead and
Gone faces
Focus on the lesson you can

Always make in the mind what does not
Form in the hands
The tinctures the herbalist
The yoga practice
The acupuncturist the energy
Healer
Each massage existence
Each is adultery against
The body
So things don't get heavy
Masturbate in tempo
With the hand of a clock

Dara Cerv lives and writes in Brooklyn. Her work can be found online and in print journals.

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