

Care, hands, magic, water.
Lara Chamas.

Tan panel, blue beam, grey pipe, circle lights, wire.
The warmth of my breath, the water through my fingers, the air on my chest, the dull
ache in my back.
The filter of the pool, the muffled voices around me, my heartbeat.
The material of the mask, chlorine.
The dryness of my mouth.

You're invited to take this one slow; sit down, breathe, watch.

Let the ambient sound of the pool take you to a childhood memory. It's school holidays, you're at the local public pool. If you're good, mum will get you an icy pole for the car ride home. Can you feel the water on your skin, your bathers as they cling to your body? Can you smell the chlorine?

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Care is a contentious topic. It doesn't seem like it should be, right? But when you find yourself in a position where you need more care than you 'should', care suddenly has all these extra meanings and costs. That's if you can access the care you need at all.

From my first steps, I learned that care is free. Care is something you do out of love, for the people you love, out of the goodness of your heart, your reward will come to you. Care, especially to one's family, is duty – Waajib – something you'll be rewarded for in the hereafter. Very early on in my life, I faced challenges that I am now comfortable to call disabilities, ones I continue to live with, and will till my last breath. So, when does care stop being care for care's sake? Where's the line between what's expected, what's enough, and what's too much?

Care changes when you are disabled.

The concept of paying for care is something I really had to wrap my head around. Care was the role of my family, right? My parents cared for me in ways I couldn't as a child, and slowly, I care for them as I age, they age faster. Additional care became something I could no longer do without by the time I was 12 years old. My first step was to admit this. So began my love-hate relationship with the care industry. Class, race, ethnicity, and temperament, all become even bigger hurdles when you are disabled and seeking access to medical, pharmaceutical, surgical, financial, social, cultural, and interpersonal care. Despite us all deserving and needing care, unfortunately, it is a privilege.

I am of an age now where after research, trial, and error, I can access around *half* of the care I need relatively easily. There are many ways the system fails us, so half feels like a win. I am not in the best position, but I am by far not in the worst. The cost of care, while often financial, is also burdensome in other ways. There is a constant balancing act in interpersonal relationships. It can be hard to ask for what you need. Often I'm in more pain than I need to be, because I don't ask for help as much as I could. Past a certain point, I'd rather put the stress on my body than put the stress on a friend or family member. It's a balancing act. What can I forego to keep this friendship intact, to keep this family relationship? How can I put the least strain on the people around me, so they don't build resentment subconsciously? Outsourcing care becomes essential in this case; allied health, doctors, specialists and so on, to alleviate some of the care we ask of others, medical care they can't provide. This, again, is a financial burden and inaccessible, particularly if you have reduced capacity to work. This is complicated further by the caregiving industry being, in many cases, gatekept. NDIS funding is notoriously hard to access and navigate, so day to day care falls on those around us, or on ourselves to suffer more than needed.

J: There are times in my relationship where I'm really ill and with my partner, our romance goes to the side, and she becomes like a caretaker for me... Um, and then it gets to a certain point where I'm like, should I be paying you for this? I'm trying to spread out my needs on other people so that it doesn't take a toll. It's all a big learning zone. One of the hardest things is how much I asked of other people, and it hurts. It's not always easy, but It's something that able bodied people don't ever have to really think of.

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In my hydrotherapy session, I am the youngest participant by 30 years. We often think of the elderly needing medical help and mobility aids as 'the disabled'. We associate them with fragility, maybe they walk a little slower, need a bit more help. When I first watched *Warm Water*, I asked myself; who are the people in the pool? They look able bodied, and hey, so do I. My next thought was; what if all the people in my hydro session look at me the same way and wonder, 'why is she here, taking up space?'

J: We would have 9am to 5pm art school crits with an hour-long break. Unless you had permission – the teachers were good after Covid, but before that – unless you had permission to sit down, they would expect you to stand the whole time.

L: I don't think even abled people can do that.

Having invisible disabilities or living with chronic health conditions may help you blend into the crowd and avoid certain stigmas, but it comes with its own complicated burdens. It creates an uncertain state of being, where one may be forced to disclose disability or chronic illness on a regular basis. Then they and then must deal with the fallout, such as discrimination, exclusion, or patronizing treatment. Suffering in silence

and not disclosing, may seem like the easier option, even if this is counter intuitive to our needs.

The subtle and unseen, or invisible, plays an important part in Juliet's work.

Perhaps It's my own obsession with hands in my own practice, but one of my favorite details I notice in *Warm Water* is the shaking and flexing the figures do to adjust their grip on the pool weights. Hands for me represent so much. Metaphysical holding, generosity, surrender, creation, magic. I experience a lot of pain in my hands as I make or go about daily tasks. Hands are pain, and what cures pain, both. My mother's hands are that which nurtured me, fed me, wiped my tears, held me. Her hands are tired, her hands show how hard her life has been, but her hands, are healing. I notice a figure in *Warm Water* I clock as Juliet's mother, upon her confirmation, I smile knowing she is part of the magic.

Water functions in a similar sense, with its capacity to hold, transform and heal. It can erode rocks and land. Not in a destructive way, but in how it creates new paths and forms, smoothing out the roughness of the surface. Bodies of water can hold such spiritual significance. To me, perhaps it is the majesty of the ocean, the power in the crash of a waterfall, or the easy-going nature of the creek, unbothered by what is in its path. It's the water's healing, magical properties, and the relief of the 34-degree pool that bring me back to hydrotherapy every week. While I'm yet to work up to all the exercises the elderly ladies can do, slowly I am strengthening and conditioning.

J: I'm a Scorpio sun and a Pisces moon.

L: I'm also a Pisces moon.

J: Sorry, I feel like that needs to-

L: That needs to go in there, like the- ok, sorry! I got really excited. Oh, what's your rising?

J: I'm a Capricorn rising.

L: Oh...

Juliet tells me of a ritual she would do with her mother, and this connection I've read in the film between care, hands, magic, and water make sense to me as she recounts this; You bring your hands together over a bowl of water and pull them apart based on where you feel your aura starts and ends. Some days it's big, some days its small, so her hands would land closer together. She tells me of pushing her hands together, to feel the energy in her palms. To complete the ritual, you transfer the energy from your hands to a glass of water and drink it. This can be a way to energize yourself, or by having another drink the water, you can gift your energy to them..

J: I definitely relate to water holding emotion in the ceremonies we do with it, even pouring each other water over a meal.

There's a magical moment towards the end of *Warm Water* where the sound changes for 10 seconds or so. It reminds me of when I go to hydrotherapy, to break up the session I float on my back, ears submerged. I can only faintly hear what's around me. It's muffled. My heartbeat throbbing in my ears. It is at this moment each week I feel closest to meditation; the water is carrying my weight, mimicking my skin's temperature and I'm not in much pain. I stare at the tan panels on the ceiling, look to the blue beams, and let the water care for me.