

# FOUR POEMS



Cheryl  
Clarke





POEM 19

Devise a fantasy of a Sunday meal  
that arouses your mother's longing  
for her mother's cooking—a mother that  
daily undermined and sabotaged her all their lives.  
Holding people to secrets long past their need  
and revealing the most treacherous of lies  
to the most vulnerable of kin.


So, did you really need to know that about my mother's mother?  
Did I,  
though I longed to know the mystery of names?

COST

Loving cost you only the synapse  
in your brain's absence of sense  
and glut of romance.  
Slap your head, full of naughts,  
tally your thoughts.  
Just as well you understand the hooks and  
limits.

Remember that last husband?

Stay away from the outdoorswoman on  
those weird world-famous bikes,  
Olympic skis carving turns.  
Get a grip.  
Grow up.  
Grope your own kind.





MAKE ME A HABIT OF YOU

was my invocation thirty-two years ago  
when I cast all caution for your love

onto the Atlantic seacoast  
(where four hundred years had already been cast)


not that you'd love me  
that you'd let me love you

whether I stay or go  
there's no love for nobody else

TO YOUNGER BLACK LESBIANS IN LOVE

enjoy it—  
'in love.'  
it won't be the last time.  
it will happen repeatedly.  
and conveniently,  
it won't last forever.  
would you want to go through your life obsessing  
about the next time you will be with the one you're 'in  
love' with?  
(you may have a job or school or children, or another  
lover  
needing your consideration.)  
  
refrain from making major life decisions 'in love.'  
be prepared for it to simmer down to the  
day-to-day, the run-of-the-mill, i.e., if you stay together  
long enough for it to become  
humdrum.  
then, be prepared for the messy ways  
— longevity has its drawbacks.  
these are merely micro-examples of what to expect,  
if you survive 'in love.'

be prepared for 'in love' to be over.  
you may still be able to have  
friendship or good sex.  
—both significant.





Notes

*Cost and Make me a habit of you* are from *Archive Of Style: Selected And New Poems*, Northwestern University Press, 2024.

