

Harpur Palate: a Literary Journal

Volume 1 | Issue 2

Article 5

October 2022

Daughter, Mother, Sister, Wife

Allison Joseph

Follow this and additional works at: <https://orb.binghamton.edu/harpurpalate>

Recommended Citation

Joseph, Allison (2022) "Daughter, Mother, Sister, Wife," *Harpur Palate: a Literary Journal*: Vol. 1: Iss. 2, Article 5.

Available at: <https://orb.binghamton.edu/harpurpalate/vol1/iss2/5>

This Poetry is brought to you for free and open access by The Open Repository @ Binghamton (The ORB). It has been accepted for inclusion in Harpur Palate: a Literary Journal by an authorized editor of The Open Repository @ Binghamton (The ORB). For more information, please contact ORB@binghamton.edu.

Daughter, Mother, Sister, Wife

by Allison Joseph

When your daughter is a poet,
burn all your possessions before you die.
Or else she will rifle through them,
searching for that one bauble, that trinket,
that one letter or card or bus schedule
to explain why you were so cold, so reluctant
to pick her up when she was nine,
when she was nineteen. Burn all
your correspondence; but be warned,
she'll make something of the cinders.

When your mother is a poet,
your breakfast may be marmalade
and wine, wheat toast and dandelion
stems. She may slit a fish's belly open
in a gesture so sudden and swift
that you can never eat fish again,
her eyes gleaming with conquest.
When your mother is a poet,
you may get crumpets, not pizza,
gravy but no potatoes.
You may not get fed at all.

When your sister is a poet,
she may steal your stories
for her own, her life's humiliations
not nearly as intriguing as yours.
She'll become the one whose left breast
popped out of her prom gown;
she'll be the one with the extra-smarmy

12 Harpur

dentist, the one at your father's
graveside, mother's deathbed.
She will send these words off to strangers,
and not discuss one page of it with you.

When your wife is a poet,
watch your mouth. Anything you say
can and will be used, anything you do
preserved whether you think it should be
or not. She may quit being your wife,
but she will never quit searching her memory
for that awful thing you said
in the delivery room, the laundry room,
the bedroom, the kitchen.
And she will write it down
in that penmanship you always loved—
an ornate script that looked
like another era's handiwork,
malice controlled by curves
and loops in ink, swelling on paper.