



Sharnie

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Rachel Long's debut collection, *My Darling from the Lions* (Picador 2020 / Tin House 2021) was shortlisted for the Forward Prize for Best First Collection, The Costa Book Award, The Rathbones Folio Prize, and The Sunday Times Young Writer of the Year Award. The US edition featured in the New York Times Book Review, and was named one of the 100 must-read books of 2021 by TIME.

An earlier version of this poem was published in *The Poetry Review*, Vol. 112, No. 3, Autumn 2022.



You weren't interested in being a mother
till you were a mother, to Sharnie. There you were – legs uncrossed
wider than *unladylike*, wider than *your dad's about!*
– giving birth on your top bunk.

Sharnie was born a ringleted blonde, already dressed in pink.
But she had steel, you saw it in her baby blues.
You stripped her, sewed and shoved her fists into a tartan smock,
you shaved her head, pierced her ears with drawing pins

and her nose, eyebrows, cheeks,
the appleyist bits, then her hands and feet, between
the rolls of her legs, the tyres of chub, her belly
was made of the softest stuff.

Some nights, when you jigged her to sleep after a feed,
the pins would prick your own hands, so you slapped her,
Bad girl! How could you do this to me?
Her mouth so tiny, so pink-pursed she had to whisper, her only register.

She ate like you. Everything her mother gave her,
which was too much, of everything.
Turkey slices so thick we had to suck them back down
from the vaults of our mouths.

And the French bread so buttered we made knives of our fingers,
scraped and smooshed it into the daisy carpet.
We did not complain, but we blinked at each other.
We recognised our ruin.

*That poor doll, your mother said, if only she could speak,
she'd cry out for mercy!*
*Yes, Mother, my baby girl, my pierced angel,
she'd cry out for mercy.*

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

