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GOLD STAR

poems

Emma McKenna

SAMPLE

Book*hug Press
Toronto 2026

FIRST EDITION

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Author's Note:

This book contains depictions of sensitive subject matter, including sexual assault. Please take care while reading.

SAMPLE

BREECH

SAMPLE

CARRYING CAPACITY

I was five
when my mother told me she would run
from one tunnel to another
to her lecture

fourteen
when I was cornered in the break room
two guys carried me out
to the dumpster

twenty-nine
when he promised that I was different
one second split in half
to silence me

my mother told me
when I was five

how many warnings can one body hold?

LIGHTS OUT

my sister has been dreaming

giant tiger
cashing out
bargain bins
orange labels
staff discounts

my friend has been mothering

fabric books
wooden toys
safety checks
feeding charts
blended purees

my husband has been working

back out
care giver
bike route
brew house
home maker

in the middle of them I cry out—

in the middle
of the baby and
the child
I
practiced quiet

ache

for the field
behind townhouses
loose sneakers
an echo across
dewy grass

choke

chew stash spit
halo of the night light
when the night
was lit
before lights out

touch

mushroom cut
nubby blanket
kick the beams

my sister

has been talking

I whisper back

TOYS

when jealous
of children who belong
to women you barely know
thinking they have more things than you

you may need to
put down your phone
roll around on the floor
suck on an olive until the pit comes loose

SAMPLE

INVENTING THE LOONIE

maybe I made my first dollar
selling pussy willows by the road

arid summer afternoons, picked
from the field next to our complex

we stood together behind
a paper sign, waved down cars

*only a buck for the softest
branch you could ever find*

palms gummy with bark and
the sweaty glue of anticipation

when a man claimed the willow
was his, shouted *stay off my property*

we gaped up at him, then
over at the vacant lot, struggling

to comprehend how a fence
was a border we shouldn't touch

LIFE ADVICE FROM A CHEEK SWAB

my grandparents came from a couch of clover
and if I had ever known them
you might find me held
waves rushing to the shore of *what is mine was yours*

unbreakable, they would call, asking questions
laughter twinkling like silverfish

when I look out onto the concrete swaddling
my apartment, I am damp with
the Atlantic, salt ground
in a forever wound—*alright, kiddo, brush off the silt*

THE BEND

before the curvilinear
roads guided us home
buffalo and coyote ran
the Blackfoot Territory
farms and coal mines
carved out hills, until
the university tunnelled
an assertion into slate

we arrived without any
lineage to root us there
but I left fingernails in
the dirt, scabs in the lake
what is more prairie than
crying out into coulee
crouched in a basement
tornado raging overhead