

*(Director's Note: "Many thanks to Hanna Cormick for this cry. Canaries are used in coal mines to warn miners of air contamination. Their tiny bodies feel the contamination first. When the canaries stop singing the miners know they must evacuate. The text has no punctuation. I interpret it as no time to pause and breath the words flow one after another nor between paragraph breaks that are slight changes of focus from internal to external from yell to whisper. The yellow highlights helped me to find the moments where a gasp or whisp of air can slip in between the phrases that gather momentum as they scroll down the pages. I found it easiest to keep on track by keeping my eyes from scanning forward and reading word for word. Please record your first reading of the text. Please allow yourself your natural hesitation, slip, sigh, cough, throat clearing, etc. It is part of the reading...the hearing. This text takes 5 to 8 minutes to read. The shorter version takes about 1-2 minutes. Reminder to turn on the recording device and the metronome before you start to read, and to press save when you finish. Share with whomever or keep it to yourself if that is better you. Welcome to Across Oceans Arts and The Arctic Cycle." Maxine Heppner)*

I am standing here for a body that cannot stand here  
I am speaking for the voice that is writing that is Hanna  
This body stands here for her body  
As we all should with our bodies that can stand here  
For those that cannot

Coal  
Was mined by hands  
With soot under nails  
A dark cramped cough  
And the little sunny flicker of the canary  
In its cage

This body is standing here for a body that four years ago  
Found an abandoned coal cellar under the streets of Paris  
Untouched for years, the walls didn't reflect the torchlight  
Consumed by the rich blackness

The canary was used as a warning signal  
She said: get the hell out, you're breathing poisoned air  
She sent it with the envelope of her silent corpse  
This body stands here for that body  
Sacrificed to send you a message  
To keep you safe

I am standing here for a body that is (insert distance to Canberra, Australia) kilometres/miles away  
This body is here for that body, her body, that cannot be here  
And not just because of the distance

For a body that lies in a bed  
Breathing through respirators  
Unable to open a window to feel the breeze on  
The skin of her body  
This body feels the breeze for her body  
This body stands in this public air for her body  
That can no longer stand in the public air or under public gaze

I am standing here amongst you for that body  
whose genes have mutated, developed a warning signal  
A body whose white blood cells attack petrochemicals  
Treat them like an allergy, a poison  
With a potentially fatal immune response

The canary thrashes its beak against the bars  
Claws scratch at cheap gilding

Her cells, on a hair-trigger  
Changing system pathways to explode at will  
Stuck on a feedback loop until every single source of food and water and breath is lost to the rising tide of reactivity  
A body injected with biologics and chemotherapy and pain  
Just to only barely survive the uninhabitable spaces we create around it

A body whose throat swelled up because her nurse accidentally wore eyeliner  
A body swollen with hives from a piece of plastic  
A body shaken by 100 seizures daily because of the propylene glycol in your soap

A body that can smell your laundry powder from across the street  
Smell what you ate three days ago through your skin  
Smell bacteria  
This body stands here for a body that doesn't know if it is an evolution or an illness

The last ink and paper book she read was David Bowie Is Inside  
She had to wear a gas mask and sit far away

She wants to ask me not to wear scent when my body stands here for her body  
She hesitates; what kind of climate activist's body would wear scent?  
What kind of activist, when 90% of the chemicals that make up scent are petroleum derived?  
she asks again, because the answer is: most of us  
Unknowingly

And  
Make up  
Hair product  
Synthetic fabrics  
Synthetic leathers  
Moisturisers  
Clothing detergents  
Our bodies soaked and wrapped in fossil fuels

Because the media drives that tell us to ditch our straws don't let us know that washing synthetic fabrics in our home is one of the highest sources of microplastics in our oceans and in our lungs

Because we were never told that our indoor use of personal care products and household cleaning supplies  
Produces half of all outdoor city air pollution  
More than cars

The little canary breaks out of the cage and yells:  
Fuck you capitalist coal-junkies!  
And flies off into the sky

This body stands for those bodies that are changing into bodies that cannot stand here like this body  
The 34% and rising of bodies that are noticeably injured by these scents and plastics and beautifiers  
We pretend we need, but we could be free from in an instant

Up high high like a cloud, all the canaries are free of their cages  
Flashing bright yellow in the sun  
Like a light

This body stands here for her body and breathes in and breathes and breathes and breathes  
Like her body cannot  
And breathes in  
what her body does not  
Have to

I stand here for her body  
In my body that is breathing all the poisons with you

And a rain of yellow feathers tumbles down  
Soft on your nose and eyelids  
And the canaries are stripping off their wings, they say  
Never again will we be made to feel like our lives are lived for your profit  
And on the dead branches, they stand gloriously naked

We stand here for their bodies

The canaries have dipped their little beaks in soot and scrawl  
Fuck the anthropocene  
And  
Oil is genocide  
And  
Drown the 1%  
Across each other's tiny naked bodies  
And welts and hives rise up around the letters

My body asks her body what it feels like  
For her body to be so damaged by all the tiny personal choices of our day  
Her body tells my body that she feels like the Earth

So this body here also stands here for the Earth that cannot stand here  
And that cannot speak to us  
Except through the envelope of silent corpses

The canaries drop themselves onto the bonnets of cars in New York  
Onto department store skylights in London  
Onto ferries full of tourists in Paris  
Their bodies catch on the girders of the Sydney harbour bridge  
Talons tangle in the hair of Hitchcock heroines  
Tiny pink blistering bodies  
Fill the chlorinated fountains

And I fill my lungs with this poison air  
To shoot bullets of words through this poison air  
Because my destruction will not be silent

In their death rattle  
The canaries say:  
This is the message we send with our bodies  
We are not your warning signal anymore  
You don't need a warning if you just  
Stay the fuck out of the coal mine  
Stay the fuck out of the coal mine

This body is here amongst their bodies and also stands for their bodies and the bodies that cannot stand here

Some lay struggling, not quite dead, on hot tarmac  
Wing-bones broken  
Beak shattered  
And tiny manacles are placed around their ankles  
As police gently scoop them up  
To be put back in cages

The words are washed from their bodies  
They are to send a new message  
As their new cages are hung high  
Outside shop fronts and town halls  
Their broken bodies on display  
A warning

But sullen silent stares seem to say something different  
Than what their captors wish  
Their caged bodies to be saying

And the corpses of the canaries that were not scooped up  
By the policemen with their  
Gently violent  
Hands

Are trodden under shoes  
Burst under the pressure of car tires

And fry very slowly in the sun

And you walk over that red smudge on the footpath  
You have your car windshield replaced  
A workman cleans your pool

And they are almost forgotten  
In the **silence of their absence**  
Forgetting also  
That **their silence**  
**Is the warning**

And  
I will go home to my home  
That is not a cage  
I won't notice the air freshener on the bus  
And the hidden petroleum ink embedded in my recycled toilet paper  
And the plastics in the product in my hair  
Or the scent that maybe I did or didn't wear today when the body I stood for  
Asked me not to

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*From CANARY by Hanna Cormick  
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