

The birds don't know about self-immolation

anonymous

The day after Aaron Bushnell set himself on fire,
I go out for an early morning walk,
wrapped in air far too warm
for late February in the Midwest—a heat wave.
False Spring has brought Nature roaring back to life.
I want to shake every person I stroll past.
“Did you know there’s a genocide happening?
Did you see a man burn himself alive in protest?”
I would ask, if only I could count
on a response that isn’t dead-eyed.
But I know I’d have better luck with the birds,
ever curious, cardinals hopping from branch to branch
like fireballs. Or missiles. I’d tell them,
some of us love you so much we’d die for you.
For a single snippet of birdsong. For a child’s first
glimpse of feathers glowing in the clear light. For a
tree for you to perch in among the rubble.
He shouted FREE PALESTINE FREE PALESTINE
FREE PALESTINE until he choked on the flames.
The callback: a long, mournful whistle from above.
The sun is blazing too bright to make out more
than a silhouette taking off,
rising slow and then fast
like smoke.

Aaron Bushnell burned himself to death on February 25, 2024 in front of the Israeli Embassy to protest the war in Gaza.