



ALCATRAZ

Confined in solitude a man looked out a thin sliver of a window
not seeing much, but captivated by a lone seagull floating on air.

Oh, how he wished – not to catch the updraft of wind, making a companion of the bird – but to
capture her, bringing her there beside him, to be with him, to share in his loneliness.

Yes, in truth, he was not alone in his tower.
His was a tower of birds,
all held in captivity.

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April 15, 2023

Prompt: "Yes, the man is a tower of birds" from the poem Farewell to Friends by Illya Kaminsky.

Credits: Federal Penitentiary built on top of a 19th-century coastal fortification on Alcatraz Island in the San Francisco Bay. [Photo courtesy Justin Sullivan / Getty Images file](#); Publicity still from [Bird Man of Alcatraz](#) (1962)

FROM PROMPTER: The prompt today is the line "Yes, the man is a tower of birds" from the poem Farewell to Friends by Illya Kaminsky. His poem is below, and I encouraged participants to use other lines as leaping off points if they spoke more to them.

(KAMINSKY POEM NEXT PAGE)

A Farewell to Friends by Illya Kaminsky
after Nikolai Zabolotsky

Yes, *the man is a tower of birds*, I write my friends
into earth, into earth, into earth.

There, with lantern in hand,
a beetle-man greets his acquaintances.

You stand in white hats, long jackets,
with notebooks of poems,

you have for sisters wild carnations,
nipples of lilacs, splinters and chickens.

Go now, I will write a biography of rain,
the pages turn --

your first steps across the room.