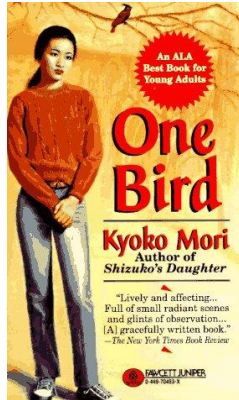


2015 Phoenix Award

One Bird

by *Kyoko Mori*

(Henry Holt & Company, 1995)



This carefully plotted, nuanced coming-of-age story transcribes a cultural history of old and new Japan. Its lean title forecasts the stark account of Megumi's four months in 1975 after her mother leaves her with an emotionally distant father. Kyoko Mori's *One Bird* allows the protagonist—and the reader—to grow in understanding of the powerful gender expectations that can rob individuals of agency. At first 15-year-old narrator Megumi feels rejected and resents her mother. However, rather than clinging to the narcissistic perception that her mother is selfish, Megumi grows in empathy. She comes to understand the abject position of women caged within traditional roles that are often reinforced by religious ideology. Only by recognizing how the cage works can Megumi free herself and her mother. Veterinarian Dr. Mizutani teaches Megumi to nurture wounded birds that eventually must continue on their own. With symbolic resonance, Megumi realizes: “My mother is a bird whose mouth has become a big sea of tears. She had to leave me to keep from drowning.”