

LIANA BADR

One Sky

A SHORT STORY

TRANSLATED BY BECKI MADDOCK

He was standing at the side of the road, atop a pile of gravel, between the asphalt and the rocky mountainside. Frozen in place, with a fixed gaze, like a wax doll, his black eye gleaming at me. His serious stance, like a miniature knight on a chess board, caught my eye. I bent over and picked him up as if he were a piece of carbonised sand. His other eye appeared to be closed. The eyelid was swollen, covering it. Between his eyes was a red scar, evidence of a blow, below which his feathers had been plucked out.

His injury suggested that a predator had pecked him between his eyes but had not succeeded in killing him. One of our group speculated that a passing car had hit the reckless bird, being able to avoid it, as birds do not recognise potential danger posed by moving vehicles. Another commented that a bird of prey must have attacked him to inflict such a severe injury.

I picked him up immediately and wrapped him in the white, silky shawl that still retained a blue mark in the form of the gold brooch that fastens the fabric of the traditional Tunisian sefseri cloak. I thanked God that the changeable spring weather had compelled me to bring what I had wrapped around my neck, so that I could use it to lift the injured bird from the dust without causing it to panic.

Cradling the small bird, I resumed walking towards the grassy slope, above which a patch of blue sky appeared. I hugged him close to my chest, hoping that the beating of my heart would transmit some warmth into his tiny, exhausted body. It seemed to me that the bird's fragility in the face of the random blows was at odds with the strength of his wings that carried him above the laws of earthly gravity. How much stronger than us he was, and yet immeasurably more fragile!