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## Under the Bridge

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Sisk: Under the Bridge

## **UNDER THE BRIDGE**

**KAREN EILEEN  
SISK**

Once upon a time,  
my mother was a girl lured  
into a dried creek bed, her face  
smeared on newspapers—  
photos of a girl that disappeared.  
She returned with swollen  
nose, broken teeth, torn,  
bleeding between her legs,  
her neck ringed in bruises,  
bite marks like a necklace.  
Some never come back.  
Ones found are bleating billy goats  
at slaughter that cannot make words.  
Your slug-suctioning fingers  
peek through footbridge planks  
that I take between home and school.  
My black patent leather shoes  
protect my toes from being  
eaten like pale gumdrops.  
Your voices deceptively soft,  
call my name through slat gaps,  
murmur you have candy  
or whisper that my father  
sent you to bring me home.  
The vibrations of your thick  
consonants tickle deep down—

between my legs, sliding my knees  
I want to see you,  
but I think of missing girls' bones  
found mounded in the dump  
or my mother on the front page,  
and I cannot run fast enough  
to cling to the cigarette ash smeared  
lace slip she wears at the stove,  
as she attempts to build dinner  
out of spare parts.