

The Ring by Karen Birtles

The curved edges are bumpy under my fingers, worn smooth by the years. It swings loosely round my fingers, dancing the way we would in the dark, always at risk of falling away from me. The grooves of the calligraphy burn my thumb as I stroke them, hidden from view in the palm of my sweaty hand. My secret's hidden with only the scuffed gold band on show. Misleading, it's showing the world a false truth of wedlock – half true, there is a marriage, but it's mine and not his.

Resting my tear-stained cheek to my fist, I can pretend it's your finger the ring embraces, snug and tight, cradling me like a child.

Holding it close to my ear, I can hear it breathing quietly, warm with intimacy and the mutter of silent kisses and promises that can't be kept. Like the curly seashells the children brought aboard the ship which roar the tales of the sea into their cold, curly little ears, his precious totem breaks enormous waves that crash deafeningly, but only I can hear it. The urge to pop it into my mouth quickly, like a stolen steaming bun straight from the oven overcomes me. I'd be a naughty child, desperately concealing my guilty secret, sucking in cold air so no one knew the sweetness, the silky soft heaven that I'm holding on my tongue. I savour every last morsel of you, every sweet powdered sugar kiss, before it's gone and it's digested to become a part of me.