



## Extract from A Rat's Tail Book One of the Circular Scrolls

### Archway of Lives

**H**ow long had it been? Sam thought as she made her way to the back of the cavern. How old am I now? Am I changed in any way? She looked down at her feet expecting to see hooves or maybe paws with claws. But no - same feet, in the same boots - scuffed and battered now - like me! - But just the same and just as tough. She had reached the end of the hall now - still no sign of the others - and paused. In front of her, and to the left and right, there was an arch, so beautiful that despite her impatience she was forced to halt and examine it more closely. In a room sombre with age and subtle lighting, it stood out like Aladdin's cave, each carved motif embedded with tiny fragments of crystal which reflected the sullen light like so many thousand eyes. Looking closer she saw that each carving was a scene.

Sam remembered Kevin telling her some stuff about ancient tribes and their beliefs, one time when they'd been discussing mysteries and magic and things. Ancient wisdom believed that everything in the world was interconnected and that all things in the world, the rivers, trees animals, and rocks, had their own wisdom; all had their own knowledge to share. A healer, (Kevin had called them Shaman), could shape shift, swap forms, into an animal or a rock, and share all this wisdom. The flowing of rivers, whispering of leaves, soaring of a flock of birds - they all had a meaning and if you understood them correctly they could shed light on the happenings in your world. So appearance and truth could be linked through symbols, but like anything it was open to interpretation and therefore to the forces of good and evil. The drawings of these ancient peoples would link the stuff of their world, people, rocks, weapons, with abstract lines and symbols, to give clues to their inner meaning, to show the continuity of all things; linking the seeing eye of man to the eye of inner vision, which got it's understanding from the spirit world.

And now, studying these beautiful stone etchings, she realised with a sense of shock, that she recognised some of the scenes on this arch and the creatures in them! There was Fox and Tig crossing that first river; there was Owl talking to her on the first night; there was Mrs Prickle introducing her to the indomitable Mrs Bristle Brush; and many more. And of course herself and Kevin, in each and every scene. But no, this was not quite true. Standing on tiptoe she could see other scenes at the top of the arch where she was absent. They were too high to study easily but she had the impression that they were unfamiliar to her. It made her feel strange to look at them. There was one right at the top. She craned her neck to see; there was a single figure, standing with its eyes shut, its face thin and expressionless. It was surrounded by other figures but all had their backs to the figure in the centre, as if they were shunning it. As she looked the central figure opened its eyes and the look in those eyes was so appealing and familiar that Sam's heart

gave an involuntary leap. Her own eyes, in a face much older, looked back at her. The figure then turned its appealing gaze on those surrounding it, but they remained resolutely facing the other direction. There was sadness and even desperation in the scene, but not, Sam thought, unkindness. Though the central figure was faced with the wall of backs, it seemed to Sam that the message was a firm but kind refusal of some kind, for the good of that central, lonely form. The encircling figures wore long robes of white and Sam suddenly noticed, they all had wings.

As she stared she suddenly found herself tilting forward and beginning to spin... 'But I must not be distracted' she thought. 'Not now; not at this time; there will be other times...I can see that... Now I have to go through, not into. I have to speak with that knight, for he has something for me. He has a missing part of my jigsaw'. The sudden sure realisation that the flash of black and silver had a form, and one she recognised, gave Sam the resolution and strength she needed to pull herself back in, and with determination she strode forward and under the archway; as she passed beneath it she had a strange experience of healing, like walking into warm sunshine after being cold and damp... Then she plunged into darkness.

*Extract from A Rat's Tail, Book One of the Circular Scrolls, by Bridget Trafford.*

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