

Chapter 1

'I don't belong here,' I said to myself. Before I even opened my eyes.

It was my morning ritual. To ward off the smell and the dirt and the fights and the noise of the day. To keep me in that bright green place in my mind which had no proper name; I called it 'Wide'.

'I don't belong here,' I said again. A dirty-faced fifteen-year-old girl frowsy-eyed from sleep, blinking at the hard grey light filtering through the grimy window. I looked up to the arched ceiling of the caravan, the damp sacking near my face as I lay on the top bunk; and then I glanced quickly to my left to the bunk to see if Dandy was awake.

Dandy: my black-eyed, black-haired, equally dirty-faced sister. Dandy, the lazy one, the liar, the thief.

Her eyes, dark as blackberries, twinkled at me.

'I don't belong here,' I whispered once more to the dream world of Wide which faded even as I called to it. Then I said aloud to Dandy:

'Getting up?'

'Did you dream of it – Sarah?' she asked me softly, calling me by my magic secret name. The name I knew from my dreams of Wide. The magic name I use in that magic land.

'Yes,' I said, and I turned my face away from her to the stained wall and tried not to mind that Wide was just a dream and a pretence. That the real world was here. Here where they knew nothing of Wide, had never even heard of such a place. Where, except for Dandy, they would not call me Sarah when I had once asked. They had laughed at me and gone on calling me by my real name, Meridon.

'What did you dream?' Dandy probed. She was not cruel, but she was too curious to spare me.

'I dreamed I had a father, a great big fair-headed man and he lifted me up. High, high up on to his horse. And I rode before him, down a lane away from our house and past some fields. Then up a path which went higher and higher, and through a wood and out to the very top of the fields, and he pointed his horse to look back down the way we had come, and I saw our house: a lovely square yellow house, small as a toy house on the green below us.'

