

It's So Wonderful Here

by Bill Pronzini

It's so wonderful here. It's so much more wonderful than on Earth. There's golden sunshine here. And the air is warm and it tastes sweet. We have a stream on our piece of land. When you go wading, the water is so cold that it makes your toes **numb**.

There's a lot of shade too. And there are fruit trees and thick green grass. There are hundreds of different kinds of flowers. Some of the flowers are as big as I am. They have huge yellow leaves that you can use to make kites.

Kite flying is fun. And it's fun to chase the orange and green butterflies. It's fun to listen to them sing as they fly across the meadow. At night, it's fun to lie on the ground and look up at our three moons in the sky. It's fun to watch them as they bounce around.

Oh, it's so wonderful here. There's so much you can do here. You can pick berries along the banks of Big Winding River. You can go exploring in Big Woods. It stretches for miles and miles behind all the pieces of land in Section A where I live.

I like Big Woods best of all. I know all the paths, and I can go in very deep. I can go where it's dark, where the tree branches are so thick that you can't see the sky. It smells green and fresh in there. And you don't have to worry about animals or anything. You see, there's nothing in Big Woods except little pink kittens. They're friendlier than the kitten I once had back on Earth. It's fun to watch them when they hide in the leaves.

Selena and I went into Big Woods this morning. We went to pick gingery snaps. Selena lives with her parents on the piece of land next to ours. She's eleven and a half, and I'm just three months younger than she is. She has

more **chores** to do because her parents make her do jobs around the house. But this morning they let her play in Big Woods. That's because they went to the Airport in the City with my mom and dad. They went with some of the other people who live in Section A.

There's a spaceship coming in from Earth today. It's the first spaceship from Earth in a very long time. Whenever a ship flies here from Earth, all the grown-ups get very excited. Then they don't pay much attention to us kids.

They used to take us along to see the spaceship arrive and unload. They used to let us hear the news about Earth that the Spacers bring. But most of us kids would rather stay home. The Spacers always tell terrible stories about what's happening on Earth. Then the grown-ups just stand around looking awful, as if the bad news were their fault. Now they let us stay at home. They go to the Airport by themselves. There's nothing on *this* world that can harm anybody. So they never have to worry about our being alone.

Selena and I spent the whole morning in Big Woods. We found a lot of gingery snaps. The gingery snaps are a funny purple color, but they're really good to eat. Mom says that they taste a little like the mushrooms on Earth. But I don't know if that's so. I don't remember about mushrooms. I don't know if I ever ate any of them on Earth.

We came out of Big Woods with our buckets of gingery snaps. We walked across the meadow toward my house. As we went, we picked white and yellow flowers and put them in our hair. That made us feel beautiful.

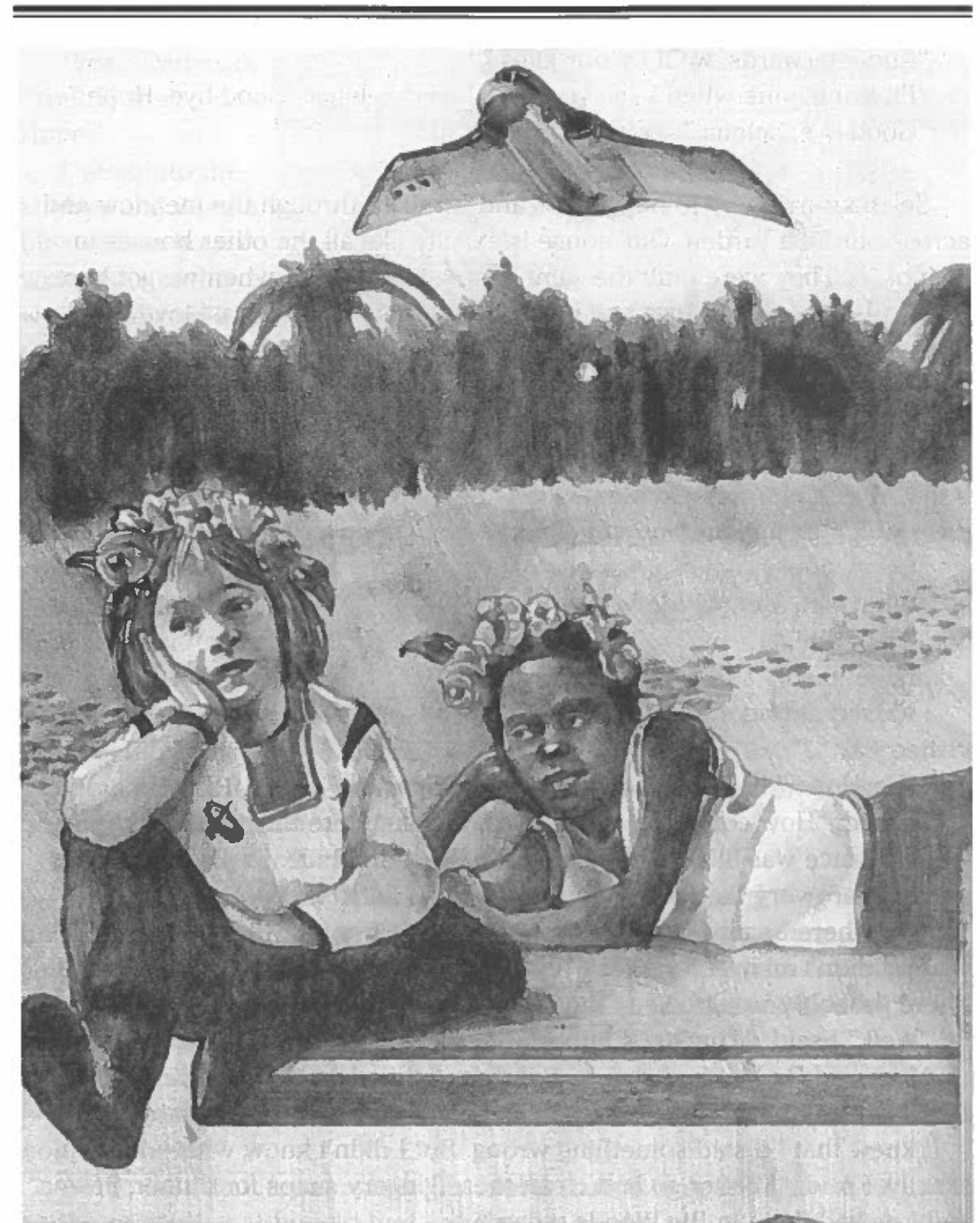
Soon I saw my house. I saw that there was smoke coming out of the chimney.

"My mom and dad are home," I said to Selena. "Mom likes to make a fire in the fireplace, even if it's a warm day. She says it **reminds** her of the house she used to live in on Earth."

Selena said, "I guess my parents are home too. I better go and see what chores they have for me to do."

"Maybe they won't have any for you," I said. "You know how strange they always act after they've talked to the Spacers."

"That's right!" said Selena. "Maybe we can go wading later."



“And afterwards, we’ll fly our kites.”

“I’ll bring mine when I see you later,” said Selena. “Good-bye, Hope.”

“Good-bye, Selena.”

Selena hurried off to her house, and I walked through the meadow and across our little garden. Our house is exactly like all the other houses in Section A. They were built the same, one after another, when we got here. The house is made of logs and stone, and it has stone floors. I love the house. It’s much nicer than the house we had on Earth, at least the way I remember our house on Earth.

When I came in, Mom and Dad were sitting at the big table in the middle of the room. They both looked up at me. I saw something shiny running down Mom’s cheeks, and I knew that she had been crying again. I went over to her, feeling unhappy, as I always do whenever Mom cries.

“Hope, honey,” she said, and hugged me tight. “Oh, honey.”

“What is it, Mom? What’s the matter?”

“It’s nothing, dear.”

She let me go and rubbed her eyes.

I looked at Dad and said, “Did you speak to the Spacers after they visited Earth?”

“Yes, Hope,” he said. “We spoke to the Spacers.”

I asked, “How come they were so late getting here this time?”

Dad’s face was filled with pain that he couldn’t hide. Dad said, “Things on Earth are very bad now, honey. Things on Earth are worse than ever.”

“Will there be any more spaceships coming from Earth?”

Dad didn’t answer for a long time. Then he finally said, “Probably not. There probably won’t be any more ships coming from Earth.”

“Well,” I said. “That’s not important, is it?”

Mom and Dad looked shocked and scared and sad, all together. But they didn’t say anything. They just looked at me in that sad, strange way.

I knew that I’d said something wrong. But I didn’t know what—not exactly. I said, “I better go and clean these gingery snaps for dinner. Selena and I picked them in Big Woods today.”

“Yes,” Dad said.
“You do that,
Hope.”

I went into the kitchen and filled a big wooden bowl with some of the water Dad carries up from the stream every morning. I washed the gingery snaps and left them on the table, ready to be cooked. Then I went outside. But when I passed the window, I could hear Mom and Dad talking again.



Mom said, “Hope doesn’t understand, John. She doesn’t understand. She only knows ‘it’s so wonderful here.’”

“Maybe it’s better that way,” said Dad.

“I don’t know. I don’t know,” said Mom. Her voice was getting higher and louder. “It’s been more than seven years since we came here, John. But it seems like seventy! No, it *seems* more like seven hundred! *Seven hundred years of nothing to do!* Nothing to *do*. There’s nothing to work for because it’s already ‘so wonderful here!’”

“Yes,” said Dad. “Yes, Karen, I know.”

Mom was crying again. “I wish we could go home,” she said. “I wish we could go home!”

Mom was silent for a minute. Then she started to speak again. She spoke so softly that I could hardly hear her.

"Maybe we should *all* go home," she said. "Maybe we could change what we let happen to our world. Maybe we could make it wonderful *there* again too. At least we'd have something to work for."

"Karen," Dad said, "you know that we can't go back." Then Mom began to **sob** again.

I went away from the window and walked toward Selena's house. I don't like to listen to Mom cry. And it's worse because I really *don't* understand. I don't understand why they talk that way after they speak to the Spacers.

Earth is a terrible place. I was only four years old when we left, so I don't remember much about it. But I've seen the photos that the Spacers brought. It's just awful there. The trees and flowers and plants are all dead. There's no sunshine. It's thick gray all the time. And you can't breathe without putting a mask over your mouth and nose. That's why almost everyone has left to come to a world like this one. That's why *we* came.

I just don't understand Mom and Dad and all the other grown-ups. Why do they act as if they're homesick or something?

Why would anyone want to go back to a place like Earth? Why would anyone want to go back to Earth when it's so wonderful here?



LOOKING FOR FACTS IN THE STORY.
How well can you find facts in a story? Put an *x* in the box next to the right answer.

- All the houses in Section A were
 a. alike.
 b. different.
 c. made of bricks.
- Hope and her parents left Earth
 a. more than seven years ago.
 b. more than seventy years ago.
 c. more than seven hundred years ago.
- Dad said things on Earth were
 a. better than ever.
 b. worse than ever.
 c. about the same.
- Hope thought that Earth was
 a. an exciting place.
 b. a beautiful place.
 c. a terrible place.

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EXAMINING VOCABULARY WORDS.
Here are four vocabulary questions. Put an *x* in the box next to the right answer. The vocabulary words are printed in **boldface** in the story. You may look back at the words before you answer the questions.

- The cold water made her toes numb. The word *numb* means
 a. dumb.
 b. pleased.
 c. not able to feel.
- Her parents made her work. They gave her chores. The word *chores* means
 a. jobs.
 b. presents.
 c. money.
- The fireplace reminds Mom of her house back on Earth. The word *reminds* means
 a. makes one remember.
 b. helps one leave.
 c. lets one enjoy.
- The bad things on Earth made Mom sob. The word *sob* means
 a. whisper.
 b. laugh.
 c. cry.

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ADDING WORDS TO A PARAGRAPH. Complete the paragraph below. Fill in each blank with one of the words in the box. Each word appears in the story. There are five words and four blanks, so one word in the box will not be used.

Earth is about 93,000,000 _____ from the sun.
 _____¹
 If _____² were too close to the sun, we could not live because of the heat. If Earth were too far from the sun, we could not live because of the _____. We are _____³ lucky that Earth and the sun are _____⁴ where they are.

scared exactly cold
 Earth miles

x 5 =
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READING BETWEEN THE LINES. These questions will help you think critically. You will have to think about what happened in the story, and then figure out the answers. Put an x in the box next to the right answer.

- We may infer (figure out) that Hope and her family live
 - a. on Earth.
 - b. 100 miles from Earth.
 - c. somewhere in space.
- Which sentence is true?
 - a. Hope loved Earth.
 - b. Hope's parents cared very much about Earth.
 - c. Hope had no friends.
- Hope was living in a place
 - a. that had no trees.
 - b. that had no sunshine.
 - c. that was very safe.
- The writer seems to be saying that
 - a. we should take better care of Earth.
 - b. there are plenty of wonderful places to live.
 - c. children can have fun anywhere.

x 5 =
 NUMBER CORRECT YOUR SCORE

NOTING STORY ELEMENTS. Some story elements are **plot, character, setting, and mood**. Put an x in the box next to the right answer.

- What happened first in the *plot*?
 - a. Hope and Selena spent the morning in Big Woods.
 - b. Hope cleaned the gingery snaps for dinner.
 - c. Hope heard Mom and Dad talking as she passed the window.
- Which sentence *characterizes* Karen and John?
 - a. Their lives were exciting.
 - b. Their lives were not very interesting.
 - c. Their lives were filled with danger.
- Who is the *main character* in the story?
 - a. Hope
 - b. Selena
 - c. Karen
- When is the story *set*?
 - a. in the past
 - b. in the present
 - c. in the future

x 5 =
 NUMBER CORRECT YOUR SCORE

THINKING MORE ABOUT THE STORY. Your teacher might want you to write your answers.

- ◆ Do you think you would like to live where Hope lives now, or would you rather live on Earth? Explain.
- ◆ Why do Hope and her parents have such different feelings about Earth?
- ◆ There may not be any more spaceships coming from Earth. Explain why. What lesson or lessons does the story teach?

Use the boxes below to total your scores for the exercises. Then write your score on pages 138 and 139.

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| + | <input type="text"/> | E XAMINING VOCABULARY WORDS |
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