

The Great Pause - A Tale for Young Children

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Once upon a time, in a land far away, but not too far away, in a time long ago, but not too long ago, there was a lovely little kingdom of very hard workers. This kingdom was built up of four villages, each ruled by a wise and kind Queen. There was the North village, the South village, the East village and the West village.

The North village was a rugged and mountainous land where the people worked hard forging tools for the kingdom and lumbering wood for houses. In the East village was the sea where fishermen spent their warm days on the sea and merchants worked tirelessly to make and trade crafts and goods. In the South village farmers tended their fields and animals, working tirelessly to feed the kingdom. In the West there was a towering city of skyscrapers where folks worked on their computers and had many meetings to run the business of the kingdom. While the adults worked each day, the children of the kingdom would all come together to play in the magic forest around the well in the center of the kingdom.

The children sang and danced together, made houses for the wee folk, and played many a circle game around the old well. At the end of their tired days, it was the children's work to bring a bucket of water back to each of their homes in the kingdom. Everyone in the kingdom knew that the water from the well was the best for washing, cooking, and nourishing themselves for it always had a magical quality that was said to have come from the wee folk of the magic forest.

One day when the adults were coming home from a long day's work, and the children were saying farewell to their friends and filling their buckets to take home, something very strange happened. One little child who was tired from his play decided to take a long drink of the water from his bucket. His friends noticed that after he drank the water, his body stood still as a statue. It was as if he had turned to stone.

The children quickly ran home to tell their families. One child went to his home in the North and was greeted by his parents who were just returning from their work in the mines. Their faces and hands were covered in soot, and as the child tried to explain what he saw at the well, his parents began to wash off the soot with the water from his bucket. As soon as they splashed their faces with the water, they too stood as still as stone, with water dripping off of their noses.

In the East, a child came home to his parents who were tailors. They had brought their sewing to the supper table and said that they simply couldn't stop to eat. They would have to eat while they sewed in order to make their quota. The child prepared some porridge using the water from the well, and as each one took a bite of their supper, without looking up from their work, they too turned as still as stone.

One child brought their water home to a farm in the South. The Farmers were so excited to have a fresh bucket of water to water the crops with but as soon as the water sprinkled over the cornfield, each stalk stood as still as stone, and not a breeze could bend nor stir them. The child who went home to the big city brought his bucket up to his apartment where his family was working away on their computer screens. They didn't even notice the boy trip on the carpet and spill his water on the floor but the splash from the spill sent drips and drops flying about which landed on the computers, phones, and furniture. Suddenly, they too were stilled. The people in the kingdom did not know what to do, so of course, they asked the Queens for help.

The Queens decided together to make a royal decree: All families must stay home together. No one was allowed to go to work, and the children were not allowed back to the well in the forest. "How long must we stay home?" asked the families. "Until we tell you it is safe," said the Queens. So all of the people in the kingdom went home and tucked themselves into their homes together and waited. The first few days at home were fun but after many days had passed, the adults began to worry about all of the work that had to be done, and the children began to wiggle and miss their friends! Day after day passed as they waited to hear from their Queens.

Meanwhile, the Queens had gathered themselves at the Well. They worked together to drain the well of water, which took many days, for it was very deep, and they were working carefully so as not to drip a single drop onto themselves. After many days of emptying bucket after bucket, they finally reached the bottom of the well, though they could not see it. They sent down a bird to inspect the well and see if anything looked suspicious. Indeed the bird found a dark grey stone covered in moss, sitting at the bottom of the well. When the bird brought this up to the Queens they immediately knew who the stone belonged to. "Old Moss Woman!" they called out together.

When they said her name, the tiniest little woman covered in moss appeared dancing around their feet, the wisest of the wee folk, Old Moss Woman. "Is this stone yours?" asked the Queens. "We know that you would do no harm to the people of our kingdom, but it seems this stone has poisoned our water." "My dears," said Old Moss Woman, "have your people had a good long rest? It is no poison at all, but simply a pause for your people to remember what is most important. You will find after they've had this good long rest, they will return in high spirits!" She took her mossy stone and disappeared quickly amongst the leaves on the forest floor.

Just as she had promised, indeed, after a long time at home together, the people of the kingdom found new joy in spending time with their families. Especially those who were so tired from their work that they were as still as stone, for they needed that sleep so badly! When they awoke from their stillness they were invigorated with energy. The Queens invited everyone to gather in the magic forest around the well once more and announced that everyone could now come back to be together again. The children were overjoyed to see their friends whom they had missed, and the people decided that they could leave their work at work from now on, and enjoy the little pauses each day. They all lived happily ever after.