

the Legend of Drum

*People everywhere have always told stories to explain why things are the way they are.
This is one such tale.*

Outside the reindeer-skin tent, the wild north wind wails and howls. Within, gathered around the peat fire, everyone is warm and cosy. The old shaman taps his drum softly, once, twice. When the children are quiet and all faces turned to him, he begins to speak.

“Silence is an absence of sound, but an absence is not a nothing. Silence is most definitely a something. Something that never wishes to be disturbed by the noisiness of life; the fierce crackle of fire, a whisper of wind over water, the slow groan of earth and stone.

“In the cold emptiness of space, Silence rules unchallenged, unperturbed by stars exploding, by towering plumes of bright-shining orange-grey smoke, billowing into the dark blue void. Silence cares nothing for the slow congealing of overheated gases into crystals of ice that bind to slivers of iron. Not even when these slivers gather together in a silent, spinning circle around a small yellow sun. For if there’s no-one there to hear it, surely the birth of a new world doesn’t make any sound?

“And yet, on this world, our world, no-one becomes someone. Amidst all the long eons of Silence, in one moment of magic, deep in the depths of the sea, Life begins to wriggle and squirm. Charcoal and water and all sorts of other things combine into something that can hear. What does it hear? It hears Noise.

“Noise speaks first through the coil and swirl of deep ocean tides, the hubble-bubble of volcanic vents, the long slow sigh of sea sliding on sand. And somewhere out in space, even though it has no voice, Silence screams in anguish at this breaking of its rule.

“Now, on this world, our world, Life changes. Fish become toads. Toads become lizards. Lizards put on fur and warm their blood and become mammals. In the wild jungles at the waist of the world, apes and people take to their separate paths.

“People hear the Noise of Life. Sheltering in their caves at night, they hear the thudda-thudda of the beating of their hearts, they hear the spitter-spatter of rainfall on stone, they hear the crash-crumble-rumble of sky-high dark thunder. And in this Noise, people find Rhythm.

“With Rhythm’s help, people try to make sense of their world. Tippety-tappety, hand against thigh. Clickety-clackety, tongue against teeth. Words start to form, twine together in speech. Now people can talk to each other, tell of the wonders they see all around them.

“But how can you share what you really feel, deep down inside? Sometimes words are not enough. Who knows who first taps idle fingers against an empty gourd? Yet, in that single throwaway moment, a spirit is freed from its prison: the Spirit of the Drum.

“Full of the joy of its freedom, the Spirit weaves a spell. An incantation, meditation, consummation, of Life and Rhythm and Noise, that creates a new way to share how we feel. Out of that spell, Drum is born and Silence banished for ever.

“And Drum flies across the world, our world. In every land, in every time, Drum speaks to the people of that land, of that time. Drum speaks to us now, in this moment, in this time. Drum gives us voice, Drum makes us free. Free to share how it feels.

“Sisters and brothers, share with each other. Share how it feels to be human.”

*Tonight, you’ll hear the Spirit of the Drum speak in many voices,
the many, different voices of our world.*

Cherish what you hear. Carry away with you the Gift of Drum. The Gift of Freedom.