

Who Song Is

“Father, I want to ask you something. I want to know who Song is, and who is Drum.”

“Yes, son. You play the drum well now. When you play it makes people dance and sing. So what else do you want to know?”

“I want to know what Drum says, and where Song learned how to sing.”

“Son, you know that Drum and Song say things that are like good talking, such as the wise do.”

“Yes, father, I know how to drum the old sayings, proverbs like ‘ A bed falling to pieces is sweeter than a new one.’ “

“And you are always clever to find the right saying, and how to turn it to fit, when someone needs to hear something. So, what else do you need to know?”

“I need to know who first drummed these sayings.”

“You know that your great-great-grandfather on your mother’s side first drummed the saying about the bed, and you know the names of the people who first drummed almost all of the other sayings. So what is it you still have to find out?”

“But tell me, who told great-great-grandfather that saying? Was it Drum himself who told him?”

“No, you know that Drum never speaks for himself. He only says what people ask him to say.”

“Who then told my ancestor that saying, so that he could ask Drum to say it?”

“Son, there is a story . . .

“In old times, before the trees had birds in them, there were some beings who had only one eye, and no ears. They looked like giant tadpoles, the size of a man, all green, and they stood up on their tails.”

“Yes, father, our people dance the masque of those strange beings at our big festival each summer.”

“Do you know what became of those beings, and how we know about them?”

“No, father, I do not know that story.”

“It was like this.

“There was once an old man who was very lonely. He had lost all his relatives. He walked around all the time looking for someone to talk to, but in every village people would say ‘No, he is not related, I have nothing to say to him.’ “

“But father, why did he not take a drum and play, or hire some musicians, and then people would gather. When people have sung and danced together no one will refuse to talk.”

“Son, in those days, there were no drums. That is part of the story.”

“Go on, please, father.”

“So one day the old man came to the village of the tadpole beings. All day he tried to talk to them, but they had no ears, so they didn’t even hear him. When night approached he went sadly down to the river, a little way from the village, and made camp.

“That night, sleeping by the river, he had a dream. A great storm came up with thunder and lightning. The river rose and flooded his camp and even flooded all the way up to the tadpole beings’ village. The tadpole beings, finding themselves in their right element, began to laugh and play. They thanked the old man for bringing the river to them, and he wasn’t lonely any more.

“In the morning he woke up and made sacrifice to the river. he promised not to eat any of the river’s fish that day. He was hoping that his dream would come true. But nothing happened.

“Each night he had the same dream and each morning he repeated the sacrifice. He became very hungry because there was not much to eat there except fish. One day, in desperation he took a stick and pounded on a big tree by the river to see if it had any bees in it. The tree happened to be hollow all the way through and it made a loud sound. The man was angry that there was no honey. He continued pounding the tree until the sound was just like thunder. Then, just as in his dream, a storm came up and the river rose, all the way up to the village of the tadpole beings.

“We still use the same drumming when we need it to rain. It changes people’s hearts from hunger and anger into a very deep feeling of hope.

“So that was the origin of drumming, and of magic.”

“Father, how did the drummers learn to make drum talk, and to drum wise sayings?”

“After the water went down, it turned out that the beings were not tadpoles after all. They had gotten very wet, but they dried up in the sun and shriveled down until they were only a few inches tall and weighed practically nothing. Their tails split down the middle and became two legs. They were so light they could dance around everywhere and even float through the air. When they learned to control their floating movement, what they were was birds! They were so happy they made all sorts of bright sounds.

“The man watched them and listened to them, and by repeating what he saw and heard he learned to dance and sing. He taught other people and was never lonely again. By the way, it

turned out that the birds had ears after all—the water washed out the mud that had plugged up their ear holes.

“So that is the true story of how drumming and dancing and singing were given to man, to bring people together, and create joy and companionship.”

“But father, you still haven’t told me where wisdom came from. How did people learn wise sayings?”

“Music and dance and magic came from people repeating things that happened in our world, which is God’s shrine; but people learned wisdom from their own mistakes. Every time somebody did something foolish, he would make a song or a drumming about it. The first saying was ‘Beat the tree that doesn’t give honey.’ “

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