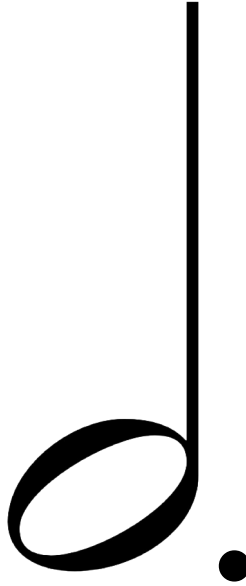


drummond



Drummond

A Novel By Patrick R. F. Blakley

Drummond

Written by Patrick R. F. Blakley

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**Make yourself someone you can trust,
then start listening to yourself.**

- *Stephen L. Melillo*

Drummond

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Lessons Are a Lot Like Church	15
Chapter 2: Joining the Marching Band	37
Chapter 3: Woop Woop Wap Wap	65
Chapter 4: Beep Beep Bip Bip	81
Chapter 5: Honk Honk Honk Honk	99
Chapter 6: Boop Boop Bop Bop	115
Chapter 7: Distress and Distractions	135
Chapter 8: Understanding the Bass Drum	151
Chapter 9: The Fourteen Disciples	165
Chapter 10: Learning the New Drill	187
Chapter 11: A Full Run Through	215
Chapter 12: The Longest Day	231

Chapter 1

Lessons Are a Lot Like Church

(Half-Step #1: D#/Eb - Di - Minor Second)

"Hi Dru," the man says from my front door.

I shudder just a little bit. Dru, a single syllable, bland and unsophisticated. Shouldn't a name be more interesting than a singular blurted sound? I mean, it represents an entire human life, complex and exciting, summed up by one syllable? Blah. I can't hold it against him, I think to myself, my name is Drummond, and he assumes I go by Dru. Every time this happens, I read that line in my head like a script. Sometimes I continue; they're just being friendly. Let's see if they're the type of person to ask what name I prefer. Some people are

careful not to insult me by shortening the name my parents gave me. Not that I'd be insulted, but I guess some people actually take offense to something like that. Not me, though! I blur the line on sarcasm.

Some people just call me Drummond right away. Usually, this is a sort of question that silently invites me to let them shorten it if I so choose. Others will use my full name but ask if I go by Dru or not. I always respond the same way, that they can call me both, but I prefer Drummond. Maybe I'm too nice. I don't love the name Dru, but I'm not going to correct someone because I don't want them to feel like they did something wrong. Maybe I tend to overthink this. Perhaps it's time to give up and let the wheel-of-randomness decide my name for everyone who meets me and spins it!

The tiniest fraction of people will issue me a multiple-choice surprise quiz. I'm not a fan of tests, and I get a little bit uneasy.

"Hi Drummond," they'd begin, "do you go by A: Drummond, B: Dru, C: Drum, or D: None of the above?" Okay, okay, they don't literally list them like that using lettered answers, but they do suggest abbreviations for my name. This single-question test is worth one-hundred percent of my grade. I better get this right since it'll go onto my permanent record with this testing institution. How do I answer, though? Am I allowed to choose more than one answer? How do I make sure they know I'm not offended by any of these names but that I do have a

preferred designation? Should I give them strict percentages for every response on how often they're allowed to use each name? Or will they cling to the most dominant answer I give and brandish that title as the pilot insignia under the cockpit of a fighter jet?

What nobody ever knows, and couldn't ever guess, is that my friends call me Drummy. I'm not sure who coined the nickname, maybe family, maybe a friend. If I had to guess, I'd say that in the past someone gave me the ol' pop-quiz, and I answered C, for Drum, and it turned into a nickname.

C is the most common answer on most multiple-choice tests since teachers don't want to give up the correct answer right away for answers A or B. And to wait until D is tantamount to circling the correct answer themselves. C! C is definitely the correct answer precisely sixty-five percent of the time, which promises you a passing grade if you just pick C all the way down the page. You'll end up bored just sitting in class after handing in your test mere moments from receiving it, but boredom is a low price to pay for just getting by with the bare minimum. However, a coy teacher would know this and, in turn, might shift their correct answers to B, the next logical hiding place. Doing this would ultimately defeat the classic C strategy. Until it's brought before the Supreme Court of the United States of America, students using the C strategy against this tactic will plummet the overall grades of every school in the county, perhaps

even the entire world!... Anyway, I probably got the wrong answer, and calling me Drum evolved into rebranding the nickname to Drummy.

Nobody gets to pick their own nickname, but at least Drummy made sense. I'll always know someone's talking to me when they call me that; it sounds just like my full name.

Funnier still, I think the name drew me toward drums. When asked what instrument I wanted to play, I gravitated toward drums, probably without realizing it! I think my dad played trumpet in school, but music isn't really a big part of our everyday lives. Besides racks of CDs in the family room and a tall wooden cabinet of sound gear, my starter drum pad just collected dust at home. Music and band is just another class in school. Half a second passed in slow motion as I oversaturated it with my tired inner monologue...

"Hello," I simply respond to the man at my front door.

The man introduces himself as just Dwayne. Until now, I'd never met a Dwane before, I mean, I knew it was a name, but I don't think I've ever said it out loud until now. My teachers taught me how to remember someone's name easily after meeting them, repeat it back to them, and it'll stick.

"Hi Dwayne," I say while shaking his hand, "I'm Drummond, but my friends call me Drummy."

Now, sticking Dwayne's name in my head was never going to be a problem. A little because this is the first Dwayne I've ever entered into my internal name database, becoming the default Dwayne in my system. However, there are other, more prominent reasons why he'll come to mind whenever I hear that name. Imagine a sizable, overstuffed teddy bear with a big, perfectly round body and short appendages. This stuffed animal is not one you can carry around, though. Imagine it even bigger, unliftably big. Dark brown fur, white shoes with tall white socks, smiling pleasantly. Now just add a button-down jean dress shirt with short sleeves! His big right paw gently envelopes my hand during his introduction. Dwayne is a lovely man, a gentle giant with a fun personality, but I'm shy and don't make eye contact. My parents are now both behind me, strategically waiting for me to be the one to answer the door first. They make the appropriate eye contact for me. Now, Dwayne is a regular door-to-door salesman, the religious type. I'm pretty sure he cold-called my parents and then showed up here with a pamphlet for us and a binder full of notes for himself. He tells us about a hole in his congregation that he's been hoping to fill and that I would be the perfect candidate for the task.

"Come, let's sit down at the table and discuss our future," Dwayne smoothly invites himself inside. I don't remember the exact words he uses. I'm already not paying attention.

My mother speed-walks down the hall, passing family member after family member in search of some cleaning spray and paper towels. My father walks a little slower. He knows the drill. If he delays a little, the kitchen will be clean in seconds. The wood floor creaks a bit as our strides stroll slowly across it, out of step with each other. The house isn't that old, it's pretty nice, but when three and a half men march down the hallway at once, I don't blame it for complaining a little.

"Come on back," my mother exclaims as the rest of us continue slowly coming on back, "sit right here, Dwayne."

She ushers him into a chair she had pulled aside just for him. He smiles a thank you. Flick! My mom flips the light switches, and the bulbs all brighten as my butt hits the bench. It's almost too bright, with light spewing from every room I can see. Mom and Dad both suddenly fill the vacant seats at the heads of the table, so I don't have to go it alone on this one. I just watch the clock.

The kitchen table is an entirely foreign environment for Dwayne but a well-known meeting ground for my family and me. The room is habitable but sometimes hostile. The table stands fast between the kitchen and the family room. It nestles between arguments and television shows, homework and birthday parties, breakfast and dinner. The kitchen is no place to

discuss religion. But then again, Dwayne's isn't just any religion.

Dwayne lays upon the table forty commandments, or whatever he calls them. I'm not totally engaged with the man, rather, the clock on the wall behind him. About six, but ticking slow and tocking even slower.

"Drummond," his big big-finger points to the page, "how many of these do you know already?"

I try to focus. I orient myself with the page, taking just a moment and stopping at the first thing I recognize.

"Oh, I know, Paradiddles," the words confidently pop out of my mouth somehow.

"Any others?" Dwayne encourages me.

I take more time and actually look at a few before chiming in again.

"Um, yeah, I think I know a lot of these already," I assure everyone at a mezzo-forte volume.

This visit isn't what I thought it was, this whole meeting. Dwayne didn't cold call us at all! My parents had something to do with this entirely. Dwayne slides the first two pages toward me and goes through his bag on the floor next to his chair. I hear a familiar wooden sound as he haphazardly searches for a pencil at the bottom of his small black backpack. The next sheet he pulls out for me has some text with blank lines scattered

throughout. Dwayne looks at me and gives me his pitch, an easy fastball right down the middle.

"I want to sign you up for percussion lessons, Drummond. I teach music at the high school, and we're looking for a few more members. Your band teacher, Mr. Ti, gave me your name specifically, and I think you'd be a great fit," he continues for a moment. "Do you think you'd be interested in joining the marching band?... Not many eighth-grade students get the opportunity to play in the high school band. We will take several baby steps to get you up to speed, 'half-steps' we call them in music. Twelve half-steps, and I'm certain you'll be ready. A chromatic scale in D, for Drummond!"

He smirks. That's probably pretty clever if you already understand what a half-step is. I don't, not yet anyway. We'll have to add that to the list of things he'll need to show me if I join the band.

"Do you have any questions about any of this?" Dwayne pauses, turning all eyes toward me.

"Yea, what's percussion?" I ask, slightly confused.

I'm a drummer in school. Why would I play percussion? I just showed him I recognized these forty drum rudiments moments ago!

"Percussion is drums," my father emphasizes. "You're a percussionist already, Drummy."

I don't feel like a percussionist, as right as he may be. I barely feel like a drummer. Right now, I'm more of a boy that just owns two cheap drumsticks!

At six-thirty, several documents don flashy new signatures of my parents, and there's a sloppy pile of sheet music and notes in front of me. Dwayne is heading to the front door, so I politely get up and see him off.

"See you at our first lesson on Sunday, Drummond," Dwayne concludes and waves before pushing the resistant storm door shut against the pneumatic door's wishes.

The storm door. It sounds so ominous, but though I try, I can't think of a better name off the top of my head. I guess that's why I'm not in charge of naming doors or other storm-related gear. I very rarely, if at all, get calls from storm-team members, or storm-chasers, looking for names to put on their equipment labels. I digress.

I have to be honest here, as soon as they all started talking about band boosters and fundraising, I stopped paying attention and only thought about the music. The show title is Stormworks. My mind bounces back to the storm front. I realize that if Dwayne didn't just say the word lessons as he left, I might not even know I just got signed up for private instruction. Perhaps I concentrated on the clock a bit too much.

My mind settles in, a new religion, one hour every Sunday morning. I've just been confirmed. I'm now a parishioner of percussion but not yet a percussionist.

"Percussion, huh?" I say to myself under my breath. "I'll have to remember that one. It's a good word." I can no longer tell if I'm just thinking or talking aloud as I look around cautiously to see if anyone heard me.

Dwayne already taught me something. Maybe this will even be fun. But first, some TV! I grab and aim the remote in a single motion, like a sharpshooter, and click to power on the television. The super high-pitched sound adults can't hear floods the family room and kitchen.

"Is your homework done?" My mom tactically returns fire upon seeing the screen illuminating. "No TV until you've finished all your schoolwork."

"I didn't have any tonight, Mom," I fib with just a little white lie.

Whatever got me in front of my favorite shows the soonest, giving me that dopamine reward! Besides, I try to convince myself, the homework isn't even due until Monday, I've got all weekend to do it! A dangerous game, and now one I must complete with stealth. I'll be caught in a lie if my mom sees me doing my homework now!

Seven strikes of Joe Sirois's snare drum blurt out into my bedroom. I lift my arm and feel around for the snooze button, the only word I know in braille. The Mighty Mighty Bosstones wake me up every morning. Sometimes I sleep up to Roil Oil, but today I'm wide awake on count number one. I have a backup alarm, just in case. It beeps annoyingly, but today I don't need it, I'm already awake! Have you ever woken up and couldn't figure out what day it was? I start getting ready for school when my mom yells up the stairs.

"Don't forget your drumsticks today and the music he gave you!" Her reminder sheds light on everything.

Oh no, it's Sunday! The nerves emerge from behind my inner curtain. Here I stand with my school book bag on my back as my mother's loud proclamation hits me. I take off my bookbag and grab my stick bag, almost forgetting my music on the music-stand. The nerves swell as the stairwell swallows me whole. My steps are a visual staccato as I focus specifically on each one down the stairs. Mom hands me breakfast to go as we efficiently enter the van. It's a little chilly out today, in late March, but the van is warm since my mom had just returned from church. She discovered recently that it's much easier to go alone than to corral the whole reluctant family into the van in the morning. God is everywhere, though, right? My brain quotes my dad, who is still asleep upstairs.

We reverse out of the driveway, and my mom turns the radio down, I reach over and adjust the volume knob even lower to a multiple of four, and we've already hit the first red light. My mom seems a little impatient, but I don't mind the delay. Each red light is a relief as the closer we get to the school, the more inflamed my nerves become. Red light number two, yes! I take a quietly deep breath. I begin to count the number of remaining lights off the top of my head. Could we be so lucky as to hit all nine others? I cringe when the Thruway and park lights are both green. Mom passes a slow car in the right lane and again another green light. I look in the passenger mirror as cars are stopping behind us. That light turned red immediately after we got through it! Sunday drivers are my glorious friends this morning, and the almighty traffic signal at Taft Road is always red going in this direction. A moment of salvation. Mom is slow on the gas as cars jump off the line alongside us this time. I look down. My quick and easy breakfast is untouched. We're at the longest stretch of road between lights, so I distract myself by eating. A bagel with butter and cinnamon spread on top, a specialty of my mom which hits the spot, but not a remedy for butterflies. I think my thoughts to myself with my mouth full, and I even hear my inner dialogue talking with food in its mouth! Half a bagel down, we turn left, then right through two more green lights. The last intersection doesn't stand a chance, with right-on-red coming in handy for my mom. The last

one comes up quickly. I set the rest of my holey cinnamon refreshment onto a napkin as the van's turn signal flashes and clicks like a metronome in the turn lane. As we accelerate, I'm pushed back into my seat, and I strategically brush the crumbs off my lap right onto the floor when my mom isn't looking. She's focusing on the left turn. Mom multitasks as she pulls out a twenty-dollar bill from her pocket while simultaneously parking the van roughly between the lines.

"Have fun," Mom smiles.

"Yep," I muster the most profound response in the history of responses as I get out of the van.

Dwayne drives a tan truck. I remember seeing it out of place in my driveway. It isn't a pickup truck, but it isn't a sport utility vehicle either. Whatever it is, it's recognizable. Some dings, some scratches, but it looks like it gets the job done. I have to walk past it to the fine arts door at the side of the high school. My body vibrates from nerves, so much that my tooth fillings moan in my mouth. The door is unlocked. I hear my mom drive away as my eighth-grade footsteps slowly inside the intimidatingly foreign high school hallway. Tall lockers on both sides like disgustingly decayed green teeth ready to devour me. I march forward with inconsistent steps.

The band room is right up this hallway on the left. I know this because I can hear the sound of snare drum tuning spilling out through a wedged open solid cedar door. I peek inside. Dwayne's back is to me at the

far side of the room. To my right is a massive metal door fit for a bank vault with dim lights and stage weights attached to pulleys on the other side. What am I getting myself into? My brain asks my body while my feet tiptoe forward. Cages and cages of instruments and folders line the room, like a pet store for horns or an inhumane metallic zoo. Colorfully dusty trophies and huge plaques adorn the perimeter of the entire massive room. They seem to be tipping themselves over, fighting for a better view of some small kid walking into their domain. This lesson is a sold-out concert full of esteemed old golden dignitaries from across the state, and country... and... does that sign say Bordeaux? An unmistakable big, bold banner. Is there a Bordeaux in New York State? Or was this band seriously performing show tunes in France?

There's no time to think about any of that now because Dwayne sees me. If only I had been quieter, maybe I could've avoided this whole thing!

"Hey Drummond," Dwayne elongates the 'hey' a bit.

"Hi Dwayne," I say, following the script.

Dwayne ushers me to move behind the silver snare drum on a tall drum stand. In front of it is a reliable black music-stand chosen for its sturdiness among a sea of inferior disciples. I approach. He takes the sheet music from me and places it neatly on the music-stand. I put down my bag on the chair behind me. An ever-familiar light wooden sound of drumsticks clunking

together reverberates through the massive room. Without fail, the golden audience on the shelves can decipher a drummer from this identifying sound. They've heard drummers' bags countless times before. I turn toward the drum. My feet comfortably shoulder-width apart, toes naturally turned out slightly, a minimal relaxed bend to the knees, hands in pockets.

Dwayne starts to flip through the papers on the stand, searching for his commandments.

"Rudiments," he reminded me, "are the essential building blocks for any percussionist."

That's true. I remember that concept from my middle school band, except Mr. Ti called us drummers. It's one thing to know a couple of rudiments on the page and another thing to have all forty memorized. Dwayne knows them all by heart and, more so, knows why each one is important to musical composition and the feeling of the musical phrase.

"Grab your sticks," Dwayne suggests.

We begin with the first one, top left, Single Stroke Roll. Dwayne quizzes me first. Could I play it? I answer by playing it on the drum. The drum sounds better than any drum I've heard in person. The entire room is designed for this. The sound frequencies bounce and absorb as planned by the foam panels on the walls and ceiling. Dwayne plays it on the drum. I immediately aspire to sound the same. The snare sounds even better when he plays it. His sticks are thicker, and his paws

command the drum to speak up. Metal snare wires under the drum vibrate hard against the bottom drum head. The other snare drums in storage echo a similar softer-sounding cry from afar.

"Good," Dwayne encourages. "Again."

A word I would come to hear a thousand times in this room for the coming months.

"Again. Again. Again," Dwayne repeats every repetition. "One more time. One more time. One more time."

When you play a rudiment so many times, you can't help but become competent. Dwayne is subtly teaching me how to practice at home. Over and over again until I can't play it wrong. We play rudiments so many times, like repeating a word too much. They begin to lose meaning as they lodge themselves in my brain.

We've turned the page onto Flams and Drags. I don't know these rudiments as well and find myself looking ahead for landmines that will potentially embarrass me.

"Pataflafla," Dwayne utters.

Dwayne is seemingly making up words at this point. Is this a test to see if I'm paying attention? Oh, there it is, number twenty-seven. I chuckle internally at this one. I struggle to make my hands do the sticking that my eyes interpret. Flam rudiments require both hands to play at almost the same time but at very different volumes. A Pataflafla has two flams right next to each other, with alternating hands. Soft right, loud left, soft

left, loud right, all condensed into two adjacent sixteenth notes. I can't play it. Dwayne demonstrates.

"Slow it way down," he recommends. "Don't think of it as sixteenth-notes yet."

He begins to click his sticks for me to play at an uncomfortably slow tempo.

I struggle at this dreadful tempo too. Dwayne circles it in pencil, and we move on. We spend less time on each one, and the page is getting heavy with number two graphite circles on almost every rudiment: Inverted Flam Taps, Swiss Army Triplet, Double Drag Tap, Lesson Twenty-five. The names aren't humorous anymore, and I struggle to play anything now. Lesson Twenty-five? I wonder if it actually takes twenty-five lessons to figure this one out. These all become homework for me to study and practice slowly. The hour vanishes. The collection basket emerges as Dwayne subtly reminds me of the twenty-dollar bill in my pocket. I take it out and hand it to him.

Dwayne smiles, "thanks."

I say goodbye and leave the room, past the trophies and cages, past the bank vault door, and out into the hallway with cavities way worse than my own. As I emerge from the building, I see Dwayne's truck again and realize I forgot about my nerves! Wow, Dwayne is good. He seems to be a sort of magician as well as a percussive clergyman. Say the magic words and he

makes the hour and nerves just disappear! I throw my bag and myself into Mom's van.

"How'd it go?" She predictably inquires.

I tell her I'm relieved, both because it wasn't as bad as I expected and because I don't have to do it again for another seven days! She has a question for every mile we drive home, which makes sense since she's the one paying for all this. I'd want some information too. I divulge everything, the rudiments, the new homework, and even the trophies. She is up to speed as if she was there. We park in our garage, and I race to my room. I toss my bag on my practice drum pad and lay back on my bed. Now, where was I? I fall asleep as fast as I woke up, still in my clothes. I'm almost as good at drums as I am at taking naps!

The weekend dissipates. Monday morning, I sit in English class and find myself Pataflafla-ing with my fingers on the desk. It doesn't dawn on me how loud my finger tapping is on the laminate desktop until the class quiets down after the bell. My teacher takes attendance with only her eyes, in silence. It's easy since our assigned seats are in alphabetical order. She then immediately stands up from her large desk and starts collecting homework.

"Pass it up," she advises, collecting it the most efficient way possible for her.

The curly-haired boy in front of me turns around, expecting me to submit my papers with the same expression and demeanor as an airport security agent. I shake my head subtly, and he turns back around. I can see his eyes roll from behind his head as he hands his work to the girl in front of him. Maybe somebody accidentally put my name on their homework. My mind flails and reaches for any comforting thought to grasp. I sink into my seat. Pataflafla, Pataflafla. I try to distract myself by tapping lightly on my desk again. I switch from hitting my pointer finger's first knuckles against the desktop to using the pads on the tips of my fingers. Instead of handing in my homework, I tiptoe with my fingers on my desk, playing drum rudiments at pianissimo in English class. This situation is all messed up! I'm still not quite getting it, but the feeling of minor frustration is preferred to the feeling of getting a zero on that homework assignment. Luckily my teacher doesn't know I didn't do it yet. I can bask in the idea that only the curly-haired FAA agent and I know that I didn't do my assignment. By the time the teacher finds out, I'll at least be out of the room!

This series of events repeats ad nauseam for weeks. Lessons with Dwayne, perform for the trophies, tithe twenty bucks to the church, and find myself blindsided by a different teacher requesting different homework that I forgot about for different reasons.

I've been here before, report card in hand, creating a script in my head to explain it away while only highlighting the high grades in band and gym class. I'm a shoddy salesman, and I already know how this pitch ends. My dad will take one look at the overall average, and I'll never see my computer again, at least until June when school is over and I somehow miraculously pass with a C average. My band grade always does most of the heavy lifting.

I'm right, of course. My dad does his thing, quite loudly, belittling, and I'm back in my room without technology. I look at my drum pad. I take out my sticks. Pataflafla, Pataflafla, Pataflafla. I really start to get it a little more each day. Swiss Army Triplets aren't bad either. I am getting much closer to a target I didn't know existed back in March. Now all I have to do is find a way to get at least all C's across the line, in every subject, by the end of the school year. The strategy is not dissimilar to my all C test theory! If I can hit those targets, I'll barely pass. I'll be back on my usual routine that my family has grown accustomed to since fourth grade. Fail a little bit and climb back up to C average.

I'll continue my drum lessons with Dwayne every Sunday, though, good grades or bad. He is the clergy, I am the parish. He is the preacher, I am the congregant. As he leads me toward salvation I obey and atone for my misjudgments. Lessons not only take the place of church,

they become the church! Percussion is my religion, and the band room is my cathedral. Inside this holy place, I don't believe in anything more than myself.

Read More By This Author

Drummy Drum Joins Marchy Band - 2017

Drummy Drum decides to join the marchy band but he can't decide which instrument to play. He tries all sorts of different instruments and can't find the one that fits him best. The story is about being yourself and fitting in. The book is filled with fun sounds and will entertain all ages! Whether you're reading to your kids or grandchildren, teaching a class, or know a parent that just loves band, this little 42 page book is just right!

The Field Percussion User Manual - 2015

New band directors, unfamiliar staff, and even the performers themselves can all walk away having learned something from this 136 page book. The text will answer questions that you didn't know you had and goes into great detail explaining the complexities of the marching percussion section and the properties of their sound.

Quadratics: The Tenor Drum Equation - 2013

Quadratics is a 150 page book specifically designed for the tenor drums. These six drums get a lot of attention throughout this publication. Anyone looking to further their understanding of this instrument will learn to appreciate the subtleties that this text uncovers. From the performer to the composer, and everywhere in between, this is an incredibly useful guide!

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-Patrick R. F. Blakley