

## Dima and Owl

Traditional San story  
English

In the old days there were two people, Dima and Owl. Owl owned the sun, water and fire. Dima did not have any of these things and lived in darkness with his family.





Dima tried to make a garden, but he could not grow vegetables because there was no sun. Everybody suffered because there was no sun. When they hunted animals to eat, they hung the meat in the trees to dry, but it rotted because there was no sun.





One day, Dima decided to visit Owl. When they served food, Dima wondered why Owl's food tasted so good. He wondered if it was because the food grew in the sun and it was cooked in fire. Secretly, Dima made a plan. He decided to dance. He wanted everyone at Owl's place to gather around him and see him dance. He was a good dancer. Owl and his family admired the beautiful dancing.

When it grew dark, Owl decided to fetch the sun from his house so that he could still watch Dima's dancing. Owl kept the sun in an animal skin bag inside his hut. He carried the sun out from his house and held it high up above his shoulders. Now it was light. Everyone could see far into the distance. Soon everyone was dancing in the light of the sun.

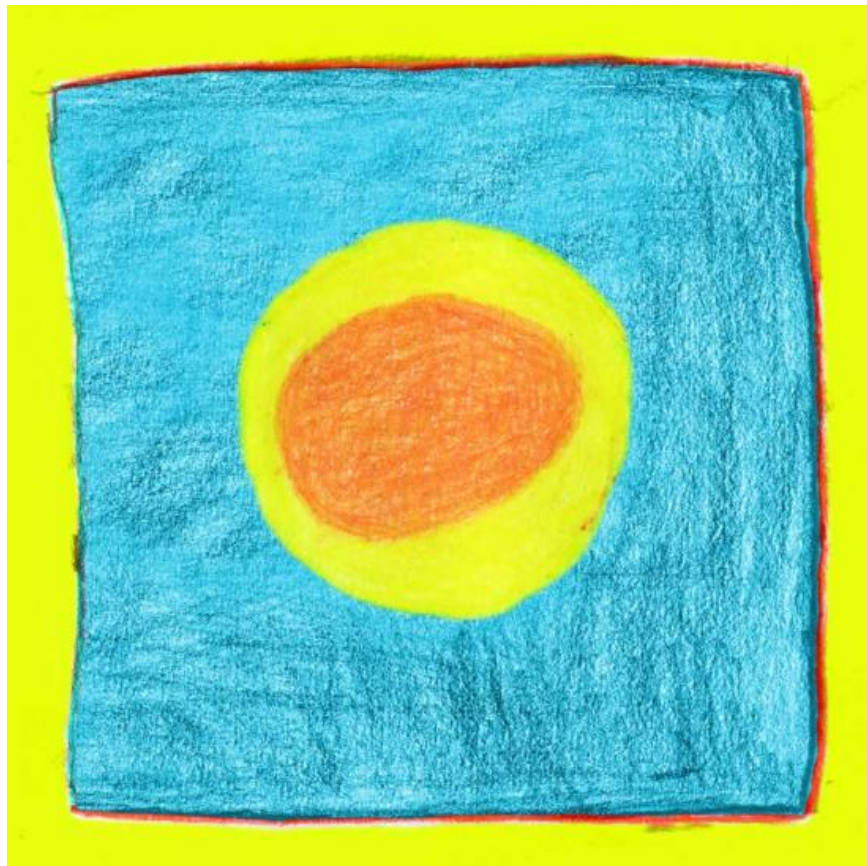




Dima crept closer to the sun while he was dancing. Owl held on to the sun but after a while he forgot about it because he enjoyed the dancing so much. He saw how beautifully Dima danced. He too wanted to dance like this.



Suddenly, Dima took his fighting stick and hit the sun into the air like a ball. The sun travelled so far that it remained forever in the sky. It gave everyone light all day.





Dima ran away so fast that Owl could not find him. He stayed far away for a long time. After a while, he disguised himself and went back to Owl's place. The children recognised him and said:

"There is the man who stole our sun!"

The adults did not agree with the children and said,

"No, this is not the man who stole our sun."



They saw that this man was an old dancer. He wore a lot of beads around his body. They were magic dancing beads and they made people dance.

It was not long before everyone was dancing. They danced the whole afternoon, until the sun began to set. It became too dark to see the magic dancer.

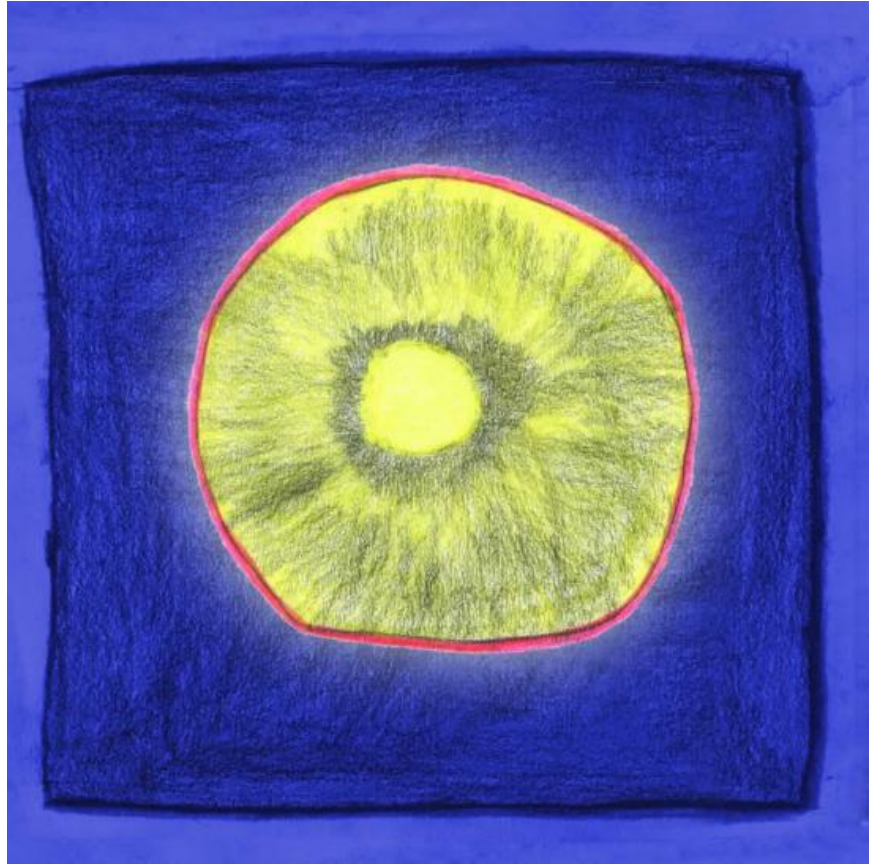




Owl said to his wife, "Go and look in my bag and fetch the moon."

Owl held the moon high above his shoulders and it lit up the darkness for all to see the dance. While they were dancing, Dima moved closer and closer to the moon, for he had a plan.

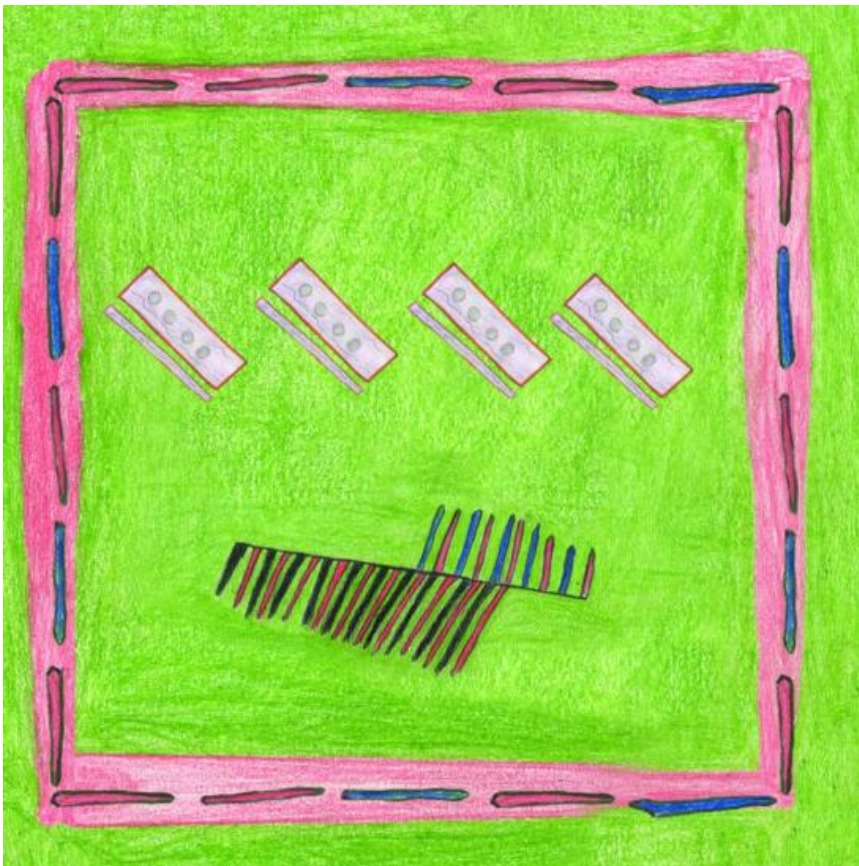
He took his fighting stick and hit the moon high up into the air. Once again, he ran away from Owl. This time he stayed away for a very long time, until Owl's family forgot all about him.







Dima disguised himself again and returned to Owl's place. This time he wanted Owl's fire. Owl had the firesticks hanging around his neck. Dima joined Owl under a tree and the two men started playing an old clapping game called gi.



They clapped and clapped and as they clapped some more, Owl's firesticks started jumping around his chest to the rhythm of the clapping. Clap-clap, clap-clap. Dima tried to grab the firesticks, but Owl threw them over his neck so that they hung across his back.

They clapped the whole day long. The rhythm of the clapping made Owl forget all about the firesticks.

When they swung around onto his chest once more, Dima grabbed the firesticks and ran away.

Owl and his family ran after Dima, but he made a clever plan. He had a bag full of thorns and threw them onto the ground behind him. This stopped Owl and his family from chasing him. They could not cross the thorns on the path.





Dima could not wait to make fire. He rubbed and rubbed the sticks. He blew and blew the ember in a little dry grass until a tiny flame appeared. The fire grew and lit the whole veld and each time the flames reached a tree, Dima said, "From now on people will be able to make a fire with each tree on earth."

A long time passed. When Dima finally returned to Owl's place, he found no one but a little boy playing with wooden animals.

Dima asked the boy to show him where they kept their water. The boy led him to the place of water. Dima saw the big djaba, the huge clay pot in which the family stored water.



Dima pretended to leave for his home, but he secretly turned round to the place of water. He turned the huge pot over so that the water started flowing on the ground.

Dima quickly jumped over the flowing water to the other side. Then he was safely across the river of water where Owl could not find him.





This is why the whole earth has rivers full of water today.  
This is why we have the sun, moon and fire, because of the magician Dima.

## Story notes

In 2003, Katunga Carimbwe told this version of the Dima and Owl origin story to Titu Mangumbu and Marlene Winberg in the Northern Cape Province of South Africa while he was busy painting on a canvas. Mangumbu, Mahongo and Winberg translated it and retold the story in this written version with as few alterations as possible. His elders told the story to him during his childhood in Mavinga, Angola, where he was born in 1958.

Most of the episodes in the Dima and Owl myth have a wide distribution in the extensive area of southern Africa and the Kalahari whose original inhabitants speak !Xun and other closely related languages, although the names and identities of the trickster, Dima, and his adversary change from area to area. The “clapping game” mentioned in our version, Dima and Owl, is still current among the !xun, the Nharo, and possibly other communities of Kalahari San. This story depicts Dima as a culture hero and transformer of the primeval world into the present world. He achieves this with words, “From now on people will be able to make a fire with each tree on earth.”

The Manyeka Arts Trust holds a !Xun audio telling of this story by Meneputo Mnaunga Maneka i

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Writer: Traditional San story  
Illustration: Manyeka Arts Trust  
Language: English



The Manyeka Arts Trust celebrates the traditions of southern African San storytellers.  
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