


Pam-Pam bird

 Traditional San story

 Manyeka Arts Trust, Pensa Limungu, Kapilolo Mahongo, Marlene Winberg

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Pensa was the best hunter in the whole Kalahari Desert. He brought home fat animals and fed his family well. There was this bird, the Pam-Pam bird, which Pensa wanted to catch. The bird's tail feathers were perfect for his arrows. The problem was, he could never manage to trap or shoot Pam-Pam. Pensa's arrows would fly through the air just like a bird - if only he could catch Pam-Pam and pull out his tail feathers!



Pensa went to the wise man, their healer. He asked for help. "Please guide me to catch the Pam-Pam bird. I need his feathers for my bow and arrows. What must do to catch him?" The healer replied, "Go and make a fire. When all the insects run away from your fire, you must catch the smallest of them. Make a trap and place this little insect inside your trap. It will tempt the Pam-Pam bird."



Pensa did not know that the healer and the Pam-Pam bird were friends. Pam-Pam often visited the healer. They exchanged stories. "I warn you," said the healer when Pam-Pam bird visited him, "I have told the hunter how to catch you. When you see a fire in the veld, you must fly far away. I want to see which one of you will win."



In the meantime, Pensa started his hunt for the Pam-Pam bird. He sat in the veld and rubbed and rubbed his fire sticks. When the smoke appeared, he blew into the fine grass around his fire sticks, until the little flame appeared and became a fire. The insects around the flaming grass flew away, but Pensa managed to catch a young grasshopper. He put it into his trap.



The Pam-Pam bird could not resist the juicy young grasshopper in Pensa's trap. He decided to fly down and grab it quickly with his sharp beak. Pensa heard Pam-Pam bird's cry, "Pam-pam, pam-pam, pam-pam." Pensa ran to his trap. The bird was trapped!



Pam-Pam bird begged Pensa to set him free. "Oh no," said Pensa, "I have wanted to catch you for a very long time. Today you are mine! Your feathers will make my arrow fly through the air, just like you."



Pam-Pam bird screeched, "If you kill me you will have no more feathers for your arrow when these are worn out, because I will be dead. Set me free and I promise to give you new feathers with each full moon."



Pensa let Pam-Pam go. As Pam-Pam walked away, he thought, "Am I really free?"



Pensa went home and made new arrows. When the people saw his new arrows, they exclaimed: "O-o, look at this hunter! He carries the Pam-Pam bird's feathers in his arrows. Now he will hunt well and bring us good food. We shall have a feast!"




That night, the healer led the people in a fire dance to celebrate the hunter's success and Pam-Pam bird's freedom. And since that day, all the good hunters remember the story of the Pam-Pam bird, to tell their children as a memory of days gone by.




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