



Blackfoot

Peace with the Shoshones

Owl Bear, the loved and respected leader of his people, awoke one morning from a good dream. Excited to tell it, he called everyone together: “I had a strong dream,” he told them, “that we captured many horses from our Shoshone enemies. It is a good omen. Who will go with me?” The young men were eager, and they say that Owl Bear went to war leading more than two hundred warriors.

They traveled on foot over the mountains toward the country of the Shoshones. The first night away from home some men had bad dreams, seeing themselves badly wounded, dying. When they had similar dreams the following night, many lost confidence. “Go home!” Owl Bear derided. “I don’t want cowards. Go back!”

Only his close relatives stayed, and they, too, wanted to turn back. “It is bad luck to go on,” they told him. “Too many dreams warn us something bad will surely happen.” Then Owl Bear became angry: “Even you, my own relatives, call yourselves warriors. Go home! And when you get back to your wives, put on women’s clothes.”

After that Owl Bear was left alone, dejected that everyone had deserted him. He did not want to live. It was starting to rain and he looked for somewhere dry. Finding a cave among the rocks, he crept inside. Feeling his way in the dark to the back, he suddenly put his hand on a leg. He hesitated, then felt again . . . yes, a man’s leg! Neither man spoke, but by feeling and signs, and a few words, Owl Bear knew the other was an enemy, a Shoshone. He told the Shoshone that his people had deserted him, and that he no longer wanted to live. He drew his knife and put it in the right hand of the Shoshone, wrapping the man’s fingers around the handle.



Owl Bear expected to die, but as he waited for the blow, the Shoshone placed his own knife into Owl Bear's hand, and said, "Like you, I was leading my people but now they have left me, and I, too, wanted to die. But let us not fight. Instead let us smoke the pipe, and then bring our two nations together in friendship."

So it was, they say, that the two nations, who had always been enemies, pitched their tipis together, and made peace. There was dancing and feasting, and generous gifts were exchanged. After the two peoples had camped happily for many days, each left for its own hunting grounds.

A few young men stayed behind for a while to gamble and to race their horses. A quarrel broke out about the winner, and soon they started to shoot, and people were killed.

No peace between the Blackfoot and the Shoshones ever lasted.