



Children *of the* Longhouse

Joseph Bruchac

It is a man's game—
but he's still a boy



GRABBER'S PLAN*Ohkwa'ri*

*H*is hands pressed on the hard earth of the hillside, Ohkwa'ri felt the footfalls of people coming before he heard or saw them. He leaned forward and looked through the branches of the shrub oak which were green with leaves. Several people were coming up the trail. He recognized the one who led them. It was Grabber.

From his shaded hiding place where he had dug out the loose earth under a slanting slab of stone, Ohkwa'ri could see out through the branches and not be seen. He had crawled in to get out of the hot noon rays of the bright sun of the Strawberry Moon, that time of the year when the days are the longest. This hiding place was his own and no one else's. The little cave and the hill on the other side of the river from his busy village were the two spots where he always

came to think. No one knew about this cave except for his sister Otsi:stia, whom he trusted with everything.

Ohkwa'ri thought to crawl out. But for some reason, though his mind thought of showing himself, his body held back. Then Grabber began to speak to his friends, and Ohkwa'ri knew that it was good he had not allowed himself to be seen. The things that Grabber was saying, here on the hillside far above their village, were not things that he wanted anyone to overhear. Grabber was talking about starting a war.

When Ohkwa'ri was very small, he had admired Grabber, who was five winters older than him. Grabber was straight-limbed and very strong. He was the fastest runner of all the young men, a hard worker, and a good hunter. He was the best at all of the games the young men played. Whether it was the game of *Tekwaarathon* in the spring, when they caught the hard deerskin ball in their webbed sticks and ran back and forth on the playing field to score goals, or snow snake in the winter, when they threw their long, finely carved spears down an ice trough to watch them skitter great distances, Grabber was almost always the first among the young men. Because of that he had a loyal group of close friends, and he was always praised for his abilities.

Now that Ohkwa'ri had seen eleven winters, he no longer admired Grabber in the same way. Despite his physical abilities, Grabber was impatient. Although

he usually won, he sulked on the few times when he lost. He often had an angry look on his face, and he did not listen well to the advice of the older men. He always thought his own way of doing things for the good of the people was the best.

"Those Anen:taks," Grabber was saying, "those eaters of bark are not real men. They are cowards. We are real human beings. If our fathers and our uncles were not too old and tired, they would see this clearly."

"That is true," said Greasy Hair. Greasy Hair was always at Grabber's side, ready to do whatever his friend suggested.

A small village of the Anen:taks was just over the mountain pass, three days' journey upriver from the big falls and then an equal number of days' journey up the big lakes. Although there were more Anen:taks in all their scattered villages than there were Longhouse People, the Anen:tak villages were often quite small—smaller than those of the Longhouse People and thus easier to raid.

"We should raid them," Grabber said, "because they have not traded fairly with us."

Even though Grabber's statement was not true, Greasy Hair agreed loudly. "*Henh!*" he said.

"When will we make the raid on their village?" asked a third person's voice. From his hiding place under the shelf of rock Ohkwa'ri could not see that person. Grabber was sitting right in front of the cave

He has made powerful enemies. Can he face them on the playing field?

When Ohkwa'ri overhears a group of older boys planning a raid, he immediately tells the elders of his Mohawk village. He knows he has done the right thing—but he has also made enemies. Grabber and his friends will do anything they can to hurt Ohkwa'ri, especially during the village-wide game of brutal lacrosse, or *Tekwaarathon*. Ohkwa'ri believes in the path of peace, but can peaceful ways work against Grabber's wrath?

"An exciting story that also offers an in-depth look at Native American life centuries ago." —*Kirkus Reviews*



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