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**Author**

Benedict, Salli

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## The Tsioneskwenrie\* Plant People

SALLI BENEDICT

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It was springtime, and the woods were alive with new plant life. Many birds had returned to their summer homes.

On the edge of the woods, there lived an old man and his wife. The man was a believer in the curative powers of plant medicines. He used his generous woods to supply him with medicinal needs to keep his wife and himself in good health.

All was not well for him this spring. He was sick in bed from an illness that he had never had before. He sent his wife to the woods several times to get medicines. She would steep a tea from these and give them to her ailing husband to drink. None of them made him better. He grew sicker each day.

Finally, he lapsed into a dream-like sleep. In his dream-sleep, he was in bed and through the door walked a little old man and a little old lady. They had purplish-red skin and shiny white hair. When they came to the side of his bed, he saw that they were not even tall enough to see over the side of his bed. They looked very cheerful. Their round faces glowed and their eyes sparkled.

They said to him, "We are Tsioneskwenrie . . . The Spirit of the plant called Tsioneskwenrie."

\* The Mohawk word for *wild ginger*.

They told him that a tea from the purplish-red root of their plant would make him well. Then they told what the plant looked like. It was a short plant with broad leaves and a thick stem. The roots were the same color as they were. They told him that they grew in the shady areas of the woods.

Then the man woke up and told his wife of the dream. His wife went to the woods and found the plant that he described and made a tea for her husband.

The Tsioneskwenrie tea had good results, just as his tiny visitors had promised. The man went out to the woods with his sacred tobacco and his pipe, to give thanks to the Great Spirit for sending the Tsioneskwenrie people to him. He left an offering at the base of a Tsioneskwenrie plant to give thanks to them for their help.

The next day the man felt so good that he went hunting. The man's wife thought that it was such a wonderful medicine that she went to the woods and collected more of the root and stored them away in a covered jar. When her husband came back from hunting, he was having trouble breathing, and he was feeling very ill. He went to bed. He then fell into another dream-sleep. In his dream he saw the little old man and the little old woman come into the room to the side of his bed to talk to him. He saw that they too were having trouble breathing. Their once bright purplish-red faces were grey, and their once happy faces were sad.

He said, gasping for air as he talked, "Why are your faces so grey, little Tsioneskwenrie people?"

They replied, also gasping for air, "We are having trouble breathing because your wife has put the Tsioneskwenrie root in a jar and covered it. Our spirit needs air to breathe, just as you do. Take the roots from the jar and put them in a burlap bag, and hang it outside in your shed. The burlap will allow the air to get to the roots, so that we can breathe."

When he awoke from his dream-sleep, he rushed to the shelf and opened the jar. His breathlessness was eased. He found a burlap bag and placed the Tsioneskwenrie roots in it, and hung it in his shed.

The next morning when he had recovered, he went to the woods to give thanks to both the Great Spirit and his helpers the Tsioneskwenrie people.