

Misconception

Halle Bryant (2018)

Tyson yelped as he lost his grip on the branch. He took a deep breath and continued to climb. He was high up and could feel the breeze tickling his neck. He smiled; the air was fresh with the sweet scent of rain. Birds sung above; their song beautiful and calming. Heaving himself up, he sat on a branch, looking over the land before him. His classmates scurried like ants below, exploring the wildlife sanctuary.

Smiling, Tyson shuffled closer to the trunk, preparing to go back down. Just as he reached for a branch, a gust of wind shook him. Heart beating fast, he turned to the sound of flapping wings. He gaped, staring at the sight before him.

Standing on the branch was a boy. He had warm brown eyes and a splatter of freckles on his cheeks. Yet, the sight that shocked Tyson most was the large feathered wings protruding out of his back. The winged boy seemed scared, yet he looked over to Tyson with hope.

‘Please, you have to help me.’

Tyson was curious, and a million questions ran through his head. ‘What do you need help with? Who are you? *What* are you?’

The winged boy looked overwhelmed. ‘I’ll explain later, I promise. My name is Casimir, nice to meet you.’

Tyson raised an eyebrow. ‘Likewise.’

Casimir shuffled closer to Tyson. ‘Will you help me?’

‘I’ll try.’ Tyson shot a glance at his classmates below, ‘as long as I get back soon.’

Casimir smiled and nodded in response. Large claws gripped Tyson’s shoulders. Looking up, Tyson saw Casimir’s face smiling cheekily down at him.

‘Sorry about this.’

Flapping his wings, Casimir dived off the branch. He manoeuvred through the trees with ease, clearing the Wildlife sanctuary. The wind battled their faces, knotting their hair and ruffling Casimir’s feathers.

The sanctuary was but a speck behind them, and they flew in an endless sea of green. Slowing to a stop, Casimir placed Tyson down on the forest floor. Casimir laughed as he

caught his breath. Tyson's shocked face amused him and made him feel guilty. 'Sorry for not warning you.'

Tyson rubbed his shoulders. 'Where are we?' He looked around, worrying that he would get lost.

'We are near my village, and it will only be a short walk in till we arrive.'

Casimir beckoned him to follow as he wandered through the trees. Tyson jogged to catch up, slowing as he fell into step with the boy. Tyson gestured to Casimir's wings. 'I don't mean to be rude, but what are you?'

'We are an ancient species, a human with avian qualities. We don't have a name.'

Tyson opened his mouth to ask another question, but was silenced by Casimir. He pointed to two large trees. 'We're here.'

Tyson raised an eyebrow at Casimir. The place didn't look any different to the rest of the forest. 'This doesn't look like a village.'

Casimir chuckled and sauntered over to two large trees. He placed his hand on one trunk, a soft golden glow coming from beneath his hand. Casimir turned and grabbed Tyson's wrist, leading him to the gap between the trees.

As they stepped through, Tyson's vision exploded with a golden light. When it faded, he marvelled at the sight before him. Century old trees towered above them, with small huts tucked into their branches. The trees surrounded a large rock with a blazing fire perched on top.

Tyson turned to Casimir. 'This place is amazing, but what was that light earlier?'

Casimir looked sheepish. 'I may have forgotten that we do certain types of magic?'

Tyson looked at him in wonder. He turned his gaze back to the village and frowned. Why was it so quiet? It was obvious this was Casimir's village, yet there was not a soul around.

Seeing Tyson's confusion, Casimir sighed. 'The people are sick. There is a virus, a curse. We don't know how or why this has happened, but we do know how to cure it.'

'That's good, right?'

'It depends. We know how to cure it, but we don't have the ingredients for the medicine.' Casimir passed a sad look over his village, his eyes watering. 'Come now, to the chief.'

Tyson followed him to a large hut in front of the fire pit. It was built into the side of the tree, with wooden walls and a roof of leaves. Casimir stretched his wings out before gripping Tyson's shoulders and lifting him up. He landed on a small perch outside the

opening to the hut. Casimir tapped his clawed feet politely on the wood, before walking through the opening.

‘Chief, I have returned.’

Tyson peeked over Casimir’s shoulder, staring at the chieftain. He reminded Tyson of his grandfather. He was old, with greying hair and a tired face. There was a light in his eye that spoke of wisdom and knowledge, but also revealed a deep sadness.

‘You have brought a visitor.’ He didn’t seem worried about Tyson, or the ancient secrets being spilled.

Casimir cleared his throat. ‘He has accepted my plea for help, and I’m sure you are aware of how he can help us.’

The chief nodded, a smile coming to his face. His people would be cured, and the curse broken. Standing and stretching his aching bones, the chieftain beckoned the boys to follow, his large grey wings dragged across the floor behind him.

He led them through the doorway and into another room. Tyson fought back the urge to sneeze as the scent of herbs hit him. Lining the walls was a collection of roots and plants, along with wooden bowls filled with various powders and mixtures.

‘The cure to the virus is a complicated potion. It has many ingredients and cannot be made hastily.’ The chieftain sighed and leaned over a large pot. ‘We have collected all that we have, yet we are still missing a very important ingredient.’

Tyson stepped forward. ‘What is it? Is there any way I can help?’

The chieftain smiled. ‘You are a kind young man. And yes, in fact, if you are willing, we could use your help. The last ingredient is a plant that grows deep in the Hediquou Lake. Our kind cannot dive that deep, as our wings will become too heavy and we will drown.’

Tyson nodded. ‘I’ll do it. Where is this lake?’

A stretched smile came across the chieftain’s face.

Tyson gulped. Why did it feel as though he’d just made a mistake?

Casimir patted his shoulder. ‘I’ll lead you there.’

When the pair reached the lake, Tyson slipped off his shoes and jacket, preparing himself for the plunge. As he stepped into the water, a firm grip took his arm. Tyson turned to Casimir. ‘What?’

‘The chief and I lied. The ingredient isn’t a plant.’

Tyson raised an eyebrow. ‘What’s the last ingredient then?’

A talon sunk deep into his chest. ‘A human heart.’

