**The Place That Wasn’t**

By Camden Pulju

16 year old Tyler wakes up disoriented in a field in the middle of nowhere. Not knowing how he got there, he pulled himself to his feet and analyzed his surroundings. This is when Tyler notices that everything around him is a bit off, like a half remembered dream, even the air feels off.

He stumbles around for a bit, sticks and leaves crunching underneath every step, searching for a clue. After what felt like years of searching Tyler is left with the same amount of information as before.

His stomach starts to rumble, so he looks around for food. He comes across a bush of berries. He plucks a few berries off and pops them into his mouth. After a little bit, he feels a burning sensation in his stomach and violently vomits the berries up. Noticing darkness is on the horizon he starts to look for shelter. Eventually he sees a not-so welcoming cave, but it's going to be his best bet for now.

Tyler lays on the hard, cold stone floor and shuts his eyes. As he was trying to get some sleep, he heard something in the distance. He could tell it was far, but he couldn’t tell what it was. Still, he went back to sleeping and tried to brush it off.

The next morning Tyler woke up to a raccoon lurking in the cave. Being caught off guard he was about to scare it off, before remembering how hungry he was. Knowing this could be his only chance at food he couldn’t let it slip through his fingers. He crept up behind it, slowed his breath, clenching a rock in his fist, and enough determination it could put a lion to shame. He only got close enough when he could hear it breathing, then he struck. He lunged at the raccoon and a brawl broke out with them two. The raccoon tried to get away but couldn’t do anything with a 190 pound Tyler mangling it.

Tyler eventually smashed the raccoon's head and he had won. He had dinner, but there still was a problem. Tyler didn’t have a fire nor did he know how to make one. With hunger slowly taking over him, he bit into the raw animal. It didn’t taste like warm dinners his mom made, but Tyler couldn’t care less.

Killing and eating a wild animal boosted his moral and confidence. Having the first glimmer of hope he’d felt since waking up.

With his new found hope he wandered out of the cave to see if he could find anything that can help him with surviving.

He looked around for a bit but didn’t find anything. As he was about to turn back he heard something, like sniffling. He looked around for a bit to try to locate the source of the sound. Then he saw it. What he saw couldn’t surprise him more. It was a girl, crying to herself. The girl looked up and spotted Tyler, and she instantly stopped crying and jumped up and ran to him. Giving him a huge hug almost knocking him to the ground. Tyler had to pry the girl off of him, but even as he pulled her away, part of him didn’t want to let go.

Tyler hadn’t seen another human since he got there. He analyzed the girl and realized she couldn’t have been here for more than a few hours. She had a green buckled dress, blonde hair, and what surprised him the most was that she looked *real*. The dress looked to be in mostly new condition, and had very few dirt stains.

He asked if she was ok, and this was when she completely broke down. bawling her eyes out, and dropped to her knees. Tyler heard her mumble something like how her mom had just passed away but he couldn’t completely understand her.

After multiple minutes of crying she finally pulled herself together, asking Tyler for help. He took her to his cave and sat her down, sitting down with her. He asked how she got here, and that's when she said she suddenly woke up in an empty field a few hours ago