**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 where 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.

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. When he got close enough he could hear it breathing, he struck. He lunged at the raccoon and a brawl broke out with the raccoon. 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.