



Death cap of despair

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An icy breeze permeates the woody enclosure today.

Amasha lives where she does, surrounded by the vibrant bewitching colours of the woods...woods teeming with lifeforms. The arbuscular wilderness hosts not just squirrels, but also solitary foxes, a passing stag, tall trees, shrubs, mosses and butterflies. Beyond a steep, almost inaccessible, slope lies this majestic landscape, and in a corner of it, next to a lone chalet, stands a tree with two names etched on it; two names carved into history. In the cloistered sleep of that forest there also is another world - that of wild mushrooms. It is almost like being transported to a fabled 'isekai'. False morels, deadly webcap, death caps, angel wings, destroying angels and a deadly dapperling occasionally lurk amongst the edible mushrooms.

Back then it had been a gentler breeze.

Amasha typically scavenged rations by day as the wind dropped in the evening making it suffocating work. Moss covered a piece of wood adjacent to angel wings. In a separate grove, edible

mushrooms grew next to a meandering river. She harvested colourful ingredients in a wooden basket. Lookalikes abound in natural habitats - a deadly gem sprouted under a tall, broadleaved tree. It was not that difficult to misidentify, only to realise later that one of the mushrooms picked was not of the edible variety. Sometimes, following a latent period, later is too late to discover that a mushroom contains the cyclopeptide amatoxin which inhibits RNA polymerase.

It was a heart-warming Goldilocks-type scene in the cottage kitchen, preparing mushroom soup that was neither too hot nor too cold. Her daughter had a toy of a smurfs' house which looked like a mushroom - a red cap with white dots, straight from a fairy tale. The real death cap was more innocuous-looking with a lovely olivaceous cap that had gills and a free hymenium. Beautiful, yet deadly - for after a period where everyone and everything was still fine, gastrointestinal upsets set in. One initially thought nothing much of it and

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it even subsequently resolved, only to be followed later by multiple organ dysfunction. When they rushed to hospital and blood was drawn there was severely deranged liver function, hypoglycaemia and coagulopathy. An unfortunate untimely demise was soon to follow.

The lingering icy breeze of a strange, obscure memory forever permeates the woody enclosures now.

Cast into the oblivion of the forest, foraging for food, memories cloud her eyes. They say it is only when you lose yourself that you find yourself. Amasha remembers hearing the tale of the woman who had added those fatal ingredients that she'd found sprouting. Who had she been? Why did it feel like Amasha knew her?

Blinded, entranced by the dancing lights that sieved through the leaves of the tall trees, she feels like she'd been in that stranger's home that evening. She remembers every detail, even those small air displacements as the ladle vigorously stirred the concoction. A

hurricane of memories. Those poisoned sips that slowly sealed their fate and stole their thunder. The mushroom soup in garlic butter that had unwittingly been fed to her husband and daughter. She did not consume it herself given she had already eaten. An eerily familiar memory.

Flashbacks of an ethereal, unwanted memory? Amasha shakes her head as she continues to wander the lovely woods. Those dissociated memoirs can not possibly be her own, and, after all, recollection of the tale is but an exercise in futility. It merely serves to raise a spectre, invite chaos. Her frenzied gaze darts about, refusing to focus on what has been squandered in a deadly moment of inattention.

A tenuous connection to reality. Memories converge and the voices come from far beyond. Fragments of remorse. Nothing but ash. Despair. Tears. Soot. Acceptance. All that's left are the names Jacob and Emma etched on the corner tree. And her life, now fatally fractured.

Author's disclaimer: This short story is a work of fiction. People's names are fictitious and any resemblances are purely coincidental.