

Cup of Destiny

by Rose of the West

The Fat Friar tells his story to one of Hogwarts's new ghosts. For the
Hogwarts_Houses community on LJ.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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I'm surprised to find you here. All the other prospective ghosts are in the shattered Runes classroom with the Bloody Baron. You can be sure that he will give you the proper guidance. He was of your house, of course...

What's that you say? You can't face them? Why not? You're quite the hero of the hour, you know. Well, you're one of the heroes. Actually, I'm a bit surprised that you didn't continue on. You're fairly certain of a good reward... Ah, there's someone you don't think you can face? I do understand that. Quite a few of us understand that. For example, Helena can't face her mother, and the Baron can't face going on without Helena, so both stay here.

Me? It's true, I can't face going on, either. You find that hard to believe? Why would that be? I'm the Hufflepuff ghost, you know. Yes, I was a Hufflepuff. This cassock was something I adopted late in life, hoping to atone... Well, if you're really interested, I can tell you the whole story. You never seemed that interested in me before, but if you're sure?

* * * * *

I met Helga Hufflepuff when I was a farm boy of eighteen. She was walking past our farm toward the town, and she was everything that I had ever thought beautiful. She had golden hair, joyful blue eyes, and everything under her green kirtle and yellow tunic suggested life. I admit I was at an impressionable age, but I knew that forever after that moment she was the only woman I would love.

The basket in my hands simply exploded. I had been gathering herbs in the forest to help my mother through yet another miscarriage. After having three children who lived and five who didn't, my parents still enjoyed what married people did and looked forward to the fruit of that blessed task. This time we had all hoped, but it simply didn't work out. The first time I saw Helga I understood my parents' sentiment completely. I felt such passion, affection, desire and... everything... that the basket gave way.

She smiled and spoke. Ah, her voice was full of music and magic all at once! "I was going to ask if you could point me to the settlement, but I think I'll ask if I might speak with your parents."

"You can move in forever, if you like."

If I thought her voice was musical, then her laughter was indescribable. "I have a home of my own," she said, "and I travel to see if there are others who might wish to join me and my companions there. I suspect you might be just such a person."

"I'll go anywhere with you," I said. I'm afraid that I was in some sort of idiotic trance around her.

She leaned over and pointed at the fragments of my basket. A golden spark flew from her hand and the basket put itself back together. It was my first vision of properly working magic, and it stunned me. I looked even more like an idiot staring at her as she started picking up my herbs.

"Is someone having difficulties, then?" she asked.

"It's for my mother. She's lost a child."

"The poor dear. Shall we see what we can do for her?"

It was the first time of many that we brewed potions together. Oh, I see your smirk. You think Slytherin House is better suited to potions? Well, perhaps it is, now. In those days though, potions were considered the work of women with their kitchen gardens and healing brews. It wasn't until much later that they were used to... "brew fame and bottle glory?" Now that I think of it, I may have helped with changing the perception... ironic.

We made a potion for my poor mother. Helga was brilliant. She made the exact potion I had in mind, the one I'd made five times before. Then she showed me how to improve it. Along with easing her pains and stopping the excessive bleeding, it would actually heal the problem within my mother that was causing the miscarriages.

"There. You won't lose the next one," she whispered to my mother.

She patted both my parents' hands and my worry-harried father relaxed as my mother's face smoothed out, making her look a decade younger. My white-faced sister smiled. She could be spared for the convent if Mother was really that much better. Our little brother, who was just old enough to help in the fields, looked as relieved as Father did.

Helga stayed with us for several days, helping out until Mother was back on her feet. If I had fallen in love at first sight, I developed an enduring emotion as I watched her. She was everywhere in our cottage at once. She helped my sister with housework and cooked meals for the rest of us. At the same time, she never seemed more than a few steps from my mother, who clung to her like a child.

When Mother was back on her feet, there was a celebratory meal with the whole family. Afterward, my parents asked Helga if there was anything they could do or give her in return.

"Well," she replied, "that brings me back to the purpose of my travels. It hasn't escaped my notice that your son is magical. I live in a community of magical people. We are encouraging witches and wizards to come to us for a few years to hone their skills and learn about the art. I would like your son to take a simple test to see if he belongs with us."

She mixed several herbs together into a cup she carried. It was a valuable thing of pure gold and bespoke of a noble birth. My attention wasn't on the cup, however. It was rare that I took my eyes from Helga. She whispered a charm into it and handed it to me. "Breathe into it," she told me. I did, and the contents of the cup instantly blended into a golden potion that gave off a faint hum. "You're definitely one of us," she said with a smile. "Go ahead and drink it."

I drank and suddenly felt my magic in ways I hadn't before. I met her eyes and knew that we shared something quite special. Surely it must be love for both of us. I spoke without looking at either my parents. "Mother, Father, I would like to go to this school."

My parents looked at each other. My father frowned, and my mother shrugged and looked worried. Suddenly I realized that they had probably discussed me and my non-conformity for years. They looked into each other's eyes, and my father finally nodded. "We have worried for him for a while. Will he meet others who are like him, people who will be good lifetime companions?"

I now realize that they were thinking of a wife for me. I should have been courting someone, but never had the desire until that day. My heart had been waiting for Helga all that time. At that moment, my heart was in my throat, waiting to hear what my parents would say.

My parents looked at each other one more time. Mother smiled and put her hand on Father's. "I think he needs to be able to do what will lead to his happiness. We've worried about him for a long time. It seems as though you might be a gift from Fate. If he wishes, he may go with you."

That was how it started. I spent three years learning at this new place called Hogwarts. I should have noticed that the special feeling of magic that I shared with Helga was actually shared with all the students and teachers. If I had been paying attention, I would have discovered that I could have the same feeling of affection with many of the others around me, but I was only willing to feel that way about Helga.

The castle wasn't like it is now...well, like it was a few days ago...although it was quite grand for its time. We only needed sleeping quarters for a few score souls and half a dozen classrooms. The founders and a few other pedagogues would sit in the middle of rooms more like salons, while we students would sit at their feet and learn. We discussed questions suggested within the discipline we were studying and considered the solutions to those questions.

After three years, I was considered proficient and was given the option of teaching Herbology. Helga had been covering that subject as an offshoot of her Potions course, but we were discovering so much that it was time to split the work into two subjects.

The next several years were the happiest in my life. I spent the school years teaching alongside my dear Helga. She fussed over the students who gravitated to her house like a mother hen. She expected me to act as a father to them, which was a role I was happy to play and hoped to continue in a more real sense later.

If the school year was happy, the summers were bliss. Then I worked even closer beside her as we traveled, seeking other young witches and wizards. Godric also sought out new students in other regions. It was only the three of us. Salazar was opposed to seeking students from Muggle families, and Rowena couldn't be fussed to drag her attention from her research.

I discovered that Helga was actually the same age I was and encouraged her dependence upon me. She often told me that she had no idea what she would do without me. She depended upon me more and more. Over the years, she turned over the task of carrying and mixing the potions in her cup. The others were starting to regard us as a couple, and our marriage seemed inevitable. She shrugged off some of my efforts to become closer, but Hufflepuffs are nothing if not persistent. I continued gently pressing my case, hoping for a positive response eventually.

Then it happened. We traveled down into the area where the Normans had heavily settled. One day we discovered another traveling wizard who was recruiting for his school in France. He was everything I was not. He was highly educated, as a Muggle as well as a magical person. There was nobility in his mien and desire in his eyes for Helga.

I saw it in a glance. It was in the way her breath caught and a light sheen of perspiration appeared on her neck and on her bosom above her collar. She desired him the same way I desired her. We stayed in the same settlement for over a week, and I watched as the pair drew closer and closer together. I couldn't take it.

I knew they came to an understanding one evening when they came back from a walk through a forest together. They were both quite messy from whatever they had been doing. Her hair had come out of its usual braid as though someone had tangled his hands in it. She took me aside and told me they would marry, and she would teach at his school.

"You can't. You belong with me," I said before I had a chance to think.

"Oh! I never thought..." She looked at me with new eyes. I saw sadness, pity, and distrust. Now she suspected everything that had ever passed between us. Every kind act, every bit of friendship was now as nothing to her. I hated the man who had caused this rift between us.

"I was hoping you would prepare the cup for me... the potion to test love."

I swallowed back the bile in my throat and blinked the disappointment from my eyes. "Of course I'll mix the cup for you. Just give me a moment."

That's when it happened. Oh, it would be a matter of weeks before Godric and Salazar would part ways, barely friends any more. Yet it was my act that broke up the Founders. I couldn't seem to help myself. I knew every leaf in my stock, but for some reason, my hands could only touch those particular ones. I made the potion and handed it to Helga's lover. He might have been a great wizard, but he had no knowledge of potions.

I suppose I became your ideological forebear in that instant. I might have "stoppered death" as you so eloquently put it so many times, but instead I let death have free reign. The man drank half the cup, his eyes on my Helga the whole time, and handed the cup to her.

Before she had a chance to swallow, he fell at her feet, dead. She thought it through in an instant... my jealousy, his death, my act of treachery... and then she made her choice. In a single gulp, she drained the cup. She spoke his name and was dead before she fell at my feet.

It wasn't supposed to happen that way. She was supposed to think, when he died, that perhaps it wasn't right for her to be with him. She was supposed to consider that the potion was warning her. I stared at her, furious with him for coming between us and at her for preferring him. Then I knelt next to her and kissed her lips, trying desperately to obtain some of the poison that would kill me, too.

It didn't work any better for me than it would for the fictional lover that Shakespeare would write about centuries later. In that second, I hated her for choosing death with him over life with me. I was too cowardly for a knife; my choice was to run. I left the cup next to my love and kissed her one last time. I know the cup went back to Hogwarts and from there to members of Helga's family. I suppose I should be shocked at its most recent use, but I know how I used it. Perhaps it was cursed from that time.

Weeks later, I entered a monastery in Ireland. I might not have been noble, but even Salazar had complimented me on my runes. I was considered quite good at penmanship, and spent the next several decades copying sacred texts for my brother monks. It was good for me. I spent almost eighty years in that monastery, until the second generation of monks started to question my longevity. At that point, I allowed myself to grow older and slipped out of this life.

My bones are even now in the graveyard of that monastery, but my spirit was reluctant to move on. I couldn't face her. I came back to Hogwarts and discovered that the school now had resident ghosts who acted as guardians to the children. They were lead by people who were children when I was last there, Helena and the Baron. That was fine. I've never wanted to be in charge. I merely want to atone for what I did.

Even now, I occasionally feel a pull to Helga, but I know I can't see her. She knows what I did to hurt her. Even if she forgives me, I would have to watch her with *him* and see their happiness in the next life. There may come a time when I'm forced to move on, but for now I'll continue to atone by watching over the people who were dearest in the world to her... the students of her house.

A/N: This was written for the Hogwarts Houses Fest on LJ for Hufflepuff House. There are many wonderful stories in the community; check them out!

Thanks to BlueArtemis for beta reading!