

Mairin Says the Magic Word

by Kailin

Mairin shows the first signs of magic - at a very inopportune time.

-another Mairin story from the 'Snape, A History' universe

Chapter 1 of 1

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Disclaimer: only Mairin, Pegeen, Lawrence and Julia are mine. The rest belong to We-All-Know-Who.

For most of my life, the Christmas season was difficult for me. During my youth, cheer was rather thin on the ground at my home on Spinner's End, and I envied my schoolmates who returned for the new term with glowing stories of good times and abundant presents. Even staying at Hogwarts over Christmas was not necessarily a better option. It was too easy to be reminded that you were there because you were failing your studies, because you were going out with a girl who had stayed as well, or as in my case because no one particularly cared whether you came home or not.

When I married Hermione, Christmas took on a new dimension. A portion of the holidays was spent with her parents, and while my relationship with Lawrence and Julia Granger was satisfactory, sometimes I would have preferred to be home with a good book and a warm fire. Worse still were the Christmas parties to which I, as Hermione's husband, was now invited. If it wasn't a Weasley throwing a party, it was Hermione's annual Ministry get-together, and I was always forced to make the obligatory appearance.

With Mairin's birth, however, things changed completely. My focus was no longer on me. Quite simply put, our lives were completely upended by the tiny creature named Mairin Julia Snape.

My daughter had been in this world barely a fortnight when her first Christmas rolled around. That holiday passed in a blur of sleep deprivation. The Queen could have stopped in for high tea and neither Hermione nor I would have noticed.

Mairin spent her second Christmas with a head cold, which she had contracted from her dratted Uncle-Who-Still-Lived and then thoughtfully passed it on to me.

As a busy two-year-old, Mairin approached her third Christmas with a strong aversion to my upsetting the natural order of things by bringing a tree into the house. "Trees go outside, Daddy," she announced, grabbing a branch and pulling the thing down on top of her. She escaped with only a few minor scratches and a healthy glob of pine sap stuck in her hair.

This year, however, Mairin was three a reasonable age, I thought, for everybody to enjoy the Christmas holidays. I wrapped her presents with anticipation, knowing that she would tear away the wrappings and reward me with blissful smiles of delight.

I wasn't disappointed. The sparkle in Mairin's eyes, her squeals of joy as she unwrapped a ridiculous number of toys, her unadulterated elation at this feast of sensory overload all brought a lump to my throat. Hermione sat next to me on the sofa, and as I hugged her with one arm, I noticed that her eyes were moist.

"Thank you," I whispered.

Hermione had no need to ask what I was thankful for. "You have to admit," she murmured as she leaned into my embrace, "that having a child was one of my better ideas."

Before long, it was time to prepare to leave for Christmas dinner with Lawrence and Julia. Hermione waved her wand once to banish the sea of wrapping paper that covered the floor, then set off to dress herself and our daughter. I was already dressed in the Muggle jumper and slacks which I usually wore to the Granger house, so I poured myself a brandy and settled into my chair to think about how much my life had changed. I had barely enough time to wish Voldemort a miserable Christmas in whatever hell he inhabited when the doorbell rang.

"Are we expecting someone?" Hermione peered from over the upper story banister.

"You know we're not," I said, wondering who would have the gall to disturb me in the midst of my Christmas. I mentally composed one of my finest rude dismissals before opening the front door. Julia and Lawrence Granger stood there, along with an elderly woman I didn't know.

"Happy Christmas, Severus. Sorry to intrude."

Lawrence Granger's falsely cheerful voice broadcast the fact that all was not well, and Julia Granger appeared equally discomfited. The unknown woman, her gray hair swept into an unmoving helmet beneath a bright green hat, clutched her purse to the bosom covered by a dowdy red coat and frowned at me as though I was quite the oddity. Her stiff demeanor, I decided, could give Minerva McGonagall's deportment a run for its money.

"Has there been a change in plans?" I asked carefully.

"Could we come in?" Julia inquired with a rather pained smile.

"Of course." I stepped back to allow them entry.

"Severus, this is my aunt, Pegeen Barry." Lawrence indicated the older woman. "Peg, this is Hermione's husband, Severus Snape."

From above, I heard a strangled gasp of "Auntie Peg!" from my wife.

"How do you do, madam?" I extended my hand towards her. She shook it briskly.

"What sort of a name is Severus?" Aunt Peg wanted to know. The woman had to be shorter by at least eight inches, yet I had the distinct impression that she was looking down her nose at me.

"It's a classical sort of name, Auntie," Julia put in.

I knew that Julia Granger was trying to steer the conversation away from anything that might expose her daughter and son-in-law as witch and wizard, but it really wasn't necessary. Yet.

"My parents had something of a preoccupation with ancient Rome," I lied.

"Oh." The woman shifted her attention to an examination of my entry hall. She ran a gloved finger along the edge of antique mahogany escritoire which I'd given Hermione for her last birthday. "A lovely piece. Is it real or a cheap reproduction? I do abhor those false wooden atrocities that many people buy these days."

There was a brief, embarrassed silence during which I contemplated hurling the woman from my house.

"It is quite real," I said, the chill in my voice dropping the temperature in the room at least ten degrees. "Would you care to examine it further?"

"Forgive the intrusion," Lawrence said a little too heartily, "but Auntie stopped by for a Christmas Day visit and insisted that before we take her to catch her train, we bring her to see where Hermione Jean I mean, Hermione lives."

I felt a pang of sympathy for Lawrence Granger. Whereas wizards had a veritable arsenal of ways to divert someone's attention, Muggles were hopelessly lacking. I suspected that he had long ago given up trying to dissuade his aunt once she was set on a certain course of action.

"Please," I said, motioning toward the lounge, "do make yourselves comfortable."

Pleasantries and manners were still rather foreign to my nature, but I was learning when to use them to best advantage. And anyway, it was Christmas: goodwill was expected, although Pegeen Barry seemed to be one of those people who could push the limits of human tolerance and accommodation. I had just followed the three into the lounge when Hermione hustled down the stairs, Mairin in her arms.

"Auntie Peg!" she cried, wearing a happy expression that I suspected was pasted there for the occasion. "It's been years! How lovely to see you!"

Peg fixed a regal gaze on her great-niece. "You're looking well, Hermione Jean. And this must be precious little Mary Ann."

"It's *Mairin*, Auntie," Lawrence corrected.

"You do go in for the odd names, don't you?" Meg glanced in my direction as if placing the blame for my daughter's name squarely on my shoulders. Merlin only knew what other atrocities I might have inflicted on my family...

"Auntie..." Hermione waved a nervous hand in the direction of the sofa. "Why don't you and Mum and Dad have a seat?"

"It's not too low, is it? If it's too low, I shan't be able to get up."

"We'll help you, Auntie. Not to worry." Lawrence gave the impression of a man eager to escape the death penalty by any means possible. I wondered how many Christmases he'd been forced to endure Auntie Peg's presence.

Hermione took the wing-backed chair and hoisted Mairin into her lap. Thus far, Mairin had done nothing but stare wide-eyed at the old woman, apparently taking her measure yet not at all interested in making her acquaintance. I took the remaining chair and mentally congratulated my daughter on her powers of perception.

"Well, then." Peg focused her scrutiny on me. "What is it again that you do, young man?"

Young man? Had it not been for the presence of my in-laws three feet away, I would have laughed aloud.

"I'm a chemist, madam." It was the standard response given to a Muggle when describing a career in Potions.

"Ah. I recall it now. You may call me Pegeen."

I nodded, hoping with all my heart that I would have limited opportunity to call her anything in the future.

"And Hermione Jean? Are you still pursuing your career in the government?"

My parents-in-law routinely described Hermione's position at the Ministry as a 'government post' to their friends. Her job in the Department for International Magical Cooperation was far from what one would consider a boring, bureaucratic dead end position, yet the very term 'government post' elicited immediate visions of monotonous tedium. According to Julia Granger, few people had ever pressed for more details.

"Not exactly, Auntie." Hermione wrapped her arms around Mairin. "I'm only working two days a week. It gives me a chance to keep my hand in, and Mairin adores the lovely woman who watches her when I'm at work."

The 'lovely woman' was Molly Weasley. One would think that raising seven children would have provided enough childcare experiences to last a lifetime, yet Molly couldn't seem to get enough. When it came to grandchildren and almost-family little ones like Mairin, her arms were always open. It was a good thing: at the rate the Weasley children were breeding, the entire wizarding population of the British Isles would have ginger hair in just a few generations.

"Are you certain that she's a reputable caregiver, Hermione Jean?"

"Absolutely, Auntie."

"Molly's a wonderful person," Julia added. "She has a large family of her own, and quite a few grandchildren. We've known her for years."

It was at that point that Mairin chose to speak up.

"Are you a witch?" she demanded point-blank.

Auntie Peg gasped. Julia Granger's eyes widened, while Lawrence Granger looked as though he wanted to nod in fervent agreement.

"Mairin!" Hermione shushed our daughter at once. "I'm sorry, Auntie. There's a picture of a witch in one of Mairin's picture books. If I'm not mistaken, you look somewhat alike."

My lips twitched. Of course there were pictures of witches in Mairin's picture books. Along with pictures of wizards, and dragons, and

"Mairin," Julia said quickly, "why don't you show us your beautiful Christmas dress, darling?"

Hermione slid Mairin off her lap and onto the floor. "Good idea. Sweetheart, I don't think your grandparents have seen your pretty new dress yet."

Mairin beamed and pirouetted proudly. She did look adorable yes, I actually used the word 'adorable' in the frothy little dress that was all red velvet and gold netting. Frankly, the colors were blatantly Gryffindor, but with her dark curls and brown eyes, it was quite becoming. And anyway, I knew she had an equally adorable dark green velvet coat to top it off.

"Very pretty," Auntie Peg pronounced, as though my child had finally passed muster. "Come here and I'll give you a sweet."

Mairin frowned. I suspected that she did not want to get anywhere within hug distance of the woman, and I couldn't blame her. Instead, she ran out of the room, saying something about going to play with her toys. Hermione leapt to her feet.

"How about some tea?" she asked.

"If it's not too much trouble," Peg told her. "I must catch my train shortly."

It was a cheerful thought. Hermione hurried off to the kitchen, leaving me with Lawrence and Julia and Auntie Peg. We chatted briefly and painfully during her absence. It had taken the better part of a year, but I had learned to converse quite ably with my mother-in-law and father-in-law. Once they had accepted me as Hermione's choice for a husband in other words, when they realized that they had no say in the matter we had begun to search for common ground and had formed a congenial working relationship of sorts. Although Lawrence and Julia and I tried now to hold a mannerly conversation, Pegeen Berry's presence demanded that we attempt to include her in our discussion. It wasn't easy, and more than once I was tempted to inquire what time her train left and did she need to be on her way? I think we were all relieved when Hermione returned, tea tray in her hands.

Cups were poured and distributed, sugar and milk passed around. Stirring and sipping gave us a very real excuse to avoid further conversation. Moments later, Mairin returned, clutching something to her chest.

"Look what I got for Christmas," she announced, dropping two items to the floor.

Hermione choked on her tea. The two presents, a toy wand and a toy broom, lay incongruously in the middle of our rug. I could sense Lawrence and Julia's dismay all the way from where they sat; as Muggles who had spent Hermione's school years deflecting constant questions from curious but well-meaning friends, they knew how rather unexplainable the toys were.

"What do you have there, child?" Auntie Peg was peering closely at the toys.

"This is a broom," Mairin told her, waving the little thing in the air.

"Let me see." Peg held out a hand and Mairin compliantly gave the broom to her. The woman inspected the toy, which was clearly labeled 'My First Broom' on the handle. Designed for a girl, there were pink flowers and butterflies surrounding the label. I recalled when Hermione and I had gone shopping for it; the boys' version had red flames and dragons in lieu of flowers and butterflies, and Hermione had spent a good ten minutes complaining to the shopkeeper about sexism in children's toys. "Why in the world would you want a broom, Mairin? Doesn't your mummy use a Hoover in the house?"

"Of course she uses a Hoover." Mairin frowned, probably deciding that the woman was quite silly to think that vacuum cleaners had anything to do with brooms.

"It doesn't appear to be a proper broom, anyway. And what are these? Hooks to hang it up?" Peg ran a finger along the small footrests.

"Mairin," I interrupted, "why don't you show Auntie Peg your new teddy bear?"

The ploy failed to divert Mairin's attention, but it did redirect Peg's thoughts.

"What is that other toy on the floor, dear?" She put the broom down and pointed to the play wand. Wordlessly, Mairin picked it up and handed it to her. "What is it for? Is it to stir my tea?"

"Of course not." Mairin grabbed the wand back and began to wave it around.

"You shouldn't grab, child," Peg said reprovingly.

"Can I have a sweetie now?" Mairin demanded.

"Mairin," Hermione began in a warning voice, "don't be impolite."

"Your mother is correct." Peg was back to looking down her nose. "You cannot have a sweet until you use the magic word."

Mairin was startled by this request, but only briefly. A wide smile spread on her face and she jumped up and down, continuing to wave the toy wand.

"*Accio* sweetie!" she cried.

From the depths of Pegeen Barry's pocketbook, a boiled sweet a sherbet lemon, no less shot skyward and struck Auntie Peg squarely between the eyes. Giggling, Mairin grabbed the sweet when it landed on the floor and sat down to unwrap it.

"Mairin!" Hermione could manage only a feeble croak of dismay.

"Oh." Mairin looked suddenly, utterly ashamed. Almost immediately, her little face brightened once more. "I forgot. Thank you!"

Hermione and I exchanged stunned glances. Our daughter had just shown her very first evidence of magical ability by smacking an old lady in the face. Abruptly, Lawrence Granger jumped from the sofa.

"Well, Auntie, it's definitely time we bundled you onto your train, I think. Goodness, I don't know where the time has gone..."

Julia joined him with enthusiasm, and within minutes our visitors were in their coats once more and headed out the door.

"Good to meet you, Severus," Auntie Peg declared, shaking my hand once more. "Still a very strange name, though you seem a decent sort."

I refrained from comment. While Hermione said her good-byes, Lawrence sidled over to where I stood, Mairin in my arms.

"Good shot, sweetheart!" he murmured to his granddaughter with thinly-veiled delight. And to me, "Do you have any idea how many times I've longed to do something like that?"

"Quite a few, I would imagine," I said dryly.

"Right in one." Lawrence wrapped his scarf around his neck and tucked it inside the winter coat. "Well, we're off to the train station. See you all shortly at our place as we'd originally planned?"

"I wouldn't miss it." And for a change, I actually meant the words.