

Tokens

by windwings

An unexpected find spoils Severus's fun.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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A/N. Another Snape_LDWS entry. The prompt was Magical Sense, and the story had to include a spell or a magical object in an unexpected place.

Winner of the challenge :)

I'd like to thank **Melusin** for being a wonderful beta, doing things on short notice, and making my stories look all cleaned up.

~OOO~

The annual cleaning of the grounds was a chore he secretly enjoyed, though every time it was announced at a staff meeting, he acted as put upon as if he'd been assigned to clean manure from a stable with a hundred Hippogriffs. Without magic.

He'd always asked for the area around the lake, stating that his variable health could use a stroll and his temper, frayed thin by the end of the year, needed some solitude. But the truth was that he immensely enjoyed searching for all the errant trap spells, awkward love tributes, friendship tokens inscribed on trees, and hastily covered duel scenes the children left after each school year.

Each time he'd stumbled upon an illicit item, intended for smuggling into the school, but left to wait for a proper moment and subsequently forgotten in the whirlpool of studies and adolescent dramas, Severus felt like a child on a hunt for Easter eggs. He was considered young by wizarding standards, but his own childhood loomed distant and dim, piled hopelessly under the wrong choices, regrets and guilt, of which he had plenty. So, each year, he took to cleaning the grounds with a rare ease and lightness, living vicariously through dozens of careless childhoods for one day.

The detection spell made his wand vibrate slightly, and he stopped to investigate the source. The relatively harmless, but very creative, jinx was anchored to an undistinguished-looking stone. Severus carefully dismantled the protection, lest some dunderhead should run into it next year and have the inhabitants of an entire bee-hive chase him around, and upturned the stone to have a look. Ah, curious. Under the stone was a minimized book, which upon casting a Finite proved to be Hogwarts, a History, a couple of Chudley Cannons Quidditch cards and a tattered, old Muggle toy car. The small piece of parchment, which accompanied the odd assortment of the little cache, informed him, "Harry, Ronald and Hermione—friends forever!"

Firmly stomping over the tendrils of envy, which were about to spring forth, he let contempt blossom instead. Garish, foolish Gryffindors. Why not "One for all and all for one" and sign it with blood at that? He minimized the book back and threw it, alongside the now crumpled piece of parchment, into the little cranny under the rock. What a tedious, puerile banality. A Slytherin would never stoop to such a platitude.

Except...

His mood now rotten, he purposefully strode deeper into the forest where a gnarled tree stood alone among younger and straighter counterparts. There, in a secret hollow,

lay a plain wooden ladle and a cheap, Muggle ballerina statuette. Wrapped in a parchment signed with an S+L. Some other teacher's well-meaning sentimentality had left the items untouched after releasing the cutting spell which had protected the nook.

They were still there.

In aimless anger, he lifted his wand to blast the damn hollow, but then his arm fell in defeat.

Next year, he'd ask to clean the Owlery.