

Quarantine

by janus

Severus and Arthur comfort one another in St. Mungo's during a dragon pox epidemic while they are both there for other reasons.

Quarantine

Chapter 1 of 1

Severus and Arthur comfort one another in St. Mungo's during a dragon pox epidemic while they are both there for other reasons.

It is fine for me, Severus thought. He was used to pain and isolation, but the man in the next bed was used to his loving family, warmth and company. A kiss on the cheek, a hug when he came home, a child on his knee, his favourite foods - all these gave the other man life as water and air sustained everyone. The dragon pox scare was keeping them all in quarantine here.

Abraxas had died from dragon pox. His mentor had been... more than his father. Severus had revered him, relied on him. His death had devastated Severus' fragile growing concept of trust. The swelling, contagious, hideous green pustules had horrified him. He had brewed new potions and been thrust away by the parade of expensive mediwizards even as his heart had been breaking, and his world had been caving in upon him.

The reality of the pox themselves still held for him an almost physical sense of creeping terror, and sometimes still, more than a decade later, he woke cold and afraid from nightmares of his flesh diseased and bubbling with betrayal, dulling his mind and will as it ate him alive. Each bite of an insect or itch of a noxious potion made him fear for himself in restrained panic, even still. On such occasions he still examined himself minutely in his own quarters.

Now this very disease was running through St. Mungo's like a Muggle plague.

The man in the next bed was suffering from curse damage and was frequently visited by curse-breakers who shook their heads sadly. His legs had been fixed with a binding spell, but his feet were locked in a cursed pair of dancing shoes that caused his feet to move constantly, dancing and pointing in a hideous unending Tarantella. Even a Leg-Locker spell that was normally a curse had no effect. He had not slept in days and lay exhausted, his eyes red with distraction. His hair was as red as his eyes. It was Arthur Weasley.

Severus' right arm had been dissolved in a nasty potions accident when two cauldrons of reprehensibly incompetent 'healing' potions had collided and exploded in one of his fourth-year classes. His arm was growing back, but it was growing from the bone outwards and without skin, it bled constantly. Even Poppy had not wanted to be responsible for the constant care and regimen of Blood-Replenishing Potion necessary for its very gradual restoration. Severus was often feverish and had been forbidden to care for himself. Despite this, he peered suspiciously at every potion that neared him and objected to minutiae of every aspect of his treatment. He had tried to study, but it was wearying to hold a book one-handed and even more difficult to turn pages. Idle and restless, he watched the man next to him.

To his surprise, the man next to him was not annoying, and even his constant motion had a rhythm to it that Severus allowed to become soothing. Severus drifted in and out of sleep. He began to notice the mediwizards and matrons came by less frequently, and one day they did not come at all. The other man groaned and twisted in frustration, locked to the bed, his forehead sprung with sweat.

They didn't talk. They had never talked, but something in the other man's eyes now impelled him wordlessly. And after all, the other man never complained either. Severus finally half-sat and fished awkwardly one-handed into his pouch for his ever-present Calming Draught - his own recipe. He pressed his ghost-arm close to his chest and

moved across to the other man's bed. Severus tucked the little vial into his hand and leaned to take the cloth and dip it in the cold water on his table.

"Here. This potion will ease your mind at least, for a little while. I would like to do more but I have very little with me." He cast a quick chilling spell on the water and wiped the other man's face.

"I'm exhausted. I'm sorry to be a bother. You shouldn't..." The red, white and blue eyes - mostly blue - spoke guilt and apology.

Severus leaned over him. The man smelled warm, like bread and wood-shavings with perhaps a hint of honey. Severus felt dizzy again and sat down on the bed, closing his eyes before the trip back to his own bed.

The other man managed to get the top from the vial, shaken as he was by the dancing of his feet. He downed the liquid and lay back against his pillows as the calm washed through him in temporary relief. He put his arm around Severus to steady him, shaky and thin in his nightshirt. "They've abandoned us."

Severus looked at the wooden floorboards between his bed and the other man's. It looked like a hundred miles and his courageous energy had dissipated completely. Normally, he could fly.

"Stay here a little, until you have rested," the other man offered.

"I..."

"Here."

"I'll bleed on your blankets."

"They will have to change them anyway."

Severus sank down to lie on his good arm. The other man's curled up around him. How strange. He was warm. The other man was so unlike Severus. Arthur was big and... enfolding. Severus inhaled the homely, kindly scent and let his head drift with his dizziness for a moment. Arthur was still moving in the rhythm of his cursed dance. It was familiar to Severus, comforting, as it had kept him company for the past few days.

"Are you all right?" Arthur asked.

Curled close, he answered honestly. "I'm afraid of the dragon pox. Abraxas..."

The big freckled hand, used to soothing his children and reassuring his wife stroked Severus' lank black hair. "I'm sorry for your loss."

Half-dreaming, Severus imagined his returning hand moving its fingers into the thick red hair, calming the damp head in his turn. Arthur knew him, and Severus was still at peace, still welcomed.

A stern voice interrupted. "Just what is going on here?"

"You haven't been taking *care* of him." Severus rose angrily and promptly reeled against the wall.

"Now we will have to change his sheets as well as yours, understaffed as we are. Back to bed with you. At once." And Severus was manhandled back beneath his own blankets.

A watch was put on the ward after that, but the two patients also received more of the attention they needed. The threat of contagion passed, and Severus' fear eased. When Arthur's red-headed family thronged about his bed without a word to Severus, he staunchly ignored them.

Arthur's eyes turned to him, through the space between his smallest son and one of the twins, but Severus' gaze was fixed proudly on the ceiling. He remembered, but he had been weak. Warmth... An almost forgotten part of him reached for the warm, full, easy comfort of his companion, but that was not for him now and would never be again. He had been delirious.

Author Notes:

With thanks to my kind, thorough and brilliant beta, Slytherinlaurel.

The Saturday Night Drabble prompt from was: "Severus/Arthur, romance, surprising interests." I managed Severus/Arthur engaged in what passes for romance with me but I was unable to work in the 'surprising interests.' I further worked in the additional assistance prompt from Pennfana: "A potions accident and a pair of cursed shoes."