how many years can you hold the weight of the world?

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how many years can you hold the weight of the world?

by dyke

Summary

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>
> The actual first time was the day Haibara died. They'd rushed her to him. She'd been *begged* to heal him. Nanami-kun had never looked more scared. Ieiri hadn't even known where to start. To this day, the memory of his still-warm chest under his hands haunted her. A rib had cracked under her hands. For a moment, she'd thought that her RCT CPR could actually work— but after ten minutes of trying, his condition wouldn't improve.
>
> That was the moment Ieiri realized a fundamental fact about her world. Not *the* world, but specifically her own: no amount of training could actually protect the people she loved.

Shoko tries to kill herself. She's interrupted, and has to actually confront her issues instead drinking them away.

Notes

> TW: onscreen suicide attempt. Like it's the entire first half of the fic. It's not successful but it IS graphic. Take care of yourself

See the end of the work for more notes

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That was the moment Ieiri realized a fundamental fact about her world. Not *the* world, but specifically her own: no amount of training could actually protect the people she loved.

Ieiri knew she could get drunk despite her automatic reverse curse technique. That night when she started drinking, the more she drank, the less stopping felt like a good idea. Geto had told her she'd had too much and carried her back to her room. He didn't know about the vodka she kept hidden.

Turns out, RCT works on alcohol poisoning, if you're too good at it. Oops.

When she woke up, not even hungover, she finally sent in her first application to med school.

The truth was, Ieiri didn't have an accurate count after that. It only seemed like a good idea when she was drunk enough for everything to be hazy. In her ordinary state of mind, Ieiri understood that having someone capable of healing sorcerers was an essential role. It was something that Sober Ieiri was willing to do it. Even if it gave her nightmares. Even if she spent her days underwater, the world cold and out of her reach, her emotions muted and her screams inaudible. None of hat mattered, not when it was Ieiri's misery giving sorcerers another chance to live.

Drunk Ieiri was sick of being selfless.

Over the years, it got less frequent. Partially because Ieiri had realized that there wasn't much she could do that *could* kill her. The better she was at her job? The harder it was for her to die. On the bright side, it was also partially because she'd gotten more to live for. Ieiri had a long-term girlfriend, she loved her friends in med school, and there were sorcerers who'd lived long enough that she could start to get attached. Even if it was numb and sucking her soul away, Ieiri was perfectly capable of tolerating her life.

The last reason was that Iori had convinced Ieiri to quit smoking and to drink less. It had worked for years, and Ieiri was almost confident she could stay off of cigarettes, long-term. That all ended during Shibuya. More then ever, after the last of her friends were dead or captured, after she found out that she and Gojo had failed to even let Geto *die*— After that, who could blame her for spending her days drunk and smoking? Once she reached the point where she scared herself, she'd cut back. It was fine.

Ieiri wasn't allowed to keep going once she wanted to die anymore; those kids needed her. Kugisaki was barely still alive. They were all getting injured in the culling games or still

healing from Shibuya. Since they were going through their days assuming Ieiri could help, who would she be if she didn't? If she gave up too soon?

She couldn't fail them.

It was after Shinjuku, once the survivors were stable and the dead were buried, that Ieiri realized something: they didn't need her anymore. Sukuna and Kenjaku were gone for good. With Gojo gone, there wouldn't be so many dangerous curses. Okkotsu could use reverse cursed technique on other people, meaning Ieiri wasn't one-of-a-kind anymore.

Her best friends were dead. She'd stitched Gojo's cooling body back together, cut open Okkotsu's head, and nearly killed the closest thing she had to a successor. At the time she'd been too numb to feel anything. She sure as hell wasn't numb in the nightmares that appeared every time Ieiri slept.

She saw Okkotsu not wake up. She heard Gojo's voice from his corpse as she mutilated the dead. She saw Okkotsu fail to use reverse cursed technique quickly enough, and die, trapped in a new body. She felt Gojo's brain, squishy and scarred from a decade of constant reverse curse technique, and couldn't get the feeling off of her hand.

In her waking hours, the kids all came in regularly, because they all still had healing injuries.

Okkotsu had confided in her that he had started getting migraines, he had dizzy spells, and there was a constant ringing noise in his ear. Post-concussion syndrome wasn't terribly surprising in these circumstances; it was a miracle he was alive. That didn't matter much, though, not when she could always wonder if she could've helped more. Had she bruised his brain? Would he ever feel fully normal again? What if he developed CTE?

Kugisaki had her first seizure while she was still unconscious. It had been a few days before she'd wake up. Ieiri had noted it as a positive sign: it meant that Kugisaki was recovering enough to have brain activity.

Back when she'd first gotten Kugisaki in her care, she'd realized that surgery would be necessary: her body would surely eventually reject the tissue that Mahito had changed. One of Ieiri's friends in college had become a neurosurgeon, which was a miracle, because there was no way she could be the one to operate on Kugisaki. The pair had figured out how to deal with the brain tissue. The actual, physical damage hadn't changed her brain— Mahito wanted his victims to stay conscious— but the shrinking and bruising had still led to bleeding in her prefrontal cortex. Nitta's technique prevented her brain cells from beginning to die, which gave them a longer timescale to decide what operation to do, but they still couldn't fully fix whatever damage had happened before Nitta made it to Kugisaki. That wasn't even to mention that Ieiri didn't know a plastic surgeon. Even though they'd been lucky that they only had to remove the eye and some of the face around it, the fact remained that Kugisaki woke up hating how she looked.

Maybe if Ieiri was capable of being better than this, she could've helped more. She was so tired of failing people who were depending on her.

Before she went through with anything, Ieiri double checked all of her medical files. There were so many issues with all of them after everything. Her replacement had to give them a high standard of care. The kids deserved it. Kugisaki, Maki, and Okkotsu's were the largest files— but there was still Itadori's depression and physiology. There was still Fushiguro's depression, suicidal tendencies, dissociation, and body dysmorphia. There was all the complications of losing an arm, which Kurusu and Inumaki now knew all too well. Kusakabe and Higuruma were both getting too old to keep up with sorcery the way they used to.

They'd be okay once she was gone, she was sure of it, she just had to… prepare enough. That was it.

Right?

Ieiri had tried plenty of techniques before. Medications or poisons wouldn't work; RCT was much easier on poisons in herself than in others. Really, anything that didn't go for her head would get healed too quickly. If she had a gun, that would be her go-to, but there was really no way to get one that wasn't suspicious.

So, hanging it was.

She'd been so careful. All her appointments were over. He phone was at home, so Iori wouldn't know she was working late. The door was locked. She'd waited until every body from Shinjuku was processed. There was no reason for anyone to be looking for her.

If Ieiri was unconscious, her reverse cursed technique *should* turn off. If it didn't, she was hoping that the injury wouldn't be fixable. With Mahito gone, her only option might be Itadori, and she wouldn't force one of her students to kill her. Not even knowing he was the only one capable of attacking her soul. He was already doing so badly, she couldn't do that to him.

Maybe she could ask Higuruma? He already had enough guilt over killing people, though.

There was a moment where she thought it might actually work.

The floor was hard and cold as it knocked the wind out of her.

…Did she tie it wrong?

"Shoko-sensei." That was… That was Okkotsu's voice. It was shaking. Why was it shaking so much?

"Okkotsu-kun, do you need something?"

"Do *I*—" he sputtered. "What the hell are you doing?"

She head a chair scooch over. It dawned on her, slowly, that Okkotsu had cut the rope, and *that* was why she'd hit the floor. He lifted her onto the char and untied it from her neck, before taking a seat across from her.

Ieiri still couldn't look him in the eyes. Not with them only inches below that line across his forehead. The scar was *her* fault, and he was the one who had to live with it. It was a living memory of what she'd done. Not only to her best friend, but to his star pupil as well. It was Okkotsu's face in every one of her nightmares lately.

Well. In all of the nightmares that didn't involve Geto.

"It became my concern when I found you."

"You've dealt with enough," she argued. "Just leave."

"So you can try again?" It was rare for Okkotsu to get angry. She'd almost forgotten that he could be intimidating. "No."

"Can't you all just let me go already?"

"What?"

How was she even supposed to *begin* to answer that? "Why are you a sorcerer?" She tried to meet his eyes, but her gaze was glued to that scar.

"To help the people I love?"

"So if they all died, would you stay? Do you think they'd even *let* you quit, since you're so powerful?"

"What are you talking about?"

"How many times can you see them get hurt?" she added. "Before you can't take it any more." She wasn't drunk, but she didn't feel sober either. It was so hard for her to care about anything anymore. This wasn't Okkotsu's to worry about, but if he wanted to pry, she didn't have the energy to hold back.

"But we won."

"Did we?" She laughed. "You won. You kids are the ones that are *supposed* to win. You're the future and all that shit. I don't know if I can call what I'm left with *winning*."

"I don't understand," Okkotsu said softly. "We're all hurting. I haven't stopped thinking about what I could've done differently. The way forward is hard to find, but it's still—"

"You can still move on," Ieiri interrupted. "You have each other. You have your whole lives ahead of you. I wouldn't want it any other way." She stared downwards. "I haven't wanted to be alive in ten years, but I've kept doing it, because somebody needs to heal you guys. That wasn't enough to save my loved ones. I *failed*, Okkotsu. Your goal was to stop Sukuna and Kenjaku; mine was to keep people alive, and they died anyway. I'm not a fighter. I'm a doctor. And I risked your life, I desecrated the dead, I could've hurt so many more people than I saved—"

"If that's true, that's something you have to live with. But—"

"I can't, okay?"

"No!" Ieiri blinked. What was he— "You did that for *me*. Because *I* asked you to. If you weren't here, even more of us would've died. You're right, you deserve to leave— but none of that is a reason to die. I'm tired of people I care about being hurt. I'm tired of losing people. You're right that I haven't lost the way you have, but I still know that isn't an excuse for you to throw it all away."

"I'm so tired," she sighed.

"When's the last time you saw a doctor?"

"What?"

"You've been making all of us do therapy. You put Fushiguro on antidepressants. You've told me so many times that the brain can be sick, just like the body, and that's why it's so important for me to tell you about any weird feelings." He crossed his arms. "When's the last time you saw a doctor?"

"I don't—"

"You're depressed," he interrupted. "I mean, it's almost as obvious as it was with Fushiguro. You can't treat your own depression, so you're ignoring it. So it can't get better."

"I'm the doctor here."

"You're a risk to yourself," he frowned. "I don't need a medical license to know that."

She shook her head. "It's too late for me."

"You're not even thirty."

"So? I've seen a lifetime of deaths."

"But that's done now." He put a hand on her arm. "You made it to the other side."

"We don't know that."

"Everyone is healing. I've seen Fushiguro smile. The fight is over. That includes you."

"Really?"

"He really did. If he can get better after all of that, I know there's hope for you."

She stepped back from the implications and examined the scar for what it was: a wound from surgery, which was healing pretty nicely. It still looked nasty, but it *did* look better than the day before.

If she hadn't done what he'd asked, would he have done it anyway, but with worse odds?

Gojo and her had spent the past ten years just surviving. Flashbacks weren't new, these were just worse. There were plenty of future days for Ieiri to die, and maybe, she could humor the kid for a little while. Gojo and Geto weren't going anywhere. Not anymore.

"Fine," she conceded. "I'll call a therapist."

End Notes

Hope you guys liked this! Shoko after Shinjuku is something I've always wanted to explore, as well as her relationship with Yuta. If you liked this, my longfic is centered on Shoko and Nobara, and in the series that this fic is part of! Anyway my tumblr is @just-a-random-dungeon-master, and plz leave a kudos or comment if you liked this (or if it made you feel smth lol)

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!