

"Come on, Nobiko! You can totally nail this one!" chanted her friends, their eyes gleaming with excitement. The gymnasium was packed with eager spectators, all cheering for her. Her heart raced as she took a deep breath, poised to serve the final point in the championship match.

Her opponent, a formidable player from the rival school, gritted her teeth, sweat beading down her forehead. Nobiko's eyes locked onto the ball, the world around her fading into a distant murmur. The gym's lights glinted off the polished surface, casting a mesmerizing pattern of shadows across the floor. She felt the smoothness of the racket in her hand, the weight of it perfectly balanced, a silent ally in her quest for victory.

With a swift, powerful motion, she served

the ball, its fiery arc cutting through the air like a meteor. It smacked against the far corner of the court with a satisfying thwack, leaving the opponent no time to react. The crowd erupted into a frenzy of cheers as the ball bounced out of bounds, sealing Nobiko's triumph. She raised her racket high, her heart swelling with pride. The scoreboard flashed the final tally, 6-0, 6-0, 6-0, and the match was officially hers.

Her friends swarmed her, showering her with hugs and high-fives. Their laughter and congratulations filled the space around her like a warm embrace. Her cheeks flushed with excitement as she took it all in, feeling like she was on top of the world. The rival team's players offered her begrudging nods of respect, which she returned with a graceful smile.

As she thanked Gian and Suneo for pushing her so hard during practice sessions, a peculiar sound reached her ears—soft, muffled sobs. The noise was jarringly out of place amidst the triumphant din. She glanced around, searching for the source, when she spotted something utterly bizarre—an anywhere door standing in the middle of the sidewalk, blinking with a gentle neon glow. The sight of the door was so unexpected that she blinked a few times, wondering if her eyes were playing tricks on her.

Nobiko stepped closer, her curiosity piqued. The door was small, almost child-sized, and led to a place she'd never seen before—a cramped, dimly lit closet. With trembling hands, she pushed it open, and what she saw on the other side made her

heart drop to the pit of her stomach. There, crouched in the corner, was a naked Nobita, his body a canvas of needles. The sight was eerily reminiscent of a twisted version of Asuka from Evangelion, but instead of being a formidable warrior in a giant robot, he was a vulnerable, crying boy.

"Nobita?" she whispered, her voice barely audible over the din of the gym. His shoulders trembled harder at the sound of his name, but he didn't look up. "What happened to you?"

He sniffled, his voice thick with pain. "I was born a boy," he murmured, as if that explained everything. The acupuncture needles glinted in the dim light, an unsettling reminder of his distress. "If I had been born a girl, like you, I could be out there, playing, winning, being...happy."

Nobiko felt a pang of sympathy for the desolate figure before her. She knew that in the real world, Nobita often felt overshadowed by her success. But she never imagined the depth of his despair. "You can still be happy," she said gently, her voice soothing. "Come on, let's get you out of here and get these needles out."

Nobita's head shot up, his eyes brimming with hope and fear. "But if I remove them, you'll disappear," he whispered, his voice quaking. "You're a part of me, my wish to be a girl, to be like you. Without these, there's no reason for you to exist."

Nobiko knelt beside him, her eyes filled with a fierce determination. "I know you're hurting, but this isn't the way," she said, her voice steady despite the lump in her

throat. "You are enough just the way you are, Nobita. You don't need to change for anyone. And if being a boy makes you this sad, then I'll help you find a way to be happy without these needles."

Gently, she began to pluck out the needles that seemed to be causing him the most discomfort, particularly those embedded in his knees and elbows. He winced with each one she removed, but she could see the beginnings of relief etching onto his face. The room grew dimmer as she worked, the light from the gym fading away as if the door was slowly closing. The sound of the ocean grew louder, the scent of saltwater and the promise of a beachside breeze filled the air, as they were transported to the inspired scope of the sunset by the sea.

With each needle, Nobita's sobs grew quieter, his breaths steadier. The tension in his body unfurled like a crumpled paper smoothed by a loving hand. The metallic tang of the needles mingled with the salty air as she laid them aside, creating a stark contrast to the serene beauty of their surroundings. The sun painted the sky with a tapestry of oranges and pinks, the waves crashing rhythmically in the distance.

Finally, the last needle was removed. Nobita looked up at her, his eyes wet but no longer brimming with despair. He took a deep, shaky breath, and a hint of a smile began to play at the corners of his lips. "Thank you, Nobiko," he murmured, his voice raw from crying. "I never knew it could be like this."

Nobiko's heart swelled with affection.

"Remember," she whispered, her hand on his shoulder, "don't give up, okay?" She leaned in to give him a comforting hug, and as she did, she felt herself begin to fade, her form becoming less substantial, like mist in the early morning. He clung to her, his grip tightening, but she pulled away, the glitter of her existence becoming more pronounced as she began to disintegrate into the air.

The warmth of her touch lingered on his skin as he watched in horror, her form breaking apart into a million shimmering pieces. "Nobiko!" he called out, his voice cracking. But she was already gone, leaving him alone on the beach. The final words she had whispered to him echoed in his mind—"諦えないで."

Suddenly, the scene around him grew



blurry, the colors of the sunset smearing into a watercolor dreamscape. The sound of the ocean retreated, replaced by the distant, comforting hum of his own room. He felt the weight of his bed beneath him, the softness of his pillow against his cheek. The scent of the sea lingered, a faint reminder of the comforting embrace of the world that was now slipping away.

Nobita slowly opened his eyes, the light from his bedside lamp piercing the darkness. He was back in reality, the dream of the acupuncture closet and the triumphant Nobiko nothing but a fading memory. His heart was still racing, the emotions of the dream clinging to him like a second skin. He sat up, the sheets tangled around his legs, and took a deep, centering breath.

The echo of Nobiko's encouragement remained, a gentle push against the tides of doubt that often washed over him. He wiped his face, the dampness of his cheeks a stark contrast to the dryness of his eyes. He knew now that he didn't need to change who he was to find happiness. All he had to do was face the world, as himself, and not give up.

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