

"Thank you, Shizuka" said Nobita lethargically "But I don't want a massage right now"

"Pleeeaaaaase? Just let me help you" said Shizuka pleadingly "I can at least play masseuse, how about it?"

Nobita couldn't resist Shizuka's gentle persuasion. After all, she had been nothing but supportive since Fuuko's passing. So, with a sigh, he nodded. The next day, he found himself in Shizuka's room, a place he hadn't visited in a while. She had a mat laid out on her bed, the scent of lavender oil filling the air. She looked at him with a soft smile, and he felt a pang of guilt for not letting anyone in, not even her, who had always been there for him.

With a sense of awkwardness, Nobita agreed to wear only a towel. It was a strange sensation, leaving himself so exposed, especially in front of someone he had a crush on for so long. His cheeks flushed, and he fidgeted as he wrapped the towel around his waist. Shizuka noticed his discomfort and did her best to put him at ease. "Don't worry, I've got this," she assured him, her voice calm and soothing. "It'll be just like we're at the spa, okay?"

He reluctantly laid down on the mat, his eyes avoiding hers. The softness of the bed beneath him was surprisingly comforting. Shizuka took a moment to appreciate the gravity of the situation. She had never seen Nobita so defeated, not even when he was bullied by the likes of Takeshi and Suneo. With a gentle touch, she placed her hands on his shoulders,

and he flinched slightly. "I'm sorry," she whispered, "I'll be careful."

Her thumbs began to work in slow, circular motions, applying gentle pressure to the tense muscles. Nobita took a deep breath, the scent of lavender and the warmth of her hands began to seep into his soul. He felt his shoulders relax slightly, his body responding to the tender care she was giving him. For a moment, he allowed himself to believe that things might just get better.

"Nobita," Shizuka began, her voice barely above a whisper, "are you okay with talking about Fuuko yet?"

Nobita's body tensed under her touch. He had hoped to avoid the topic altogether, but Shizuka's question hung in the air like a

weighted silence. He took a moment before responding, his voice cracking slightly. "I don't know," he admitted, "It still hurts."

Shizuka nodded, understanding. She decided to keep the conversation light, knowing that he needed time to heal. She started to massage his feet, her touch feather-light as she worked her way to his heels. "You know," she said, trying to smile, "you're not too shabby in maths anymore."

Nobita couldn't help but chuckle a little, remembering the countless times she had tutored him. "Thanks to you," he said, his voice a mix of sincerity and pain. The mention of his academic progress was a stark reminder of how much had changed since Fuuko's passing. For a brief moment, the heaviness in the room lifted as they

shared a small, bittersweet memory of their time together.

Shizuka felt a warmth spread through her as she heard his laugh, even if it was just a faint echo of his usual self. She took this as a cue to continue the massage, moving her focus to his ribcage. Her fingers danced over his skin, each stroke deliberate and tender. The gentle pressure and rhythm seemed to soothe not just his muscles but also his soul.

"I learned a new song on the violin," she said, trying to keep the conversation flowing. "It's by Mozart. Do you remember which one it was that you liked?"

Nobita's shoulders slumped as he dejectedly replied, "Mozart? Oh, I don't know. I forgot all about that."

This annoyed Shizuka a little, but she didn't speak, instead moving on to his ankles and thighs. She had hoped that sharing something beautiful, like music, would help him find a semblance of joy. Yet, she understood his pain was a deep-rooted one, and it would take more than a simple massage to lift the veil of sadness that shrouded him. She applied a bit more pressure, her fingers gliding over his skin with a newfound determination to help him relax.

"You know, Nobita, it isn't a walk in the park, it's true" she said, placing almost uncomfortable effort "but I've been able to get used to a lot of things. Gian's views on true adventure, Doraemon's random malfunctions in the face of peril, our animal friends we've had to leave behind

along the way... And... I think that's it"

Yet out of the blue Shizuka removes the towel altogether from Nobita.

"Oh no, I forgot one: YOU walking in on me with that door"

Nobita's eyes shot open in shock and mortification as the towel fell away, exposing him completely. His cheeks burned redder than a sunset. "Shizuka-san!" he squealed, trying to cover himself with his hands.

"Nobita, it's okay," she said, her voice calm yet firm. "I'm almost done. This is about you, not about Fuuko. You need to let go of this tension. Stay still, please."

Nobita nodded, his face buried in the

pillow, his heart racing as Shizuka's hands hovered over his lower back. He felt her warm breath as she leaned closer, and he braced himself for the sensation of her touch on his most sensitive area. When her fingers finally made contact with his glutes, he couldn't help but jolt, a gasp escaping his lips.

"You see," she whispered, her voice filled with gentle understanding, "just like the suddenness of my touch, your feelings for Fuuko are something that you can't ignore. They're a part of you, just like these nerves. You need to accept the shock, let it pass through you, and then breathe."

Nobita's body slowly relaxed under her touch, the tension dissipating like mist in the morning sun. He felt the first tear slip down his cheek, and then another, until he



was openly sobbing into the pillow. "I miss her, Shizuka," he choked out, his voice thick with emotion. "I didn't even know I wanted a daughter, but she was the closest thing to it, and now she's gone."

Shizuka paused her massage, giving him a moment to gather himself. Then, she reached for the towel and gently placed it back over him, her hand lingering for a second on his bare skin before retreating. "It's okay to miss her, Nobita," she murmured, her voice a soothing balm to his aching heart. "You cared for her deeply, and she for you."

Her hands continued their dance over his body, working the last knots of tension from his muscles. The massage had turned into something more than just a physical act of comfort; it was a silent

communication of shared pain and healing. As she finished, she whispered, "But you mustn't forget to live for yourself too."

Nobita nodded, his eyes still squeezed shut. When he finally sat up, he wiped his tears with the back of his hand. He looked at Shizuka, her eyes glistening with unshed tears, and felt a warmth in his chest that hadn't been there in a long time. "Thank you," he said, his voice gruff with emotion. "I don't know what I'd do without you."

"You're welcome, Nobita," she replied, her voice just as thick with feeling. "But remember, you're not alone. We're all here for you." She offered her pinky, and without hesitation, he linked his with hers. They shared a silent promise, a bond that went beyond friendship.

They finished the spa treatment with a cup of warm herbal tea that Shizuka had prepared earlier. The sweetness of the brew contrasted with the bitterness of their conversation, but it brought a hint of comfort to Nobita's parched throat. As they sipped in companionable silence, the setting sun painted the room in soft hues of orange and pink.

Shizuka leaned over and whispered, "Promise me you won't let this sadness consume you. Fuuko wouldn't want that."

Nobita took a deep breath and nodded. "I promise," he murmured. They held onto their pinky promise, their fingers entwined like a lifeline. As they let go, Shizuka hoped that she had reached him, that her words had planted a seed of hope in the barren

field of his grief.

The massage had ended, but the warmth of Shizuka's touch remained, seeped into his very being. As he left her room, the weight on his shoulders felt a bit lighter, the air around him a bit less suffocating. He knew he had a long road ahead, but for the first time in months, he felt like maybe, just maybe, he could take that first step forward.