

Naoto's Chewy Fortune

(Persona 4)

(Girl to chewing gum TF)

"Huff... puff..." Naoto Shirogane gasped as the shadow before her disintegrated into pure nothingness. "Just a few more and I'll unlock a new spell, I know it...!" Rubbing some light sweat off her face, she called Sukuna-Hikona back.

While her friends were busy with their own social lives, the Detective Prince decided to visit the Midnight Channel all by herself, with only a single goal in her mind - training. As much as she loathed to admit it, her investigation of the murder along with the usual stress of studying for exams and such left the persona user with little time to do... well, persona-related stuff. Even if the rest of the Investigation Team was nice enough to not mention it, it didn't take a lot of time to realize... She was slowly falling behind in regards to her battle capability, and with the killer seemingly closer than ever, she couldn't let herself be the weakest link once they actually confronted whatever monster was behind the murders of Inaba.

Naoto might've been desperate, however, she wasn't reckless. Everybody knew that fighting alone in this realm of shadows was a risky thing to do, all the more when their navigator, Rise, wasn't here to support her. And so, before Naoto left for Junes, it was decided that once Rise finished her club activities, she'd go check in on her classmate, which was definitely appreciated if not somewhat infantilizing to the girl.

"I'm almost out of SP, but I can feel it, the power surging inside me! Only a few more mobs left before something new awakens, I'm sure of it! Then I'll be able to stand side by side with Kanji and everyone else without feeling like I'm holding them back!"

And so, the girl took out her flintlock once again, looking for more easy fights inside the dungeon her very own shadow once resided in, finding a ton of comparatively low-level enemies she could defeat with ease, barely even using up her already quite low SP pool. Yet no matter how many she slew, nothing seemed to happen! After the twentieth or so enemy, the girl finally gave up and made her way towards the exit to rest for a moment. Rise should be here in a few minutes, after all! With all her support skills, the detective would finally be able to take on stronger opponents without having to worry about her own safety nearly as much, so the grind should go by much quicker.

...And just as Naoto was about to leave this sci-fi vault behind, something caught her attention. In one of the many winding corridors was a pink, hand-shaped shadow! She knew that shape well, as their ragtag group of persona users had seen and fought *it* many times. A hand, one that always yielded massive rewards when defeated, but quite hard to corner and prone to escapes. *I still have enough to cast a megidola or two, it won't hurt to try as long as I stay vigilant.* The girl pondered.

Perhaps against her better judgment, Naoto decided to come closer to the shadow, Sukuna-Hikona visible behind her, ready to strike at a moment's notice...

And strike it did, as the spell went off in all of its almighty glory, hitting the shadow from behind and...

"H-huh? It... absorbed it?! But Yu always used almighty attacks on these things, so why...? Unless... The pink coloring means it was a tougher version perhaps...?" Naoto tried to puzzle the pieces back together while still keeping her distance. Well, she was completely drained now, and some gunshots most likely weren't enough to take down a shadow of this caliber. It was a shame, but retreating was all she could do - fighting in her current state would only end with her getting needlessly hurt, and playing the role of a damsel in distress was the last thing the girl wanted.

Hoping to simply scurry away, Naoto did just that, but unfortunately... The shadow she just hit seemed to be having none of it! Being quite close to the exit, Naoto decided to simply make a run for it the second she saw the pink monster charging up an attack of some sort. Fortunately, it was just a straight line leading outside the secret lab, and once out of here, she could just use a Goho-M to get to safety.

...Unfortunately, the blue-haired girl not only underestimated the attacking capabilities of the pink shadow, she overestimated her own ability to dodge projectiles while tired out after fighting monsters for the past hour. And sadly... she was just a second too slow to avoid the spell.

At once, her eyesight was filled with pink light as if someone just threw a flashbang grenade where she stood, and the girl lost consciousness.

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Naoto awoke with a dizzying headache.

As the pain slowly weakened, the girl could only ask herself. *What... happened...? Did I make it outside...?*

It certainly didn't feel that way, seeing as she temporarily lost consciousness... In fact, was she even awake right now? It was so dark everywhere!

The detective tried opening her eyes, but was met with a rather concerning realization - they were already open! What's more, she seemingly couldn't get them to close, no matter how hard she tried.

Then... was she simply in a very dark room? No, that wasn't quite right, the darkness was more akin to the feeling of... being blindfolded, maybe? Except it wasn't just her eyes that

were covered, it was as if her whole body was wrapped in some sort of thin layer of paper or something!

Yet somehow, this wasn't the weirdest part about it all. The most unusual and concerning thing was... the shape. *Her* shape. Why did she feel so flat and rectangular?! She couldn't even feel her limbs, as if someone had painlessly taken them away without her noticing... Surely, this was all a dream then, right? Or some sort of psychedelic effect caused by that shadow... Yes, it had to be!

Robbed of her ability to see, Naoto decided to at least try to get a sense for her situation, but that too, proved to be a rather difficult if not completely impossible task. At this point, the girl guessed that she wasn't so lucky after all, and whatever attack that weird, glittery shadow used actually hit her...

Did that mean she was paralyzed then...? Zio skills certainly weren't as pink as this particular attack, but if it was some sort of unique beast, it could have a special spell of some kind that could immobilize its targets all the same.

"Naoto, you here? I used Himiko to scan around, so I know you're somewhere nearby, so just show yourself, or at least give me a shout that you've heard me!" A voice boomed from behind the veil covering the detective's body. It was Rise, she found her! It was a bit scary how powerful her voice now seemed to be, but the seemingly-blindfolded girl chalked it up to some aftereffects of the attack, just like all the other unusual sensations she had felt thus far.

I'm here, Rise! Naoto tried to call out but her words fell silent. Was it because her mouth was paralyzed like the rest of her body? ...No. That train of thought did make sense in the girl's head, but it didn't *feel* nearly as correct. She hated that she even had to question this but... similar to her limbs, it felt as if she didn't even have a mouth anymore! Still, the girl kept wailing in silence, hoping against reason that she'll somehow break through this barrier of silence, or that the spell will start wearing off... Alas, it seemed that luck wasn't on her side this time.

Similarly, the much more vocal shouts of the navigator kept happening over, and over, and over again, the last few leaving the girl audibly out of breath. "Seriously, where did you go...? I *really* don't wanna enter that stupid dungeon, you know?"

Come on, R-Rise, stop playing around! Naoto shouted soundlessly once again. She knew the girl could be a bit more on the ditzy side, but come on! Even if she was covered by something, a human-shaped bag or the like would still stick out like a sore thumb in a place that's only ever inhibited by shadows, wouldn't it?!

"Guh, I just hope she didn't get herself into any trouble... Then again, I'm probably overthinking it. If it were Kanji or Chie, I could see them doing dumb, reckless stuff, but Naoto...? I'm sure she's just... huh?" The brunette's short monologue came to a halt as she noticed something laying on the ground next to the entrance.

"Is that... gum...?"

At this point, Naoto was actually getting somewhat miffed at her friend. *She noticed a tiny sweet but not a literal human being?! Seriously, what's wrong with--?!* Before she could finish the berating of her fellow persona-user, the blue-haired detective was taken by surprise by something she certainly didn't expect - movement! The girl would've been delighted, were it not for one simple but significant problem... the motion wasn't actually caused by her.

The spell hadn't worn off, and neither did she suddenly get back the ability to move for some other reason, no, she was still completely inanimate. It was as if... as if someone picked her up! But that didn't make any sense, Rise didn't even show the slightest of impressions that she actually found her, all she did was talk about some stupid gum and...



Light.

All of a sudden, whatever had been keeping the girl in the dark thus far was no more, and her irises were flooded with the somewhat faint, red gleam that shone from above, revealing something the girl never would've expected - Rise's gigantic, hungry-looking face!

At that moment, a terrifying thought entered Naoto's head. No... surely, it couldn't be, right? It *had* to be a coincidence, it just had to! ...Yet the girl's more calculated side couldn't deny it, in a very roundabout way, that'd explain everything! The flatness, the weirdly rectangular shape and lack of limbs, this overbearing inanimacy, and the fact that Rise seemingly couldn't find her human body...

Naoto knew it sounded childish, impossible even, but... she was currently inside of a TV, using the tamed personification of her very own insecurities to fight shadows, so... in the grand scheme of things, someone becoming an inanimate object didn't sound as silly as it should've.

Did she really become a treat for people like herself to chew on?! No, more importantly, was *she* herself going to end up as such?! Was Rise the kind of person to try out some gum she found on the floor?! Yes, the girl could be a bit of a ditz but... but...

Somehow, Naoto didn't feel as sure about it all as she thought she would've...

"Blue...? Is it mint-flavored...? What's gum even doing here in the first- Wait, it's probably Naoto's!" Rise mused as she looked over the partially-unwrapped sweet in her hand, much to its utter despair. *No! It's not mine, it's literally me! Please, notice that! I beg of you!*

"I wonder if she dropped it while entering... Well, I haven't seen her leave, and I doubt she'd leave on her own without telling me..." Just to be safe, the girl looked over her phone and sure enough, there were no new messages from the detective, and a quick scan from Himiko proved that Naoto was still inside the Midnight Channel. "Guess I'll just wait for her, not like I can enter that dungeon on my own anyways..." The persona-user wrapped the gum back up and pocketed it to give back to its rightful owner later.

And so, both Rise and Naoto spent the next few minutes in silence, both waiting for completely different things. The songstress has never once seen shadows attack outside of dungeons or other, very specific areas, so it should be safe enough to wait for her friend to come back. If, however, the detective was nowhere to be seen after 20 minutes had passed, the girl decided she'd call Yu or someone else to explore together in search of Naoto... all the while the former girl in question wailed in soundless agony, pleading for Rise to notice with zero success... At least until a certain sound echoed through the empty area.

gurgle...

"Guh, I'm so hungry... dumb Naoto, she owes me a snack once she comes back..." Rise pet her revolting belly with a sigh before an idea struck. "Hmm... it's not much, but some sugar might be nice... Not like her world's gonna end cause I took a single stick of gum from her, right? Plus, it's only fair for making me wait so long..."

If Naoto had any blood inside of her new, sugary body, it would've ran cold. S-she was considering it! Her very own friend, classmate, and a trusted ally was considering eating her alive! It was all so wrong on so many levels, yet the detective could do nothing to stop the songstress!

The transformed girl was picked up by the slim, feminine fingers of her still-human friend and soon, she was able the outside world once more as Rise carefully removed her wrapper again, throwing what used to be the girl's clothes to the ground as Naoto herself was promptly flung into a gigantic, gaping cavern of a mouth, landing unceremoniously on Rise's disgustingly wet, soft tongue.

P-please, no! You have to see I'm not just some gum, please! Use your persona's ability to scan and look for my more precise location, please! I can't end up as some girl's- Agck!!

Naoto's words stopped midway through as she felt herself rising up and being moved somewhere more solid before suddenly, her whole body was wrecked by an insurmountable amount of pain. *W-what just-*

And again.

Over and over, the girl's body was being constatly squashed, crushed, reformed, and covered in more and more saliva as Rise's teeth and tongue worked in unison to completely grind the once-human gum into a blue-colored pulp of sugar.

"Thish ish sho gooth! Am sho happy itsh nah actchually mint too... Tastheh fruity..." The girl remarked, painfully oblivious to the silent screams of agony of her former comrade as the very words she was currently saying echoed inside of her mouth through Naoto's very existence, hitting the former-girl like an earthquake.

The screams only increased in intensity with each passing minute of this excruciating torture. It was the worst! Every second felt like hell to the girl who could do nothing except wail in horror while her new form was constantly rearranged into different shapes, sometimes thin, stretched between the songstress' gargantuan fangs, sometimes in a small, sugary clump when the giant's jaw closed.

In between all the torture, there was the slightest window of relative peace as Rise attempted to blow a balloon out of Naoto's new, unwanted form. Sadly, the girl failed miserably in her endeavor, as only a pathetically tiny, blue bubble left her lips. "Guess chewing gum doesn't work like bubble ones do..." She sighed before returning to her routine of tormenting said chewing gum that could only attempt to cry out of her nonexistent sockets as she was soon back inside the giant's maw, forced to endure even more abuse.

Every now and then, the detective would be granted a small peek into the outside world when her unaware torturer was nice enough to open her mouth, but it barely did anything to ease this endless torment, especially when after just a few minutes, the landscape outside began changing. The outside of the Secret Lab soon turned into the yellowish hub, which then led directly to the entrance inside Junes that the gang always used to enter the Midnight Channel and before the girl knew it...

Real world.

Naoto had hoped that maybe leaving this accursed realm of shadows would've turned her back by some sort of divine miracle, but nothing of the sort happened. Instead, Rise just went ahead, paying no mind to what a stick of now shapeless gum was thinking, the thought of the treat not even crossing her mind. After all, why would it?

The former detective couldn't blame her. Up to this point, did *she* ever pay any mind to what her food might've been thinking? Obviously not, the idea itself sounded silly. To everyone in the world, she wasn't a living, breathing, girl anymore, she was just a snack to chew on and to spit out once it lost its flavor. Would that happen to her as well...? No, the question wasn't *if* that grim prediction was going to come true, it was *when* that'd happen. By now, she had to have been completely dry of flavor, right...?

The next few minutes were spent in constant existential fear. She knew it had to happen soon, she knew it! The transformed detective gave a few weak final cries for help before that happened however, not exactly expecting to be heard, but maybe, just maybe...

ptui!

Rise's puffy lips parted and sent the former persona user plummeting towards the gray pavement which she soon reached with an unceremonious, wet splat.

"Stupid Naoto, now I gotta go and call and meet Yu so we can go find her and... Just the... two of us...? I-I guess it's not the worst thing to have happened... Senpai, here I come!" Rise remarked as she picked up the pace while taking out her phone.

A few painfully slow seconds passed and already, the songstress left the sugary sweet's sight, never to reappear again as the gum-which-had-been-Naoto was forced to stare up at the gradually reddening sky of afternoon Inaba.

That was it.

The Detective Prince that was able to crack all those seemingly unsolvable cases was no more, replaced by a spit out, shapeless, gray lump of flavorless gum. Was this really her fate...? *Why me, of all people...*? The former girl started to ponder these questions, but as hours of complete silence went by, this kind of rumination slowly gave way to complete and utter silence. After all, it wasn't like she'd magically turn back, even if she somehow found a way to. Without the ability to move, she had no way to act on any sort of plans, no matter how simple it was to act out.

Soon, the afternoon sun disappeared completely, giving way to evening, night, and then the morning, during which Naoto's already somewhat dried out form was forced to endure a few face-to-face meetings with the soles of all kinds of people living in this town. Workers, little children, even some schoolgirls that she didn't recognize to be any of her still-human friends, none of them not even noticing the fact they stepped on any sort of object, let alone that said object once used to be a proud member of the human race just like them. A person who

wanted to meet again with her friends or, do something as simple as enjoy some ramen while reading a crime thriller, hell, she wanted to at least have her breathing and pulse back!

But no, she would never be able to do these simple, pleasurable things again.

Never More.