

Gonna Be Gone

The rust eats everything. It's not really rust, if I'm talkin' clear, but that's what vills call it. I guess it's what I call it too, if you're askin'. It's red, dusty, and grabs on to everything it touches like a dog on a corpse. If it gets on your skin, you're deadgone. No comebacks from the rust. If it gets in your lungs you won't even be able to worry about dyin', you'll be gone before you take your first breath. I guess it's a better way to go than most, quick-like at least. I'll probably go that way.

The rust covers the tile of the floor I'm lying on. I think it used to be some vill's kitchen or somethin'. The tiles look red-orange, but they coulda been any color before the Turn. I can feel their sharp edges scratching my suit. I look up at my boots, far away through the misty window of my mask. They look red-orange too. I've been runnin' rust to rust so long I forget what color they're supposed to be.

The whole world ain't covered in rust. It pops up in patches now and again, no one knows how or why. Sometimes in the Empty Spaces where it can't hurt no one, but sometimes in the cities. This one used to be a vill-town, full of hopeful farmers just trying to go back to the before-times. They cleared out or died when the rust came, just like all of 'em.

'Cept me, I guess.

I got this suit that works mostly, rubber with good seals. Rough around the edges a bit where time takes its toll but I learned from the first suit how to fix 'em good enough. Lost my hand when I didn't do it right. Rust ate right through and I had to cut it off so it wouldn't spread. Now I got one hand and a new suit I pulled out of some rubble used to be a sick-place. I don't remember where the first suit came from. Don't remember much before the rust.

I go out in the rust where no one else goes and I take what I can. Most stuff's gone to the

rust, but some things can be saved n taken. It's safe in the rust, too, if you got a suit. No hunters out here. I can sleep without settin' up a dozen traps in my sleepin-place. I don't, course. Traps is good.

There's something moving in the rust.

I'm not sure why I bring that up. Guess it seemed like something you should know. I first saw it a few days ago. Shaped like a person, mostly, so I hid from it. People will kill ya. Weapons don't hold up in the rust and I'm only good at hand-fights from surprise. The thing never showed up. When I nerved up to peek out, it wasn't around any more.

Saw it yesterday too. Same place, same distance – like it's movin' back n forth instead of towards something. Like it's pacing? Could be some sort of animal – it'll die soon enough if it is, poor thing. I've found too many rust-eaten animals in my time. Chewed up like billions of bugs wanted a crack at its guts.

Wait. I'm upside down so I can't be sure. Let me... right. Yeah, there it is again. Same place. Maybe I should just go see what it is. It'll drive me nutso at this rate. I got everything worth getting out this rust anyways. Time to go to the next. Wish I had a beat-stick at least.

The used-to-be-vill-town melts around me, slow but certain. Roof-tops have crumbled into old bedrooms, nurseries, doors turned to dust and blown away in the face of the rust. The street, pretty sure it used to be black-tar, is nothin' but shards of red stone under my feet, crunchin' like gravel as I walk through the neighborhood. The sun tries to shine through the rust, small showers of sun-rays cut through at points but the rust wins. It always wins.

You know that, though. Wait. You know that, right?

I stop in the road, the shadow of the person far in the distance – like I got no closer in my walk. It's stopped moving now.

Who are you? Why am I talking to you? Are you... here?

I don't know why... this is dumb-talk, right? I can't tell if you're here or not or who you are. Rust don't cut your mind like that though. It'll take your skin but not your headspace, I'm most sure. You're sort of, shit what's that word... cloud-like, I guess? That's not the word I thought, but it's near to it at least.

The shadow seems like it's more 'portant though. I'm thinkin' it sees us. Me. Too late to turn back now – I force my feet to start moving again. The road feels like sand under my boots.

I think it's walking towards me now. It's definitely a person.

I think... I should tell you who I am. Someone should know. Well, I want someone to know. Should ain't much these days, yeah?

My name is Gonna and I'm a scavenger – always have been, least as long as I know. Don't remember my people or where I got the name. Don't remember where I'm from or how old I am.

Am I talking out loud? You understand me, yeah? Do you think the shadow hears me? You're real quiet, yeah? Not even a word for me?

My name is Gonna and I've been alone as long as I can remember. Vills don't wanna be around a scavenger whose gone to the rust. Think it's contagious or something. Maybe it is! Hunters I stay away from my own self. They turn on each other like animals when the pickings get slim. The rust makes sure all the pickings are slim.

My name is Gonna and... listen, I know you don't owe me shit but I gotta know if you're really there. Just, say something? Maybe your name? I just don't remember where you came from.

Wait! Sorry to cut you off. Think I heard the shadow say something. Hunters sometimes

talk to draw out their prey – can't just trust words. Godshit! I wish I had a beat-stick!

I think... I should be able to see its face by now. Is it wearing a suit like me? It's so close now. Do you see it? Please tell me if you can, I can't...

Can't do this one alone. Please don't leave me now.

Hello?