



## We All Fall Down

By Eric Walters

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A novel from one of the country's most prolific and popular YA authors, this book, set in New York City on September 11th, shows us how the experiences of that day profoundly changed one teen's life and relationships.

Today is September 10, 2001, and Will, a grade nine student, is spending the day at his father's workplace tomorrow. As part of a school assignment, all the students in his class will be going to their parents tomorrow, but Will isn't excited about it—he'd rather sleep in and do nothing with his friends. His father doesn't even have an exciting job like his best friend James's father who is a fireman. Will's dad works for an international trading company and has to wake up early every morning to commute to his office on the eighty-fifth floor in the south building of the World Trade Center in Manhattan. Will doesn't see his father very often because of the hours he puts in at the office. He doubts that his dad will bother making time for him tomorrow even when they are supposed to be spending the day together.

In this fast-paced and dramatic new novel by bestselling author Eric Walters, Will discovers a new side of his father during an event that continues to affect the world. As Will's new teacher says, tomorrow "might be an experience that changes your entire life."

*From the Trade Paperback edition.*

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## **We All Fall Down** By Eric Walters Bibliography

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## Editorial Review

### Review

"Realistic, frightening, and heartbreaking.... A novel that is compelling and emotionally wringing."--*Quill & Quire*

### Praise for Eric Walters

"Eric Walters is a classic storyteller. His award-winning novels are smooth, clean reads that put ordinary kids in extraordinary situations. . . . Highly Recommended." --*CM Magazine*

"Vintage Walters . . . the adventure just doesn't stop." --*Canlitforkids.com*

### About the Author

Eric Walters, a former elementary-school teacher, began writing as a way to encourage his students to become more enthusiastic about literature. His many works include **Camp X**, **Royal Ransom**, and **Run**. His novels have won numerous awards including the Silver Birch, Blue Heron, Red Maple, Snow Willow and Ruth Schwartz awards and have received honours from the Canadian Library Association Book of the Year and UNESCO's international award for Literature in Service of Tolerance. He lives in Mississauga, Ontario.

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### Chapter One

"Okay, everybody, let's settle down and get to work!" Mrs. Phelps, my history teacher, yelled out over the din of the class.

Slowly, reluctantly, people ended their conversations and shuffled to their seats. Monday morning at 8:30 was not a great time to do anything except sleep. Up until last week, that's what I *was* doing at this time. I still couldn't believe how fast the summer holidays had gone by.

While there were no assigned seats I slipped into my usual spot, like everybody else. It was amazing how quickly – within a few days – everybody had fallen into predictable patterns. Not that I was complaining, because I had a good seat – not by the front, but not in the very back row, either. Teachers always kept a close eye on anybody who sat in the last row. On my left-hand side was my best friend, James. Beside him, clearly visible as I innocently looked in his direction to talk, was a girl who had lots of cleavage, wore little tiny tops and had a tendency to bend over a lot to get things out of the pack underneath her desk. Actually, this was a *very* good seat.

"You'll have to excuse me if I still don't know all of your names," Mrs. Phelps said.

I figured her not knowing mine was still a plus.

"I have four grade nine history classes this semester, so that's over one hundred students who are new to the school and new to me."

I didn't know Mrs. Phelps very well yet, but I liked her. She was interested in her students, but not too

interested. And she seemed to take her job seriously, but not too seriously. She wore a wedding ring, and there were pictures of a couple of kids on her desk. That meant she had a life beyond history. Teachers who lived for their subject could really make their students' lives miserable.

This school was so much bigger than my old school. It was hard to go from being the big guys in grade eight to being the little kids in grade nine. High school was like a whole different world – a world inhabited by thousands and thousands of kids I didn't know, all of whom seemed a whole lot bigger than me. Thank goodness almost all of my class from the old school had made the transfer, so I knew lots of people already. Actually, people like James I'd known since *Kindergarten*. Good old James. I looked over and past him to that girl . . . wow . . . maybe there was nothing wrong with getting to know new people, either.

"I'm going to recite a line of poetry and I want you all to say the next line."

There was an audible grumbling and I turned to James to ask if I'd missed a poem in the assigned reading. Suddenly my attention was caught as that girl slowly reached underneath the desk for her history textbook. My mouth dropped open and I tried not to stare . . . I wondered if she was doing that by accident or if it was a very deliberate thing meant to drive boys – to drive *me* – crazy.

"*Ring around the rosie!*" Mrs. Phelps sang out.

"*A pocket full of posies,*" most of us chanted back after a slight hesitation.

"*Ashes, ashes,*" she continued.

"*We all fall down,*" we all said, finishing the rhyme.

"Excellent! So you all know that poem."

"Poem? Isn't that like a nursery rhyme?" somebody asked.

"Rhyme, as in poem," Mrs. Phelps replied. "Since this is a history class, can anybody tell me the *history* of this verse?"

"I think my mother taught it to me, so it must be pretty old," a girl said.

I realized that with the exception of a few kids in the class it wasn't just Mrs. Phelps who didn't know people's names.

"It *is* very old. Even older than your mother or grandmother, or great-grandmother," Mrs. Phelps said.

"And it's English, right?" a second girl said – or really asked.

"Old English. Very old. This poem is believed to be somewhere between six and seven hundred years old."

That surprised me, and judging from the looks and murmurs from the rest of the class I wasn't alone.

"Does anybody know what this verse means?"

"It's something kids say when they play games or skip," the first girl replied.

“Yeah, they played a lot of games back then because they didn’t have TV or radios or even video games,” a guy added. “All they had was, like, rocks . . . I think that’s why they called it the Stone Age.”

“Actually, the time frame when that verse was written is most commonly called the Dark Ages, but you’re correct, they didn’t have anything that we would consider modern,” Mrs. Phelps said.

I was impressed by how gently she’d said that, instead of just telling him that he was stupid.

“And the rhyme became popular because of the absence of some other modern amenities . . . primarily health care, medicine and proper sanitation. Many people believe that the poem that you all knew and recited is about the bubonic plague, about the Black Death.”

James leaned over and gave me a little nudge. “Black Death . . . how about that for a name for the group?” he whispered.

I shook my head. We weren’t black, and I was seriously hoping that nobody would die. James played guitar and I played bass and saxophone. We’d been jamming with a couple of other guys in James’s garage, and we were trying to come up with a name for our band.

“I’ll translate the poem for you,” Mrs. Phelps said. “The first line, *Ring around the rosie*, refers to the rose-colored discoloration of the skin and flesh caused by the plague. The skin turns purple and then black, most often in the extremities . . . fingers, toes and, in males, the genitalia.”

I felt a shudder go up my spine as an audible groan came from the males in the room. Somehow that last part seemed a lot worse than your fingers and toes changing color.

*From the Trade Paperback edition.*

## **Users Review**

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