

We All Fall Down

Tale One of Doore's Despair

by Michael J. Allen

Jacob Taverner awoke from his rest early in the morn. Sleep clung on in his eyes. A sudden chill, as if someone walking upon his grave, gripped him as he stood. With a mighty stretch, he fought to shake the ill sensation away and revive himself for the day's labors. His preparations were a blur. Before he knew it, he was outside and following his feet into town. Jacob glanced down at his reflection in a cool meandering stream, verifying he had not reversed any garments in his half waken state.

Jacob was not a small man. Grey streaks in his chopped brown hair and beard did nothing to diminish his presence, but lent him a solemn dignity, unmarred by the constant twinkle in his eyes. His nose was great and rounded and to the unending amusement of the village children did a convincing imitation of a braying mule when blown. All in all he presented a dignified if imposing figure to his inn's patrons.

His clothes were simple but clean, kept so by the leather apron he wore as he tended his guests. Upon his left foot, the sole of his boot flapped with each step, but his boot stubbornly clung to it, preventing its escape. Jacob grimaced at it and reminded himself once again to have it repaired when he had the time.

He crossed the old wooden bridge into the small town of Folksham. He stepped from the bridge, wary of loose cobbles. A few rocked under his feet. His eyes trailed to the left, as they always did, to the remains of an old house.

To an outsider it appeared unremarkable. To Jacob, it was a grim reminder of his Folksham's darkened past. Empty windows, their panes long gone, peered like soulless eyes into the street. A neglected picket fence bared broken teeth at passersby. The small sign upon the house's door declared it and its owner, now deceased, as infected with the Black Death. Every morning, the house drew his gaze against his will. Jacob frowned, shook his head and forced the dark memories from his thoughts.

An old woman stood on the street in front of the house, staring dolefully at the old place. Her periwinkle blue dress rustled in the morning breeze.

"Been over twenty years since the last case of the death," Jacob said. "Yet this old house is still empty."

Overhead, a crow cawed a raucous greeting. Both turned to follow its flight. It fluttered onto a high branch in the towering oak, standing sentinel over the abandoned house.

"It is a shame," Jacob continued. "I hear there are villages down south that are totally empty. No one dares live there even after all this time. Still scared, I think, but who can blame them?"

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