

## *Sweet Bells Jangled*

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### PRELIBATORY

Gladdest of all is he who gives,  
    Discovering that his gift hath grace,  
For passeth straight into his heart  
    The joy of the receiver's face.

If I could lift to longing lips  
    A beaker filled with drink divine,  
Or sing to yearning ears a song  
    That should be welcomer than wine,—

I should not blush to lift my voice  
    And bid each passer to my side;  
Nor, since I come unheralded,  
    Shrink back, lest favor be denied.

But I have brought a little thing,  
    And I am doubtful of its worth,  
And, at the last, am half afraid  
    To show its nature clearly forth.

And if, despite my long delay,  
    I only cheat expectant eyes,  
And you should give me formal words,  
    Not glad, enthusiastic cries,—

Ah! lay it honestly aside;  
    And I shall see my great mistake,  
But, knowing my intent was sound,  
    I shall be patient for its sake!

Yet here and there a pensive smile,  
 Or, dearer, an impulsive sigh,  
 Shall pay me for the slights of those  
 Who throw my offering idly by.

And haply, if a tear should fall  
 Where some of mine have dropped before,  
 Then I shall know one heart, at least,  
 Has heard me knocking at the door.

But who will rise to let me in?  
 And shall I be a welcome guest?  
 A comrade and interpreter,  
 When all my errand is confest?

I turn the key, I lift the lid,  
 I lay the casket on the sill,  
 And, wistful, linger at the door  
 To know the tenor of your will.

## SWEET BELLS JANGLED\*

### I.

#### A GIRL'S SUBTERFUGES

“Wilt thou be an ancient maiden?”  
 Say the matrons unto me;  
 “Wilt thou have no chubby children,  
 Clinging fondly to thy knee?”  
 “Ruddy matrons! happy mothers!  
 What are children unto me?”

“Will thou live alone forever?”  
 Say the matrons unto me.  
 Light I answer: “Who is single  
 Should be ever blithe and free.

\*Numerous segments of this poem were also published separately in periodicals like *Galaxy*, *Atlantic*, *Appleton's Journal*, *Heartb and Home*, and *Harper's*.

Sober matrons! thoughtful mothers!  
Liberty is sweet to me!"

"Youth is scornful in the sunshine,"  
Say the matrons unto me.  
"Drop thy kerchief, boastful beauty!  
While thine eye is bright of blee,  
Age is lurking in the shadow,  
Age is creeping up to thee!"

And I answer, lightly laughing,  
What the matrons say to me:  
"I am given to Diana,—  
To the huntress, fair and free,—  
And the lumpy, lovesick Venus  
Hath no follower in me!"

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I am nineteen to-day. I'm growing old.  
I saw the merest phantom of a wrinkle  
Between my brows this morning. Mother says  
It is because I pore above my books  
So late of nights; and Mother does not like  
To have me different from other girls,  
Except that I should show the freshest face,  
The prettiest dresses, and the readiest smile.  
And ah! how shocked she would be, if she knew  
That I write poems sometimes,—nay, not poems,  
But wretched verses; that I've even dared  
To publish some of them. I signed them "Faith,"  
And never was so flurried in my life,  
Nor so exultant, as when first I saw  
My rhymes—my very own—in black and white  
For all the world to read; and not a soul  
Had even the least suspicion they were mine!  
I hardly know what I would like to be;  
But then it is so grand to be a poet!  
If I might be one! "God! how Art is long!"  
Great Goethe says, and at his words I shudder;  
For I have done no more than play at work.

Can I do more? Can I stand all alone?  
 I do not know, and there are none to help me.  
 If Mother saw me musing, she would say  
 Something in substance very much like this:  
 "Go to your music!" or, "Go take a walk!  
 I hate to see you moping. It is bad  
 For any girl's complexion. Do you know  
 That Edward Mason marries Mary Grey?  
 And she will wear white satin and real lace!  
 And you left school a year before she did,  
 And might have had him." Yes, that is the way!  
 Leave school, get married, (just as well be buried!)  
 Have a fine house, and get one's life crushed out  
 In caring for it. Dust on the piano,—  
 And no book opened,—never time to think!  
 Then the babies come!—Is that wan woman there  
 The merry, pink-cheeked girl I used to know?  
 She dies at forty years, or thereabouts,  
 And fades from memory as she fades from sight.  
 What has she done but drag herself through life?  
 And Mother wants that I should be like this!

## II.

I'm sick of hearing so much about love!  
 I can't take up a magazine or journal  
 But 't is the same old story,— Love! Love! Love!  
 Whether in poem, prose, essay, or tale;  
 And all my music's set to silly words.  
 There's too much harping on this same old string,  
 I'm tired of listening to it every day.  
 The boys and girls can talk of nothing else;  
 And 'tis the same with grown-up men and women.  
 I used to like such stuff when I was callow,  
 But now it palls upon me when I think  
 There are so many other things to talk of,  
 So many other things to think about,  
 So many more to pray for, do, and suffer!  
 And—the stupidest of all!—if any woman  
 Dares call a man her friend, and treat him so,  
 Straightway around her rises a great babbling;

And all the babbling is of—Love! Love! Love!  
Now, Clarence Dale has been my friend a year.  
We've read together, walked and talked together;  
Both understanding that we were but friends.  
He's all friend that I have ever had.  
(I have no fancy for fine school-girl frenzies.)  
Older than me he is, by several years;  
Wiser than me he is, beyond compare.  
He has the answers for my questionings;  
He helps me solve my problems, lets me lean  
Upon his strength, and does not like me less  
Because I am unlike other girls.  
He smiles—a little sadly—when I talk  
Of the grand things that I would like to do,  
But says a man should never try to hinder  
A woman in her climbing,—rather help her.  
Ah, how I bless and honor him for that!  
How proud I am to have him for my friend!  
And then to think that they should dare to talk  
Of anything like Love 'twixt him and me,—  
I can't endure to think of it a moment!

### III.

#### HIS PICTURE OF HER.

She carries heaven wherever she goes;  
An angel with hidden wings,—  
She's sphered about with a sweet repose  
That touches surrounding things.

You cannot look in her bonny eyes  
But your thought will warm and stir  
With a thankful thrill, in its glad surprise,  
For the beauty born with her.

She's the mate of all that is sweet and pure,—  
The birds, the stars, and the flowers,—  
Her touch is delight, and her kiss a cure,  
In this briery world of ours!

There's a light that lieth upon her grace,  
Like the sun on far blue seas;

And her voice is as tender as her face,  
And like the harp of the breeze;

And tender as either of the twain  
Her shapely and supple hand,  
The soother and sweetener of pain,  
And the lily of all the land!

O, under her feet the roses bloom,  
Where only were thorns of yore!  
She's so bright that the shadow finds no room  
Where all was so dark before!

Till by Heartsease sown in this wilderness  
We reckon her years' increase;  
For she knows the ways of Pleasantness,  
And finds the paths of Peace!

#### IV.

Sitting alone to-day, there came to me  
A thought that vexed me, like a flitting shadow  
That comes between us and the sun. It was,  
"When Clarence marries, what becomes of me?"  
I shall not marry; but can I expect  
That he will keep like singleness of soul?  
They say fair faces wile men's hearts away.  
And yet I cannot think of him as married  
Without a twinge of pain,—I am so selfish!

#### V.

##### TRANSFORMATION.

"But then you take my friend from me!"  
She looked into his eyes;  
The shy, awakening womanhood  
Grown bolder from surprise.

"Who finds a lover needs must lose  
A friend, however tried!"  
"Choose you the lover or the friend!"  
His deeper voice replied.

The shadow of some coming pain,  
Of some mysterious ill,  
Hung round her young, uncertain soul,  
And made her falter still.

Ah! sweeter far to droop and dream  
Above a love untold  
And vaguely guessed, than when we count  
What we may have and hold!

But this faint, lingering, strange regret  
Her woman's heart construed  
Into a longing for the ties  
Of Friendship's graver mood.

"Ah! let me keep my friend," she cried,  
"Whose gently guiding hand  
Subdues my griefs and plans my joys,  
With such serene command!"

"Mine is a man's impulse, and you  
Are wiser in your way,  
And cooler in your blood; but I  
No medium course essay.

"Our lives must blend, or we must part,—  
That fiat lies with you!"  
She could not say, "Depart from me!"  
For all that she could do.

"But I? I give you all," she cried;  
"My life, my love, my soul;  
The surety of my happiness  
Goes into your control!"

An answering look, a clasping arm,  
A passionate caress,—  
Man's old reply to woman's words,  
Nor yet believed the less!

## VI.

He left me, slightly vexed, because  
 I made him promise not to tell,—  
 At least to wait till we should see  
 If all would work together well.

Because my mother does not dream  
 That we have thought of such a thing;  
 Not even though she saw to-day  
 Upon my hand another ring.

It is not what would please her best,  
 And I must try to smooth the way;  
 And I must have some little time  
 To think of fitting words to say.

## VII.

## FOUND

Sitting together only yester-even,  
 A hush fell on us with the deepening gloom;  
 To me it seemed as if the peace of heaven  
 Descended with the twilight in the room.  
 You drew my head down to your sheltering bosom,  
 And kissed the brow, so stirless in its calm;  
 And then my passionate thought burst into blossom  
 On glowing lips: "Unworthy though I am,  
 Love me, Beloved!"

The charmed world may lay her hand in blessing  
 Upon my young head's waves of sunny brown;  
 But I shall sigh for tenderer caressing,  
 And Love must plait the laurels for my crown.  
 If up the heights where gleams the golden glory  
 Of royal souls my woman's feet should go,  
 Think not these lips could then forget the story  
 Now gushing from my wild heart's overflow:  
 "Love me, Beloved!"

No, no! If in the clamor of glad voices  
 Blending my name with high, exultant song,

I missed the tone that most my heart rejoices,—  
The very sweetest singer in the throng,—  
I would not care to listen any longer;  
You are all grace and melody to me;  
And, leaning on your life, my life grows stronger,  
Your strength shall nerve me for Eternity.

Love me, Beloved!

How tenderly you meet the mute appealing  
Of eyes that ever seek to read your own.  
This clinging trust—this wild excess of feeling—  
But, dearest, I have been so long alone!  
Henceforth there is no good beyond my grasping,  
No splendor that my earth-life may not take;  
The passionate heart which to your own you're clasping  
Is henceforth sacred for your princely sake.

Love me, Beloved!

### VIII.

I have been poring over some old papers;  
Some of my earliest writings,—school-girl things,—  
And found this page, which reads like prophecy  
In the full light that Love casts on to-day.  
When I concluded to devote my life  
To writing poems and to studying Greek,  
I burnt a copy of it,—called it callow,—  
And did not know that I had kept this one.

### AVE CÆSAR.

How shall I know thee when thou comest, my King,  
Seeing that thou wearest not thy crown abroad,  
Seeing that thou sendest me no token-ring,  
And that no mark is on thy forehead set?  
Ah! I shall know thee as my heart knows God!  
And I affirm that thou art all for me,  
As I thy queen and subject am for thee,  
If that thou be not wrongly captive led  
By any other woman's luring smile,  
Nor lay on any other heart thy head;  
If thou canst live thy life apart awhile,

Waiting to have it perfected by mine;  
 If so be thou canst bear this long, sharp cark  
 Which eats my heart as it consumeth thine,  
 While I go groping vainly in the dark,  
 Hoping to touch thy hand and find thee out,  
 And by thy love be robed and wrapped about,  
 And crying like a newly orphaned child  
 Because I do not grasp thee anywhere.  
 Or like to one who is in sleep beguiled;  
 For ah! in dreams what will not fancy dare?  
 Be true to me, as to thyself thou'rt true!  
 Be true to me as I am true to thee!  
 Keep sacred all thy tender ways for me;  
 Keep the caresses of thine eyes for me,  
 And every thrilling hand-clasp, till I come,  
 Like one who staggers wearied toward home,  
 To hold my unkissed face up unto thine,  
 To feel thy strong life passing into mine,  
 Making me likewise strong, until my feet,  
 Like to my heart's responsive, steady beat,  
 Keep firm and even step beside thine own;  
 And we walk on together through the world—  
 Never, ah! never more to be alone—  
 With faces like unto the face of him  
 Whose life was haunted by a dream of treasure,  
 Which he went searching for throughout the earth,  
 Holding all lighter things of little worth,  
 Until at last he found it, one glad day,  
 Which it made sweeter than all flowers of May,  
 And took it up, and went his way with pleasure!

## IX.

## AN IDYL OF THE EARLY SPRING

Oh! Clear and calm and open as  
     The forehead of a sleeping child,  
 And blue and cool and far away,  
     The April heaven o'er me smiled!  
 The violets from their low, green homes  
     Peeped up, and patterned by its hue;  
 "We will be like the sky," they said,  
     "Forever pure, forever blue!"

Dropped through the branches of the beech,—  
    Unleaved and sear from wintry stress,—  
The fervid kisses of the sun  
    Recalled the earth to blessedness.  
And, startled from her long, white trance,  
    Abashed and scanty clad she lay;  
Meanwhile the robin's glancing breast  
    Gave life and gladness to the day.

And where the creeping wintergreen  
    Its fruit in coral broidery weaves,  
I found the shy arbutus hid  
    Beneath the crisp and russet leaves.  
The fair patrician of the woods!  
    Their daintiest treasure,—pink and white!  
As balmy as the myrtle flower  
    That sweetens the Italian night.

The vagrant brightness of the days  
    Had coaxed a freshness to the moss;  
And many a brown and naked stretch  
    By maple blooms was blown across.  
Like swarms of tiny winged things,  
    Clinging to branches bare and high,  
Their tender scarlet clusters shone  
    Against the blueness of the sky.

There were mysterious gleams of white  
    Among the hollows, lying low,  
Drooped over by dusk evergreens,—  
    But I could laugh at April snow.  
I knew its fostering mantle hid  
    The darlings of the coming May,  
When constant Nature should fulfil  
    Her premonitions of to-day.

And sudden, silver sweet, I heard  
    A bluebird singing in the hedge;  
Near by a venturous wood-flower sunned  
    Its whiteness on a mossy ledge.

Therefore I could no longer doubt,—  
 So much was plain to eye and ear,—  
 And thrilled with sudden joy, I cried,  
 “The Spring, the pleasant Spring, is here!”

“But such a brightness never shone  
 On hill and dale and stream before,—  
 Or else my eyes were strangely dull,  
 And could not see so well of yore!”  
 That rogue, the bluebird, as I spoke,  
 Proclaimed my secret far and near;  
 Out of his merry heart he sang:  
 “Be glad! For Love and Spring are here!”

## X.

This used to be a problem unto me:  
 Can woman's life hold Art and Love together?  
 And now I know it can! Not one heart only,  
 But one soul and one mind are shared between us!

## XI.

I stood at early dawn beside my window,  
 So glad! so glad! His ring was on my hand,—  
 I could not sleep for the joy of feeling it,—  
 I leant out to the dim and dewy day,  
 And heard the first faint sounds of waking birds;  
 And saw the hills in shadow, and the deeps—  
 The blue, unsounded deeps—of restful skies  
 Unsunned above me. Then to me a voice—  
 A timid voice afraid of its own self,  
 A voice that snag the sorrow of a heart  
 That could not choose but suffer—floated up.  
 I caught the song, but could not see the singer.

## XII.

## A GIRL'S AFTER-SINGING

When I was a wee white maiden,  
 I was my mother's delight;  
 She plaited my yellow tresses,  
 And she cuddled me close at night.

But once I woke in her clasping,  
And felt that her arms were chill;  
And they took me away from my mother,  
Because she lay so still.  
The buttercups shine in the meadow,  
And her grave is wet with dew;  
A sparrow is chirping near it,  
Alas! what shall I do?

Love came, and sought me, and found me!  
He entreated me passing fair;  
It was for him that I braided  
The jessamine into my hair.  
He pelted me once with a rosebud;  
When I stooped to where it lay,  
He departed, and only left me  
The flower that he flung away,  
The bloom is all over the orchard,  
While I sit here and sew;  
So sorry for sweet Love's going,  
Alas! what shall I do?

Pale Christ! I'll put thy betrayal  
'Twixt me and my miseries twain;  
Thou wert forsaken,—and I am  
A motherless creature in pain!  
Dear God! I will take thy pity,  
And wrap it about my life;  
O, let me be thy little one,  
Since I'll be no man's wife!

### XIII.

And it is well that I had wit  
To counsel silence and delay;  
And he has owned that I was right,  
And things have proved it so to-day.

It is his father's wish that he  
Should spend abroad at least a year,  
Before he settles gravely down  
Into a well-worn office-chair.

His cousin—he is Clarence too—  
 (I always quiver at the name;  
 And never can remember that  
 So many others have the same!)

His cousin makes the tour with him;  
 But then he says that *we* shall go  
 When we are married; then he kissed  
 Away the sudden overflow

Of rebel tears that would not wait  
 Till I should find myself alone;  
 I thinking that he would be gone  
 Till next year's clematis was blown!

I know that all his friends would think  
 He would be wiser to go free;  
 And if the thing were known, he says  
 'Twould make a tedious time for me.

He will not have me set apart  
 Like pictures placarded as "Sold";  
 He is not jealous of the state  
 My unclaimed maidenhood can hold.

And guessing some of her designs,  
 I sadly fear my mother's frown,  
 Since Robert Graeme has fancied me,—  
 For he's the richest man in town.

#### XIV.

##### BENEDICTION.

Good by, good by, my dearest!  
 My bravest and my rarest!  
 I bless thee with a blessing meet  
 For all thy manly worth.  
 Good by, good by, my treasure!  
 My only pride and pleasure!  
 I bless thee with the strength of love  
 Before I send thee forth.

Mine own! I fear to bless thee,  
I hardly dare caress thee,  
Because I love thee with a love  
    That overgrows my life;  
And as the time gets longer  
Its tender throbs grow stronger:  
My maiden troth but waits to be  
    The fondness of the wife.

Alas! alas! my dearest,  
The look of pain thou wearest!  
The kisses thou dost bend to give  
    Are parting ones to-day!  
Thy sheltering arms are round me,  
But the cruel pain hath found me.  
What shall I do with all this love  
    When thou are gone away?

Ah, well! One poor endeavor  
Shall nerve me while we sever;  
I will not fret my hero's heart  
    With piteous sobs and tears.  
I send thee forth, my dearest,  
My truest and my rarest,  
And yield thee to the keep of Him  
    Who blessed our happier years.

Once more good-by! and bless thee!  
My faltering lips caress thee.  
When shall I feel thy hand again  
    Go kindly o'er my hair?  
Let the dear arms that fold me  
One last sweet moment hold me;  
In life or death our love shall be  
    No weaker for the wear!

### XV.

Gone for a year and a day!  
I am like a bird that guards the empty nest,  
And flutters in and out, and cannot rest,—  
Gone for a year and a day!

## XVI.

## DRIFTING APART.

Out of sight of the heated land,  
Over the breezy sea;  
Into the reach of the solemn mist,  
Quietly drifted we.

The sky was blue as a baby's eye  
When it falleth apart in sleep,  
And soft as the touch of its wandering hand,  
The swell of the peaceful deep.

Hovered all day in our sluggish wake  
The wonderful petrel's wing,—  
Following, following, ever afar,  
Like the love of a human thing.

The day crept out at the purple west,  
Dowered with glories rare;  
Never a sight and never a sound  
To startle the dreamy air.

The mist behind me and the mist before,  
But light in the purple west,  
Until we wearied to turn aside  
And drift to its haunted rest.

But the mist was behind; and the mist before  
Rose up like a changeless fate;  
And we turned our faces toward the dark,  
And drearily said, "Too late!"

So, with foreheads fronting the far-off south,  
We drifted into the mist,  
Turning away from the glorious west's  
Purple and amethyst.

For the sea and the sky met everywhere,  
Like the strength of an evil hate,

And a thunder-cloud came out of the west,  
And guarded the sunset gate.

*Thou* art in the royal, radiant land  
That stretcheth across the sea,  
And the drifting hours of each weary day  
Take me further from thee!

XVII.

HALF AWAKE.

Sleep ravished me from pain, and laid a hand  
Cool, quiet, and heavy on my smarting eyelids!  
My soul fled from the clamors of the land,  
Nor heard the distant portals close behind it.

When I awoke, the brightness of the day  
Had slipped from the green earth's tranquil visage;  
And in my darkened room I freshened lay,  
And Ease had wrapped me in its welcome mantle

Befringed with cheerful thoughts, and fancies sweet  
That it had gathered in the realm of visions,  
Whilst I therein had walked with soundless feet  
Over pale asphodels and poppies crimson.

Sometimes a lone bird in its darkened nest  
Makes broken twittering before the dawning.  
Perhaps a leaf, wind-stirred, has brushed its breast,  
But its faint chirps are for its absent comrade.

Thuswise my heart lay half awake in me,  
Before the mist of dreams had faded wholly,  
And, stirred by half-reminders, groped for thee,  
With drowsy calls and murmurous cries unworded!

XVIII.

A LOVE-LETTER.

All the day was dark and weary, freighted down with shadows dreary,  
Other shadows kept the sunlight from the threshold of my heart;

Failure in its circle held me; by its mighty magic spelled me.  
Ere one hurt had ceased to rankle, some new prickle made me start.

“Letters!” and I, wholly broken, turned in hopelessness unspoken:  
“Doubtless, other stripes to smite me—Lord! my soul is sore enough!”  
Then I forced my hand to take them, but I scanned, ere I would break them,  
All the seals,—for I was growing cowardly through long rebuff.

Till my spirit-broken seeming was enlightened by the gleaming  
Of a dear familiar writing, by a dearer hand devised.  
When the arms that ache to hold us only may in dreams enfold us,  
What a blessing lies in letters then I wholly realized!

O my talisman in sadness! O, my pledge of coming gladness!  
O my letter! tempest-drifted over briny billowed seas!  
For the sender’s sake I bless you, for the sender’s sake I press you,  
To my trial-chastened bosom,—be its comforter for these!

Ah! I know whose letter this is! there’s embalméd freight of kisses,—  
Not the weapon that I dreaded in your travel-battered sheath.  
You will feed my incompleteness, with your hived hoard of sweetness,  
When I peel away the cover and pluck out the fruit beneath!

Yet my eyes with tears are filling,—my awakened pulse is thrilling  
To some far-off spirit signal; and I shiver, unaware,  
As the wavelets of the river to the zephyr’s kisses quiver;  
Is my darling thinking of me in the distance, over there?

### XIX.

Trouble on trouble! When he went away  
It seemed as if my darkest hours began.  
My life since then has been much like a day  
Bright at the dawning,—very early clouded,—  
I sometimes think the clouds will never lift!  
First: father failed and we lost all we had;  
And he was old and could not stand the blow,  
And never tried to lift his head again  
After our home was sold and we came here.  
I never wore a black dress in my life  
Till I got this one, and it seems so strange

That it reminds me every day of father!  
 I have no time to think about myself  
 Except of nights; and then I cannot sleep  
 Because of all my sore perplexity.  
 I must do all I can for mother now;  
 She can do nothing for herself at all;  
 But sits and rocks and moans and sighs all day,  
 Or holds my little sister in her arms.  
 And I am glad that I must think for them;  
 For had I time to sit with folded hands,  
 I think I should go crazy with the strain  
 Of all this waiting!

## XX.

How long is it since any letter came?  
 Now that I think, 'tis full three months to-day.  
 I cannot hear a word of him by chance,  
 His father's house is closed,—they are away.

## XXI.

## WAITING.

The first, glad day of summer saw our parting;  
 Our hopes were vague, our words were very few.  
 I murmured—from your passionate hold upstarting—  
     *“I'll wait for you!”*  
 Ah, I was brave, and life was all before me—  
 My love should make it beautiful and true!  
 I said,—when passionate, parting pains came o'er me,—  
     *“There is so much to do!”*  
 Come home! dearest, come home!

The summer waned and anguish fell upon me,  
 Such heavy loss as wears the strength away!  
 And for a time its greatness seemed to stun me;  
     And so I lay  
 Weak and bewildered, with one wish forever  
 Haunting my nights and darkening my days:  
 That I might fall upon your breast, ah, never  
     My head therefrom to raise!  
 Come home! dearest, come home!