

FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS

By Amy Bennett

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3 bells

No sunlight, no colour, a world full of grey. I have only been here a day yet my execution is scheduled for tomorrow. I hear the cries of women and men all around me. The straw for a bed is filthy and many around have a sickness that is too grotesque to describe. A man coughs violently just a few yards away. After it has ended he takes his hands away from his mouth, red liquid stains both his hands and the floor. To me it didn't look like blood but more like paint the colour of scarlet. Again, he turns his head and coughs, this time louder, as a savage creature inside of him. He sits alone with no one willing to take a step near him. Softly he whimpers to himself and raises his hands to the heavens. Out of the corner of my eye I see another suffering from the sweat. A strong, young woman suffering with pain and fever, and having visions of imaginary tormentors. She was already in hell.

I trace the cracks in the walls with my hands as salty tears run down my face. My thumbs brush them away and I curl myself into a tight ball. The guards will come soon and take away the corpse of my only friend. May, I think her name was. She told me to be strong and not to let anyone know I was afraid. Later, two overseers took her aside behind a wall. Moments later we heard screaming that sent pure frozen horror to our hearts. Then silence. People slowly turned away and prayed to God once more to save them from this hell. Mary was accused of the same crime as me. Witchcraft I believe it was. In my mind it's more like an excuse to see a human suffering in pain as a tortured soul.

6 bells

I was right; the guards took Mary away quickly. No questions asked and not bothering to conceal her in any way. They practically dragged her lying body out from the wooden door and slid the bolt home. Yet again we were left in almost complete darkness. The cries around me are getting worse and worse. They are now more like howls from wild animals. What I'd give to see my family once again, in our peaceful house before all this started.

9 bells

No one is sleeping; how can you in a place such as this? I thought that strange men coming in the night to take me away was bad. But this place is like the land of the dead. They came in the night and accused me of all sorts of things. I laughed but they took it as a witch's cackle, landing me in even more trouble. I tried to plead, to beg, but they would hear none of it. They suggested my cat, Charles, was my familiar, and I had cursed the farmer's cow next door. Just a few of the allegations I was charged with. Then with quick roughness they shoved me into their carriage as I looked back to see my family standing in silent terror. My younger sister Elizabeth began to break into a run after the carriage but stumbled and fell. Her tears mixed with the dust of the road as I heard her shout "Anne!". That's the last time I shall probably see my family. Never again.

12 bells.

Midnight, I heard the bell strike. The bags under my eyes seem to be getting heavier and heavier but I shall not give in to sleep. I have seen people, heard people who just dozed for a bit but never woke up again. There are many brutal murders in this prison, but the guards just look the other way. They don't care that we're fellow humans; they see us as mere

creatures that aren't worth the light of day. It makes me sick that someone could ever be so cruel.

3 bells

Again a fresh corpse is metres away from where I'm sitting. This time, a man and quite obvious of how the deed was done. A silver blade sticks out from his chest as blood is smeared all over his shirt. This murder happened because he stood up to a guard who kicked at his wife, as if she were an animal. Many shuffle away and shield their eyes from the scene they see before them. A woman screams and rushes forward. I immediately recognise her as the man's wife. She lies next to him and repeats his name again and again. Wishing for his life to be restored. Slowly her hands slip to his wide open eyes, and then gently she closes them, letting him leave this world. Then she stands up and makes her way to the door. Her voice cracked and hoarse, she shouts for the guards. Angrily they pounce like wild beasts woken from their slumber. Two bodies now lie on the floor; the woman still alive turns her head and smiles like she's at least in peace. Then slowly her eyes close as she waits for death.

6 bells

Yet again guards came to take them away; different to those who had done the deed. My back aches so I slowly start to shuffle into a better sitting position. The cries are getting louder as the sentences of death draw closer. A little girl in the corner of a wall quietly whimpers to herself. Crying for her mother who went to the stake yesterday. I have to look away because I know the same fate will come to her, and me. Yet I can't get the image of her fragile body out of my mind. She looks so young and innocent. So, I take my old shawl off and fold it neatly into a square. Then gingerly, I nudge it towards her with my hand. She meets my brown dull eyes with a blue hazel look of appreciation. My lips slowly turn into a smile and then I nod my head.

9 bells

My time has nearly come. It leads me to wondering whether my family will watch. I think not, they have probably gone far away, if not then they will have been arrested. Once someone in a family is punished then usually the others suffer as well. They've hopefully gone somewhere far away. Although I hope that they will think about me. The little girl has now gone, moved to a different cell. My eyes are heavy and wish to be closed. As I look down at my hands, I can't believe how different they look, nails almost black and caked with mud and straw and tiny scratches scattered over both hands and arms. I reach up to my black midnight hair. It's filthy but still it reminds me of my mother. I smile as I remember her gently counting the strokes of each brush. Now my clothes look like rags and she probably wouldn't recognise the child that had come from her womb.

12 bells

The door opens and two guards walk in. One points to me and the other roughly pulls me up. Then half taking, half dragging they bring me to the outdoors. The last time I shall ever see the sun shining and the sky as grey as ever. In the distance I see the crowds waiting in anticipation, like a crowd of savages waiting for their prey. As they rope me to the stake in the pile of wood I hear angry cheers from the mob. "Die, witch, die", they shout. I feel the flames flicker and tease my body as I let out a shriek that sounds abnormal. The crowds get louder as I feel the blood rush to my head ...

Then silence, no more sunlight, just pitch black darkness and a bell in the distance striking noon.

It tolls for thee