**Age suitability 8 Plus.**

**Bell of Atri.**

**A Child's Story Garden, by Various**

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**In the little town of Atri, which was nestled on the side of a wooded hill, there was a strange custom. The king had one day brought to the town a great bell, which he hung in the market place beneath a shed, protected from the sun and rain. Then he went forth with all his knightly train through the streets of Atri and proclaimed to all the people that whenever a wrong was done to any one, he should go to the market place and ring the great bell, and immediately the king would see that the wrong was righted. Many years had gone by. Many times the great bell had rung in the little town of Atri, and, as the king had said, the wrongs of which it told, were always righted. In time, however, the great rope by which the bell was rung, unraveled at the end and was unwound, thread by thread. For a long time it remained this way, while the great bell hung silent. But close by, a grape-vine grew, and, reaching upward, finally entwined its tendrils around the ragged end of the bell rope, making it strong and firm again as it grew around it, up toward the great bell itself.**

**Now, in the town of Atri there lived a knight, who, in his younger days, had loved to ride and hunt; but as he grew old he cared no more for these things. He sold his lands, his horses and hounds, for he now loved only the gold which the sale of them brought to him. This he hoarded and saved, living poorly, that he might save the more. Only one thing he kept--his favorite horse, who had served him faithfully all his life. But even this faithful friend he kept in a poor old stable, often allowing him to go cold and hungry. Finally the old man said: "Why should I keep this beast now? He is old and lazy, and no longer of any use to me. Besides, his food costs me much that I might save for myself. I will turn him out and let him find food where he can." So the faithful old horse, who had served his master all his days, was turned out without a home. He wandered through the streets of the town, trying to find something to eat. Often the dogs barked at him, and the cold winds made him shiver as he wandered about, hungry and homeless, with no one to care for him.**

**One summer afternoon, when all the drowsy little town seemed sleeping, the tones of the great bell rang out, loud and clear, waking the people from their naps and calling them forth to see who was ringing the bell of justice. The judge, with a great crowd following, hurried to the market place, but when they came near, they stopped in surprise. No man was near, who might have rung the bell; no one but a thin old horse, who stood quietly munching the vine which grew around the bell rope. He had spied the green leaves growing there, and, being hungry, had reached for them, thus ringing the great bell of Atri, and calling forth the judge and all the people. "'Tis the old knight's horse," the people cried. Then many told the tale of how the old horse had been turned out to starve, while his master hoarded and saved his gold. "The horse has rung the bell for justice, and justice he shall have," said the judge. "Go, bring the old knight to me." The knight was hurried to the place, where, before all the people, the judge censured him for his cruel treatment of his faithful old horse, and asked him to give a reason for it.**

**"The old beast is useless," said his master. "He is mine, and I have a right to do with him as I wish." "Not so," said the judge. "He has served you faithfully all his life. He can not speak to tell of his wrongs, so we must speak for him. Go, now; take him home. Build a new stable and care for him well." The old knight walked slowly home, while the horse was led behind by the crowd. So the Great Bell of Atri had righted one more wrong, for it was even as the judge had commanded. The faithful old horse lived in comfort all the rest of his life, for his master, in caring for him, learned to love him again, and treated him as only a faithful friend should be treated. When the king heard the story he said: "Surely, never will the bell ring in a better cause than in speaking for a suffering dumb creature who can not speak for himself." Henry Wadsworth Longfellow [Adapted]**