



## String Bridge (The Bell Collection)

*Jessica Bell*

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Greek cuisine, smog and domestic drudgery was not the life Australian musician, Melody, was expecting when she married a Greek music promoter and settled in Athens, Greece. Keen to play in her new shoes, though, Melody trades her guitar for a 'proper' career and her music for motherhood. That is, until she can bear it no longer and plots a return to the stage--and the person she used to be. However, the obstacles she faces along the way are nothing compared to the tragedy that awaits.

This novel is accompanied by an all-original soundtrack, written and performed by the author, entitled, 'Melody Hill: On the Other Side'. If you purchase this book, please send your receipt to Jessica via her website, and she'll send you the soundtrack for free.

## String Bridge (The Bell Collection) Details

Date : Published October 1st 2016 by Vine Leaves Press (first published October 20th 2011)

ISBN : 9781925417449

Author : Jessica Bell

Format : Paperback 394 pages

Genre : Romance, Music, Womens Fiction, Chick Lit, Fiction

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## From Reader Review String Bridge (The Bell Collection) for online ebook

Lise \*friends don't flag\* says

Freebie alert, 3-14-13!

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### Trisha says

Jessica Bell's STRING BRIDGE has been hyped up all around the writer blogger world and so it's only natural I should get around to reading it eventually! Before I started, I had got to know a little bit more about the author, and found we had a fair few things in common (namely writing, nationality and music! We are both Australian singer-songwriters who write novels too). I also knew I'd look forward to the read because it was about a character I could relate to - another singer-songwriter.

Anyway, onto the book itself! The writing truly was beautiful, descriptive in a way that made me feel often that I was on the ocean, listening to the waves washing/crashing/hissing onto the shore. I could smell the exhaust fumes and feel the sapping heat of a Greek summer. I could smell the sea salt in the air. I could smell Alex's cologne even though I haven't actually ever smelled that scent (knowingly) before. haha. I could definitely relate to Melody in a lot of ways, but in other ways she was different and had many "issues" to deal with.

I knew there would be some tragedy in the book, and having read another (non-fiction) book recently dealing with the death of a child, I feared that would be the outcome in this novel too. Thankfully no kids died in the making of this book, only a mother and a husband (wow, that's mean of me, being thankful for two character deaths!!). I'm not a mother myself but there's still something very very uncomfortable about reading of children's suffering. After Tessa was injured I did fear that things would only escalate from there. I suppose they did, in a way, but not as I'd feared. Still pretty bad, though. ;)

It was strange for me reading about Melody's decision to return to Australia, because while I personally daydream of using my British passport for something more substantial than just getting in the shorter lines at airports (European airports anyway), I was excited for Melody when she decided to "go home". If I was her, I would have leaped at the chance to go home as well. And yet I also could understand her reluctance to leave the apartment she and Alex had shared. I could totally picture a scene in my head, Melody staring around the apartment thinking of all the memories that had been created. Still, I thought to myself, 'Yay!' when the decision was finally made.

All in all, despite the occasional typographical error that pulled me out of the story and made me twitch, I thought this was a wonderful read and I definitely see Jessica Bell as an author to watch! Oh, and the soundtrack that came with the book? Stunningly beautiful!

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### Nicole Ducleroir says

Jessica Bell's debut novel *String Bridge* is the story of Melody, an Australian musician, who put down her

guitar to raise a family with her Greek husband. Four years later and living on his native soil, Melody realizes she's become the empty, passionless shell of the person she once was. A return to music is the key to her salvation. But her struggle to decipher her dark feelings, to understand when they are surging from a place of honesty and when they are the result of her own fears or selfishness, threatens to turn all their lives upside-down. And when fate flings tragedy her way, she learns some bridges are easier to cross than others.

I was mesmerized by this book. The narration is raw and unapologetic, from deep inside Melody's complicated heart and psyche. Her fragileness and her egocentricity are exposed in a way that feels naked and truthful. I loved the way each scene peeled away another of Melody's layers, allowing me to eventually understand her as well as she could understand herself.

Melody's relationships with the people in her life are as important to the story as her relationship with her music. The genius in Bell's writing lies in her ability to show each character in authentic light and to therefore demonstrate one of life's truths: no one is 100% right or 100% wrong in his/her convictions. Responsibility and culpability spin in cycles of blame and redemption in *String Bridge*, leaving me with a healthy dose of pathos for every character, by the book's end.

Bell writes with poetic flourish, her descriptions lush, poignant and intense. At the same time, her main character is quirky, oftentimes ungraceful and unpolished. The combination creates a style that is fresh, unique, and wholly intoxicating. This character-driven story that dives into the abyss of the human condition is a must-read!

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### **Karen says**

I got the ARC in the mail on Saturday, started the first chapter that night, and couldn't stop thinking about it. Sunday afternoon I decided would be reading day. It had been a hectic week, I deserved a reading day! I was eager to get completely immersed in the world that Jessica Bell so skillfully created in her debut novel **STRING BRIDGE**.

The print book is a reader's dream: just the right length, a cover you can keep turning back to, finding meaning in each detail. And nice paper! Not that rough cheap stuff but pages with a nice feel to them, a sensual pleasure to hold and read. I was thrilled that an ARC was available in print version!

The writing is deep and beautiful, with imagery and details that make the characters come alive and move the narrative along seamlessly. Bell writes literary fiction, but don't let that stop you. I realize that some literary writing is self-conscious, overdone, lacking in plot and well, just plain dull. Not this book! *String Bridge* has a strong narrative that kept me turning pages to see what happens next with Melody and Alex, the troubled couple living in Athens, raising a precocious and adorable (omigosh she is so dang cute!) little girl named Tessa.

Woven through the relationship between Melody and Alex is the complex relationship that Melody has with her bipolar mother, and the fears that she will become like her own mother and do irreparable damage to Tessa. In fact, Melody is so afraid of being hurt by those she loves that she effectively creates barriers to protect herself. It's not until tragedy strikes that Melody begins to understand how very much she did love and was loved in return.

The last novel that moved me and engaged me to this extent was Prince of Tides by Pat Conroy. Like Conroy, Jessica Bell is a brilliant writer of great skill and depth. She doesn't pull back from the difficult scenes, from conflict, pain, intensity. She puts it all out there, no holds barred, no holding back. She knows how to craft a scene, how to develop character, how to create suspense. This is an absolutely brilliant debut novel. I look forward to reading her next novel, and next and next.

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### **Glynis Smy says**

Warning: Do not read String Bridge—unless you have plenty of spare time. Jessica Bell hooks the reader with a storyline so powerful it consumes you. I read this book in one sitting. I could not put it down.

The POV Melody bares her soul, the descriptive writing is intense and one forgets it is a work of fiction. I was drawn into a storyline so swollen with discontentment that I had to read more. Each page turned I wondered if the ugly side of Melody's life would emerge and when it did it was through an explosion of emotions. One minute I was in her corner the next I wanted to shake her into reality.

Music called out to Melody from her past, it wanted to move her forward into the future but she was suffocated by the present. Her loyalty to her marriage moved me yet frustrated me at the same time. I wanted her to be a stronger woman but the more I read I realised at that point in her life she could only be Melody, wife, mother and daughter. Her daughter will not suffer the torment of a jealous mother as she had done. Melody would never be a lover, she could never betray her husband. Or could she? Would she walk away from the restrictive bindings of a strong Greek male? Does she have the power within to leave the hot-tempered Mediterranean passion her husband uses so skilfully?

Melody slowly realises while she has been concentrating on putting everyone first, no one had shown her the same respect. By the time she gets her head around what she has to do a tragic event decides for her. Before she drowns in her collapsing world Melody finds a life-line; a life-saver.

The book is peppered with undertones of what could be and just as you are sitting comfortably, Bell pulls the rug from under Melody's feet making the reader sit up wondering 'what happens now?'

I give this book 5\* for its beautifully crafted, descriptive sentences alone. A fantastic debut novel and I look forward to reading more from this author.

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### **Angela says**

Lucky press sent me the arc of this book last week, and the moment I took it from the mailbox, I was dying to start reading. Jessica is a poet, so it's not surprising that she employs good use of imagery, metaphor, and other poetic devices from the very beginning.

The preface is gorgeous and reads more like poetry than any other part of the book. It gets you into the mindset of 30-year-old Melody almost immediately, and paints her as a woman who loves music, but has chosen to give it up for the sake of her family and a stable paycheck.

Though the protagonist refers to herself in the preface as "a mother, a wife, a 'happy' homemaker--who lives a socially acceptable existence," it becomes clear while reading not only that Melody isn't happy, but that the source of her angst comes less from the demands of her daughter (who was so good I sometimes wished I could trade her for one of my real children) and more from the strain of living with a husband who is both verbally and emotionally abusive. Not to say he's always a tyrant, or that Melody is a perpetual victim. She has her own moments of irrational behavior and fits of rage. One in particular where she hurls plates at her husband's head because she doesn't want to be a "doormat." But much of Melody's problems are brought on by her own distorted thinking, perpetuated by her husband, mother, and her need to turn her anger inward so she can think the best of them.

This book deals with some serious issues: mental illness, self-injury, infidelity, and codependency to name a few. It takes you through stages of grief and pain with evocative description, puts you in the midst of turmoil, grabs you by the shoulders and makes you examine what is true and false. Melody is not a Stepford Wife with a pasted on smile and politically correct emotions; she doesn't do or feel anything halfway, and the way she comes to view her life is nothing short of inspirational.

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### **Madeline Sharples says**

From the outside it would appear Melody Hill, the main character and narrator of Jessica Bell's debut novel, *String Bridge*, has a perfect life. She lives in Athens with her charming Greek music promoter husband, she has an adorably precocious daughter, and she has a dream job as an editor for a publishing company with a promotion and raise in the offing.

But getting deeper into her story, the reader finds what's hidden behind this façade and her wanting-to-please-everyone persona. She is frightened by her husband's abusive yelling and mortified at finding out he has had an affair. She is suffering from the effects of her mother's erratic bipolar behavior and worries that she is bipolar herself. She is constantly searching for help from her silent but loving father. And she regrets giving up her music career for a life that she can hardly bear anymore.

That author Bell is a poet is evident through her use of metaphors, rhyme, and repetition. As I said in my review of her book of poetry, *Twisted Velvet Chain*, Bell is "a genius at portraying the raw and the dark parts of life through her use of clipped lines, staccatos, onomatopoeia, and descriptions of icky body fluids."

In *String Bridge* she describes a character sometimes so disheveled that she wears unmatched shoes to work, she doesn't wash off yesterday's smeared makeup or bother to separate whites from darks in the washing machine, and her buttons pop off her dress during a public speech. Melody always seems to be cleaning up jammy fingers or other messes. Bell excels in showing life's little details.

This is a novel that has it all: regret, romance, sex, desire, guilt, an adorable child, a bumpy marriage, mental illness, a devastating tragedy, and the promise of a live-happily-ever-after-ending. But, that ending doesn't negate the ever-increasing struggle to get there. *String Bridge* is a wonderful read, well worth going through the struggle to find out what happens to Melody Hill and her family in the end.

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## **Jolene Perry says**

Wow.

Okay.

So Jessica Bell's an incredibly talented poet, and her unique way with words completely translates into fiction. I was so there, in the frustration of unsaid things in relationships, of wanting something you're not sure you'll ever have. I trusted the author from page one, and never felt let down by characters actions. She made imperfect people, and made us like and love them still. Not an easy feat.

I won't spoil this for you, but the story's intense, emotional, and her strong language carries throughout.

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## **Robyn says**

String Bridge explodes with emotional conflicts to the very end. Melody's story is an exercise in decision making, guilt, and in yearning.

Melody's bipolar mother and her own self worth all threaten to send Melody off the deep, deep end. She believes that she is living a socially acceptable existence. But the strong desire to play her guitar is overwhelming at times. From panic attacks to believing there is a family curse, Melody must come to terms with what she really wants out of life and with her insecurity. Her husband Alex agrees that she should start playing her music again. This makes their marriage stronger until, you guessed it; Jessica throws a hammer into Melody's happiness.

I loved Jessica's descriptions; they made me feel as if I was standing inside the book covers walking through it with all of the characters. Her voice is amazing. I found myself wishing and hoping that I could develop my voice as well as she has. The characters are flawed, but isn't that what we want when we read a novel? They are real people with real problems, not some perfect smerefect types.

I do have to mention that this is a book for adults. It does contain swear words which I had to skip over. But her story, her music, her poetic voice are exceptional. The original metaphors made me want to start adding them to my own WIP.

Jessica is a powerful writer who intends on keeping her readers glued to their seats or bathtubs or wherever they do their reading.

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## **Calum says**

'String Bridge' is the debut novel from the very artistic writer Jessica Bell. If you enjoy stories that involve characters who experience adversity within their lives and that explores the frailty that can exist within some human relationships, then this is a book that should be added to your reading list!

This particular story tells the tale of Melody, an aggravated wife and mother who somehow finds herself separated from the person she felt she used to be and also the individual that she would really like to be.

As a musician, Melody gave up her music for marriage and motherhood but soon Melody finds that this routine quickly becomes a grind for her. With added suspicions that her Greek Music Promoter husband may

be having relationships outside of their marriage with women that he meets through his music promotion business and his late returns to home from work at night, Melody is certainly not happy.

This hard hitting story works through the trials and tribulations that Melody encounters in her interactions and relationships with her husband, her daughter and the other people that she meets during her turbulent journey.

*String Bridge*' is another one of those books that once started can become very difficult to put down! The author herself has a musical background and this is reflected very well in the setting that has been chosen for this particular narrative.

As well as being a good author Jessica Bell is also a very good musician. As an added bonus, a CD of Melody's songs has been produced by Jessica Bell to accompany this book. As well as reading '*String Bridge*' the accompanying music CD entitled '*Melody Hill – On the Other Side*' is also worth listening to as well!

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### **Magdalena says**

Melody is at a crossroads. She's given up her music career for the corporate world of course writing, and motherhood, and her increasingly overbearing Greek husband is trying to keep her in the kitchen and away from both music and management. As Melody inches closer to reinvigorating her stalled dreams and pump up her life, she finds that the obstacles that begin appearing are far more significant and overarching than she could ever imagine. Poet and musician Jessica Bell's debut novel *String Bridge* is a rich exploration of desire, guilt, and the difficult balancing act of the modern woman. The writing is lyrical throughout, seamlessly integrating setting, character and plot in a musical structure that allows the reader to identify with Melody's growing insecurity as her world begins to unravel:

I close my eyes for a moment, facing the window, pretending to look out at the overcast sky--at the clouds that make living in a high-rise building seem like living low in a valley, in the mountains, in the mist, in a place where self-doubt and fear have been erased from the dictionary, and self-belief and hope are not only feelings, but material objects that you can hold in your hands and confidently say you possess.

While the plot centres on Melody's own growth in this character driven novel, Alex, her husband, and Tessa, her daughter also develop and grow, literally in Tessa's case. The plot twists are unexpected and at times quite wrenching, as Melody finds that her beliefs, perceptions and desires distort, change and are pulled in different directions. Behind the character development, the Greek setting becomes a rich backdrop that enriches the book, showcasing the beauty of landscape seen through a visitor's eyes:

At dawn, especially, it was a Neverland of lush luminescent green mountain, deep purple sea, sherbet orange sky and sharp-toothed cliffs so high you could literally walk on clouds

Throughout the book the writing is poetic and fine, with original metaphors working the imagery thorough. Air is so crisp you can "snap it like celery", lips part like "velcro", and the piano shines like a "freshly glazed tart". Above all, this is a novel about music. Music drives the plot as Melody's desire for music becomes the motivating catalyst for change in her life. Her guitar and voice underpin the narrative in all sorts of ways, from the songs that open each chapter, to the lullabies Melody sings for her daughter to the musical career she attempts to resurrect. Then there is the music of others -- the pop and rock bands that Alex promotes and those stars like Patti Smith and Joni Mitchell, whose music is the inspiration for Melody. Patti makes her own cameo in the book, and Joni's "Blue" is referred to a number of times in the book.

Jessica Bell's *String Bridge* is a powerful debut from a promising writer, full of music, metaphor, and just a hint of magic.

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### **Debbie Young says**

This is the first novel I've read by Jessica Bell, but I've read and enjoyed some of her poetry and also her non-fiction books about writing, so I was already tuned in for her distinctive poetic and lyrical writing style with quirky use of similes and adjectives. I was drawn to choose this novel because I was interested in the relationship between a Greek husband and a non-Greek wife. Having been to Greece often, and fallen in love with the country, the one aspect of life there that I find most alien is the old-fashioned, unequal status of men and women in society, so I was keen to see how it worked in this book, where the Greek husband is dismissive of his wife's career. Without giving away the plot, I thought it provided an intelligent and realistic portrait of the constraints of such a marriage and its impact on other relationships too. I welcomed the addition of a spirited small daughter binding the pair together through thick and thin (she was my favourite character) which also added to the melting pot the old chestnut of "can you have it all?" for women who want a great relationship, successful career and a happy family life. I loved the precise and accurate evocation of daily life in Athens as the heroine begins to buckle under the strain of trying to have it all. I also thought the detailed handling of grief and bereavement, and the rebuilding of life after loss, was done very well. I found the book hard to put down, reading more at every opportunity, and thought the conclusion was logical and pleasing, although it felt ever so slightly rushed and reductive after the much more detailed and slow unveiling in the previous part of the book. Especially recommended for any woman who has ever tried to "have it all", for anyone interested in modern life in Greece, and for anyone seeking intelligent contemporary fiction that alludes throughout to guitar music and the love of playing guitar.

Disclosure: I know Jessica Bell professionally but I paid for this book like a normal reader and she doesn't know I'm reviewing it.

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### **Dee Montoya says**

For us who had been married for a long time; we know how hard it can get once the years start to pile up, kids are present and routine kills the romance. Eventually the relationship changes, and if we are not careful, one day we wake up feeling like we are living with a stranger instead of the person who is suppose to be the love our lives. This is what happen to Melody and Alex in *String Bridge*. They are drifting apart, and both struggling with who they are now and what they used together. Melody is currently fulfilling the role of wife, mother and career woman, but she misses her music, feeling like something is incomplete she starts to recent her husband for it. Turns out Alex is feeling neglected by his wife and instead of communicating this to her,

goes out and cheats on her. Its a very compelling story, because even though they both love each other and adore their daughter, are just barely making it work. This is a very interesting book because the characters and their situations felt real, but full of despair. I found myself desperately hoping for something to change, a little light inside all the darkness in the life of this couple, in other words, 95% of this book was heartbreaking and just plain sad, we only get little glimpses of the happiness they once share. unfortunately it took an awful and unexpected event for Melody to finally find herself, and be able to feel whole again. One thing I got from reading this novel is the reminder to never go to bed angry with your love ones, because you never know if you will be able to tell them "I Love you" once morning comes.

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### **Jessica Bell says**

This is my debut. I hope you enjoy it! :o)

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### **Bidisha says**

Taken from [HERE](#)

Dare you call this chicklit. And as much as I adore chicklit, this is not the tale of a single girl, lost in the city, romping about to find HER MAN. String Bridge goes beyond that. This is after the girl has found her man, her family and is pushed over as she is made to face the hard realities of life. You could call this the after-the-fairy-tale part of life.

Familial love, marital drudgery, long suppressed dreams - Jessica Bell brings it all in and questions it all. What really is more important?

The writing is awe-inspiring. It's easy to see that she's a poet. Don't get me wrong. There's no floweriness. Bell's writing hits hard and yet there's an underlying musical cadence to it.

I was so surprised with this book. I'm a YA book whore. So much so that other genres often get neglected. But reading this reminded me how much I love a good women's fiction. And this wasn't just good. It was effing brilliant.

Bell picks at the nuances of life. The little things magnified. She isn't afraid to mention things that often go unmentioned. Like, sometimes getting irritated with the demands of the daughter you love so much that you'd wish she'd shut up. Or feeling jealous when you see her smiling with her father. Or wanting to throw utensils at your husband like a stark raving lunatic even though he's not really the villain you think of him to be. Or make him out to be. Emotions run high here, so high they spiral into cracks in the main character, Melody's life and her relationships with the people around her.

The author deftly paints relationships like she is really exhibiting the pages out of the tormented mind of a woman trying to find an identity for herself beyond being a mother and a wife. Melody's relationships with each and every character that appears in the book is explored in such depth, it is as real as it gets. The strains with her mother. The annoyance with her husband, Alex. The love for Tessa. The need for music. The fluttering feelings for a certain 'button boy'. Bipolarity, anxiety, depression. It's raw but dealt with a sensitivity, much like the one used to deal with the oddity of love.

And if you think you have it all figured out, think again. Because *String Bridge* veers off the path of predictability and throws you off your seat in such a way it makes you gasp for breath.

*String Bridge* is evocative of music that comes from a sad place then rises above the din and makes you appreciate the beauty of the world we live in and the time we have here.

I highly recommend this.

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