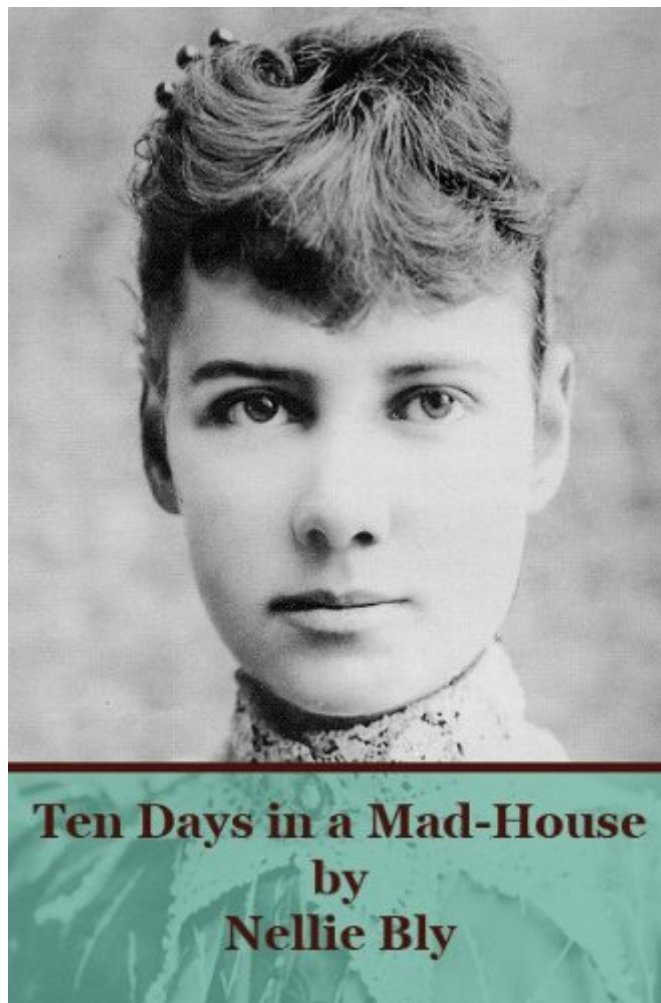


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# Ten Days In A Mad-House



## Synopsis

Nellie Bly (May 5, 1864 - January 27, 1922) was a pioneer woman in journalism. She remains notable for two feats: a record-breaking trip around the world in emulation of Jules Verne, and an exposé in which she faked insanity to study a mental institution from within. In addition to her writing, she was also an industrialist and charity worker.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

As a new resident to Roosevelt Island (formerly Blackwell's Island) I wanted to learn a little bit history surrounding my new home, so I picked up this book. Nellie Bye, a journalist in the late 1800s, was challenged by her editor to have herself committed to the insane asylum on Blackwell's Island, a small strip of land in the East River between Manhattan and Queens. First on her agenda was to have herself declared insane. She located a woman's work house (sort of a hostel for women), was taken in there, and began to behave as she thought an insane person might...staring off into space, amnesia, feigning fright of the other women, and (this was the determining factor)

staying awake all night! Oh, the horror!! In today's society, this behavior would not have earned a second glance. Within 24 hours, Nellie was sent to Bellevue Psychiatric Hospital where she was examined by the physicians, declared insane, and ferried over to Blackwell's Island for "rehabilitation". She found the conditions to be atrocious. Inmates were fed foul-smelling food, completely lacking in nutrition. They were required to share the same bath water, no matter that some had obvious skin diseases and open wounds. The weather was cold and inmates were not provided warm clothes and blankets. Verbal and physical abuse were doled out on a regular basis. Though she acted as her normal self in the asylum and begged to be examined and declared sane, she was ignored. After 10 days, Nellie's editor was able to have her discharged. She reported her findings in a series of articles she wrote about her experience (which were collected into this book) did much to improve conditions on Blackwell's Island. This book is short, absorbing, and informative. Great for anyone interested in New York, the late 1800s, or insane asylums.

Nellie Bly goes undercover in the late 1800's to expose the Blackwell Asylum for women. It is easy to fake being mentally ill she says, and it is easy for the person who put you in the institution to fake your illness. Why? The hospital was run by charitable donations, and when you read the deplorable conditions, someone with avarice had to be skimming money off the top. Nellie says after a week in this institution, working under cover, her own health from rotten food and no outside stimuli was weakening her stamina and state of mind. She says many women were not mentally ill. Was this to rob them of property and wealth and get them out of the way by legal officials to steal from them when their husbands died? Little has changed. In order to get your bill paid, you must in modern age have a diagnosis that fits the DSM V. Other books, the modern day Nellie Bly is "Voluntary Madness," Norah Vincent she goes undercover in a modern day facility, and "Becoming Anna," by Anna J. Michener.

An interesting account of a young reporter able to have herself legally committed to a mental institution in the early 1900s. Her "symptoms" of mental illness could be easily described as laughable today. Many things about treatments and staff cruelty are alluded to throughout the narrative. The story has nothing new or exciting to offer to history. Accounts of a couple of other assignments in are offered at the end of the main story.

I found this book to be a good read. However, I would have liked it to be longer and more descriptive. It was so shocking in that Nellie had no problem feigning madness. How is

that possible? Back in those days, I believe it was but, hopefully, not today. The thinking in those days was so different than it is today. I know we still have mental health issues and thank God, that Nellie was a catalyst in changing the system way back then. How brave to actually go undercover and live as the insane lived. How horrible these sad inmates were treated. I have always wondered why these terrible people that work in asylums get hired? But, it seems that (in those days at least) people with tender consciences would never have been able to do service in those places. This is not the first book I've read on this subject. It is hard reading but this particular book was a treatise on her report after she came out again, so that accounts, I guess, for the short read it was NOT a fictionalized novel. Also makes me wonder if Nellie did not even want to repeat some of the doings going on there. But it was so amazing that she was even believed in the end being a woman especially after the inspection was forewarned. So too bad that it was. But they did believe Nellie and because of that, changes came about. No one who cares at all about people in general should ever be employed in these places. The heart of stone is so so very cruel.... Good for Nellie!!!

Wow! This is an old book that discusses an ongoing issue. The picture drawn of the "madhouse" is disturbing! I like to believe that insane asylums are better now, and I actually do believe that they are, but it's really easy to see how simple it is to abuse the system and get away with it. This book by Nellie Bly is truly a cautionary tale as well as illustrative!

While reading this article I was absolutely sickened by the description of the horrible treatment of the mentally ill in that asylum. Additionally the rationale used for the patients being committed was beyond belief. The courage of Ms Bly to have herself committed to expose the inhumane treatment is to be commended. While one can hope that conditions and the treatment of the mentally ill have vastly improved, in today's economic environment one may ask "has progress been made and maintained?"

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