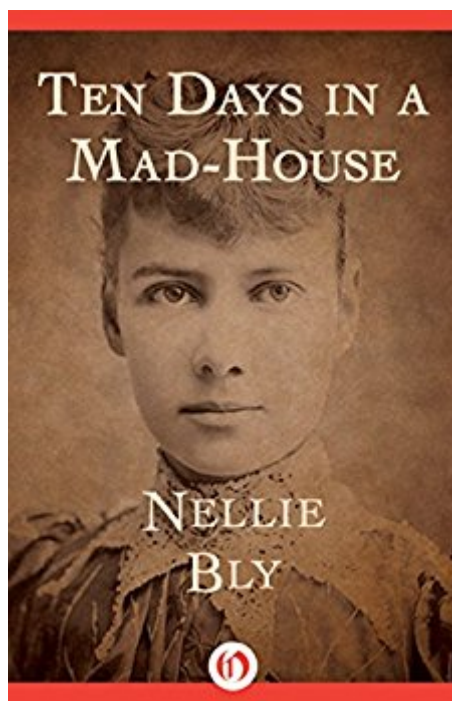


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# Ten Days In A Mad-House



## Synopsis

A courageous female journalist's classic exposé of the horrific treatment of the mentally ill in nineteenth-century America. In 1887, Nellie Bly accepted an assignment from publisher Joseph Pulitzer of the New York World and went undercover at the lunatic asylum on Blackwell Island, America's first municipal mental hospital. Calling herself "Nellie Brown," she was able to convince policemen, a judge, and a series of doctors of her madness with a few well-practiced facial expressions of derangement. At the institution, Bly discovered the stuff of nightmares. Mentally ill patients were fed rotten, inedible food; violently abused by a brutal, uncaring staff; and misdiagnosed, mistreated, or generally ignored by the doctors and so-called mental health experts entrusted with their care. To her horror, Bly encountered sane patients who had been committed on the barest of pretenses and came to the shocking realization that, while the Blackwell Island asylum was remarkably easy to get into, it was nearly impossible to leave. This ebook has been professionally proofread to ensure accuracy and readability on all devices.

## 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 By, 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 article 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 was the pen name of Elizabeth Jane Cochrane who was an American journalist. She was born in May of 1864 and died in January 1922. While she was working for a newspaper in New York City she was given an undercover assignment to feign insanity and allow herself to be committed to the Women's Lunatic Asylum on Blackwell's Island in order to write an expose of the inhumane way the women in the Asylum were being treated by caretakers, nurses and even doctors. This book is the true account of what she observed while in that Asylum. She is amazed at how readily people in the medical profession proclaim her insane and how quickly they decide she needs to be committed to an Asylum. Once an inmate in the "Lunatic Asylum" she is dismayed when she sees the patients being taunted, laughed at, and even struck by nurses. The patients were also given inadequate clothing to keep them warm in a hospital that has no heat because the heat is turned on only for certain months of the year. She observes the cold, disgusting and inedible food that is served to the patients while the nurses are being served hot meals and being given fresh fruit. This book, which

she wrote from notes she took while in the Asylum, singlehandedly brought about serious reform in this country in the way people are diagnosed as mentally incompetent and also in the way they are treated if they have to be committed. I can't say I "enjoyed" this book but it was very enlightening.

Ten Days in a Mad-House is the true account of female journalist Nellie Bly as she took on an undercover assignment investigating the inner working of a mental institution in New York in 1887. The fact that Bly took the risk of getting herself committed, knowing that conditions would be grim, says a lot about her bravery and dedication to journalistic integrity. Over the course of ten days, Bly (who expressed surprise at how easily she was pronounced insane) experienced the poor conditions of Blackwell's Island alongside her fellow inmates. She soon found that with inedible food, no heat, filthy water, abusive "nurses", and total seclusion it was no wonder the women had gone insane. Bly viewed them with sympathy and felt that many of them were not, in fact, "crazy", but depressed, sick, or victimized. Bly was soon released and shared her findings in The York World. Her time at Blackwell's Island provided fascinating and disturbing insight into the treatment of mentally ill patients and did result in reform. You might think that a book about mental illness and a corrupt system would be hard to get through, but it is a surprisingly quick read. Bly has a very engaging style of writing and the first-person descriptions are engrossing. She was something of an anomaly in her time, but her risks paid off for the future of the mental health field. Bly had this to say when approached by her editor with the idea of going undercover. "I said I would and I could. And I did." Yes she did. Most of us would not have done the same. A great read for those who enjoy investigative journalism or who are interested in learning more about 19th century asylums. To the latter, I must also recommend Seeing the Insane by Sander Gilman.

I read this in just a few days but the story will be with me forever. I have an interest in mental health and this book is a snapshot of time when mental health wasn't really understood. Nellie Bly went undercover and sought out the truth of what was happening to mental patients at institutions during a time when it was common to send women away for just about anything. The story turns truly horrifying when she arrives at the island. Her determination and bravery began a serious look at the treatment of the patients and had outcomes that would be sure that the patients would be treated with dignity and respect.

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