Nellie

A Play in One Act

By
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STORY OF THE PLAY

In the late 1800s rumors were circulating about alleged horrors taking place on Blackwell's Island, home of the Insane Asylum of New York. Women were apparently the victims of abuse and torture, and one woman, a newspaper reporter, decided to risk her own life to investigate. Nellie Bly committed herself to the asylum, documenting her findings and ultimately revealing the horrors to the entire world. This one-act play, adapted from her book, "Ten Days in a Madhouse," tells the incredible story of how this "girl" reporter forever changed the way the world looks at treatment and housing of the insane.

CAST OF CHARACTERS
(1 m, 9 w)

NELLIE BLY: Journalist for *The New York World.*

ANNE NEVILLE: The second oldest at Blackwell's.

MRS. FOX: The outspoken elder of Blackwell's.

TILLIE MAYARD: The youngest woman at Blackwell's.

LOUISE-SCHANZ: Foreign patient who speaks little English.

CATHERINE: The mischievous sister of Bridget.

BRIDGET: The adventurous sister of Catherine.

MISS GRUPE: The head of Blackwell's Island Asylum.

NURSE: The assistant to Miss Grupe.

MAN: Plays all the male roles within the script.

*Casting Note: Male actors can be added to play the roles of Dr. Kinier, Dr. Ingram, etc., as desired. If one actor is to portray all of the male roles, it becomes crucial that the costumes can change quickly.

Set

Lighting, sound effects, and the movement of the actors create the setting. Everything must be "choreographed" to revolve around the other action.

Costumes and Props

The MAN wears a white button-up shirt with black dress pants. Different costume pieces and props can be added for the different characters. These include: newspaper, briefcase, bloodstained doctor's robes, stethoscope, captain's hat, large book, glasses, a tie, a notebook, and a gavel.

NELLIE wears a brown frock with a notebook that peeks out from her pocket. Nellie's childhood nickname was "Pink" or "Pinkey" and there is a reference in the script in which she wears pink at the end.

MISS GRUPE dresses in a black gown.

NURSE dresses in white with a matching bonnet.

The WOMEN patients all dress in gray smocks.

ADDITIONAL PROPS: bench, set of keys, bucket of water, a bloody rag; wash tub, rag, pushing a cart with various sized bottles on its top, chair, a scarf, ropes, measuring device, small bottle and needle, bucket and spoon, bowls, bloody bandage, and a pedestal.

SFX and Music

Lightning / thunder
A woman's scream
Heavy rain
Slam of a door
Rain
Waves crash
Sound of heels
Gavel
A drumroll

"Home Sweet Home" by Henry Bishop. A short version for the beginning and a longer version for the end.

Nellie

(AT RISE: Stars twinkle within a darkening sky. SFX: Lightning and thunder. NELLIE is onstage.)

NELLIE:
‘Twas a beautiful night,
Born the woman,
Heart made of gemstones,
Soul flooded with stardust.
And a fountain pen for a sword.
‘Twas a sad day, though,
Not when the man was born,
But when the man changed!
He saw the woman’s uniqueness.
Jealousy shrouded him.
The man mopped clouds into her sky.
Struck her light with blisters and bolts.
The woman didn’t want to be concealed,
The man crafted her in that image.
When the woman looked about her,
She saw that her brothers and sisters,
Suddenly, had ink-stained eyes.
This poison was injected into the world,
And when these two forces combined,
Madness was born.
Madness that tears the world apart,
Madness that causes humans to harm their own,
Categorizing them,
Endlessly setting them apart.
The woman swore she would strive
To become the Mother of the World.
To protect and find truth within it,
Because it was only the woman that knew
That without a telescopic lens,
The shimmer from a shooting star,
Can often be mistaken,
As the sneer from a sneaky sky leech.

(NELLIE exits. SFX: A woman screams! Lightning and thunder. The stars have disappeared. LIGHTS up on a tableau. MISS GRUPE stands with a set of keys dangling from her wrist. CATHERINE sways like a slow-moving river. BRIDGET moans, holding her stomach in pain. ANNE wipes her tears away. The MAN hides behind a newspaper. MRS. FOX raises a fist in protest. TILLIE holds a hand to her heart. LOUISE clasps her hands in prayer. The NURSE carries a bucket of water with one hand while a bloody rag is folded over the other.)

WOMEN: Women.
MISS GRUPE: Women
NURSE: Women.
MAN: Nellie Bly--
MISS GRUPE: *--Ten Days--*
NURSE: *--in a Madhouse.*
MAN: Madhouse?
WOMEN: MADHOUSE!

(Beat.)

WOMEN: *(Cont'd.)* Women.
CATHERINE: Sad women.
BRIDGET: Bad women.
ANNE Silenced women.
MRS. FOX: Violent women.
TILLIE: Riot women.
LOUISE: Quiet women.

(Beat.)

MAN: A woman should never use her words to provoke.
WOMEN: A man should never use his hands to choke.
MISS GRUPE: I don't care--
MAN: --'bout your troubles--
NURSE: --or pain.
WOMEN: You tricked us all with lies and games!

End of Freeview

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