

Undercover Reporting

The year is 1887, and you are a 23-year-old journalist named Nellie Bly. You have recently moved from Pittsburgh to New York City, in an attempt to make it big in the world of newspaper reporting. You are a talented writer, and you are passionate about issues affecting women in American society. There are very few women journalists at this time, but you are determined to succeed.

You are also a risk-taker, which is reflected in your reporting. You recently traveled to Mexico for six months to write about Mexican culture and society. After criticizing the Mexican government in one of your articles, the police threatened to arrest you, so you returned to the United States. Now you are living in New York City, trying to establish yourself as a leading voice in American journalism. You have many amazing ideas for stories, but you have not yet found a newspaper that is willing to hire a female investigative journalist.

After smooth-talking a receptionist, you have been given a meeting with an editor of the New York World, the biggest newspaper in the city. In the meeting with the editor, you propose an idea for a story in which you will travel to Europe, and then return to America, pretending to be an immigrant. You will travel through the immigration offices of Ellis Island, and write about your experiences. Nobody has tried anything like this before, and you know Americans are curious about what actually happens at Ellis Island.

Traveling across the Atlantic Ocean takes about 10 days each way, so you will be on a boat for almost three weeks. You will also be traveling in steerage, which means you have to stay in the bottom of the boat in crowded, smelly, unsanitary conditions for the entire journey.

The editor likes your idea, but he has another option for you to consider. There is a hospital near the city called the Women's Lunatic Asylum. There are rumors that the female patients are being abused and neglected. The editor wants you to pretend to be insane, get admitted to the hospital, and then write about your experiences. He says he will rescue you from the hospital after 10 days.

Now you must make a choice. Will you go undercover as a European immigrant and travel twice across the ocean? Or will you go undercover as an insane woman, and enter the Women's Lunatic Asylum? Writing about either of these experiences would make you famous as a reporter, but both options have risks involved. What will you do?

