

# NELLIE BLY

AMERICA'S BEST REPORTER



IRIS NOBLE



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All rights reserved. This book is a tribute to the trailblazing spirit of Nellie Bly, whose relentless pursuit of truth and justice paved the way for future generations.

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## **A Note from the Editor**

This is an updated edition of *Nellie Bly: First Woman Reporter* by Iris Noble, a fictionalized biography written for young readers in the 1960s. While based on real events and people, it sometimes blends fact with imaginative storytelling to create a more cohesive narrative. While keeping those elements intact, I've chosen to supplement them with Bly's actual writings so you can experience the difference between historical fiction and primary sources.

I've included full articles by Nellie Bly to give you a deeper appreciation for her sensationalistic style and skill, as well as an opportunity to peek at the pressing issues of her time. From gender rights to labor struggles and human trafficking, Nellie's writing boldly confronted the societal challenges she witnessed firsthand—remarkably unchanged from those we face today.

At the end of the book, in the "Extra!" section, you'll find two bonus articles that I believe are of unique value to today's readers. One paints a graphic picture of the ever-so-high cost of war, while the other features a lengthy interview with a brilliant activist who has always awed me—Susan B. Anthony. What a woman! I'll never forget a childhood trip to Washington, D.C., with my dad, where we used Susan B. Anthony one-dollar coins to pay for everything. Nellie's interview with her offers a valuable, intimate look into her life and strategies as a suffragist.

I hope this combination of Iris Noble's storytelling and Nellie Bly's reporting deepens your fascination with this period of history, as it did for me.

-Ambre Gilman Sautter



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“I have never written a word that did not come from my heart. I never shall.”

— **ELIZABETH COCHRANE (NELLIE BLY)**

*The Evening-Journal*

January 8, 1922

# 1

*NOTICE: Will the gentleman who wrote a letter to The Pittsburg Dispatch, criticizing our editorial of Friday entitled "What Girls Are Good For," please send his name and address to the editor? Mr. Madden wishes to discuss with the unknown contributor the possibility of his writing a feature article on the same subject for this paper.*

The notice appeared on the inside third page of the *Dispatch*, under the dateline of November 22, 1885. Most readers of the Pittsburgh paper passed it by completely, so small and tucked away was it between a dull article on the Erie Canal and an advertisement for Pears' soap.

One person did read it and to that one, it was as if a miracle had happened.

To Elizabeth Cochrane it was an answer to a prayer. Suppose she hadn't seen it? What if she had neglected, that one day, to open the *Dispatch* and read it?

She was shaking with excitement, standing in the small but elegant hallway of Thomas Kennedy's home. Behind the closed doors of the library she could hear the murmur of voices: her mother's, her older brothers' and her Uncle Thomas' as they sat over their afternoon tea. Those voices had been going on and on for over an hour, now, and the girl knew she was the subject of their discussion. What to do with Elizabeth? She was twenty years old. Her father, Judge Cochrane, was dead. There was no money to launch her debut into Pittsburgh society, no money

to attract suitors for her hand, in fact, she and her mother were living in real poverty, in one housekeeping room, since they had come to Pittsburgh.

Suddenly, in the still, quiet hall, Uncle Thomas' voice came clearly through the closed door. He must have walked nearer, probably to tap out his pipe into the curiously-carved Chinese bowl which he had brought home from his travels. The girl caught a fragment of what he was saying—"...why not school teaching?... or ... you prefer ... perhaps companion to old Mrs. Blakely ... rich ..."

Elizabeth turned and ran up the stairs. She went into the sitting room, closed the door and crossed hurriedly to the small writing desk, her long black mourning skirt almost tripping her in her haste. Pulling a piece of note paper out of her uncle's fashionably smart writing case, she wrote:

Mr. George A. Madden, Editor of *The Pittsburg Dispatch*.  
Dear Sir: In answer to your printed request for the name of the person who answered your editorial "What Girls Are Good For," I am that person and I am most interested in writing articles for your paper. I realize you are not expecting to hear from a woman, but it must have been my ability to write that impressed you. It surely makes no difference whether I am a man or a woman. As I said in my answer to your editorial, girls have the same ability, the same talents and the same intelligence as men. They only lack the same opportunities. I beg of you to give me an interview and—

She flung the pen to the floor. It would not do! If she told him she was a girl he might never answer. If she begged for an interview, he might feel she was appealing to him out of pity or sympathy. It just would not do. On a fresh sheet of note paper she wrote:

Mr. George A. Madden, Editor. Dear Sir: In reply to your request, I am the writer who answered your editorial "What Girls Are Good For." May I suggest next Wednesday afternoon at three o'clock for our appointment? If I do not hear from you to the contrary, I will be at your office at that time.

Sincerely, E. Cochrane.

Be a schoolteacher? Or a companion to a rich and cantankerous old woman like Mrs. Blakely? It was not for that her father had taken such pains with her education. She wanted to write. Ever since she was a child she had scribbled all over her schoolbooks—stories, poems, fairy tales. Her father had trained her to think. He had opened up the whole wide world of politics and economics and the law to her. He had even hoped for a while that she might become a lawyer like himself, but when he saw that her bent was for writing, he had encouraged her, taught her to have faith in herself.

There was no use talking to Uncle Thomas or her mother about a writing career. Even if they weren't just amused by the idea, they would point out certain hard, cold, economic facts. To wit, she had no money, she must earn a living. It might take years to write a book.

But it had taken her only one afternoon to write the answer to the editorial. It had impressed George Madden. He was *asking* for articles from her. And it might pay money!

In his cramped and cluttered office that next Wednesday, George Madden sat before his shabby old ink-stained, roll-top desk. His short legs dangled over the floor as he creaked back in his swivel chair, leaned over to jerk a paper off the wall spindle. Papers were everywhere, heaped on his desk and in piles on the floor.

Oddly enough, the only clean thing in the room was the cus-

pidor, it being the office boy's abominated job to clean it three times a day until it shone.

That was not a matter of finickiness, but of necessity. In those days men chewed and spat with great vigor.

Madden was tired and irritable. Beneath his feet, from the floor below, he could feel the vibrations of the presses. He could hear the steady clack-clack of the machines. Usually it was a sound that soothed him. Just hearing it there underneath him was all the sound, the tone, the harmony of the most beautiful of symphonies. His ear was like that of an orchestra conductor's who can hear the slightest flaw in the playing of the farthest man in the farthest row. Madden could come suddenly alert at the tiniest break in the rhythm below.

But today it was not the machines that troubled him. His difficulty lay with the men inside his city room. There they were, his ten reporters, scratching away at long sheets of foolscap with pen and pencil. And when they finished what they were doing, all ten of them would then just sit back and wait for him to tell them what next to cover.

He couldn't understand it. He had known reporters who went searching for news, who had ideas. Was that breed dying out?

From his window he could see the tall buildings of Pittsburgh. It was the Pittsburgh of 1885, a city that in an incredibly short space of time, since the end of the Civil War—and with a good share of its money made out of that war—had shucked off its cow-village frontier ways and emerged into this exciting, corrupt, colorful and inventively progressive manufacturing city, making news faster than he could print it.

The city he could cope with—if he had the men to do it.

His staff was made up of hard-working, competent newspapermen. But on a day like this he felt he would like to take all of

their ten heads and knock them together just to see if just one spark of imagination might not be jolted out of them.

"I don't get what you're driving at, Mr. Madden." Pelton, his lean tall assistant, who seemed to exude ink vapor and pencil dust and machine oil from his pores instead of the more human variety of perspiration, leaned over the desk and jabbed a bluish finger at a page of copy. One arm garter slid down over the elbow of his black alpaca shirt, and he pushed it up with a gesture of long habit. "What's wrong with that story? It's the Triangle Merchants' Dinner. Jones covered it. He got all the names straight. He got some of the main speech. What more do you want?"

"It's only one story. What about other stories?" Madden spoke in short, sharp barks of exasperation. "This story was in the banquet room. What about what happened in the lobby? In the bar? Fifty of the biggest financiers in the country there and Jay Gould their guest—there should be fifty stories. What's old Gould up to? What did Andrew Carnegie say to him? What mergers are coming up? What firms are due to collapse? Why, I could have picked up enough material there to fill the whole paper!"

"But you told him just to—"

"I know! I know! But can't he use his brains? Doesn't he have any curiosity? Pelton, the *Dispatch* is going stale. *Something* has to be done."

Now the assistant editor was thoroughly alarmed. He knew Madden to be a hardheaded, conservative man ordinarily. But when he reached these moments of despair over the paper, when he decided the *Dispatch* needed gingering up, then he seemed to lose all caution. He was apt to do queer and startling things. And before matters got back to normal there would be trouble, and he, Pelton, would be in as much hot water as his boss. The door opened. A boy's tight red curls peeped around

the door frame. A freckled face showed a mixture of fear and excitement. "A lady to see you, sir."

"Not in."

"But she says she has an appointment for three o'clock. And she's right here in the city room and the men are gawking at her." The boy thrust a letter at Pelton and scuttled out.

Madden took the letter and glanced at it. It was his, all right, confirming an appointment with E. Cochrane. But what was a woman doing here?

He thought back. Pelton had written an editorial on "What Girls Are Good For." It was the usual thing. Girls belonged in the home; it was to be deplored that some of them were venturing out to get jobs. It encouraged them to think they should vote or own property, this business of leaving home, and some of them might so far forget their noble womanhood as to join with the detested women suffragists who were undermining the whole fabric of society.

An answer had come in the mail from this Cochrane. It was a blistering answer. It said that girls had brains and ability and were good for something else besides cooking and homework and sewing fringe all over antimacassars. Said that the country needed all the talents it could get, but by its treatment of girls it was robbing itself of half the brains, half the skills, of its citizens. It was a letter that rang with passionate sincerity, calling for women to take their rightful place alongside of men in what was now a man's world.

It was well written. It would have been good, readable copy for any newspaper.

Well, maybe Cochrane couldn't come and had sent this woman with a message. "Send her in, Pelton," he said wearily.

When Elizabeth walked into that room and stood facing the

editor at his desk, neither she nor Madden could have had the slightest idea of how momentous was this first meeting. Neither could foresee a future for this girl that would mean both fame and notoriety, high honors and scandalous attacks. They could not see that from this room she would walk into paths no woman had walked before, paths that would take her into the homes of the great and the rich, into the slums of the poor, into insane asylums and pest-houses, across oceans and into foreign lands. Neither could hear, far off in the future, the screaming, cheering, applauding crowds—Americans and people in strange, foreign costumes, too—that would take her to their hearts, trampling each other to get a look at her or touch her hand.

Madden saw only a very feminine, timid girl in mourning clothes. She was a small girl and in her slender face her large gray eyes seemed enormous and somehow compelling. And she was very young, barely eighteen, he guessed.

She didn't wait for him to speak.

"I know you were expecting to see a man, Mr. Madden. But I am E. Cochrane—Elizabeth Cochrane. I was afraid if you knew I was a woman you wouldn't want to see me. And I very much want the chance to write for your newspaper. You mentioned my doing an article for you?"

He stared at her, astounded. Women didn't write for newspapers. Everyone knew that.

"Sit down, miss." As she moved to the chair he noticed again how young she was. She must have only just begun to put up her red-brown hair, because it was amateurishly pinned and threatening to come tumbling down around her shoulders at any minute. Her small bonnet was slipping sidewise. Her black dress of mourning was a pathetic, touching compromise between the hourglass silhouette of the older woman and the shapeless

frock of the child. The bustle at the back was a flat, pancake affair and it wobbled when she walked, for she was too slim to support it well. Her black, shiny high-button shoes were neat on her very small feet.

"I'm sorry you made the trip down here, Miss Cochrane. Because I'll have to disappoint you. I couldn't possibly—"

"Please! Before you say that, please listen to me. I *can* write. I could be a good newspaper reporter."

"Now don't talk nonsense. You're too young. Even if you weren't, I don't employ women." But his curiosity got the better of him. "I just don't understand, Miss Cochrane, why you should want to do this. Do you have some idea that writing for newspapers is a romantic fling?"

"Of course not." She sat forward on the edge of her seat, gripping her purse tightly. "I know it is hard work. But I must earn a living. My mother and I are penniless. My two brothers are just beginning in business here; I can't be a burden on them. And the only thing I do well is write. I've *proved* that to you. My father was a lawyer and when he had cases to try he used to send me out—he used to say I was scouting his cases—and I would get all the facts, all kinds of hidden information from families and neighbors, information that might not come out in a courtroom. Then I would write up a report. That kind of training—it isn't much different from newspaper reporting, is it?"

"I thought you said you wanted to do one article." The editor sounded dazed. "Now you're talking about newspaper *reporting*—you really mean that you want to be a *reporter*? Whew! Now I think I've heard everything!"

To his own dumbfounded astonishment, he found himself becoming interested. She talked well. In spite of her demure

manner, she talked with poise and maturity and she used words as if they were good tools to express herself with.

"One article alone won't feed me. If I can prove to you that you will want to print what I write, then let me write more. I can do it as well as anyone on your paper." Elizabeth was not boasting. It was a statement of fact. "And I have ideas."

"What kind of ideas?"

Her face lit up, intense, earnest. "Mr. Madden, I've been all over Pittsburgh, looking at everything. One day I walked down to the slums. Sir, there are a million stories there! Let me go and find them, not just in the slums—everywhere. I found two children that day, just babies, sleeping in a doorway. I learned they had no parents, no one to take care of them, except for the kindness of neighbors who fed them in turns. The older one was nine years old and she looked after her brother. Isn't that a story? I think people want to read about themselves. Your subscribers are working people mostly. They don't want to read just what some woman in society is doing, or what some big politician is saying, or what is happening in Washington or Wall Street. They want to read about their own lives—how they work and live and the kind of houses they have—and what they *think!*"

Madden stared at her. Ten minutes ago he had been wondering if there was such a thing as a fresh idea, and if there was, where would he find the person who could put it on paper. Here she was—a reporter who would go out and mingle with people and *find* stories. He had dreamed of this.

He tried to be cautious. He explained to her: a newspaper was supposed to report about big people, not little ones. People bought the *Dispatch* to read about the rich, the famous, the influential.

"I'm not denying that, Mr. Madden. But isn't there room for both kinds of stories?"

He threw caution away. He wanted to know more of her ideas.

And Elizabeth Cochrane literally poured them out, leaving him bewildered at the profusion, the variety, the daring of them. She would take a photographer with her and explore a factory. She would go into shops and talk to the women who worked there; she would go home with them and find out how they lived, where they learned their trades, what they did for amusement. She had seen children of ten working in the mills from dawn to dusk. How many Pittsburgh citizens gave them even a thought? And she would go to the orphan asylums, the poorhouses, hospitals, prisons—she would go everywhere!

As she spoke, he was amazed at what was happening right in front of his eyes.

Again and again her personality changed in swift flashes of characterization. Why, Madden thought, this youngster is an actress! In rapid succession he saw her turn into a tired woman coming home from work. He saw her old and poor and hobbled with rheumatism, as she spoke of the poorhouse. He saw her face flood with tenderness and become almost matronly as she spoke of the children. She was restless as she talked. She paced up and down. But he felt, too, that she was totally unaware of the fact that she was acting out her thoughts.

He slapped the desk with the flat of his hand. He would have given that hand—and arm, too—to have had a man on his staff to whom he could have turned over her ideas. But there wasn't any.

They were *her* ideas. She had a right to her chance.

George A. Madden did the most revolutionary thing in his life. "All right," he said. "We'll see about this. I think you are on the right track. I want you to do a feature for me—no, you pick

your own topic. If it's any good, then you'll be a reporter for me. I mean it—" he waved her grateful stammerings aside. "Don't thank me. Do a good feature and you've got a job. At least"—caution returning—"I'll give you a chance with some of your ideas."

The article on divorce reached him two days later. It was well written, excitingly written. The controversy over divorce—over whether people should or should not have the right to divorce—had been fought over in pulpits and senates and law courts for many years. The subject had been chewed over in articles until it was limp as a rag. But she had managed to give it freshness. Elizabeth remembered all the painstaking legal work her father had done on the subject; she added social, humanistic arguments to advocate that people should have the right to free themselves from intolerable relationships.

Madden liked it. It was vivid and bright and easy reading.

He sent her a note: she had fulfilled her share of the bargain. Now she would have her assignment as a reporter. She was to visit a factory that bottled jams and jellies and pickles and other condiments—the Grubacher Company. A photographer would meet her in front of the factory at ten o'clock Monday morning.

So far Elizabeth had kept what she was doing a secret from her family. The article on divorce would be in the Sunday paper. Let it speak for itself, break the news, then she could take it from there.

Sunday came. As usual, the Cochranes visited the Kennedys for Sunday noon dinner. All morning, untouched, the *Dispatch* lay on the hall table. It was not proper to open it until after church services. Even then Elizabeth controlled her eagerness. She didn't dare touch it; she was too agitated. She wanted her mother and the others to read it first.

But after dinner Uncle Thomas leafed through the pages

without a comment. Her brothers went through it carefully, in turn, discussing the local news with each other. Her mother glanced at the headlines.

Elizabeth could hardly contain herself. Wasn't it printed? Had Mr. Madden changed his mind? She couldn't stand it any longer. She grabbed the paper and went through it, item by item.

There it was! The top article—prominently displayed on the feature section. Bold, black type slashed the title "Divorce" at the head of the column. But it was signed—Nellie Bly—not Elizabeth Cochrane.

It was the fashion of those days for pen names. Also, Madden had made inquiries and found that Elizabeth's father had been Judge Cochrane, member of an old, influential Pennsylvania family. The town where Elizabeth was born was called Cochran's Mills after the family. It would not do to bandy around such a name signed after articles on divorce.

An office boy happened to be passing, whistling a tune. It was Stephen Foster's popular song "Nelly Bly." It struck Madden as a good pen name, catchy and also one that *Dispatch* readers were familiar with.

And thus she was to gain a new name—Nellie Bly.

When she disclosed her authorship, the storm in the family was what she had expected. Women did not cheapen themselves by appearing in print, certainly no woman of the Cochrane-Kennedy family. Uncle Thomas was outraged. Her brothers were furious. Her mother was wronged and aggrieved. This was no work for a gently reared, cultured young girl. They would not permit it; how could she have done such a thing without consulting them? She would be associating with riffraff, she might be sent into saloons! Uncle Thomas roared.

Elizabeth thought it best not to mention Monday or the bottle factory.

But she faced them with her mind made up. She must earn a living, she pointed out to them. She refused to be a companion or a governess—these were only polite names for being a high-class servant. And she was being paid five dollars for this article.

In 1885 this was no small sum for two days' work. Even Uncle Thomas was impressed. But what finally defeated both her uncle and her brothers was not the money, but Elizabeth's determination and—to everyone's surprise—her mother's sudden about-face. Mrs. Cochrane had her own doubts about the suitability of this new work, but she wasn't going to stand by and hear the menfolk bully her daughter.

"You know very well," she scolded them, with a twinkle of humor on her plump face, "that you are all secretly afraid you will have Elizabeth on your hands and have to support her. So don't stand in her way when she wants to be independent."

That Monday morning at the corner of Howell and Jane streets, in the heart of the slum-factory area, Elizabeth met the photographer from the *Dispatch*. He was a tall man, bald and dyspeptic, his hands full of his big black camera, his tripod, his plates and flash powder. His name was Sam, he told her. And that's all he did say. He was there to take pictures. If Madden wanted to send a woman or a hippopotamus along, that was Madden's affair.

His matter-of-factness was just what Elizabeth needed. It was obvious that he was looking to her to take the lead. She could not show him that she was scared, that this was her first job.

Getting into the factory was easy. The factory manager was pleased. He had visions of good publicity for his plant. He took them on a quick tour and then back to his office, just off the big

room where the women stood in long rows to wash the bottles. He was charmed with Elizabeth, delighted with her innocent little questions and her girlish curiosity. He told her of course she could wander around in the room and talk to the women if she wanted to. It was a waste of her time but it would give her something to do while the photographer took pictures of himself and his handsome new office.

Sam took endless pictures. There were no plates in the camera, but the manager didn't know that. He was exhausted by posing when Elizabeth came back. He teased her playfully, fatherly, for her curiosity. What in the world had she been doing all that time?

He found out—when the story broke.

Again it was signed Nellie Bly, and it told of all the things she had learned from the women themselves; the long working hours, the terrible conditions of cold and damp and of standing for hours on tired, aching feet; of the bottles that broke and cut the girls' hands to ribbons in long, ugly slashes; of the water that splashed, hot and steaming, over hands and faces at the washing sinks. It told of complaints that the manager ignored: the dirty, unsanitary conditions; the rats that came crawling around for scraps of food fallen on the floor; the one toilet for both men and women on two whole floors of the factory.

There were no pictures of the potbellied little manager. Instead, displayed in three columns across the second page were pictures of girls at work, pictures of girls with their feet bundled in rags against the bitter cold of the cement floor.

The story was written in a highly personal, highly emotional vein. Nellie Bly was furiously indignant. Every line was a trumpet call for justice.

The reaction of Pittsburgh citizens was a mixed one. The

*Dispatch* was a sold-out issue. Subscriptions jumped. The working people dug down into worn-out wallets and pocketbooks to take the paper, because this was their story and Nellie was their champion.

On the other side the story was no less a sensation, though there it stirred a tempest of anger and pious condemnation. Factory owners, whose plants were no better than Grubacher's, were enraged and denounced Nellie, Madden and the *Dispatch* for their presumption in daring to criticize their way of doing business. They called Nellie radical and blasted Madden as irresponsible. Some clergymen preached sermons branding Nellie an immoral woman who pried into matters worldly instead of sticking to matters spiritual as befitted a woman. Civic groups sent a delegation to the *Dispatch* with orders the paper was to boost Pittsburgh, not expose it.

But who was Nellie Bly? And what was a woman doing writing articles for newspapers, anyway!

Madden was pleased. The *Dispatch* was being read, that was the main thing. He laughed at Pelton for his warnings of trouble to come. He gave Elizabeth another assignment. This time she would have a free hand and she could go anywhere she wanted, write any kind of a story, and she could have a staff artist to go with her to sketch illustrations for her.

So Elizabeth Cochrane, twenty years old, went into the slums of Pittsburgh. She walked through narrow, dirty, garbage-strewn streets. She talked to women and to men. She found conditions more horrible than anything she had dreamed of—whole families living in one room without heat to warm them or enough food to feed them—tenements that were fire traps—tenements that were rat ridden. Here were children who had never been to school, and other children of ten and twelve who were sent to

work in the mills because otherwise there wouldn't be enough food for the family.

These children struck horror to her heart. They were tiny little old men and women, their minds empty of any natural childish thought, their bodies already stunted and twisted by work too heavy and hours too long.

She saw hunger. She saw fear. She listened to angry talk about the rich who cared nothing for the poor, and she sought out men who belonged to the Knights of Labor and who were agitating for an eight-hour day. But mostly she talked to women, following them to the mills and shops to see where and how they worked.

The "Nellie Bly" articles became a regular feature of the *Dispatch*. And month by month the pressure mounted against Madden to stop her. Factory owners, landlords, big businessmen, all concentrated their fire against one newspaper and against one "meddling" female.

Madden wavered. True, he had received warm support from many reform leaders and from woman-suffrage and trade-union leaders, from educators and from some preachers. But they were not the people who could place or pull out advertisements in his newspaper. So he compromised.

"We'll give them a breathing space, Nellie—do you mind my calling you that? I always think of you as Nellie. Now we'll stop the stories for a while. In the meantime, I want you to try your hand at something else."

The "something else" was a theater opening of the new play *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, starring Mr. Mansfield. Like a good reporter, Elizabeth was eager to try every kind of work. She went to her new assignment with almost as much enthusiasm as she had for her special stories. She even bought fashionable new clothes. Uncle Thomas was proud to be her escort. He had

agreed to it with some doubts—what was she going to do at a theater opening? To his delight she sat quietly, an attractive, well-dressed girl, watching the performance and making notes on her program. He found it very satisfying, too, that she asked him for help; he knew who was who of Pittsburgh society who sat in the expensive boxes and he knew a great deal of the stage itself.

Through the months of January and February and on through the spring and summer of 1886, Elizabeth covered the theater, the opera, concerts, lectures, art exhibits. She enjoyed it. But she was marking time, waiting for Madden to give her back the kind of assignments she wanted to do.

She begged him to let her go back to the slums.

Finally he gave in. She could do a factory story. But first he had another story for her, one that he was sure she would like. He wanted her to visit the new Western Penitentiary, the most modern and advanced of its kind. Then she'd be free to do her own story.

Two assignments—and both to her liking. Elizabeth was excited and happy. She visited the new prison and talked to the warden. He was most co-operative. He took her around and showed her the advances he had made: the clean quarters, the reading rooms, the shops where the men could be taught a trade. There would be no more whippings here, no more starving the men into submission. In the account she wrote for the *Dispatch* she minced no words in telling the horrible stories of what happened to most prisoners in other jails of that time.

Then she went to the factory.

She knew just which one she wanted. One day, happening to pass by a big, dilapidated brick building in the heart of the slums, she had been fascinated by a glimpse she had caught of the basement workroom. More than a hundred women seemed



to be crouching there over long tables, although she couldn't tell what they were doing. This was the place to which she took the artist who would make sketches for her.

Elizabeth tried first to get into the main factory upstairs. The gatekeeper had his orders; no visitors.

All morning she waited outside in an agony of indecision. How was she going to get into that basement? Then, just before noon, the women poured up and out into the street—from a door she hadn't seen. And as they came into the bright sunlight every single one of them did the same thing! They put up their hands to shield their eyes, rubbed their eyes as if the light were too painful to bear.

The artist made a quick, rapid sketch. It made a superb picture.

Now it was her turn. She walked over to one of the women, debating in her mind what to say and how to get in.

The woman spoke first, unwittingly giving Elizabeth her opportunity. "You lookin' for work, honey? If you want a job you couldn't a come at a better time. They said they was planning on hiring some girls tomorrow. You come back with us after lunch and I'll bet you get in."

She went back with them. The foreman looked at her sourly, at her soft white, well-cared-for hands.

"You don't look to me like you've ever worked before. If you want a job you might as well know you are going to work hard. We don't go for any pampering. Any complaints and you just pick yourself up and get out!" He rounded this out with a few choice curses on the troubles he had with beginners.

He led her to a bench. Long strands of copper wire were placed in front of her. The foreman grabbed them in one hand, looped a cord around them, flipped a cord end inside the loop and pulled it tight. "See? Just keep doing this every two inches

all the way down the cable. No—not like that! Clumsy! Do it like I showed you!”

For ten minutes he stood over her. And for ten minutes he showered curses and abuse on her head. Her fingers ached with the tension of trying to do it right and fast, and with the strain of pulling the heavy cord. Across from her and on all sides women's hands were flying, doing the same operation as she was, over and over. Thick calluses on thumbs and finger joints showed where the heavy cords had thickened the skin. Her own unprotected hands were soon sore and raw.

Now she understood, too, the reason why the women had shielded their eyes against the sun. There was hardly any light in the room. Gas jets along walls gave a flickering, yellowish glow, but they were of little help over the tables. In order to see their work the women bent so low over the tables that back and shoulder muscles were tortured with pain.

The foreman was called away. This gave her some moments to talk to her fellow workers. In answer to her questions, they whispered about their splitting headaches, of their fear of going blind over their work. Their hands were scored and roughened by the cables, their backs in constant pain. No matter how fast they worked the foreman was standing over them, urging them, yelling at them in the foulest of language to go faster. The speed was inhuman.

At the end of an hour Elizabeth was fired.

Being thirsty, she had left her bench and had found an old sink in one corner of the room. She was rinsing out the one dirty glass when the foreman spotted her.

“What are you doing here?” he roared. “Get back to your bench. You ask permission if you want to leave it, for anything, you hear?”

Her temper exploded. "I don't ask anyone's permission to get a drink of water!"

She was fired.

The next day her story appeared. This time there was a new quality in it. It was no longer an I-saw story. It was an I-was-there, a personal experience story burning with the deepest sense of outrage and insult. Reading it, people felt that they, too, had lived through that day with her, that their hands hurt and their backs ached, that their eyes were tortured. It was the best reporting she had ever done.

The article she had written on the prison had come out the day before—and now this one. It was too much.

The attack, slanderous and vile, centered around her prison story. She was called an abandoned, evil woman to have walked through a prison full of nothing but men, looked into their cells, talked to them. Shameless! City officials denounced her as incompetent to judge their prison systems. A rival newspaper printed an editorial demanding all decent women shun such a one as Nellie Bly, who could so lower the standards of female decency as to write about the coarse subject of the life of men in jail.

The outcry did not lessen with the passing of days. On the contrary, it grew. Her account of the basement factory infuriated many businessmen. They sent Madden an ultimatum: no more stories like that or they would boycott the *Dispatch*, pull out their advertisements. There were many voices that praised both the stories. But these were quiet voices, not the loud ones or the ones with money and authority.

Madden capitulated.

Elizabeth was assigned back to reporting the theater, back to the art reviews, back to the respectable job of covering lectures and recitals. He raised her salary to fifteen dollars a week, an excellent salary for a young girl in those times.

January 25, 1885

## THE GIRL PUZZLE

### SOME SUGGESTIONS ON WHAT TO DO WITH THE DAUGHTERS OF MOTHER EVE.

For the *Dispatch*.

What shall we do with our girls?

Not our Madame Neilsons; nor our Mary Andersons; not our Bessie Brambles nor Maggie Mitchells; not our beauty or our heiress; not any of these, but those without talent, without beauty, without money.

What shall we do with them?

The anxious father still wants to know what to do with his five daughters. Well indeed may he inquire and wonder. Girls, since the existence of Eve, have been a source of worryment, to themselves as well as to their parents, as to what shall be done with them. They cannot, or will not, as the case may be, all marry. Few, very few, possess the mighty pen of the late Jane Grey Swisshelm, and even writers, lecturers, doctors, preachers and editors must have money as well as ability to fit them to be such. What is to be done with the poor ones?

The schools are overrun with teachers, the stores with clerks, the factories with employees. There are more cooks, chambermaids and washerwomen than can find employment. In fact, all places that are filled by women are overrun, and still there are idle girls, some that have aged parents depending on them. We cannot let them starve. Can they that have full and plenty of this world's goods realize what it is to be a poor working woman, abiding in one or two bare rooms, without fire enough to keep warm, while her threadbare clothes refuse to protect

her from the wind and cold, and denying herself necessary food that her little ones may not go hungry; fearing the landlord's frown and threat to cast her out and sell what little she has, begging for employment of any kind that she may earn enough to pay for the bare rooms she calls home, no one to speak kindly to or encourage her, nothing to make life worth the living? If sin in the form of man comes forward with a sly smile and says, "Fear no more, your debts shall be paid," she can not let her children freeze or starve, and so falls. Well, who shall blame her? Will it be you that have a comfortable home, a loving husband, sturdy, healthy children, fond friends—shall you cast the first stone? It must be so; assuredly it would not be cast by one similarly situated. Not only the widow, but the poor maiden needs employment.

Perhaps father is dead and mother helpless, or just the reverse; or maybe both are depending on her exertions, or an orphan entirely, as the case may be.

What is she to do? Perhaps she had not the advantage of a good education, consequently cannot teach; or, providing she is capable, the girl that needs it not half as much, but has the influential friends, gets the preference. Let her get a position as clerk. The salary given would not pay for food, without counting rent or clothing. Let her go to the factory; the pay may in some instances be better, but from 7 a.m. until 6 p.m.,

except for 30 minutes at noon, she is shut up in a noisy, unwholesome place. When duties are over for the day, with tired limbs and aching head, she hastens sadly to a cheerless home. How eagerly she looks forward to pay day, for that little mite means so much at home. Thus day after day, week after week, sick or well, she labors on that she may live. What think you of this, butterfly of fashion, ladies of leisure? This poor girl does not win fame by running off with a coachman; she does not hug or kiss a pug dog nor judge people by their clothes and grammar; and some of them are ladies, perfect ladies, more so than many who have had every advantage.

Some say: "Well, such people are used to such things and do not mind it." Ah, yes, Heaven pity them. They are in most cases used to it. Poor little ones put in factories while yet not in their teens so they can assist a widowed mother, or perhaps father is a drunkard or has run away; well they are used to it, but they mind it. They will very quickly see you draw your dress away that they may not touch it; they will very quickly hear your light remarks and sarcastic laugh about their exquisite taste in dress, and they mind it as much as you would, perhaps more. They soon learn of the vast difference between you and them. They often think of your life and compare it with theirs. They read of what your last pug dog cost and think of what that vast sum would have done for them—paid father's doctor bill, bought mother a new dress, shoes for the little ones—and imagine how nice it would be, could baby have the beef tea that is made for your favorite pug, or the care and kindness that is bestowed upon it.

But what is to be done with the girls? Mr. Quiet Observations says: "In China they kill girl babies. Who

knows but that this country may have to resort to this sometime." Would it not be well, as in some cases it would save a life of misery and sin and many a lost soul?

If girls were boys quickly it would be said: start them where they will, they can, if ambitious, win a name and fortune. How many wealthy and great men could be pointed out who started in the depths: but where are the many women? Let a youth start as errand boy and he will work his way up until he is one of the firm. Girls are just as smart, a great deal quicker to learn: why, then, can they not do the same? As all occupations for women are filled why not start some new ones? Instead of putting the little girls in factories let them be employed in the capacity of messenger boys or office boys. It would be healthier. They would have a chance to learn: their ideas would become broader and they would make as good, if not better, women in the end. It is asserted by storekeepers that women make the best clerks. Why not send them out as merchant travelers? They can talk as well as men—at least men claim that it is a noted fact that they talk a great deal more and faster. If their ability at home for selling exceeds a man's, why would it not abroad? Their lives would be brighter, their health better, their pocket-books fuller, unless their employers would do as now—give them half their wages because they are women.

We have in mind an incident that happened in your city. A girl was engaged to fill a position that had always been occupied by men, who, for the same, received \$2.00 a day. Her employer stated that he never had anyone in the same position that was as accurate, speedy and gave the same satisfaction; however, as she was "just a girl" he gave her \$5.00 a week. Some call this equality.

The position of conductor on the Pullman Palace car is an easy, clean and good paying business. Why not put girls at that? They do many things that are more difficult and more laborious. In the banks, where so many young men are employed, give the girls a chance. They can do the work as well, and, as a gentleman remarked, "It would have a purifying effect on the conversation." Some people claim it would not do to put woman where she will not be protected. In being a merchant traveler or filling similar positions, a true woman will protect herself anywhere—as easily on the road as behind a counter, as easily as a Pullman conductor as in an office or factory. In such positions, receiving men's wages, she would feel independent; she could support herself. No more pinching and starving, no more hard work for little pay; in short, she would be a woman and would not be half as liable to forget the duty she owed her own true womanhood as one pinched by poverty and without means of support. Here would be a good field for believers in women's

rights. Let them forego their lecturing and writing and go to work; more work and less talk. Take some girls that have the ability, procure for them situations, start them on their way, and by so doing accomplish more than by years of talking. Instead of gathering up the "real smart young men" gather up the real smart girls, pull them out of the mire, give them a shove up the ladder of life, and be amply repaid both by their success and unforgetfulness of those that held out the helping hand.

However visionary this may sound, those interested in human kind and wondering what to do with the girls might try it. George M. Pullman has tried and succeeded in bettering this poor class. Some of our purse-filled citizens might try it by way of variety, for, as someone says: "Variety is the spice of life." We all like the "spice of life": we long for it, except when it comes in the form of hash in our boardinghouse table. We shall talk of amusements for our girls after we find them employment.

LONELY ORPHAN GIRL