

I SEE YOU, NELLIE BLY

You say that you're not one of 'us' but that's just a symptom, a manifestation of your lunacy. You reside in imaginations. When you were first escorted into this place, your eyes widened. Not in that wild, cliched way that you were affecting with the doctors – but rather - with shock. Involuntary movements of the irises. Rapidly oscillating, as if to reject those sights that were being thrust upon them. That sterile floor, whose gleam holds the reflections of the filthy, broken women. Those wretches that spent their morning hours scrubbing shine into cold tiles and are now obliged to sit ram-rod straight upon the low, long bench running down the middle of the room. They gaze upon their own reflections, wavering images beneath their feet. They play games in their minds, counting backwards in multiples of seven. Anything to still the cries of arthritic knees and empty stomachs.

The stench of mouldy bread and cold cabbage pervades the air. It perhaps explains the skeletal appearance of the starving inmates that have no option to seek out other, superior nourishment. That terrible silence, broken only by the stifled wails of torment escaping from those poor women whose frail bodies can hold in their agonies no longer. The orderlies, who are - neglected and standing for hours - perhaps it was a donation from some kindly soul whose wildest imaginations could never countenance a place where music is forbidden. Where the God-given comfort of nature is driven out. No flowers here. No cross-stitched homilies adorning the walls. Just an emptiness, of spirit, of humanity, of joy.

In that moment, in that sliver of time you reveal yourself. You are afraid. You are in over your head. You have walked willingly, even eagerly into the lion's den.

You knew then, *where* you were. More or less. In a trap. Your neck upon the block and staring up at the mirrored blade. The power as to whether it hurtles down to slice through that pretty neck, held in hands other than yours. You realise then that you are in error. That you have made a grave and serious mistake. The realisation draws the blood from your face. Your pale, waxy-sheened face. What have you done, Nellie Bly? What have you gotten yourself into?