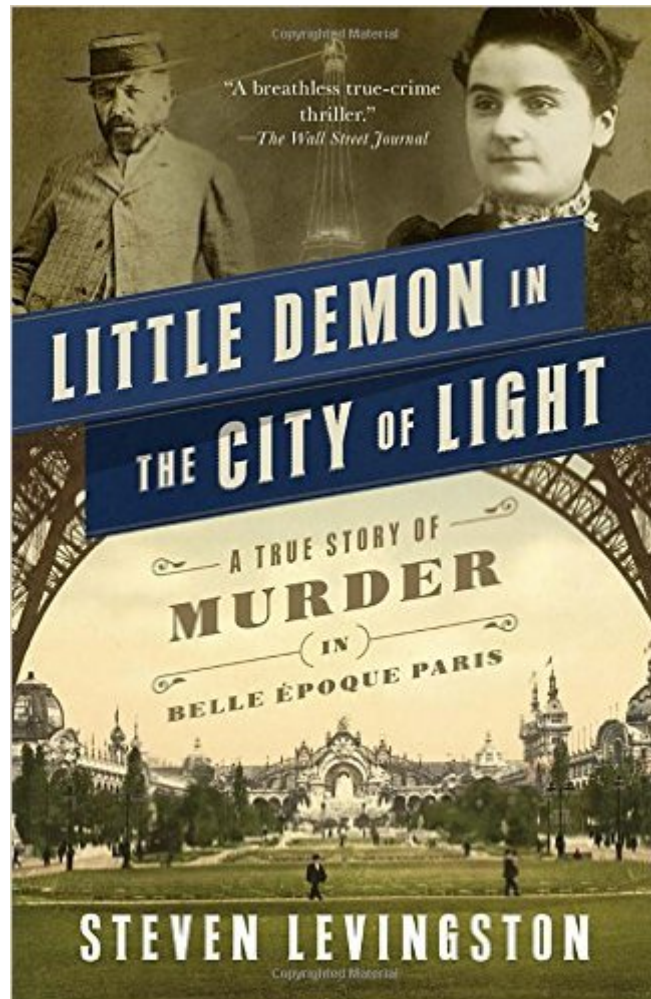


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Little Demon In The City Of Light: A True Story Of Murder In Belle Époque Paris



Synopsis

In 1889, the gruesome murder of a lascivious court official at the hands of a ruthless con man and his pliant mistress launched the trial of the century. When Toussaint-Augustin Gouffé entered 3, rue Tronson du Coudray, expecting a delightful assignation with the comely Gabrielle Bompard, he was instead murdered by Gabrielle and her lover, Michel Eyraud. An international manhunt chased the infamous couple from Paris to America's West Coast, culminating in a sensational trial that investigated the power of hypnosis to possess, control, and even kill. As the inquiry into the guilt or innocence of the woman the French tabloids dubbed the "Little Demon" intensified, the most respected minds in France vehemently debated: Was Gabrielle Bompard the pawn of her mesmerizing lover or simply a coldly calculating murderess capable of killing a man in cold blood?

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I don't generally read a lot of non-fiction for entertainment, but the story told in Steven Levingston's "Little Demon in the City of Light" sounded particularly interesting. Ostensibly, this is a tale of a notorious criminal case in 1889 Paris in which one of the defendants used a hypnotism defense at trial. Gabrielle Bompard, who to all outward appearances played an active role in the murder of a wealthy businessman, claimed she was not responsible for her actions as she was under the mental suggestion/influence of her partner in crime. A lot was unknown or theorized about hypnotism at the time, and two schools of thought ruled the day. Of course, one set of scholars found Bompard accountable for her deeds while the other favored her claims of being controlled. In a precedent

setting decision, the court weighed in on whether hypnotism could be a valid defense against culpability in a crime. From its description, this is really what I thought "Little Demon in the City of Light" would be about. In truth, the hypnotism defense and trial don't even take center stage until the final third of the book. What we get, instead, is a more fully rounded portrait of events and of the era itself. Levingston really stages an effective canvas on which to place these larger than life characters. His description of the free wheeling period in Paris history known as La Belle Époque makes the tale all the more fascinating. Within this framework, we see how the criminals integrated into this world of extravagance, how they practically became celebrities in a culture that reveled in scandal. We get to know Bompard (eventually dubbed the Little Demon) and her criminal cohort Michel Eyraud in the days preceding the crime and its aftermath.

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