



American Eve: Evelyn Nesbit, Stanford White, the Birth of the "It" Girl and the Crime of the Century

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The scandalous story of America's first supermodel, sex goddess, and modern celebrity, Evelyn Nesbit, the temptress at the center of Stanford White's famous murder, whose iconic life story reflected all the paradoxes of America's Gilded Age

Known to millions before her sixteenth birthday in 1900, Evelyn Nesbit was the most photographed woman of her era, an iconic figure who set the standard for female beauty. Women wanted to be her. Men just wanted her. When her life of fantasy became all too real, and her jealous millionaire husband, Harry K. Thaw, killed her lover, celebrity architect Stanford White, builder of the Washington Square Arch and much of New York City, she found herself at the center of the Crime of the Century, and the popular courtroom drama that followed, a scandal that signaled the beginning of a national obsession with youth, beauty, celebrity, and sex.

The story of Evelyn Nesbit is one of glamour, money, romance, sex, madness, and murder, and Paula Uruburu weaves all of these elements into an elegant narrative that reads like the best fiction - only it's all true. *American Eve* goes far beyond just literary biography; it paints a picture of America as it crossed from the Victorian era into the modern, foreshadowing so much of our contemporary culture today.

American Eve: Evelyn Nesbit, Stanford White, the Birth of the "It" Girl and the Crime of the Century Details

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From Reader Review American Eve: Evelyn Nesbit, Stanford White, the Birth of the "It" Girl and the Crime of the Century for online ebook

King says

It has some pretty "poppy" writing. For example, I am not fond of how Ms. Uruburu's sentences end. But then there's just one more thing.

Sex. A one-word sentence like that is too melodramatic a device to employ in a serious history book.

And extended metaphors equating 1900 to the Garden of Eden are very pretty, but here I feel Ms. Uruburu succumbed to some fork-tongued serpent's sophistry in introducing this forbidden fruit to the verdant prelapsarian prose that might otherwise have characterized her work.

Nevertheless, it's a great read.

Arminius says

I have read about many great people who had many great gifts including courage, vision, and persistence among others. Evelyn Nesbit had however, what I consider, a rare quality. The quality is: being seen almost universally as beautiful. This is an attribute that I believe most people would love to have. But being so beautiful is not always a blessing as Evelyn Nesbit would discover.

Evelyn had a normal early child hood in the suburbs of Pittsburgh. She evidently had a wonderful father who was making every effort to see that his daughter receive a college education. However when he unexpectedly died, Evelyn's family plunged into poverty. So when a painter saw Evelyn's stunning teenage face he offered money to paint a portrait. Evelyn's mother readily agreed. As Evelyn's name caught on more painters and photographers would paint or photograph her for a small fee.

Evelyn's mother knew that more money could be made in a larger city. So she packs up the family and moves to Philadelphia. Evelyn finds more modeling work there. Her mother realizes that there was more opportunities in New York City. So she obtains references for a New York photographer and they go off to New York.

Evelyn finds lots of work there. She eventually winds up in stage plays. When the famous architect Stanford White discovers her he becomes enthralled with her beautiful face. The clever and devious White embraces the poor Nesbit family. He sets them up in nice apartment and lavishes them with food and presents. He also pays for her brother to go to college. He would act fatherly (he was 48, she was 15), for what seems, for months. He ensured Evelyn and her mother were well fed and would take care of any problem either of them came across. This enabled both Evelyn and her mother to learn to like and trust him. All the while though Stanford White was married and was seducing other very young underage actresses. But with their trust he develops a devious plan. He talks Evelyn's mother into taking a vacation back to Pittsburgh paying the bill and leaving Evelyn in his care.

He then takes Evelyn to a lavish hotel room, gets her drunk and rapes her. The author states all along that Stanford White was a known molester of young teenage girls. He then proceeds to threaten the 15 year old

Evelyn not to tell anyone. Evelyn obliges and, in my eyes, oddly starts treating him like a boyfriend.

Her life continues as she acts on stage and continues her relationship with Stanford White. Being the very busy man he was he was, he became absent from Evelyn for a few days. In steps a young 21 year old beau named John Barrymore. He was the son of a famous actor and he swept her off her feet. Her mother quickly ends this relationship by notifying Stanford White. White and Mrs. Nesbit plan to breakup the pair by shipping Evelyn to a school in New Jersey.

Then an odd twist occurs in Evelyn's tough life. Evelyn was released from her New Jersey school when White and Mrs. Nesbit thought Barrymore had given up on her. Evelyn goes back to New York and starts to work again when a mega millionaire 32 year old comes into her life. His name was Harry Thaw. Harry was from a coke and steel business back in her home town surroundings of Pittsburgh. What we find out about him is almost as freakish as Stanford White's string of pedophile seductions. But one of the bizarre things about him is that he hated Stanford White, even before he knew of Evelyn. White had somehow snubbed Thaw at a party while Thaw was visiting New York. This may have been the reason behind his hatred.

Thaw continues to pursue Evelyn and his persistence eventually led to Evelyn's acceptance of him. He was close enough to her that when she got sick, Thaw paid for her hospitalization and medical care. He then convinces her mother that a cruise on a ship followed by a European vacation would do wonders for Evelyn's recovery. Thaw would pay for it and sail in a separate ship. He meets them in Europe and plans their itinerary. Using a clever ploy he moves Evelyn and her mother to different European cities. But in each city he would make Evelyn and her mother switch hotels multiple times. This drove Mrs Nesbit crazy leading to her demand to be sent home, just as Thaw likely hoped. The good natured happy-go-lucky Evelyn wanted to stay. His plan worked perfectly.

Now that he has Evelyn alone, his plan is executed. He rents a castle in a remote part of the Alps; he dismisses the two assigned servants and takes Evelyn there. One night when after Evelyn went to bed, Thaw walks in, beats and rapes her. This is the second time in her young life that she has to endure such harsh brutality. But in a somewhat characteristic manner she forgives him and enjoys his company throughout the rest of their vacation.

In the meantime, Evelyn's irate mother gets back to New York and reports to White that Thaw has kidnapped Evelyn. White proceeds to get all the details. When Evelyn returns to New York White shows up at the Nesbit apartment and demands that Evelyn see his lawyer. The lawyer interrogates her and records the whole castle incident. He gives it to White. White does nothing with the evidence because he was fearful that his pedophilic life would be exposed if he did.

Evelyn however still kept seeing Harry Thaw. When she turned 18, he proposes. She accepts. They marry in Pittsburgh and live at the Thaw mansion with Harry's mother. Harry seemed like a decent husband while there but after a while his anger at White flared up.

He decides to take Evelyn on another European vacation. They would go to New York for a short stay and then board a ship bound to Europe. Harry takes Evelyn out while in NYC. What is odd is that he takes her to a restaurant designed and often frequented by his pedophile nemesis Stanford White. White shows up there but leaves before Harry notices. Evelyn was pleased. However when Harry takes Evelyn to the Madison Square Garden Restaurant, Harry spots Stanford at a table sitting with his son. Harry then excuses himself, sneaks off to Stanford White's table and shoots him.

Harry is arrested and the book describes a very detailed circus over the trial. It was in every newspaper. People could not bear to not know what was going on with it. It was known as the trial of the century up until the Fatty Arbuckle trial. Harry considered himself a "savior" of young women. Harry's mother hires a very capable lawyer from San Francisco after the original lawyer failed. This lawyer goes for the temporary _____

insanity plea. As part of his plan, he makes Evelyn describe her brutal rape by Stanford White on the jury stand. It worked. He was able to obtain a hung jury with this strategy. Harry would be charged with temporary insanity in a later trial.

Evelyn divorced Harry and led interesting life afterwards. She would marry and divorce again. She would party with popular prizefighters. She became an alcoholic and drug addict. She would improve her life though. She wrote two memoirs and became an advisor in the movie based upon her life "The Girl in the Red Velvet Swing." She retired quietly teaching ceramics. She lived to the age of 82 and after a very tough life she survived and that's what counts!

Carolyn says

American Eve by Paula Uruburu is the quintessential documentation of the first "crime of the century" which occurred in 1906. This painstakingly researched book on the murder of the famous gilded age architect, Stanford White, by Harry K. Thaw, the playboy son of a multi-millionaire pious Pittsburgh family. The murder centers on the honor and affections of Evelyn Nesbit to whom Harry was married at the time of the murder. Evelyn, as a young girl, found herself in the position of possessing an extraordinary beauty and a need to use those good looks to support her entire family upon the sudden death of her beloved father. She ends up in New York where she has a huge success modeling for products, famous photographers, illustrators and painters. Additionally, she creates a budding stage career for herself. Stanford, many years her senior, arranges a meeting with her after admiring her from afar. He immediately takes over the paternal role that was missing in her life. Stanford, of course, had ulterior motives and set up the opportunity to drug and rape Evelyn while she was still a virginal 16 years of age. She came to forgive and then to love Stanford and subsequently became his lover. She, of course, believed that he loved her as well, but we all know how that story ends. She was just another conquest and he eventually moved on. Stanford White had a felonious obsession with "little" girls and his money along with his professional and social position protected him from ever being prosecuted. Enter Harry K. Thaw, a self appointed moral crusader and in his role as protector eventually persuades Evelyn to marry him. Harry is, as it turns out, a sadist, a heroine and cocaine addict, and a raging psychopath who again, because of his fortune is able to brutally beat and whip young women and boys, including Evelyn, abuse people and destroy property without suffering any consequences. Harry, in his psychotic hatred of Stanford, pulls out a gun one night in Madison Square Garden and shoots Stanford several times killing him in front of hundreds of witnesses. Stanford is dead; Evelyn becomes penniless, loses her career, her friends, and her family; and Harry gets off relatively free!

This book is very well written. One hundred years later the story is still tragic, titillating and mesmerizing as told by Ms. Uruburu. I also have a personal interest in the book. Harry Thaw bought a large home and farm in Winchester, VA where I live. He lived here for several years after he got done doing all his "time". He did spend a couple of years in an insane asylum in Fishkill, New York for Stanford Whites's murder, but then when he was released he savagely whipped a young man in a hotel in Pennsylvania and ended up doing 8 years in another insane asylum for that crime. He came to the farm in Virginia to live after he was finally released. I know the owners and have been in the house. It is a large antebellum home with wonderful out-buildings (ice house and smoke house along with barns) and beautiful property. The owners told me that the story is that the train stopped at both the north and south ends of the farm so that he could get away easily anytime he wanted, which was frequently.

I also note a piece that appeared in Time Magazine in March of 1937. stating that Mr. Thaw left his

Winchester farm to go to Washington, D.C. (it is outside of Winchester, VA) to contest a \$10,000 damage suit brought by the headwaiter of the Shoreham Hotel in D.C. for Mr. Thaw's attack on him in 1937 by grinding his cigarette ashes in his eyes after the waiter presented him with his dinner bill. The waiter prevailed in the suit.

I believe that Evelyn is the only one in this story who comes out a winner. She, in the end, spent her years in the loving company of her son and daughter-in-law and surrounded by wonderful grandchildren who loved her. I truly believe that if she hadn't gotten out of his clutches that at some point Evelyn would have been killed by Harry Thaw's hand. I enjoyed this book immensely and recommend it highly.

Jessica says

So after a sleepless night of guilty twisting in my sheets (really) plagued by nightmares about having been so horrid and rude to someone on the Internet, today I sat down and finally finished this book.

Oh, *American Eve*. I was so primed and eager to fall in love with you! Over the years my father had mentioned Evelyn Nesbit's bizarre love triangle on afternoon walks from Penn Station or in front of the Farragut memorial in Madison Square Park.... (*In case anyone reading this isn't familiar with the story, Stanford White was a brilliant, glamorous architect with hedonistic, predatory appetites who built the original Madison Square Garden and a lot of the rest of Manhattan. He deflowered gorgeous teenage model/chorine/"It girl" Evelyn Nesbit, who went on to marry psychotic sociopath millionaire Harry Thaw. Thaw became obsessed with White's ruination of his young wife's innocence and wound up shooting him dead during a performance at Madison Square Garden's rooftop theater. Thaw's lurid trial, where Evelyn was the major focus, became a 1900s predecessor to the O. J. Simpson case in terms of media frenzy and public captivation.*) I'd always been fascinated by this piece of NYC lore, and when I saw your fetching cover design and thrilling title, I felt we were destined to fall in love. Yes, *American Eve*, it was clear in my mind: I was prepared for wooing and romance, for stars in our eyes, and I'd pictured us moving to a warm, gentle climate, where we'd breed adorable babies who'd grow up to be rich, and support us in our dotage so we could lie around in hammocks on a beach together, growing old gracefully and doing the crossword....

Alas, it was not to be. And it's easy in these situations to blame you and your failings. Yes, *American Eve*, your unnecessary cliches (police tried to clear away spectators, but "it was like herding cats." Why? Why? AARGGHHH!), confusing sentence structures, superfluous literary references, clunky word choice, overuse of adjectives, and failed metaphors were trying at times, and having to hear you tell me yet again what a bad mother "Mamma Nesbit" was did sometimes make me want to fling myself (or you) off the roof of the Flatiron building....

And yet, if the prose was not always beautiful, the pictures of Evelyn Nesbit certainly were. This book clearly was researched extensively, and it's very possible that the writing style I've criticized as overwrought did create a more vivid sense of time and place than I would've gotten from a more restrained approach. There were some very tangible descriptions of scenes in here that could probably not have been evoked with the bloodless kind of writing I like to think I prefer.

Oh, it may be due to a simple lack of chemistry between us; or it may even be -- though I'm loathe to admit it -- that some of the issues here were my own. It could be the case that I don't really like biographies (unless they're by Robert Caro): I haven't read many, and I was frustrated or disappointed by my experiences with Dare Wright's and Jacqueline Susann's. It could also be that I'm more generally just not into popular narrative histories. I like some heavy footnotes with my history, and I really *don't* like most narrative

nonfiction that reads at all like a novel. For example, I hated *The Devil in the White City* so much I couldn't even get through it, and everyone else in the world was just nuts about that book. So it could all just be me.

Anyway, I struggled a lot reading this book -- we just didn't get along, I guess -- but the subject matter is fascinating, and there's a lot of information in it. Probably someone who doesn't have the same fairly narrow and intolerant tastes that I do would find the whole thing a pure creamy delight -- if, like every other living human except me, you liked *The Devil in the White City*, you'd probably love the hell out of *American Eve*. As it is, I'm personally glad to be done with it, but pleased to know much more than I did about Gilded Age NYC and Evelyn Nesbit, so I don't consider this time wasted and I'm sorry I was so harsh on this book's perceived faults while I was reading it. I'm sure this book will move on and find the reader it deserves; I myself have already started reading some other books, and I know that soon our troubled time together will be little more than a vague, blurring memory.

Oh, *American Eve*. Things just didn't work out between us, but I do wish you well and hope we can be friends. You're young -- really young -- and I'm sure you'll find plenty of other readers after me.

You know how when you're really hungry and sitting around someplace and there's some kind of sick-tasting dessert or something set there on the table in front of you, and since you're just sitting there and all hungry you keep taking bites out of it, because it's really not *that* sick, it's technically *edible*, but then each time you taste it you remember, "ew, this is kind of gross," but then a few minutes pass and you forget what it tastes like and take another chance that maybe it'll be better than you thought the last time, so you have another bite but -- well, it's still not that good.

But then, well, after long enough of all this you don't actually develop a taste for it really, but it does become slightly more palatable. Or bearable, anyway.

That's kind of how I feel about this book. The story's so great that I can't stop reading it, and the more I do the more I'm convinced that the writing's not actually *terrible*, it's just not to my taste. (Oh God Paula Uruburu, Goodreads Author, please understand this is all highly subjective and I know lots of other people would love your writing style. There's really nothing wrong with it at all, as I'm sure you know. I'm probably just jealous because you trumped MY in-progress biography of Evelyn Nesbit, which is written in choppy-Hemingwayesque haiku, with an anticipated release date of June 2012.) I guess I just wish this had been written by a historian instead of an English teacher.... And I feel like she might have secretly wished she were writing a historical novel instead of nonfiction, but who wants to go up against Doctorow? Oh, but I bet a lot of people would like this. Really. Mostly I just think she uses too many adjectives, awkward cliches, clunky and self-conscious literary references, forced metaphors, and ungracefully long sentences, which probably bothers me so much because I'm guilty of all these sins myself.

What I really wish is that this book had been co-written by the ghosts of Norman Mailer and Edith Wharton, but it wasn't, so this is what we got. Really, though, Gilded Age sex scandals are a tough topic, and it's difficult for me to think of a writer who could rise to that challenge. Personally, I would've preferred a much more spare and understated style.

It's a great story, anyway, for those who don't know it, and timely as New York plummets from another depraved age of hedonism, excess, and underaged-model fucking. Again, though, the best prose is in the excerpts from Evelyn Nesbit's own memoirs, which makes me think I should just skip the middle-woman and track those down instead.

Honestly, though, this book's worth the price of admission just for the photographs of Evelyn Nesbit. You can sort of overlook a lot of flaws in the text just for those.

Rose says

In turn of the century New York, Pennsylvania-born Florence Evelyn Nesbit was a famous teen beauty. Her waterfall of dark red hair, heart-shaped face, and expression of unawakened sexuality put her in hot demand as a model, therefore her image graced calendars, sheet music covers, and printed ads. Canadian author Lucy Maud Montgomery used one of Nesbit's photos as inspiration for the heroine of her bestseller "Anne of Green Gables". She shone in the Floradora chorus and her stage-door admirers included some of the wealthiest men in New York. She had her pick of suitors, and could have married well. Instead, she attracted two moral lepers disguised as rich gentlemen, and let them use her alternately as a sex toy and a pawn.

The first was famed architect Stanford White, who drugged and deflowered her. The second was Pittsburgh millionaire and raging sadist Harry Kendall Thaw, who beat and raped her in a remote European castle, and married her partly out of mad infatuation, partly from a determination that his hated enemy Stanford White should never have her again. Thaw made sure the latter event could never come to pass when he shot and killed White in June 1906. Thaw's trial for murder dominated headlines throughout the world and made Evelyn a universal object of lust and fascination.

When Thaw's family cast her adrift after he was sentenced to an asylum for the criminally insane, Nesbit returned to the stage. She became a vaudeville performer, silent film actress and cafe manager. In 1910 she bore a son, whom she always insisted was the result of a conjugal visit with Harry, but Thaw denied paternity. Evelyn spent years fighting alcoholism and morphine addiction, and attempted suicide more than once. She seems to have regained control of her life in her twilight years: she acted as a technical adviser on the 1955 movie "The Girl in the Red Velvet Swing". Nesbit died in Santa Monica, California, in January 1967.

I wasn't prepared to like this book because I simply don't find Evelyn Nesbit to be a sympathetic figure. She let herself be used by two wealthy and powerful degenerates, and married a man who'd whipped her bloody not too long before. While I retain my negative opinion about her moral standards, "American Eve" has shown her to be quick witted, intelligent, and sensitive. In reconstructing the early years of this 'child woman', Paula Uruburu relies heavily on Nesbit's two published memoirs, therefore injecting a lot of her subject's voice and personality into the book. She also interviewed Evelyn's grandson, Russell. The result is a well-written biography that may be the closest we will ever come to knowing Evelyn Nesbit personally. Even if you're not too fond of her, you can't help but enjoy "American Eve".

????? 🖱️ **The Bookish Blonde says**

THE DISHEARTENING TALE OF HOW ONE GIRL'S INNOCENT BEAUTY BECAME HER CURSE.

Exploited by those closest to her and by enamored strangers alike.

She had the misfortune of being tempted with fortune...

It was so sad to witness the story telling of the conniving and manipulations that went on behind the scenes

when Evelyn was just a trusting girl who was tempted by rich foods, toys, and books which then progressed to jewels, furs, and clothing once she was prematurely “made a woman” at the hands of one Stanford White. *“But as time went on, Evelyn came to see that the majority of White’s other girls fit a disturbingly familiar pattern. They were invariably underage, from poverty-stricken or disadvantaged families with dead or absent fathers; they were usually naive or emotionally needy, starved for attention, many feeling abandoned and sometimes desperately alone in the city.”*

Still knowing what White did to take advantage of poor Kittens (Evie) it was nothing on what was coming for her, *“Then fate played yet another nasty trick on Evie. As if the scenario weren’t melodramatic enough, what with two men half in and half out of her life, neither of whom could give her wholly what she wanted or needed, a third emerged from out of the shadows. He had simmered there for nearly a year, plotting and pining, sending notes and keeping tabs, then materializing, like some haunted doppelgänger in a bad Gothic thriller, in the form of Harry K. Thaw. The unseen watcher.”* Boy, in hindsight this is the scariest line of the book...sends chills up the back of my skull knowing just what I know now about this skulking, doe eyed varmint.

I just hate how she couldn’t catch a break with the kinds of people she attracted and how this Thaw guy knew how to get to her... *“One series of anonymous letters that arrived daily for an entire week actually did make an impression upon Evelyn as having been evidently written by a “man of some refinement” who talked at length about books and animals, two of Evelyn’s favorite subjects.”* It’s just so sad that inside she was remaining quite childlike but the paradox of the outward appearance brought drooling, dirty older men hunting after her with wicked intentions...though in Thaw’s case...under the guise of being her “rescuer” and it was frustrating to witness him claiming to save this poor “child” from the clutches of her benefactor [White] that was rumored to “destroy” the purity of pubescent girls. When ironically it was ultimately Thaw that brought about her complete destruction. It angers me that he claimed to hate what White was getting away with but he defiled her way worse than what White committed. It was the most disturbing portion of the book I’ll tell you that much...to hear of what he did to her in the name of him being “upset” at what White did to his “Boofuls”.

This truly was an exciting (though at times disturbing) read. Each time I picked it up, no matter where I was, I was always drawn right back into Evelyn’s sordid life. It’s just too bad that her life was fraught with so much scandal when she was just a pawn for so many perverse, selfish people.

Some of my favorite highlights are:

“Herself a product of the Victorian past but with an approach to life that was unconsciously and uncannily modern, Evelyn Nesbit unwittingly embodied the country’s paradoxes and ambiguities at its trembling turn into the twentieth century.”

“Women wanted to be her; men wanted to own her. She became a maddening object of desire, and tragically, a victim of her own beguiling beauty during the “gaudy spree,” which she would help bring to a stunningly shameful end.”

“Irvin S. Cobb, a well-known syndicated columnist and social critic, described her as “the most exquisitely lovely human being I ever looked at—[she had] the slim quick grace of a fawn, a head that sat on her flawless throat as a lily on its stem, eyes that were the color of blue-brown pansies and the size of half dollars; a mouth made of ruffled rose petals.” Yet even as her startling testimony helped push an unsuspecting and unprepared America into the modern age, while canny entrepreneurs sold hastily manufactured little red velvet swings on the street outside the courthouse, as quickly as Evelyn’s star rose, it fell victim to the very culture that created and consumed her.”

“In the girl’s graceful, undeveloped figure, boyish in its thin, lean lines, she saw the perfect embodiment of a

kind of ambivalent, classically androgynous spirituality wrestling with the sensuality of her face.”

“Florence Evelyn was dubbed the “modern Helen” by one columnist, and her evocative and soon familiar face launched any number of advertising campaigns as canny entrepreneurs began to capitalize on her uncanny ability to appeal to both sexes and appear chaste and alluring at the same time.”

Melissa says

When I first started reading this book, I had to find a way to get past the author's writing, which prevents me from giving this anything more than 3 stars. The complexity of the language and obscure references to things only experts on this time period would understand were frustrating to me. Rather than a novel at times it felt like an academic experiment, which I think it sort've started out as anyway.

But beyond that I found the story to be astonishingly mesmerizing. I had no more knowledge of Ms. Nesbit than most people, I feel--which is the very short inclusion of her character in Ragtime, the book and subsequent musical. So I only vaguely knew how the story was going to turn out, but I had no idea of the twists and turns and mistakes that were made along the way. I can't help but come out of this extravaganza feeling helplessly sorry for the girl, despite her own complicity in the actions. She was so young and had such a useless mother, I really blame the mother for not helping her find her way, and not being there to support her daughter in her times of need. Beyond that, everyone in the story has something going for them and something terrible behind it all, so everyone's to blame. The morbid fascination that was felt at the turn of the 19th century when this all happened still continues to this day, and I found myself inevitably drawn to it to find out the conclusion.

Paula Uruburu says

It is reviewed in the April 2008 Vogue, May O!, May 11th LA Times. It's in the June 1st New York Times Summer Reads Book Review. You can hear my podcast with the Washington Post BookTalk on their website.

Annie says

I have been enthralled with the Evelyn Nesbit story for years and was very excited to read this biography to learn what was really what, and who was really who.

Paula Uruburu is certainly the expert on Evelyn Nesbit, her terrible story and why it's been fascinating to so many of the morbidly curious. I have to say that her writing style vacillates between bombastic and cloying - a little too much and a little too little.

I also had a hard time with the fact that Uruburu completely overlooked some of the main facts in Nesbit's history. The affair with John Barrymore was glossed over as a school-girl whim, and while most historians agree that Nesbit aborted two pregnancies by him, Uruburu does not even mention this as a footnote. Instead, she follows the "appendicitis" cover story that was spread at the time. Also, Evelyn Nesbit's son Russell Thaw is known to NOT be Harry Thaw's son - by Nesbit's own admission. Uruburu likewise does not even mention this.

Overall a good, entertaining (if twisted) read of a very tragic history. I just found it surprising that the author omitted so many of the known facts, or if not facts, cited the "rumors" and then dispelled them with the truth.

Terri says

Young Evelyn Nesbit was raised in poverty and brought to New York City by a really horrible mother who left her to become a millionaire's mistress and later another's wife. The decadence of the era where the young model and showgirl became the face of womanhood for her generation led to a tragedy and media circus.

This was an interesting book in many ways. It is a period of American history I know little about for one. Though I have heard of Stanford White and his architectural accomplishments, I had not heard of his proclivities for young showgirls or that he was murdered. The entire subculture was conveyed very well by the author and she definitely brought life to the players for me. At many times I was outraged or saddened by the events in Evelyn's life.

I found the story compelling and feel I learned something in the process. Recommend.

Liz says

The first third reads like a romance novel, if the author cut out half the redundant sentences she would lose about 30 pages from the whole book. Also it was like the author wrote this book while constantly using her thesaurus. I was reminded of an English professor who used too many adjectives to explain one point, so the style starts to wear down the reader to almost boredom. The book really picks up after the first 130 pages then the story takes off. The ending is really packed with facts as if she was running out of time to finish the novel. It was overall a really strange pace given the historical events happened only over a few years and one important night. I was slightly disappointed. I can't say how it could have been better but it really isn't that great of a read. Very slow then very fast like when you receive bad service at a restaurant. I was slightly bored until the crime actually happened.

Matt says

Some years ago, long before I started receiving student loan bills, I took a college course called "The History of American Architecture." Having been assured that this was a humanities course, and that no engineering or mathematics would be involved, I settled in to learn about gables, cornices, and dentils.

My professor was intensely passionate about the subject. He took us on a walking tour of Omaha, Nebraska, in a vain attempt to convince us that Omaha had interesting architecture. Once, he sang "America the Beautiful", just so he could talk about "thine alabaster cities" gleaming "undimmed by human tears". At the time, I thought he was a nut, but that's to be expected from a college kid. Youth always mistakes passion for madness, because when we are young, the only thing we can be passionate about is ourselves. It takes time for us to look outward, and appreciate life beyond the tips of our noses.

I first learned about Evelyn Nesbit from this professor. He took great joy in telling us the story of Stanford White's red velvet swing, and little Evelyn kicking at paper parasols with her little feet. He told us to check out the movie, *The Red Velvet Swing*, which featured a young Joan Crawford. We didn't, of course.

Years later, though, when I came across the title of this book, something clicked. I recalled my professor's fractured tale with renewed interest.

Evelyn Nesbit was an otherworldly beautiful girl (the book has plenty of pictures to back this up) who lifted herself out of poverty by modeling. Though her career was initially modest, she eventually became ubiquitous. Her angelic mug was on advertisements and postcards and even served as the model for an angel on a stained glass window in church. She was like the Olsen Twins of her day, if the Olsen Twins were attractive.

Admirers reached deep into pulpy romance novels to come up with words to describe her (think "smokey eyes", skin like a "gossamer veil," and a mouth like "crumpled rose petals"). She may have been the most photographed woman of her day. Except she wasn't a woman. She was a girl.

(This is where I tried to find a workable Chris Hanson/*To Catch A Predator* joke but failed).

Evelyn eventually fell into the clutches of Stanford White, the famous architect, who also happened to be a rapacious pedophile. White raped Evelyn one night after she passed out at his house. For whatever reason, Evelyn didn't immediately tell anyone, and actually became White's lover. Later, she drifted into the orbit of crazy Harry Thaw, heir to a vast fortune. Harry also raped Evelyn, and in a case of heightened Stockholm syndrome, ended up marrying him. She also made the mistake of telling Harry what Stanford White had done to her.

Harry took his revenge on White at the Madison Square Garden Rooftop Theater. The killing took place in 1906 and was the first in a long line of crimes of the century.

The story is gripping in and of itself. It gives truth to the old saying that the "difference between fiction and nonfiction is that fiction has to make sense." Here, you have a tug-of-war between two pedophiles over the most famous female in America, which starts with a velvet swing and ends with three gunshots and a circus of a trial.

Somehow, though, this book was a disappointment. It scores as high as it does simply because the story is so entertainingly cracked (I suppose we could debate the ethics of murder as entertainment, but it's been over a hundred years, and seriously, there's a red velvet swing involved).

The problems I had with the book are numerous. It's clear that the author is well-versed in Evelyn's life. However, most of the details seem to come from Evelyn's own memoirs. This means that the account is necessarily one-sided and biased. Yes, there are a few points where the author compares her differing accounts, but mostly Evelyn's version is accepted as truth, without a lot of critical analysis. And while we're talking sources and citation, I found the endnotes section to be quite lacking. For instance, author Paula Uruburu writes that *State of New York v. Thaw* was the first trial in American history where the jury was sequestered. That's an interesting factoid, and as a lawyer, I intended to walk into the office the next morning and wow all my lawyer friends. But when I looked for some sort of citation to back up this pronouncement, I didn't find anything.

Then there is the writing style. *American Eve* is overwritten and stuffed with purple prose, grandiloquence, and exaggerated metaphors (Harry Thaw as Jekyll and Hyde? Really?). I suppose this style might be a subtle nod to New York's famous penny press, which paved the way for today's *National Enquirer*, but that doesn't make it any more readable.

The subtitle of the book is "Evelyn Nesbit, Stanford White...and the Crime of the Century." However, this is totally Evelyn's story (which goes back to the reliance on her memoirs). You don't learn anything about Stanford White. Oh, there are bits and pieces, but these tidbits about his life - that he was an architect, that he

was married, that he liked little girls - are all given indirectly. I never got a sense of the man; the author told me he was rich and famous without ever telling why.

There is a long, portentous build-up to the murder, and when it finally happened, I was suitably impressed with the gruesome depiction.

Then, however, Uruburu skims through the two trials in what seemed a race to the finish. The author claimed this was the crime - and by extension - trial of the century, but the book's description of the proceedings lacks detail, clarity, and drama. Harry changes lawyers so many times in so few pages it's hard to keep up. I got no real understanding of the proceedings, the strategy, or the participants. I would have welcomed a real discussion on Harry's trials, including court excerpts, since it presented myriad legal issues that are relevant today but were in their infancy in 1906. For instance, the author mentions alienists without ever detailing what an alienist did (good thing I read *The Alienist* by Caleb Carr).

I also have to ask publishers: please, please stop calling every crime the "crime of the century." Stanford White's murder was *not* the crime of the century. Heck, it came five years after William McKinley was murdered. And he was the president! And what about Leopold & Loeb, Sacco & Vanzetti, Bruno Hauptman & the Lindbergh Baby, JFK & Oswald, OJ & Nicole, or *Shakespeare in Love* stealing the Oscar from *Saving Private Ryan*? All these crimes were also the "crime of the century." So just stop this shameless ploy.

Oh, who am I kidding. I will buy any book with that tag line.

In a brief epilogue, the reader learns that Evelyn was cut off from the Thaw fortune, had a child, divorced Harry, got remarried, and lived to a ripe old age. On the final page, there is a picture of Evelyn in the full bloom of her youthful beauty.

When I reached that point, I was strangely moved. I noticed there wasn't a picture of Evelyn in her later years, but for once my insatiable curiosity did not compel me to go searching. She exists almost as a legend, an eternal beauty, and I didn't want to disrupt that image. I wondered about what it must have been like for her, to have lived such an extraordinary life in 21 years, and then to spend 60 years in what must have amounted to an extended anticlimax. Weighing this response against my criticisms, I would have to conclude I liked the book almost in spite of it.

George says

AN INCREDIBLE STORY. But NOT a quick and easy read.

“Less than an hour after the crime, rogue reporters alerted to the murder and hungry for immediate gratification grew to a fearsome pack. They began prowling throughout the city, ‘scavenging for the puniest morsel of information’, ‘purveyors of salacious and demoralizing minutiae of vice’.” --pg. 289

A hundred and two years later and they still prowl. It's a fascinating story, set in an equally fascinating time and place.

Paula Uruburu's, *American Eve: Evelyn Nesbit, Stanford White; The Birth of The "It" Girl and the Crime of the Century* is perhaps a tad bit overwritten. I has a hard time getting into sync with the her style and rhythm. It was worth the effort, though. She tells a very comprehensive and captivating tale of madness and mayhem,

on a larger-than-life scale.

Some of the best reading were the quotes from Ms. Nesbit's memoirs from 1915 and 1934. It might pay to look into going directly to the source.

Recommendation: If you find that beautiful, charismatic, mega-wealthy and wacky, people, with amazing lifestyles, make for interesting reading you might find this biography of America's (the world's really) first supermodel celebrity, Evelyn Nesbit, to your liking. I did.

Megan says

I was fascinated by Evelyn Nesbit's story after seeing a television documentary about the Thaw/White trial a few years ago (American Experience: Murder of the Century). What a joy it is to now have this sad, dramatic life explored in depth. The overall tone is very sympathetic to Evelyn, while maintaining a critical eye on the facts, whether they play in her favor or not. The narrative flows in an easy, conversational manner, often reading more like a novel than nonfiction, but this only serves to draw the reader even deeper into this fascinating bit of history.

This book has everything I love in a biography. Granted, I have a soft spot for actresses in distress; but that fact notwithstanding, I still thought it was excellent! Recommended.

Rachel McMillan says

one of the most interesting pieces of non-fiction i have ever read
