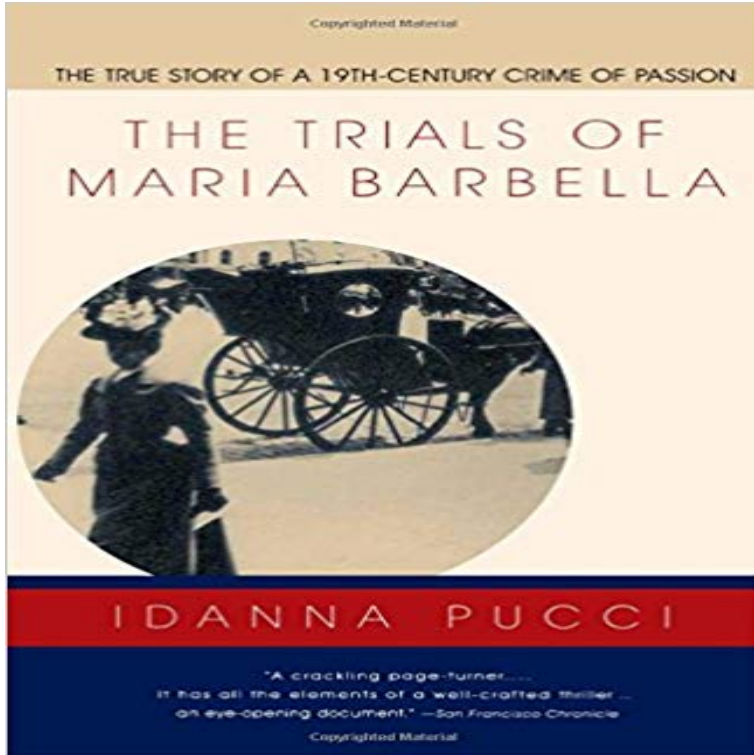


The Trials of Maria Barbella: The True Story of a 19th-Century Crime of Passion



New York City, April 26, 1895, 9:30 AM. Domenico Cataldo sat studying his cards in a saloon on East 13th Street. He was looking forward to boarding a ship leaving for Italy that very afternoon. His lover, also a young Italian immigrant to New York - Maria Barbella - then entered the bar. There was a brief exchange. Only a pig can marry you! were his last words. Maria Barbella whipped out a straight razor and slashed his neck so swiftly Cataldo had no chance to scream. He staggered out the door, clutching his throat with both hands, knocking Maria over, spraying blood everywhere. Finally, as he reached Avenue A, he lurched off the curb and fell twitching into the gutter, where he died. Thus began the saga of Maria Barbella, who shortly became the first woman sentenced to die in the electric chair, at the time a brand-new invention. Hearing of her plight, Cora Slocomb, Countess di Brazza - an American by birth, and author Idanna Pucci's great-grandmother - returned to this country to help organize an appeal to save Maria that was, ultimately, successful. The Victorian public was galvanized by the spectacle of Maria's trials. But in fact, her story rings with issues that would fascinate a contemporary audience: sex; prejudice; and the right of a woman to reject the role of victim, to avenge herself against a persecutor.

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