



Angel of Vengeance: The Girl Who Shot the Governor of St. Petersburg and Sparked the Age of Assassination

Ana Siljak

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In the Russian winter of 1878 a shy, aristocratic young woman named Vera Zasulich walked into the office of the governor of St. Petersburg, pulled a revolver from underneath her shawl, and shot General Fedor Trepov point blank. "Revenge!," she cried, for the governor's brutal treatment of a political prisoner. Her trial for murder later that year became Russia's "trial of the century," closely followed by people all across Europe and America. On the day of the trial, huge crowds packed the courtroom. The cream of Russian society, attired in the finery of the day, arrived to witness the theatrical testimony and deliberations in the case of the young angel of vengeance. After the trial, Vera became a celebrated martyr for all social classes in Russia and became the public face of a burgeoning revolutionary fervor. Dostoyevsky (who attended the trial), Turgenev, Engels, and even Oscar Wilde all wrote about her extraordinary case. Her astonishing acquittal was celebrated across Europe, crowds filled the streets and the decision marked the changing face of Russia. After fleeing to Switzerland, Vera Zasulich became Russia's most famous "terroristka," inspiring a whole generation of Russian and European revolutionaries to embrace violence and martyrdom. Her influence led to a series of acts that collectively became part of "the age of assassinations." In the now-forgotten story of Russia's most notorious terrorist, Ana Siljak captures Vera's extraordinary life story--from privileged child of nobility to revolutionary conspirator, from assassin to martyr to socialist icon and saint-- while colorfully evoking the drama of one of the world's most closely watched trials and a Russia where political celebrities held sway.

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