

Olga gazed at him with a strange feeling of fraternal regard. In the near presence of death all men are brothers, and at moments of supreme passion it is woman's native instinct to let her womanly emotions have free play without restraint or regard of persons. He was a common, stalwart, bearded Russian peasant; she was a high-born lady, delicately bred, daintily nurtured. He was tanned by the sun and scarred by the frosts of winter; she was white as the newly-fallen snow on the fields by the Oka. But she gazed at him for a moment as he bent, all reverence, over that strange relic of the martyr they both loved and honoured. Then she leant forward, unabashed.

'Ruric Brassoff kissed these lips,' she said in a very clear voice. 'I pass you on the kiss, in token of brotherhood.'

The *dvornik* accepted it with a certain stately acquiescence.

'For Russia,' he said simply.

And Olga Mireff answered in the same tone:

'For Russia.'

Ten minutes later he came back, pleased, proud, and smiling. Olga sat in a chair, listlessly toying with the beautiful, deadly revolver.

'I have posted it,' the man said.

'Unobserved?'

'Yes, unobserved, dear sister.'

'That's well,' Olga Mireff answered, without a tremor in her voice. 'Now go, that I may kill myself in quiet as he did.'

The man nodded his assent, and glided noiselessly from the room. There was a short interval of silence as he descended the stairs. Then a shot above was heard clearly ringing through the *dvornik's* lodge.

This time the prudent porter took two men up with him to search the apartment. On the rug by the fireplace Olga Mireff lay dying, with her mouth full of blood. Ruric Brassoff's fresh bloodstains were pressed to her lips by her left hand; her right grasped a revolver, very small and finished. The large eyes still stood open. They gazed towards the table. By its edge