



Larisa Reisner

1926

Larisa Mikhailovna Reisner

Born on 1 May 1895 in Lublin, Poland, Larisa Mikhailovna Reisner moved with her family to Tomsk for five years, then to Germany. She began studying in Russia after returning in 1906. She soon revealed considerable literary talent and joined her father, Professor Mark Reisner, in editing the antiwar satirical journal *Rudin*.

In 1917, Larisa actively supported the February and October revolutions, and joined the Bolshevik Party in the summer of 1918. She served in the Red Army and Navy, and for several months in 1919 was commissar of the General Staff of the Red Fleet. Larisa displayed unusual courage during front-line action, and was once captured behind enemy lines while gathering intelligence. Her sketches of the Civil War include a vivid account of the battle at Sviazhsk.

Larisa lived in Afghanistan for much of 1921 to 1923 with her husband, Fyodor Raskolnikov, then traveled to Germany in October 1923 to witness and participate in the revolutionary events in Hamburg. With the revolution's defeat, she returned to study the conditions of the working class in the Urals. After continuous bouts with malaria in 1925, she contracted typhus and died on 9 February 1926.

Reisner was widely admired and the Soviet Union was deeply stunned by her death. She was eulogized not only by Voronsky, but by Pasternak, Shklovsky, Radek, Sosnovsky, Trotsky and many other prominent literary and political figures. For a biography, see: Cathy Porter, *Larissa Reisner* (London: Virago Press, 1988).

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SHE DIED at the height of her powers, intellect, talent and beauty. She died in a clinic from an unexpected, absurd and accidental illness after long suffering had worn her out. She should have lived, however, and she should have died somewhere in the steppes, at sea, or in the mountains, clutching a rifle or mauser in her hands, for she was renowned for her spirit of adventure, her unceasing restlessness, her courage, greed for life and strong will. This was a fighting spirit, and, without sparing herself, she gave herself completely to the revolution.

As if sensing or foreseeing the brevity of her life's span, she made haste and was always in a hurry. Her noble face was both strong-willed and feminine, reminding one of the legendary Amazons, and was framed by chestnut hair. During the most difficult days of the revolution her supple and confident figure was seen on armored trains, on board our Red fighting ships, and amidst rank-and-file soldiers. With irreproachable courage she penetrated the camp of the White enemy, and she knew the underground conspiratorial apartments of persecuted communist comrades abroad; one of her best sketches was written on the barricades in Hamburg. Distant, sandy Afghanistan, the dull and dreary mines of the Donbass and Urals, the textile mills of the northern workers' regions—here, too, her pure and throaty voice resounded. It was clear and fragile, like rock crystal, so firm and stubborn, yet so girlish and pliable.

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She was courageous. Such people are faithful, and the revolution relies upon them like its own children and offspring.

Comrade Larisa was completely captivated by our fighting epoch and devoted her talent as a writer to polemical work, but she was able to combine the polemicist with the artist, which is both very difficult and very valuable in these days of ours. She had a fine eye for noticing and finding details which were small but necessary and important, and she used them to make significant conclusions and broad generalizations, uniting them in a creative synthesis but never forgetting about the whole or what was most important. But her greatest gift as a writer was her words, her language. Every one of her sketches, every article, resembled a tree which is laden with a rich and magnificent abundance of fruit. Like in an enormous and wide-ranging flower bed, one's eyes would

dart about in the wealth of similes, images, unexpected and astute definitions, in the decorative lace pattern, in the eastern clarity, colorfulness and richness. Sometimes her writing would seem to be overly refined. Yes, she had mastered the culture of the literary word, knew and sensed its secrets, but this was not a sign of refinement, but of the generosity of a person who easily and freely shared and scattered around her in great handfuls that which she possessed in such plenitude.

She lost not a mode of existence, but her life. Larisa Reisner hated commonplace philistinism, wherever it might be encountered. She was incapable of settling down, or acquiring things. She didn't enjoy adjusting to a quiet and everyday tedium; but in the prose of life, as an artist and revolutionary fighter, she was able to find the sublime, the all-embracing, the great and substantive. Perhaps that is why she loved to wander so much, to travel and to be in ever newer lands. She knew neither depression nor boredom.

In her coffin this is what remains: an alabaster face faded from illness, the half-closed deathliness of an immobile and blind stare, the grimace of even white teeth, the mournful, agonized and sharp crease by her mouth—what has death done to this beautiful and truly rare example of the human species! But we, her comrades and friends, will preserve another, quite different visage, one that is both passionate and cold, trembling and thoughtful, aggressive and soft, courageous and feminine.