

Living and Dying in Davos: Dmitry Romanov at Sanatorium Schatzalp, 1939-1942

By William Lee

On Thursday, 31 August, 1939, Grand Duke Dmitry of Russia ate his last dinner in Paris and bid a sad farewell to his sister, Grand Duchess Maria. She had already booked passage to New York, but it was not her departure that they marked. He was leaving for Switzerland that very evening, and this dinner reminded him more than anything of their anxious separation in August 1914, when his regiment had been mobilized for the Russian invasion of East Prussia. There had been no guarantee then that they would meet again, and there was no guarantee now. But this experience was somehow worse -- much worse. He'd felt the same way when he said goodbye to his twelve-year-old son, now at school in England -- felt that he would never see the boy again. He'd already lost so many people; his father shot to death by the Bolsheviks, his half-brother buried alive. In exile, he had wished more than anything to have his own family. But his wife had divorced him two years ago, remarried, and moved far away. It was hard.

Maria, meanwhile, didn't realize how sick he was. He didn't want her to realize. He'd been taught since earliest childhood to keep all his trials to himself. Grand Dukes, after all, were not ordinary mortals. For the past several weeks He'd felt horrible, but managed to pull himself together in the presence of others. Alone, at night, he just gave in, not only to the physical affliction but to fear and self-pity. He did not know it, but he had already discovered the *spes phthisica*, a phenomenon observed among the tuberculous for centuries. They were elated by irrational, almost ethereal, hope, then plunged into the abyss of depression -- over and over again. Even as he held his sister in his arms, horrified by their imminent parting, he felt the emergence of "an awfully stubborn, awfully strong resolution to do all that I can to pull through!"

She did not go with him to the station, and his thoughts, en route, were occupied with purely practical concerns. As much as he loathed the idea of going into a sanatorium, he knew, nonetheless, that it was his best chance for survival, and he would have to overcome obstacles just to get there. With the threat of war looming, transportation was disrupted -- there was no guarantee that there would even be a train for him to board. Assuming there was, he could still expect to encounter trouble at the border since he wasn't actually a citizen of any country, having only a Nansen passport -- the document conferred upon officially displaced persons.

The station was ominously empty, but there stood "the General", an old friend and one of several erstwhile tsarist officers who had become a part of the grand ducal household in exile. He could scarcely contain his anxiety now. The train had indeed arrived, "frightful" to both men as a symbol of Dmitry's affliction, but absolutely essential, and, after all the agitation of the past few days, they still worried that it would somehow fail to even leave the platform.

A porter took charge of Dmitry's bags and the 9:50 departure time neared. Konstantin Grunwald, another friend and retainer, appeared at the last minute, rushing toward Dmitry, red-faced. He took the grand duke by the hand, pumped his arm vigorously, wished him the best of luck. The General, for his part, threw himself upon Dmitry and kissed him on the shoulder, likewise grasping his hand. "My God, how can this be?" He spoke with genuine emotion. "Only write and I will come -- on foot if I have to."

Aboard the train, gazing out upon his friends, Dmitry shuddered beneath a sensation of "cold fear". "How will all this end? On the other side!? No!!!" For the first ten minutes he could scarcely

bear it. Then he felt the reemergence of his “iron determination to do all in my power to pull through!!!” Especially encouraging was the memory of his meeting with a “Hindu doctor” on the banks of the Red Sea. That man had “put in[to] my soul” a conviction that “the ever lasting power of good” could and would ensure his survival, “if only I never... let myself slip in to a state of apathy and indifference!!!”

They reached the Swiss border the next morning, and Dmitry was delighted to find himself ignored. No one approached to look at his papers. No one rifled through his bags. It hadn't always been that way -- upon arrival in France in December 1918 he had been told to leave the country within twenty-four hours or face arrest. England hadn't wanted him either, but they'd been more civil about it, suggesting, rather than demanding, that he should go elsewhere. Things had quickly improved, of course, when George V decided to receive him at Buckingham Palace, but he had never forgotten the sheer, maddening grief of that initial experience, and the news that Germany had, within the last twenty-four hours, invaded Poland, could only exacerbate the preexisting anxiety of one who had seen his world torn asunder by the Great War. It was “painfully unpleasant”, and it left no room for doubt that a new conflagration was imminent.

His spirits were nonetheless high when he finally arrived in Davos. The sun was shining. The altitude didn't bother him this time, though it had on previous visits. The only worrisome sign, indeed, was the emptiness of the streets. Low season could not explain the dearth of local men. Horses, too, were conspicuously few, though he managed to hire a small droshky at the station, with room for himself and his bags alone. The coachman trotted alongside.

The Hotel Angleterre, his resting place for the night, felt even more deserted. Only two other guests resided there at the moment -- so the proprietor remarked -- and his gaze seemed to ask “What are you doing here? Don't you know there's a war on the way?”. When the grand duke coughed, the man's demeanor changed, not for the worse -- on the contrary! A “sugary smile” spread across his face. He thumped his chest and confessed that he, too, had suffered from “la maladie”. Not to worry. One simply managed to recover. There was just the small matter of an additional charge, s7.50 for the disinfection of the room after the sufferer moved on. His Highness should also know that the sanatoria were closed, their patients bundled off home, whether for good or ill. This news, so matter-of-factly delivered, threw Dmitry into a “complete panic”. He telephoned Sanatorium Schatzalp at once and, to his great relief, discovered that it, at least, remained open.

At 11:30 the next day (2 September), Dmitry presented himself for examination at Schatzalp. It was by no means inconceivable that he would be given a sentence of death, and his nerves made the experience a frightful one. The head physician, “thankfully”, was “very nice”. This was Gustav Maurer, highly recommended by his London doctors. Dmitry described him as a “small Swiss who, for some reason, speaks with an Italian accent.”

The results of the examination were, indeed, disheartening. It seemed that he was “very far [gone], much too far gone to be funny!”. Maurer, for his part, described the presence of “une caverne de la grandeur d'une grande pomme” in his patient's left lung. The right lung was not as badly effected, but the overall picture was nonetheless grim, especially given the presence of additional staph and strep infections. For these, creosote was prescribed -- three capsules a day by mouth. Complete bed rest was, of course, necessary. Mustard plasters might help. For the rest, they would just have to wait and see what happened.

On Sunday, 3 September, Dmitry left the Hotel Angleterre, with its grinning proprietor and empty rooms, behind him, and took up residence at Schatzalp, a “charming place”, “not at all like a hospital”.

Most of the “guests” there undoubtedly knew that this was the man who had been banished from Russia in 1916 for his participation in the assassination of Rasputin, the man who had had a passionate affair with Coco Chanel in 1920-21. First cousin of the murdered tsar, Nicholas II. A favorite of George VI. Ex-husband of a beautiful American heiress. All very romantic.

His political activities were less well known outside of the “white” Russian community, but there were those who looked upon him with considerable suspicion. He had been a co-founder of the Young Russia Party, an organization dedicated to the incitement of a nationalist revolution in the Soviet Union. He had taken a long sea voyage on a German naval vessel in recent years. And he was rumored to be an undercover operative for the British espionage agency, MI5.

Decades later, long after Schatzalp had closed its doors to the tuberculous, A.W. Federle, its last managing director, would tell the story of a mysterious private nursing sister there. She was attached to a guest of political importance (the man’s name he refused to reveal), and would pace the corridor outside his door every night. This odd behavior, coupled with the sister’s enormous stature and large hands and feet, set the other guests to speculating that “she” was actually a male bodyguard in disguise. Could this story have pertained to Dmitry? He is the first choice of some who have heard it, but evidence there is little, and, in fact, he arrived at Schatzalp quite unaccompanied.

Whatever preconceived notions his fellow guests might have had of him, or he of them, there was little opportunity for interaction during his first month and a half in residence. He was sent straight to bed, settling into a large third-floor room situated directly above the sanatorium’s grand entryway. There he found armchairs, a divan, and “a wonderful bathroom” -- the same green and black tiled chamber attached to room 309 at Hotel Schatzalp today. Even more delightful than the bathroom, however, was the huge balcony with its “truly splendid” view of the mountains, already dusted with snow. Further down he saw the “wonderfully green fields” of the valley, and houses that appeared, from his perspective, to be nothing more than “little toys”. “It is truly beautiful”, he exulted, happily spending his first afternoon in an outdoor bed, surrounded by “every other kind of wicker furniture”. His feet rested cozily upon an “electric cushion”. His fears seemed to dissipate. And all was peaceful and pleasant until, at six o’clock, the time came for him to submit himself, unreservedly, to the “command of the sana”.

The bearer of this “command” was a middle-aged nursing sister, her face distinguished by a conspicuous moustache! Dmitry, for his part, appears not to have questioned her femininity. She seemed to him, indeed, the very embodiment of a cozy old “Russian nanny”. Her first order of business was to take his temperature, and this, as it happened, was distressingly high -- an extraordinary 39 degrees. Sister was so surprised that she insisted upon taking it again, and Dmitry, too, wondered at the result, since he had already begun to feel better.

He ate his dinner from a tray, and was tucked into bed by his new care giver promptly at nine o’clock -- lights out -- reminding him that, appearances notwithstanding, this wasn’t a hotel “after all”. It occurred to him, also, that he had never before spent a single night in hospital. The shadow of tuberculosis had long clung to him, it was true. Born prematurely, under mysterious circumstances which had culminated in the death of his twenty-one year old mother (Princess Alexandra of Greece), he had always seemed frail and sensitive -- the very type of the romanticized, literary consumptive. In 1908, his father, Grand Duke Paul of Russia, warned by friends that his son was on the brink of tuberculosis, had whisked the indignant sixteen year old

away from summer military maneuvers in Russia to a quaint Bavarian inn, where the boy complained he was likely to die of boredom. In 1915, a lady friend had shuddered at the grand duke's laughing attitude toward his own blood-stained handkerchief. But that, whatever its cause, had not been real TB. Just the shadow. And now, at last, the shadow had gained substance. He couldn't laugh anymore. Alone in his room at Schatzalp, he couldn't sleep either. Fear seized him, the same feeling of helpless dread he had fought against on the train. When would he leave Schatzalp? How would he leave Schatzalp? His restlessness was such that he simply couldn't remain in bed. He felt frightfully sorry for himself, for his son, for his sister. All three of them were alone now. He stepped out onto the balcony, was invigorated by the beautiful, clear, moonless night. A moment later he was back in the room, on his knees, pouring out his thanks to "the one whom I call God, [thanks] for everything that has happened." His train had been the last train from Paris, and He'd boarded it at the last minute. His sanatorium was one of the few still receiving patients. God had given him an opportunity to survive. He begged now that he should not be deprived of the "passionate moral strength" he needed to seize that opportunity. Was it "mysticism"? More than that. His desire "to pull through" was in every way "irresistible". And when Monday dawned he embarked upon the campaign for his life.

Living and Dying in Davos: Dmitry Romanov at Sanatorium Schatzalp, Part II

Three weeks had passed since Dmitry's arrival at Schatzalp. It was now late September, and all he had done was "lay, lay, and lay", leaving the bed in his room only when he was allowed to occupy its counterpart on the balcony. His improvement was already great, however. He coughed little, ate much, had a normal temperature, and felt no pain in his chest. Dr Maurer was amazed, and told him he possessed "the constitution of a horse", a thing which Dmitry recalled with elation in a letter to his sister, adding: "I must pull through, I wish to pull through - amen - mysticism!!?... Even the doctor knows it somehow." "The sister with the moustache" likewise understood that he was a blessed individual, commenting: "What a strange person you are - you could have been months here and not have done such progress."

The treatment for tuberculosis, much to his surprise, was "frightfully intense", with plasters, pills, physical examinations, and the daily routine of weigh-ins, thermometer checks, prescribed baths, naps, and feedings every three hours. It gave him confidence, however, that his was not a hopeless case. After all, if the doctors didn't think he had a chance for recovery, they surely would not trouble themselves so much with his care.

Meanwhile, he, for his part, was doing what he could to aid in his own progress. He had given up his long-standing and entrenched devotion to cigarettes, a feat which only his "mystical outlook" could have allowed him to accomplish. In fact, under the circumstances, it had not been "difficult in the least", or for that matter "even noticeable!" His fellow patients, on the other hand, being less enlightened, "suffered horribly" from their efforts to quit, a thing which was especially true of "the old timers and the women." Neither he nor they had been forced to take this step, but, of course, it was strongly recommended.

His letter to his sister, one of the most detailed he would write about his new life at Schatzalp, bubbled with optimism and the joy of renewed hope. Now he could do more than profess his confidence in a happy outcome -- he could actually believe in it himself. That said, the painfulness of his situation could not be entirely suppressed, and exerted itself in his parting lines. He apologized to Maria for writing exclusively about himself and his illness, "but", she would surely understand, "I am entirely alone, and my 'maladie' is my only companion."

On 3 October, released from bed temporarily, he reported to Dr. Maurer's office for a second set of x-rays, and the outcome was encouraging. "That horrible cavity has constricted by a third, if not more." And the other, more "trifling" lesions appeared to be all but scarred over.

Back in his room, Dmitry managed to pass the time pleasantly. He wrote to France for a model train, and composed letters to old friends. One went to the exiled Queen Ena of Spain -- a woman he had once romanced -- another to his uncle, Prince Andrew of Greece, the father of the future Duke of Edinburgh. In the days that followed, his stomach and back began to trouble him, and he feared the spread of tuberculosis to his spine, but Maurer seemed unconcerned, and so, complaining only that "they" gave him nothing to alleviate the pain, he remained largely content.

By November he had broadened his sickbed occupations to include stamp collecting, a former passion now revived, and one which he could pursue through the same Parisian friends who had purchased his train set for him. If it occurred to him that the trains and stamps might clash with the romantic image he "enjoyed" in the larger world, he was unconcerned. That, at any rate, had always been a thing of dubious value, and those most fascinated with the exploits of Russian grand dukes were, so it seemed, often the first to criticize and sneer. He had, in his day, been caught within many a carefully laid trap. One London society lady had invited him to a dinner party, only to introduce him to her friends, quite unjustly, as the murderer of Rasputin. And a dentist in Baghdad had, while his patient was still at his professional mercy, demanded his autograph on a magazine article about the assassination. Now, however, he lived as a virtual recluse, with only his balcony as a window upon the world, from which he observed the signs of approaching winter. Something about that somber metamorphosis reminded him of Ilyinskoe, his birthplace just beyond Moscow, the site of his mother's death, and the setting for much of his boyhood. The manor house there was an old wooden building, fronted by a large first floor balcony. The estate was solitary and serene.

It was true, of course, that he had not been a particularly happy boy, sent off to live with an uncle after his father remarried. That was in 1902. In 1905, terrorists murdered the uncle, so he spent his adolescence shuttling between relatives -- primarily his widowed aunt in Moscow, and the Emperor and Empress in Tsarskoe Selo. But the former had become a nun upon the death of her husband, and the latter had five children of their own, including a desperately ill son.

Ilyinskoe had belonged to the murdered uncle, and had passed to Dmitry as his heir. But he and his sister, when they became adults, kept their distance from it. The winter of 1915, on leave from the army due to poor health, he had lived for a time at Usovo, an estate within striking distance of Ilyinskoe, and when Maria came for a visit, they had walked around the old place, feeling slightly unsettled. It aroused all kinds of complicated emotions -- but it was lovely, like Davos was lovely now.

As December dawned and snow swaddled Schatzalp, Dmitry settled in deeper. His back and stomach had improved, and he could sit at his writing table in the mornings, no longer forced to compose his letters from bed. Then a plague, like something from the book of Job, fell upon him -- his face, once celebrated for its extraordinarily handsome features, began to burn, itch, and swell. Maurer looked it over, of course, but he didn't know what was happening. A specialist was called in, and he smeared poor Dmitry, forehead to neck, with a substance resembling boot polish -- black boot polish. That was all right, though, because the itching stopped immediately, and the other symptoms gradually subsided. More importantly, when one faced death from a vicious disease, all these trifling "red herrings" -- once revealed as such -- called up a delicious, cathartic sigh of relief. And in this particular case, the medical revelation proved to be a profound one.

Creosote had caused the rash, and creosote had saved Dmitry's life -- had dragged him back from the very edge of the grave. While he had been basking contentedly on his balcony these two months, writing optimistic letters, Maurer had been waiting for him to die, and keeping silent about it. It seemed that the first medical examination had revealed early signs of gangrene in his lungs -- cadaverous breath, sputum as thick as molasses -- and gangrene always brought death within five weeks. Measure this man for his "angel's wings", that's what Maurer had thought. But creosote was a powerful disinfectant. Dmitry, being a railroad enthusiast, knew that it was used industrially, to purify and preserve wooden ties. At any rate, he himself had survived, and Maurer, taking his hand, could now jest: "I have great respect for gangrene, but for that stuff on your face -- I have no respect whatsoever!"

The joke worked. They shared a laugh, and when he next sat down to write his sister, Dmitry could declare, without anger at having been deceived, that his brush with death was "all behind" him. His most pressing concern lay entirely outside the milieu of medicine. For months now, his ex-wife had been firing off telegrams, demanding that he send their son to America. He argued as long as he could, refused as long he could, but even Maria had now taken her side, and the tone of the messages made it clear that neither would back down without an all out fight. He wanted his son to be raised a European, wanted to move him to a school in Switzerland, but the women in his life would not allow it -- and who could win a fight with two determined women? For that, one needed more than the constitution of a horse. Thus, while he languished in bed, his face covered with black goo, final arrangements were made for the boy to sail from Genoa to New York, accompanied by a nanny.

It was, of course, imperative that he say farewell to his son -- in person -- and Maurer, who had not even allowed him to leave his room for anything other than doctors' examinations, simply had to grant his consent. There were times when a patient's emotional health came first. Dmitry could not be permitted to go to Genoa itself. The "salty air" represented too much of a danger. But if he agreed to stop in Milan, taking leave of the child there, then returning immediately to Schatzalp -- that much Maurer would allow -- and on 1 December he boarded a train heading south.

In Milan, feeling "fine", but with no precise knowledge of his son's scheduled time of arrival, he spent an anxious evening at his hotel. The boy did come, however, and it was wonderful, if bittersweet, to be in his presence again. Dmitry bought him a new set of toy soldiers, then reminded him, as they parted, to be a good soldier himself. The time for his own departure arrived on the morning of 5 December, and he reached Zurich amid "horrible rain". By 8:30 that evening, he was back in bed at Schatzalp, pen in hand, but the joy he had experienced in September, upon his first arrival at the sanatorium, was now gone: "It is like returning to prison. How long more I wonder? To his sister, who had helped to force his hand, he jotted off an uncharacteristically angry letter. "I actually now have no wife, no home, and now no son -- splendid!"

It helped, however, that Maurer did not force him back into solitary confinement. After a few days in bed, he was given the run of Schatzalp. He could dine downstairs, set up his train in the basement, and attend the in-house cinema. On 16th December, he wrote to a friend in Paris:

"I weigh more now than I ever have in my life... the Doctors say that I have only now attained the correct weight for my height, and have been too thin for the past ten years. That theory is probably absolutely correct.

I have jokingly divided all the patients, myself included, into various ranks. For instance, those who are bedridden are simple privates. Those who are allowed to sit at "writing tables" are ncos... then, those who are allowed to dine downstairs... are captains, and those who are even permitted to undertake duties - to walk in the mornings and to eat downstairs - those are generals. I've gone

through all these stages and, thank God, have passed a great many poor colleagues in obtaining my promotion. Early this morning an old doctor came to me and congratulated me on my “general’s rank”.

By January he was feeling so well that the doors of Schatzalp were themselves flung open before him, and he began to ride the funicular down to the village almost every day. He had friends there -- a handful of aristocratic ladies, mostly English, mostly ill, who had managed to slip into Davos themselves, despite the tumult in Europe. It was wonderful to lunch with them at the cafe Schneider, wonderful simply to stroll up and down the promenade. He found himself a local tailor, since he had “gotten so fat that I need to buy all new clothes,” and shopped for a camera, settling upon the state-of-the-art Kodak “Retina II”.

To his Parisian friend he noted:

“It has become rather more difficult to write, because they chase me out for walks in the morning, and during the day... from 2 til 5, there’s an obligatory rest in bed. Then in the evening, although one returns to one’s room [as early as] 10:00 or 10:30, the brain has somehow already ceased to function, and one is drawn to one’s bed.”

That left a few hours of free time after dinner, during which one still felt relatively well, and Dmitry began to make friends with his fellow ambulatory patients. He had never found it difficult to get along with people, male or female, young or old, grand or common. His friendliness and sense of humor extended to all. On a drive across Mesopotamia in 1918 he had endeared himself so to his chauffeur, a certain Sergeant Brown, that the man slipped a prized pocket knife into his hand when they parted, and Dmitry received it with genuine gratitude. In India, he was outraged at the exclusion of natives from the British clubs, and in Britain itself he disliked the cold formality which governed the relationship between masters and servants. A childhood spent as an outsider in other people’s households, and adult life in exile, had ensured that he never took anyone’s goodwill for granted -- had ensured, as well, that he knew how to make himself liked. Finally, the overwhelming presence in his life of a sister of strong personality had taught him how to get along with even the most difficult of women -- or so he had thought, at least, though his strong-willed American wife had utterly confounded him. At Schatzalp, in a state of genteel uncertainty -- the limbo of the “magic mountain” -- he formed a passing attachment to a woman of more traditional outlook, a Sicilian called Mlle Termini, and they sat together, chatting, in the evenings.

So the time passed. His vision seemed to blur -- not metaphorically, but actually -- and for a few days he tormented himself with worry that the tuberculosis had spread to his eyes. Maurer sent him to an oculist in the village, Dr. Semadeni, and another blessed relief ensued: “Thank God, [it is] only old age and glasses.” Under other circumstances, he might have resented this concession to father time, but now it made him happy, and more good news followed at his regular examination the next day. His lungs, it seemed, were “almost purged”. “Only” the cavity remained, and Maurer believed there was cause to hope that this might heal by itself. It came as a horrible blow therefore, when, two weeks later, on the evening of the 27th, Dmitry fell suddenly ill, coughing violently and producing a purulent sputum. Only that afternoon he had lunched at Schneider’s with an English friend who had seemed much worse off than he. The next day he wrote: “I feel poorly, like I’ve been poisoned. Could it be my lungs?.. I need to pull myself together because my morale is falling.”

Dr. Holdener, Maurer’s junior colleague, popped in for a look, and saw no cause for alarm. This was just a part of the healing process -- the last gasp of the cavity. Dmitry could, should, and did

take his place in the dining room that evening. Indeed, by the 30th, he felt “completely normal”, and wrote with relief: “The poison does not take hold.”

Living and Dying in Davos: Dmitry Romanov at Sanatorium Schatzalp, Part III

On 1 February, 1940, a “guest” died at Schatzalp, and the news traveled up and down the corridors, inevitably reaching room 309, where Dmitry struggled with nausea, cough, and a phantom fever which defied the effectiveness of his thermometer. The death he regarded only as an anomaly. But it was difficult, under the circumstances, not to feel hyper-aware of one’s own condition, and he recognized that he was becoming increasingly anxious, even though his weight climbed steadily, and Maurer dismissed his symptoms as insignificant.

There were plenty of in-house activities to distract him -- a “kind of carnival” on the 4th, “rather sordid” but vaguely amusing; a lecture on the 7th, delivered by “some Polish professor”; a film screening on the 9th (“My God, how monotonous it all is”). But the feverish non-fever continued, and, as March dawned, he wrote in his diary: “Something is going on with me, but the doctors are not talking.” His instinct told him he would “never leave [Schatzalp].”

Then his weight began to fall, slipping away in small increments, and his mental acuity wavered. The most trifling demands upon his concentration left him frustrated, and this at a time when he needed every faculty just to keep up with the progress of the war. Dr. and Mme Maurer took him to lunch in Davos, smiled and laughed, tried their best to cheer him, but even Maurer had to admit that there seemed some cause for worry -- nothing serious, of course, just trouble enough to warrant a cautious return to creosote pills and a shot of tuberculin (the latter of dubious medical value at best). Dmitry accepted these willingly. His symptoms duly receded, but he struggled to recover his emotional equilibrium. Schatzalp itself seemed enthralled by a spirit of feverish restlessness, growing in urgency with each new report of Axis expansion. People who had lived at the sanatorium for months now felt themselves drawn to their homelands, and a Romanian couple, two of his closest friends, were the first to pack up and leave.

For him, that meant a disheartening trip to the train station, sad farewells, and a reexamination of his own commitment to the cure (“For some reason it has become more and more difficult for me here. I simply don’t have the strength to remain, but I must endure”). He informed his Parisian friend that he wished to find a rental property somewhere in the French countryside, and sought to renew his expired passport. Then came Maurer with an invitation to dinner -- under other circumstances a very minor event, but here constituting Dmitry’s first opportunity to spend an evening away from Schatzalp since his return from Milan last December. He owed this good fortune to the doctor’s wife. Madame Maurer was a social creature by nature, a woman of the world, and she, much more than her husband, understood the wellspring of her guest’s discontent. She had been a sufferer herself, treated and cured by Maurer -- willing to leave her Belgian husband behind in order to embark upon a new life with the doctor -- but the taint of *la maladie* no longer clung to her. She was happiness, confidence, and warmth personified. Dmitry relaxed in her presence, accepting her assurances that he should not feel weak for remaining behind while others fled in panic. The mere bourgeois normality of her household produced a revitalizing effect upon him, and the next day he bought her flowers.

For a time thereafter his will-power conquered his anxiety, and the anticipated retreat of winter seemed a promise of all good things. But April arrived without sunshine or greenery. Snow fell as

thickly as it had in December. Death, moreover, began to intensify its presence -- to assert its mastery against Maurer's claims -- and Dmitry found abundant opportunity to dwell upon that subject.

Of all the images which existed, available for recall from the depths of his memory, a handful asserted themselves. He remembered seeing Uncle Sergei's remains, heaped onto a stretcher and concealed beneath a coat, with one long leg sticking out. He remembered Rasputin's "body" -- the dead weight of it -- as he and his comrades had hoisted it over a bridge railing and dropped it into the Neva. He remembered postmortem photographs of his murdered aunt and brother, their bodies retrieved from a mine shaft. But, oddly enough, the thing he remembered most was an incident from 1918, that tumultuous year in his life, when he had sought refuge with friends in Teheran, and the youngest daughter of the household had fallen ill with dysentery.

There had been no barriers between the frightened family and the suffering child. They all gathered around her, and Dmitry, too, watched her battle for her life, noting every detail. When the last struggle passed and the doctor pronounced her dead, he simply couldn't make himself believe it. He had heard of morphine trances so profoundly convincing that brilliant men were deluded, and the sufferer buried alive. That morbid outcome seemed a real possibility in this instance, but he knew the doctor would dismiss it, if confronted, and to mention it to the parents would be cruel beyond measure. Thus, at the last possible moment, he had crept alone into the mortuary chamber and opened the casket lid. There lay the child, black with putrefication, every hint of romanticized humanity stripped away from her. He fled from the sight, of course, but he couldn't erase it from his mind, the moreso since an identical twin-sister remained to remind both him and the parents of life at its most beautiful and ephemeral... From then on that was what he associated with death -- not blood, pain, or oblivion, but grotesque irony.

It seemed natural, therefore, that after seven months in residence at Schatzalp, he would at last recognize the very near presence of the foe, its power essentially unchecked, and its incarnation as mocking as it had been in Teheran those many years ago. Here, on the third floor, he had a next-door neighbor -- a Serbian woman who shared his patronymic -- Pavlovich. They had not become friends, but they were friendly, and it didn't escape his notice when she stopped appearing at meals. Then one night he heard her sobbing. A thing which arrested his attention and deprived him of sound sleep. There where groans between the episodes of crying, loud enough and pained enough to shake him, but he didn't complain -- he listened. For seventy-two hours, with scarcely an interruption, the sick woman voiced her anguish, her reserves of strength seemingly immense. Finally, on the morning of the fourth day, Dmitry awoke to silence, a phenomenon which jarred him just as surely as the first sobs had. His vigil, however, was not yet concluded. He continued to listen, but it wasn't until the following night that men came, under cover of darkness, to bear his neighbor's body away. And that act of secrecy, once perceived, exposed the true underpinnings of Schatzalp's "sordidness".

Meanwhile, the hemorrhage from the sanatorium continued unstaunched. Eight more guests packed their bags, drinking farewell cocktails at an eve-of-departure gathering on the terrasse, and what followed thereafter seemed cruelly predictable. On 1 May, Dmitry learned that he would need surgery after all. That meant invalidism, for how long he did not know, but it was easy to imagine all kinds of complications, each one having the potential to prolong his captivity. Emotionally, he hit bottom. It seemed as though he lacked the capacity to struggle anymore. It wasn't just his lungs, either. Generally speaking, life was not going well. His stomach had begun to trouble him again; he had a toothache that wouldn't give him a moment's peace; in Paris, his friends from the Young Russia Party were being rounded up and imprisoned, and he had just been informed that the bulk of

his worldly possessions, now in storage, were threatened by heavy rains and a leaky roof. On the plus side, of course, his sister, his son, and he himself were safe from the ravages of war, a blessing which he grasped very well, but it was not always easy to put things in their proper perspective.

Two more friends departed for home (“It seems as though everyone is leaving except me”), and a third died suddenly. This last had been “a very nice Italian man... only two weeks ago we were playing cards together in Lia Termini’s room.” The cause of death was laryngeal tuberculosis -- a “complication” which had spiraled out of control, and Dmitry’s own throat soon became inflamed. His temperature shot up and he fell mute, lying in bed one whole day. Maurer appeared at his side the next morning, accompanied by Holdener and the sister with the moustache. Together they sat him up in a chair, administered a local anesthetic, and punched a hole into his chest cavity, the object of the procedure being the collapse of his left lung. This was the feared operation -- an artificial pneumothorax -- and the whole thing had happened so quickly that he scarcely had time to adjust to it, let alone object

The gasses used to maintain lung collapse had to be replaced periodically, and Dmitry found these procedures trying. The first “refill” merely hurt. The second and third left him panting “like a fish [out of water]”. He coughed, spit, lost weight, and his throat continued to hurt, but the doctors offered little relief (“They give me all kinds of filth, but so far nothing has helped much.”). Nor did his spirits rise when they told him he was doing well. His diary entries for the month of June reflected his pessimism: “God knows what is wrong with me... and Maurer says nothing”; “It’s like something is happening inside me”; “Of course this is a rechutte”; “I’m worried that Maurer isn’t telling me something.”

On 2 July he suffered “une nouvelle crise” -- this time severe stomach pain. Maurer waited four days, allowing the attack to diminish somewhat on its own, then bundled him onto a train and whisked him off to Liechtenstein. By that same afternoon they were both standing hip deep in river water, fly rods in their hands. Dmitry couldn’t believe it -- it was like a dream. When night fell he paced the floor of his hotel room, unable, from sheer excitement, to fall asleep. The next day he felt wonderful, coughed little, and slept like a baby. The doctor, clearly, had some idea of how to treat “complications”.

The return to “prison”, however, was as demoralizing as the escape had been joyous, and Dmitry’s symptoms reemerged as soon as he reached home. He noticed that he no longer received refills, and suspected, rightly, that the “pneumo” had proven ineffective. But Maurer insisted that his cavity was shrinking, and finally, on 24 July, greeted him with news that he was truly on the “road to recovery”. When Dmitry failed to respond enthusiastically, the doctor departed, only to return some hours later, more adamant than ever that the good tidings must be believed. He spoke with such earnest excitement that the sufferer’s defenses crumbled, more suddenly and thoroughly than he himself could have foreseen. The *spes phthisica* broke through in a rush, pushing aside all the worry and depression, flooding the weary brain. After that Dmitry could hardly contain himself: “I stumbled around like a drunk all day!” But his joy was extremely short lived. The following morning brought a new onslaught of stomach pain. He refused to eat or get dressed, and dwelt upon news of the latest Schatzalp death. The victim, an English woman, “was not very nice, but poor thing, when I arrived one saw her a lot.”

Maurer diagnosed an ulcer, and promptly blamed this affliction for all of Dmitry’s symptoms. Holdener concurred, but the patient himself remained frustrated (“...they don’t do anything about it. It’s insane!”). He nonetheless defended Maurer to his sister, who phoned from New York, begging him to join her there. What she didn’t understand was how vehemently he wished to be free of the sanatorium. He would have given “anything” to be able to walk away as she and his ex-wife

suggested, confessing in his diary: "I do not want to die here." It was just that death elsewhere seemed a certainty, whereas at Schatzalp, he still believed in Maurer's ability to repel it. And, indeed, when the next crisis engulfed him, it was during a visit to his tailor's shop in town. He suddenly felt so ill -- so weak, hot, and breathless -- that he feared he would collapse on the floor, an object of pity and morbid curiosity. But he managed, through sheer strength of will, to make it "home". What he couldn't force himself to do, however, even within the sanctuary of room 309, was to take his own temperature. Someone had once told him that when a tuberculous individual began to experience sudden spikes of fever it meant "the beginning of the end. Lovely!" And yet, Maurer insisted that his cavity was now closed, and allowed him to have cigarettes. The one lesson he had learned from the whole, distressing affair was summed up by the perception that on the streets of Davos he stood exposed. In his own imagination, if not in reality, possession of "la maladie" singled him out as a freak among the healthy people of that entire region.

Thus, it was only grudgingly that he allowed himself to be coaxed into a group excursion to Parsenn. At home he wrote in his diary: "I always find something awfully sordid in these outings or [gala] dinners. Maurer with his wife, the doctors, etc. It's pretty awful. An outing of a colony of lepers!" To leave the neighborhood of the sanatoria was, on the other hand, another thing entirely, and Maurer managed to lift Dmitry's depression by promising a second visit to Liechtenstein, this one longer than the first. He had, at that moment, a critically ill patient to attend to, but was confident that they would be able to depart before the arrival of the grand duke's anniversary at Schatzalp -- a date much dreaded by Dmitry. The patient, an Englishman, soon began to gain strength, and it was thus not death but optimism which colored the onset of the anticipated holiday.

How foolish, however, to have imagined that one could simply outrun dogged misfortune! The grand duke and the doctor enjoyed one glorious afternoon on the river, grilling their own trout upon the bank, but this time Dmitry's fever and stomach pain had followed him to Liechtenstein, and he was forced to spend the last three days of the trip in his hotel room. Back at home, his weight bottomed out at a frightening 69.2, and his confidence in his treatment plummeted:

"Consultations have ceased to interest me. One never finds anything out. [The last one] was, supposedly, successful, but I spit like a horse, and in the evening my temperature rises... Maurer thinks it's gastrointestinal, but I think it's just the old tuberculosis".

His forty-ninth birthday came and went, marked by a special dinner on the terrasse. For a few days thereafter he felt well, but his chest began to ache, his temperature spiked, and by 28 September he was back in "solitary confinement", this time with bronchitis, a particularly feared complication. Maurer would not even allow him to lie on his balcony, and he had to do without his cigarettes, voluntarily left behind in Liechtenstein.

As the days passed, his muscles grew weak from lack of use, and his weight melted away ("Probably tuberculosis everywhere!"). His morale lingered in the depths, and he didn't even desire to be around other people. The very thought of conversation seemed "unpleasant".

He had been in bed almost three weeks when a telegram arrived from his sister: "She insists that I should come over. Apparently, she thinks that I don't want to, or that the doctors, out of personal interest, refuse to release me. She doesn't realize that I'm not even allowed downstairs for meals."

In fact, he needed surgery again, and this time it would be a major, debilitating procedure ("What a wintry perspective!"). The "method Monaldi" involved the insertion of a partially external catheter into the chest cavity, allowing for continual drainage. This apparatus would jut out

just above his left nipple, and could not be smoothly disguised beneath a shirt, or adapted to an active lifestyle. Thoracoplasty, a more common procedure which involved the resection of ribs to collapse a stubbornly inflated lung, was judged unworkable in his case. The cavity was “trop grande and et trop secretante”. But, if he himself knew this, he didn’t allow it to bother him, writing on the 26th: “Thank God my mood is calm, and, as far as I am concerned, so long as I have to have the operation, the sooner [it is done], the better.”

By the 28th, however, simmering nervousness had seriously undermined his equilibrium. Maurer sat down to have a “long talk” with him, emphasizing the dramatically positive results this procedure could achieve: “so I decided to have the ‘tubage’. If I am freed of the cavity, I can finally recover.” With this resolution, a new calm descended. Mme Maurer came to him the day before the surgery, and he recorded her visit in his diary, noting their discussion of the Monaldi method. That entry, made on 4 November, was his last.

Neither will-power nor serenity -- however profound -- could ensure a successful operation. Dmitry remained conscious, as he had during the “pneumo”, but this time he reacted badly to a crucial pleural injection, and coughed so violently that he hemorrhaged from a tear in his left lung. The bleeding was controlled, but the surgery had to be aborted.

When news of this development reached New York, Grand Duchess Maria reacted angrily. She had long since ceased to trust Maurer, especially after corresponding with a fellow emigré, who had himself been a patient at Schatzalp just before the outbreak of the war. This man, P.L., claimed that Maurer was a capable doctor, but primarily interested in profit. He also insisted that there was another doctor in Davos (Schubert) more esteemed than Maurer for his performance of the Monaldi operation.

Maria quickly relayed these allegations to her brother, who could not even sit up in bed, but nonetheless managed to rise to his doctor’s defense. “Don’t forget that I didn’t find [Dr. Maurer myself],” he wrote:

“He was recommended to me by [my] doctors in Paris.” In fact, even Dr. Young in London, the man considered the premier English tuberculosis specialist, recommended him to me, and he himself had been ill and had stayed at three different Swiss sanatoria.

“Secondly, you know as well as I how [P. L.] tends to exaggerate and deviate from the truth. Why he has his knife in to Maurer - I don’t know, but it must be something personal. Last year there was a certain Dutch guest here, who often went [down] to Davos to play bridge with [P.L.], and [he] often asked me why [P.L.] hated Maurer so much... For God’s sake, if, in conversation... you mention Maurer suspiciously, then be sure to stipulate [that you are repeating] the opinion of that infamous liar [P.L.], and not the opinion of the Swiss doctors, with whom you have never spoken.”

The grand duchess was not prepared to give in quite so easily, however. She wrote to another acquaintance -- a colleague of Maurer’s -- and this man took it upon himself to investigate her complaints. In his reply, he quoted Maurer verbatim:

“Grand Duke Dmitry of Russia is an extremely nice man and, alas, extremely ill... The Grand Duchess Marie seems to have been influenced against me. I suppose it is the same old Zauberberg story, etc. So much the worse for her brother, who has all my affection. I have done the impossible to save him, [and] have already reached the point of [obsessiveness], thinking day and night about how to heal this horrible case. Thus I do not need additional stress from overseas. I am, in fact, the first to admit how much simpler my life would be if I, [like Maria], just advised the Grand Duke to go to America.”

As for the investigator, his sympathies clearly remained with his colleague. After thus transmitting Maurer's exasperation, he wrote:

“I can add my own personal conviction that the Grand Duke Dmitry could not be better cared for. Doctor Maurer is, most certainly, one of the greats in his field. He is, moreover, a man of conscience, devotion, and complete integrity.”

By January, 1941, the lung tear had healed, and Dmitry accepted the need for a return to surgery. He did not inform his sister about it, however, leaving that task to Maurer, who wrote: “There is nothing to lose and everything to gain. Monseigneur himself understands the gravity of the situation, and ardently desires this intervention.”

Again he was wheeled on a gurney, down the long third-floor corridor, onto a waiting elevator, into the operating room. Whatever his thoughts at that moment, they surely did not touch upon the notion that future generations of holiday-goers would one day bathe in that very chamber, their legs stretching down toward what used to be a morgue. The irony of that image would, however, have seemed cruelly natural to Dmitry. And, indeed, good-fortune continued to elude him, the second surgery, like the first, proving an utter failure.

Another month passed with little cause for optimism. He recovered sufficiently to sit up in bed, but his situation was desperate. A third surgery ensued, and this time everything proceeded smoothly -- miraculously smoothly. By March the patient was on his feet, gaining weight, feeling well, and on 1 April, 1941, Maurer wrote to Maria: “I am profoundly moved to be able to tell you that, following today's auscultation, I was able to establish that the Grand Duke Dmitry is saved.”

Unfortunately, of course, the Grand Duke Dmitry was not saved. He died eleven months and four days later, on the morning of 5 March, 1942, aged fifty. No cause of death was recorded in the town registry, and the records kept at Schatzalp were destroyed when the sanatorium closed at the end of the 1940s.

One rather romantic sounding account of Dmitry's death purports that he was, in fact, cured of tuberculosis, threw a joyous, Russian-themed, eve-of-departure party, then collapsed from kidney failure, the sudden onset of which suggested poisoning! Who the culprit might have been, and what his or her motivation, is never specified, but this story, along with the tale of the transvestite nurse, remained extant at Schatzalp into the 1990s.

Dmitry's son maintains that his father died of tuberculosis, and this remains the most likely version of events, Maurer's optimism notwithstanding. There was, at any rate, no police investigation of the death, and no mention of mysterious circumstances in the local newspaper. Nor was there any mention of a Russian gala at Schatzalp. The sad tidings were, however, reported to Dmitry's ex-wife not by Maurer or some other representative of the sanatorium staff, but by a German military officer who phoned her at her home in the US, a thing which she herself found inexplicable, and this alone stands out as a genuinely mysterious occurrence.

The grand duke's funeral was a lonely one. His obituary in the Davos Courier listed him only as “Dmitry Romanov, privatier,” and a handful of mourners followed his casket to the Waldfriedhof, where he was buried beneath a plain wooden cross. Sixteen years later, in 1958, his remains were exhumed, cremated, and moved to the Island of Mainau, a horticultural paradise owned by Grand Duchess Maria's only child. She herself had only recently died there, her last wish being to rest beside her brother. And so they remain, united to this day. It was in Davos, however, that Dmitry fought the battle for his life, succumbing on the very eve of a medical breakthrough -- the advent of

powerful antibiotics. Nor was he the only one who perished thusly, a victim, at the last, of death's irony.

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[Any comments or questions?](#)