DMITRI NABOKOV: UNFINISHED PHOTOGRAPHS

Dmitri Nabokov, the only child of Vladimir Nabokov and Véra Nabokov (née Slonim), died on 22 February 2012 in Vevey, Switzerland. Even though Dmitri's passing, at the age of 77, ruptured what had remained of their enchanted family circle, the legacy of Véra, Vladimir and Dmitri lives on.

Contrary to the Russian popular wisdom about children of talented parents, *природа не отдыхала на сыне Владимира и Веры Набоковых*. Dmitri Nabokov was a person of many musical, literary, thespian, and athletic gifts, and one of the most loving and dedicated sons a writer and a writer's muse have ever produced. He revered his father and adored his mother. And he looked like both of them: his lips, like those of his father in the early American photographs, expressing irony and vulnerability; his eyes, proud, piercing and a little chagrined, like his mother's in many pictures.

I spent an evening with Dmitri Nabokov on 11 December 2011. This was at his new apartment on the first floor of a modern building in the Chernex area of Montreux, not far from the old apartment on Chemin de la Caudraz, which had originally been intended for Véra Nabokov and became Dmitri's home. Even though wheel-chair-bound, Dmitri towered over his helper, the table, and the objects in the living room. That evening, wearing shorts and a polo shirt, he exuded energy and spoke of being able to drive (a Ferrari) again. He was very hard at work—collaborating with two scholars on a volume of his father's letters to his mother. I had previously visited Dmitri in Montreux and had seen him on other occasions, but this time I was particularly touched by his insistence that we use the familiar Russian pronoun *ты*. We began in Russian, and when I asked what language we should use during the taped part of the conversation, Dmitri smiled and offered to speak "как хочешь" ("as you like"), adding French and Italian to

English and Russian. *L'Incantatore*, his recently published Italian translation of *The Enchanter*, had just received a prize, and Dmitri half-joked that this coincided with the honoring of his chef with a culinary award.

That evening we spoke mostly about various Jewish and Judaic questions and intersections in his parents' lives—and in his own. Reflections on the Shoah and on anti-Semitism in the America of Dmitri's childhood entered our conversation. Dmitri's voice grew especially tender when he remembered his mother. "She was wonderful...," he said. I took a few snapshots of Dmitri Nabokov; the conversation was meant to be continued—before long. These pictures capture him the way he was just two months ago, looking so intellectually alive and so much like both of his parents—so Russian and so Jewish.

Maxim D. Shrayer
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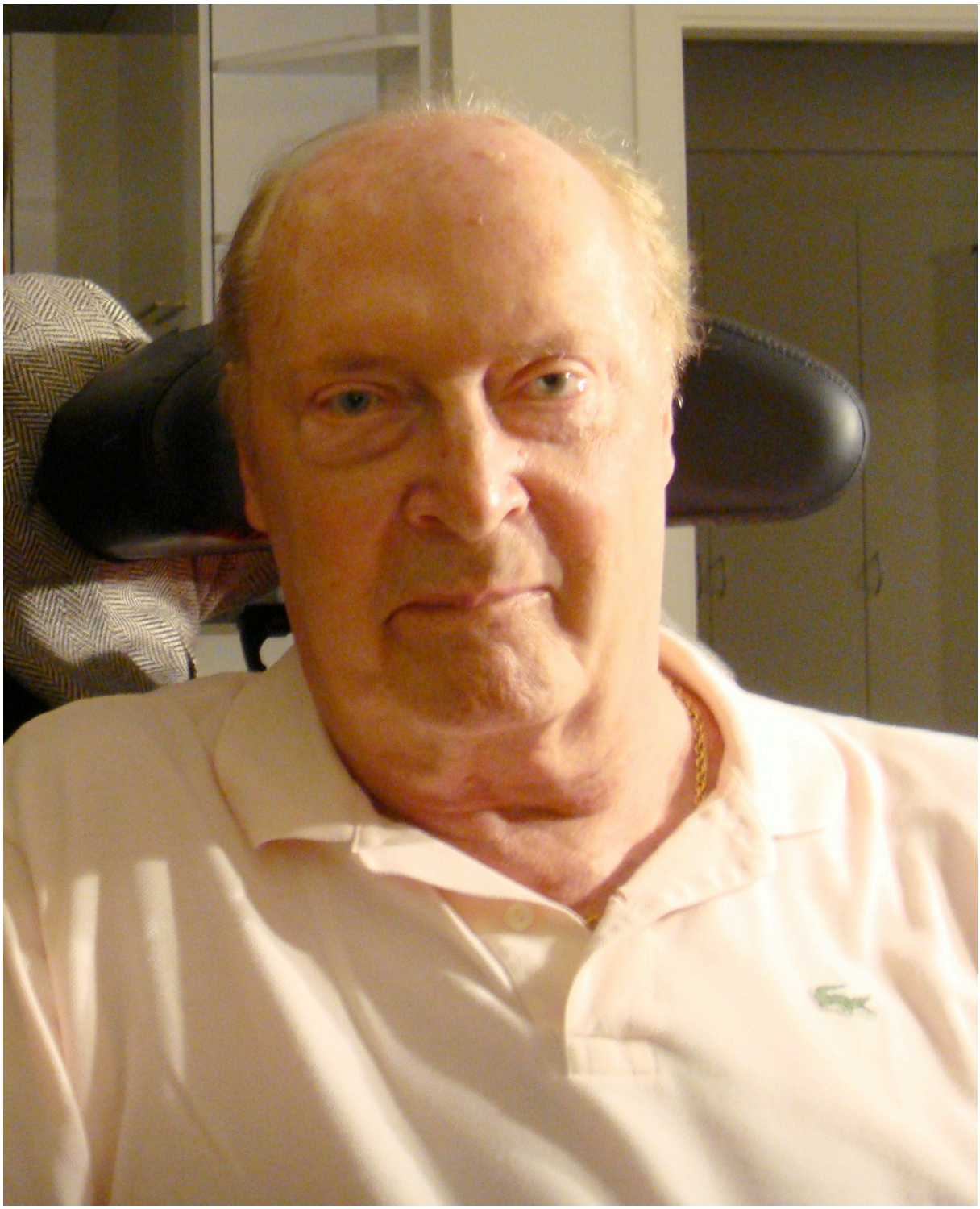

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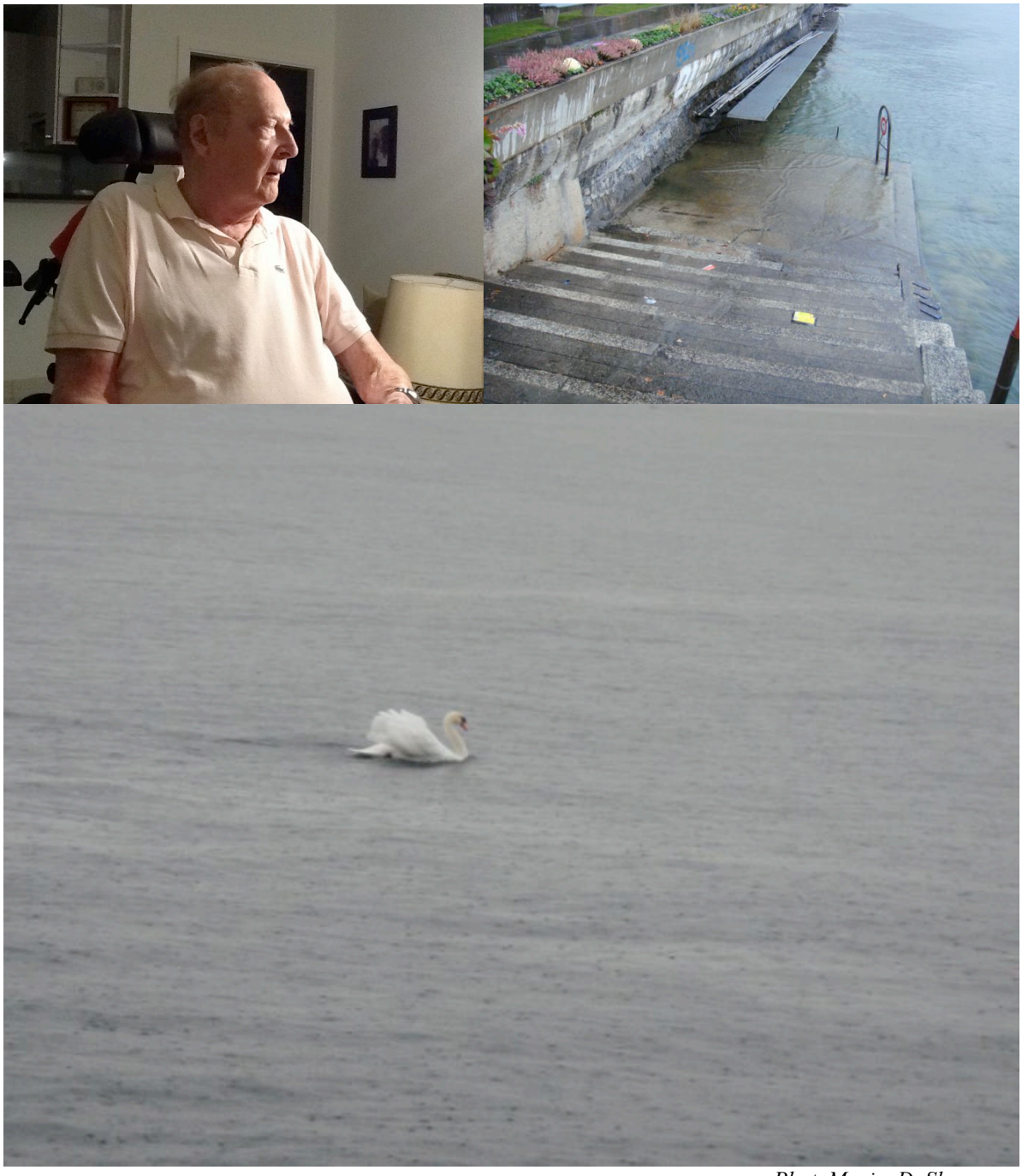

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