

Notes:

This translation was made from the original 1973 paper edition of Un ange à Sodome. The only correction made to this original French document itself was the replacement of "Alexis" by "Ganymede" in the final dialogue between the two boys, "Alexis s'effraya de la fièvre avec laquelle Alexis lui parlait" becoming "Alexis was frightened by the feverishness with which Ganymede was speaking to him."

The final version of The Abduction was proofread by Edmund Marlowe, whom I wish to thank here for his invaluable kindness.

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J.M. THIAN
February 2025

The Abduction of Ganymede is the second of seven short-stories written by Saint Ours and published in 1973 by Guy Gauthier éditeur in a collection called *Un ange à Sodome, l'homosexualité sublimée*. The six other stories are: *Le Journal d'un ange*, *Le Château des sables (Oukhaidour)*, *L'Écurie des Centaures*, *Le Juge et l'assassin*, *Chronique d'une saison des pluies* and *Le Bout du monde*. Each story is set in a different background: Sodom for *Le Journal d'un ange*, an oriental desert, Siam, Anjou or Marrakech for the others...

So far, only Saint Ours's first two short stories have been translated. The first one, *Diary of an angel*, is available on the website Greek Love Through The Ages. The second one is the one you are about to read.

Saint Ours is the pen-name of Claude Achille Clarac. Clarac was born in Nantes, France, on August 31, 1903. He studied law and entered the Foreign Service in 1930. In 1934, he became embassy secretary in Tehran, where he married, in May 1935, the Swiss writer and photojournalist Anne-Marie Schwarzenbach (1908-1942). He was Consul of France in Tehran until 1942, was employed in Washington, DC and then became French ambassador to Syria in Damascus from 1955 to 1956 and later French ambassador in Thailand in Bangkok from 1956 to 1968.

In 1971, Clarac wrote *Discovering Thailand* with Michael Smithies (published by Siam Publications). *Un ange à Sodome* is the only literary book he ever published. As of now, it has not been reprinted.

Roger Peyrefitte knew Saint Ours's real identity but never revealed it. In *Propos secrets* (Albin Michel et René Julliard, 1977, p. 106) he writes: « Lettré, du reste, comme beaucoup de diplomates, (Saint Ours) a publié, sous un pseudonyme, *Un ange à Sodome*, recueil de nouvelles assez remarquables ». « Assez remarquable » is, of course, an under-statement: if one needed to compare the *Diary of an Angel* to another works of the same merits, it would be with Annie Messina's *The Myrtle & The Rose*, that's how good Saint Ours's short-stories are.

Claude Achille Clarac died on January 11, 1999.

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THE ABDUCTION OF GANYMEDE

From the mountain which marks the end of the valley, a stream flows down to the plain. Through alternations of tumult and calm, between rocks, sands and woods, it reaches the fields whose crops it waters but, before losing itself there, it turns gracefully around a hill. The place, where tall trees grow, is an invitation for the traveller to rest.

Ganymede's family had long owned a farmhouse in this location, with a long, low facade overlooking the river and wings framing a courtyard enclosed by the last escarpments of the hillside. On one side were the cellar, the sheepfold and the oil cellar; on the other, the kitchen and the slave quarters. Ganymede's grandfather, ruined by the war, had turned his farm into an inn. He had arranged benches around the fountain that ran down the centre of the courtyard in the shade of a plane tree whose venerable trunk supported a world of branches and leaves. There was always fresh wine in the cellar and vegetables and fruit in the garden. The food was rustic, but tasty: chicken grilled over an open fire, fish flambéed on a bed of fennel, stuffed aubergines and peppers or seasonal fruit. People came here from Athens to admire the silver reflections adorning the mountains at dusk. Young people drank, sang or declaimed under the plane tree, and the philosophers enjoyed taking their students to the inn, which they playfully called the Field Academy.

Lycidas had two children by his wife Cleone. His daughter was born less than six months after the wedding. Their bed then remained barren for twenty years and Ganymede was not born until after Helen's marriage. Lycidas, who had been handsome as a young man, grew prematurely stouter but Cleone retained her grace for a long time. She was never heard to scold but she had the stubbornness of some shy people and, unnoticed, it was she who ruled the house.

Ganymede was born crying. He had a tooth, some hair and, being large for a newborn, he made his mother suffer. When the birth was over, Lycidas entered his wife's room and kissed her on the forehead. Then, snatching the infant from its nurse's arms, he raised it above his head.

“By Zeus,” he cried, “Cleone, it’s a boy! A boy, Cleone! Long live the gods!”

Ganymede was spoiled. Lycidas and Cleone surrounded him with care that they had not shown Helen. Although he was, at the age of one, already strong, his sister and brother-in-law, deprived by his birth from a part of their inheritance, whispered among themselves that he looked stupid and would never live. They didn’t dare say anything to their parents who, full of admiration for this son who came late, would have taken their compassion badly, but every time they came to the inn, they couldn't refrain from adding innuendo to their comments.

Helen, built like a tower, swelled and emptied with the regularity of a tide. Aristippus, who was hairier than a satyr, bore all the attributes of one such and, as his wife was not enough for him, pushed the maids against the wall whenever he had the chance to. Helen reproached him over it but only to square things with her conscience, as she was busy enough with her pregnancies and her children. All in all, it was a good household. The children played, laughed and cried, the boys fought and the girls scratched one another. When he got home from work, the father would give them all a beating and everything would return to normal. The family, who would grow by two every three years, was healthy, diverse and a little uncouth. Those who died in infancy were not mourned for long and the others grew up as best they could, hammering out their Greek lessons under the guidance of a village master.

Ganymede, whose parents pampered him like a Phoenix egg, did not mix much with the boys who lived on the neighbouring farms, but as soon as he was old enough to learn to read, his lively wit attracted the attention of the philosophers who frequented his father’s inn. They caressed him, teased him and offered him treats. One of them, an old-fashioned man who was sober and content with little, offered to instruct him. He was bald, had a round nose and big eyes, looked like an affable Silenus but the benevolent majesty of his beard made him akin to the Olympus of the Gods. Callicrates taught his pupil by walking with him. The child, sitting on a stone or leaning on his stick, would listen with affectionate respect to the lessons that his teacher illustrated with pleasant fables or poetic invocations.

Callicrates fought the tendency in his pupil to isolate himself from boys his own age. He made him wrestle with them, swim with them and climb trees with them. A rustic sap thus reddened the cheekbones of Ganymede, whose body developed at the same time as his mind.

Cleone grew old quickly after the birth of her son. The more she bent down towards the earth, the more she was delighted to see grow up her child, whom she looked at with sad tenderness as if she wanted to take beyond the River Styx the image that would continue to enchant the world after her. Her eyes moistened with tears that she tried in vain to hide, and every evening she would pass silently by Ganymede as he slept and place a shy, touching old mother's kiss on his temple.

Lycidas, for his part, could see from afar his son haranguing the crowds, inflaming them with a word, calming them with a gesture; he would also imagine him as a poet or a playwright, for his admirable mouth seemed destined to distil a honey that would intoxicate the peoples.

Cleone was the first to leave. For some time she had been unable to control her nerves. Bad dreams troubled her and the slightest omen overwhelmed her. She hesitated to go out, as if the universe were teeming with perils from which only the walls of her house could protect her. Although the death she felt lurking around the farm was aimed only at her, her heart feared it only for those who were dear to her. One day, she called Ganymede to her bedside and showered him with passionate kisses. The child, who was thirteen at the time, tried to hold back his emotion but the sense of the emptiness his mother's disappearance would leave in his heart tightened the lump in his throat. They tried to take him away. However, under cover of darkness, he slipped in beside the dying woman and when, at dawn, Lycidas entered the room where she had retired, he found his son asleep against his mother's cold cheek.

Callicrates tried to console him. He described to him the blessed abode where mothers rest without ceasing to watch over their sons. Months passed, then years, but in Ganymede's memory, the image of the dead woman shone with a light that never faded.

As a widower, Lycidas began to drink and gamble. He neglected the inn. Dirty dishes lay on the tables, the stools were wobbly and stray dogs would fight in the courtyard on the lookout for food. The child, who

noted these signs of decadence without daring to admit the cause, often felt sad. And yet, under the plane tree that continued to spread its branches, the fountain was still flowing.

Callicrates, who was gradually losing his sight, would sit down on the roots of the tree next to Ganymede. He groped his way along, his face to the sky, his hand on his pupil's shoulder. The light and the beauty that the old man could now only see through a veil merged and bathed his weakened eyes in a hazy glory.

The child did not yet know how to admire himself, and the complacency inspired by his beauty was accompanied by a wave of joy whose price he did not know. Watching his reflection in the fountain, he asked Callicrates:

"Do you think, dear master, that the gods will love me?"

"They will respond to your love. The gods, Ganymede, are what we make them. Zeus loves those who are strong, Apollo those who are beautiful, but they do not give strength to the weak or uprightness to the flawed. Be strong, wise, skilful and handsome: Zeus, Athena, Aphrodite and Hermes will be kind to you. We are serving the feast of Olympus and pouring for the gods the wine they drink, the wine that lifts them up, the wine that lulls them to sleep. We are their show. They applaud the good actors and throw stones at the bad ones. Our actions give meaning to reality, they nourish it with myths and symbols without which it is just a bad joke. The gods will applaud you, Ganymede, before you open your mouth, for you are beautiful. Fear that they love you too much and that, in order to protect your beauty from the vagaries of life, they take you away from the earth..."

And Callicrates would tell his pupil how Leda, sitting by the river, had seen a swan rowing towards her, its cold legs feeling her white belly and, before she had time to think about it, she had given birth to the Gemini, Europa had been ravished by a bull whose horns she was decorating and Danae, swooning in her alcove, had received the golden shower between her long thighs. To Ganymede's questions, Callicrates would reply:

"To love mortal women, the King of Gods must become flesh and blood because otherwise no one could bear his gaze. Intermediation is the key

to power. Zeus enjoys his creatures but it is the touch of the God that makes them immortal...”

Ganymede was running his fingers through his black curls, following the line of his nose, the arch of his eyebrows and the hem of his lips with his index finger. He was wondering whether some unforeseen form of divinity might not seek him out and asked Callicrates to tell him how he would recognise Zeus if the latter were to disguise himself to approach him.

“I don’t know,” replied the old man. “Perhaps by his height? Perhaps by his audacity? Perhaps by his brutality? In any case, trust only the advice of your heart. It alone justifies the kiss of the beast where the God is hiding...”

Callicrates declined gradually. Ganymede never left his master’s side, piously gathering his last words. When night fell, he would guide the old man to a place he loved. It was an eminence surmounted by an olive tree, in the shade of which shone, in the grass, pieces of divinities and blocks adorned with inscriptions. Callicrates would sit down on the still-warm stones, where lizards were running about and, taking Ganymede’s hands in his own, invite him to describe what he could see. The child would count the villages, the streams and the fields. The old man would say to him: “Nothing has changed. But this landscape is not as beautiful as I remember it. Here we walked, here we refreshed our feet in the river, here I told you the fable of Daphne. Nature is in the image of the gods, Ganymede. She will be what you make her be, a stepmother or a friend, a desert or a shelter...”

Callicrates died on an evening so calm that his soul seemed to evaporate into thin air.

“I don’t want you to mourn me, my child,” he said to Ganymede. “You will bury my body under the olive tree that we loved, and although my remains must return to the earth, they will rejoice when, through the stone that covers them, they will feel the impetus of your stride. But before I join Cleone in the Underworld, let me caress you one last time...” And with a trembling hand, Callicrates traced on Ganymede’s body the curves of his cheeks, his neck and his shoulders, the hollow of his loins

and the curve of his legs; then he placed it on the child's hair, from which, like a dead leaf, it fell back into eternity.

From then on, Ganymede was alone. Lycidas, drunk almost every night, was weeping drunken tears at the memory of his wife. The quality of the clientele declined; the inn was full of bad boys, gamblers and debauchees. Around the plane tree that had shaded Callicrates's lessons, the sound of brawls and knucklebones could be heard; deals were struck in hushed tones between rich merchants and prostitutes, between shameful old men and effeminate.

Ganymede, though already formed, had remained chaste at heart; in love with the universe at the age of fifteen, he dreamt of noble passions under the olive tree where his master was resting but at night he would throw back his blankets and at the end of dreams that made him faint, he would feel, running down his thighs, tears that he did not dare wipe away. When he was sixteen, the age at which young shepherds are entrusted with their animals, his father sent him to tend the flocks in the mountains. With a stick in his hand and a pouch on his back, he set off in the spring to the pastures where the grass remains green. He lived with comrades from the neighbouring villages, sleeping in caves on beds made of skins, drinking from springs and eating honey, fruit and milk. Once they had become men, the children would leave their mothers' skirts to get used to herding cattle. It was also said that the satyrs who haunted these solitudes taught them secrets that experience had not yet revealed to them.

On the slopes of Pelion, where he had arrived in June, Ganymede chose a cave half-veiled by a curtain of ivy, which he used as a shelter. The shepherds already living in the neighbourhood were rude and quarrelsome. They called one another from one slope to the next, singing guttural songs and blowing endless tunes into pierced reeds. As Ganymede's beauty aroused their envy, they threw stones at him and frightened his animals. The child kept them at bay, but he asked the heavens about the love promised by Callicrates and thought, gazing into the distance, of the inn where he had been pampered as a child. He thought he was condemned to solitude and when, in the evening, he would push aside the ivy that hid the entrance to his cave, he would call for sleep in order to lay the weight of his empty heart on his bed.

One day at midday, he spotted a shepherd hurrying towards him, his hands hanging down from the stick he was carrying across his shoulders. The newcomer looked at him cheerfully and said:

“Hello, friend! May the gods protect you! What’s your name?”

“Ganymede! What’s *your* name?”

“I’m Alexis, son of Glaucon. How old are you, Ganymede?”

“Sixteen since April...”

“I’ve never seen you around here before...”

“It’s my first time here. What about you, Alexis?”

“Oh, I’m nineteen. This is the fourth summer I am spending in these mountains.”

He leaned on his stick, his eyes laughing in the shade of his hat.

“By my faith, Ganymede, you are beautiful! More beautiful than Narcissus, Orpheus or young Bacchus! Would you like to be my friend?”

Alexis camped nearby. He defended Ganymede against the quarrels of the louts, hunted and fished with him. For the child, the world changed in an instant. Alexis was not, like Callicrates, a wise man from whose lips one drank the knowledge of men and things, but a hero with hard hocks and strong arms who knew how to fight. In the solitude of his cave, Ganymede would think how sweet it would be to lie by his friend’s side in the evening and his heart would beat in anticipation of some revelation whenever he felt the shepherd’s breath on the back of his neck. At night, they would kindle a fire by the light of which Alexis would tell stories of war and love. Then they would split up to sleep and would meet again at dawn the next day.

After a long day’s absence, Alexis said to Ganymede, lowering his eyes:

“I have seen the nymph playing in the willow grove. She’s asked me to meet her tonight under the carob tree where she makes her bed. I won’t go...”

Ganymede blushed. He wished he could have thought of something wonderful to say, but the panic in his heart paralysed his tongue. Alexis

lingered longer than usual that evening. He tucked under his head the sheepskins his friend had been sleeping on and covered him up to the chin to protect him from the cool night air. The next day, Ganymede caught the shepherd hugging against his cheek the fur he had rested on and which retained some of his scent. But that evening, as they shared the cheese and honeycomb that made up their dinner, Alexis said to him:

“Forgive me, Ganymede!”

“What do I have to forgive you, Alexis?”

“Nothing, oh nothing...”

The child sought sleep in vain. Beyond the curtain of ivy, he tried to find in the depths of the sky the constellations whose names Callicrates had taught him. But what to do with this science? All that mattered was Alexis’ attitude, his reserve and his friendship. The more Ganymede guessed at its meaning, the more jealousy crept into his heart. “Oh Gods! Don’t let him go and join the nymph playing in the willow grove!”

A lamb bleated. The wind from the peaks was whistling and, far away, the sound of a waterfall could be heard...

Ganymede, unable to bear the doubt that stirred his heart any longer, quietly approached Alexis’ cave. The idea that the shepherd had abandoned him made him tremble with apprehension. Motionless, with blood rushing to his temples, he stood for a long time at the entrance to the shelter, where he could make out the embers glowing under the ashes at the foot of the wall but where the shape of his friend, blurred by the darkness, remained indistinguishable. He took two more steps, bent over and sighed with relief as he finally discovered Alexis’ face on the fur pillow. Thus tranquilized, he wanted to withdraw, but an incomprehensible necessity held him in place and, before he had time to flee, Alexis, throwing back the skin that covered him, took his friend in his arms. “I’ve been waiting for you. How I have been waiting for you,” he whispered in his ear.

In an instant, Ganymede felt kissed and caressed, his mouth became Alexis’s without ceasing to be his own, his heart beat in his friend’s chest, the veins in his neck throbbed in his. Under Alexis’s sinuous lips, under his tender knees and tingling hands, Ganymede felt his modesty

melt away in the radiance of a star whose name Callicrates had not taught him; and in the morning, when he lifted his head from his lover's shoulder, it was to ask him and to give back to him the kisses he had just taught him; when he took his hand, it was to lead it back to the place of his excitement; when he snuggled up in his arms, it was to slip down to the spring he was never tired of drinking from...

There was not a cloud to disturb their happiness. Yet Alexis did not give in to Ganymede's pleas to live with him and share his bed every night. He would say to him:

"We look after our animals together. All day long I see you and if, in the evening, I distance myself from you, it is only to desire you all the more the next day. Let me stay by myself in my cave, thinking of Ganymede, remembering each of his features and holding back my desire a little, to which I know you will respond at the slightest sign. And when all is silent, I will enter you like a dream, or you will come, still shivering from the mountain air, to warm yourself into my arms. And I will receive you, O my delicious one! and you will quench my thirst better than the water from the spring or the wine from the banquet would. We will unite all the more, all the better, because we will have been separated for a moment, for the lover only withdraws in order to find other reasons to yield..."

This new wisdom was accompanied by endless games. Often, sitting on Alexis's lap, Ganymede would taste with his lips the honey they shared; their fingers and mouths joined together on the pipes; they would wrestle, disarming each other with kisses, or they would bathe in a pool hidden away in the valley. Ganymede lived in the shadow of Alexis, admiring his chest adorned with black curls, his muscular belly and his runner's legs. As for Alexis, he would never tire of gazing at Ganymede and caressing the golden skin that blurred his budding vigour. His face animated by the reflection of the pool, he would stretch out before his friend, sure and delighted to please him. His waist was slim and, still childish, his buttocks weighed less on his loins than magnolia petals. Alexis, fearful of sullyng his poignant beauty in broad daylight, liked to think about the secret of the cave. He would pluck a flower, place it on his friend's ear, kiss his lips and say:

“You are beautiful, Ganymede! Too handsome for a man’s pleasure! Too handsome, alas, for poor Alexis!”

The summer passed like a day. They parted, weeping, and vowed to meet again. In the season that followed, Alexis’s goats bore the young of Ganymede’s billy goats and Ganymede’s ewes gave birth to lambs sired by Alexis’s rams.

Ganymede returned home to find the house in turmoil. Aristippus, Helen and their offspring had moved into the inn that Lycidas, paralysed, could no longer run. They had taken over Ganymede’s room and thrown his belongings into a corner, jumbled up with Cleone’s souvenirs. Realising that he was now alone, he restrained his anger, put his clothes away in the sheepfold and made his bed next to the lambs, whose bleating reminded him of Alexis’s season. “If you want to avoid the whip,” said Aristippus, “don't you dare go out without my permission. Your life as a prince and your laziness are over! For a start, take this broom and clean up the courtyard!” Ganymede obeyed without saying a word. His nephews danced around him, insulting him.

“Ah! Ah!” they shouted, “your pretty face won't save you from the dung or the club. Now it’s your turn to get your hands dirty!” Ganymede kept on sweeping but when he saw one of the children pissing into a vase that had belonged to his mother, he beat him savagely. Helen rushed to her children’s cries and Aristippus whipped Ganymede into submission in front of his persecutors.

Ganymede continued to grow more beautiful despite the mistreatment he received. He grew taller and his face took on a serious, pensive expression that made him touching. Less neatly groomed than before, his curls were entwined around his forehead and ears, giving him a rebellious air that belied the resignation in his eyes. His natural grace only encouraged his tormentors to persecute him.

Aristippus, who seemed to pursue his brother-in-law with a particular hatred, overwhelmed him with work and reproaches, as if he had hoped to dominate him by debasing him. Ganymede sought refuge with his father, the only remnant of happier times. He would carry him in his arms to sunny places where the old man could peacefully warm his bones. He would feed him and wash his face and hands, because in the

house that had once been his and that had been taken over by a bitter tribe, only Ganymede still cared about Lycidas.

Helen and her husband restored the inn's prosperity. They were hard on the slaves, whom they never ceased to scold, but the walls were whitewashed, the tables and benches repaired and the cellars filled. The fountain flowed into a new trough, decorated with garlands and bucrania. Hospitality was expensive and vulgar. It was no longer philosophers and their disciples but wealthy bourgeois who came to distract themselves from commerce and politics or to get drunk in the arms of gitons and flute players. Ganymede hid as much as he could. Between the sheep and the goats, he had set up a domestic altar where he had placed the memories of Cleone, Callicrates and Alexis. When everything was asleep, he would sit under the plane tree in whose shade he had so often conversed with his master, but the gently worn edge of the fountain had been replaced by a sharp marble whose main merit was that it had been expensive. The child would then call on Alexis for protection; he hoped that a miracle of love would bring his message to the shepherd and that the latter would immediately seize his stick to join him.

One night while he was thus dreaming, he heard the sound of wings above his head. The sky darkened and a bird landed heavily on the top of the plane tree. Ganymede looked up: an eagle was watching him with its round, clear, piercing eye. Although he was not a coward, an instinctive respect prevented him from moving. The bird bent its neck and looked at the child as if to question him, then stretched out its beak, opened its wings and flew back to the stars. Ganymede would have liked to escape with him from the courtyard where he was a prisoner of Aristippus, but the murmur of the fountain brought him back to what he had loved in the house where he was born. The eagle returned several nights in a row. A science seemed to warn him of the presence of the young man, whom he gazed at with an avid stare. Ganymede grew tired of this silent conference, the meaning of which he did not understand, and thinking that the king of birds wanted to nest in the tree, he stayed inside the sheepfold during the fourth night so as not to bother him. Through the crack in the door, he saw the bird soaring in circles in the lunar void, even more giant than it had been on the branches of the plane

tree. Ganymede called out Alexis's name with redoubled fervour in the foolish hope that the eagle would carry his call to him. The only response he received was, from immeasurable distances, a tender, melodious cry, a lament as heartbreaking as the pain that gave birth to the world, but the next day the bird did not return.

That night, Aristippus slipped into the sheepfold, hiccupping with offers and threats to try and rape Ganymede, but the young man sent him rolling into the yard with a well-aimed kick between the legs. He swore revenge.

"Your brother," he said to his wife, "is vicious. We must get him out of here, because if we don't, he'll corrupt our children." Helen replied, shrugging her shoulders:

"Do you think, my friend, that I have eyes in order not to see? When will you become reasonable? You want to get rid of my brother because you tried to shove your satyr's cock between his buttocks and he told you to get lost. There's no point in denying it, my dear! I know your type. Ganymede is a real beauty. Let's use him. Don't forget that we have sons to raise and daughters to endow."

Ganymede was combed, anointed and depilated. He was dressed in embroidered robes, the folds of which revealed his legs. His nails were dyed with henna, his curls perfumed and tied with silk headbands. Aristippus ordered him to serve the guests, to smile at them when they spoke to him, but not to give them anything without his permission. On the other hand, he threatened him with the most appalling punishment if he refused to submit to the whims of those who would obtain permission to enter his room. Ganymede then suffered his cruellest martyrdom. His beauty singled him out for the concupiscence of the debauched. It was a curse he carried with him and, if he had not been afraid of insulting the gods, he would have torn his face. He had to pour wines from Samos and Cyprus for those whose lasciviousness was aroused by his presence, and by lavishing drunkenness on them for the benefit of the inn, he was freeing them from their last scruples. With his eyes locked on the memory of Alexis, he could see, as if he were in another world, the obscene gestures that his beauty provoked. One would lift his dress up to feel his thighs, another would take him by the

waist and try to kiss his lips. Helen would whisper to the richer people that, if they were generous, she could provide them with the means to spend a moment with the young man. After the fatigue of the day, Ganymede would fall back on his bed with a sigh, knowing that an oily breath was about to approach his lips. What was the point of defending himself? The pleasures that so many strangers were extracting from his body, so different from those he had tasted in Alexis's arms, passed over him like clouds and, stiffening against himself, he inwardly paid tribute to someone else for the pleasures that were being snatched from him. He then associated the memory of his lost lover with the high altitudes and revived his courage by evoking the purity of the firmament.

Helen and Aristippus, who knew that Ganymede was one of the main attractions of the guesthouse, spared him the work likely to spoil his complexion and harden his skin. Ganymede was freer and could have escaped, but his father's infirmities kept him at home. What's more, nothing attracted him to the outside world anymore, because every time he went out he was humiliated: when they saw him, the peasants in the neighbourhood spat in contempt.

"No," thought Ganymede sadly, "no, the Gods do not love me! Why am I a poor shepherd without any grace or spirit! O Gods, your gifts overwhelm me! Take them back! Those I reject insult me, those who have known me despise me, and if the attraction I unfortunately still exert on them draws them back to me, they take revenge on it by persecuting me. Coveted by all, sold to all, I cannot dispose of myself in favour of the only one who matters to me..."

But whenever he was alone, the child could see the eagle circling in the space above his head. One day, as he was sleeping under Callicrates's olive tree, he woke to see the bird resting two paces away, on a rock. Its claws, armed with cruel nails, were scratching the stone, its wings were sovereign, its beak imperious, but its breast seemed as sweet as honey. Ganymede, frightened, grabbed a stick to ward off the animal, which stared back at him with its agate gaze. The earth groaned. The great feathers brushed the shoulder of the child who felt the wind of flight push him upward and, from the heart of the eagle, a drop fell, red, where the heat of the embers was mingling with that of the wine. Ganymede hesitated for a moment to pick up the carbuncle shining in

the grass, then he clutched it to his heart like the pledge of a mysterious alliance. From then on, the eagle never left his side. Day and night its presence, near or far, pursued the child, who hated it, feared it, invoked it. It darkened the sky, sparkled in the hub of the sun; it weighed like a crushing weight on the heart of Ganymede who was filled with dread at the approach of an indecipherable fate.

One evening, on his way to the mountain, the child met a slender, lively man who approached him with a smile.

“Fear not, Ganymede,” he said to him. “I am the annunciation and the message. Stay here for a while and remember what I am going to tell you, for I am speaking to you in the name of someone who, without revealing his name, wants you to know that he loves you.”

“Why so many detours, stranger? Don't you know that my price is posted at the inn where I work?”

“Ah! do not blaspheme! He who sent me receives only the gifts given to him. But so far you have not recognised any of the signs by which he has tried to reveal his love to you. For you are as insensitive as you are beautiful, Ganymede!”

“Why would I try to find the meaning of a parable that means nothing to me? I only love Alexis. He is the one who revealed me to myself. I belong only to him. Does your master, who seems to know so much, not know that?”

‘Because Alexis has made you the boy in love that you are, must you so remain forever in love with him? The Ganymede of today is neither the Ganymede of yesterday nor the Ganymede of tomorrow. The mountain shepherd has unsealed the bottle whose perfume is now evaporating to the delight of the animals, the men and the gods; no one anymore has the power to deprive them of it. Because he is sovereign, he who sends me is begging you; because he is source of beauty, he is asking you to give him yours; because he is fountain of love, he is yearning for the desire of your soul; because he is truth, he is masking himself to approach you...’

“Who is he, then?”

“Stupid child, can't you guess?”

“What is he like?”

“He is the form of desire of the one he loves!”

“And if I meet him, how will I recognise him?”

“When you threw yourself into the arms of Alexis, who was just a herdsman, did you know where your love was leading you? After you have abandoned yourself to the one who sent me to you, you will perhaps understand the meaning of my words...”

With that, the stranger disappeared as quickly as he had come, but the eagle continued to draw circles in the sky, crying louder and louder.

The next day, Alexis appeared at the door of the inn. Ganymede, who could not believe his happiness, ran to him and burst into tears on his chest. Although the shepherd had become a man and wore a beard, the child immediately felt his sensitive kindness. He told him what had happened to him since they had parted and begged him to take him with him to the mountains.

“I love you, Alexis! Remember the cave! Don’t abandon me to the swine at the inn!”

Alexis was frightened by the feverishness with which Ganymede was speaking to him. He had thought he was teaching him games for one season, but he realised too late that he had unwittingly cast into his friend’s hitherto dark heart a light that continued to dazzle him. He took Ganymede’s hand and, lowering his eyes, said to him:

“Do not condemn me, little brother! I am no longer free to love you. I have married my uncle’s daughter. When I come home from ploughing or from the pastures, I sit on my doorstep and my son jumps on my lap, laughing as he pulls at my beard. Understand me, Ganymede! I couldn’t take you with me without upsetting my wife and if you lived next to me, I know you’d die of jealousy...”

Ganymede’s heart dropped like a stone in his chest and when Alexis said goodbye to him that evening, he couldn’t even find the strength to cry. Times had truly changed. Cleone and Callicrates had left first; the spirit of Lycidas had died out in his worn-out body and Alexis was on his way home to his family. Ganymede climbed the hill where Callicrates was

lying. The night had the insensible purity of eternity, but a deadly perfume was rising from the warm grass. He threw his tunic to the ground and stood up, naked, towards the stars. "O Gods!" he cried, raising his arms, "you who gave me this beauty that I curse, O Gods! take it back! It belongs only to your faceless love, to your borderless embraces. O cruel ones! stop this heart that no longer knows for whom to beat, destroy this form that has no place here below, strike down the servant of men, ravish Ganymede!"

The night suddenly thickened. The child felt enveloped in an intense, quivering plumage. He gave himself up, letting his arms fall on the eagle's wings, tipping his head onto its powerful shoulder. His humanity vanished in this cradle that he could not see but whose warmth dispossessed him of himself. The great wings stretched out and Ganymede, relieved of the weight that held him to the earth, invaded by the force that invested him, was lifted in a leap to the stars. The eagle's tail parted his legs and spread out between them to serve as a throne. The desire that urged him on penetrated to the very depths of his entrails, filling them with pulsating jets of fire, music and perfume, while his mortal sap watered space with a protective covering of stars. And as he soared above the stars, radiant with immortality, he heard the eagle sing in his ears:

"It is I, Zeus, king of the gods, thus armed with claws, thus clad in feathers, who have stolen you from men, Ganymede, creature of all delights! You could have been content with their admiration; despite this, you preferred to vanish on my wing. By surrendering your beauty to the pleasure of the God, you have made it divine. Ecstasy enters you through the wound I inflict on you. Thus your ephemeral substance is transmuted into that which knows neither beginning nor end, thus is accomplished the miracle that allows you to look at me without any fear. Ganymede, lover of Zeus, cupbearer of Olympus, turn around!"

The child obeyed. A radiant God was contemplating him through Alexis's eyes, just as they had shone in the serenity of the mountains. He himself was floating weightlessly in the bosom of space, his lips sealed to those of his lover, an idea, a reflection of the divine imagination, created in the act by desire, eternally resurrected by the virility that engenders forms, dilection and rest of an inconceivable strength.

Thus was Ganymede abducted...