

Pierre Klossowski

Translated by Austryn Wainhouse

*The Rule of Hospitality.*

The master of this house, having no greater nor more pressing concern than to shed the warmth of his joy at evening upon whomever comes to dine at his table and to rest under his roof from a day's wearying travel, waits anxiously at the gate for the stranger he will see appear like a liberator upon the horizon. And catching a first glimpse of him in the distance, though he be still far off, the master will call out to him, "Come in quickly, my happiness is at stake." This is why the master will be grateful in advance to anybody who, rather than considering hospitality as an accident in the souls of him and of her who offer it, shall take it as the very essence of the host and hostess, the stranger in his guest's capacity partaking of this essence. For with the stranger he welcomes, the master of the house seeks a no longer accidental, but an essential relationship.

At the start the two are but isolated substances, between them there is none but accidental communication: you who believe yourself far from home in the home of someone you believe to be at home, you bring merely the accidents of your substance, such accidents as conspire to make a stranger of you, to him who bids you avail yourself of all that makes a merely accidental host of him. But because the master of this house herewith invites the stranger to penetrate to the source of all substances beyond the realm of all accident, this is how he inaugurates a substantial relationship between himself and the stranger, which will be not a relative relationship but an absolute one, as though, the master becoming one with the stranger, his relationship with you who have just set foot here were now but a relationship of one with oneself.

To this end the host translates himself into the actual guest. Or, if you prefer, he actualizes a possibility of the guest quite as you, the guest, actualize a possibility of the host. The host's most eminent gratification has for its object the actualization in the mistress of the house of the inactual essence of the hostess. Now upon whom is this duty incumbent if not upon the guest? Does this mean that the master of the house might expect betrayal at the hands of the mistress of the house? Now it seems that the essence of the hostess, such as the host visualizes

it, would in this sense be undetermined and contradictory. For either the essence of the hostess is constituted by her fidelity to the host, and in this case she eludes him the more he wishes to know her in the opposite state of betrayal, for she would be unable to betray him in order to be faithful to him; or else the essence of the hostess is really constituted by infidelity and then the host would cease to have any part in the essence of the hostess who would be susceptible of belonging, accidentally, as mistress of the house, to some one or other of the guests.

The notion of mistress of the house reposes upon an existential basis; she is a hostess only upon an essential basis: this essence is therefore subjected to restraint by her actual existence as mistress of the house. And here the sole function of betrayal, we see, is to lift this restraint. If the essence of the hostess lies in fidelity to the host, this authorizes the host to cause the hostess, essential in the existent mistress of the house, to manifest herself before the eyes of the guests; for the host in playing host must accept the risks of the game, and these include the consequences of his wife's strict application of the rules of hospitality and of the fact that she dare not be unmindful of her essence, composed of fidelity to the host, for fear that in the arms of the inactual guest come here to actualize her *qua* hostess, the mistress of the household exist only traitorously.

If the essence of the hostess lay in infidelity, the outcome of the game would be a foregone conclusion and the host the loser before it starts. But the host wishes to experience the risk of losing and feels that losing rather than winning in advance, he will, at whatever the cost, grasp the essence of the hostess in the infidelity of the mistress of the house. For to possess the faithless one *qua* hostess faithfully fulfilling her duties, that is what he is after. Hence by means of the guest he wishes to actualize something potential in the mistress of the house: an actual hostess in relation to this guest, an inactual mistress of the house in relation to the host.

If the hostess' essence remains thus indeterminate, because to the host it seems that something of the hostess might escape him in the event this essence were nothing but pure fidelity on the part of the mistress of the house, the essence of the host is proposed as a homage of the host's curiosity to the essence of the hostess. Now this curiosity, as a potentiality of the hospitable soul, can have no proper existence except in that which would look to the hostess, were she naive, like suspicion or jealousy. The host however is neither suspicious nor jealous, because he is essentially curious about that very thing which, in everyday life, would make a master of the house suspicious, jealous, unbearable.

Let the guest not be the least bit uneasy; above all let him not suppose he could ever constitute the cause for any jealousy or suspicion when there is not even anyone to feel these sentiments. In reality the guest is anything but that;



for it is owing to the absence of cause for jealousy and suspicion, which are not otherwise determined than by this absence, that the guest is going to emerge from his stranger's accidental relationship to enjoy an essential relationship with the hostess whose essence he shares with the host.

The host's essence—hospitality—rather than being confined to impulses of jealousy or suspicion, aspires to convert into a presence the absence of cause of these impulses, and to actualize itself in that cause. Let the guest understand his role well: let him then fearlessly excite the host's curiosity by that jealousy and that suspicion, worthy in the master of the house but unworthy of a host; the latter enjoins the guest loyally to do his utmost; in this competition let them surpass each other in subtlety: let the host put the guest's discretion to the test, the guest make proof of the host's curiosity: the term generosity has no place here, it is without meaning in the discussion, since everything is generosity, and everything is also greed, but let the guest take all due care lest this jealousy or this suspicion grow to such proportions in the host that no room is left for his curiosity; for it is upon this curiosity the guest will depend in order to display his abilities.

If the host's curiosity aspires to actualize itself in the absent cause, how does he hope to convert this absence into presence unless it be that he awaits the visitation of an angel? Solicited by the host's piety, the angel is capable of concealing himself in the guise of a guest—is it you?—whom the host believes fortuitous. To what extent will the angel actualize in the mistress of the house the essence of the hostess such as the host is prone to visualize it, when this essence is known to none but him who beyond all being knows? By inclining the host farther and farther, for the guest, be he angel or no, is only inclination in the host: learn, dear guest, that neither the host, nor yourself, nor again the hostess herself knows the essence of the hostess; surprised by you she will attempt to find herself in the host who then will no longer hold her back: but who, knowing her in your arms, will hold himself richer in his treasure than ever.

In order that the host's curiosity not degenerate into jealousy or suspicion, it is for you, the guest, to discern the hostess' essence in the mistress of the house, for you to cast her forth from potentiality into existence: either the hostess remains sheer phantasm and you a stranger in this house if you leave to the host the in actualized essence of the hostess; or else you are indeed that angel, and by your presence you give an actuality to the hostess: you shall have full power over her as well as over the host. And so, cherished guest, you can't help but see that it is in your best interest to fan the host's curiosity to the point where the mistress of the house, driven out of herself, will be completely actualized in an existence which shall be determined by you alone, by you, the guest, and not by the host's curiosity. Where upon the host shall be master in his house no more: he shall have carried out his mission. In his turn he shall have become the guest.

## THE TWO PEASANTS

(13th century)

Guatier le Leu

Trans. Nathaniel Dubin

They both had risen with the sun and traveled far ere day was done, so, when they found a place to stay, so tired and tuckered out were they, the older of them was so bushed, he was at once both pale and flushed and couldn't eat at all that night, nor could they whet his appetite by any means. The tender heart (he scraped away the outer part) of two cabbage stems and one roast turnip was all he ate, at most.

The other man ate his fair share—he, unlike his friend, was not so weary—and then they lay down side by side in bed, sleepy and satisfied, where they slept on soundly and tight till past the middle of the night, when the older peasant awoke, who'd felt so tired, he thought he'd croak.

He nudged his partner there in bed. "Psst, are you listening?" he said. "I am so famished, I don't doubt that I am ready to pass out or maybe go stark raving mad. Is there anything to be had that you know of, vittles or bread?"

The younger peasant racks his head and tells him, "Friend, I don't see how at any price I'd find bread now unless I go and wake my host and strain myself to the utmost, which surely wouldn't be polite, but half a pot remained last night of a thick milk and batter gruel.

Just lie here patiently. If you'll behave yourself and keep your calm, I'll hurry up and get you some, and you can have your fill of what —'s left over if I find the pot."

Then he rose, naked as a jay-bird, and to the stores made his way and searched till he found the pot and reached out, lifting up his right hand, and grabbed the ladle by the stem and picked it up, filled to the brim (they'd left it standing in the gruel), and, with the ladle overfull, he then proceeded to return, but doing so took a wrong turn, for unfamiliar with the lay-out there, in the end he went way off left and came to his host's bed. "Can you hear me?" he softly said. "See here: I've brought it as agreed."

Off the edge of the bed, where she'd moved it, the wife's ass hung undraped. Between her cheeks her asshole gaped, but since her sleep was so profound, the woman didn't hear a sound