

*No. 10**Anonymous: The Warm Donation*

This fifteenth-century verse narrative was traditionally attributed to the mid-fourteenth-century didactic poet Heinrich der Teichner, but modern scholarship has rejected this attribution. The highly popular motif of the housewife who has nothing to give away to a beggar but her own body for sexual gratification because her husband has locked away everything out of sheer miserliness found expression in numerous verse ballads (first printed in 1530 in Nuremberg), and also in a verse narrative from the early fourteenth century, composed sometime around 1320 or 1330 in southern Bohemia. The text was copied down in eight manuscripts, of which one has been lost today, whereas another has survived only as a fragment. The two oldest manuscripts containing this text are housed in Heidelberg (cpg 341) and Geneva-Cologne (Bibliotheca Bodmeriana, formerly Kalocsa, Ms. 1). Folklorists have speculated that the motif of this tale could be traced back to the ancient Indian *Panchatantra*, but there are remarkable differences, and certainly the line of descent eludes us. But the account of the poor suffering wife who substitutes sex for a regular charity donation has enjoyed popularity in songs and tales until the twentieth century. The story's title probably means: a live donation (the woman's body), instead of bread or any other food item, or money.

Edition:

Friedrich Heinrich von der Hagen, ed., *Gesammtabenteuer*, 2: 241–48.

Text:

[motto:] This is truly a strange story of the clever warm charity donation

Once upon a time there was a miserly man who had the habit of spending very little. He locked everything he owned away from his wife (5), both early in the morning and late at night. He was the most miserly person in the world. He carried the key for all things with him wherever he walked or rode on horseback. He knew exactly how many eggs the chicken had laid for him (10). He counted them every day. His wife could not get even one. His cheeses he had also counted. He did not grant her any control, neither over this nor over that (15). She got hardly anything to eat.

One day he had to go to his mill and she was told to guard the house. Once he had left, a very poor man arrived at her house (20). He implored her in the name of almighty God to give him something [to eat]. The lady lamented bitterly that she had nothing (25), although she would have liked to grant him his wish. She said: "My miserly husband has locked away everything that I own, both meat and bread. Even at the risk of starving to death (30), I would not be allowed access to the food. If you would like to accept my love [instead], I would be happy to share it with you in the name of God."

He answered: "Lady, do not mock me; I am such a poor man (35) that I do not deserve to be ridiculed. If it were true what you are telling me, I would lament it bitterly. [Through my begging] I receive meat and bread (40) enough to feed myself well and do not suffer from hunger."

The lady took him by his hand and led him to her bedroom. Both lay down (45), both the lady and the good man. Look, there he played with her most happily, as is usual among all people [literally: according to the customs in this world]. This way he received his donation and said that he had never (50) received more and greater honor. She said: "What I have given you, I gave you instead of bread. Now take [whatever you want] instead of meat (55), if you like to do so next."

Herewith the good man embraced his lady one more time and took the better donation. Full of eagerness she gave him that (60). He said: "My Lord, Saint Michael, will reward your soul for it! No one has ever given me in my whole life a donation of the kind that she granted me (65). She should be rewarded for it, by the Holy Sepulchre!"

While thanking her with these words he went out of the door. At that moment, when he was already outside, he ran into the husband who heard his blessing and the words of thanks that he uttered (70). The husband ran into the house to find his wife. He said: "Wife, tell me, what did you give to the good man [sic] whom I met when he left the house (75) and who thanked you so exuberantly?"

She answered: "I did not give him anything, because you did not let me have one bit that I might have been able to grant to anyone. I have a soul and know what life means." (80) When he had heard this the husband grabbed a piece of firewood and beat his wife so long that she finally told him the truth. She began to cry and said: "I know one thing for certain (85); the person who wants to enter heaven must first give alms [here on earth]. I have a soul [I am a good Christian] and do not want to live like a heathen woman. Therefore I allowed the beggar to have sex with me [literally: I gave him my love] (90) as endowment for mass service, in the hope that he would later pray for our souls once we are in Purgatory. I did not have anything else available to do penance for your and my sinfulness, and his praying was supposed to serve us both."

When the good man (95) carefully considered her sinful act, it grieved him and made him very unhappy. He cried out loudly and spoke: "Oh dear, why was I ever born? You have lost your honor (100), but it was me who was responsible for it! The sin you have committed you could have easily avoided, but I had locked away from you everything on which you were supposed to live (105) and which you could have given to poor people [as alms]. This is all my fault, at least as much mine as yours. Now, take control of everything I own and that I have ever gained (110), both meat and bread, and give it away to those people who are in need of it. But if you distribute anything else beyond that [such as sex], you will lose your honor."

This way the wife gained control (115) of the power in the house and the key to everything, and from then on she enjoyed a happy life. Since that time she could grant alms as much as it pleased her.

However, there is one thing that puzzles me, and I ask you to think about it (120). Would a woman nowadays do the same thing [as this wife had done] if she had nothing else to hand out? I am telling you very specifically, and you can trust me: a woman would give even more alms who would give them out of love (125) for almighty God in Heaven.

Herewith our *mare* has come to an end. Women could always live without suffering from grief if they give such a donation.