

## No. 14

### *The Knight with the Hazelnuts*

The narrative motif of this tale can be traced back to Oriental literature, and was first employed in medieval Europe by the Spanish poet Petrus Alphonsus, who had converted from Judaism to Christianity, in his *Disciplina Clericalis* (ca. 1108–1110). Our tale has come down to us in three fourteenth-century manuscripts (Munich, cgm 717; Vienna, cod. 2885; Innsbruck, Tiroler Landesmuseum, Hs. FB 3200). It finds explicit parallels in the Old French fabliau *Pliçon* by Jean de Condé (d. ca. 1340) and in the Middle High German *mare Schlafpelz* by Heinrich Kaufringer (ca. 1400). As far as we can tell, *The Knight with the Hazelnuts* seems to have been composed in the early fourteenth century in the area of Thuringia (today central eastern Germany).

#### Edition:

von der Hagen, *Gesammtabenteuer*, 273–82; cf. also Ursula Schmid, ed., *Codex Vindobonensis* 2885, 169–74.

#### Text:

One must speak in good terms about women. He who does so will be blessed, because women know many tricks (are intelligent), as you will learn from an example how a knight was deceived (5). I will tell you a true story. One day, when a knight left his wife to go hunting with his dogs, as was his custom, she immediately sent (10) for her beloved, but she did this secretly, asking him to come as soon as he received her note. When he had learned of it (15), he was very pleased and rushed to her. When he entered her room, these two secret lovers went to bed and did as their pleasure taught them (20). But what they really did, only a monk might figure out.

In the meantime, the knight was surprised by a heavy rainstorm, which forced him to return home. He thought: “Now you are getting wet: (25) go home, that would be better.” At that time, just when the clouds had burst open, children had come out to collect hazelnuts. The knight approached them, who were now also seeking shelter from the rain (30) before it would come pouring down. They had already cracked open some of the hazelnuts that I have mentioned already.<sup>1</sup> The knight approached them and asked them to share some with him (35), which they gladly did.<sup>2</sup> He handed over his hat, enjoying this opportunity, and the children were not loath to fill it with nuts. Then the knight rode home (40). His greyhounds ran ahead of him, and one of them scratched at the gate to the house, which greatly frightened the lover who was lying in the marital bed [with the wife]. He thought that the husband had arrived (45). When the wife heard it, she stood up quickly [and said]: “You do not have to worry.” Then she said: “Dear sir, remain here quietly: this is my advice and my wish (50). The curtain is of very good quality, and nothing bad can happen to us. I will certainly and safely get you away from here in a most proper fashion. Whatever I will say, you keep quiet (55). I will help you to escape from here, believe me that.”

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<sup>1</sup> This is a very strange passage in the original and would read literally: “They had already cracked open a part of the hazelnuts in their chests.”

<sup>2</sup> This line is included only in the version used by von der Hagen in his edition, *Gesammtabenteuer*.

When the husband arrived in the yard, servants immediately took his horse from him. When he got to the bedroom, she had already opened the door (60) and had sat down next to a stone. The knight was lying on the bed all by himself, hidden by the curtain. It did not take long until the husband came in (65). The wife greeted him in friendly fashion.

“Wife,” he said, “what are you doing?” She answered: “I had intended to take a nap. It bothered me a great deal (70) that I was so alone. My God, what good does it do you to go hunting with your dogs, leaving me alone? (75) You would be smarter if you spent more time with me, since I soothe all your discomfort.”

He replied: “I have brought you some hazelnuts.” She said: “You obviously realized (80) that I have no entertainment. Now you have done well, you are indeed smart.” They both sat down and cracked nuts which they picked up out of the lady’s lap (85). The visitor, who was hidden behind the curtain, experienced great fear. She said: “Sir Knight, who are lying on the bed, you do not have to worry, I will help you; we do not need to bet (90) to get out of this bedroom. You are not being betrayed. As I have told you before, nothing can happen to you here. What could be the charge against you? (95) Help us crack some nuts, and no one will hurt you.”

Then she took a handful of nuts and threw them behind the curtain. This eating of nuts seemed to take too long for the guest (100). The husband looked at her and said: “By God, what has happened to you? To whom are you addressing these words?”<sup>3</sup> She answered: “A knight is lying on our bed.” (105) The husband immediately replied: “He would not dare to await me there, if any person would indeed be there.” She said: “I believe you that. You are telling me that every day (110). Now, I do not want to be guilty of it, I tell you to go there yourself. Get up and take a look who he might be. He was lying with me just a short while ago. Since you returned so quickly (115), you have robbed us of much happiness. After all, he is a courageous hero.”

The husband retorted: “Truly, you are possessed by a devil, called Calumniator.<sup>4</sup> May God help to improve matters with you (120) and assist me in making sure that you regain your sound mind. By God, this would be really necessary! Who would be such a daredevil as to risk his death and lie down in my own bed (125), where I could catch and kill him? So help you God, be reasonable and do not vex me so badly.”

Thereupon the knight’s wife said: “Now get up and take a look yourself (130). You think that I have lost my mind?<sup>5</sup> I have all my reason together. You are deceiving yourself. I have never lied to you.”<sup>6</sup>

He answered: “You cannot fool me, whatever you try all the time (135). You treat me like a monkey. You would like me to go there and find no one behind the curtain. Then you would laugh at me and make fun of me (140) when you are among other women. I must and want to stay here because I do not trust your words.”

She said: “My words have no impact on you; one has to trust a horse when it follows its own direction [proverb] (145). But I am honestly telling you the truth, and I am ready to swear an oath; everything I have told you so far is the complete truth. But you do not dare to go to the bed: you are a coward (150). He is really lying there, the way any bold guy would do.”

However much she entreated him to believe her, he never went to the bed. The man who was lying on the bed, (155) and gladly trusted the wife, did not crack any of the nuts. He rather would have gone on a pilgrimage to Saint James [Santiago de Compostella] to collect them there because he was anxious to enjoy a knight’s reputation (160).

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<sup>3</sup> Again a slight difference in the wording, and I am following von der Hagen’s version here because the appeal to God seems quite fitting.

<sup>4</sup> In the Codex Vindobonensis, the husband says, instead: “You must have eaten henbane or some other herb,” implying some herbal hallucinogenic.

<sup>5</sup> In Schmid’s edition, the lady says: “Do you think that I am a ghost?”

<sup>6</sup> Again, this is an additional line in Schmid’s edition.

“Honestly,” she said, “believe me, I have told you lies. In fact there is no other man, because I love only you. But I am going to tell you (165), if a knight were there, I would dare to get him out of here in a most proper fashion, securing his escape from this house without any loss to his honor.” (170)

He answered: “How would you do that?” She: “Well, I am going to tell you. I would take you and put your head under my robe, pressing you to me (175), and then I would wrestle with you. This way I would cover your head. [Next she demonstrated it to him, preparing the actual escape of her lover.] Sir Guest, now you are permitted to take to the road: that is my command (180). Leave the house immediately; I have covered his head.”

Just as she had told the guest, he did not hesitate and departed right away and disappeared without being seen by anyone (185). In this way she helped her lover<sup>7</sup> to escape safely. Then she let go of her husband’s head, held him by his hair and said: “Lift your head, my love, (190) and look at me openly; understand the joke that I played on you and forgive it me out of your goodness.”

One had better take heed of evil women who know how to catch mice. Fools deserve to be deloused with clubs.

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<sup>7</sup> Whereas von der Hagen’s version contains the Middle High German word “buol” for lover, Schmid’s version uses the word “ameyse,” which has the same meaning, but it derives from Old French “amis.”