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Throughout history, traditional marriages have often been structured patriarchally with the notion that the women should be submissive towards her husband and must give herself completely to their husband. Carmen Machado explores this idea in her work “*The Husband Stitch*” where a young woman enters a passionate relationship with a gentle man and as the relationship develops into marriage, the dynamic soon follows that of a patriarchal marriage where the narrator, the wife, is fighting for her autonomy against her husband, and society as a whole. In the story “*Husband Stich*” by Carmen Machado, the author portrays marriage as a tool that the husband exercises for control and entitlement over his wife, whose autonomy is constantly undermined. Through the symbolism of the ribbon, the husband’s entitlement, the narrator’s gradual loss of agency, and the tragic ending, the story demonstrates how a relationship can strip a woman of her governance over her mind, body and more.

To me, the ribbon is symbolic in the story as it represents a woman’s boundaries, identity, and self-governance. It is portrayed in the story as a thing only women have, in unique places, and it is very important when trying to understand the role that marriage played for the narrator in this story. Throughout the story, the narrator is always adamant about protecting her ribbon from her husband, in fact, it was the only rule imposed on the husband by the narrator. She states, “he cannot touch my green ribbon” (page 19). The fact that the narrator explicitly made it forbidden to touch the ribbon and repeatedly reminds her husband that “it’s mine” shows that it’s her strongest form of sense of self governance. This key symbolism highlights the unselfish

nature of the narrator who has, by every means, given the husband everything except the ribbon and yet it is the one thing that the husband wants the most. It gives the readers a sense of the demanding nature of the husband, and by extension, society, when it comes to a woman's sense of self-autonomy. The ribbon's importance to the narrator is explicitly stated and yet the husband demands that she reveal everything to him, highlighting the sense of entitlement that marriage creates in this story.

Machado's work portrays the marriage as more than just an affectionate relationship. We actively see the husband almost weaponizing the marriage to create a false notion that a woman must give up all her secrets and control to her husband. One moment from the story that demonstrates this expectation is when the husband literally states, "A wife should have no secrets from her husband" (page 33). He tries to pull the ribbon as his wife is orally pleasuring him and when she pushes herself back, he becomes furious. He tries to use the fact that they are married to argue that there should be no more secrets. He doesn't even consider what the ribbon means to his wife, he just wants control and uses marriage to fulfill his desire for complete control. I found this really significant because even as the narrator is literally pleasuring him, he still isn't content and wants the only thing the narrator tries to protect. His insistence reflects broader societal expectations that wives must be fully available to their husbands. It reflects how women are pressured and guilt-tripped into slowly handing their agency to their partners due to the institution of marriage.

Moreover, the story also demonstrates the narrator's gradual loss of agency and sense of self. This loss is accelerated by the narrator's marriage as she is perceived differently by society, her husband, and even herself after marriage. Initially, the narrator is very enthusiastic about the marriage, and very confident in her governance. However, as the story progresses, we see that gradually the narrator loses her strength to try and overcome societal and family pressure. The

husband becomes more and more aggressive about the ribbon, disregarding the narrator's personal wishes and undermining her. Her body is given to her husband through sex, childbearing, and more and even then, it's not enough. Her governance over her body is also violated by the doctor who places an extra stitch on her body without consulting her so that she can become just "like a Vir--" (page 29). She loses her self-autonomy with her son as well who eventually begins to question and tug on the ribbon. The gradual loss of the narrators Agency throughout her marriage highlights a theme of how relationships often demand women prioritize their husbands' desires over their own.

The tragic ending serves as the ultimate consequence of the constant pressure that surrounds women from society and their spouses. Although the narrator constantly fought to maintain ownership of her ribbon, her husband's endless badgering led to her giving in. After years of preservation and safeguarding the only thing that was solely her, the ribbon is undone and her "head lops backward and rolls off the bed" (page 44). Obviously, the head falling off is symbolic but to me it represents the complete loss of autonomy for the narrator. It shows how marriage/partnership can completely strip a woman of her governance and loss of identity. This is reflective of boarder norms where, essentially, the demanding nature of traditional marriage on women can kill their bodily autonomy because of the expectation to continuously give and give.

In conclusion, marriage in Machado's work, "*The Husband Stich*", shapes the relationship dynamic between the narrator and her husband, as well as society. It demonstrates how marriage can often deprive a woman of her identify by expecting her to submit to male entitlement and give up all sense of autonomy relating to body, mind, and more. The theme of

marriage demanding the wife's time and autonomy is reflected across Machado's collection of stories, highlighting its deep-rooted persistence in society.