

How did the wife keep her husbands ‘hoolly in my hand’ and how do you respond to her character in this section of the prologue?

The Wife of Bath used several methods to keep her husbands ‘hoolly in my hand’ one of which was using sex for gain. She used sex for gain because when she couldn’t get her own way or what she wanted from her husbands she would withdraw sex from them as a punishment until they gave into her demands. From line 409 the wife says *“I wolde no lenger in the bed abide, if that I felte his arm over my side, til he had maad his raunson unto me; thane woulde I suffer him do his nicetee.”* This shows that the wife can control her husbands by withdrawing things they enjoy like sex therefore getting her way with them.

Another way the wife managed to get her own way with her husbands was by nagging until they gave into her, at one point in the wife’s tale, she talks about the way her husband acts with her and how he should be acting. From line 318 she says *“thou sholdest seye, ‘wyf, go wher thee liste; taak youre disport, I wol nat leve no talis. I knowe yoe for a trewe wyf, dame Alis’ We love no man that taketh kep or charge where that we goon; we wol ben at oure large”*. This may make readers feel that the husband in question is trying to control the wife but she clearly states that she won’t love him if he tries to take charge, this nagging therefore may persuade the husband to allow the wife free reign.

She uses examples of anti-feminist writers to get her own way with her husband. When her husband comes in one night *“drunken as a mous”* she claimed he said several things for example *“thou seist som folk desiren us for richesse, somme for oure shap, and somme for oure fairnesse”* which he actually didn’t say but in order to make him feel guilty she lied about it and with the backing of her neice and Janekin the husband had no choice other than admit it and do what the wife said in order for her to forgive him.

In addition the wife also keeps her husbands ‘hoolly in her hand’ by the way in which she protests against her husbands idea of not being happy with sharing her with someone else. She talks about the philosopher Ptolemy who said only miserable people envy what other people have. She said *“have thou ynogh, thee thar nat pleyne thee”* which is where she is asking her husband, if you feel you have enough (meaning either enough attention or enough sexual activity) from her, what is the problem in her giving her ‘favours’ to other men.

Another way in which the wife got her own way with her husbands was by the ways in which she argued with them constantly if she wasn’t getting her own way. An example of this is when her husband accuses her of seeing their assistant, Janekin. This is because he is suspicious when Janekin is looking her up and down. But in return to this she says she wouldn’t go with Janekin even if her husband was dead although she says Janekin has *‘crispe heer shininge as gold so fyn’* which readers will find humorous because it’s a bit obvious that her intentions towards the assistant are hardly innocent and it will make her husband paranoid that they will get together.