

A Husband to Order

Behind Martha's Curtain

From the World of the Dark Sheriff

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A Husband to Order

Behind Martha's Curtain

From the World of the Dark Sheriff

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To my mother – Carmen.
She called me to this life and nurtured and cared for me.

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PROLOGUE

Before the curtain rises, let us step briefly into the history and legacy of the play itself.

A Husband to Order, a Serio-Comic Drama in Two Acts by John M. Morton, Esq., first graced the stage of London's *Royal Olympic Theatre* on October 17, 1859. Beloved for its wit, charm, and spirited characters, the play delighted audiences with its lively humor and subtle dramatic intrigue.

This adaptation offers a faithful yet immersive retelling of Morton's work—transformed into a novel-style narrative by Roger Mendoza. The original dialogue has been lightly modernized for clarity while preserving Morton's distinctive voice. Stage directions have been reshaped into flowing prose, enriched with atmospheric detail and vivid imagery. Where characters once addressed the audience directly, their asides now appear as murmurs, whispers, or quiet reflections, drawing readers deeper into their inner worlds.

Set first in 1806 and later in 1808, the story unfolds across two pivotal years. Within the wider Dark Sheriff universe—where histories, legends, and personal narratives intertwine—this play holds a special place, not only for its theatrical legacy but for the influence it carried into the life of Martha Swanson.

Stories shape us in unexpected ways. They slip quietly into our lives, influencing our choices, beliefs, and sometimes even our sense of who we are. They act as mirrors, reflecting the parts of ourselves we recognize—or the parts we long to become. For Martha, one story, or rather one play, held particular significance: *A Husband to Order*.

She first saw it on October 23, 1859, during a picnic with her aunt, Gertrude, and a man she was fond of. The performance took place in a tent, the theater having suffered minor fire

damage, but the makeshift setting did nothing to diminish the experience. The play itself was lighthearted entertainment, crafted to amuse its audience, yet it struck a deeper chord with Martha. What captivated her most was Josephine, the leading lady—a woman of spirit, intelligence, and wit. Gertrude teasingly remarked that Josephine reminded her of Martha, and as the play unfolded, Martha realized just how true that was.

Josephine was clever, opinionated, and fiercely independent—a woman out of time, much like Martha herself. Yet where Josephine was constrained by the expectations of high society, Martha's life had taken a different shape. Thanks to her father's wealth and status as a New York socialite, she had access to an education few women of her era enjoyed. College opened doors that could have molded her into the refined, agreeable woman society expected. But Martha had no interest in becoming someone else's vision of propriety. She sought independence in a more tangible form—one forged through action, intellect, and the confidence to stand on her own terms.

This is where she and Josephine diverged. While Josephine struggled against the confines of her class, Martha believed, with unwavering certainty, that she could do anything she set her mind to, even in a world that frowned upon such ambition. She didn't want to be valued for her social standing; she wanted to be recognized for her abilities, her insight, and her determination.

This novelization of *A Husband to Order* is more than a retelling of a classic play. It is a celebration of influence, character, and the stories that shape us. It honors the power of literature—not only to entertain, but to mold ideals, inspire action, and spark quiet rebellions against the expectations of the world. Martha saw herself in Josephine, the woman who defied convention even as she remained entangled in it. She recognized in her a reflection of her own spirit, sharpened by education, strengthened by experience, and guided by a fierce desire for independence.

Step behind Martha's curtain, into the world that shaped her

—a world of independence, defiance, and justice. A world where the stories she loved, including the play she watched that autumn afternoon, helped forge the remarkable woman she would become.

What follows is the play Martha experienced that day—the very performance that stirred something deep within her. Though the stage was simple and the setting improvised, the tale itself carried a charm and spirit that lingered long after the final applause.

So settle in, let the story unfold, and enjoy the performance.

Now... let the curtain rise.

CHAPTER ONE

Act First - Part 1

It was 1806, and in a large, handsome apartment, a young woman named Elise sat near the front door, her needle moving gracefully through a length of embroidery. A soft smile played on her lips as she worked, the quiet rhythm of her stitching filling the space with a gentle, steady calm.

The apartment was warm and inviting. A broad sofa dominated the center of the space, its cushions arranged with careful precision. To one side, a tall picture window framed a scenic view of the road below, sunlight spilling across the floor in soft, golden patches. Opposite the window, a door stood slightly ajar, leading to the rest of the apartment.

Every so often, Elise lifted her gaze from her embroidery and glanced toward the front door, as though expecting someone — or perhaps simply listening for a sound from the world beyond the threshold.

“There’s nobody here to see me, so I may as well enjoy it!”

She yawned loudly, enjoying the quiet. A tap came from the middle door.

“Oh, lud! I was just in time.”

Another tap.

“I know who that is, before the door opens. That gentle tap can only emanate from the gentle knuckles of the gentle Monsieur Anatole Latour!”

The tap repeated with impatience.

“Why don’t you come in?” she yelled.

Anatole entered through the middle door wearing a long black advocate’s gown, breeches, black stockings, and fancy shoes.

Latour bowed repeatedly as he entered through the center

door and sauntered over to her. "I beg ten thousand pardons, mademoiselle."

Elise let out a huff. "Why didn't you come in at once? You weren't afraid I should eat you, were you?"

"No, mademoiselle! But hearing you were alone, I was afraid..."

Elise chuckled. "Ha! If I were a man, and wanted to see a young woman, and they told me she was alone, that would be just the very reason that I should not be afraid."

"Oh! mademoiselle..."

"Now, pray, don't keep on twiddling that hat of yours about in that way! It does fidget me so dreadfully."

Latour fussed with his hat. "Mademoiselle." He put the hat on his head, then quickly snatched it off again. "Ah!" He looked tenderly at Elise and sighed. "If Mademoiselle Elise only knew the mingled feelings of respect and admiration which animate this hat—I mean this heart!"

Elise sat on the right side of the couch. "Hold your tongue and sit down!"

Latour quickly sat next to her.

"In the first place, don't call me mademoiselle. I'm not mademoiselle, I won't be mademoiselle. I know they want to make a fine lady of me, but I defy them."

Latour smiled tenderly. "Then—Elise!"

Elise glared at Latour. "Don't call me Elise, my name is Lise, or rather, Lisette!"

Latour nodded. "Then—Lisette!"

Elise winced. "Don't call me Lisette!"

Latour stifled a grin. "Instead of telling me what I am not to call you, if you would only condescend to say what I am to call you."

"I don't know—I don't care—I don't care about anything or anybody, there! Yes, I do! I care about the dear old farm, and heartily wish I was back in it, with Monsieur Phillipeau and his plump, fat, comfortable wife!"

Latour nodded. "Your affection for this worthy couple is but natural, for thanks to the good stewardship of Monsieur

Phillipeau, you are now the wealthy mistress of this, the fairest château in Brittany.”

“I hate the château! ! great, long, straggling, dark, dull, melancholy, old, tumbledown place! Ah! I can’t get up here at five o’clock in the morning and milk the cows, and churn the butter, and make the cheese, and go bird-nesting as I used to do at the farm.”

The corner of Latour’s lips cracked up slightly. “But at any rate, it enabled you to offer hospitality to your guardian, the Baron de Beaupré, on his return to France six months ago, after his long exile.”

“Of course, I was happy to pay the old gentleman every sort of respect, though I had never seen him in my life, but the moment I saw him, I said to myself, ‘I shan’t have much trouble in twisting you round my little finger, old gentleman, but his niece, Mademoiselle Josephine—oh dear, that’s quite another pair of shoes!’ She stood abruptly.

Latour jumped to his feet, his face tight with confusion. “Another pair of shoes?”

Elise chuckled. “Yes, you mustn’t mind my free and easy style of speaking. I picked it up at the farm, and it sticks to me. Oh, she’s a grand young lady, I can tell you! A peacock with two tails is a joke to her! She treats me just as if I were a child, and is always finding fault with my appearance, or my manners, or my grammar; in short, she snubs me!”

Latour smiled. “Well, never mind!”

“I don’t mind! No, not I. Ha! If you had only heard her yesterday, because I would go down into the kitchen and mind the soup—she said it was unladylike, low, vulgar! Vulgar, me? That is a good one, eh? Ha!”

Latour’s breath hitched in his throat, but then he managed to choke out, “Yes, as you say, it is a good one. Ha, ha!”

“I dare say my education isn’t quite as good as it might be. Never mind, I know as much as most young women for all that!”

Latour’s eyes flittered about timidly. “There is one necessary portion of a young lady’s education in which I should like to instruct you.”

Elise wrinkled her nose as if she'd smelled something foul. "Lor! What's that?"

His gaze flickered to her eyes, and a faint smile touched his lips. "To like me a little better than you do."

Elise stifled a chuckle. "I don't think I could."

Latour's face filled with a smile. "Then you love me?"

Elise stepped toward the window. "Oh, dear no! That's a horse of quite another color!"

He exhaled sharply. "Yes, I'm fully aware that I'm a horse of quite another color. But your guardian doesn't object."

"Of course not! Because it isn't my guardian you want to marry. Besides, he's under great obligations to you—it was you who brought about this marriage for his niece, by which all the family property, which had become forfeited to the nation, will be restored to him."

Latour's eyes darted away from her, timidly. "Can you wonder at my zeal, when I knew it would make the baron my mediator with you?"

"How very disinterested of you to be sure! Ha!"

Latour's shoulders dropped, "Oh, mademoiselle—I mean Elise—Lisette you'll not doom me to despair? I've been living on hope for the last three months."

"Have you? Then it must be very nourishing food, for you certainly have got fat upon it!"

Anatole's head cocked back, his chin up, in a dignified pose.

Elise continued, "Now don't look so awfully tragic, or I shall laugh!"

Latour exhaled sharply. "Give me some little encouragement, some trifling assurance."

"Assurance! I wish I could, for that's just what you want, you're so demure and reserved! Then your manners are so very nice, your conversation so very refined, your appearance, especially in that long black coat, so very serious! Ha! And as for a hearty laugh, I don't believe it's in you, ha!"

Latour huffed. "That's enough! Now that I know how to please you, I'll become a dashing fellow, a devil of a fellow—in short, I'll go it! You shant, by...." He cocked his head back,

straightened his shoulder. “By Jupiter! I said—By Jupiter! What do you think of that? And as for my timidity and bashfulness, thus I throw them off forever!” He leaned in and kissed her cheek. “There! What do you think of that?”

She froze, her eyes fixed on his.

He stepped back into his timid manner. “Oh, dear! Oh, dear! I didn’t know... I didn’t mean.... Shall I throw myself headlong at your feet?” His eyes fell to the floor, his face drained of color.

Elise chuckled. “Ha! Here’s a fuss about a trifle!”

The voices of Baron de Beaupré and Josephine came from behind the front door. Elise and Latour turned expectantly toward the door.

Baron said, “Josephine, Josey, Jo!”

Josephine answered, “I repeat, Baron, it is highly indecorous and excessively improper!”

CHAPTER TWO

Act First - Part 2

The door opened, and in walked Josephine, wearing a blue silk dress that hugged her waist and flowed smoothly to barely an inch above the floor. It sparkled in the light.

Barely a pace behind her, Baron wore a plain, colored, square-cut, embroidered coat, an embroidered vest, black breeches, striped stockings, nankeen gaiters, and powder.

Baron continued, "But, my dear niece, if you'll only listen to reason."

Josephine stopped just short of the sofa. "Reason! Pshaw! What has reason to do with the usages of society?"

A frustrated Baron said, "Very little, I admit!" Baron declared. Under his breath, scarcely audible, he added, "Her lamented aunt's temper to a T."

Josephine said contemptuously, "I repeat that in selecting an apartment for this Monsieur Pierre Marceau. You ought to have chosen one as remote as possible from that which I occupy!"

Baron gritted his teeth. "Well, but considering that we expect the gentleman this very day, and that the moment he arrives, he will conduct you to the Hymeneal altar."

Elise murmured under her breath, "Poor man!"

Baron's eyes grew wide. "Then and there to be joined to you in the bonds of wedlock."

Josephine stiffened. "Don't be too sure of that! And permit me to say, Baron, that in the whole of this strange affair, you have shown a degree of precipitancy totally at variance with the laws of decorum and good breeding."

Baron half-smiled. "Perhaps so!" He covered his mouth and muttered, "That's so like her aunt the baroness again!" He raised a brow at her. "But my natural anxiety to see you happily married."

Josephine guffawed. “Happily married to a man I have never seen.”

Baron smiled as his eyes warmed, his voice gentle. “But you will see him before you are married to him! In point of fact, you can’t be married to him without seeing him. What can you desire more? Besides, you can’t say, ‘No!’ at the last moment—you couldn’t see your poor uncle go back into exile again; for if you do say ‘No,’ back into exile again your poor uncle certainly will go!”

“Well, you will only be sharing the fate of your lawful sovereign.”

Baron nodded. “I flatter myself there is no man more anxious to see his lawful sovereign than I am, but with all due respect to my lawful sovereign, I shall wait till he comes to me!”

Josephine wrinkled her nose and said contemptuously, “There was a time when the Baron de Beaupré would have blushed to use this language.”

“Yes! But my blushing days are over, and for the best of all possible reasons, I found I got nothing by it; consequently, when the emperor—”

Josephine said, satirically, “The *ci-devant* lieutenant of artillery!”

Elise stifled a chuckle. “And the conqueror of Italy!”

Baron cleared his throat, “I repeat, when the emperor graciously permitted my return to France, and generously restored to me my title.”

Josephine chuckled, “Wondrous generosity, forsooth! When the property belonging to that title had been sequestered and sold to the highest bidder, Monsieur Pierre Marceau, whose father was your own vassal by right of inheritance.”

Elise, her eyes narrowed, said, “And who is now himself a colonel by right of courage.” A small smile cracked her lips as she muttered to herself, “There! — Take that!”

Baron sighed. “I confess I was rather puzzled what to do, when I found myself a baron again, without the means of living like a baron; when a sublime idea suddenly struck me.” He turned to Anatole. “You remember. I said it was a sublime idea,

the moment you suggested it.”

Josephine glared at Anatole. “So, sir, it is to you then that I am indebted, for this most flattering alliance, in store for me!”

Latour’s breath stuck in his throat. His gaze fell to the floor, his palms suddenly sweaty. “I’m sure I’m very sorry, but the facts are simply these, not having the faintest idea that—of course I couldn’t have the slightest notion that—that—and I therefore hope this explanation will be perfectly satisfactory.”

Baron said, “Satisfactory? Of course! I never heard a plainer and more intelligible statement in all my life! My young friend, Anatole, undertook to memorialize the emperor on my behalf. The decision of that great man was contained in these few but emphatic words:”

Baron inhaled deeply and continued, “The family estates of the Baron de Beaupré, forfeited to the nation and recently purchased by Colonel Pierre Marceau, shall be restored to the above mentioned baron, provided that within two months, his niece Mademoiselle de Beaupré shall bestow her hand in marriage on the aforementioned Colonel Pierre Marceau.”

Josephine walked up behind the sofa. “The emperor might have condescended to consult the lady in such a matter.”

Baron shrugged. “Yes, he certainly might, but he didn’t.”

Josephine said sharply, “To be valued like cattle at a country fair.” She shook her head at Baron. “And your blood didn’t boil at the indignity.”

Baron said softly, “My boiling days are over. Besides, my name hasn’t appeared in the matter! Everything connected with the estates and the marriage contract was settled in Paris, between the colonel’s principal farmer and bailiff, one Monsieur Phillipeau.”

Josephine chuckled. “I’m sure, Monsieur Phillipeau, farmer and bailiff, does Mademoiselle de Beaupré infinite honor.”

Elise said, “I’ll be bound he never thought of you at all; all he cared for was to serve Pierre Marceau, and no wonder, since they are...”

Baron looked expectantly at Josephine. “Then you’ll try to receive your husband with a smile.”

Josephine smiled satirically. “No! That’s a grin!”

Baron looked away and muttered to himself, “She’s the image of her aunt, the baroness!”

The edge of Josephine’s lips curled up slightly. “There is but one way to receive a gentleman who has never once condescended to honor me with his presence!”

Baron’s face wrinkled. “How could he? He was with the army.”

Josephine said sharply, “He should have left the army.”

“On what plea!”

“Any plea!”

Elise looked incredulously at Josephine. “What! On the eve of a battle, and such a battle as Austerlitz—catch him!”

The noise of wheels and the crack of a postilion’s whip came from outside.

Elise shrieked, “Hark! A post chaise is rumbling into the courtyard. Who can it be?” She ran to the window. “It’s he! It’s he! I’m sure it’s Pierre despite his moustaches!”

Josephine’s brows narrowed. “Moustaches? Surely the man can’t mean to be married in moustaches!”

Elise waved at the man below. “Pierre, Pierre Marceau! He doesn’t see me!”

Josephine walked up to Elise. “Elise, I’m ashamed of you! standing at an open window, and staring at a man!” She looked out the window. “Where is he?”

Elise pointed below. “There!”

Josephine squinted. “The man in the boots?”

“No, that’s the postillion! That’s Pierre in a traveling cloak.”

Josephine wrinkled her nose. “And a cigar in his mouth, ugh!” Pierre was standing next to a young man. She shook her head and stepped away.

Pierre’s words wafted into the room loudly. “Now then, young man, left shoulder forward, march! Quicker than that! fire and furies!”

Josephine shook her head. “He swears as well as smokes! I think he might have left the habits and language of a barrack room behind him. You may receive him, Baron, I shall not!” She

walked assuredly past the sofa.

Baron gasped as he leaned up against the back of the sofa. “But, niece! Josephine! I say, Jo!”

Josephine raised her nose. “I repeat, I shall not!” She covered her mouth and muttered quietly. “The man is evidently a bear. That’s a pity too, for the creature is by no means ill-looking.”

Pierre’s voice wafted in from behind the center door. “Now then!”

A frightened Josephine hastily disappeared out the door opposite the picture window.

About the Author

Roger Mendoza is a storyteller, designer, and multimedia creator whose work blends frontier grit, mythic imagination, and emotional truth. As the founder of Romen Graphics and a creative force behind Dark Sheriff Records, he builds interconnected worlds across books, music, photography, and handcrafted physical editions.

Roger spent most of his career as a software engineer in the defense industry, where he honed his analytical mind and lifelong passion for problem-solving. After twenty-three years in California and fifteen years in Colorado, he returned to his hometown of San Antonio, Texas, settling on the outskirts where rural quiet meets city convenience. There, he continues to write, design, and produce his work with a hands-on approach that reflects both precision and artistry.

A professional photographer, Roger explores the natural beauty around San Antonio, capturing light and quiet moments that inspire his stories. Family history is another cornerstone of his life; as the eighth of ten children, he has spent years preserving photographs, documents, and memories that connect generations.

His curiosity about human behavior, life's mysteries, and the drama that unfolds in everyday lives fuels his storytelling. Whether writing frontier dramas, ghost stories, or modernized classics, a single creative philosophy unifies Roger's work: stories should feel lived-in, personal, and unforgettable.

He continues to expand the World of the Dark Sheriff, a mythic, evolving universe that ties his books, music, and visual art into one cohesive creative saga. His work invites readers into worlds that feel lived-in, mythic, and unmistakably his own.