

THE ADVENTURES OF BLACK MASK AND PALE RIDER
A TALE OF SIX GUN AND SORCERY
BY TIM HOLTORF



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Black Mask & Pale Rider, Shani Wennemein and Pania Alow are copywritten by Tim Holtorf 2009.

PART TWENTY-SIX

Ezekiel Morgan followed obediently behind one of the slavers as he was taken out of the paddock. He'd seen this before, slaves taken from one owner to another. This was his time now. Ezekiel prayed at least that maybe this master would be kind and understanding. Perhaps, maybe even grant him his freedom. He kept his head low, eyes looking to the ground, knowing exactly when to stop and exactly when to start walking. He listened as the slavers talked but didn't really register what they said. He didn't really look up until he heard the voice of the one who had paid for him.

"Thank ya kindly, boys," he heard her say. A woman. He'd never heard of a woman owning property before. His eyes drifted up for a brief moment, taking in the lean figure that stood before him. He saw the pair of long barrels slung low on her hips, a pair of short swords tucked neatly into scabbards that rested near the holsters. A gunslinger. He'd been bought by a gunslinger. What would a gunslinger possibly want with a slave? "Son," he heard her say again. "Y'all kin look up, son." Ezekiel's head slowly looked up to take in the woman before him. She was shorter than he was by at least a foot and a half, and skin whiter than any white man he'd seen. True white in colour. And her ears, her pointed ears.

"Yes'm," he said as he looked up, nodding respectfully.

"Name's Shani," she replied. That alone took him aback, never before had his owner introduced him or herself to him before. "Ya gots a name, son?"

"Y-yes'm," he replied with a hesitant nod. "Ezekiel, ma'am." His timber remained respectful and timid, as he'd learned from previous owners. Any sign of confidence was usually beaten out of most slaves.

Shani nodded with approval and turned to the guards. "Y'all gots the key ta his shackles?" The guards stared at her for a moment in disbelief. Shani huffed and rolled her eyes as she continued. "If I wanted a puppy ta lead 'round on a leash I'da bought a dog." The guards muttered as they finally handed Shani the key to the shackles, and watched as the pale elf began unlocking the chains around Ezekiel's hands and feet.

"Miss," one of the guards cautioned as he stared at Ezekiel. "He could bolt an' run."

Shani stood up and tossed the shackles to the ground and looked Ezekiel in the eye. "Ya ain't gonna run from me, are ya, Zeke?" The tall black man shook his head slowly. He didn't know what to make of this woman, and decided if he did run, she could easily gun him down. "There, see?" she said as she looked back to the guards. "Sides, I don't need no personal servant draggin' b'hind me all chained up. C'mon, son. Let's go."

Ezekiel followed her dutifully, keeping his head bent low and eyes on the ground. His mind raced as he tried to figure this woman. That detective work would

have to continue later, as he heard another voice call out to his new Mistress.

"I congratulate you, Madam," the very debonair voice stated as he approached with his entourage, the dandy that he had seen before. Along with the woman. The woman that made him feel uneasy. "I had hoped to add a strong back to my work force, but it would appear that t'day was not that day."

"I reckon so," Shani replied with a nod. She didn't smile, but remained cool as the dandy approached. "I needed somebody ta help out with a few things, an' a strong back's what I need. I can't lift ev'rythin'."

The dandy extended his hand in an offer of greeting. "Allow me ta introduce myself. I am Jeremiah Kingston. The Third. It is a pleasure to meet such a lady as yerself." He smiled to her with a slight bow as he introduced himself, his well trimmed mustache and goatee matching his demeanor.

Shani smirked and nodded as she shook the man's hand. "Shani Wennemein," she said slowly, allowing him to believe that she had a slow, Texas drawl. "The first." Ezekiel kept his head low but managed to shift his eyes back and forth between the two of them. He already was beginning to piece together some of Shani's body language. He could tell she really didn't like this man. Rightly so, he also gave Ezekiel a very odd feeling.


"If I may be so bold," Jeremiah continued after the short introduction. "But it is often an honour ta meet a lady such as yaself. It would be most pleasant if ya might join me at my plantation for dinner." His smile was ever present, making Shani believe that it actually might really be a fake.

"I would haveta say thet is most kind o' ya, Mr. Kingston," she said with a nod. "Gotta mention I am gonna bring 'long my partner. Pania's 'er name."

"Well then," Jeremiah let draw out as his eyes seemed to brighten at the prospect of not one, but two women that he could entertain. "I will look forward ta seein' ya both. And please, do bring your manservant. He is most welcome ta join us as well. I will send a carriage ta your quarters around six this evenin'. If you will just give me the name of the hotel you are stayin' at, then I can make certain a carriage comes by to pick you up at the appointed time." He bowed to her as his smile grew just a bit as Shani wrote down the name of the hotel, and then he moved off, followed closely by his entourage.

When he was completely out of ear shot, Shani turned to Ezekiel. "I sure as hell don't trust thet bastard." This comment, combined with the fact that she confided in him, surprised him even more. No one had ever done that before. Ever. "C'mon," she said as she began to move down the street. "Need ta git cleaned up an' then all three o' us needa git gussied up. Y'all kin meet Pania, too." Even with the few surprising events in the last few

minutes, he obediently followed her down the street. These events would be nothing compared to what was to come.



Pania sat back in the warm water, eyes closed as she hummed quietly to herself. Finally, she had a decent bath. After several days of running creek water through her hair, she would be able to soak and get some of the stench of the trail out of her skin. This was something that she'd been waiting for over the course of their ride from Oxford to Shreveport. They didn't stay for very long in one place, so it made it difficult to get a decent bath. Now she had the opportunity to actually sit and soak in a nice warm bath.

The boarding house was very high class. The few thousand they had accumulated from previous jobs afforded them some ability to pass themselves off as higher than their class. Even on Earth, flash enough cash and it would get you places. She sighed deeply as she relaxed. All was perfect with the world. Even the sounds that filtered in through the window; the tromping of booted feet down the hall, the laughter from the patrons of the establishment, the shouts from outside as people called to each other; all of it seemed relaxing.

She even enjoyed the reception she received, as each person took to calling her Mademoiselle, to which she would nod her head in thanks and repeated the greeting. It felt very high class here.

The sound of light boots and the familiar ching of spurs signaled that Shani had returned. Pania smiled, maybe if she remained in the tub, Shani might be tempted in some way shape or form. The door opened as Pania continued to hum to her self.

"Damn, it is hot out there," Shani called out as she moved through the three room apartment they had rented. A decent sized place for such a boarding house. Another example of its high class nature. Pania heard the shuffling around of feet. And then she heard something else.

"Oh my Lawd!" The voice was most definitely male. "I am so sorry, Miss. I did not mean ta ..." Pania opened her eyes, which grew to the size of saucers when she saw the tall black man standing with his back to her, a hand covering his face. "I am so sorry, Miss."

"Shani!" Pania called out quickly as she rose to her feet and quickly grabbed a towel. The elven gunslinger walked back into the room as she heard the commotion, somewhat confused by what she was hearing.

It became all too clear when she became enlightened of the situation.

"Oh fer cryin' out loud!" she said with a sigh. "Pania, put some dang clothes on."

"Oh, I'm sorry," Pania huffed, her voice holding a mocking tone. "I didna know we were gonna 'ave comp'ny comin' o'er." She wrapped the towel around her, gazing over at the black man every so often, then

motioned Shani over as the shock of being seen in all her glory had finally passed. "Who's tha'?"

"His name's Ezekiel," Shani explained. "I call i'm Zeke. Seem fittin' 'nough."

"Mhmm," Pania said with a nod as her eyes continued to gaze over the man's form. "Now. Please explain why there's a very, very black man in the room. An' dunna try an' say ye met an ol' friend on the street. I know 'ow blacks 're treated 'ere." Her eyes moved to Shani as she waited for the explanation.

Shani sighed slightly, knowing that no excuse would be good enough for the elven bard. "I ... I bought 'im," she finally said in a quiet voice. Pania's only response was a blank stare, only broken up by the odd blink from time to time.

Pania opened her mouth two or three times as she tried to find the words. Her mind tried to process what she had just been told. Naturally, it was the only logical answer, but she still couldn't believe what she had just been told. "Ye... bough' 'im?" she finally said with a voice filled with shock. "With money?"

"Yeah, money," Shani shot back. "I figger one way ta actually free a slave may very well be ta buy 'em." Shani rolled her shoulders as though she struck a small victory with her comment. Ezekiel heard the words, and realization sunk in. This woman did plan on saving him. Maybe not him per se, but she purchased him, and she wanted to free him.

"An'... wha' 'xactly were the plan?" Pania finally managed as she was able to produce a full sentence with less shock in her voice. "Buy a slave, ride up ta 'Arrisburg, knock o'er a bank, ride back 'ere, buy a few more..."

"Hell, no," Shani replied with a grim tone. "It were impulse. I jist... I couldn't jist stan' there an' watch." She took a deep breath as she waited for Pania to continue her tirade. But the elven bard's attention had focused on Ezekiel again. "Zeke," she called out to the black man. "'S'alright, she ain't all nekked no more, ya kin turn 'round." Ezekiel did as he was told, keeping his head bowed low and eyes to the floor.

Pania moved forward, her anger toward Shani, the shock of being exposed in front of a complete stranger, was all but gone. "Ye dunna 'aveta look ta the ground, ye know lad," she said softly. "I were a bit s'prised, an' no' angry." She smirked as she looked to the elven gunslinger behind her for a moment. "Least no' a ye, lad."

Shani sighed and shook her head in reply before changing the subject. "We got other problems ta think 'bout anyways," she stated quickly. "We been invited ta a fancy dinner by a Jeremiah Kingston. The Third."

"The Third?" Pania repeated with a chuckle. "Sounds important, aye."

"I bet he thinks he is," Shani replied with a smirk. "Anyways, coach is gonna come pick us up at six. We needa git us some fancy clothes an' git ourselves all pertied up fer t'night." Her eyes moved over to Ezekiel

and then to the bath tub. "But first, we needa git cleaned up."



Ezekiel stood straight while he inspected the fine suit he wore. He never had clothes like these, and it made him feel important. The fine, black material of the slacks and suit jacket. A soft cotton shirt that felt light on his skin. Even the black dress shoes, though they did pinch a bit, but he wore them, never having had such articles before. Both Shani and Pania were off in other rooms dressing for the evening. Ezekiel still had a difficult time getting past the image of the white hair elf from his mind. It was their first meeting, and he often did not see people naked when being introduced. One thing was certain with these two, they were different, and they treated him differently. While they shopped for clothes, they took him along, asked his opinion, wanted to know if he liked the clothes they picked out. Granted, it was done in hushed tones, but still, they asked his opinion as though they treated him as an equal.

His thoughts came back to the present as the door to one of the spare rooms opened and Shani walked in. She wore smart looking slacks and matching vest that covered a fine silk shirt. The pale elf slipped on a matching bolero jacket and topped off the wardrobe with a brand new stetson. Her new boots seemed slick and the spurs gave a sharper ching as she walked. Even the gunbelt was new and pristine looking, holding her trusted long barrels with care. Under the vest, she wore a shoulder harness that held each short sword in comfortable scabbards and neatly tucked away from sight. Ezekiel smiled as she stood in the middle of the room, as though modeling the latest fashion. Shani dressed up quite well, making the Tom Boy look come out that much more for her. Had it not been for the fact that her long hair and feminine features gave away her gender, she could have been mistaken for a man.

"Ya look right nice, Miss Shani," Ezekiel said with a genuine smile. His opinion was honest, it wasn't a forced thought that came out to satisfy an owner. Shani did look very nice indeed.

"Well, thank ya, Zeke," Shani replied with a grin. She had begun taking to calling him Zeke, finding the name quicker to use and easier to say. "How ya find them clothes?"

"They fit right good, Miss Shani," he said with a nod. There was some hesitation before he continued, however. He knew there would be no reprisal for his

comment, but he had grown up not wanting to voice discomfort in front of white folks. "Shoes're a bit tight."

"Well, couldn't find nuthin' in yer size," Shani replied with a sigh as she fixed up the bow tie for him. "Jist keep up 'ppearances 'til we git done dinner 'n then we kin find ya a decent pair o' soft shoes." She picked up a smart looking black cap that sat on a nightstand and handed it to Ezekiel. He took it carefully and gently placed it on his head, adjusting it so it felt comfortable. The pale elf smiled and nodded her approval. "I figger we gonna come off lookin' like a right respect'ble group o' upper class society at Kingston's lil swore-ay." She looked back to one of the doors that lead to another spare room. "How y'all comin' in there, Panny?"

"I'm comin'," a muffled voice said from behind the door. "Jus' gimme 'nother minute."

Shani rolled her eyes and shook her head as she muttered in a low voice next to Ezekiel. "Fer swingin' fer the other team, she sure are a girly girl."

"I 'eard tha'," a louder, but still muffled voice called out from behind the door. There was some shuffling around and several moments passed. Finally the door opened, and Pania stepped out. Both Shani and Ezekiel were silent for a good long while as they took in the vision that Pania had become. Her dress was maroon with gold trimming along the ruffles of the skirt, at the waist line and about the neckline. Pania wore long evening gloves and displayed a gold ring on her left hand. A gold flower nestled on her bosom, as gold trim went up to the shoulders. With her left hand, she held lightly onto a matching umbrella. Pania had transformed into an upstanding southern belle.

Ezekiel smiled as he nodded. "You... ya look real nice, Miss Pania." The elven bard grinned as she curtsied. She could tell the tall, black man's comment was genuine. Just something in his eyes let her know.

"Yeah," Shani added with a slight smirk. "Y'all purty up but good, girly-girl." The elven gunslinger snickered as Pania scowled mockingly at her. The seeming playful nature between the two elves made Ezekiel smile. It had been a long time since he had felt like this. It felt good. The sound of a carriage coming to a stop could be heard through the open window, and Shani moved to get a clear view of the street below. "Looks like our carriage has 'rrived." She looked back to her companions, smiling a sly smile. "We went all out an' gussied up, now it's time ta play the part. Like I done said b'fore, I don't trust this Kingston 'far as I kin throw 'im, so be on yer guard."