



The Bride and the
Barbarian
Naomi James

Warning

This e-book contains sexually explicit scenes and adult language. This material is meant for mature audiences!

Naomi James

Previous Works

Untamed: Dacien and Tia

Naomi James

**The Bride and the Barbarian
A Whispers Publishing Publication
December 2010**

Copyright © 2010 Naomi James
Cover illustration copyright © **Rene Walden of BG
Designs**

ISBN Not Assigned

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by an information storage and retrieval system-except by a reviewer who may quote brief passages in a review to be printed in a magazine, newspaper, or on the Web-without permission in writing from the publisher.

All characters in this book have no existence outside the imagination of the author and have no relation whatsoever to anyone bearing the same name or names. They are not even distantly inspired by any individual known or unknown to the author, and all incidents are pure invention.

Published by: **Whispers Publishing**, P.O. Box 1165, Ladson, SC 29456-1165.

Dedication

To my beautiful children who continue to inspire me.

*And to my sisters and brothers-in-law, and parents
who encourage me every time I put pencil to paper.*

*Your love and support means more to me than I can
put into words.*

Thank you for everything.

I love you all.

Chapter One

The second Saturday of November ushered in the final day of the Sun Spirit festival. The warm, Indian Summer morning encouraged the ever growing crowd to enjoy rides, renaissance era games, art, crafts, and a host of other activities for people of all ages. In addition, tents and vendor booths lined Main Street on both sides, hawking every imaginable ware.

Zora Austin browsed leisurely, scarcely giving any particular item more than a fleeting glance before moving on to the next. She examined a turquoise necklace here, a psychedelic halter dress there. The dress, she held up to her five foot seven inch frame with a bit more interest: the violet, burgundy, and cream combination would accent her deep caramel complexion nicely.

Nah, not this time, she decided, returning it to its hanger.

She stopped her browsing long enough to watch a young blonde curl her hand into a 'thumbs up' gesture. With the help of the vendor, she lowered the hand into clear melted wax, followed by melted blue. After some gentle loosening, the vendor eased the woman's hand out of the wax, pushed a short-stemmed rose into the wax thumb of the creation, and handed it to her.

As Zora exited, a rapid movement from across the pathway captured her attention. She turned to see a plump, mid-fiftyish woman gesturing in her direction from beneath the burgundy awning of a dimly lit tent. The woman's dark, loose flowing hair, mascara--enhanced black eyes, and blood red mouth, combined with her white, off the shoulder top and long skirt gave her the appearance of a gypsy.

Zora glanced over her shoulder to see whose attention the woman attempted to hail. There were

The Bride and the Barbarian

dozens of other would be patrons moving about, filtering in and out of the small tents, yet no one seemed to be paying the woman the slightest bit of attention.

Zora pointed an index finger at herself. "Me?"

The woman nodded dramatically with a mouthed, "Yes."

Normally, she would be put off by such emphatic efforts for her business. Yet something about the other woman's manner pricked the curious streak in her. Before she knew it, she was crossing the wide, crowded pathway, ducking under the tent flap, and approaching the glass display case behind which the woman now stood.

Of the myriad wares for sale, those most prominently displayed were crystals of various sizes both on top of and within the waist high counter. Each piece contained at least one translucent figurine within its clear walls.

One of the larger rectangular pieces contained an intricately designed grand piano. Another held a wolf, baying at the tiny moon hovering high above its head. In still another, a small harp was suspended inside of a square shaped crystal, which sat on top of a lighted base. As the reds, blues and purples within the base alternately poured into the crystal, the tiny strings of the harp glimmered with colorful clarity.

"Beautiful."

Zora murmured the word before she realized she'd spoken. She loved crystal figurines and had long ago promised herself she would buy a huge curio cabinet and fill it to bursting with beautiful pieces. Her gloved fingers clenched into a fist. A fire destroyed her tiny collection before she'd had a chance to buy her cabinet. She had yet to purchase new figurines to replace those lost.

It took a moment for her to realize the woman had spoken. Reluctantly, she looked up from the harp.

"What is this? You come to my tent and do not

greet me?” The woman’s accent was pleasant, and a teasing smile curved her mouth upward, a stark contrast to her bold features. “It is good that you are here. Come let me look at you.”

Before Zora could react, the woman reached over the counter and clamped her palms on either side of her face. She regarded her with an expression of familiarity that seemed odd, since she was fairly certain they’d never laid eyes on each other before.

Caught off guard and wary, Zora allowed the brief perusal, telling herself the greeting was cultural and she shouldn’t be put off by it. Instead she boldly met her gaze.

After another few seconds, she was released.

The woman bent at the waist, sifting through a box at her feet.

For a moment, Zora thought she would come up with tarot cards, splay them out and begin an undesired palm reading. If that happened she knew she’d bolt.

A bit on the superstitious side, she’d never liked the art of fortune telling or any practice that dabbled in predicting the future. The very idea made her uneasy, believing that whatever she’d be told would involve a catastrophic event in her future. If that were the case, she’d rather it just wipe her out. She certainly didn’t want to go through life dreading each day.

“Have we ever met?” Zora asked. “Before today, I mean.”

“Of course not. You would have remembered me,” the woman declared. There was no haughtiness in her tone, just the calm intonation of a belief considered to be fact. “I am Shalindra. Welcome.”

“Pleased to meet you.” Zora purposefully withheld her name, not entirely certain of this woman or what she wanted with her. She nodded, indicating the crystals. “You have a lot of lovely pieces here.” Lifting the figurine with the harp inside, she looked at its bottom. “I’ll take this one. I

think I have a twenty in here.”

As she rifled through her purse, Shalindra plucked the crystal out of her hand and set it back on top of the display case with a thunk. She made no move to wrap or ring it up.

Zora’s head snapped up and she glanced from the harp to Shalindra. “I want that one. If you’ll go ahead and--”

“No. It is not for you.”

Zora’s brows drew together, confused. “You won’t let me buy it?”

“It is not for you,” Shalindra repeated, her tone final.

“But--”

The woman placed another crystal in front of her. “This is for you.”

Frustrated with the strange woman and more than ready to leave, Zora snapped her eyes down to the crystal Shalindra insisted on pushing toward her.

It was large compared to the other pieces, standing about five or six inches tall and about half that deep. The three dimensional figurine inside was that of a man, or rather a warrior of some kind. Whoever designed him and the tiny coins littering the inner floor had paid an extraordinary amount of attention to the work. It was almost eerie how perfectly detailed the man was. Far more so than that of the other figurines around him.

If the pouch against his hip and the translucent image of plaid around his bare waist was any indication, he was Scottish. From what period she couldn’t say.

The warrior stood with his left arm extended in front of him, his right reared back as if in the process of hurling the spear clutched in his tiny fist. His booted feet were braced apart, the right far behind the left. On his face was the ferocious expression of a battle cry. He was fantastic.

“He is The Barbarian. You want him, yes?”
Shalindra was beside her now, looking up at her with

Naomi James

expectant coal black eyes. “You need only pledge to him and he is yours.”

Zora blinked into the woman’s disconcerting stare. “Pledge to keep him, you mean.” She returned her gaze to the warrior. “I’m going to have to think about it. I’ll try to come back.”

Shalindra’s disappointment was palpable. Nevertheless, she smiled and allowed Zora to leave without any further oddity on her part.

Chapter Two

The warrior figurine remained on Zora's mind the rest of the afternoon. As a result, she stayed at the fair long after she should have gone home. She'd tried all sorts of things to take her mind off of him. Riding amusement rides. Browsing tables. She even bought a few random knick knacks, all destined for her giveaway box by week's end.

At the end of the day, the crowd had thinned to a trickle and Zora found herself approaching the odd woman's table again. With every step she took, her heart pounded erratically, and her palms became increasingly damp. Ridiculous. Why should she be nervous?

A quick look told her Shalindra wasn't there, and she breathed a sigh of relief. She hadn't been looking forward to encountering her again. Glancing around, she frowned. The crystal with the tiny warrior inside was gone. She stooped to look into the display case from the front, eyes darting from figurine to figurine with mounting dread.

The Barbarian wasn't inside.

A small stack of boxes lined the floor behind the counter. Perhaps Shalindra had put him into one of them, in case she returned, she thought hopefully. She leaned far over the counter to see if she could catch a glimpse of the warrior inside one of them. All of the boxes were open and empty. What if he'd been sold?

Her stomach knotted.

Then she looked up.

Behind the counter, several long dresses hung from an overhead pole. Tucked away within the bunched folds of the bottom of the dress in front, was the crystal encased warrior.

Zora quickly pushed the figurines in front of her

to one side and leaned as far over the counter as she could without risking breaking the glass. She snagged the crystal and pressed it to her chest, popping back onto the balls of her feet. She accidentally caused several of the crystals to clink together.

“What is this noise I hear?”

A middle-aged man appeared from behind the dresses, startling her. His dark gaze scanned the disheveled crystals before pinning her where she stood. “Did you need something?”

“I was...uhh, wondering how much you wanted for him?” She held the figurine aloft. The motion turned fading glimmers of sunlight into mini rainbows on the glass counter.

The little man called over his shoulder. “Salindra. We’ve a customer. She’s asking how much are we want for...let me see that.” He plucked the crystal from Zora’s fingers.

She resisted snatching it back.

Bushy eyebrows drawing together, he studied the crystal. “Come to think of it, I don’t recall seeing him before. Is he new?”

Zora looked around the man as a woman scooted her upper half from under another table, where she’d been straightening even more boxes, and climbed to her feet. Her dark eyes went to the crystal in question.

“No, he is not new. He shouldn’t be out. Why is he out, Rafiel?” the woman asked, retrieving the tall, heavy crystal rectangle. “He must not--” Her eyes met Zora’s as the crystal slipped from her fingers.

Zora gasped in dismay.

“Aaaaiiii!” Rafiel groaned, hopping on one foot while vigorously rubbing the top of the other.

Ignoring him, Salindra maneuvered around the counter, her eyes alight with wonder. She came to within inches of Zora, gazing up at her. “It is you!”

“Yes,” Zora said carefully. “We met this morning.”

Smiling a brilliant yet disquieting smile, the

The Bride and the Barbarian

woman shook her head slowly. “We have never spoken...but I know you.” She retrieved the crystal from the ground, wrapped white tissue paper around it, and held it almost reverently out to Zora, who accepted it.

“Listen. I was just wondering how much you wanted for him,” she tried again.

“Did you hear, Rafiel?” the woman breathed, clasping her hands together in delight. “She said ‘him’ not it! ‘Him!’ I knew she was the one.”

This was getting her nowhere. She wished the woman would just answer the damned question so she could get the hell out of here. She couldn’t bring herself to put the crystal down and walk away, no matter what the nutcase said next. “Will thirty dollars cover the cost?” she offered. “If not, I can--”

Salindra waved the money aside and motioned her closer.

In spite of her trepidation, Zora’s accursed curiosity had her taking a step forward.

“Do not concern yourself with prices. When the time comes, you will understand the price required of you. It will be up to you whether you choose to pay it.”

“She will,” a voice identical to the first, intoned from Zora’s left.

She jumped, startled to be looking into the eyes of an exact replica of the woman behind the counter. “Twins...” she muttered unnecessarily.

“I am who you met. My sister is Salindra,” the woman explained, gazing up at Zora with an unsettling light in her eyes.

She swallowed hard. It took everything she had in her not to run away as fast as she could.

“Please join us. We are nearly finished here.”

“Thanks but I can’t.” Forgetting the crystal was still in her hand, Zora took a step back.

Salindra’s hand shot out, clamping upon her forearm. “The Barbarian awaits you, Zora.”

“I never told you my name.” Zora snatched her

arm free of the other woman's grasp, dropped the thirty dollars onto the display table and another five for a lighted stand, and began backing away.

Salindra remained unmoving, a serene grin plastered to her face as she waved a slow farewell. Her twin joined her, the same expression on hers.

Zora had gone no less than forty feet before she felt comfortable enough to turn and run. She'd had enough of the fair to last a lifetime.

* * * *

As she approached her car, Viking music blared from her cell phone, startling her. A string of expletives poured from her mouth as she juggled the crystal from hand to hand to keep it from falling to the dirt. Snatching the phone from the clip, Zora flipped it open.

"What?"

"Jeez! Who put a thorn in your panties?"

"Sorry, Deena. I'm kind of spooked, that's all. You know how these crazy vendor types will do anything to get you to buy their stuff."

"That's why I don't go to fairs. Carnies freak me the hell out."

"Yeah, well these women just acted off and said the strangest things."

"Was one a fortune teller? The other a palm reader?" Deena asked with a snicker.

"No to both, and I hate you," Zora grumbled, annoyed that her friend knew her so well. "You know what? It's over. Let's just change the subject. How are the wedding plans coming along?" She didn't really listen to the answer. It was the same all the time anyway.

Deena was a wedding planner and according to her, every bride was a basket case. Personally, Zora had no experience with such things. She wasn't married and had no prospects, though she'd always wanted a home, a husband, and a family, in that order. Not long ago, she'd been on her way to making that dream a reality.

The Bride and the Barbarian

At twenty-four she'd landed her dream job at a local engineering firm. The following year she closed on her first home. Things only seemed to get better when Todd Elridge, her then boyfriend, proposed over Labor day weekend, begging her to be Mrs. Elridge by year's end. Having dreamed of a Christmas wedding since she was a child, Zora excitedly made preparations.

Unfortunately, Todd decided they would marry in November to coincide with Thanksgiving. There'd been no reasoning with him and she'd been heartsick. Then a house fire nine months into home ownership derailed everything.

As she lay recovering in a hospital bed, Todd took one look at the disfigured flesh of her fire-scarred hands and broke off the engagement. It didn't matter that she'd burned them while rescuing his cat as he stood outside waiting. He no longer wanted a woman he couldn't stand to touch.

Zora shook herself free of the bad memories and plopped into the driver's seat as Deena went into the latest 'monster bride' temper tantrum. She put the phone in her lap and studied the warrior a moment before laying him on his side on the passenger seat. What was it about the figurine that so interested her?

You only need pledge to him and he is yours.

What an odd thing to say.

Chapter Three

Zora started the car and began backing out of the parking space. She merged into traffic before remembering Deena was still on the line, and snatched the cell out of her lap. “Hello, Deena?”

Silence.

“Hello? Hello? Shoot!” She’d have to remember to apologize later.

Setting the phone aside, she tugged the pressure gloves from her hands. She no longer needed them to keep the swelling down, but wearing them had become a habit she typically only broke at bedtime. Their appearance still made her grimace.

The scars on her hands weren’t nearly so noticeable as they had once been, yet they were a constant reminder of all she’d lost.

As she pulled into the driveway of her two-bedroom duplex, her cell called out, “It’s the jerk again. Don’t answer.”

Todd.

“What the hell could you possibly want, asshole?” she muttered to the ringtone.

It went to voicemail.

* * * *

Late that night, Zora stood in front of the full length mirror, admiring her off the shoulder ivory wedding gown. Funny thing was, she’d bought it after Todd left her. In a belated fit of rebellion, she’d returned the puffy sleeved abomination he’d handpicked and purchased the gown she’d wanted.

One day, she would marry the right man and this would be her gown.

As she sat on the side of the bed, her eyes drifted to the crystal on her nightstand. She lifted the crystal from its wrapping and turned it back and forth in her gloved hands, marveling at how it appeared

The Bride and the Barbarian

the barbarian warrior faced her no matter which direction she turned him.

His face was so intense. So real looking.

If he was modeled after an actual person who'd lived centuries ago, that man must have been damned impressive and intimidating as hell. From the matching swords strapped to his cloaked back, the dagger at his hip, and the spear in his hand, the man looked every bit the capable defender of clan or king.

It was actually kind of sexy.

“What am I thinking?”

Zora switched on the base and a pale stream of blue light shot into the air. As it changed to red, she leaned over to place the crystal on top of it. That's when she noticed an inscription etched into the bottom of the crystal. The writing was tiny and parts of it had been scratched away.

and the Bride shall free the Barbarian

“Hmm...”

She repeated the phrase several times, her eyes on the man inside the crystal. “Let me guess, you're the Barbarian. Well, I hate to be the one to tell you, but there is no bride. I guess you're stuck with me.”

Zora pressed her lips together, feeling foolish. She sat the crystal on its base, then turned down the overhead light before removing her gloves and laying them neatly on a book she'd been reading.

She watched the crystal turn her room from blue, to red, to green, and finally to purple before repeating the cycle. Lying on her side, she reached out and glided her fingertips across the top, then down one side. Before she knew it she'd drifted off to sleep.

Zora wasn't certain how much time elapsed when the sound of thumping roused her. Yawning, she kept her eyes closed, willing who or whatever it was making the noise to stop. When it didn't, she cracked open one bleary eye, reached to turn up the lamp...and froze.

The warrior inside the crystal stood frowning up

at her, small fists pounding against his crystal prison. His tiny mouth opened wide then closed, his neck straining as if he were shouting.

Zora bolted upright, rubbed her eyes, then stared hard at the man. He stared back, unmoving.

“Uh uh...no. I’m losing it.” She flopped back against the pillows, closed her eyes...and shrieked when the pounding began again in earnest. She shot across the bed, moving so far so fast that she got tangled in the wedding dress and pitched over the side in her haste to get away.

Sprawled on the floor and glaring up at the color-changing ceiling, she groaned with self disgust. “I must be out of my damned mind, trying to get away from a Liliputian-sized man with an attitude!” She giggled to herself as she went over to the nightstand.

“It was a dream, Z. Pull yourself together.” Pushing her short hair behind an ear, she leaned until her face was inches from the crystal’s smooth surface.

The warrior stood frozen in the same position as when she’d bought him.

“Huh. I knew it.”

She poked out a finger and traced it down the front of the crystal.

The little barbarian came to life, mouth open in a bellow.

Zora pitched forward on a wave of dizziness. Fumbling blindly, she reached for the nightstand, only to grab the crystal instead. The bedroom blazed white and she hurled through a blinding void, screaming, arms and legs flailing wildly.

The sudden jarring impact of a floor beneath her feet made her knees buckle, and she stumbled forward at a run. Her bare feet slipped on flat golden objects that littered the floor. She would have fallen flat on her face had she not collided with a wall. She clung to it desperately, terrified she’d go flying again if she let go.

Zora wheezed air and her pulse pounded

The Bride and the Barbarian

furiously. Her limbs trembled violently as she tried to straighten them. Recovering, she moved her gaze along the oddly bluish walls surrounding her.

Somehow she was still in her bedroom. The book she'd been reading, as well as the pressure gloves, remained on the bed in the same place she'd left them. Still, something felt off. She just couldn't put her finger on... The room blazed from green to purple.

The blood leached from her face. "Impossible."

Except deep down, she knew even as she sagged that she was inside the crystal.

The 'wall' hauled her none too gently back to her feet.

Her heart stopped.

Hesitantly, she flattened a palm against it. The 'wall' was warm and ridged, yet smooth like...skin. She angled her head to the side and back, looking along the tanned muscular arm encircling her waist, beyond a thick male neck and wavy black hair that lay against it. She looked higher, to an arrogant jaw and ultra close-cut beard. Her gaze skimmed past full masculine lips and up a Roman nose to collide with onyx eyes so fierce her breath seized in her throat.

The miniature barbarian who'd been frozen in a battle stance was now very much alive and scowling down at her.

"Oh no..."

Dazed, Zora pulled out of the man's grasp and backed away. She got the feeling it was only because he allowed it. Frantically, she pinched her inner arm. "Wake up! Wake up!"

"Are ye daft, woman?" his baritone voice thundered. "Ye were to get me out of this blasted prison! Not tumble into it yerself!" He turned his broad back and breathed hard, agitated breaths. "This wasnae to happen!" Over his shoulder he said, "The Christmastide bride of time yet to be with skin of bronze and heart of sea, shall choose thine path, yea thine destiny. Only then will the barbarian go

free.”

“I don’t understand.”

He whipped back around. “What the devil are we to do now?”

She took several more steps backward.

Frowning, the barbarian closed the distance between them in two long strides. He leaned down until his face hovered inches from hers. “What were ye thinking, bride?”

Zora looked down at herself and loosed a hysterical little giggle. “Other than not dying of fright while falling down this insane rabbit hole of a dream into your oh so welcoming arms? Not much.”

A muscle in the warrior’s jaw began to twitch furiously.

She cringed.

The Barbarian was the most formidable looking man she’d ever laid eyes on, outweighing her by at least ninety pounds of solid muscle. He appeared equally capable of quartering a person with his bare hands as with the swords at his disposal. The fact he wore a deep blue kilt around his waist, boots on his feet, and nothing else made him look even more fierce.

She should be backing...hell, running away, screaming her head off in terror.

So why wasn’t she? Had she finally lost her mind? Then she remembered. Of course! She was still dreaming

Feeling monumentally better, Zora allowed her gaze to travel over his starkly handsome face appreciatively. Boldly, she lifted her fingers and smoothed away the creases of a frown between his eyebrows then slowly sifted her fingers through his hair, savoring the silken texture.

The barbarian went utterly still, a look of surprise replacing his frown. A low rumble accompanied his midnight stare. His eyelids lowered in a slow blink. Before she knew it, his hands shot out, hooked under her arms, and plucked her off her feet.

The Bride and the Barbarian

Zora managed only a startled, “Mphf!” when his mouth slammed down over hers. Stunned into immobility, she could only whimper as his firm lips moved over hers, demanding a response.

What’s next? Let him drag you to the floor by your hair? Pound into you until you can’t stand straight?

To her horror, moisture slickened the folds between her thighs.

How could she want a complete stranger?

Then his lips parted hers and Zora stopped thinking altogether. She slid her arms up and around his thick neck and suckled his full bottom lip.

With a groan of approval, he swept his tongue inside her mouth, cupped her bottom in his large hands, then lifted her again, grinding his arousal against her.

Zora moaned as arousal turned her limbs to liquid. None of her dreams were ever this incredible. *Ever!*

That’s because you’re not dreaming.

The shock of that realization worked like a shot of ice water straight to her spine. She began to struggle.

The barbarian fisted her hair, jerked her head back, and glided his tongue along her throat.

Oh yes!

“No. S...stop!” Zora whimpered, pushing against his chest, slapped at his shoulders. “Put. Me. Down!”

He ignored her.

Exasperated, she planted both hands on his forehead and shoved his head back. “I said, put me down.”

His obsidian gaze bore into her as if waging some great internal battle. Finally, he lowered her to her feet.

Zora took a shaky step back, pressing her fingers to lips that tingled.

“’Tis been centuries since I’ve felt a woman’s touch,” he said, huskily. “Have a care wench, lest ye

find yerself beneath me afore we are properly acquainted.”

Zora jerked back. “Wench?”

“Aye...wench. Dunna ye understand? I dinna take ye for simple, though I may have erred.” The barbarian peered into Zora’s eyes as if trying to ascertain the truth of his assumption.

Anger narrowed her eyes to slits. She yanked his knife out of the sheath at his hip and pressed the tip to his jugular. The instant she realized what she’d done her knees started shaking. Still, her voice was calm when she said, “My name is Zora, you cretin. Call me *wench* again and I’ll ram this blade so far up your tailpipe you’ll taste it. Understand?”

The barbarian didn’t reply but the flicker of admiration in his eyes was unmistakable. She didn’t know how to take that. “Now, kindly tell me what the hell is going on or you’re not getting a thing out of me, including freedom.”

Oh please, you can’t even free yourself.

“Oh and I’ll take an apology while you’re at it.”

The barbarian rocked back on his heels. “Christ, woman, we haven’t the time--”

“Whenever you’re ready...” Zora snapped, wrapping her free arm across her chest and glaring up at him. The dumbfounded expression on the barbarian’s face might have been comical if she weren’t so pissed. Equally irritating was the raging attraction she still felt toward the assuming brute.

Chapter Four

Thedan regarded the bronze-skinned beauty before him with long dormant hunger and a burst of pride. His bride was graced with the sort of form to tempt a man to sin while her temper was something to keep his attentions for a lifetime. Her skin gleamed with the promise of silk to the touch, and her full breasts would fill his hands as if made for them. Her curly, dark hair was tucked behind her ears and hung past her shoulders. Her brown eyes slanted slightly at the outer corners, and her nose was softly rounded.

That mouth though...The sensual possibilities of those plump lips sent his erection to pounding almost painfully.

As the point of his dirk nipped into his flesh, he acknowledge that his fiery betrothed possessed more courage than many men he'd known. Hardened soldiers once soaked their trews in fear of him. Yet this defiant, albeit tempting beauty dared threaten him, with his own blade no less, and demand appeasement for her bruised feelings.

Remarkable!

Thedan knew he could reclaim the dirk from her easily enough, but he didn't. For some odd reason he wanted to win her trust.

After a brief pause he said, "My apologies, lass-- Zora. I was wrong to have questioned yer sanity. Indeed, yer clear-minded and capable. And aye, there is bravery and wit behind those lovely eyes that my hasty judgment dinnae acknowledge. I pray I am allowed to experience more of it."

Trembling, his Zora lowered the tip of the blade from his skin. She feared him? Now? Aye. Verily she was near to shaking herself apart.

Thedan didn't want her to fear him. He wanted

her needy and hot for him as she'd been only moments ago. And he wanted her on yon bed, outside these walls.

Seeking to calm her, he removed the swords at his back and placed them on the floor, then nudged them aside with his boot. He straightened to his full height and said, "Ye've naught to fear from me, Zora. I have ne'er harmed a lass, neither have I taken one unwilling. Come to me, my bride."

* * * *

Zora watched Thedan remove his weapons and listened to his reassurance. She started to tell him she wasn't afraid but stopped herself. She hadn't been afraid he'd hurt her. It was the raw lust on his face that had her trembling. Her body responded in kind, thumping a hard pulse between her thighs that made her hot and achy. Her nipples hardened, straining for his touch. She folded her arms. "What's your name?"

The barbarian pressed a fist to his chest. "I am Thedan the Dark, hunter of men."

"A hunter of--" Mercenary, she thought with an inward shudder. Then something he'd said occurred to her. "A minute ago you said 'my bride'. Why?"

"That is who you are."

Zora shook her head. "You're mistaken...um Thedan. I'm not your bride."

His gaze dropped pointedly to the wedding gown she wore. "No yet, though we are betrothed."

"No, we're not. I don't even know you."

Thedan snorted. "Does that matter? Only the Christmastide bride with skin of bronze may enter the crystal and thus free me, and here ye are."

Zora made an impatient gesture with her hands. "In case it's escaped your notice, I'm stuck in here with you. I can't even free myself."

"Ye havna tried."

He has you there.

Seeking to change the subject, Zora asked. "How did you end up in here?"

The Bride and the Barbarian

Thedan held out his hand. "Come. I will tell you all you wish to know."

Zora eyed his proffered hand dubiously before sliding hers into it. His palm was warm and firm, calloused, and easily swallowed hers. She cast him a musing sidelong glance. He wasn't nearly so intimidating now that he'd stopped scowling and yelling. She supposed he could even be likeable.

Placing the dirk on the floor, she allowed Thedan to lead her away from the weapons. Something clinked against her toes and she remembered the gold pieces. Her questioning gaze lifted to his.

"The taunt amused the woman who cursed me."

Zora stopped walking. "Why were you cursed?"

"I made the grave error of mistaking a sorceress for a prostitute." He paused at Zora's sharp intake of breath. "She'd been bound, put in a sack, and given to me as a spoil of war. When I dumped her out she cursed me, believing 'twas by my order she was captured. I gave no such order."

"And she wouldn't listen," Zora concluded.

"It no longer matters."

Thedan pulled her against him, pressed his nose into her hair and inhaled. He did the same at the curve of her neck. "You smell as a woman ought, clean and sweet."

Zora resisted the odd little thrill his words caused, wondering instead why she felt no compulsion to pull away.

Yeah, you've lost your mind.

She didn't care.

"My prison was placed behind a loosened stone, where I remained until wars destroyed the castle and revealed me."

"How long had you been there before you were discovered?"

"I know not. I was imprisoned in the year of our Lord, thirteen hundred ten and four."

Zora exhaled hard.

Thedan took hold of her shoulders and looked into

her eyes. "What is it?"

"Nothing, I—" He gave her a look and she said, "It's the year two thousand and ten. It's been nearly seven hundred years, Thedan."

For a split second his expression didn't change, then he swayed, his eyes going utterly bleak, desolate. "So much time..." He gripped her shoulder. "Pray, tell me tis a jest, lass."

Zora shook her head. "I wish I could." Her words sounded pathetically weak to her ears.

Century after century he'd been a captive with no end. Any connection he may have had was long gone. He had nothing and no one. Just thinking about it made her eyes mist. How had he survived all that time with his sanity intact? She knew she couldn't have.

Not knowing what else to do, Zora wrapped her arms around his middle and whispered, "I'm so sorry." She half expected him to reject her offer of comfort outright. Thedan exuded pride, after all, and she knew he wouldn't give vent to the sorrow that must surely be weighing on him. She felt the weight of his chin on the top of her head as his arms came around her.

She held him tighter and sighed.

They remained that way for a long time, saying nothing, each in their own thoughts. Finally Thedan drew in a long shuddering breath and angled back. His face registered his surprise as he brushed moisture from under her eyes. "You weep for me?"

"Allergies," Zora lied, dipping her chin.

He lifted it.

A full unguarded smile touched his mouth, revealing even, white teeth. He clasped her hands in his. "I was a prisoner alone, knowing neither hunger nor thirst, sound nor sight. I felt nothing save a lust for vengeance upon those who betrayed me and the sorceress who cursed me. After a time even that grew bitter, and I learned to feel nothing."

Zora studied him. "And now? Do you feel

anything?”

“Aye, lass I feel,” he said quietly. “’Twould best be shown you what I feel.” The message in his eyes left no doubt as to his meaning. He brushed his knuckles along her cheek. “Would you welcome my touch, lovely Zora?”

As she stared into those midnight eyes, she swallowed against emotions she dared not put a name to. Those emotions took root and began to grow. She wanted to be reckless. She wanted him.

At her slow nod his eyes flared with arousal and something else that gave her the impression they’d reached an agreement beyond the physical.

There she went again, thinking too much.

Averting her gaze, Zora stepped back and cleared her throat. “We need to get out of here.”

“As you wish.”

Thedan sheathed his weapons and began gathering what coins he could from the floor into a pouch at his hip.

It hadn’t occurred to her, but the coins would be worth a small fortune by today’s standards.

“Thedan, you’re a genius.”

Zora helped, stuffing as many gold pieces as she could fit inside the bodice and hidden pockets of her gown. When they were finished they walked to one of the now green walls.

Thedan slid his arms around her, curled his big body around hers and held the spear across her back, caging her in. “Hold tightly to me. No matter what, dunna let go.”

“Try prying me off,” Zora replied, curling one arm around his waist. She lifted a hand toward the wall as the color changed yet again. “Please let this work.” Zora squeezed her eyes shut and reached out.

Chapter Five

Thedan's arms tightened as the pads of Zora's fingers touched the smooth crystal, then went through it. She and Thedan were pulled inside.

They careened through the blinding void together, each crushing against the other. Within seconds bright light blazed and they pitched across her bed and onto the floor on the other side of it.

It was Zora who first peeled her eyes open and realized she was in her bedroom, and sprawled on top of Thedan whose grip threatened to crush her. She couldn't lift her head because his hand forced it into the curve of his neck. His other hand held tight around her waist, and he lay very still.

"Thedan?"

Nothing.

Anxious, she shook him. "Thedan, open your eyes."

He groaned. "Are ye injured?"

"Nay," Zora answered with a relieved grin. "And you can let go of me now."

He did and she sat up, threw her head back, and laughed. "We made it!"

Thedan's hot gaze never left hers. "Aye, we did."

The laughter died on her lips. "What--?"

Thedan gripped her hair and dragged her down to his waiting mouth, spearing his tongue between her lips to kiss her hard and deep. His firm lips slanted across hers again and again. Impatient, he yanked her zipper down and snatched the dress over her head, sending coins flying. As he licked a wet trail down her luscious throat, he cupped her perfect breasts, sucking her stiff nipples into his mouth.

Zora gasped at the insistent tugging that sent shock waves through her body and dampness gathering in her core.

The Bride and the Barbarian

Thedan angled up, kissing her again as his hand grazed up her thigh and across her bottom to push two thick fingers into her moist heat. He stretched her and her inner walls contracted. Her soft cries filled his mouth, and he groaned, moving his fingers slowly in and out as he reclaimed a creamy breast.

Zora mewled, clinging to his shoulders, grinding against his talented fingers as his thumb used her own dampness to rhythmically circle her engorged nub. She shattered in an explosive orgasm, but before she could recover, Thedan dragged her up his chest, looped his arms around her thighs and buried his face in her saturated core.

A part of his brain shut down the instant he tasted his woman on his tongue. He devoured her, growling into her sweet depths, laving her slick flesh. He slurped at her swollen nub before plunging his tongue inside her.

Zora could only wail out her pleasure as she convulsed again and again, sobbing, hips undulating helplessly against his mouth as he drank of her.

At last she fell forward, limp.

Thedan lifted her unresisting form onto the bed and leaned over her. He teased the blunt head of him along her opening, eliciting another moan from her. “Do you want me, Zora?”

“Yes...Oh please, Thedan, yes...”

“Please what?” he gritted mercilessly, rotating his hips until he was drenched in her essence.

“I need you...inside me,” she panted.

“Then have me.” He bent her knees up and out and surged inside her with a shout, drinking in her cry of ecstasy as he buried himself to the hilt. He hissed as her inner walls clamped around him like a fist. “Ach, lass you’re so tight...hot...”

Zora screamed as Thedan’s hips slammed against hers. Her back arched high as she met him stroke for stroke, her hands gripping the sheets as he pounded into her relentlessly. She came violently, her voice pitching into a high wail. He bellowed his release,

shooting hot jets of his seed deep into her body. For long moments his hips surged, and he shuddered, filling her to overflowing.

They collapsed together gasping for breath.

Too exhausted to do more than pull the covers over them both, Thedan curled his big body around Zora's and they slept.

* * * *

"I dunna see why ye're vexed."

"Are you serious?" Zora lifted her chin from Thedan's chest and fixed him with a put upon look. "Falling into the crystal, you, a sorceress, a curse, and a must have wedding by Christmas? It's a lot for a girl to take in over nearly a week. Don't you think?"

She thumped him in the ribs when he remained silent.

He only kissed her, which earned him another playful thump.

"You're trying to distract me," she accused. Not that she minded his methods. He'd distracted her very well for the better part of the last several days.

"It's almost too incredible to--"

"Believe," Thedan said, and Zora knew he wasn't merely finishing her sentence but encouraging her to open her mind to the truth.

"I'm going to seek therapy the minute we come back from---" She stopped herself from saying 'our honeymoon'. She could not marry him. She would, however be his personal tour guide into the twenty-first century.

Eventually he will marry someone else, then what?

The hot stab of jealousy took Zora by surprise, and she realized she didn't want to even think of Thedan with another woman, much less marrying one.

"Admit it."

Had she missed something? She looked into his eyes. "Admit what?"

His arms tightened around her. "You love me."

The Bride and the Barbarian

Zora would have shot out of the bed had Thedan not been holding her so tightly. “I can’t possibly...I mean...I...”

As if he hadn’t blindsided her, Thedan rolled to the edge of the bed and swatted her on the behind. “Come along, woman. Ye’ve kept me abed with yer wanton ways long enough. If we are to get this shopping you insist I need done, we canna continue to laze. To the shower.”

Incredibly, Zora felt herself become aroused. After all of the lovemaking in every room including the shower, she’d thought the feelings would go dormant for awhile.

She was wrong.

She scooted to the edge of the bed, stilling as another thought she’d had several times niggled at her.

“What trouble’s ye?”

She nibbled her lip. “Now that you’re free, you can go anywhere you want, see the world. Why would you want to stay?” She hated the chord of longing she heard in her voice but she needed to know.

Thedan pressed her back to the bed, and bracketed her upper body with his massive arms. He grazed his lips over hers before giving her deep, drugging kisses that sent her thoughts scurrying to the far corners of her mind. When he lifted his head, she looked thoroughly bemused. His expression was one of arrogant male satisfaction.

“We are betrothed, Zora. Curse or no, you are mine as I am yours, pledged unto death. I go nowhere unless ye’re with me.”

“And this pledge of yours, it’s voluntary? No sorcery?”

“My choices are my own. Ye need only find the church where we will speak our vows to one another.”

“Weeeeeell,” she drawled, walking her fingers up his bicep, “...there is a nice little church three blocks south of here. The minister may be willing to perform

Naomi James

a Christmas wedding.”

Chapter Six

After a visit to a coin appraiser, Zora and Thedan made a stop at Gibbon's Big and Tall for men.

Thedan stood in front of the full length mirror of the oversized dressing area, admiring himself in his 'wedding whites' long slacks with a matching long-sleeved shirt and vest.

Zora entered carrying an armful of casual men's clothes. She took one look at him and nearly fell over. The man was positively edible. Damn, she was glad she'd agreed to marry him. It would be hot, exhausting, sometimes maddening, but never ever boring

She held a pair of pants out to the side, careful to keep the backs of her hands facing her. "What do you think of these?"

Thedan eyed the pants a moment, then his gaze shifted to the left, then the right. He strode over to her, placed the bundle in her arms on a chair, and startled her by taking hold of her hands and studying the ruined back sides.

Since falling into the crystal, Zora had stopped wearing her pressure gloves, yet she remained very self-conscious of the burns. She tugged against his hold but Thedan wouldn't release her.

Embarrassment made her turn her face away, unable to bear the look of repulsion written all over his handsome face. God, would it be like last time? She'd told him what had happened to her but now that he saw for himself how scarred her hands were, would he leave her now too? Would he--? She jolted in shock as she felt him kiss the ravaged skin on both hands.

Her eyes filled as they met his.

Clasping both of her hands in one large one, Thedan pulled her forward and cupped her cheek.

“These scars symbolize strength. Cease hiding them. Be proud.”

“Proud?” she scoffed, holding up her hands. “It’s because of these that Todd broke off our engagement.”

“He was a fool. A half man. Do you mourn the loss of a marriage to such a man?”

“Not at all,” Zora said without reservation.

“Then I am in his debt. Had he not fled, I would have killed him to claim you for my own.”

Zora giggled, sliding her arms around Thedan’s mid-section. “You’re such a barbarian.”

“I would end his life for causing you pain.”

Something in his tone had Zora tipping her head back to meet his eyes. When she did her smile faltered. He was dead serious. “Thedan, you can’t kill someone just for hurting my feelings.” He opened his mouth to argue but she covered it with a hand. “If you’re going to make it in my world, you’re going to have to be just a little more civilized. Promise me you’ll try.” She removed her hand.

He growled.

“Promise?” she pressed. He gave a brief nod and she sighed. It was as close to a promise as she was going to get.

“You will teach me?” He blanched. “...to be civilized?” As he forced the words out he looked like something sour had been pushed down his throat.

Zora laughed outright. “I will. Now what will you teach me?” She was only teasing, yet Thedan’s expression turned hot the moment the words left her mouth.

All humor between them fell away. “’Tis better shown than said, woman.”

Zora held his gaze, meeting it with a sensual half-lidded one of her own. “Then show me, man.”

* * * *

Hours later, Thedan lay on his side stroking his fingertips along Zora’s spine.

“What are you thinking about?” she asked.

He shrugged but didn't answer.

She rolled onto her side to face him. "Tell me."

Thedan sighed, deep and heavy. "'Tis possible the crystal will call me back. It can only happen once, so be calmed."

Zora's finger stopped the lazy circles she'd begun drawing around his nipple. She lifted her head. "What do you mean 'call you back'?"

"Save for the curse, I thought it another taunt, my freedom, finding my bride, all of it."

"Thedan, you're starting to scare me. Tell me what's going on."

"The sorceress claimed that before the eve of Christmastide, should the crystal reclaim me, I must make a choice. A second chance at the life I once knew, or a lifetime with my bride."

Zora sat up rigidly to pin Thedan with a forbidding stare. "Can you repeat that?"

"Zora." Thedan reached for her but she pulled away, stood, and rounded on him.

"Are you kidding me? I'm supposed to be okay with you leaving me to decide whether or not you want me or your previous life?" She clenched her fingers. "I'm such an idiot! I should have known this couldn't last."

"'Tis not as bad as all that. Come back to bed."

Tears prickled her eyes. God, she really hated that superior tone. "Damn you! Why couldn't you have told me this from the beginning, before I fell--" *in love with you*. Zora cut herself off, mortified. She clamped her lips together.

"Before ye what?" Thedan asked softly.

"Nothing." Zora turned away from him to swipe angrily at her eyes. Not knowing what else to do, she snatched a shirt from a drawer and yanked it on.

"This is really shitty, you know."

The bed squeaked with the sound of Thedan's movements as he rose to approach her from behind. He slid his arms around her waist and pressed kisses along the column of her throat. His hands went under

her shirt and cupped her breasts, thumb and forefinger teasing her nipples to hardened peaks. “Ye worry overmuch.”

“How can you say that?” Zora murmured, wishing she could reject his touch. The possibility that he would leave her, regardless of the reason made her feel raw inside and still she wanted him.

God, this sucks.

“My choice was made the moment I first saw ye. ‘Tis ye I want, Zora Austin, whether I am pulled back in or no.”

“Why should I believe that?”

Thedan turned her in his arms, then tipped her chin up, forcing her to meet his determined gaze.

“Because I love ye, and I have promised ye a Christmas wedding and so ye shall have it.”

For several moments, Zora couldn’t speak knowing Thedan meant every word he said. Even as her heart sang, she said, “You don’t love me. It doesn’t happen this fast.” She wrapped her arms around his middle and held on.

“Dunnae think to tell me how I feel.”

The words Zora longed to speak lodged in her throat, held back by fear and doubt. “I want to believe you,” she said instead.

“Then do.” Thedan kissed her long and thoroughly. When he at last pulled back, Zora swayed against him. “I’ve told ye these things only in case the crystal forces me back. I will never leave ye of my own will.”

“And I wouldn’t let you go without a fight,” she admitted, her eyes revealing what she was too afraid to say.

“If I return to the crystal for a time, there is something ye must do.”

Already Zora shook her head.

“Heed me, Zora.”

Her shoulders slumped. “I’m listening.”

“You must cover the crystal and do not touch it even if wearing your gloves.”

The Bride and the Barbarian

“What will happen if I do?”

“I will disappear from within it forever. Absolute faith in each other is a condition of my complete freedom.”

“Thedan?”

“Yes, love?”

“I really hate that sorceress bitch.”

He kissed the top of her head and hugged her close.

“If I am taken, I want you to go to the church on the eve of Christmas as we planned. Wear your bride’s gown. I will come to you there.”

Zora pressed a palm over his heart. “Thedan, what if--”

“Shhhh.” He pressed a finger to her lips. “I will be there. Have faith in me.”

This time she nodded without hesitation. “I do.”

“Remember those words, woman,” he growled, lifting the shirt over her head.

* * * *

Thedan stood on the small step ladder, on tip-toe, placing the glimmering star on the top of the Christmas tree. “Did ye ‘ave t’get the tallest tree they sold, woman?” he grumbled.

Zora sat on the floor, Christmas lights in hand, looking under his kilt. “Looks good to me.”

“’Tis no the star ye speak of, saucy wench.” He beamed, revealing the deep dimple in his clean-shaven cheek.

Mercy, the man was gorgeous.

He stepped down and reached for a string of lights.

“How should we---” Zora gasped.

“What’s wrong?”

“You... You’re fading!”

Thedan looked down at his arms and hands. He could see through them! His head snapped up and his alarmed gaze clashed with the panicked eyes of his beloved. “I will come to you!” His shout was a mere distant wisp even as he and Zora lunged for each

Naomi James

other. Her fingers sifted through his translucent body.

“THEDAN!” She screamed his name over and over but he was gone, lost in the dark void of nothingness. Sorrow choked her, and Zora whirled, nearly snatching the crystal off its base before remembering Thedan’s stern warning. She knelt down to peer into it instead.

And there he was, his translucent form in the same posture as when she’d first bought the crystal. Her trembling fingers hovered mere inches from the crystal. “Thedan...Oh, Thedan...” She covered the crystal and sobbed uncontrollably.

Chapter Seven

Zora moved through most of Christmas Eve in a fog. She did everything she could to keep her mind off the crystal atop her nightstand. It wasn't hard. She had no desire to even try to peek to see if Thedan remained inside it. If he was gone, she knew he'd chosen to go back to his previous life. She couldn't bear it if he had. So she left the crystal alone.

At last she stood in a back room of the little church, feeling small and alone.

What if he'd chosen vengeance over a life with her?

Thedan was a man accustomed to war. What if the prospect of love and a quiet life was too foreign a concept for him to grasp?

Zora bowed her head and sighed, the desire to give in to despair nearly overwhelming.

No!

She would not doubt him. Thedan said he'd come to her and that's what she'd believe. She had to.

In front of the full length mirror, she straightened her veil, curled her bare fingers around the door, and paused. It was for Thedan she no longer wore her gloves. He loved her hands.

He loved her.

Zora felt her heart seize. That's what else he'd been trying to tell her as he faded back into the crystal. He loved her! And she believed it with her whole heart.

The door swung open and Deena appeared.

"Thedan loves me," Zora announced, tears in her eyes.

"I'm sure he does, honey."

She missed the look of sympathy Deena flashed her as she passed on her way to the sanctuary.

“Um, Z?”

She turned.

“He’s not here yet.”

Zora smiled softly. “He will be.” She pulled the veil over her face and opened the doors.

* * * *

Zora sat on the top step leading up to the pulpit, her face ashen, her eyes dry. Disbelief had stolen her tears.

Thedan hadn’t come. He’d chosen vengeance over her, after all.

They’d waited nearly two hours before the minister’s wife arrived to collect him for Christmas with his family. Once he explained what had happened, she’d hugged Zora tightly to her and, after offering words of comfort, she followed her husband to his office to allow her time to compose herself.

Deena pulled the veil from her hair and, with an arm around her shoulders, pressed Zora’s cheek onto her shoulder. “From everything you’ve told me, I’m sure he would have made it if he could have.”

Zora said nothing. She couldn’t. Her throat and her emotions were too raw, her heart shredded. Soon she’d have to go home. God knew, she didn’t want to. When she got there, she now knew the crystal would be empty. Thedan would be gone, having left her alone to pick up the pieces of her life.

The church bells announced the eight o’clock hour.

“Come on, honey. You’re spending Christmas with me.” Deena stood with her and began guiding her up the aisle.

Zora jerked to a stop, capturing her friend’s worried gaze. “This was supposed to be our first Christmas as husband and wi--” Zora broke off, trembling, struggling to hold her emotions in, afraid if she started crying she wouldn’t stop. “I love him so much and I didn’t e...ven tell him.”

Deena, crying herself, grabbed her in a tight hug.

Zora gave vent to the agony in her heart. To all

The Bride and the Barbarian

that could have been and would never be. The pain was so great she didn't think she could take it. Knew she couldn't. What was she going to do without him?

"Bride!"

Her head snapped up, her gaze shooting to the back of the church.

A lone figure stood in the shadows and her knees turned to jelly.

Thedan stepped into the light, dressed in his 'wedding whites'. Much of his hair, which was peppered with snow, was braided and pulled back off his face.

"Ohhh." Zora gasped, not daring to look away.

Thedan's expression turned thunderous as he began striding toward her. "Is that paltry greeting all you offer me woman? Come and greet me!"

With a squeal, Zora hiked up her dress and raced up the aisle. Meeting him halfway, she leaped into his outstretched arms and rained kisses all over his face. "I thought--" she said, between kisses. "...you'd changed your mind. I thought..."

Thedan held Zora tightly against him, fisted her hair, and sealed his lips over hers until she sighed into his mouth. When at last he lifted his head, he said, "Ye willnae doubt me again." He lowered his head until their foreheads touched. "My heart and my soul are yers to do with as ye will. I'll not leave again. I vow it."

Zora pressed her palms against either side of Thedan's face so that there could be no misunderstanding. "I'll love you forever, Thedan. I swear I'll never doubt you again."

The look of pure unguarded emotion in Thedan's eyes made her catch her breath.

"Again," he ordered softly.

"I love you." She kissed him. "I love you."

"Ahem."

Thedan glowered over Zora's shoulder toward the front of the sanctuary.

The minister and his wife were back and waited

Naomi James

patiently beside Deena.

Unhooking her legs from around Thedan's mid-section, Zora jumped to her feet, grasped his hand, and began walking toward the beaming threesome.

Epilogue

Thedan and Zora Hunter spent their wedding night stretched upon furs piled in front of the fireplace inside their home.

As the clock chimed the midnight hour, announcing Christmas, Zora sat up and pulled a ribbon-wrapped box from beside the sofa.

“What is this?” he asked, angling up to capture a nipple in his mouth.

“It’s...” Her breath caught as his tongue glided across the sensitive peak. “...your Christmas present.”

Intrigued, Thedan sat up until the covering slipped from his ridged stomach to pool around his naked hips. His wife’s gaze trailed over him with such hunger that he forgot all but the need to be inside her.

Setting the gift aside, Thedan caught Zora up in his arms and rolled, pinning her beneath him.

“Aren’t you going to open your Christmas present?” she asked.

Thedan ducked his head and kissed her as he thrust his hips forward and entered her in one long, slow stroke.

With a husky moan, Zora lifted her hips to receive him.

“I’ve everything I could want.”

Naomi James

About the Author

Naomi James lives in the Midwest with her family and monster dog. At home she loves nothing better than to curl up on the loveseat with a notepad and several pencils to plot out her next novel. She loves to hear from readers. You may contact her and read excerpts of her current works in progress at www.naomijames.blogspot.com.

Find your favorite fantasy at...

Whispers Publishing
(www.whispershome.com)

For your convenience, all of Whispers Publishing's books are available from our website as well as Fictionwise, Mobipocket, All Romance e-Books, and Amazon Kindle.

Be sure to join our newsletter for up-to-date news from your favorite authors, contests, giveaways, upcoming releases, and more! To join, send a blank e-mail to:

whisperyourfantasies-subscribe@yahogroups.com

We're also on Facebook and Twitter at:

www.facebook.com/whisperspub
www.twitter.com/whisperspublish