

# Leading Ladies

*four fairy tales retold*

Misty Simon

Judy Bagshaw

Kate Devlin

Louise King



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Draumr Publishing, LLC  
Maryland

Leading Ladies

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Cover art by A.K. Brown.

There is no ISBN associated with the electronic version of this book.

PUBLISHED BY DRAUMR PUBLISHING, LLC

[www.draumrpublishing.com](http://www.draumrpublishing.com)

Columbia, Maryland

Printed in the United States of America

# *Foreword*

## Fairy Tales Retold

by Misty Simon

The first fairy tale I clearly remember my mother reading to me was Cinderella. I felt the sprinkle of Fairy Godmother dust, was whisked away in a pumpkin coach, and danced madly with a handsome prince before losing my shoe during my late night escape. And when the moment finally came, the clear glass slipper that fit like a dream, was cool against my toes. After that, I was insatiable. I read every tale I could get my hands on. They opened up a new world to me—one I never wanted to leave. They also started me on the path I travel today.

Ultimately, I love the happily ever after, but I wanted those of us who are voluptuous, curvy, or full-figured to have our own princes lean down and wake us with true love's first kiss. This anthology gave me the perfect opportunity to spread my fairy wings and give my plump princess her very own walk in the world of make believe.

So, I'd like to welcome you to a world of faeries, princes, kings, and magic. Here you'll find inventive stories based on such wonderful fairy tales as:

- ◆ "The Haughty Princess" - the story of the journey of a spoiled princess who turns into a humble and lovely woman—inside and out—through trials that test who she thinks she is.
- ◆ "Seamus and the Sleeping Princess" - an Irish fairy tale where a peasant man rescues a princess from the fairies (but this time it's the lady who saves the prince).
- ◆ "The Princess in Disguise" - the story of a queen-to-be that runs away and disguises herself as a boy to save herself from an unwanted marriage.
- ◆ "The Princess and the Pea" - the story of a princess who unknowingly proves her royalty by sleeping on a stack of mat-

tresses, within which a pea is hidden. (This contemporary version of the tale has the prince stuck on the lumpy mattress.)

The ladies and I have taken these fascinating stories and set them on their collective ears. We've given them big beautiful heroines who can, and do, find their way through trials and tests with love as the ultimate prize. The knight on a white steed is still there, but our leading ladies can not only rescue themselves, they sometimes end up rescuing the knight as well. Each of our heroines is savvy enough and strong enough to love her man as he is, flaws and all. It's the man inside, not the title, she falls for.

So, settle back and get comfy because we've got a tale or four to tell you.

*With Many Thanks*

To the lovely ladies involved in this anthology. Despite the fact that several of them had health and family issues to deal with, they continued to be the professionals that they are.

It's ladies like you who inspire stories like these.



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*Come Away  
With Me*

Misty Simon

## *Dedication*

As always – to Daniel for everything he is.

And to Rida and Sir for the chance to live my dreams.

## *Acknowledgements*

Great big thanks to all the other authors in this anthology. It has been a pleasure and a privilege to work with all of you.

We did a great job, ladies.

# Chapter One



“*I* am not going down there, Father, and that’s final.” Princess Ashlyn twitched the heavy brocade drape to the side and looked down onto the central courtyard. A large group of well-dressed men milled around below. They’d been waiting for two hours, and as far as Ashlyn was concerned, they could wait another ten before she participated in her father’s idiotic scheme.

“Why not, Ashlyn? These nobles came to visit with you, some from very far away. The least you can do is meet them.”

“The answer is no. I will not be paraded around like some prize pig! I don’t care if there are kings down there, I will not debase myself in front of anyone. This was your idea. You take care of them. In fact, just tell them to go home.”

Below the window, one voice rose above the rest of the hushed conversations before the king could respond to Ashlyn’s command. “Have you seen the princess? I hear she needs an attitude adjustment, but has the face of an angel.”

Another voice joined the first. “I’d like her face to be beautiful, but that’s not nearly as important as her other assets.” A chorus of laughs followed the announcement.

Another person, probably wanting to top the first, made

a bawdy suggestion about the enormous valley between her breasts.

Ashlyn turned from the window and leveled a narrow-eyed stare at her father. “Do you honestly expect me to go down and greet those imbeciles with their foul mouths and filthy minds? I will not step outside this room unless you drag me down the hall, kicking and screaming.”

The king flushed and cleared his throat. “Men talk when they are together, Daughter. They do not know you are up here and perhaps it has loosened their tongues. However, rude noises and talk aside, you will greet them since each is here at my request. You will not embarrass the kingdom, and me, by refusing see them. Your birthday is coming and you must choose a suitor soon.”

Ashlyn huffed out a very unladylike breath and turned her back to her father. Drumming her fingers on her ample hips, she pursed her full lips. She had to make a decision quick.

In her mind, she knew she would never be a wife, never fall prey to anyone in any way. Her voluptuous body, with all its many curves and dips, was too perfect to submit to some filthy ogre’s attentions. She wouldn’t be used for the pleasure of a groaning, groping man. She’d heard of such things from eavesdropping on unsuspecting servants. She refused to be a party to it.

She’d only have to get through today. Once she thwarted her father’s plans, she’d have a very well modulated word with him. Well modulated because she’d seen ugly lines around her mouth in a mirror the last time she’d screamed. After their conversation, he would think twice before trying this again.

“Fine,” she snapped. “To keep you and your precious kingdom from embarrassment, I will go down to the courtyard, but I do not promise to choose a suitor.” Ashlyn was determined to refuse every single pompous male waiting below. According to law, her father couldn’t force her into marriage and she would make it very apparent to him that to try would be disastrous.

She descended the stone steps, each footfall accompanied by a huff. Her father would regret forcing her in this. The assembly below might be well bred and rich, but none would make her give up her luxuries, her freedom, and her position as the supreme person in this household. Everyone knew she was to be attended

to first and never went without whatever she wanted. She wouldn't get the same treatment in any other home, so she wasn't leaving. Ever.

One of the servants opened the door from outside and a plan formed in her mind. At first it wasn't hard to execute the stroke of genius. While strolling through the lush garden, it hardly presented a challenge at all to find fault with the many lords she passed.

Birds twittered in the full green trees, bees buzzed around the tall red, blue and yellow flowers. Amidst this beauty, Princess Ashlyn insulted every single noble by picking his most obvious flaw and giving him a nickname as she saw fit.

"Princess Ashlyn," the king said, as they stood before another poor fool, "may I present the Grand Duke Orlan."

The man before her was so tall and thin she had to stretch her neck to look into his ordinary brown eyes. His hair was lank and black, his skin sallow and pockmarked. There was no way in the world she would shackle herself to him for life. She fell into a deep curtsy, folding her plump body forward with a fluid grace many would envy. When she straightened, she looked him right in the eye, gave her best smile and said, "I will not have you, Beanpole."

Her father sputtered in shock next to her and she took a great deal of satisfaction in his gasping. Before the king could compose himself, she moved on, pausing only to offer each an obnoxiously polite curtsy before delivering one scathing remark after another. The stone walls rang with her insults. "I will not have you, Scarecrow. Nor you, Barrel-Gut. I will not have you, Beak-face."

And so it went as she leveled each and every suitor. Her father would recover and come after her, but her next words would send him into another bout of sputtering. With each taunting snub, Ashlyn felt more and more powerful.

She was doing splendidly if she did say so herself, and having a marvelous time, when she was left with one last idiot. Those who had gone before clustered in angry groups. Some hadn't even spoken to her—from fear for themselves or loyalty to their fallen comrades, she did not know, or even care. Others eyes glinted with challenge, which she quickly extinguished with her razor tongue.

So, the last stood before her. He had lustrous black hair and

a square chin. Clear, beautiful blue eyes stared back at her above a straight and perfect nose. Struck dumb for a moment, Ashlyn couldn't think of an appropriate put-down. Her hand rose from her side without thought and almost touched those glossy curls. At the last moment, she brought her hand to her own blonde hair, but didn't miss the knowledge in the stranger's eyes. He'd known what her original intention was – how mortifying. Here was a gentleman so handsome she could not think of a single negative thing to say.

A moment passed in which the corner of his perfect mouth kicked up in an amused smile - and what a smile it was. Ashlyn got lost in it for a second, then jerked herself back to reality because he was laughing at her. Well, she'd fix him. Her eyes darted over his face, looking for any imperfection. She zeroed in on his silky, black, manicured beard. "I will not have you, Whiskers," she said in her most venomous voice, then turned on her heel, her brocade dress making a haughty swish. With exaggerated care, she walked back into the castle and closed the door. It wouldn't do for the princess to stomp and slam doors, no matter how much she wanted to.