

*Princess Ida*

MELISSA.

But 'twould be an error  
To confess our terror,  
So in Ida's name,  
Boldly we exclaim:

CHORUS.

Death to the invader!  
Strike a deadly blow,  
As an old Crusader  
Struck his Paynim foe!

*Flourish. Enter PRINCESS, armed, attended by BLANCHE and PSYCHE.*

PRIN. I like your spirit, girls! We have to meet  
Stern bearded warriors in fight to-day;  
Wear naught but what is necessary to  
Preserve your dignity before their eyes,  
And give your limbs full play.

BLAN. One moment, ma'am,  
Here is a paradox we should not pass  
Without inquiry. We are prone to say  
'This thing is Needful – that, Superfluous' –  
Yet they invariably co-exist!  
We find the Needful comprehended in  
The circle of the grand Superfluous,  
Yet the Superfluous cannot be bought  
Unless you're amply furnished with the Needful.  
These singular considerations are –

PRIN. Superfluous, yet not Needful – so you see  
The terms may independently exist.

*(To Ladies)* Women of Adamant, we have to show  
That Woman, educated to the task,  
Can meet Man, face to face, on his own ground,  
And beat him there. Now, let us set to work;  
Where is our lady surgeon?

SACH. Madam, here!

PRIN. We shall require your skill to heal the wounds  
Of those that fall.

SACH. *(alarmed)* What, heal the wounded?

PRIN. Yes!

SACH. And cut off real live legs and arms?

PRIN. Of course!

SACH. I wouldn't do it for a thousand pounds!

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- PRIN. Why, how is this? Are you faint-hearted, girl?  
You've often cut them off in theory!
- SACH. In theory I'll cut them off again  
With pleasure, and as often as you like,  
But not in practice.
- PRIN. Coward! Get you hence,  
I've craft enough for that, and courage too,  
I'll do your work! My fusiliers, advance!  
Why, you are armed with axes! Gilded toys!  
Where are your rifles, pray?
- CHLOE.** Why, please you, ma'am,  
We left them in the armoury, for fear  
That in the heat and turmoil of the fight,  
They might go off!
- PRIN. 'They might!' Oh, craven souls!  
Go off yourselves! Thank heaven I have a heart  
That quails not at the thought of meeting men;  
I will discharge your rifles! Off with you! (*Exit CHLOE.*)  
Where's my bandmistress?
- ADA. Please you, ma'am, the band  
Do not feel well, and can't come out today!
- PRIN. Why, this is flat rebellion! I've no time  
To talk to them just now. But, happily,  
I can play several instruments at once,  
And I will drown the shrieks of those that fall  
With trumpet music, such as soldiers love!  
How stand we with respect to gunpowder?  
My Lady Psyche – you who superintend  
Our lab'ratory – are you well prepared  
To blow these bearded rascals into shreds?
- PSY. Why, madam –
- PRIN. Well?
- PSY. Let us try gentler means.  
We can dispense with fulminating grains  
While we have eyes with which to flash our rage!  
We can dispense with villainous saltpetre  
While we have tongues with which to blow them up!  
We can dispense, in short, with all the arts  
That brutalize the practical polemist!
- PRIN. (*contemptuously*) I never knew a more dispensing chemist!  
Away, away – I'll meet these men alone  
Since all my women have deserted me!

*Exeunt all but PRINCESS, singing refrain of 'Please you, do not hurt us', pianissimo.*

- PRIN. So fail my cherished plans – so fails my faith –