



Enter OLD HANNAH, from cottage.

Han. Nay, gentle maidens, you sing well but vainly, for Rose is still heart-free, and looks but coldly upon her many suitors.

Zor. It's very disappointing. Every young man in the village is in love with her, but they are appalled by her beauty and modesty, and won't dare declare themselves; so, until she makes her own choice, there's no chance for anybody else.

Ruth. This is, perhaps, the only village in the world that possesses an endowed corps of professional bridesmaids who are bound to be on duty every day from ten to four—and it is at least six months since our services were required. The pious charity by which we exist is practically wasted!

Zor. We shall be disendowed—that will be the end of it! Dame Hannah—you're a nice old person—you could marry if you liked. There's old Adam—Robin's faithful servant—he loves you with all the frenzy of a boy of fourteen.

Han. Nay—that may never be, for I am pledged!

All. To whom?

Han. To an eternal maidenhood! Many years ago I was betrothed to a god-like youth who woo'd me under an assumed name. But on the very day upon which our wedding was to have been celebrated, I discovered that he was no other than Sir Roderic Murgatroyd, one of the bad Baronets of Ruddigore, and the uncle of the man who now bears that title. As a son of that accursed race he was no husband for an honest girl, so, sadly as I loved him, I left him then and there. He died but ten years since, but I never saw him again.

Zor. But why should you not marry a bad Baronet of Ruddigore?

Ruth. All baronets are bad; but was he worse than other baronets?

Han. My child, he was accursed.

Zor. But who cursed him? Not you, I trust!

Han. The curse is on all his line and has been, ever since the time of Sir Rupert, the first baronet. Listen, and you shall hear the legend.