

# The Love of Ulrich Nebendahl

By

Jerome K. Jerome

[Web-Books.Com](http://Web-Books.Com)

## The Love of Ulrich Nebendahl

Perhaps of all, it troubled most the Herr Pfarrer. Was he not the father of the village? And as such did it not fall to him to see his children marry well and suitably? marry in any case. It was the duty of every worthy citizen to keep alive throughout the ages the sacred hearth fire, to rear up sturdy lads and honest lassies that would serve God, and the Fatherland. A true son of Saxon soil was the Herr Pastor Winckelmann--kindly, simple, sentimental.

"Why, at your age, Ulrich--at your age," repeated the Herr Pastor, setting down his beer and wiping with the back of his hand his large uneven lips, "I was the father of a family--two boys and a girl. You never saw her, Ulrich; so sweet, so good. We called her Maria." The Herr Pfarrer sighed and hid his broad red face behind the raised cover of his pewter pot.

"They must be good fun in a house, the little ones," commented Ulrich, gazing upward with his dreamy eyes at the wreath of smoke ascending from his long-stemmed pipe. "The little ones, always my heart goes out to them."

"Take to yourself a wife," urged the Herr Pfarrer. "It is your duty. The good God has given to you ample means. It is not right that you should lead this lonely life. Bachelors make old maids; things of no use."

"That is so," Ulrich agreed. "I have often said the same unto myself. It would be pleasant to feel one was not working merely for oneself."

"Elsa, now," went on the Herr Pfarrer, "she is a good child, pious and economical. The price of such is above rubies."

Ulrich's face lightened with a pleasant smile. "Aye, Elsa is a good girl," he answered. "Her little hands--have you ever noticed them, Herr Pastor--so soft and dimpled."

The Pfarrer pushed aside his empty pot and leaned his elbows on the table.

"I think--I do not think--she would say no. Her mother, I have reason to believe-- Let me sound them--discreetly." The old pastor's red face glowed redder, yet with pleasurable anticipation; he was a born matchmaker.

But Ulrich the wheelwright shuffled in his chair uneasily.

"A little longer," he pleaded. "Let me think it over. A man should not marry without first being sure he loves. Things might happen. It would not be fair to the maiden."

The Herr Pfarrer stretched his hand across the table and laid it upon Ulrich's arm.

"It is Hedwig; twice you walked home with her last week."

"It is a lonesome way for a timid maiden; and there is the stream to cross," explained the wheelwright.

For a moment the Herr Pastor's face had clouded, but now it cleared again.

"Well, well, why not? Elsa would have been better in some respects, but Hedwig--ah, yes, she, too, is a good girl a little wild perhaps--it will wear off. Have you spoken with her?"

"Not yet."

"But you will?"

Again there fell that troubled look into those dreamy eyes. This time it was Ulrich who, laying aside his pipe, rested his great arms upon the wooden table.

"Now, how does a man know when he is in love?" asked Ulrich of the Pastor who, having been married twice, should surely be experienced upon the point. "How should he be sure that it is this woman and no other to whom his heart has gone out?"

A commonplace-looking man was the Herr Pastor, short and fat and bald. But there had been other days, and these had left to him a voice that still was young; and the evening twilight screening the seared face, Ulrich heard but the pastor's voice, which was the voice of a boy.

"She will be dearer to you than yourself. Thinking of her, all else will be as nothing. For her you would lay down your life."

They sat in silence for a while; for the fat little Herr Pfarrer was dreaming of the past; and long, lanky Ulrich Nebendahl, the wheelwright, of the future.

That evening, as chance would have it, Ulrich returning to his homestead--a rambling mill beside the river, where he dwelt alone with ancient Anna--met Elsa of the dimpled hands upon the bridge that spans the murmuring Muhlde, and talked a while with her, and said good-night.

How sweet it had been to watch her ox-like eyes shyly seeking his, to press her dimpled hand and feel his own great strength. Surely he loved her better than he did himself. There could be no doubt of it. He pictured her in trouble, in danger from the savage soldiery that came and went like evil shadows through these pleasant Saxon valleys, leaving death and misery behind them: burnt homesteads; wild-eyed women, hiding their faces from the light. Would he not for her sake give his life?

So it was made clear to him that little Elsa was his love.

Until next morning, when, raising his eyes from the whirling saw, there stood before him Margot, laughing. Margot, mischief-loving, wayward, that would ever be to him the baby he had played with, nursed, and comforted. Margot weary! Had he not a thousand times carried her sleeping in his arms. Margot in danger! At the mere thought his face flushed an angry scarlet.

All that afternoon Ulrich communed with himself, tried to understand himself, and could not. For Elsa and Margot and Hedwig were not the only ones by a long way. What girl in the village did he not love, if it came to that: Liesel, who worked so hard and lived so poorly, bullied by her cross-grained granddam. Susanna, plain and a little crotchety, who had never had a sweetheart to coax the thin lips into smiles. The little ones--for so they seemed to long, lanky Ulrich, with their pleasant ways--Ulrich smiled as he thought of them--how should a man love one more than another?

The Herr Pfarrer shook his head and sighed.

"That is not love. Gott in Himmel! think what it would lead to? The good God never would have arranged things so. You love one; she is the only woman in the world for you."

"But you, yourself, Herr Pastor, you have twice been married," suggested the puzzled wheelwright.

"But one at a time, Ulrich--one at a time. That is a very different thing."

Why should it not come to him, alone among men? Surely it was a beautiful thing, this love; a thing worthy of a man, without which a man was but a useless devourer of food, cumbering the earth.

So Ulrich pondered, pausing from his work one drowsy summer's afternoon, listening to the low song of the waters. How well he knew the winding Muhldes' merry voice. He had worked beside it, played beside it all his life. Often he would sit and talk to it as to an old friend, reading answers in its changing tones.

Trudchen, seeing him idle, pushed her cold nose into his hand. Trudchen just now was feeling clever and important. Was she not the mother of the five most wonderful puppies in all Saxony? They swarmed about his legs, pressing him with their little foolish heads. Ulrich stooped and picked up one in each big hand. But this causing jealousy and heartburning, laughing, he lay down upon a log. Then the whole five stormed over him, biting his hair, trampling with their clumsy paws upon his face; till suddenly they raced off in a body to attack a floating feather. Ulrich sat up and watched them, the little rogues, the little foolish, helpless things, that called for so much care. A mother thrush twittered above his head. Ulrich rose and creeping on tiptoe, peeped into the nest. But the mother bird, casting one glance towards him, went on with her work. Whoever was afraid of Ulrich the wheelwright! The tiny murmuring insects buzzed to and fro about his feet. An old man, passing to his evening rest, gave him "good-day." A zephyr whispered

## Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

