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THE LOVE OF ULRICH
NEBENDAHL

Jerome Klapka Jerome
The Love of Ulrich Nebendahl

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The Love of Ulrich Nebendahl:

Содержание

THE LOVE OF ULRICH NEBENDAHL

4

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

7

Jerome K. Jerome

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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.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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