

# **Chronicles of Avonlea**

**by**

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## I. The Hurrying of Ludovic

Anne Shirley was curled up on the window-seat of Theodora Dix's sitting-room one Saturday evening, looking dreamily afar at some fair starland beyond the hills of sunset. Anne was visiting for a fortnight of her vacation at Echo Lodge, where Mr. and Mrs. Stephen Irving were spending the summer, and she often ran over to the old Dix homestead to chat for awhile with Theodora. They had had their chat out, on this particular evening, and Anne was giving herself over to the delight of building an air-castle. She leaned her shapely head, with its braided coronet of dark red hair, against the window-casing, and her gray eyes were like the moonlight gleam of shadowy pools.

Then she saw Ludovic Speed coming down the lane. He was yet far from the house, for the Dix lane was a long one, but Ludovic could be recognized as far as he could be seen. No one else in Middle Grafton had such a tall, gently-stooping, placidly-moving figure. In every kink and turn of it there was an individuality all Ludovic's own.

Anne roused herself from her dreams, thinking it would only be tactful to take her departure. Ludovic was courting Theodora. Everyone in Grafton knew that, or, if anyone were in ignorance of the fact, it was not because he had not had time to find out. Ludovic had been coming down that lane to see Theodora, in the same ruminating, unhastening fashion, for fifteen years!

When Anne, who was slim and girlish and romantic, rose to go, Theodora, who was plump and middle-aged and practical, said, with a twinkle in her eye:

"There isn't any hurry, child. Sit down and have your call out. You've seen Ludovic coming down the lane, and, I suppose, you think you'll be a crowd. But you won't. Ludovic rather likes a third person around, and so do I. It spurs up the conversation as it were. When a man has been coming to see you straight along, twice a week for fifteen years, you get rather talked out by spells."

Theodora never pretended to bashfulness where Ludovic was concerned. She was not at all shy of referring to him and his dilatory courtship. Indeed, it seemed to amuse her.

Anne sat down again and together they watched Ludovic coming down the lane, gazing calmly about him at the lush clover fields and the blue loops of the river winding in and out of the misty valley below.

Anne looked at Theodora's placid, finely-moulded face and tried to imagine what she herself would feel like if she were sitting there, waiting for an elderly lover who had, seemingly, taken so long to make up his mind. But even Anne's imagination failed her for this.

"Anyway," she thought, impatiently, "if I wanted him I think I'd find some way of hurrying him up. Ludovic SPEED! Was there ever such a misfit of a name? Such a name for such a man is a delusion and a snare."

Presently Ludovic got to the house, but stood so long on the doorstep in a brown study, gazing into the tangled green boskage of the cherry orchard, that Theodora finally went and opened the door before he knocked. As she brought him into the sitting-room she made a comical grimace at Anne over his shoulder.

Ludovic smiled pleasantly at Anne. He liked her; she was the only young girl he knew, for he generally avoided young girls--they made him feel awkward and out of place. But Anne did not affect him in this fashion. She had a way of getting on with all sorts of people, and, although they had not known her very long, both Ludovic and Theodora looked upon her as an old friend.

Ludovic was tall and somewhat ungainly, but his unhesitating placidity gave him the appearance of a dignity that did not otherwise pertain to him. He had a drooping, silky, brown moustache, and a little curly tuft of imperial--a fashion which was regarded as eccentric in Grafton, where men had clean-shaven chins or went full-bearded. His eyes were dreamy and pleasant, with a touch of melancholy in their blue depths.

He sat down in the big bulgy old armchair that had belonged to Theodora's father. Ludovic always sat there, and Anne declared that the chair had come to look like him.

The conversation soon grew animated enough. Ludovic was a good talker when he had somebody to draw him out. He was well read, and frequently surprised Anne by his shrewd comments on men and matters out in the world, of which only the faint echoes reached Deland River. He had also a liking for religious arguments with Theodora, who did not care much for politics or the making of history, but was avid of doctrines, and read everything pertaining thereto. When the conversation drifted into an eddy of friendly wrangling between Ludovic and Theodora over Christian Science, Anne understood that her usefulness was ended for the time being, and that she would not be missed.

"It's star time and good-night time," she said, and went away quietly.

But she had to stop to laugh when she was well out of sight of the house, in a green meadow bestarred with the white and gold of daisies. A wind, odour-freighted, blew daintily across it. Anne leaned against a white birch tree in the corner and laughed heartily, as she was apt to do whenever she thought of Ludovic and Theodora. To her eager youth, this courtship of theirs seemed a very amusing thing. She liked Ludovic, but allowed herself to be provoked with him.

"The dear, big, irritating goose!" she said aloud. "There never was such a lovable idiot before. He's just like the alligator in the old rhyme, who wouldn't go along, and wouldn't keep still, but just kept bobbing up and down."

Two evenings later, when Anne went over to the Dix place, she and Theodora drifted into a conversation about Ludovic. Theodora, who was the most industrious soul alive, and had a mania for fancy work into the bargain, was busying her smooth, plump fingers with a very elaborate Battenburg lace centre-piece. Anne was lying back in a little rocker, with her slim hands folded in her lap, watching Theodora. She realized that Theodora was very handsome, in a stately, Juno-like fashion of firm, white flesh, large, clearly-chiselled outlines, and great, cowey, brown eyes. When Theodora was not smiling, she looked very imposing. Anne thought it likely that Ludovic held her in awe.

"Did you and Ludovic talk about Christian Science ALL Saturday evening?" she asked.

Theodora overflowed into a smile.

"Yes, and we even quarrelled over it. At least I did. Ludovic wouldn't quarrel with anyone. You have to fight air when you spar with him. I hate to square up to a person who won't hit back."

"Theodora," said Anne coaxingly, "I am going to be curious and impertinent. You can snub me if you like. Why don't you and Ludovic get married?"

Theodora laughed comfortably.

"That's the question Grafton folks have been asking for quite a while, I reckon, Anne. Well, I'd have no objection to marrying Ludovic. That's frank enough for you, isn't it? But it's not easy to marry a man unless he asks you. And Ludovic has never asked me."

"Is he too shy?" persisted Anne. Since Theodora was in the mood, she meant to sift this puzzling affair to the bottom.

Theodora dropped her work and looked meditatively out over the green slopes of the summer world.

"No, I don't think it is that. Ludovic isn't shy. It's just his way--the Speed way. The Speeds are all dreadfully deliberate. They spend years thinking over a thing before they make up their minds to do it. Sometimes they get so much in the habit of thinking about it that they never get over it-- like old Alder Speed, who was always talking of going to England to see his brother, but never went, though there was no earthly reason why he shouldn't. They're not lazy, you know, but they love to take their time."

"And Ludovic is just an aggravated case of Speedism," suggested Anne.

"Exactly. He never hurried in his life. Why, he has been thinking for the last six years of getting his house painted. He talks it over with me every little while, and picks out the colour, and there the matter stays. He's fond of me, and he means to ask me to have him sometime. The only question is-- will the time ever come?"

"Why don't you hurry him up?" asked Anne impatiently.

Theodora went back to her stitches with another laugh.

"If Ludovic could be hurried up, I'm not the one to do it. I'm too shy. It sounds ridiculous to hear a woman of my age and inches say that, but it is true. Of course, I know it's the only way any Speed ever did make out to get married. For instance, there's a cousin of mine married to Ludovic's brother. I don't say she proposed to him out and out, but, mind you, Anne, it wasn't far from it. I couldn't do anything like that. I DID try once. When I realized that I was getting sere and mellow, and all the girls of my generation were going off on either hand, I tried to give Ludovic a hint. But it stuck in my throat. And now I don't mind. If I don't change Dix to Speed until I take the initiative, it will be Dix to the end of life. Ludovic doesn't realize that we are growing old, you know. He thinks we are giddy young folks yet, with plenty of time before us. That's the Speed failing. They never find out they're alive until they're dead."

"You're fond of Ludovic, aren't you?" asked Anne, detecting a note of real bitterness among Theodora's paradoxes.

"Laws, yes," said Theodora candidly. She did not think it worth while to blush over so settled a fact. "I think the world and all of Ludovic. And he certainly does need somebody to look after HIM. He's neglected--he looks frayed. You can see that for yourself. That old aunt of his looks after his house in some fashion, but she doesn't look after him. And he's coming now to the age when a man needs to be looked after and coddled a bit. I'm lonesome here, and Ludovic is lonesome up there, and it does seem ridiculous, doesn't it? I don't wonder that we're the standing joke of Grafton. Goodness knows, I laugh at it enough myself. I've sometimes thought that if Ludovic could be made jealous it might spur him along. But I never could flirt and there's nobody to flirt with if I could. Everybody hereabouts looks upon me as Ludovic's property and nobody would dream of interfering with him."

"Theodora," cried Anne, "I have a plan!"

"Now, what are you going to do?" exclaimed Theodora.

Anne told her. At first Theodora laughed and protested. In the end, she yielded somewhat doubtfully, overborne by Anne's enthusiasm.

"Well, try it, then," she said, resignedly. "If Ludovic gets mad and leaves me, I'll be worse off than ever. But nothing venture, nothing win. And there is a fighting chance, I suppose. Besides, I must admit I'm tired of his dilly-dallying."

Anne went back to Echo Lodge tingling with delight in her plot. She hunted up Arnold Sherman, and told him what was required of him. Arnold Sherman listened and laughed. He was an elderly widower, an intimate friend of Stephen Irving, and had come down to spend part of the summer with him and his wife in Prince Edward Island. He

was handsome in a mature style, and he had a dash of mischief in him still, so that he entered readily enough into Anne's plan. It amused him to think of hurrying Ludovic Speed, and he knew that Theodora Dix could be depended on to do her part. The comedy would not be dull, whatever its outcome.

The curtain rose on the first act after prayer meeting on the next Thursday night. It was bright moonlight when the people came out of church, and everybody saw it plainly. Arnold Sherman stood upon the steps close to the door, and Ludovic Speed leaned up against a corner of the graveyard fence, as he had done for years. The boys said he had worn the paint off that particular place. Ludovic knew of no reason why he should paste himself up against the church door. Theodora would come out as usual, and he would join her as she went past the corner.

This was what happened, Theodora came down the steps, her stately figure outlined in its darkness against the gush of lamplight from the porch. Arnold Sherman asked her if he might see her home. Theodora took his arm calmly, and together they swept past the stupefied Ludovic, who stood helplessly gazing after them as if unable to believe his eyes.

For a few moments he stood there limply; then he started down the road after his fickle lady and her new admirer. The boys and irresponsible young men crowded after, expecting some excitement, but they were disappointed. Ludovic strode on until he overtook Theodora and Arnold Sherman, and then fell meekly in behind them.

Theodora hardly enjoyed her walk home, although Arnold Sherman laid himself out to be especially entertaining. Her heart yearned after Ludovic, whose shuffling footsteps she heard behind her. She feared that she had been very cruel, but she was in for it now. She steeled herself by the reflection that it was all for his own good, and she talked to Arnold Sherman as if he were the one man in the world. Poor, deserted Ludovic, following humbly behind, heard her, and if Theodora had known how bitter the cup she was holding to his lips really was, she would never have been resolute enough to present it, no matter for what ultimate good.

When she and Arnold turned in at her gate, Ludovic had to stop. Theodora looked over her shoulder and saw him standing still on the road. His forlorn figure haunted her thoughts all night. If Anne had not run over the next day and bolstered up her convictions, she might have spoiled everything by prematurely relenting.

Ludovic, meanwhile, stood still on the road, quite oblivious to the hoots and comments of the vastly amused small boy contingent, until Theodora and his rival disappeared from his view under the firs in the hollow of her lane. Then he turned about and went home, not with his usual leisurely amble, but with a perturbed stride which proclaimed his inward disquiet.

He felt bewildered. If the world had come suddenly to an end or if the lazy, meandering Grafton River had turned about and flowed up hill, Ludovic could not have been more

astonished. For fifteen years he had walked home from meetings with Theodora; and now this elderly stranger, with all the glamour of "the States" hanging about him, had coolly walked off with her under Ludovic's very nose. Worse--most unkindest cut of all--Theodora had gone with him willingly; nay, she had evidently enjoyed his company. Ludovic felt the stirring of a righteous anger in his easy-going soul.

When he reached the end of his lane, he paused at his gate, and looked at his house, set back from the lane in a crescent of birches. Even in the moonlight, its weather-worn aspect was plainly visible. He thought of the "palatial residence" rumour ascribed to Arnold Sherman in Boston, and stroked his chin nervously with his sunburnt fingers. Then he doubled up his fist and struck it smartly on the gate-post.

"Theodora needn't think she is going to jilt me in this fashion, after keeping company with me for fifteen years," he said. "I'LL have something to say to it, Arnold Sherman or no Arnold Sherman. The impudence of the puppy!"

The next morning Ludovic drove to Carmody and engaged Joshua Pye to come and paint his house, and that evening, although he was not due till Saturday night, he went down to see Theodora.

Arnold Sherman was there before him, and was actually sitting in Ludovic's own prescriptive chair. Ludovic had to deposit himself in Theodora's new wicker rocker, where he looked and felt lamentably out of place.

If Theodora felt the situation to be awkward, she carried it off superbly. She had never looked handsomer, and Ludovic perceived that she wore her second best silk dress. He wondered miserably if she had donned it in expectation of his rival's call. She had never put on silk dresses for him. Ludovic had always been the meekest and mildest of mortals, but he felt quite murderous as he sat mutely there and listened to Arnold Sherman's polished conversation.

"You should just have been here to see him glowering," Theodora told the delighted Anne the next day. "It may be wicked of me, but I felt real glad. I was afraid he might stay away and sulk. So long as he comes here and sulks I don't worry. But he is feeling badly enough, poor soul, and I'm really eaten up by remorse. He tried to outstay Mr. Sherman last night, but he didn't manage it. You never saw a more depressed-looking creature than he was as he hurried down the lane. Yes, he actually hurried."

The following Sunday evening Arnold Sherman walked to church with Theodora, and sat with her. When they came in Ludovic Speed suddenly stood up in his pew under the gallery. He sat down again at once, but everybody in view had seen him, and that night folks in all the length and breadth of Grafton River discussed the dramatic occurrence with keen enjoyment.

"Yes, he jumped right up as if he was pulled on his feet, while the minister was reading the chapter," said his cousin, Lorella Speed, who had been in church, to her sister, who



had not. "His face was as white as a sheet, and his eyes were just glaring out of his head. I never felt so thrilled, I declare! I almost expected him to fly at them then and there. But he just gave a sort of gasp and set down again. I don't know whether Theodora Dix saw him or not. She looked as cool and unconcerned as you please."

Theodora had not seen Ludovic, but if she looked cool and unconcerned, her appearance belied her, for she felt miserably flustered. She could not prevent Arnold Sherman coming to church with her, but it seemed to her like going too far. People did not go to church and sit together in Grafton unless they were the next thing to being engaged. What if this filled Ludovic with the narcotic of despair instead of wakening him up! She sat through the service in misery and heard not one word of the sermon.

But Ludovic's spectacular performances were not yet over. The Speeds might be hard to get started, but once they were started their momentum was irresistible. When Theodora and Mr. Sherman came out, Ludovic was waiting on the steps. He stood up straight and stern, with his head thrown back and his shoulders squared. There was open defiance in the look he cast on his rival, and masterfulness in the mere touch of the hand he laid on Theodora's arm.

"May I see you home, Miss Dix?" his words said. His tone said, "I am going to see you home whether or no."

Theodora, with a deprecating look at Arnold Sherman, took his arm, and Ludovic marched her across the green amid a silence which the very horses tied to the storm fence seemed to share. For Ludovic 'twas a crowded hour of glorious life.

Anne walked all the way over from Avonlea the next day to hear the news. Theodora smiled consciously.

"Yes, it is really settled at last, Anne. Coming home last night Ludovic asked me plump and plain to marry him,--Sunday and all as it was. It's to be right away--for Ludovic won't be put off a week longer than necessary."

"So Ludovic Speed has been hurried up to some purpose at last," said Mr. Sherman, when Anne called in at Echo Lodge, brimful with her news. "And you are delighted, of course, and my poor pride must be the scapegoat. I shall always be remembered in Grafton as the man from Boston who wanted Theodora Dix and couldn't get her."

"But that won't be true, you know," said Anne comfortingly.

Arnold Sherman thought of Theodora's ripe beauty, and the mellow companionableness she had revealed in their brief intercourse.

"I'm not perfectly sure of that," he said, with a half sigh.

## II. Old Lady Lloyd

### I. The May Chapter

Spencervale gossip always said that "Old Lady Lloyd" was rich and mean and proud. Gossip, as usual, was one-third right and two-thirds wrong. Old Lady Lloyd was neither rich nor mean; in reality she was pitifully poor--so poor that "Crooked Jack" Spencer, who dug her garden and chopped her wood for her, was opulent by contrast, for he, at least, never lacked three meals a day, and the Old Lady could sometimes achieve no more than one. But she WAS very proud--so proud that she would have died rather than let the Spencervale people, among whom she had queened it in her youth, suspect how poor she was and to what straits was sometimes reduced. She much preferred to have them think her miserly and odd--a queer old recluse who never went anywhere, even to church, and who paid the smallest subscription to the minister's salary of anyone in the congregation.

"And her just rolling in wealth!" they said indignantly. "Well, she didn't get her miserly ways from her parents. THEY were real generous and neighbourly. There never was a finer gentleman than old Doctor Lloyd. He was always doing kindnesses to everybody; and he had a way of doing them that made you feel as if you was doing the favour, not him. Well, well, let Old Lady Lloyd keep herself and her money to herself if she wants to. If she doesn't want our company, she doesn't have to suffer it, that's all. Reckon she isn't none too happy for all her money and pride."

No, the Old Lady was none too happy, that was unfortunately true. It is not easy to be happy when your life is eaten up with loneliness and emptiness on the spiritual side, and when, on the material side, all you have between you and starvation is the little money your hens bring you in.

The Old Lady lived "away back at the old Lloyd place," as it was always called. It was a quaint, low-eaved house, with big chimneys and square windows and with spruces growing thickly all around it. The Old Lady lived there all alone and there were weeks at a time when she never saw a human being except Crooked Jack. What the Old Lady did with herself and how she put in her time was a puzzle the Spencervale people could not solve. The children believed she amused herself counting the gold in the big black box under her bed. Spencervale children held the Old Lady in mortal terror; some of them--the "Spencer Road" fry--believed she was a witch; all of them would run if, when wandering about the woods in search of berries or spruce gum, they saw at a distance the spare, upright form of the Old Lady, gathering sticks for her fire. Mary Moore was the only one who was quite sure she was not a witch.

"Witches are always ugly," she said decisively, "and Old Lady Lloyd isn't ugly. She's real pretty--she's got such a soft white hair and big black eyes and a little white face. Those

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