THE AWAKENING

Chapter 4 — Narrator Script (Booth Ready)

by Kate Chopin · narrated by Mike Vendetti & Kathy Verduin

Léonce Pontellier **Edna Pontellier** **Robert Lebrun** **Madame Lebrun** **Parrot (off-stage voice — French)** **Adèle Ratignolle** **Monsieur Ratignolle** **Mademoiselle Reisz** **Victor Lebrun** **Mariequita** **Monsieur Farival** **Doctor Mandelet**

NARRATOR

★ BEAT — Edna is not a mother-woman; the boys go it alone

Open with mild sociological observation, almost anthropological in tone. Chopin is gently amused, never unkind. Pace the description of the mother-women slowly — their "fluttering, extending wings" should have a slight absurdist edge without being mocking. Edna's difference is simply registered, not condemned.

It would have been a difficult matter for Mr. Pontellier *[pon-tel-YAY]* to define to his own satisfaction or any one else's wherein his wife failed in her duty toward their children. It was something which he felt rather than perceived, and he never voiced the feeling without subsequent regret and ample atonement.

If one of the little Pontellier boys took a tumble whilst at play, he was not apt to rush crying to his mother's arms for comfort; he would more likely pick himself up, wipe the water out of his eyes and the sand out of

his mouth, and go on playing. Tots as they were, they pulled together and stood their ground in childish battles with doubled fists and uplifted voices, which usually prevailed against the other mother-tots. The quadroon *[KWAH-droon]* nurse was looked upon as a huge encumbrance, only good to button up waists and panties and to brush and part hair; since it seemed to be a law of society that hair must be parted and brushed.

In short, Mrs. Pontellier was not a mother-woman. The mother-women seemed to prevail that summer at Grand Isle *[grand EYE-uhl]*. It was easy to know them, fluttering about with extended, protecting wings when any harm, real or imaginary, threatened their precious brood. They were women who idolized their children, worshiped their husbands, and esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals and grow wings as ministering angels.

★ BEAT — Adèle Ratignolle — embodiment of womanly grace

Chopin lingers here with warm, deliberate excess: the golden hair, the sapphire eyes, the cherried lips, the taper fingers — all of it. Let the catalog breathe and build. This is the idealized feminine, painted in miniature. The slight irony is in how

perfectly Adèle fulfills every expected grace; read it with quiet admiration, not parody.

Many of them were delicious in the role; one of them was the embodiment of every womanly grace and charm. If her husband did not adore her, he was a brute, deserving of death by slow torture. Her name was Adèle *[ah-DEL]* Ratignolle *[rah-tee-NYOL]*. There are no words to describe her save the old ones that have served so often to picture the bygone heroine of romance and the fair lady of our dreams. There was nothing subtle or hidden about her charms; her beauty was all there, flaming and apparent: the spun-gold hair that comb nor confining pin could restrain; the blue eyes that were like nothing but sapphires; two lips that pouted, that were so red one could only think of cherries or some other delicious crimson fruit in looking at them. She was growing a little stout, but it did not seem to detract an iota from the grace of every step, pose, gesture. One would not have wanted her white neck a mite less full or her beautiful arms more slender. Never were hands more exquisite than hers, and it was a joy to look at them when she

threaded her needle or adjusted her gold thimble to her taper middle finger as she sewed away on the little night-drawers or fashioned a bodice or a bib.

★ BEAT — An afternoon of sewing, nougat, and Creole frankness

The scene settles into domestic sociability: sewing on the porch, the box of bonbons, the pattern of impossibly armored infant-wear. Keep it warm and gently comic. Robert's embarrassed half-sentence about the lady who subsisted on nougat — then his sudden check when Edna's color rises — is a very quick human moment; don't rush it. The reflection on Creole society and its startling absence of prudery should be read with quiet scholarly gravity — it explains much of what Edna is learning to navigate.

Madame Ratignolle was very fond of Mrs. Pontellier, and often she took her sewing and went over to sit with her in the afternoons. She was sitting there the afternoon of the day the box arrived from New Orleans. She had possession of the rocker, and she was busily engaged in sewing upon a diminutive pair of night-drawers.

She had brought the pattern of the drawers for Mrs. Pontellier to cut out—a marvel of construction, fashioned to enclose a baby's body so effectually that only two small eyes might look out from the garment, like an Eskimo's. They were designed for winter wear,

when treacherous drafts came down chimneys and insidious currents of deadly cold found their way through key-holes.

Mrs. Pontellier's mind was quite at rest concerning the present material needs of her children, and she could not see the use of anticipating and making winter night garments the subject of her summer meditations. But she did not want to appear unamiable and uninterested, so she had brought forth newspapers, which she spread upon the floor of the gallery, and under Madame Ratignolle's directions she had cut a pattern of the impervious garment.

Robert was there, seated as he had been the Sunday before, and Mrs. Pontellier also occupied her former position on the upper step, leaning listlessly against the post. Beside her was a box of bonbons, which she held out at intervals to Madame Ratignolle.

That lady seemed at a loss to make a selection, but finally settled upon a stick of nougat, wondering if it were not too rich; whether it could possibly hurt her. Madame Ratignolle had been married seven years.

About every two years she had a baby. At that time she had three babies, and was beginning to think of a fourth one. She was always talking about her “condition.” Her “condition” was in no way apparent, and no one would have known a thing about it but for her persistence in making it the subject of conversation.

Robert started to reassure her, asserting that he had known a lady who had subsisted upon nougat during the entire—but seeing the color mount into Mrs. Pontellier's face he checked himself and changed the subject.

Mrs. Pontellier, though she had married a Creole, was not thoroughly at home in the society of Creoles; never before had she been thrown so intimately among them. There were only Creoles that summer at Lebrun *[luh-BRUHN]*'s. They all knew each other, and felt like one large family, among whom existed the most amicable relations. A characteristic which distinguished them and which impressed Mrs. Pontellier most forcibly was their entire absence of

prudery. Their freedom of expression was at first incomprehensible to her, though she had no difficulty in reconciling it with a lofty chastity which in the Creole woman seems to be inborn and unmistakable.

Never would Edna Pontellier forget the shock with which she heard Madame Ratignolle relating to old Monsieur Farival *[fah-ree-VAHL]* the harrowing story of one of her accouchements, withholding no intimate detail. She was growing accustomed to like shocks, but she could not keep the mounting color back from her cheeks. Oftener than once her coming had interrupted the droll story with which Robert was entertaining some amused group of married women.

A book had gone the rounds of the pension *[pahn-SYOHN]*. When it came her turn to read it, she did so with profound astonishment. She felt moved to read the book in secret and solitude, though none of the others had done so,—to hide it from view at the sound of approaching footsteps. It was openly criticised and freely discussed at table. Mrs. Pontellier gave over

being astonished, and concluded that wonders would never cease.

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