

THE AWAKENING

Chapter 5 — Narrator Script (Booth Ready)

by Kate Chopin · narrated by Mike Vendetti & Kathy Verduin

Edna Pontellier

Robert Lebrun

Adèle Ratignolle

NARRATOR

★ BEAT — Robert recounts his hopeless devotion to Adèle

The three are easy together on the porch — Madame Ratignolle sewing, Robert performing his comic self-pity for an audience of two. His seriocomic catalog of commands she gave him (“come; go; stand up; sit down”) should feel theatrical, confiding, half-earnest. Adèle's replies are arch and amused, not cutting. Chopin is at her most playfully ironic here — ride the lightness; don't let it tip into farce.

They formed a congenial group sitting there that summer afternoon—Madame Ratignolle [*rah-tee-NYOL*] sewing away, often stopping to relate a story or incident with much expressive gesture of her perfect hands; Robert and Mrs. Pontellier [*pon-tel-YAY*] sitting idle, exchanging occasional words, glances or smiles which indicated a certain advanced stage of intimacy and camaraderie.

He had lived in her shadow during the past month. No one thought anything of it. Many had predicted that Robert would devote himself to Mrs. Pontellier when

he arrived. Since the age of fifteen, which was eleven years before, Robert each summer at Grand Isle [*grand EYE-uhl*] had constituted himself the devoted attendant of some fair dame or damsel. Sometimes it was a young girl, again a widow; but as often as not it was some interesting married woman.

For two consecutive seasons he lived in the sunlight of Mademoiselle Duvigné [*doo-veen-YAY*]'s presence. But she died between summers; then Robert posed as an inconsolable, prostrating himself at the feet of Madame Ratignolle for whatever crumbs of sympathy and comfort she might be pleased to vouchsafe.

Mrs. Pontellier liked to sit and gaze at her fair companion as she might look upon a faultless Madonna.

ROBERT LEBRUN

Could any one fathom the cruelty beneath that fair exterior? She knew that I adored her once, and she let me adore her. It was 'Robert, come; go; stand up; sit down; do this; do that; see if the baby sleeps; my

thimble, please, that I left God knows where. Come and read Daudet to me while I sew.'

ADÈLE RATIGNOLLE

Par exemple! I never had to ask. You were always there under my feet, like a troublesome cat.

ROBERT LEBRUN

You mean like an adoring dog. And just as soon as Ratignolle appeared on the scene, then it was like a dog. 'Passez! Adieu! Allez vous-en!'

She interjoined, with a glance toward her husband, Alphonse [*al-FAWNS*], with excessive naïveté:

ADÈLE RATIGNOLLE

Perhaps I feared to make Alphonse jealous.

That made them all laugh. The right hand jealous of the left! The heart jealous of the soul! But for that matter, the Creole husband is never jealous; with him the gangrene passion is one which has become dwarfed by disuse.

Meanwhile Robert, addressing Mrs Pontellier, continued to tell of his one time hopeless passion for Madame Ratignolle; of sleepless nights, of consuming

flames till the very sea sizzled when he took his daily plunge. While the lady at the needle kept up a little running, contemptuous comment:

ADÈLE RATIGNOLLE

Blagueur—farceur—gros bête, va!

He never assumed this seriocomic tone when alone with Mrs. Pontellier. She never knew precisely what to make of it; at that moment it was impossible for her to guess how much of it was jest and what proportion was earnest. It was understood that he had often spoken words of love to Madame Ratignolle, without any thought of being taken seriously. Mrs. Pontellier was glad he had not assumed a similar role toward herself. It would have been unacceptable and annoying.

★ **BEAT** — Edna sketches Adèle; Robert rests his head on her arm

Shift to a quieter register: Edna with her brushes, absorbed, self-critical. Robert's twice-repeated intrusion — resting his head against her arm — is the chapter's physical and emotional pivot. Neither speaks about it; she repulses him quietly both times. Let the silence around that gesture land without comment. His French appreciation to Madame Ratignolle is a deflection. The sketch ends in failure and a decisive smear of paint.

Mrs. Pontellier had brought her sketching materials, which she sometimes dabbled with in an unprofessional way. She liked the dabbling. She felt in it satisfaction of a kind which no other employment afforded her.

She had long wished to try herself on Madame Ratignolle. Never had that lady seemed a more tempting subject than at that moment, seated there like some sensuous Madonna, with the gleam of the fading day enriching her splendid color.

Robert crossed over and seated himself upon the step below Mrs. Pontellier, that he might watch her work. She handled her brushes with a certain ease and freedom which came, not from long and close acquaintance with them, but from a natural aptitude. Robert followed her work with close attention, giving forth little ejaculatory expressions of appreciation in French, which he addressed to Madame Ratignolle.

ROBERT LEBRUN

Mais ce n'est pas mal! Elle s'y connaît, elle a de la force, oui.

During his oblivious attention he once quietly rested his head against Mrs. Pontellier's arm. As gently she repulsed him. Once again he repeated the offense. She could not but believe it to be thoughtlessness on his part; yet that was no reason she should submit to it. She did not remonstrate, except again to repulse him quietly but firmly. He offered no apology. The picture completed bore no resemblance to Madame Ratignolle. She was greatly disappointed to find that it did not look like her. But it was a fair enough piece of work, and in many respects satisfying.

Mrs. Pontellier evidently did not think so. After surveying the sketch critically she drew a broad smudge of paint across its surface, and crumpled the paper between her hands.

★ **BEAT — The children arrive; Adèle faints; they all go their ways**

The afternoon disperses in small domestic ceremonies: the boys raid the bonbon box, the sun drops, Adèle's faint arrives with its touch of theater (the rose tint never fading from her cheek). Close with the quiet exchange about bathing — Robert's insistence and Edna's acquiescence. The last line should feel like a door opening rather than a scene closing.

The youngsters came tumbling up the steps, the quadron following at the respectful distance which they required her to observe. Mrs. Pontellier made them carry her paints and things into the house. She sought to detain them for a little talk and some pleasantries. But they were greatly in earnest. They had only come to investigate the contents of the bonbon box. They accepted without murmuring what she chose to give them, each holding out two chubby hands scoop-like, in the vain hope that they might be filled; and then away they went.

The sun was low in the west, and the breeze soft and languorous that came up from the south, charged with the seductive odor of the sea. Children freshly befurrowed, were gathering for their games under the oaks. Their voices were high and penetrating.

Madame Ratignolle folded her sewing, placing thimble, scissors, and thread all neatly together in the roll, which she pinned securely. She complained of faintness. Mrs. Pontellier flew for the cologne water and a fan. She bathed Madame Ratignolle's face with

cologne, while Robert plied the fan with unnecessary vigor.

The spell was soon over, and Mrs. Pontellier could not help wondering if there were not a little imagination responsible for its origin, for the rose tint had never faded from her friend's face.

She stood watching the fair woman walk down the long line of galleries with the grace and majesty which queens are sometimes supposed to possess. Her little ones ran to meet her. Two of them clung about her white skirts, the third she took from its nurse and with a thousand endearments bore it along in her own fond, encircling arms. Though, as everybody well knew, the doctor had forbidden her to lift so much as a pin!

ROBERT LEBRUN

Are you going bathing?

It was not so much a question as a reminder.

EDNA PONTELLIER

Oh, no. I'm tired; I think not.

Her glance wandered from his face away toward the Gulf, whose sonorous murmur reached her like a loving but imperative entreaty.

ROBERT LEBRUN

Oh, come! You mustn't miss your bath. Come on.
The water must be delicious; it will not hurt you.
Come.

He reached up for her big, rough straw hat that hung on a peg outside the door, and put it on her head. They descended the steps, and walked away together toward the beach. The sun was low in the west and the breeze was soft and warm.

— *END OF CHAPTER 5* —