

# THE AWAKENING

## Chapter 8 — Narrator Script (Booth Ready)

by Kate Chopin · narrated by Mike Vendetti & Kathy Verduin

Robert Lebrun

Madame Lebrun

Adèle Ratignolle

### NARRATOR

#### ★ BEAT — Adèle warns Robert about Edna

*The scene begins in motion — Adèle and Robert walking slowly home — and escalates through a charged exchange that is more serious than it appears on the surface. Adèle’s warning is maternal and Creole-coded: she means it kindly, utterly. Robert’s angry burst should come as a surprise, even to him — there is real heat and perhaps real danger under his wounded pride. He simmers, pivots, tells gossip-stories, and the urgency dissolves. Let the reader feel that something has been narrowly avoided.*

“Do me a favor, Robert,” spoke the pretty woman at his side, almost as soon as she and Robert had started their slow, homeward way. She looked up in his face, leaning on his arm beneath the encircling shadow of the umbrella which he had lifted.

ROBERT LEBRUN

Granted; as many as you like,

he returned, glancing down into her eyes that were full of thoughtfulness and some speculation.

ADÈLE RATIGNOLLE

I only ask for one; let Mrs. Pontellier alone.

ROBERT LEBRUN

Tiens! Voilà que Madame Ratignolle est jalouse!

ADÈLE RATIGNOLLE

Nonsense! I'm in earnest; I mean what I say. Let Mrs. Pontellier alone.

ROBERT LEBRUN

Why?

he asked; himself growing serious at his companion's solicitation.

ADÈLE RATIGNOLLE

She is not one of us; she is not like us. She might make the unfortunate blunder of taking you seriously.

His face flushed with annoyance, and taking off his soft hat he began to beat it impatiently against his leg as he walked.

ROBERT LEBRUN

Why shouldn't she take me seriously? Am I a comedian, a clown, a jack-in-the-box? Why

shouldn't she? You Creoles! I have no patience with you! Am I always to be regarded as a feature of an amusing programme? I hope Mrs. Pontellier does take me seriously. I hope she has discernment enough to find in me something besides the blagueur. If I thought there was any doubt—

ADÈLE RATIGNOLLE

Oh, enough, Robert! You are not thinking of what you are saying. You speak with about as little reflection as we might expect from one of those children down there playing in the sand. If your attentions to any married women here were ever offered with any intention of being convincing, you would not be the gentleman we all know you to be, and you would be unfit to associate with the wives and daughters of the people who trust you.

Madame Ratignolle had spoken what she believed to be the law and the gospel. The young man shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

ROBERT LEBRUN

Oh! well! That isn't it. You ought to feel that such things are not flattering to say to a fellow.

ADÈLE RATIGNOLLE

Should our whole intercourse consist of an exchange of compliments? Ma foi!

ROBERT LEBRUN

It isn't pleasant to have a woman tell you—

he went on, unheedingly, but breaking off suddenly, invoking Arobin [*AR-oh-ban*]:

ROBERT LEBRUN

Now if I were like Arobin—you remember Alcée Arobin and that story of the consul's wife at Biloxi?

And he related the story of Alcée [*al-SAY*] Arobin and the consul's wife; and another about the tenor of the French Opera, who received letters which should never have been written; and still other stories, grave and gay, till Mrs. Pontellier and her possible propensity for taking young men seriously was apparently forgotten.

★ **BEAT — Robert begs pardon, turns self-deprecating, departs**

*The anger cools into self-aware irony. Robert's apology to Adèle is genuine, and his revised verdict — that it is he who should have been warned against taking himself seriously — is one of the most revealing lines he speaks. His offer of bouillon is tender and domestic. Keep this beat light and warm; the danger has passed for now.*

Madame Ratignolle, when they had regained her cottage, went in to take the hour's rest which she considered helpful. Before leaving her, Robert begged her pardon for the impatience—he called it rudeness—with which he had received her well-meant caution.

“You made one mistake, Adèle [*ah-DEL*],” he said, with a light smile:

ROBERT LEBRUN

there is no earthly possibility of Mrs. Pontellier ever taking me seriously. You should have warned me against taking myself seriously. Your advice might then have carried some weight and given me subject for some reflection. Au revoir. But you look tired. Would you like a cup of bouillon? Shall I stir you a toddy? Let me mix you a toddy with a drop of Angostura.

She acceded to the suggestion of bouillon, which was grateful and acceptable. He went himself to the kitchen, which was a building apart from the cottages and lying to the rear of the house. And he himself brought her the golden-brown bouillon, in a dainty Sèvres cup, with a flaky cracker or two on the saucer.

She thrust a bare, white arm from the curtain which shielded her open door, and received the cup from his hands. She told him he was a bon garçon, and she meant it. Robert thanked her and turned away toward “the house.”

★ **BEAT — Robert at his mother’s room; Victor and the rockaway**

*A tonal pivot into domestic comedy with an edge of underlying tension. The sewing-machine’s clatter punctuating the desultory conversation is one of Chopin’s finest small devices — keep the rhythm of the machine alive in your voice, the conversation fitful. Victor’s insolence — galloping away after ignoring the whistle and the waving handkerchief — should feel both funny and slightly ominous. Madame Lebrun’s fixed belief about the late Monsieur Lebrun belongs to gentle social comedy.*

The lovers were just entering the grounds of the pension. They were leaning toward each other as the water-oaks bent from the sea. There was not a particle of earth beneath their feet. Their heads might have

been turned upside-down, so absolutely did they tread upon blue ether. The lady in black, creeping behind them, looked a trifle paler and more jaded than usual. There was no sign of Mrs. Pontellier and the children. Robert scanned the distance for any such apparition. They would doubtless remain away till the dinner hour. The young man ascended to his mother's room. It was situated at the top of the house, made up of odd angles and a queer, sloping ceiling. Two broad dormer windows looked out toward the Gulf, and as far across it as a man's eye might reach. The furnishings of the room were light, cool, and practical.

Madame Lebrun [*luh-BRUHN*] was busily engaged at the sewing-machine. A little black girl sat on the floor, and with her hands worked the treadle of the machine. The Creole woman does not take any chances which may be avoided of imperiling her health.

Robert went over and seated himself on the broad sill of one of the dormer windows. He took a book from his pocket and began energetically to read it, judging by the precision and frequency with which he turned

the leaves. The sewing-machine made a resounding clatter in the room; it was of a ponderous, by-gone make. In the lulls, Robert and his mother exchanged bits of desultory conversation.

MADAME LEBRUN

Where is Mrs. Pontellier?

ROBERT LEBRUN

Down at the beach with the children.

MADAME LEBRUN

I promised to lend her the Goncourt. Don't forget to take it down when you go; it's there on the bookshelf over the small table.

Clatter, clatter, clatter, bang! for the next five or eight minutes.

ROBERT LEBRUN

Where is Victor going with the rockaway?

MADAME LEBRUN

The rockaway? Victor?

ROBERT LEBRUN

Yes; down there in front. He seems to be getting ready to drive away somewhere.

MADAME LEBRUN

Call him.

Clatter, clatter!

Robert uttered a shrill, piercing whistle which might have been heard back at the wharf.

ROBERT LEBRUN

He won't look up.

Madame Lebrun flew to the window. She called "Victor!" She waved a handkerchief and called again. The young fellow below got into the vehicle and started the horse off at a gallop.

Madame Lebrun went back to the machine, crimson with annoyance. Victor was the younger son and brother—a tête montée, with a temper which invited violence and a will which no ax could break.

ROBERT LEBRUN

Whenever you say the word I'm ready to thrash any amount of reason into him that he's able to hold.

MADAME LEBRUN

If your father had only lived!

Clatter, clatter, clatter, clatter, bang! It was a fixed belief with Madame Lebrun that the conduct of the universe and all things pertaining thereto would have been manifestly of a more intelligent and higher order had not Monsieur Lebrun been removed to other spheres during the early years of their married life.

ROBERT LEBRUN

What do you hear from Montel?

Montel was a middle-aged gentleman whose vain ambition and desire for the past twenty years had been to fill the void which Monsieur Lebrun's taking off had left in the Lebrun household. Clatter, clatter, bang, clatter!

MADAME LEBRUN

I have a letter somewhere. He says to tell you he will be in Vera Cruz the beginning of next month,— and if you still have the intention of joining him—

ROBERT LEBRUN

Why didn't you tell me so before, mother? You know I wanted—

MADAME LEBRUN

Do you see Mrs. Pontellier starting back with the children? She will be in late to luncheon again. She never starts to get ready for luncheon till the last minute. Where are you going?

ROBERT LEBRUN

Where did you say the Goncourt was?

— END OF CHAPTER 8 —