

THE AWAKENING

Chapter 10 — Narrator Script (Booth Ready)

by Kate Chopin · narrated by Mike Vendetti & Kathy Verduin

Léonce Pontellier

Edna Pontellier

Robert Lebrun

Madame Lebrun

NARRATOR

★ BEAT — The procession to the beach under the mystic moon

The chapter opens in the wake of Reisz's music — the crowd streaming toward the beach feels dreamlike, carried on a shared current. The night description is one of Chopin's most beautiful: read it slowly, letting each sensory layer land. The white moonlight, the sea smells, the distant band at Klein's — this is the world between waking and sleep. Robert lingering behind with the lovers, and Edna noticing his absence, should feel pointed but not over-stressed. The sun simile — missing him like missing the sun on a cloudy day — is the chapter's first quiet blow.

At all events Robert proposed it, and there was not a dissenting voice. There was not one but was ready to follow when he led the way. He did not lead the way, however, he directed the way; and he himself loitered behind with the lovers, who had betrayed a disposition to linger and hold themselves apart. He walked between them, whether with malicious or mischievous intent was not wholly clear, even to himself.

The Pontellier [*pon-tel-YAY*]s and Ratignolles [*rah-tee-NYOLZ*] walked ahead; the women leaning upon the arms of their husbands. Edna could hear Robert's voice behind them, and could sometimes hear what he said. She wondered why he did not join them. It was unlike him not to. Of late he had sometimes held away from her for an entire day, redoubling his devotion upon the next and the next, as though to make up for hours that had been lost. She missed him the days when some pretext served to take him away from her, just as one misses the sun on a cloudy day without having thought much about the sun when it was shining.

The people walked in little groups toward the beach. They talked and laughed; some of them sang. There was a band playing down at Klein's [*KLYNZ*] hotel, and the strains reached them faintly, tempered by the distance. There were strange, rare odors abroad—a tangle of the sea smell and of weeds and damp, new-plowed earth, mingled with the heavy perfume of a field of white blossoms somewhere near. But the night sat lightly upon the sea and the land. There was no

weight of darkness; there were no shadows. The white light of the moon had fallen upon the world like the mystery and the softness of sleep.

Most of them walked into the water as though into a native element. The sea was quiet now, and swelled lazily in broad billows that melted into one another and did not break except upon the beach in little foamy crests that coiled back like slow, white serpents.

★ **BEAT — Edna swims — terror and exultation in the dark water**

The central event of the chapter and one of the novel's defining moments: Edna, who has been afraid all summer, suddenly swims alone. The shift from clutching child to confident stroke should feel electric — read it with growing energy. Then the daring, the recklessness, the desire to swim where no woman had swum before: don't shout it, but let the forward movement carry. The vision of death is sudden and cold — drop your voice for it. Her recovery and return are swift; she says almost nothing. The brief exchange with Pontellier about 'perishing out there' is dry, domestic, slightly deaf.

Edna had attempted all summer to learn to swim. She had received instructions from both the men and women; in some instances from the children. Robert had pursued a system of lessons almost daily; and he was nearly at the point of discouragement in realizing

the futility of his efforts. A certain ungovernable dread hung about her when in the water, unless there was a hand near by that might reach out and reassure her.

But that night she was like the little tottering, stumbling, clutching child, who of a sudden realizes its powers, and walks for the first time alone, boldly and with over-confidence. She could have shouted for joy. She did shout for joy, as with a sweeping stroke or two she lifted her body to the surface of the water.

A feeling of exultation overtook her, as if some power of significant import had been given her to control the working of her body and her soul. She grew daring and reckless, overestimating her strength. She wanted to swim far out, where no woman had swum before.

Her unlooked-for achievement was the subject of wonder, applause, and admiration. Each one congratulated himself that his special teachings had accomplished this desired end.

“How easy it is!” she thought.

EDNA PONTELLIER

It is nothing. Why did I not discover before that it was nothing. Think of the time I have lost splashing about like a baby!

She would not join the groups in their sports and bouts, but intoxicated with her newly conquered power, she swam out alone.

She turned her face seaward to gather in an impression of space and solitude, which the vast expanse of water, meeting and melting with the moonlit sky, conveyed to her excited fancy. As she swam she seemed to be reaching out for the unlimited in which to lose herself.

Once she turned and looked toward the shore, toward the people she had left there. She had not gone any great distance—that is, what would have been a great distance for an experienced swimmer. But to her unaccustomed vision the stretch of water behind her assumed the aspect of a barrier which her unaided strength would never be able to overcome.

A quick vision of death smote her soul, and for a second of time appalled and enfeebled her senses. But by an effort she rallied her staggering faculties and managed to regain the land.

She made no mention of her encounter with death and her flash of terror, except to say to her husband:

EDNA PONTELLIER

I thought I should have perished out there alone.

LÉONCE PONTELLIER

You were not so very far, my dear; I was watching you,

he told her.

Edna went at once to the bath-house, and she had put on her dry clothes and was ready to return home before the others had left the water. She started to walk away alone. They all called to her and shouted to her. She waved a dissenting hand, and went on, paying no further heed to their renewed cries which sought to detain her.

MADAME LEBRUN

Sometimes I am tempted to think that Mrs.
Pontellier is capricious,

said Madame Lebrun, who was amusing herself immensely and feared that Edna's abrupt departure might put an end to the pleasure.

LÉONCE PONTELLIER

I know she is; sometimes, not often.

★ **BEAT — Robert overtakes her — the spirit of the twenty-eighth of August**

This long, intimate exchange between Edna and Robert walking through the moonlit night is the chapter's emotional center. Edna's monologue — exhausted, porous, barely coherent — should be read with a hushed fervor, as if she is thinking aloud rather than speaking to him. Robert's legend of the Gulf spirit should be warm and mysterious, not theatrical; he is half-earnest. When Edna says 'Don't banter me' her wound is real and delicate — read it quietly. End in the hammock: the moonlight passing over Robert's figure, the silence, the first-felt throbbings of desire. These are Chopin's most charged words; do not push them. Let the prose carry the weight.

Edna had not traversed a quarter of the distance on her way home before she was overtaken by Robert.

EDNA PONTELLIER

Did you think I was afraid?

she asked him, without a shade of annoyance.

ROBERT LEBRUN

No; I knew you weren't afraid.

EDNA PONTELLIER

Then why did you come? Why didn't you stay out there with the others?

ROBERT LEBRUN

I never thought of it.

EDNA PONTELLIER

Thought of what?

ROBERT LEBRUN

Of anything. What difference does it make?

EDNA PONTELLIER

I'm very tired,

she uttered, complainingly.

ROBERT LEBRUN

I know you are.

EDNA PONTELLIER

You don't know anything about it. Why should you know? I never was so exhausted in my life. But it isn't unpleasant. A thousand emotions have swept through me to-night. I don't comprehend half of them. Don't mind what I'm saying; I am just

thinking aloud. I wonder if I shall ever be stirred again as Mademoiselle Reisz's playing moved me to-night. I wonder if any night on earth will ever again be like this one. It is like a night in a dream. The people about me are like some uncanny, half-human beings. There must be spirits abroad to-night.

ROBERT LEBRUN

There are. Didn't you know this was the twenty-eighth of August?

EDNA PONTELLIER

The twenty-eighth of August?

ROBERT LEBRUN

Yes. On the twenty-eighth of August, at the hour of midnight, and if the moon is shining—the moon must be shining—a spirit that has haunted these shores for ages rises up from the Gulf. With its own penetrating vision the spirit seeks some one mortal worthy to hold him company, worthy of being exalted for a few hours into realms of the semi-celestials. His search has always hitherto been fruitless, and he has sunk back, disheartened, into

the sea. But to-night he found Mrs. Pontellier. Perhaps he will never wholly release her from the spell. Perhaps she will never again suffer a poor, unworthy earthling to walk in the shadow of her divine presence.

EDNA PONTELLIER

Don't banter me,

she said, wounded at what appeared to be his flippancy. He did not mind the entreaty, but the tone with its delicate note of pathos was like a reproach. He could not explain; he could not tell her that he had penetrated her mood and understood. He said nothing except to offer her his arm, for, by her own admission, she was exhausted. She had been walking alone with her arms hanging limp, letting her white skirts trail along the dewy path. She took his arm, but she did not lean upon it. She let her hand lie listlessly, as though her thoughts were elsewhere—somewhere in advance of her body, and she was striving to overtake them.

Robert assisted her into the hammock which swung from the post before her door out to the trunk of a tree.

ROBERT LEBRUN

Will you stay out here and wait for Mr. Pontellier?

EDNA PONTELLIER

I'll stay out here. Good-night.

ROBERT LEBRUN

Shall I get you a pillow?

EDNA PONTELLIER

There's one here,

she said, feeling about, for they were in the shadow.

ROBERT LEBRUN

It must be soiled; the children have been tumbling it about.

EDNA PONTELLIER

No matter.

And having discovered the pillow, she adjusted it beneath her head. She extended herself in the hammock with a deep breath of relief. She was not a supercilious or an over-dainty woman. She was not

much given to reclining in the hammock, and when she did so it was with no cat-like suggestion of voluptuous ease, but with a beneficent repose which seemed to invade her whole body.

ROBERT LEBRUN

Shall I stay with you till Mr. Pontellier comes?

asked Robert, seating himself on the outer edge of one of the steps and taking hold of the hammock rope which was fastened to the post.

EDNA PONTELLIER

If you wish. Don't swing the hammock. Will you get my white shawl which I left on the window-sill over at the house?

ROBERT LEBRUN

Are you chilly?

EDNA PONTELLIER

No; but I shall be presently.

ROBERT LEBRUN

Presently? Do you know what time it is? How long are you going to stay out here?

EDNA PONTELLIER

I don't know. Will you get the shawl?

ROBERT LEBRUN

Of course I will,

he said, rising. He went over to the house, walking along the grass. She watched his figure pass in and out of the strips of moonlight. It was past midnight. It was very quiet.

When he returned with the shawl she took it and kept it in her hand. She did not put it around her.

ROBERT LEBRUN

Did you say I should stay till Mr. Pontellier came back?

EDNA PONTELLIER

I said you might if you wished to.

He seated himself again and rolled a cigarette, which he smoked in silence. Neither did Mrs. Pontellier speak. No multitude of words could have been more significant than those moments of silence, or more pregnant with the first-felt throbbings of desire.

When the voices of the bathers were heard approaching, Robert said good-night. She did not answer him. He thought she was asleep. Again she watched his figure pass in and out of the strips of moonlight as he walked away.

— *END OF CHAPTER 10* —