

THE AWAKENING

Chapter 13 — Narrator Script (Booth Ready)

by Kate Chopin · narrated by Mike Vendetti & Kathy Verduin

Edna Pontellier

Robert Lebrun

NARRATOR

★ BEAT — Edna leaves the church and is led to Madame Antoine's

Begin in bodily discomfort — the church is oppressive, the lights sway, Edna needs air immediately. Robert's solicitude is active and practical here; he leads rather than woos. The village beyond the church should feel hushed, sun-struck, and Sabbath-still — 'it must always have been God's day' is the key note. Madame Antoine's hospitality enters like shade and cool water. Keep the movement simple and restorative, as if the chapter itself is exhaling.

A feeling of oppression and drowsiness overcame Edna during the service. Her head began to ache, and the lights on the altar swayed before her eyes.

Another time she might have made an effort to regain her composure; but her one thought was to quit the stifling atmosphere of the church and reach the open air. She arose, climbing over Robert's feet with a muttered apology. Old Monsieur Farival, flurried, curious, stood up, but upon seeing that Robert had followed Mrs. Pontellier, he sank back into his seat. He

whispered an anxious inquiry of the lady in black, who did not notice him or reply, but kept her eyes fastened upon the pages of her velvet prayer-book.

EDNA PONTELLIER

I felt giddy and almost overcome. I couldn't have stayed through the service.

They were outside in the shadow of the church. Robert was full of solicitude.

ROBERT LEBRUN

It was folly to have thought of going in the first place, let alone staying. Come over to Madame Antoine's; you can rest there.

He took her arm and led her away, looking anxiously and continuously down into her face.

How still it was, with only the voice of the sea whispering through the reeds that grew in the salt-water pools! The long line of little gray, weather-beaten houses nestled peacefully among the orange trees. It must always have been God's day on that low, drowsy island, Edna thought. They stopped, leaning over a jagged fence made of sea-drift, to ask for water.

A youth, a mild-faced Acadian, was drawing water from the cistern, which was nothing more than a rusty buoy, with an opening on one side, sunk in the ground. The water which the youth handed to them in a tin pail was not cold to taste, but it was cool to her heated face, and it greatly revived and refreshed her.

Madame Antoine [*ahn-TWAHN*]'s cot was at the far end of the village. She welcomed them with all the native hospitality, as she would have opened her door to let the sunlight in. She was fat, and walked heavily and clumsily across the floor. She could speak no English, but when Robert made her understand that the lady who accompanied him was ill and desired to rest, she was all eagerness to make Edna feel at home and to dispose of her comfortably.

The whole place was immaculately clean, and the big, four-posted bed, snow-white, invited one to repose. It stood in a small side room which looked out across a narrow grass plot toward the shed, where there was a disabled boat lying keel upward.

★ **BEAT — The long sleep — a strange bed and a changed afternoon**

This entire beat should feel drowsy, suspended, and deeply sensuous without strain. The details of Edna undressing, stretching, touching her own arms, falling asleep with her hands clasped above her head — read them plainly and quietly. The sleep itself is layered: first half-waking sounds, then a deeper oblivion, then awakening into a transformed afternoon. Robert under the shed, reading against the overturned boat, is an image of watchful constancy. The little gestures of toilette — the poudre de riz, the distorted mirror, the glowing face — should feel intimate and fresh, like she is returning to herself altered.

Madame Antoine had not gone to mass. Her son Tonie had, but she supposed he would soon be back, and she invited Robert to be seated and wait for him. But he went and sat outside the door and smoked. Madame Antoine busied herself in the large front room preparing dinner. She was boiling mullets over a few red coals in the huge fireplace.

Edna, left alone in the little side room, loosened her clothes, removing the greater part of them. She bathed her face, her neck and arms in the basin that stood between the windows. She took off her shoes and stockings and stretched herself in the very center of the high, white bed. How luxurious it felt to rest thus in a strange, quaint bed, with its sweet country odor

of laurel lingering about the sheets and mattress! She stretched her strong limbs that ached a little. She ran her fingers through her loosened hair for a while. She looked at her round arms as she held them straight up and rubbed them one after the other, observing closely, as if it were something she saw for the first time, the fine, firm quality and texture of her flesh. She clasped her hands easily above her head, and it was thus she fell asleep.

She slept lightly at first, half awake and drowsily attentive to the things about her. She could hear Madame Antoine's heavy, scraping tread as she walked back and forth on the sanded floor. Some chickens were clucking outside the windows, scratching for bits of gravel in the grass. Later she half heard the voices of Robert and Tonie talking under the shed. She did not stir. Even her eyelids rested numb and heavily over her sleepy eyes. The voices went on—Tonie's slow, Acadian drawl, Robert's quick, soft, smooth French. She understood French imperfectly unless directly addressed, and the voices

were only part of the other drowsy, muffled sounds lulling her senses.

When Edna awoke it was with the conviction that she had slept long and soundly. The voices were hushed under the shed. Madame Antoine's step was no longer to be heard in the adjoining room. Even the chickens had gone elsewhere to scratch and cluck. The mosquito bar was drawn over her; the old woman had come in while she slept and let down the bar. Edna arose quietly from the bed, and looking between the curtains of the window, she saw by the slanting rays of the sun that the afternoon was far advanced. Robert was out there under the shed, reclining in the shade against the sloping keel of the overturned boat. He was reading from a book. Tonie [*TOH-nee*] was no longer with him. She wondered what had become of the rest of the party. She peeped out at him two or three times as she stood washing herself in the little basin between the windows.

Madame Antoine had laid some coarse, clean towels upon a chair, and had placed a box of poudre de riz

within easy reach. Edna dabbed the powder upon her nose and cheeks as she looked at herself closely in the little distorted mirror which hung on the wall above the basin. Her eyes were bright and wide awake and her face glowed.

★ **BEAT — Bread, wine, orange trees, and Baratarian legends**

A long afternoon extending toward evening: appetite, play, delay, and enchantment. Edna's hunger and Robert's pleasure in feeding her give the domestic scene a tender ease; keep it light and companionable. Then slow into the orange-tree waiting and the sunset turning the sky to copper and gold. Madame Antoine's storytelling should feel rich, earthy, and half-supernatural, as if the island itself is speaking through her. The final sentence — phantom ships, misty spirit forms, the red lateen sail — must float. End in full dreamlight.

When she had completed her toilet she walked into the adjoining room. She was very hungry. No one was there. But there was a cloth spread upon the table that stood against the wall, and a cover was laid for one, with a crusty brown loaf and a bottle of wine beside the plate. Edna bit a piece from the brown loaf, tearing it with her strong, white teeth. She poured some of the wine into the glass and drank it down. Then she went softly out of doors, and plucking an

orange from the low-hanging bough of a tree, threw it at Robert, who did not know she was awake and up.

An illumination broke over his whole face when he saw her and joined her under the orange tree.

EDNA PONTELLIER

How many years have I slept? The whole island seems changed. A new race of beings must have sprung up, leaving only you and me as past relics.

How many ages ago did Madame Antoine and Tonie die? and when did our people from Grand Isle disappear from the earth?

He familiarly adjusted a ruffle upon her shoulder.

ROBERT LEBRUN

You have slept precisely one hundred years. I was left here to guard your slumbers; and for one hundred years I have been out under the shed reading a book. The only evil I couldn't prevent was to keep a broiled fowl from drying up.

EDNA PONTELLIER

If it has turned to stone, still will I eat it. But really, what has become of Monsieur Farival and the others?

ROBERT LEBRUN

Gone hours ago. When they found that you were sleeping they thought it best not to awake you. Any way, I wouldn't have let them. What was I here for?

EDNA PONTELLIER

I wonder if Léonce will be uneasy!

she speculated, as she seated herself at table.

ROBERT LEBRUN

Of course not; he knows you are with me,

Robert replied, as he busied himself among sundry pans and covered dishes which had been left standing on the hearth.

EDNA PONTELLIER

Where are Madame Antoine and her son?

ROBERT LEBRUN

Gone to Vespers, and to visit some friends, I believe.
I am to take you back in Tonie's boat whenever you
are ready to go.

He stirred the smoldering ashes till the broiled fowl began to sizzle afresh. He served her with no mean repast, dripping the coffee anew and sharing it with her. Madame Antoine had cooked little else than the mullets, but while Edna slept Robert had foraged the island. He was childishly gratified to discover her appetite, and to see the relish with which she ate the food which he had procured for her.

EDNA PONTELLIER

Shall we go right away?

she asked, after draining her glass and brushing together the crumbs of the crusty loaf.

ROBERT LEBRUN

The sun isn't as low as it will be in two hours,
he answered.

EDNA PONTELLIER

The sun will be gone in two hours.

ROBERT LEBRUN

Well, let it go; who cares!

They waited a good while under the orange trees, till Madame Antoine came back, panting, waddling, with a thousand apologies to explain her absence. Tonie did not dare to return. He was shy, and would not willingly face any woman except his mother.

It was very pleasant to stay there under the orange trees, while the sun dipped lower and lower, turning the western sky to flaming copper and gold. The shadows lengthened and crept out like stealthy, grotesque monsters across the grass.

Edna and Robert both sat upon the ground—that is, he lay upon the ground beside her, occasionally picking at the hem of her muslin gown.

Madame Antoine seated her fat body, broad and squat, upon a bench beside the door. She had been talking all the afternoon, and had wound herself up to the storytelling pitch.

And what stories she told them! But twice in her life she had left the Chênierre Caminada, and then for the briefest span. All her years she had squatted and waddled there upon the island, gathering legends of the Baratarians [*bah-rah-TAIR-ee-ans*] and the sea. The night came on, with the moon to lighten it. Edna could hear the whispering voices of dead men and the click of muffled gold.

When she and Robert stepped into Tonie's boat, with the red lateen sail, misty spirit forms were prowling in the shadows and among the reeds, and upon the water were phantom ships, speeding to cover.

— *END OF CHAPTER 13* —