

THE AWAKENING

Chapter 15 — Narrator Script (Booth Ready)

by Kate Chopin · narrated by Mike Vendetti & Kathy Verduin

Edna Pontellier

Robert Lebrun

Madame Lebrun

Adèle Ratignolle

Monsieur

Farival

NARRATOR

★ BEAT — The dinner table erupts — Robert is leaving for Mexico

Open with a crowded, noisy scene — voices overlapping, the energy chaotic. Edna enters late, flushed and lovely, and is ambushed by news she clearly didn't expect. The bewilderment on her face should feel exposed, almost naked — she doesn't bother to hide it. Robert's lifted eyebrows and uneasy glance across the table carry enormous unspoken weight; read that exchange quietly, as a pause inside the noise. The table voices — 'To-night!' 'This very evening!' — should be quick, staccato, almost comic, before Edna's own voice cuts through with 'Impossible!'

When Edna [ED-nuh] entered the dining-room one evening a little late, as was her habit, an unusually animated conversation seemed to be going on. Several persons were talking at once, and Victor's voice was predominating, even over that of his mother. Edna had returned late from her bath, had dressed in some haste, and her face was flushed. Her head, set off by her dainty white gown, suggested a rich, rare blossom. She took her seat at table between old Monsieur

Farival [*fah-ree-VAHL*] and Madame Ratignolle [*rah-tee-NYOL*].

As she seated herself and was about to begin to eat her soup, which had been served when she entered the room, several persons informed her simultaneously that Robert was going to Mexico. She laid her spoon down and looked about her bewildered. He had been with her, reading to her all the morning, and had never even mentioned such a place as Mexico. She had not seen him during the afternoon; she had heard some one say he was at the house, upstairs with his mother. This she had thought nothing of, though she was surprised when he did not join her later in the afternoon, when she went down to the beach.

She looked across at him, where he sat beside Madame Lebrun [*luh-BRUHN*], who presided. Edna's face was a blank picture of bewilderment, which she never thought of disguising. He lifted his eyebrows with the pretext of a smile as he returned her glance. He looked embarrassed and uneasy.

“When is he going?” she asked of everybody in general, as if Robert were not there to answer for himself.

“To-night!” “This very evening!” “Did you ever!” “What possesses him!” were some of the replies she gathered, uttered simultaneously in French and English.

EDNA PONTELLIER

Impossible! How can a person start off from Grand Isle to Mexico at a moment’s notice, as if he were going over to Klein’s or to the wharf or down to the beach?

ROBERT LEBRUN

I said all along I was going to Mexico; I’ve been saying so for years!

cried Robert, in an excited and irritable tone, with the air of a man defending himself against a swarm of stinging insects.

Madame Lebrun knocked on the table with her knife handle.

MADAME LEBRUN

Please let Robert explain why he is going, and why he is going to-night. Really, this table is getting to be more and more like Bedlam every day, with everybody talking at once. Sometimes—I hope God will forgive me—but positively, sometimes I wish Victor would lose the power of speech.

Victor laughed sardonically as he thanked his mother for her holy wish, of which he failed to see the benefit to anybody, except that it might afford her a more ample opportunity and license to talk herself.

Monsieur Farival thought that Victor should have been taken out in mid-ocean in his earliest youth and drowned. Victor thought there would be more logic in thus disposing of old people with an established claim for making themselves universally obnoxious.

Madame Lebrun grew a trifle hysterical; Robert called his brother some sharp, hard names.

★ **BEAT — Robert explains; the table gossips about Mexico**

The chaos subsides just enough for Robert to explain himself— but he speaks to Edna more than to anyone else, and that directness should read as intimate and slightly guilty. Monsieur Farival's cross-examination is almost comic, nagging and

relentless; Robert's lofty, theatrical reply ('At four o'clock this afternoon, Monsieur Farival') lands with dry, performative dignity. Then Chopin pans the table: the lovers whispering, the lady in black with her prayer-beads, Madame Ratignolle's anxious tamale story. Read these as a kind of ironic chorus — everyone talking about Mexico except the two people for whom Mexico actually means something.

ROBERT LEBRUN

There's nothing much to explain, mother,

he said; though he explained, nevertheless—looking chiefly at Edna—that he could only meet the gentleman whom he intended to join at Vera Cruz by taking such and such a steamer, which left New Orleans on such a day; that Beudelet [*boh-duh-LAY*] was going out with his lugger-load of vegetables that night, which gave him an opportunity of reaching the city and making his vessel in time.

MONSIEUR FARIVAL

But when did you make up your mind to all this?

ROBERT LEBRUN

This afternoon,

returned Robert, with a shade of annoyance.

MONSIEUR FARIVAL

At what time this afternoon?

persisted the old gentleman, with nagging determination, as if he were cross-questioning a criminal in a court of justice.

ROBERT LEBRUN

At four o'clock this afternoon, Monsieur Farival,

Robert replied, in a high voice and with a lofty air, which reminded Edna of some gentleman on the stage.

She had forced herself to eat most of her soup, and now she was picking the flaky bits of a court bouillon with her fork.

The lovers were profiting by the general conversation on Mexico to speak in whispers of matters which they rightly considered were interesting to no one but themselves. The lady in black had once received a pair of prayer-beads of curious workmanship from Mexico, with very special indulgence attached to them, but she had never been able to ascertain whether the indulgence extended outside the Mexican border. Father Fochel of the Cathedral had attempted to explain it; but he had not done so to her

satisfaction. And she begged that Robert would interest himself, and discover, if possible, whether she was entitled to the indulgence accompanying the remarkably curious Mexican prayer-beads.

Madame Ratignolle hoped that Robert would exercise extreme caution in dealing with the Mexicans, who, she considered, were a treacherous people, unscrupulous and revengeful. She trusted she did them no injustice in thus condemning them as a race. She had known personally but one Mexican, who made and sold excellent tamales, and whom she would have trusted implicitly, so soft-spoken was he. One day he was arrested for stabbing his wife. She never knew whether he had been hanged or not.

Victor had grown hilarious, and was attempting to tell an anecdote about a Mexican girl who served chocolate one winter in a restaurant in Dauphine Street. No one would listen to him but old Monsieur Farival, who went into convulsions over the droll story.

Edna wondered if they had all gone mad, to be talking and clamoring at that rate. She herself could think of nothing to say about Mexico or the Mexicans.

EDNA PONTELLIER

At what time do you leave?

ROBERT LEBRUN

At ten. Beaudalet wants to wait for the moon.

EDNA PONTELLIER

Are you all ready to go?

ROBERT LEBRUN

Quite ready. I shall only take a hand-bag, and shall pack my trunk in the city.

He turned to answer some question put to him by his mother, and Edna, having finished her black coffee, left the table.

★ **BEAT — Edna retreats — refuses to join the farewell**

A quiet, tightly wound beat. Edna channels her agitation into purposeless domestic busyness — rearranging clothes, combing her hair with unusual energy, putting the boys to bed. Read these actions with a controlled, almost mechanical rhythm; she is doing anything to avoid feeling. Madame Ratignolle's gentle coaxing should be warm but ineffectual, and Edna's 'No' is quiet and slightly sullen — not dramatic, just shut. The peignoir going on and coming off is a small, telling detail of Edna's inability to decide.

She went directly to her room. The little cottage was close and stuffy after leaving the outer air. But she did not mind; there appeared to be a hundred different things demanding her attention indoors. She began to set the toilet-stand to rights, grumbling at the negligence of the quadroon [*KWAH-droon*], who was in the adjoining room putting the children to bed. She gathered together stray garments that were hanging on the backs of chairs, and put each where it belonged in closet or bureau drawer. She changed her gown for a more comfortable and commodious wrapper. She rearranged her hair, combing and brushing it with unusual energy. Then she went in and assisted the quadroon in getting the boys to bed.

They were very playful and inclined to talk—to do anything but lie quiet and go to sleep. Edna sent the quadroon away to her supper and told her she need not return. Then she sat and told the children a story. Instead of soothing it excited them, and added to their wakefulness. She left them in heated argument,

speculating about the conclusion of the tale which their mother promised to finish the following night.

The little black girl came in to say that Madame Lebrun would like to have Mrs. Pontellier [*pon-tel-YAY*] go and sit with them over at the house till Mr. Robert went away. Edna returned answer that she had already undressed, that she did not feel quite well, but perhaps she would go over to the house later. She started to dress again, and got as far advanced as to remove her peignoir [*pay-NWAHR*]. But changing her mind once more she resumed the peignoir, and went outside and sat down before her door. She was overheated and irritable, and fanned herself energetically for a while. Madame Ratignolle came down to discover what was the matter.

EDNA PONTELLIER

All that noise and confusion at the table must have upset me, and moreover, I hate shocks and surprises. The idea of Robert starting off in such a ridiculously sudden and dramatic way! As if it were

a matter of life and death! Never saying a word about it all morning when he was with me.

ADÈLE RATIGNOLLE

Yes, I think it was showing us all—you especially—very little consideration. It wouldn't have surprised me in any of the others; those Lebruns are all given to heroics. But I must say I should never have expected such a thing from Robert. Are you not coming down? Come on, dear; it doesn't look friendly.

EDNA PONTELLIER

No. I can't go to the trouble of dressing again; I don't feel like it.

ADÈLE RATIGNOLLE

You needn't dress; you look all right; fasten a belt around your waist. Just look at me!

EDNA PONTELLIER

No; but you go on. Madame Lebrun might be offended if we both stayed away.

Madame Ratignolle kissed Edna good-night, and went away, being in truth rather desirous of joining in the

general and animated conversation which was still in progress concerning Mexico and the Mexicans.

★ **BEAT — Robert comes to her door — the charged farewell**

The emotional center of the chapter. The scene is dark, intimate, and almost unbearably restrained. The match flaring and dying — ‘emphasized the darkness for a while’ — is one of Chopin’s great images; slow down for it. Robert is nervous, fidgeting with his hat, deflecting with small talk about the heat. Their dialogue has the weight of everything unsaid beneath every line. Edna’s speech — ‘I’ve grown used to seeing you, to having you with me all the time’ — should be read with quiet intensity, not melodrama. Robert’s half-finished sentence (‘Perhaps that’s the—’) is the pivot; read it as if he physically stops himself. His final ‘I will, thank you. Good-by.’ is devastatingly flat — make the narrator’s comment land: ‘How unlike Robert.’

Somewhat later Robert came up, carrying his handbag.

ROBERT LEBRUN

Aren’t you feeling well?

EDNA PONTELLIER

Oh, well enough. Are you going right away?

He lit a match and looked at his watch. “In twenty minutes,” he said. The sudden and brief flare of the match emphasized the darkness for a while. He sat down upon a stool which the children had left out on the porch.

EDNA PONTELLIER

Get a chair,

said Edna.

ROBERT LEBRUN

This will do,

he replied. He put on his soft hat and nervously took it off again, and wiping his face with his handkerchief, complained of the heat.

EDNA PONTELLIER

Take the fan,

said Edna, offering it to him.

ROBERT LEBRUN

Oh, no! Thank you. It does no good; you have to stop fanning some time, and feel all the more uncomfortable afterward.

EDNA PONTELLIER

That's one of the ridiculous things which men always say. I have never known one to speak otherwise of fanning. How long will you be gone?

ROBERT LEBRUN

Forever, perhaps. I don't know. It depends upon a good many things.

EDNA PONTELLIER

Well, in case it shouldn't be forever, how long will it be?

ROBERT LEBRUN

I don't know.

EDNA PONTELLIER

This seems to me perfectly preposterous and uncalled for. I don't like it. I don't understand your motive for silence and mystery, never saying a word to me about it this morning.

He remained silent, not offering to defend himself. He only said, after a moment:

ROBERT LEBRUN

Don't part from me in any ill humor. I never knew you to be out of patience with me before.

EDNA PONTELLIER

I don't want to part in any ill humor. But can't you understand? I've grown used to seeing you, to having you with me all the time, and your action

seems unfriendly, even unkind. You don't even offer an excuse for it. Why, I was planning to be together, thinking of how pleasant it would be to see you in the city next winter.

“So was I,” he blurted. “Perhaps that’s the—” He stood up suddenly and held out his hand.

ROBERT LEBRUN

Good-by, my dear Mrs. Pontellier; good-by. You won't—I hope you won't completely forget me.

She clung to his hand, striving to detain him.

EDNA PONTELLIER

Write to me when you get there, won't you, Robert?

she entreated.

ROBERT LEBRUN

I will, thank you. Good-by.

How unlike Robert! The merest acquaintance would have said something more emphatic than “I will, thank you; good-by,” to such a request.

He had evidently already taken leave of the people over at the house, for he descended the steps and

went to join Beaudalet, who was out there with an oar across his shoulder waiting for Robert. They walked away in the darkness. She could only hear Beaudalet's voice; Robert had apparently not even spoken a word of greeting to his companion.

★ **BEAT — Edna alone — the recognition of infatuation**

The chapter's emotional resolution, and one of the novel's great moments of self-knowledge. Let it breathe. Edna biting her handkerchief, striving to hold back tears she can barely name — read with contained anguish, not weeping. The final paragraph is dense and interior; let each clause arrive separately, with deliberate weight. 'The present alone was significant; was hers, to torture her' — that clause is the landing place. Don't rush past it.

Edna bit her handkerchief convulsively, striving to hold back and to hide, even from herself as she would have hidden from another, the emotion which was troubling—tearing—her. Her eyes were brimming with tears.

For the first time she recognized the symptoms of infatuation which she had felt incipiently as a child, as a girl in her earliest teens, and later as a young woman. The recognition did not lessen the reality, the poignancy of the revelation by any suggestion or promise of instability. The past was nothing to her;

offered no lesson which she was willing to heed. The future was a mystery which she never attempted to penetrate. The present alone was significant; was hers, to torture her as it was doing then with the biting conviction that she had lost that which she had held, that she had been denied that which her impassioned, newly awakened being demanded.

— *END OF CHAPTER 15* —