

THE AWAKENING

Chapter 17 — Narrator Script (Booth Ready)

by Kate Chopin · narrated by Mike Vendetti & Kathy Verduin

Léonce Pontellier

Edna Pontellier

NARRATOR

★ BEAT — The Pontellier house — comfort, convention, and Tuesday ritual

A deliberately cool, almost ironic opening. Chopin catalogs the house's appointments with the same appraising eye Pontellier himself uses; read it with a slight remove, as if looking at a beautifully arranged museum case. The Tuesday reception ritual should be read with deliberate, even ceremonial regularity — this is the life that has been Edna's. The repetition of 'always' and 'religiously' is pointed; don't rush past those words.

The Pontellier [*pon-tel-YAY*]s possessed a very charming home on Esplanade [*ES-pluh-nahd*] Street in New Orleans. It was a large, double cottage, with a broad front veranda, whose round, fluted columns supported the sloping roof. The house was painted a dazzling white; the outside shutters, or jalousies, were green. In the yard, which was kept scrupulously neat, were flowers and plants of every description which flourishes in South Louisiana. Within doors the appointments were perfect after the conventional type. The softest carpets

and rugs covered the floors; rich and tasteful draperies hung at doors and windows. There were paintings, selected with judgment and discrimination, upon the walls. The cut glass, the silver, the heavy damask which daily appeared upon the table were the envy of many women whose husbands were less generous than Mr. Pontellier.

Mr. Pontellier was very fond of walking about his house examining its various appointments and details, to see that nothing was amiss. He greatly valued his possessions, chiefly because they were his, and derived genuine pleasure from contemplating a painting, a statuette, a rare lace curtain—no matter what—after he had bought it and placed it among his household gods.

On Tuesday afternoons—Tuesday being Mrs. Pontellier's reception day—there was a constant stream of callers—women who came in carriages or in the street cars, or walked when the air was soft and distance permitted. A light-colored mulatto boy, in dress coat and bearing a diminutive silver tray for the

reception of cards, admitted them. A maid, in white fluted cap, offered the callers liqueur, coffee, or chocolate, as they might desire. Mrs. Pontellier, attired in a handsome reception gown, remained in the drawing-room the entire afternoon receiving her visitors. Men sometimes called in the evening with their wives.

This had been the programme which Mrs. Pontellier had religiously followed since her marriage, six years before. Certain evenings during the week she and her husband attended the opera or sometimes the play.

Mr. Pontellier left his home in the mornings between nine and ten o'clock, and rarely returned before half-past six or seven in the evening—dinner being served at half-past seven.

★ BEAT — Dinner table confrontation — Edna was out; the visiting cards

The chapter's dramatic engine. Léonce's consternation at Edna being out on Tuesday is genuine and proprietary — read it with the puzzlement of a man who genuinely cannot understand why his world has shifted. Edna's answers are cool and almost indifferent; she is not performing defiance, she simply doesn't care anymore. The visiting-cards speech, with Léonce reading names and giving mini-lectures on social capital, should be slightly comic — self-important and oblivious.

When Edna finally explodes with 'Mercy!' it should be genuine exasperation, not fury.

He and his wife seated themselves at table one Tuesday evening, a few weeks after their return from Grand Isle. They were alone together. The boys were being put to bed; the patter of their bare, escaping feet could be heard occasionally, as well as the pursuing voice of the quadrone, lifted in mild protest and entreaty. Mrs. Pontellier did not wear her usual Tuesday reception gown; she was in ordinary house dress. Mr. Pontellier, who was observant about such things, noticed it, as he served the soup and handed it to the boy in waiting.

LÉONCE PONTELLIER

Tired out, Edna? Whom did you have? Many callers?

he asked. He tasted his soup and began to season it with pepper, salt, vinegar, mustard—everything within reach.

EDNA PONTELLIER

There were a good many. I found their cards when I got home; I was out.

“Out!” exclaimed her husband, with something like genuine consternation in his voice as he laid down the vinegar cruet and looked at her through his glasses.

LÉONCE PONTELLIER

Why, what could have taken you out on Tuesday?
What did you have to do?

EDNA PONTELLIER

Nothing. I simply felt like going out, and I went out.

LÉONCE PONTELLIER

Well, I hope you left some suitable excuse,

said her husband, somewhat appeased, as he added a dash of cayenne pepper to the soup.

EDNA PONTELLIER

No, I left no excuse. I told Joe to say I was out, that was all.

LÉONCE PONTELLIER

Why, my dear, I should think you'd understand by this time that people don't do such things; we've got to observe les convenances if we ever expect to get on and keep up with the procession. If you felt that you had to leave home this afternoon, you should

have left some suitable explanation for your absence. This soup is really impossible; it's strange that woman hasn't learned yet to make a decent soup. Any free-lunch stand in town serves a better one. Was Mrs. Belthrop here?

EDNA PONTELLIER

Bring the tray with the cards, Joe. I don't remember who was here.

The boy retired and returned after a moment, bringing the tiny silver tray, which was covered with ladies' visiting cards. He handed it to Mrs. Pontellier.

EDNA PONTELLIER

Give it to Mr. Pontellier,

she said.

Joe offered the tray to Mr. Pontellier, and removed the soup.

Mr. Pontellier scanned the names of his wife's callers, reading some of them aloud, with comments as he read.

LÉONCE PONTELLIER

‘The Misses Delasidas.’ I worked a big deal in futures for their father this morning; nice girls; it’s time they were getting married. ‘Mrs. Belthrop.’ I tell you what it is, Edna; you can’t afford to snub Mrs. Belthrop. Why, Belthrop could buy and sell us ten times over. His business is worth a good, round sum to me. You’d better write her a note. ‘Mrs. James Highcamp.’ Hugh! the less you have to do with Mrs. Highcamp, the better. ‘Madame Laforcé.’ Came all the way from Carrolton, too, poor old soul. ‘Miss Wiggs,’ ‘Mrs. Eleanor Boltons.’

He pushed the cards aside.

EDNA PONTELLIER

Mercy! Why are you taking the thing so seriously and making such a fuss over it?

LÉONCE PONTELLIER

I’m not making any fuss over it. But it’s just such seeming trifles that we’ve got to take seriously; such things count.

★ **BEAT — Léonce storms out; Edna finishes dinner alone**

A short, sharp beat. The domestic discontents pile up — scorched fish, unsatisfactory roast, ill-served vegetables — and Léonce's departure for the club is petulant and cold. Read his exit line ('I'm going to get my dinner at the club. Good night.') clipped and final. Edna's deliberate, solitary finishing of dinner is remarkable; she is not weeping or fleeing. The face flushed with inward fire should be read with quiet intensity — something has changed tonight, permanently.

The fish was scorched. Mr. Pontellier would not touch it. Edna said she did not mind a little scorched taste. The roast was in some way not to his fancy, and he did not like the manner in which the vegetables were served.

LÉONCE PONTELLIER

It seems to me, we spend money enough in this house to procure at least one meal a day which a man could eat and retain his self-respect.

EDNA PONTELLIER

You used to think the cook was a treasure,

returned Edna, indifferently.

LÉONCE PONTELLIER

Perhaps she was when she first came; but cooks are only human. They need looking after, like any other class of persons that you employ. Suppose I didn't

look after the clerks in my office, just let them run things their own way; they'd soon make a nice mess of me and my business.

EDNA PONTELLIER

Where are you going?

asked Edna, seeing that her husband arose from table without having eaten a morsel except a taste of the highly-seasoned soup.

LÉONCE PONTELLIER

I'm going to get my dinner at the club. Good night.

He went into the hall, took his hat and stick from the stand, and left the house.

She was somewhat familiar with such scenes. They had often made her very unhappy. On a few previous occasions she had been completely deprived of any desire to finish her dinner. Sometimes she had gone into the kitchen to administer a tardy rebuke to the cook. Once she went to her room and studied the cookbook during an entire evening, finally writing out a menu for the week, which left her harassed with a

feeling that, after all, she had accomplished no good that was worth the name.

But that evening Edna finished her dinner alone, with forced deliberation. Her face was flushed and her eyes flamed with some inward fire that lighted them. After finishing her dinner she went to her room, having instructed the boy to tell any other callers that she was indisposed.

★ **BEAT — Edna's room — the vase, the ring, the maid**

The chapter's most charged beat. Begin in the beautiful, half-dark room — let the sensory description of the garden below settle for a beat before the voices start turning mournful. Edna's pacing, her shredding the handkerchief, her flinging the ring — read these as escalating, not frantic; there is almost a controlled desperation to them. The stamping on the ring, which leaves no mark, is perfectly chosen by Chopin — pause on it. The vase shattering is the release. The maid's calm practical response is a deliberate tonal break — read it matter-of-factly. End with Edna quietly slipping the ring back on; the reversal is complete, and devastating.

It was a large, beautiful room, rich and picturesque in the soft, dim light which the maid had turned low. She went and stood at an open window and looked out upon the deep tangle of the garden below. All the mystery and witchery of the night seemed to have gathered there amid the perfumes and the dusky and

tortuous outlines of flowers and foliage. She was seeking herself and finding herself in just such sweet, half-darkness which met her moods. But the voices were not soothing that came to her from the darkness and the sky above and the stars. They jeered and sounded mournful notes without promise, devoid even of hope. She turned back into the room and began to walk to and fro down its whole length without stopping, without resting. She carried in her hands a thin handkerchief, which she tore into ribbons, rolled into a ball, and flung from her. Once she stopped, and taking off her wedding ring, flung it upon the carpet. When she saw it lying there, she stamped her heel upon it, striving to crush it. But her small boot heel did not make an indenture, not a mark upon the little glittering circlet.

In a sweeping passion she seized a glass vase from the table and flung it upon the tiles of the hearth. She wanted to destroy something. The crash and clatter were what she wanted to hear.

A maid, alarmed at the din of breaking glass, entered the room to discover what was the matter.

EDNA PONTELLIER

A vase fell upon the hearth. Never mind; leave it till morning.

“Oh! you might get some of the glass in your feet, ma’am,” insisted the young woman, picking up bits of the broken vase that were scattered upon the carpet. “And here’s your ring, ma’am, under the chair.”

Edna held out her hand, and taking the ring, slipped it upon her finger.

— *END OF CHAPTER 17* —