

# THE AWAKENING

## Chapter 18 — Narrator Script (Booth Ready)

by Kate Chopin · narrated by Mike Vendetti & Kathy Verduin

Léonce Pontellier

Edna Pontellier

Adèle Ratignolle

### NARRATOR

#### ★ BEAT — Morning after — Léonce's invitation; Edna's distant mood

*Open quietly, the morning after the storm of chapter seventeen, though no storm is acknowledged. Léonce is brisk and practical; he notices Edna looks unwell with the same clinical distance he noticed her sunburn at Grand Isle. Edna's refusal of the library-fixture outing should be gentle and slightly ironic — she sounds almost maternal, scolding his extravagance. Then the scene drifts: she picks jasmine, she stares at the street, the children, the fruit vendor. Read these observations with a beautiful, flat detachment — the world has become alien to her, and she is watching it through glass.*

The following morning Mr. Pontellier [*pon-tel-YAY*], upon leaving for his office, asked Edna if she would not meet him in town in order to look at some new fixtures for the library.

EDNA PONTELLIER

I hardly think we need new fixtures, Léonce. Don't let us get anything new; you are too extravagant. I don't believe you ever think of saving or putting by.

LÉONCE PONTELLIER

The way to become rich is to make money, my dear Edna, not to save it,

he said. He regretted that she did not feel inclined to go with him and select new fixtures. He kissed her good-by, and told her she was not looking well and must take care of herself. She was unusually pale and very quiet.

She stood on the front veranda as he quitted the house, and absently picked a few sprays of jessamine that grew upon a trellis near by. She inhaled the odor of the blossoms and thrust them into the bosom of her white morning gown. The boys were dragging along the banquette a small “express wagon,” which they had filled with blocks and sticks. The quadron [*KWAH-droon*] was following them with little quick steps, having assumed a fictitious animation and alacrity for the occasion. A fruit vender was crying his wares in the street.

Edna looked straight before her with a self-absorbed expression upon her face. She felt no interest in

anything about her. The street, the children, the fruit vender, the flowers growing there under her eyes, were all part and parcel of an alien world which had suddenly become antagonistic.

She went back into the house. She had thought of speaking to the cook concerning her blunders of the previous night; but Mr. Pontellier had saved her that disagreeable mission, for which she was so poorly fitted. Mr. Pontellier's arguments were usually convincing with those whom he employed. He left home feeling quite sure that he and Edna would sit down that evening, and possibly a few subsequent evenings, to a dinner deserving of the name.

**★ BEAT — Walking to the Ratignolles— sketches in hand, Robert in mind**

*A gentle transitional beat. Edna is walking through New Orleans with her old sketches under her arm, and the narration moves fluidly between the external world and her obsessive interior. Read the passage about Robert as thought — unhurried, almost musical, the way an obsession actually feels: not dramatic, just ever-present. The description of the Ratignolle neighborhood and their soirees musicales should be warm and admiring; this is a world Edna appreciates but cannot inhabit.*

Edna spent an hour or two in looking over some of her old sketches. She could see their shortcomings and defects, which were glaring in her eyes. She tried to work a little, but found she was not in the humor. Finally she gathered together a few of the sketches—those which she considered the least discreditable; and she carried them with her when, a little later, she dressed and left the house. She looked handsome and distinguished in her street gown. The tan of the seashore had left her face, and her forehead was smooth, white, and polished beneath her heavy, yellow-brown hair. There were a few freckles on her face, and a small, dark mole near the under lip and one on the temple, half-hidden in her hair.

As Edna walked along the street she was thinking of Robert. She was still under the spell of her infatuation. She had tried to forget him, realizing the inutility of remembering. But the thought of him was like an obsession, ever pressing itself upon her. It was not that she dwelt upon details of their acquaintance, or recalled in any special or peculiar way his

personality; it was his being, his existence, which dominated her thought, fading sometimes as if it would melt into the mist of the forgotten, reviving again with an intensity which filled her with an incomprehensible longing.

Edna was on her way to Madame Ratignolle [*rah-tee-NYOL*]'s. Their intimacy, begun at Grand Isle, had not declined, and they had seen each other with some frequency since their return to the city. The Ratignolles lived at no great distance from Edna's home, on the corner of a side street, where Monsieur Ratignolle owned and conducted a drug store which enjoyed a steady and prosperous trade. His father had been in the business before him, and Monsieur Ratignolle stood well in the community and bore an enviable reputation for integrity and clearheadedness. His family lived in commodious apartments over the store, having an entrance on the side within the porte cochère [*port koh-SHAIR*]. There was something which Edna thought very French, very foreign, about their whole manner of living. In the

large and pleasant salon which extended across the width of the house, the Ratignolles entertained their friends once a fortnight with a soirée musicale [*swah-RAY myoo-zee-KAL*], sometimes diversified by card-playing. There was a friend who played upon the cello. One brought his flute and another his violin, while there were some who sang and a number who performed upon the piano with various degrees of taste and agility. The Ratignolles' soirées musicales were widely known, and it was considered a privilege to be invited to them.

★ **BEAT — In the salon — Adele's enthusiastic praise of the sketches**

*Light, affectionate, slightly comic. Adele's praise is extravagant and well-meaning, and Edna knows its 'true worth' even as she is warmed by it. Let Ratignolle's lines have the warm over-enthusiasm of a devoted friend who genuinely cannot tell great art from competent art. Edna's 'Nonsense!' should be lightly pleased — she is enjoying being flattered even as she sees through it. The Bavarian peasant and the basket of apples should sound like Ratignolle is almost breathless with admiration.*

Edna found her friend engaged in assorting the clothes which had returned that morning from the laundry. She at once abandoned her occupation upon

seeing Edna, who had been ushered without ceremony into her presence.

ADÈLE RATIGNOLLE

‘Cité can do it as well as I; it is really her business,

she explained to Edna, who apologized for interrupting her. And she summoned a young black woman, whom she instructed, in French, to be very careful in checking off the list which she handed her. She told her to notice particularly if a fine linen handkerchief of Monsieur Ratignolle’s, which was missing last week, had been returned; and to be sure to set to one side such pieces as required mending and darning.

Then placing an arm around Edna’s waist, she led her to the front of the house, to the salon, where it was cool and sweet with the odor of great roses that stood upon the hearth in jars.

Madame Ratignolle looked more beautiful than ever there at home, in a negligé which left her arms almost wholly bare and exposed the rich, melting curves of her white throat.

EDNA PONTELLIER

Perhaps I shall be able to paint your picture some day,

said Edna with a smile when they were seated. She produced the roll of sketches and started to unfold them.

She mentioned that she might study for a while with Laidpore [*layd-POR*], the painting master:

EDNA PONTELLIER

I believe I ought to work again. I feel as if I wanted to be doing something. What do you think of them? Do you think it worth while to take it up again and study some more? I might study for a while with Laidpore.

She knew that Madame Ratignolle's opinion in such a matter would be next to valueless, that she herself had not alone decided, but determined; but she sought the words of praise and encouragement that would help her to put heart into her venture.

ADÈLE RATIGNOLLE

Your talent is immense, dear!

EDNA PONTELLIER

Nonsense!

protested Edna, well pleased.

ADÈLE RATIGNOLLE

Immense, I tell you. Surely, this Bavarian peasant is worthy of framing; and this basket of apples! never have I seen anything more lifelike. One might almost be tempted to reach out a hand and take one.

Edna could not control a feeling which bordered upon complacency at her friend's praise, even realizing, as she did, its true worth. She retained a few of the sketches, and gave all the rest to Madame Ratignolle, who appreciated the gift far beyond its value and proudly exhibited the pictures to her husband when he came up from the store a little later for his midday dinner.

★ **BEAT — Monsieur Ratignolle at dinner — Edna's departing pity**

*The chapter's bittersweet close. Monsieur Ratignolle is a genuinely good man — read him with warmth, not mockery. Chopin is precise: he is 'the salt of the earth.' The lunch itself is quietly satisfying. But then Edna leaves, and Chopin gives us her interior response: she is depressed, not soothed. The word 'commiseration' is key — she pities Adele's contentment. Read the final lines slowly: 'a colorless existence*

*which never uplifted its possessor beyond the region of blind contentment.' The last sentence — 'Edna vaguely wondered what she meant by "life's delirium"' — is a moment of genuine self-puzzlement; don't rush it.*

Mr. Ratignolle was one of those men who are called the salt of the earth. His cheerfulness was unbounded, and it was matched by his goodness of heart, his broad charity, and common sense. He and his wife spoke English with an accent which was only discernible through its un-English emphasis and a certain carefulness and deliberation. Edna's husband spoke English with no accent whatever. The Ratignolles understood each other perfectly. If ever the fusion of two human beings into one has been accomplished on this sphere it was surely in their union.

As Edna seated herself at table with them she thought, "Better a dinner of herbs," though it did not take her long to discover that it was no dinner of herbs, but a delicious repast, simple, choice, and in every way satisfying.

Monsieur Ratignolle was delighted to see her, though he found her looking not so well as at Grand Isle, and

he advised a tonic. He talked a good deal on various topics, a little politics, some city news and neighborhood gossip. He spoke with an animation and earnestness that gave an exaggerated importance to every syllable he uttered. His wife was keenly interested in everything he said, laying down her fork the better to listen, chiming in, taking the words out of his mouth.

Edna felt depressed rather than soothed after leaving them. The little glimpse of domestic harmony which had been offered her, gave her no regret, no longing. It was not a condition of life which fitted her, and she could see in it but an appalling and hopeless ennui. She was moved by a kind of commiseration for Madame Ratignolle,—a pity for that colorless existence which never uplifted its possessor beyond the region of blind contentment, in which no moment of anguish ever visited her soul, in which she would never have the taste of life's delirium. Edna vaguely wondered what she meant by "life's delirium." It had

crossed her thought like some unsought, extraneous impression.

— *END OF CHAPTER 18* —