

THE AWAKENING

Chapter 19 — Narrator Script (Booth Ready)

by Kate Chopin · narrated by Mike Vendetti & Kathy Verduin

Léonce Pontellier

Edna Pontellier

NARRATOR

★ **BEAT — Edna abandons convention — paints, drops Tuesdays, goes where she likes**

The chapter opens with a declarative energy that should feel almost liberating after the constraint of the previous chapters. Read briskly but not triumphantly — Chopin is observing, not celebrating, and the undercurrent of danger is already present. The phrase ‘casting aside that fictitious self which we assume like a garment’ is the chapter’s most important line — read it with quiet weight. Léonce’s bewilderment has a genuine pathos; he is not villainous, simply unable to see.

Edna could not help but think that it was very foolish, very childish, to have stamped upon her wedding ring and smashed the crystal vase upon the tiles. She was visited by no more outbursts, moving her to such futile expedients. She began to do as she liked and to feel as she liked. She completely abandoned her Tuesdays at home, and did not return the visits of those who had called upon her. She made no ineffectual efforts to conduct her household en bonne ménagère [*ahn bon may-nah-ZHAIR*], going and coming as it

suiting her fancy, and, so far as she was able, lending herself to any passing caprice.

Mr. Pontellier [*pon-tel-YAY*] had been a rather courteous husband so long as he met a certain tacit submissiveness in his wife. But her new and unexpected line of conduct completely bewildered him. It shocked him. Then her absolute disregard for her duties as a wife angered him. When Mr. Pontellier became rude, Edna grew insolent. She had resolved never to take another step backward.

★ **BEAT — The argument about painting and domestic duty**

A tightly coiled domestic argument. Léonce's opening speech ('the utmost folly for a woman at the head of a household') should be read with proprietary irritation, not cruelty. Edna's replies are spare and final — 'I feel like painting' is almost a shrug. His invocation of Madame Ratignolle as a model housewife has a slightly comic obliviousness. Edna's counter — 'She isn't a musician, and I'm not a painter. It isn't on account of painting that I let things go' — is the most honest thing she says in this chapter; read it quietly and carefully. Her final 'Oh! I don't know. Let me alone; you bother me.' is genuinely weary.

LÉONCE PONTELLIER

It seems to me the utmost folly for a woman at the head of a household, and the mother of children, to spend in an atelier days which would be better employed contriving for the comfort of her family.

EDNA PONTELLIER

I feel like painting. Perhaps I shan't always feel like it.

LÉONCE PONTELLIER

Then in God's name paint! but don't let the family go to the devil. There's Madame Ratignolle; because she keeps up her music, she doesn't let everything else go to chaos. And she's more of a musician than you are a painter.

EDNA PONTELLIER

She isn't a musician, and I'm not a painter. It isn't on account of painting that I let things go.

LÉONCE PONTELLIER

On account of what, then?

EDNA PONTELLIER

Oh! I don't know. Let me alone; you bother me.

It sometimes entered Mr. Pontellier's mind to wonder if his wife were not growing a little unbalanced mentally. He could see plainly that she was not herself. That is, he could not see that she was becoming herself and daily casting aside that fictitious

self which we assume like a garment with which to appear before the world.

Her husband let her alone as she requested, and went away to his office. Edna went up to her atelier—a bright room in the top of the house. She was working with great energy and interest, without accomplishing anything, however, which satisfied her even in the smallest degree. For a time she had the whole household enrolled in the service of art. The boys posed for her. They thought it amusing at first, but the occupation soon lost its attractiveness when they discovered that it was not a game arranged especially for their entertainment. The quadron sat for hours before Edna's palette, patient as a savage, while the house-maid took charge of the children, and the drawing-room went undusted. But the house-maid, too, served her term as model when Edna perceived that the young woman's back and shoulders were molded on classic lines, and that her hair, loosened from its confining cap, became an inspiration.

★ BEAT — The little air — painting and Robert's memory flood back

One of the novel's most intimate moments. While painting, Edna sings the song Robert sang at Grand Isle. Read the French title of the air lightly, without over-pronunciation — it is half-remembered, half-hummed. The sensory return — the ripple of water, the flapping sail, the glint of moon on the bay — should feel like a sudden physical presence, not nostalgia. The final image, of desire weakening her grip on the brushes and making her eyes burn, is precise and erotic. Read it without modesty but also without melodrama; it is simply the truth of what she feels.

While Edna worked she sometimes sang low the little air, “Ah! si tu savais!”

It moved her with recollections. She could hear again the ripple of the water, the flapping sail. She could see the glint of the moon upon the bay, and could feel the soft, gusty beating of the hot south wind. A subtle current of desire passed through her body, weakening her hold upon the brushes and making her eyes burn.

★ BEAT — Days of happiness and unhappiness — the grotesque pandemonium

The chapter's coda, which is really two distinct emotional registers held side by side. The days of happiness — sunlight, color, odors, wandering — should be read with a genuine, almost surprised joy. Then the pivot: the days of unhappiness, ‘a grotesque pandemonium and humanity like worms struggling blindly toward inevitable annihilation’. That last phrase is extreme and should land as such — pause before it. End the chapter in that flat, enervated state: she could not work, nor stir her pulses. The contrast with the vivid opening beats is the whole point.

There were days when she was very happy without knowing why. She was happy to be alive and breathing, when her whole being seemed to be one with the sunlight, the color, the odors, the luxuriant warmth of some perfect Southern day. She liked then to wander alone into strange and unfamiliar places. She discovered many a sunny, sleepy corner, fashioned to dream in. And she found it good to dream and to be alone and unmolested.

There were days when she was unhappy, she did not know why,—when it did not seem worth while to be glad or sorry, to be alive or dead; when life appeared to her like a grotesque pandemonium and humanity like worms struggling blindly toward inevitable annihilation. She could not work on such a day, nor weave fancies to stir her pulses and warm her blood.

— *END OF CHAPTER 19* —