

THE AWAKENING

Chapter 22 — Narrator Script (Booth Ready)

by Kate Chopin · narrated by Mike Vendetti & Kathy Verduin

Léonce Pontellier Doctor Mandelet

NARRATOR

★ BEAT — Léonce arrives at the Doctor's quiet study

Open with a portrait of professional New Orleans life — the semi-retired physician in his garden study, the comfortable authority of age and discretion. The Doctor's mild irritation at being disturbed should be played lightly, a man accustomed to not being bothered and accustomed to tolerating it when he is. Léonce's arrival is businesslike; he belongs to a world of consultations and managed appearances. Keep the initial exchange brisk and social — 'Not sick, I hope' — before the conversation turns.

One morning on his way into town Mr. Pontellier [*pon-tel-YAY*] stopped at the house of his old friend and family physician, Doctor Mandelet [*mahn-duh-LAY*]. The Doctor was a semi-retired physician, resting, as the saying is, upon his laurels. He bore a reputation for wisdom rather than skill—leaving the active practice of medicine to his assistants and younger contemporaries—and was much sought for in matters of consultation. A few families, united to him by bonds of friendship, he still attended when they required the

services of a physician. The Pontelliers were among these.

Mr. Pontellier found the Doctor reading at the open window of his study. His house stood rather far back from the street, in the center of a delightful garden, so that it was quiet and peaceful at the old gentleman's study window. He was a great reader. He stared up disapprovingly over his eye-glasses as Mr. Pontellier entered, wondering who had the temerity to disturb him at that hour of the morning.

DOCTOR MANDELET

Ah, Pontellier! Not sick, I hope. Come and have a seat. What news do you bring this morning?

He was quite portly, with a profusion of gray hair, and small blue eyes which age had robbed of much of their brightness but none of their penetration.

★ **BEAT** — Léonce describes Edna's changed behavior; the Doctor listens

This is the most revealing conversation in the novel about how Léonce understands — and fails to understand — his wife. Read Léonce's complaints with the measured exasperation of a man who considers himself reasonable and is genuinely baffled: 'I don't want to quarrel or be rude to a woman, especially my wife; yet I'm driven to it.' His language is proprietary throughout — 'she doesn't act well,' 'she's odd,' 'she's

making it devilishly uncomfortable for me.' The Doctor's responses are measured, paternalistic, gently probing. Let Léonce's monologue build in frustration without becoming comic — he is not a villain, merely an era.

LÉONCE PONTELLIER

Oh! I'm never sick, Doctor. You know that I come of tough fiber—of that old Creole race of Pontelliers that dry up and finally blow away. I came to consult—no, not precisely to consult—to talk to you about Edna. I don't know what ails her.

DOCTOR MANDELET

Madame Pontellier not well. Why, I saw her—I think it was a week ago—walking along Canal Street, the picture of health, it seemed to me.

LÉONCE PONTELLIER

Yes, yes; she seems quite well,

said Mr. Pontellier, leaning forward and whirling his stick between his two hands;

LÉONCE PONTELLIER

but she doesn't act well. She's odd, she's not like herself. I can't make her out, and I thought perhaps you'd help me.

DOCTOR MANDELET

How does she act?

inquired the Doctor.

LÉONCE PONTELLIER

Well, it isn't easy to explain,

said Mr. Pontellier, throwing himself back in his chair.

LÉONCE PONTELLIER

She lets the housekeeping go to the dickens.

DOCTOR MANDELET

Well, well; women are not all alike, my dear
Pontellier. We've got to consider—

LÉONCE PONTELLIER

I know that; I told you I couldn't explain. Her whole
attitude—toward me and everybody and
everything—has changed. You know I have a quick
temper, but I don't want to quarrel or be rude to a
woman, especially my wife; yet I'm driven to it, and
feel like ten thousand devils after I've made a fool
of myself. She's making it devilishly uncomfortable
for me. She's got some sort of notion in her head
concerning the eternal rights of women; and—you

understand—we meet in the morning at the breakfast table.

The old gentleman lifted his shaggy eyebrows, protruded his thick nether lip, and tapped the arms of his chair with his cushioned fingertips.

DOCTOR MANDELET

What have you been doing to her, Pontellier?

LÉONCE PONTELLIER

Doing! Parbleu!

DOCTOR MANDELET

Has she been associating of late with a circle of pseudo-intellectual women—super-spiritual superior beings? My wife has been telling me about them.

LÉONCE PONTELLIER

That's the trouble, she hasn't been associating with any one. She has abandoned her Tuesdays at home, has thrown over all her acquaintances, and goes tramping about by herself, moping in the street-cars, getting in after dark. I tell you she's peculiar. I don't like it; I feel a little worried over it.

This was a new aspect for the Doctor.

DOCTOR MANDELET

Nothing hereditary? Nothing peculiar about her family antecedents, is there?

he asked, seriously.

LÉONCE PONTELLIER

Oh, no, indeed! She comes of sound old Presbyterian Kentucky stock. The old gentleman, her father, I have heard, used to atone for his weekday sins with his Sunday devotions. I know for a fact, that his race horses literally ran away with the prettiest bit of Kentucky farming land I ever laid eyes upon. Margaret—you know Margaret—she has all the Presbyterianism undiluted. And the youngest is something of a vixen. By the way, she gets married in a couple of weeks from now.

DOCTOR MANDELET

Send your wife up to the wedding. Let her stay among her own people for a while; it will do her good.

exclaimed the Doctor, foreseeing a happy solution.

LÉONCE PONTELLIER

That's what I want her to do. She won't go to the marriage. She says a wedding is one of the most lamentable spectacles on earth. Nice thing for a woman to say to her husband!

exclaimed Mr. Pontellier, fuming anew at the recollection.

★ **BEAT — The Doctor's advice — let her alone; the unasked question**

The Doctor's long speech about women as 'peculiar organisms' should be read with a tone of genuine professional authority mixed with the comfortable condescension of the age — he is not malicious, only limited. His prescription ('leave her alone; the mood will pass') is kindly meant and entirely wrong. The chapter's final turn — the Doctor's thought about 'Is there any man in the case?' which he does not ask — is the most important moment: read the narrator's gloss quietly, without irony, as simple observation. Then the closing image of the old man alone at his window, staring into the garden, should settle like a held breath.

DOCTOR MANDELET

Pontellier, let your wife alone for a while. Don't bother her, and don't let her bother you. Woman, my dear friend, is a very peculiar and delicate organism—a sensitive and highly organized woman, such as I know Mrs. Pontellier to be, is especially peculiar. It would require an inspired

psychologist to deal successfully with them. And when ordinary fellows like you and me attempt to cope with their idiosyncrasies the result is bungling. Most women are moody and whimsical. This is some passing whim of your wife, due to some cause or causes which you and I needn't try to fathom. But it will pass happily over, especially if you let her alone. Send her around to see me.

LÉONCE PONTELLIER

Oh! I couldn't do that; there'd be no reason for it,

objected Mr. Pontellier.

DOCTOR MANDELET

Then I'll go around and see her. I'll drop in to dinner some evening en bon ami.

LÉONCE PONTELLIER

Do! by all means. What evening will you come? Say Thursday. Will you come Thursday?

he asked, rising to take his leave.

DOCTOR MANDELET

Very well; Thursday. My wife may possibly have some engagement for me Thursday. In case she has, I shall let you know. Otherwise, you may expect me.

Mr. Pontellier turned before leaving to say:

LÉONCE PONTELLIER

I am going to New York on business very soon. I have a big scheme on hand, and want to be on the field proper to pull the ropes and handle the ribbons. We'll let you in on the inside if you say so, Doctor,

he laughed.

DOCTOR MANDELET

No, I thank you, my dear sir. I leave such ventures to you younger men with the fever of life still in your blood.

LÉONCE PONTELLIER

What I wanted to say, I may have to be absent a good while. Would you advise me to take Edna along?

continued Mr. Pontellier, with his hand on the knob.

DOCTOR MANDELET

By all means, if she wishes to go. If not, leave her here. Don't contradict her. The mood will pass, I assure you. It may take a month, two, three months—possibly longer, but it will pass; have patience.

LÉONCE PONTELLIER

Well, good-by, à jeudi,

said Mr. Pontellier, as he let himself out.

The Doctor would have liked during the course of conversation to ask whether there were any man in the case, but he knew his Creole too well to make such a blunder as that.

He did not resume his book immediately, but sat for a while meditatively looking out into the garden.

— *END OF CHAPTER 22* —