

# THE AWAKENING

## Chapter 23 — Narrator Script (Booth Ready)

by Kate Chopin · narrated by Mike Vendetti & Kathy Verduin

Edna Pontellier

Adèle Ratignolle

Doctor Mandelet

### NARRATOR

#### ★ BEAT — Edna's father visits — companionable disturbance and public display

*Read the opening with a sense of stirred energies rather than affection. Edna is not deeply attached to her father, but his arrival gives her feelings a new direction; that phrase is crucial, and the beat should feel like a rechanneling of force. The Colonel himself is vivid, theatrical, self-important, and not unlovable — the white mustache, the padded shoulders, the Confederate bearing. The scenes of shopping, sketching, and walking about the city should have movement and outward brightness. Underneath, Edna is trying on new sensations.*

Edna's father was in the city, and had been with them several days. She was not very warmly or deeply attached to him, but they had certain tastes in common, and when together they were companionable. His coming was in the nature of a welcome disturbance; it seemed to furnish a new direction for her emotions.

He had come to purchase a wedding gift for his daughter, Janet, and an outfit for himself in which he

might make a creditable appearance at her marriage. Mr. Pontellier had selected the bridal gift, as every one immediately connected with him always deferred to his taste in such matters. And his suggestions on the question of dress—which too often assumes the nature of a problem—were of inestimable value to his father-in-law. But for the past few days the old gentleman had been upon Edna's hands, and in his society she was becoming acquainted with a new set of sensations. He had been a colonel in the Confederate army, and still maintained, with the title, the military bearing which had always accompanied it. His hair and mustache were white and silky, emphasizing the rugged bronze of his face. He was tall and thin, and wore his coats padded, which gave a fictitious breadth and depth to his shoulders and chest. Edna and her father looked very distinguished together, and excited a good deal of notice during their perambulations. Upon his arrival she began by introducing him to her atelier and making a sketch of him. He took the whole matter very seriously. If her talent had been ten-fold greater than it was, it would

not have surprised him, convinced as he was that he had bequeathed to all of his daughters the germs of a masterful capability, which only depended upon their own efforts to be directed toward successful achievement.

Before her pencil he sat rigid and unflinching, as he had faced the cannon's mouth in days gone by. He resented the intrusion of the children, who gaped with wondering eyes at him, sitting so stiff up there in their mother's bright atelier. When they drew near he motioned them away with an expressive action of the foot, loath to disturb the fixed lines of his countenance, his arms, or his rigid shoulders.

★ **BEAT — The soirée musicale — coquetry, attention, and Edna's difference**

*This section has social brightness on the surface, but it is full of contrast. Adèle Ratignolle's coquetry with the Colonel should sparkle — amused, warm, effortless, almost extravagant. Edna's marveling at it must be quiet and inward; she watches a language she does not speak. Then let the smaller observations about men at the soirée and the glances of strangers on the street gather gently into a mood of awakening susceptibility. The exchange about Pontellier staying home in the evenings is deceptively casual: Edna's 'What should I do if he stayed home? We wouldn't have anything to say to each other' must land plainly, almost blankly, and all the harder for that.*

Edna, anxious to entertain him, invited Mademoiselle Reisz [*mad-mwah-ZEL REES*] to meet him, having promised him a treat in her piano playing; but Mademoiselle declined the invitation. So together they attended a soirée musicale [*swah-RAY myoo-zee-KAL*] at the Ratignolles [*rah-tee-NYOL*]. Monsieur and Madame Ratignolle made much of the Colonel, installing him as the guest of honor and engaging him at once to dine with them the following Sunday, or any day which he might select. Madame coquetted with him in the most captivating and naive manner, with eyes, gestures, and a profusion of compliments, till the Colonel's old head felt thirty years younger on his padded shoulders. Edna marveled, not comprehending. She herself was almost devoid of coquetry.

There were one or two men whom she observed at the soirée musicale; but she would never have felt moved to any kittenish display to attract their notice—to any feline or feminine wiles to express herself toward them. Their personality attracted her in an agreeable way. Her fancy selected them, and she was glad when

a lull in the music gave them an opportunity to meet her and talk with her. Often on the street the glance of strange eyes had lingered in her memory, and sometimes had disturbed her.

Mr. Pontellier did not attend these soirées musicales. He considered them bourgeois, and found more diversion at the club. To Madame Ratignolle he said the music dispensed at her soirées was too "heavy," too far beyond his untrained comprehension. His excuse flattered her. But she disapproved of Mr. Pontellier's club, and she was frank enough to tell Edna so.

ADÈLE RATIGNOLLE

It's a pity Mr. Pontellier doesn't stay home more in the evenings. I think you would be more—well, if you don't mind my saying it—more united, if he did.

EDNA PONTELLIER

Oh! dear no! What should I do if he stayed home? We wouldn't have anything to say to each other.

She had not much of anything to say to her father, for that matter; but he did not antagonize her. She discovered that he interested her, though she realized that he might not interest her long; and for the first time in her life she felt as if she were thoroughly acquainted with him. He kept her busy serving him and ministering to his wants. It amused her to do so. She would not permit a servant or one of the children to do anything for him which she might do herself. Her husband noticed, and thought it was the expression of a deep filial attachment which he had never suspected.

The Colonel drank numerous "toddlies" during the course of the day, which left him, however, imperturbed. He was an expert at concocting strong drinks. He had even invented some, to which he had given fantastic names, and for whose manufacture he required diverse ingredients that it devolved upon Edna to procure for him.

★ **BEAT — Thursday dinner — racing talk, argument, and Mandelet's alarm**

*This beat moves from lively table talk to something far more revealing. Edna enters radiant, palpitant with life; read her with unusual brightness here, and let the Doctor's attentive watchfulness run underneath the whole scene. The racing talk with the Colonel should be animated and convivial, but when Pontellier voices disapproval and the little dispute follows, let Edna's warmth in defending her father register as energy rather than mere contrariness. The Doctor's inward observation — that she resembles 'some beautiful, sleek animal waking up in the sun' — is one of the chapter's crucial notes: speak it with quiet astonishment. The invented pirogue story at dinner should turn the room dreamlike; the prose floats. Then the chapter closes outdoors with the Doctor's unease and his muttered fear — 'I hope to heaven it isn't Alcée Arobin' — which should be delivered softly, almost to himself, as real apprehension rather than melodrama.*

When Doctor Mandelet dined with the Pontelliers on Thursday he could discern in Mrs. Pontellier no trace of that morbid condition which her husband had reported to him. She was excited and in a manner radiant. She and her father had been to the race course, and their thoughts when they seated themselves at table were still occupied with the events of the afternoon, and their talk was still of the track. The Doctor had not kept pace with turf affairs. He had certain recollections of racing in what he called "the good old times" when the Lecompte stables flourished, and he drew upon this fund of memories so that he

might not be left out and seem wholly devoid of the modern spirit. But he failed to impose upon the Colonel, and was even far from impressing him with this trumped-up knowledge of bygone days. Edna had staked her father on his last venture, with the most gratifying results to both of them. Besides, they had met some very charming people, according to the Colonel's impressions. Mrs. Mortimer Merriman and Mrs. James Highcamp, who were there with Alcée Arobin [*al-SAY AR-oh-ban*], had joined them and had enlivened the hours in a fashion that warmed him to think of.

Mr. Pontellier himself had no particular leaning toward horseracing, and was even rather inclined to discourage it as a pastime, especially when he considered the fate of that blue-grass farm in Kentucky. He endeavored, in a general way, to express a particular disapproval, and only succeeded in arousing the ire and opposition of his father-in-law. A pretty dispute followed, in which Edna warmly

espoused her father's cause and the Doctor remained neutral.

He observed his hostess attentively from under his shaggy brows, and noted a subtle change which had transformed her from the listless woman he had known into a being who, for the moment, seemed palpitant with the forces of life. Her speech was warm and energetic. There was no repression in her glance or gesture. She reminded him of some beautiful, sleek animal waking up in the sun.

The dinner was excellent. The claret was warm and the champagne was cold, and under their beneficent influence the threatened unpleasantness melted and vanished with the fumes of the wine.

Mr. Pontellier warmed up and grew reminiscent. He told some amusing plantation experiences, recollections of old Iberville [*EE-ber-vil*] and his youth, when he hunted 'possum in company with some friendly darky; thrashed the pecan trees, shot the grosbec, and roamed the woods and fields in mischievous idleness.

The Colonel, with little sense of humor and of the fitness of things, related a somber episode of those dark and bitter days, in which he had acted a conspicuous part and always formed a central figure. Nor was the Doctor happier in his selection, when he told the old, ever new and curious story of the waning of a woman's love, seeking strange, new channels, only to return to its legitimate source after days of fierce unrest. It was one of the many little human documents which had been unfolded to him during his long career as a physician. The story did not seem especially to impress Edna. She had one of her own to tell, of a woman who paddled away with her lover one night in a pirogue and never came back. They were lost amid the Baratarian Islands, and no one ever heard of them or found trace of them from that day to this. It was a pure invention. She said that Madame Antoine had related it to her. That, also, was an invention. Perhaps it was a dream she had had. But every glowing word seemed real to those who listened. They could feel the hot breath of the Southern night; they could hear the long sweep of the

piroque through the glistening moonlit water, the beating of birds' wings, rising startled from among the reeds in the salt-water pools; they could see the faces of the lovers, pale, close together, rapt in oblivious forgetfulness, drifting into the unknown.

The champagne was cold, and its subtle fumes played fantastic tricks with Edna's memory that night.

Outside, away from the glow of the fire and the soft lamplight, the night was chill and murky. The Doctor doubled his old-fashioned cloak across his breast as he strode home through the darkness. He knew his fellow-creatures better than most men; knew that inner life which so seldom unfolds itself to unanointed eyes. He was sorry he had accepted Pontellier's invitation. He was growing old, and beginning to need rest and an imperturbed spirit. He did not want the secrets of other lives thrust upon him.

He muttered to himself as he walked:

DOCTOR MANDELET

I hope it isn't Arobin. I hope to heaven it isn't Alcée  
Arobin.

— *END OF CHAPTER 23* —