

# THE AWAKENING

## Chapter 26 — Narrator Script (Booth Ready)

by Kate Chopin · narrated by Mike Vendetti & Kathy Verduin

Edna Pontellier

Mademoiselle Reisz

### NARRATOR

#### ★ BEAT — Arobin's apology folds into daily intimacy

*The opening should feel faintly ironic and very clear-eyed. Edna's embarrassment after receiving Arobin's elaborate apology is not romantic confusion but a cooler recognition that she herself helped magnify the moment. Read her reasoning briskly and lucidly — she is managing appearances, including the appearance of her own susceptibility. Then the chapter shifts from note-writing to habit: he presents himself, keeps appearing, finds endless pretexts. Let the rhythm become incremental and inevitable, because that is how intimacy is gathering here — not by declaration, but by repetition.*

Alcée Arobin [*al-SAY AR-oh-ban*] wrote Edna an elaborate note of apology, palpitant with sincerity. It embarrassed her; for in a cooler, quieter moment it appeared to her absurd that she should have taken his action so seriously, so dramatically. She felt sure that the significance of the whole occurrence had lain in her own self-consciousness. If she ignored his note it would give undue importance to a trivial affair. If she replied to it in a serious spirit it would still leave in his

mind the impression that she had in a susceptible moment yielded to his influence. After all, it was no great matter to have one's hand kissed. She was provoked at his having written the apology. She answered in as light and bantering a spirit as she fancied it deserved, and said she would be glad to have him look in upon her at work whenever he felt the inclination and his business gave him the opportunity.

He responded at once by presenting himself at her home with all his disarming naïveté. And then there was scarcely a day which followed that she did not see him or was not reminded of him. He was prolific in pretexts. His attitude became one of good-humored subservience and tacit adoration. He was ready at all times to submit to her moods, which were as often kind as they were cold. She grew accustomed to him. They became intimate and friendly by imperceptible degrees, and then by leaps. He sometimes talked in a way that astonished her at first and brought the crimson into her face; in a way that pleased her at

last, appealing to the animalism that stirred impatiently within her.

There was nothing which so quieted the turmoil of Edna's senses as a visit to Mademoiselle Reisz. It was then, in the presence of that personality which was offensive to her, that the woman, by her divine art, seemed to reach Edna's spirit and set it free.

**★ BEAT — At Mademoiselle Reisz's — Edna declares she will move**

*This visit begins in dreary weather and physical chill, then warms into declaration. Keep the room shabby and inhospitable — the rusty smoking stove, the dust-hooded Beethoven, the damp clothes — because Edna's announcement about moving must sound all the more startling against that setting. Mademoiselle's skepticism should be direct and unflattering, but not hostile; she knows Edna too well to accept tidy explanations. The essential line in the whole beat is Edna's recognition that she wants 'the feeling of freedom and independence.' Read that plainly, as if the words surprise her even while she says them.*

It was misty, with heavy, lowering atmosphere, one afternoon, when Edna climbed the stairs to the pianist's apartments under the roof. Her clothes were dripping with moisture. She felt chilled and pinched as she entered the room. Mademoiselle was poking at a rusty stove that smoked a little and warmed the room indifferently. She was endeavoring to heat a pot

of chocolate on the stove. The room looked cheerless and dingy to Edna as she entered. A bust of Beethoven, covered with a hood of dust, scowled at her from the mantelpiece.

MADemoiselle REISZ

Ah! here comes the sunlight! Now it will be warm and bright enough; I can let the fire alone.

She closed the stove door with a bang, and approaching, assisted in removing Edna's dripping mackintosh.

MADemoiselle REISZ

You are cold; you look miserable. The chocolate will soon be hot. But would you rather have a taste of brandy? I have scarcely touched the bottle which you brought me for my cold.

A piece of red flannel was wrapped around Mademoiselle's throat; a stiff neck compelled her to hold her head on one side.

EDNA PONTELLIER

I will take some brandy,

said Edna, shivering as she removed her gloves and overshoes. She drank the liquor from the glass as a man would have done. Then flinging herself upon the uncomfortable sofa she said:

EDNA PONTELLIER

Mademoiselle, I am going to move away from my house on Esplanade Street.

MADEMOISELLE REISZ

Ah!

ejaculated the musician, neither surprised nor especially interested. Nothing ever seemed to astonish her very much. She was endeavoring to adjust the bunch of violets which had become loose from its fastening in her hair. Edna drew her down upon the sofa, and taking a pin from her own hair, secured the shabby artificial flowers in their accustomed place.

EDNA PONTELLIER

Aren't you astonished?

MADEMOISELLE REISZ

Passably. Where are you going? to New York? to Iberville? to your father in Mississippi? where?

EDNA PONTELLIER

Just two steps away, in a little four-room house around the corner. It looks so cozy, so inviting and restful, whenever I pass by; and it's for rent. I'm tired looking after that big house. It never seemed like mine, anyway—like home. It's too much trouble. I have to keep too many servants. I am tired bothering with them.

MADemoiselle REISZ

That is not your true reason, ma belle. There is no use in telling me lies. I don't know your reason, but you have not told me the truth.

Edna did not protest or endeavor to justify herself.

EDNA PONTELLIER

The house, the money that provides for it, are not mine. Isn't that enough reason?

MADemoiselle REISZ

They are your husband's,

returned Mademoiselle, with a shrug and a malicious elevation of the eyebrows.

She mentioned her art dealer, Laidpore [*layd-POR*], and her servant, Célestine [*say-les-TEEN*]:

EDNA PONTELLIER

Oh! I see there is no deceiving you. Then let me tell you: It is a caprice. I have a little money of my own from my mother's estate, which my father sends me by driblets. I won a large sum this winter on the races, and I am beginning to sell my sketches.

Laidpore is more and more pleased with my work; he says it grows in force and individuality. I cannot judge of that myself, but I feel that I have gained in ease and confidence. However, as I said, I have sold a good many through Laidpore. I can live in the tiny house for little or nothing, with one servant. Old Celestine, who works occasionally for me, says she will come stay with me and do my work. I know I shall like it, like the feeling of freedom and independence.

MADAMOISELLE REISZ

What does your husband say?

EDNA PONTELLIER

I have not told him yet. I only thought of it this morning. He will think I am demented, no doubt. Perhaps you think so.

Mademoiselle shook her head slowly.

MADAMOISELLE REISZ

Your reason is not yet clear to me,

she said.

Neither was it quite clear to Edna herself; but it unfolded itself as she sat for a while in silence. Instinct had prompted her to put away her husband's bounty in casting off her allegiance. She did not know how it would be when he returned. There would have to be an understanding, an explanation. Conditions would some way adjust themselves, she felt; but whatever came, she had resolved never again to belong to another than herself.

EDNA PONTELLIER

I shall give a grand dinner before I leave the old house! You will have to come to it, Mademoiselle. I will give you everything that you like to eat and to

drink. We shall sing and laugh and be merry for  
once.

And she uttered a sigh that came from the very depths of her being.

★ **BEAT — Robert's new letter — he is coming back**

*This final movement should feel like a sudden lifting of pressure. The habitual exchange of Robert's letters between the women is already intimate and strange; then the revelation of his imminent return changes the air at once. Read Mademoiselle's explanation bluntly and without sentiment — 'it is because he loves you' is said as plain fact. Edna's reaction, by contrast, is all joy, impatience, brightness, disbelief. When she finally says 'Yes' to being in love with Robert, it is the first open naming of what has long been true; let the moment be simple and full. The closing pages should move quickly and buoyantly — the murky sky now invigorating, the bonbons for the children, the cheerful letter to her husband. End in a high clear key.*

If Mademoiselle happened to have received a letter from Robert during the interval of Edna's visits, she would give her the letter unsolicited. And she would seat herself at the piano and play as her humor prompted her while the young woman read the letter. The little stove was roaring; it was red-hot, and the chocolate in the tin sizzled and sputtered. Edna went forward and opened the stove door, and Mademoiselle rising, took a letter from under the bust

of Beethoven and handed it to Edna. Her eyes filled with delight, and she exclaimed:

EDNA PONTELLIER

Another! so soon! Tell me, Mademoiselle, does he know that I see his letters?

MADemoisELLE REISZ

Never in the world! He would be angry and would never write to me again if he thought so. Does he write to you? Never a line. Does he send you a message? Never a word. It is because he loves you, poor fool, and is trying to forget you, since you are not free to listen to him or to belong to him.

EDNA PONTELLIER

Why do you show me his letters, then?

MADemoisELLE REISZ

Haven't you begged for them? Can I refuse you anything? Oh! you cannot deceive me,

and Mademoiselle approached her beloved instrument and began to play. Edna did not at once read the letter. She sat holding it in her hand, while the music penetrated her whole being like an

effulgence, warming and brightening the dark places of her soul. It prepared her for joy and exultation.

EDNA PONTELLIER

Oh! Why did you not tell me?

she exclaimed, letting the letter fall to the floor. She went and grasped Mademoiselle's hands up from the keys.

EDNA PONTELLIER

Oh! unkind! malicious! Why did you not tell me?

MADAMOISELLE REISZ

That he was coming back? No great news, ma foi. I wonder he did not come long ago.

EDNA PONTELLIER

But when, when? He does not say when.

MADAMOISELLE REISZ

He says 'very soon.' You know as much about it as I do; it is all in the letter.

EDNA PONTELLIER

But why? Why is he coming? Oh, if I thought—

and she snatched the letter from the floor and turned the pages this way and that way, looking for the reason, which was left untold.

**MADemoisELLE REISZ**

If I were young and in love with a man, it seems to me he would have to be some grand esprit; a man with lofty aims and ability to reach them; one who stood high enough to attract the notice of his fellow-men. It seems to me if I were young and in love I should never deem a man of ordinary caliber worthy of my devotion.

**EDNA PONTELLIER**

Now it is you who are telling lies and seeking to deceive me, Mademoiselle; or else you have never been in love, and know nothing about it. Why do you suppose a woman knows why she loves? Does she select? Does she say to herself: 'Go to! Here is a distinguished statesman with presidential possibilities; I shall proceed to fall in love with him.' Or, 'I shall set my heart upon this musician, whose fame is on every tongue?' Or, 'This financier, who controls the world's money markets?'

MADemoiselle REISZ

You are purposely misunderstanding me, ma reine.  
Are you in love with Robert?

EDNA PONTELLIER

Yes,

said Edna. It was the first time she had admitted it, and a glow overspread her face, blotching it with red spots.

MADemoiselle REISZ

Why? Why do you love him when you ought not to?

Edna, with a motion or two, dragged herself on her knees before Mademoiselle Reisz, who took the glowing face between her two hands.

EDNA PONTELLIER

Why? Because his hair is brown and grows away from his temples; because he opens and shuts his eyes, and his nose is a little out of drawing; because he has two lips and a square chin, and a little finger which he can't straighten from having played baseball too energetically in his youth. Because—

MADEMOISELLE REISZ

Because you do, in short. What will you do when he comes back?

EDNA PONTELLIER

Do? Nothing, except feel glad and happy to be alive.

She was already glad and happy to be alive at the mere thought of his return. The murky, lowering sky, which had depressed her a few hours before, seemed bracing and invigorating as she splashed through the streets on her way home.

She stopped at a confectioner's and ordered a huge box of bonbons for the children in Iberville. She slipped a card in the box, on which she scribbled a tender message and sent an abundance of kisses.

Before dinner in the evening Edna wrote a charming letter to her husband, telling him of her intention to move for a while into the little house around the block, and to give a farewell dinner before leaving, regretting that he was not there to share it, to help out with the menu and assist her in entertaining the

guests. Her letter was brilliant and brimming with cheerfulness.

— *END OF CHAPTER 26* —