

THE AWAKENING

Chapter 30 — Narrator Script (Booth Ready)

by Kate Chopin · narrated by Mike Vendetti & Kathy Verduin

Edna Pontellier Mademoiselle Reisz Victor Lebrun Alcée Arobin Mrs.
Highcamp Mrs. Merriman Mr. Merriman Miss Mayblunt Gouvernail

NARRATOR

★ BEAT — A small, select dinner gathers around Edna's table

Open with elegant social scene-setting. This dinner has been advertised in Edna's own imagination as something grand, but Chopin immediately reduces it to something smaller, choicer, more intimate. Let the guest list unspool with composure and quiet amusement; each brief portrait adds color and social position. You are placing people around the table with care because this scene becomes a chamber piece. Keep the tone poised and observant, with no hurry.

Though Edna had spoken of the dinner as a very grand affair, it was in truth a very small affair and very select, in so much as the guests invited were few and were selected with discrimination. She had counted upon an even dozen seating themselves at her round mahogany board, forgetting for the moment that Madame Ratignolle [*rah-tee-NYOL*] was to the last degree souffrante and unpresentable, and not foreseeing that Madame Lebrun [*mah-DAHM luh-BRUHN*] would send a thousand regrets at the last moment. So

there were only ten, after all, which made a cozy, comfortable number.

There were Mr. and Mrs. Merriman, a pretty, vivacious little woman in the thirties; her husband, a jovial fellow, something of a shallow-pate, who laughed a good deal at other people's witticisms, and had thereby made himself extremely popular. Mrs. Highcamp had accompanied them. Of course, there was Alcée Arobin [*al-SAY AR-oh-ban*]; and Mademoiselle Reisz [*REES*] had consented to come. Edna had sent her a fresh bunch of violets with black lace trimmings for her hair. Monsieur Ratignolle brought himself and his wife's excuses. Victor Lebrun, who happened to be in the city, bent upon relaxation, had accepted with alacrity. There was a Miss Mayblunt, no longer in her teens, who looked at the world through lorgnettes and with the keenest interest. It was thought and said that she was intellectual; it was suspected of her that she wrote under a nom de guerre. She had come with a gentleman by the name of Gouvernail [*goo-vair-NIY*], connected with one of the daily papers, of whom

nothing special could be said, except that he was observant and seemed quiet and inoffensive. Edna herself made the tenth, and at half-past eight they seated themselves at table, Arobin and Monsieur Ratignolle on either side of their hostess.

Mrs. Highcamp sat between Arobin and Victor Lebrun. Then came Mrs. Merriman, Mr. Gouvernail, Miss Mayblunt, Mr. Merriman, and Mademoiselle Reisz next to Monsieur Ratignolle.

★ **BEAT — Candles, satin, roses — Edna presides over the feast**

This beat is pure visual splendor. Read it richly but not heavily — yellow satin, lace, candlelight, roses, gold, crystal. Everything gleams. Then let Edna's birthday announcement and the cocktail toast bring a bright social sparkle. Miss Mayblunt's fussiness and Arobin's gallantry give the scene lift; Merriman's easy laughter gets the party moving. This should feel like the dinner at its most buoyant and controlled, with Edna at the center of the light.

There was something extremely gorgeous about the appearance of the table, an effect of splendor conveyed by a cover of pale yellow satin under strips of lace-work. There were wax candles, in massive brass candelabra, burning softly under yellow silk shades; full, fragrant roses, yellow and red, abounded. There were silver and gold, as she had said there

would be, and crystal which glittered like the gems which the women wore.

The ordinary stiff dining chairs had been discarded for the occasion and replaced by the most commodious and luxurious which could be collected throughout the house. Mademoiselle Reisz, being exceedingly diminutive, was elevated upon cushions, as small children are sometimes hoisted at table upon bulky volumes.

MISS MAYBLUNT

Something new, Edna?

exclaimed Miss Mayblunt, with lorgnette directed toward a magnificent cluster of diamonds that sparkled, that almost sputtered, in Edna's hair, just over the center of her forehead.

EDNA PONTELLIER

Quite new; 'brand' new, in fact; a present from my husband. It arrived this morning from New York. I may as well admit that this is my birthday, and that I am twenty-nine. In good time I expect you to drink my health. Meanwhile, I shall ask you to begin with

this cocktail, composed—would you say
'composed?' composed by my father in honor of
Sister Janet's wedding.

She made the appeal to Miss Mayblunt. Before each guest stood a tiny glass that looked and sparkled like a garnet gem.

ALCÉE AROBIN

Then, all things considered, it might not be amiss to start out by drinking the Colonel's health in the cocktail which he composed, on the birthday of the most charming of women—the daughter whom he invented.

Mr. Merriman's laugh at this sally was such a genuine outburst and so contagious that it started the dinner with an agreeable swing that never slackened.

Miss Mayblunt begged to be allowed to keep her cocktail untouched before her, just to look at. The color was marvelous! She could compare it to nothing she had ever seen, and the garnet lights which it emitted were unspeakably rare. She pronounced the Colonel an artist, and stuck to it.

★ **BEAT — Talk eddies around the table in separate currents**

This is an ensemble beat: several conversations happening at once, each with its own temperature. Keep the narration lucid about who is speaking to whom. Ratignolle is earnest and literal; Arobin is witty and lightly insolent; Mademoiselle Reisz is sharp and rude in French; the Merrimans are social and half-comic; Mrs. Highcamp hangs on Victor with practiced ease. Let the scene breathe as overlapping talk rather than a single line of action. The fountain and jessamine outside should enter softly, almost like a stage note behind the room's chatter.

Monsieur Ratignolle was prepared to take things seriously; the mets, the entre-mets, the service, the decorations, even the people. He looked up from his pompano and inquired of Arobin if he were related to the gentleman of that name who formed one of the firm of Laitner and Arobin, lawyers.

The young man admitted that Laitner was a warm personal friend, who permitted Arobin's name to decorate the firm's letterheads and to appear upon a shingle that graced Perdido Street.

ALCÉE AROBIN

There are so many inquisitive people and institutions abounding that one is really forced as a matter of convenience these days to assume the virtue of an occupation if he has it not.

Monsieur Ratignolle stared a little, and turned to ask Mademoiselle Reisz if she considered the symphony concerts up to the standard which had been set the previous winter. Mademoiselle Reisz answered Monsieur Ratignolle in French, which Edna thought a little rude, under the circumstances, but characteristic. Mademoiselle had only disagreeable things to say of the symphony concerts, and insulting remarks to make of all the musicians of New Orleans, singly and collectively. All her interest seemed to be centered upon the delicacies placed before her.

Mr. Merriman said that Mr. Arobin's remark about inquisitive people reminded him of a man from Waco the other day at the St. Charles Hotel—but as Mr. Merriman's stories were always lame and lacking point, his wife seldom permitted him to complete them. She interrupted him to ask if he remembered the name of the author whose book she had bought the week before to send to a friend in Geneva. She was talking 'books' with Mr. Gouvernail and trying to draw from him his opinion upon current literary

topics. Her husband told the story of the Waco man privately to Miss Mayblunt, who pretended to be greatly amused and to think it extremely clever.

Mrs. Highcamp hung with languid but unaffected interest upon the warm and impetuous volubility of her left-hand neighbor, Victor Lebrun. Her attention was never for a moment withdrawn from him after seating herself at table; and when he turned to Mrs. Merriman, who was prettier and more vivacious than Mrs. Highcamp, she waited with easy indifference for an opportunity to reclaim his attention. There was the occasional sound of music, of mandolins, sufficiently removed to be an agreeable accompaniment rather than an interruption to the conversation. Outside the soft, monotonous splash of a fountain could be heard; the sound penetrated into the room with the heavy odor of jessamine that came through the open windows.

★ **BEAT — Edna feels herself queen — and already apart**

Here the social brightness opens into Edna's inner solitude. First give us the magnificent image of her in satin and lace, arms spread, head back — regal, singular, self-possessed. Then pivot inward: the old ennui returns even in the middle

of triumph. The phrase 'the beloved one' should be touched lightly but clearly; Robert's absence enters as a sudden inward ache. When Ratignolle and Reisz depart, let the charm begin to thin but not break abruptly. Mademoiselle Reisz's whispered good night should feel intimate, odd, and faintly ceremonial.

The golden shimmer of Edna's satin gown spread in rich folds on either side of her. There was a soft fall of lace encircling her shoulders. It was the color of her skin, without the glow, the myriad living tints that one may sometimes discover in vibrant flesh. There was something in her attitude, in her whole appearance when she leaned her head against the high-backed chair and spread her arms, which suggested the regal woman, the one who rules, who looks on, who stands alone.

But as she sat there amid her guests, she felt the old ennui overtaking her; the hopelessness which so often assailed her, which came upon her like an obsession, like something extraneous, independent of volition. It was something which announced itself; a chill breath that seemed to issue from some vast cavern wherein discords waited. There came over her the acute longing which always summoned into her spiritual

vision the presence of the beloved one, overpowering her at once with a sense of the unattainable.

The moments glided on, while a feeling of good fellowship passed around the circle like a mystic cord, holding and binding these people together with jest and laughter. Monsieur Ratignolle was the first to break the pleasant charm. At ten o'clock he excused himself. Madame Ratignolle was waiting for him at home. She was bien souffrante, and she was filled with vague dread, which only her husband's presence could allay.

Mademoiselle Reisz arose with Monsieur Ratignolle, who offered to escort her to the car. She had eaten well; she had tasted the good, rich wines, and they must have turned her head, for she bowed pleasantly to all as she withdrew from table.

MADemoiselle REISZ

Bonne nuit, ma reine; soyez sage.

She kissed Edna upon the shoulder. She had been a little bewildered upon rising, or rather, descending

from her cushions, and Monsieur Ratignolle gallantly took her arm and led her away.

★ **BEAT — Victor becomes a tableau; Edna breaks the spell**

The dinner turns theatrical, then suddenly too intimate. Mrs. Highcamp and Miss Mayblunt help transform Victor into an almost absurdly beautiful object, and for a moment the whole company participates in the pose. Let that enchantment feel playful and slightly decadent. When Victor begins to sing, the key changes at once. Edna's interruption must be immediate and involuntary — not social annoyance but a genuine inward blow. The broken glass, spilled wine, hand over Victor's mouth, the fling of roses across the room: all happen quickly. After that, the guests disperse under the strain. End in the night's silence, with the departing voices briefly jarring against it.

Mrs. Highcamp was weaving a garland of roses, yellow and red. When she had finished the garland, she laid it lightly upon Victor's black curls. He was reclining far back in the luxurious chair, holding a glass of champagne to the light.

As if a magician's wand had touched him, the garland of roses transformed him into a vision of Oriental beauty. His cheeks were the color of crushed grapes, and his dusky eyes glowed with a languishing fire.

ALCÉE AROBIN

Sapristi!

But Mrs. Highcamp had one more touch to add to the picture. She took from the back of her chair a white silken scarf, with which she had covered her shoulders in the early part of the evening. She draped it across the boy in graceful folds, and in a way to conceal his black, conventional evening dress. He did not seem to mind what she did to him, only smiled, showing a faint gleam of white teeth, while he continued to gaze with narrowing eyes at the light through his glass of champagne.

MISS MAYBLUNT

Oh! to be able to paint in color rather than in words!

exclaimed Miss Mayblunt, losing herself in a rhapsodic dream as she looked at him.

GOUVERNAIL

There was a graven image of Desire / Painted with red blood on a ground of gold.

murmured Gouvernail, under his breath.

The effect of the wine upon Victor was to change his accustomed volubility into silence. He seemed to have

abandoned himself to a reverie, and to be seeing pleasing visions in the amber bead.

MRS. HIGHCAMP

Sing. Won't you sing to us?

ALCÉE AROBIN

Let him alone.

MR. MERRIMAN

He's posing. Let him have it out.

MRS. MERRIMAN

I believe he's paralyzed.

Mrs. Merriman laughed. Leaning over the youth's chair, she took the glass from his hand and held it to his lips. He sipped the wine slowly, and when he had drained the glass she laid it upon the table and wiped his lips with her little filmy handkerchief.

VICTOR LEBRUN

Yes, I'll sing for you.

He turned in his chair toward Mrs. Highcamp. He clasped his hands behind his head, and looking up at the ceiling began to hum a little, trying his voice like a

musician tuning an instrument. Then, looking at Edna, he began to sing:

VICTOR LEBRUN

Ah! si tu savais!

EDNA PONTELLIER

Stop! don't sing that. I don't want you to sing it.

She laid her glass so impetuously and blindly upon the table as to shatter it against a carafe. The wine spilled over Arobin's legs and some of it trickled down upon Mrs. Highcamp's black gauze gown. Victor had lost all idea of courtesy, or else he thought his hostess was not in earnest, for he laughed and went on:

VICTOR LEBRUN

Ah! si tu savais / Ce que tes yeux me disent—

EDNA PONTELLIER

Oh! you mustn't! you mustn't.

She pushed back her chair and got up, and going behind him placed her hand over his mouth. He kissed the soft palm that pressed upon his lips.

VICTOR LEBRUN

No, no, I won't, Mrs. Pontellier. I didn't know you meant it.

He looked up at her with caressing eyes. The touch of his lips was like a pleasing sting to her hand. She lifted the garland of roses from his head and flung it across the room.

EDNA PONTELLIER

Come, Victor; you've posed long enough. Give Mrs. Highcamp her scarf.

Mrs. Highcamp undraped the scarf from about him with her own hands. Miss Mayblunt and Mr. Gouvernail suddenly conceived the notion that it was time to say good night. And Mr. and Mrs. Merriman wondered how it could be so late.

Before parting from Victor, Mrs. Highcamp invited him to call upon her daughter, who she knew would be charmed to meet him and talk French and sing French songs with him. Victor expressed his desire and intention to call upon Miss Highcamp at the first

opportunity which presented itself. He asked if Arobin were going his way. Arobin was not.

The mandolin players had long since stolen away. A profound stillness had fallen upon the broad, beautiful street. The voices of Edna's disbanding guests jarred like a discordant note upon the quiet harmony of the night.

— *END OF CHAPTER 30* —