

# THE AWAKENING

## Chapter 33 — Narrator Script (Booth Ready)

by Kate Chopin · narrated by Mike Vendetti & Kathy Verduin

Edna Pontellier

Robert Lebrun

Adèle Ratignolle

### NARRATOR

#### ★ BEAT — Edna seeks refuge at Mademoiselle Reisz's flat

*Open quietly — this is Edna's interior life, a day full of obligations she barely felt. Let the accumulation of morning interruptions (Adèle's visit, the social callers) register as low-grade fatigue rather than comedy. The detail of Adèle asking Edna to be 'careful' about Arobin carries a faint undertone of warning; read it as gentle but real. Edna's laughter at 'You may say anything you like to me' is affectionate but slightly hollow — she is already somewhere else. End the beat on the solitude in Mademoiselle's room: the window, the geranium, the river breeze — let them breathe.*

It happened sometimes when Edna went to see Mademoiselle Reisz [*mad-mwah-ZEL REES*] that the little musician was absent, giving a lesson or making some small necessary household purchase. The key was always left in a secret hiding-place in the entry, which Edna knew. If Mademoiselle happened to be away, Edna would usually enter and wait for her return.

When she knocked at Mademoiselle Reisz's door one afternoon there was no response; so unlocking the

door, as usual, she entered and found the apartment deserted, as she had expected. Her day had been quite filled up, and it was for a rest, for a refuge, and to talk about Robert, that she sought out her friend.

She had worked at her canvas—a young Italian character study—all the morning, completing the work without the model; but there had been many interruptions, some incident to her modest housekeeping, and others of a social nature.

Madame Ratignolle [*rah-tee-NYOL*] had dragged herself over, avoiding the too public thoroughfares, she said. She complained that Edna had neglected her much of late. Besides, she was consumed with curiosity to see the little house and the manner in which it was conducted. She wanted to hear all about the dinner party; Monsieur Ratignolle had left ‘so’ early. What had happened after he left? The champagne and grapes which Edna sent over were ‘too’ delicious. She had so little appetite; they had refreshed and toned her stomach. Where on earth was she going to put Mr. Pontellier in that little house, and the boys? And then

she made Edna promise to go to her when her hour of trial overtook her.

Edna assured her she would come at any time—any time of the day or night.

Before leaving Madame Ratignolle said:

ADÈLE RATIGNOLLE

In some way you seem to me like a child, Edna. You seem to act without a certain amount of reflection which is necessary in this life. That is the reason I want to say you mustn't mind if I advise you to be a little careful while you are living here alone. Why don't you have some one come and stay with you? Wouldn't Mademoiselle Reisz come?

EDNA PONTELLIER

No; she wouldn't wish to come, and I shouldn't want her always with me.

Well, the reason—you know how evil-minded the world is—some one was talking of Alcée Arobin [*al-SAY AR-oh-ban*] visiting you. Of course, it wouldn't matter if Mr. Arobin had not such a dreadful reputation.

Monsieur Ratignolle was telling me that his attentions

alone are considered enough to ruin a woman's name, Madame Ratignolle continued.

EDNA PONTELLIER

Does he boast of his successes?

asked Edna, indifferently, squinting at her picture.

ADÈLE RATIGNOLLE

No, I think not. I believe he is a decent fellow as far as that goes. But his character is so well known among the men. I shan't be able to come back and see you; it was very, very imprudent to-day.

EDNA PONTELLIER

Mind the step!

ADÈLE RATIGNOLLE

Don't neglect me, and don't mind what I said about Arobin, or having some one to stay with you.

EDNA PONTELLIER

Of course not. You may say anything you like to me.

They kissed each other good-by. Madame Ratignolle had not far to go, and Edna stood on the porch a while watching her walk down the street.

Then in the afternoon Mrs. Merriman [*MAIR-ih-man*] and Mrs. Highcamp [*HY-camp*] had made their “party call.” Edna felt that they might have dispensed with the formality. They had also come to invite her to play vingt-et-un one evening at Mrs. Merriman’s. She was asked to go early, to dinner, and Mr. Merriman or Mr. Arobin would take her home. Edna accepted in a half-hearted way. She sometimes felt very tired of Mrs. Highcamp and Mrs. Merriman.

Late in the afternoon she sought refuge with Mademoiselle Reisz, and stayed there alone, waiting for her, feeling a kind of repose invade her with the very atmosphere of the shabby, unpretentious little room.

Edna sat at the window, which looked out over the house-tops and across the river. The window frame was filled with pots of flowers, and she sat and picked the dry leaves from a rose geranium. The day was warm, and the breeze which blew from the river was very pleasant. She removed her hat and laid it on the piano. She went on picking the leaves and digging

around the plants with her hat pin. Once she thought she heard Mademoiselle Reisz approaching. But it was a young black girl, who came in, bringing a small bundle of laundry, which she deposited in the adjoining room, and went away.

Edna seated herself at the piano, and softly picked out with one hand the bars of a piece of music which lay open before her. A half-hour went by. There was the occasional sound of people going and coming in the lower hall. She was growing interested in her occupation of picking out the aria, when there was a second rap at the door. She vaguely wondered what these people did when they found Mademoiselle's door locked.

**★ BEAT — Robert appears — the shock of his return**

*The pivot of the entire novel. Keep your voice steady on the prose leading up to his entrance — Chopin wants the anticipation understated so the arrival lands. Edna's 'Why, Robert!' should be just a breath, not a cry — she 'fell back upon the stool' because she cannot trust her body. Robert's flustered greeting is incoherent with surprise. The devastating beat is 'Day before yesterday' — let it land twice, then land a third time in the narrator's interior echo. The gap between Edna's imagined reunion and the reality of them sitting ten feet apart is the chapter's emotional core; sit with it.*

She called out to come in, turning her face toward the door. And this time it was Robert Lebrun who presented himself. She attempted to rise; she could not have done so without betraying the agitation which mastered her at sight of him, so she fell back upon the stool, only exclaiming his name.

EDNA PONTELLIER

Why, Robert!

He came and clasped her hand, seemingly without knowing what he was saying or doing.

ROBERT LEBRUN

Mrs. Pontellier! How do you happen—oh! how well you look! Is Mademoiselle Reisz not here? I never expected to see you.

EDNA PONTELLIER

When did you come back?

asked Edna in an unsteady voice, wiping her face with her handkerchief. She seemed ill at ease on the piano stool, and he begged her to take the chair by the window.

She did so, mechanically, while he seated himself on the stool.

ROBERT LEBRUN

I returned day before yesterday,

he answered, while he leaned his arm on the keys, bringing forth a crash of discordant sound.

She repeated the words aloud—“Day before yesterday!”—and went on thinking to herself, in a sort of an uncomprehending way. She had pictured him seeking her at the very first hour, and he had lived under the same sky since day before yesterday; while only by accident had he stumbled upon her.

Mademoiselle must have lied when she said, “Poor fool, he loves you.”

EDNA PONTELLIER

Day before yesterday, then if you had not met me here to-day you wouldn't—when—that is, didn't you mean to come and see me?

she repeated, breaking off a spray of Mademoiselle's geranium.

ROBERT LEBRUN

Of course, I should have gone to see you. There have been so many things— I started in at once yesterday with the old firm. After all there is as much chance for me here as there was there—that is, I might find it profitable some day. The Mexicans were not very congenial.

So he had come back because the Mexicans were not congenial; because business was as profitable here as there; because of any reason, and not because he cared to be near her. She remembered the day she sat on the floor, turning the pages of his letter, seeking the reason which was left untold.

She had not noticed how he looked—only feeling his presence; but she turned deliberately and observed him. After all, he had been absent but a few months, and was not changed. His hair—the color of hers—waved back from his temples in the same way as before. His skin was not more burned than it had been at Grand Isle [*grand EYE-uhl*]. She found in his eyes, when he looked at her for one silent moment, the

same tender caress, with an added warmth and entreaty which had not been there before—the same glance which had penetrated to the sleeping places of her soul and awakened them.

A hundred times Edna had pictured Robert's return, and imagined their first meeting. It was usually at her home, whither he had sought her out at once. She always fancied him expressing or betraying in some way his love for her. And here, the reality was that they sat ten feet apart, she at the window, crushing geranium leaves in her hand and smelling them, he twirling around on the piano stool, saying:

**ROBERT LEBRUN**

I was very much surprised to hear of Mr. Pontellier's absence; it's a wonder Mademoiselle Reisz did not tell me; and your moving—mother told me yesterday. I should think you would have gone to New York with him, or to Iberville with the children, rather than be bothered here with housekeeping. And you are going abroad, too, I hear. We shan't have you at Grand Isle next

summer; it won't seem—do you see much of Mademoiselle Reisz? She often spoke of you in the few letters she wrote.

EDNA PONTELLIER

Do you remember that you promised to write to me when you went away?

A flush overspread his whole face.

ROBERT LEBRUN

I couldn't believe that my letters would be of any interest to you.

EDNA PONTELLIER

That is an excuse; it isn't the truth.

Edna reached for her hat on the piano. She adjusted it, sticking the hat pin through the heavy coil of hair with some deliberation.

ROBERT LEBRUN

Are you not going to wait for Mademoiselle Reisz?

EDNA PONTELLIER

No; I have found when she is absent this long, she is liable not to come back till late.

She drew on her gloves, and Robert picked up his hat.

EDNA PONTELLIER

Won't you wait for her?

ROBERT LEBRUN

Not if you think she will not be back till late, and I should miss the pleasure of walking home with you.

Edna locked the door and put the key back in its hiding-place.

★ **BEAT — Walking home together — the pigeon-house and dinner**

*A tentative, tender movement. The two walk through city streets almost as if in a dream; the Pontellier mansion passing like a ghost is an important image — read it with understated significance. Robert's 'I never knew you in your home' and Edna's 'I am glad you did not' land quietly, with weight. When she asks him to stay and he hesitates, then capitulates at the sight of her pained face — read his 'Oh! you know I want to stay' as a surrender he's almost relieved to make. The line 'This is the first moment you have seemed like the old Robert' is warm, almost joyful — a brief uncomplicated happiness before the chapter turns.*

They went together, picking their way across muddy streets and sidewalks encumbered with the cheap display of small tradesmen. Part of the distance they rode in the car, and after disembarking, passed the Pontellier [*pon-tel-YAY*] mansion, which looked broken and half torn asunder. Robert had never known the house, and looked at it with interest.

ROBERT LEBRUN

I never knew you in your home,

he remarked.

EDNA PONTELLIER

I am glad you did not.

ROBERT LEBRUN

Why?

She did not answer. They went on around the corner, and it seemed as if her dreams were coming true after all, when he followed her into the little house.

EDNA PONTELLIER

You must stay and dine with me, Robert. You see I am all alone, and it is so long since I have seen you. There is so much I want to ask you.

She took off her hat and gloves. He stood irresolute, making some excuse about his mother who expected him; he even muttered something about an engagement. She struck a match and lit the lamp on the table; it was growing dusk. When he saw her face in the lamp-light, looking pained, with all the soft lines

gone out of it, he threw his hat aside and seated himself.

ROBERT LEBRUN

Oh! you know I want to stay if you will let me!

All the softness came back. She laughed, and went and put her hand on his shoulder.

EDNA PONTELLIER

This is the first moment you have seemed like the old Robert. I'll go tell Célestine.

She hurried away to tell Célestine [*say-les-TEEN*] to set an extra place. She even sent her off in search of some added delicacy which she had not thought of for herself. And she recommended great care in dripping the coffee and having the omelet done to a proper turn.

★ **BEAT — Arobin's photograph — the edge of jealousy**

*The mood shifts. The photo of Arobin on the table is a small grenade. Robert's curiosity about it is barely disguised jealousy, and his pointed questions ('Is he a friend of Mr. Pontellier's?') are jealous even as he tries to be casual. Edna deflects with ease — 'He's a friend of mine' — and then pivots immediately: 'I'd rather talk about you.' Robert's confession that he saw 'the waves and the white beach of Grand Isle' in Mexico, and Edna echoing it word-for-word, is one of the most charged moments in the book. Their mirrored speeches should feel like breath held.*

*His 'you are cruel' is not anger — it's surrender. Let the silence before Célestine announces dinner settle.*

When she reentered, Robert was turning over magazines, sketches, and things that lay upon the table in great disorder. He picked up a photograph, and exclaimed:

ROBERT LEBRUN

Alcée Arobin! What on earth is his picture doing here?

EDNA PONTELLIER

I tried to make a sketch of his head one day, and he thought the photograph might help me. It was at the other house. I thought it had been left there. I must have packed it up with my drawing materials.

ROBERT LEBRUN

I should think you would give it back to him if you have finished with it.

EDNA PONTELLIER

Oh! I have a great many such photographs. I never think of returning them. They don't amount to anything.

Robert kept on looking at the picture.

ROBERT LEBRUN

It seems to me—do you think his head worth drawing? Is he a friend of Mr. Pontellier's? You never said you knew him.

EDNA PONTELLIER

He isn't a friend of Mr. Pontellier's; he's a friend of mine. I always knew him—that is, it is only of late that I know him pretty well. But I'd rather talk about you, and know what you have been seeing and doing and feeling out there in Mexico.

Robert threw aside the picture.

ROBERT LEBRUN

I've been seeing the waves and the white beach of Grand Isle; the quiet, grassy street of the Chênier; the old fort at Grande Terre. I've been working like a machine, and feeling like a lost soul. There was nothing interesting.

She leaned her head upon her hand to shade her eyes from the light.

ROBERT LEBRUN

And what have you been seeing and doing and feeling all these days?

EDNA PONTELLIER

I've been seeing the waves and the white beach of Grand Isle; the quiet, grassy street of the Chênierre Caminada; the old sunny fort at Grande Terre. I've been working with a little more comprehension than a machine, and still feeling like a lost soul. There was nothing interesting.

ROBERT LEBRUN

Mrs. Pontellier, you are cruel,

he said, with feeling, closing his eyes and resting his head back in his chair. They remained in silence till old Célestine announced dinner.

— *END OF CHAPTER 33* —