THE AWAKENING

Chapter 34 — Narrator Script (Booth Ready)

by Kate Chopin · narrated by Mike Vendetti & Kathy Verduin

Edna Pontellier **Robert Lebrun** **Alcée Arobin**

NARRATOR

★ BEAT — Dinner and the Vera Cruz tobacco pouch

Open with a domestic, almost intimate warmth that is also slightly ceremonious — 'a certain degree of ceremony' settled over them. Robert and Edna are finding their footing. The tobacco pouch is a trap: Edna's curiosity about it is barely disguised jealousy, and her questions ('What was she like—the one who gave you the pouch?') inch toward something raw. Robert deflects with a slightly philosophical dodge — 'some people leave impressions not so lasting as the imprint of an oar upon the water' — which is both graceful and evasive. Read with an undercurrent of wanting more from each other than the surface will allow.

The dining-room was very small. Edna's round mahogany would have almost filled it. As it was there was but a step or two from the little table to the kitchen, to the mantel, the small buffet, and the side door that opened out on the narrow brick-paved yard.

A certain degree of ceremony settled upon them with the announcement of dinner. There was no return to personalities. Robert related incidents of his sojourn in Mexico, and Edna talked of events likely to interest

him, which had occurred during his absence. The dinner was of ordinary quality, except for the few delicacies which she had sent out to purchase. Old Célestine *[say-les-TEEN]*, with a bandana tignon twisted about her head, hobbled in and out, taking a personal interest in everything; and she lingered occasionally to talk patois with Robert, whom she had known as a boy.

He went out to a neighboring cigar stand to purchase cigarette papers, and when he came back he found that Célestine had served the black coffee in the parlor.

ROBERT LEBRUN

> Perhaps I shouldn't have come back. When you are tired of me, tell me to go.

EDNA PONTELLIER

> You never tire me. You must have forgotten the hours and hours at Grand Isle in which we grew accustomed to each other and used to being together.

ROBERT LEBRUN

I have forgotten nothing at Grand Isle,

he said, not looking at her, but rolling a cigarette. His tobacco pouch, which he laid upon the table, was a fantastic embroidered silk affair, evidently the handiwork of a woman.

EDNA PONTELLIER

You used to carry your tobacco in a rubber pouch,

said Edna, picking up the pouch and examining the needlework.

ROBERT LEBRUN

Yes; it was lost.

EDNA PONTELLIER

Where did you buy this one? In Mexico?

ROBERT LEBRUN

It was given to me by a Vera Cruz girl; they are very generous,

he replied, striking a match and lighting his cigarette.

EDNA PONTELLIER

They are very handsome, I suppose, those Mexican women; very picturesque, with their black eyes and their lace scarfs.

ROBERT LEBRUN

Some are; others are hideous, just as you find women everywhere.

EDNA PONTELLIER

What was she like—the one who gave you the pouch? You must have known her very well.

ROBERT LEBRUN

She was very ordinary. She wasn't of the slightest importance. I knew her well enough.

EDNA PONTELLIER

Did you visit at her house? Was it interesting? I should like to know and hear about the people you met, and the impressions they made on you.

ROBERT LEBRUN

There are some people who leave impressions not so lasting as the imprint of an oar upon the water.

EDNA PONTELLIER

Was she such a one?

ROBERT LEBRUN

It would be ungenerous for me to admit that she was of that order and kind.

He thrust the pouch back in his pocket, as if to put away the subject with the trifle which had brought it up.

★ BEAT — Arobin drops in — the triangle sharpens

Arobin's entrance is tonal whiplash: easy, worldly, slightly predatory charm after Robert's strained delicacy. His manner — 'How did they treat you down in Mexique?' — is casual and almost taunting. The two men circling each other through pleasantries is a compressed scene of male rivalry; read it lightly but with awareness of the currents underneath. Edna's line 'You were less fortunate than Robert, then' is a small provocation she cannot help. Robert's departure — rising, shaking hands, 'Please convey my regards to Mr. Pontellier' — is formal, almost cold: he is sealing himself off. Let that formality sting.

Arobin dropped in with a message from Mrs. Merriman *[MAIR-ih-man]*, to say that the card party was postponed on account of the illness of one of her children.

ROBERT LEBRUN

How do you do, Arobin?

said Robert, rising from the obscurity.

ALCÉE AROBIN

Oh! Lebrun. To be sure! I heard yesterday you were back. How did they treat you down in Mexique?

ROBERT LEBRUN

Fairly well.

ALCÉE AROBIN

But not well enough to keep you there. Stunning girls, though, in Mexico. I thought I should never get away from Vera Cruz when I was down there a couple of years ago.

EDNA PONTELLIER

Did they embroider slippers and tobacco pouches and hat-bands and things for you?

ALCÉE AROBIN

Oh! my! no! I didn't get so deep in their regard. I fear they made more impression on me than I made on them.

EDNA PONTELLIER

You were less fortunate than Robert, then.

ALCÉE AROBIN

I am always less fortunate than Robert. Has he been imparting tender confidences?

ROBERT LEBRUN

I've been imposing myself long enough. Please convey my regards to Mr. Pontellier when you write.

said Robert, rising, and shaking hands with Edna. He shook hands with Arobin and went away.

ALCÉE AROBIN

Fine fellow, that Lebrun. I never heard you speak of him.

EDNA PONTELLIER

I knew him last summer at Grand Isle. Here is that photograph of yours. Don't you want it?

ALCÉE AROBIN

What do I want with it? Throw it away.

She threw it back on the table.

EDNA PONTELLIER

I'm not going to Mrs. Merriman's. If you see her, tell her so. But perhaps I had better write. I think I shall write now, and say that I am sorry her child is sick, and tell her not to count on me.

ALCÉE AROBIN

It would be a good scheme. I don't blame you; stupid lot!

Edna opened the blotter, and having procured paper and pen, began to write the note. Arobin lit a cigar and read the evening paper, which he had in his pocket.

EDNA PONTELLIER

What is the date?

He told her.

EDNA PONTELLIER

Will you mail this for me when you go out?

ALCÉE AROBIN

Certainly.

He read to her little bits out of the newspaper, while she straightened things on the table.

ALCÉE AROBIN

What do you want to do? Do you want to go out for a walk or a drive or anything? It would be a fine night to drive.

EDNA PONTELLIER

No; I don't want to do anything but just be quiet. You go away and amuse yourself. Don't stay.

ALCÉE AROBIN

I'll go away if I must; but I shan't amuse myself. You know that I only live when I am near you.

He stood up to bid her good night.

EDNA PONTELLIER

Is that one of the things you always say to women?

ALCÉE AROBIN

I have said it before, but I don't think I ever came so near meaning it,

he answered with a smile. There were no warm lights in her eyes; only a dreamy, absent look.

ALCÉE AROBIN

Good night. I adore you. Sleep well,

he said, and he kissed her hand and went away.

★ BEAT — Edna alone — the reverie and the jealous pang

This closing beat is interior, quiet, and quietly devastating. Edna replays every word and look of the evening with Robert, and finds it meager — 'how few and meager they had been for her hungry heart!' Let that word 'hungry' land. The 'transcendently seductive vision of a Mexican girl' that rises before her is pure

jealousy, shot through with longing. The final observation — 'some way he had seemed nearer to her off there in Mexico' — is the chapter's last, desolate twist. Read it slowly, without melodrama; the stillness is everything.

She stayed alone in a kind of reverie—a sort of stupor. Step by step she lived over every instant of the time she had been with Robert after he had entered Mademoiselle Reisz's door. She recalled his words, his looks. How few and meager they had been for her hungry heart! A vision—a transcendently seductive vision of a Mexican girl arose before her. She writhed with a jealous pang. She wondered when he would come back. He had not said he would come back. She had been with him, had heard his voice and touched his hand. But some way he had seemed nearer to her off there in Mexico.

— END OF CHAPTER 34 —