

THE AWAKENING

Chapter 36 — Narrator Script (Booth Ready)

by Kate Chopin · narrated by Mike Vendetti & Kathy Verduin

Edna Pontellier

Robert Lebrun

NARRATOR

★ BEAT — Catiche's garden — the secret corner

Set the scene with quiet sensuousness: the orange trees, the sleeping cat, the mulatresse dozing at the window, the milk that tasted of Iberville. This small suburban garden is Edna's sanctuary — unhurried, out of fashion, beyond the city's social gaze. Read it as a still-life that breathes. The note that it was 'the last place in the city where she would have expected to meet any one she knew' sets up the inevitability of what follows. Providence and accident are the same thing in this chapter.

There was a garden out in the suburbs; a small, leafy corner, with a few green tables under the orange trees. An old cat slept all day on the stone step in the sun, and an old mulatresse slept her idle hours away in her chair at the open window, till some one happened to knock on one of the green tables. She had milk and cream cheese to sell, and bread and butter. There was no one who could make such excellent coffee or fry a chicken so golden brown as she.

The place was too modest to attract the attention of people of fashion, and so quiet as to have escaped the notice of those in search of pleasure and dissipation. Edna had discovered it accidentally one day when the high-board gate stood ajar. She caught sight of a little green table, blotched with the checkered sunlight that filtered through the quivering leaves overhead. Within she had found the slumbering mulatresse, the drowsy cat, and a glass of milk which reminded her of the milk she had tasted in Iberville [*EE-ber-vil*].

She often stopped there during her perambulations; sometimes taking a book with her, and sitting an hour or two under the trees when she found the place deserted. Once or twice she took a quiet dinner there alone, having instructed Célestine [*say-les-TEEN*] beforehand to prepare no dinner at home. It was the last place in the city where she would have expected to meet any one she knew.

Still she was not astonished when, as she was partaking of a modest dinner late in the afternoon, looking into an open book, stroking the cat, which had

made friends with her—she was not greatly astonished to see Robert come in at the tall garden gate.

★ **BEAT — Robert found — the confrontation at the garden table**

The emotional temperature rises sharply. Edna had resolved to be cool and indifferent; that resolve dissolves the instant she sees him. The dialogue here is some of the most charged in the novel: his ‘Why are you so personal?’ is a cry of someone barely holding himself together. Her ‘You are the embodiment of selfishness’ is direct and true and slightly reckless. His reply — that she is ‘forcing me into disclosures which can result in nothing; as if you would have me bare a wound’ — is the most honest and most anguished thing he says in the book. Read it as pain, not evasion. The chapter then — miraculously — detours into Edna’s chatty, gracious patter about the garden, the coffee, the cress. Read this as her deliberately easing the pressure: she has won something and feels generous. Robert’s half-smile, buying his own cigar, is a surrender he finds almost sweet.

EDNA PONTELLIER

I am destined to see you only by accident,

she said, shoving the cat off the chair beside her. He was surprised, ill at ease, almost embarrassed at meeting her thus so unexpectedly.

ROBERT LEBRUN

Do you come here often?

EDNA PONTELLIER

I almost live here,

she said.

ROBERT LEBRUN

I used to drop in very often for a cup of Catiche's good coffee. This is the first time since I came back.

Edna had intended to be indifferent and as reserved as he when she met him; she had reached the determination by a laborious train of reasoning, incident to one of her despondent moods. But her resolve melted when she saw him before designing Providence had led him into her path. She told him she would have Célestine bring a plate, that there was always enough for two—even three.

EDNA PONTELLIER

Why have you kept away from me, Robert?

she asked, closing the book that lay open upon the table.

ROBERT LEBRUN

Why are you so personal, Mrs. Pontellier? Why do you force me to idiotic subterfuges? I suppose there's no use telling you I've been very busy, or that I've been sick, or that I've been to see you and

not found you at home. Please let me off with any one of these excuses.

EDNA PONTELLIER

You are the embodiment of selfishness. You save yourself something—I don't know what—but there is some selfish motive, and in sparing yourself you never consider for a moment what I think, or how I feel your neglect and indifference. I suppose this is what you would call unwomanly; but I have got into a habit of expressing myself. It doesn't matter to me, and you may think me unwomanly if you like.

ROBERT LEBRUN

No; I only think you cruel, as I said the other day. Maybe not intentionally cruel; but you seem to be forcing me into disclosures which can result in nothing; as if you would have me bare a wound for the pleasure of looking at it, without the intention or power of healing it.

EDNA PONTELLIER

I'm spoiling your dinner, Robert; never mind what I say. You haven't eaten a morsel.

ROBERT LEBRUN

I only came in for a cup of coffee.

His sensitive face was all disfigured with excitement.

EDNA PONTELLIER

Isn't this a delightful place? I am so glad it has never actually been discovered. It is so quiet, so sweet, here. Do you notice there is scarcely a sound to be heard? It's so out of the way; and a good walk from the car. However, I don't mind walking. I always feel so sorry for women who don't like to walk; they miss so much—so many rare little glimpses of life; and we women learn so little of life on the whole.

EDNA PONTELLIER

Catiche's coffee is always hot. I don't know how she manages it, here in the open air. Célestine's coffee gets cold bringing it from the kitchen to the dining-room. Three lumps! How can you drink it so sweet? Take some of the cress with your chop; it's so biting and crisp. Then there's the advantage of being able to smoke with your coffee out here. Now, in the city—aren't you going to smoke?

ROBERT LEBRUN

After a while,

he said, laying a cigar on the table.

EDNA PONTELLIER

Who gave it to you?

she laughed.

ROBERT LEBRUN

I bought it. I suppose I'm getting reckless; I bought a whole box.

She was determined not to be personal again and make him uncomfortable.

The cat made friends with him, and climbed into his lap when he smoked his cigar. He stroked her silky fur, and talked a little about her. He looked at Edna's book, which he had read; and he told her the end, to save her the trouble of wading through it, he said.

★ **BEAT — The pigeon-house — the kiss and the declaration**

The emotional summit of the entire novel. Move into it slowly — the walk home at dusk, the lamp lit, Edna stepping away to bathe her face, Robert sitting in shadow when she returns. The kiss she initiates — 'a soft, cool, delicate kiss, whose voluptuous sting penetrated his whole being' — must be read with exquisite care: do not rush it. His confession ('Now you know what I have been fighting against since

last summer') is trembling, not triumphant. Their exchange about marriage and freedom ('I am no longer one of Mr. Pontellier's possessions') is Edna's most revolutionary declaration; her voice should be calm and certain, not defiant. Robert's 'What do you mean?' when his face goes 'a little white' carries the full weight of what neither of them has thought past. The knock at the door — Adèle's servant — cuts across everything. Edna's 'Good-by, my sweet Robert' and his 'Don't go; don't go!' carry a premonition of severance that neither of them recognizes yet. End charged and unresolved.

Again he accompanied her back to her home; and it was after dusk when they reached the little "pigeon-house." She did not ask him to remain, which he was grateful for, as it permitted him to stay without the discomfort of blundering through an excuse which he had no intention of considering. He helped her to light the lamp; then she went into her room to take off her hat and to bathe her face and hands.

When she came back Robert was not examining the pictures and magazines as before; he sat off in the shadow, leaning his head back on the chair as if in a reverie. Edna lingered a moment beside the table, arranging the books there. Then she went across the room to where he sat. She bent over the arm of his chair and called his name.

EDNA PONTELLIER

Robert, are you asleep?

ROBERT LEBRUN

No,

he answered, looking up at her.

She leaned over and kissed him—a soft, cool, delicate kiss, whose voluptuous sting penetrated his whole being—then she moved away from him. He followed, and took her in his arms, just holding her close to him. She put her hand up to his face and pressed his cheek against her own. The action was full of love and tenderness. He sought her lips again. Then he drew her down upon the sofa beside him and held her hand in both of his.

ROBERT LEBRUN

Now you know, now you know what I have been fighting against since last summer at Grand Isle; what drove me away and drove me back again.

EDNA PONTELLIER

Why have you been fighting against it?

she asked. Her face glowed with soft lights.

"Why? Because you were not free; you were Léonce *[lay-AWNS]* Pontellier's wife. I couldn't help loving you if you were ten times his wife; but so long as I went away from you and kept away I could help telling you so." She put her free hand up to his shoulder, and then against his cheek, rubbing it softly. He kissed her again. His face was warm and flushed.

ROBERT LEBRUN

There in Mexico I was thinking of you all the time,
and longing for you.

EDNA PONTELLIER

But not writing to me,

she interrupted.

ROBERT LEBRUN

Something put into my head that you cared for me;
and I lost my senses. I forgot everything but a wild
dream of your some way becoming my wife.

EDNA PONTELLIER

Your wife!

ROBERT LEBRUN

Religion, loyalty, everything would give way if only you cared.

EDNA PONTELLIER

Then you must have forgotten that I was Léonce Pontellier's wife.

ROBERT LEBRUN

Oh! I was demented, dreaming of wild, impossible things, recalling men who had set their wives free, we have heard of such things.

EDNA PONTELLIER

Yes, we have heard of such things.

ROBERT LEBRUN

I came back full of vague, mad intentions. And when I got here—

EDNA PONTELLIER

When you got here you never came near me!

She was still caressing his cheek.

ROBERT LEBRUN

I realized what a cur I was to dream of such a thing, even if you had been willing.

She took his face between her hands and looked into it as if she would never withdraw her eyes more. She kissed him on the forehead, the eyes, the cheeks, and the lips.

EDNA PONTELLIER

You have been a very, very foolish boy, wasting your time dreaming of impossible things when you speak of Mr. Pontellier setting me free! I am no longer one of Mr. Pontellier's possessions to dispose of or not. I give myself where I choose. If he were to say, 'Here, Robert, take her and be happy; she is yours,' I should laugh at you both.

His face grew a little white.

ROBERT LEBRUN

What do you mean?

There was a knock at the door. Old Célestine came in to say that Madame Ratignolle [*rah-tee-NYOL*]'s servant had come around the back way with a message that Madame had been taken sick and begged Mrs. Pontellier to go to her immediately.

EDNA PONTELLIER

Yes, yes. I promised. Tell her yes—to wait for me. I'll go back with her.

ROBERT LEBRUN

Let me walk over with you,

offered Robert.

EDNA PONTELLIER

No, I will go with the servant.

She went into her room to put on her hat, and when she came in again she sat once more upon the sofa beside him. He had not stirred. She put her arms about his neck.

EDNA PONTELLIER

Good-by, my sweet Robert. Tell me good-by.

He kissed her with a degree of passion which had not before entered into his caress, and strained her to him.

EDNA PONTELLIER

I love you, only you; no one but you. It was you who awoke me last summer out of a life-long, stupid dream. Oh! you have made me so unhappy with

your indifference. Oh! I have suffered, suffered!
Now you are here we shall love each other, my
Robert. We shall be everything to each other.
Nothing else in the world is of any consequence. I
must go to my friend; but you will wait for me? No
matter how late; you will wait for me, Robert?

ROBERT LEBRUN

Don't go; don't go! Oh! Edna, stay with me. Why
should you go? Stay with me, stay with me.

She told him she would come back as soon as she could; she would find him there. She buried her face in his neck, and said good-by again. Her seductive voice, together with his great love for her, had enthralled his senses, had deprived him of every impulse but the longing to hold her and keep her.

— *END OF CHAPTER 36* —