

THE AWAKENING

Chapter 38 — Narrator Script (Booth Ready)

by Kate Chopin · narrated by Mike Vendetti & Kathy Verduin

Edna Pontellier

Robert Lebrun

Doctor Mandelet

NARRATOR

★ BEAT — The night walk with Doctor Mandelet

Edna and the Doctor walk through the night city — stars blazing overhead, the air mild and cool with spring. She is dazed; the prose says so and you should honor it. Read the walk slowly, with measured weight, ‘as if her thoughts had gone ahead of her and she was striving to overtake them.’ The Doctor’s concern is genuine and tender (‘That was no place for you... I felt that it was cruel, cruel’) — let it register as real care, not paternalism. Edna’s answers are half-coherent, slipping between the public self and the private one. Her speech about not wanting to go abroad, wanting to ‘be let alone’ — trailing off mid-sentence — should feel like her thoughts genuinely outrunning the words available to her. The Doctor’s speech about Nature and illusions is wise but also worldly and resigned; read it as the philosophy of a man who has made his peace with what he cannot change. Edna’s reply about waking from dreams — ‘perhaps it is better to wake up after all, even to suffer’ — is quiet, luminous, and wholly her own.

Edna still felt dazed when she got outside in the open air. The Doctor’s coupé had returned for him and stood before the porte cochère [*port koh-SHAIR*]. She did not wish to enter the coupé, and told Doctor Mandelet [*mahn-duh-LAY*] she would walk; she was not afraid, and would go alone. He directed his carriage to meet him

at Mrs. Pontellier's, and he started to walk home with her.

Up—away up, over the narrow street between the tall houses, the stars were blazing. The air was mild and caressing, but cool with the breath of spring and the night. They walked slowly, the Doctor with a heavy, measured tread and his hands behind him; Edna, in an absent-minded way, as she had walked one night at Grand Isle [*grand EYE-uhl*], as if her thoughts had gone ahead of her and she was striving to overtake them.

DOCTOR MANDELET

You shouldn't have been there, Mrs. Pontellier. That was no place for you. Adèle is full of whims at such times. There were a dozen women she might have had with her, unimpressionable women. I felt that it was cruel, cruel. You shouldn't have gone.

EDNA PONTELLIER

Oh, well! I don't know that it matters after all. One has to think of the children some time or other; the sooner the better.

DOCTOR MANDELET

When is Léonce coming back?

EDNA PONTELLIER

Quite soon. Some time in March.

DOCTOR MANDELET

And you are going abroad?

EDNA PONTELLIER

Perhaps—no, I am not going. I'm not going to be forced into doing things. I don't want to go abroad. I want to be let alone. Nobody has any right—except children, perhaps—and even then, it seems to me—or it did seem—

She felt that her speech was voicing the incoherency of her thoughts, and stopped abruptly.

DOCTOR MANDELET

The trouble is, that youth is given up to illusions. It seems to be a provision of Nature; a decoy to secure mothers for the race. And Nature takes no account of moral consequences, of arbitrary conditions which we create, and which we feel obliged to maintain at any cost.

sighed the Doctor, grasping her meaning intuitively.

EDNA PONTELLIER

Yes. The years that are gone seem like dreams—if one might go on sleeping and dreaming—but to wake up and find—oh! well! perhaps it is better to wake up after all, even to suffer, rather than to remain a dupe to illusions all one's life.

DOCTOR MANDELET

It seems to me, my dear child, you seem to me to be in trouble. I am not going to ask for your confidence. I will only say that if ever you feel moved to give it to me, perhaps I might help you. I know I would understand. And I tell you there are not many who would—not many, my dear.

said the Doctor at parting, holding her hand.

EDNA PONTELLIER

Some way I don't feel moved to speak of things that trouble me. Don't think I am ungrateful or that I don't appreciate your sympathy. There are periods of despondency and suffering which take possession of me. But I don't want anything but my

own way. That is wanting a good deal, of course, when you have to trample upon the lives, the hearts, the prejudices of others—but no matter—still, I shouldn't want to trample upon the little lives. Oh! I don't know what I'm saying, Doctor. Good night. Don't blame me for anything.

DOCTOR MANDELET

Yes, I will blame you if you don't come and see me soon. We will talk of things you never have dreamt of talking about before. It will do us both good. I don't want you to blame yourself, whatever comes. Good night, my child.

★ **BEAT — The porch step — kindled senses and anticipation**

A brief, luminous interval — Edna sits alone on her porch step in the spring night after the Doctor leaves, and all the tearing emotion falls away. She returns to Robert: his words, his arms, his lips. This is pure interior life; the prose is warm and almost sensuous. Read it without rushing — let the 'intoxication of expectancy' actually intoxicate. The undercut is Adèle's voice still whispering in her memory. Edna acknowledges it — that determination had driven into her soul like a death wound — but defers it: 'To-morrow would be time.' That deferral should not be read as selfishness; read it as the final assertion of a self that has just barely come to life.

She let herself in at the gate, but instead of entering she sat upon the step of the porch. The night was quiet and soothing. All the tearing emotion of the last few

hours seemed to fall away from her like a somber, uncomfortable garment, which she had but to loosen to be rid of. She went back to that hour before Adèle [*ah-DEL*] had sent for her; and her senses kindled afresh in thinking of Robert's words, the pressure of his arms, and the feeling of his lips upon her own. She could picture at that moment no greater bliss on earth than possession of the beloved one. His expression of love had already given him to her in part. When she thought that he was there at hand, waiting for her, she grew numb with the intoxication of expectancy. It was so late; he would be asleep perhaps. She would awaken him with a kiss. She hoped he would be asleep that she might arouse him with her caresses.

Still, she remembered Adèle's voice whispering to think of the children; to think of them. She meant to think of them; that determination had driven into her soul like a death wound—but not to-night. To-morrow would be time to think of everything.

★ **BEAT — Robert has gone — the note in the lamplight**

The final turn — the cruelest thing in the novel. Read the discovery with absolute stillness. 'Robert was not waiting for her in the little parlor. He was nowhere at

hand. The house was empty.’ Three sentences; three hammer-blows. Do not add vocal weight — Chopin’s simplicity is the weight. The note — ‘I love you. Good-by—because I love you’ — should be read once, and then allowed to sit in absolute silence before moving on. Edna’s response: she grows faint, sits on the sofa, stretches out, never utters a sound, does not sleep, does not go to bed. The lamp sputters and goes out. She is still awake at morning. Read this closing paragraph in a near-whisper, very slow — the prose is already a farewell.

Robert was not waiting for her in the little parlor. He was nowhere at hand. The house was empty. But he had scrawled on a piece of paper that lay in the lamplight:

ROBERT LEBRUN

I love you. Good-by—because I love you.

Edna grew faint when she read the words. She went and sat on the sofa. Then she stretched herself out there, never uttering a sound. She did not sleep. She did not go to bed. The lamp sputtered and went out. She was still awake in the morning, when Célestine [*say-les-TEEN*] unlocked the kitchen door and came in to light the fire.

— END OF CHAPTER 38 —