

THE AWAKENING

Chapter 39 — Narrator Script (Booth Ready)

by Kate Chopin · narrated by Mike Vendetti & Kathy Verduin

Edna Pontellier

Robert Lebrun

Mademoiselle Reisz

Victor Lebrun

NARRATOR

★ BEAT — Victor and Mariequita gossip at the cottage

Light, warm, almost comically ordinary — a domestic idyll that has no idea what is coming. Victor is young and boastful, Mariequita is jealous and charmed in equal measure; play them as lightly comic. The Lucullean feast description is pure Victor — a little stagey, a little ridiculous. Mariequita's sulking is girlish rather than bitter. Keep the tone breezy; this beat is the world going on as normal, indifferent to Edna's inner crisis.

Victor, with hammer and nails and scraps of scantling, was patching a corner of one of the galleries.

Mariequita [*mah-ree-eh-KEE-tah*] sat near by, dangling her legs, watching him work, and handing him nails from the tool-box. The sun was beating down upon them.

The girl had covered her head with her apron folded into a square pad. They had been talking for an hour or more. She was never tired of hearing Victor

describe the dinner at Mrs. Pontellier [*pon-tel-YAY*]'s. He

exaggerated every detail, making it appear a veritable

Lucullean feast. The flowers were in tubs, he said. The champagne was quaffed from huge golden goblets. Venus rising from the foam could have presented no more entrancing a spectacle than Mrs. Pontellier, blazing with beauty and diamonds at the head of the board, while the other women were all of them youthful houris, possessed of incomparable charms. She got it into her head that Victor was in love with Mrs. Pontellier, and he gave her evasive answers, framed so as to confirm her belief. She grew sullen and cried a little, threatening to go off and leave him to his fine ladies. There were a dozen men crazy about her at the Chênrière [*shay-NYAIR*]; and since it was the fashion to be in love with married people, why, she could run away any time she liked to New Orleans with Céline's husband.

Céline's husband was a fool, a coward, and a pig, and to prove it to her, Victor intended to hammer his head into a jelly the next time he encountered him. This assurance was very consoling to Mariequita. She dried her eyes, and grew cheerful at the prospect.

★ **BEAT** — **Edna arrives unexpectedly** — **dialogue at the gallery**

A sudden shift in register: the two young people are struck dumb by Edna's appearance as if by a ghost. Edna's lines are quietly matter-of-fact — she is tired, travel-stained, and somewhere very far away already. Victor's hospitality is eager and slightly flustered; his final grumble ("Women have no consideration!") is comic relief. Mariequita's silent appraisal — the lovers' rendezvous theory quietly abandoned — is observed without comment. Keep dialogue nimble; the scene moves fast.

They were still talking of the dinner and the allurements of city life when Mrs. Pontellier herself slipped around the corner of the house. The two youngsters stayed dumb with amazement before what they considered to be an apparition. But it was really she in flesh and blood, looking tired and a little travel-stained.

EDNA PONTELLIER

I walked up from the wharf, and heard the hammering. I supposed it was you, mending the porch. It's a good thing. I was always tripping over those loose planks last summer. How dreary and deserted everything looks!

It took Victor some little time to comprehend that she had come in Beaufort [*boh-duh-LAY*]'s lugger, that she had come alone, and for no purpose but to rest.

VICTOR LEBRUN

There's nothing fixed up yet, you see. I'll give you my room; it's the only place.

EDNA PONTELLIER

Any corner will do,

she assured him.

VICTOR LEBRUN

And if you can stand Philomel's cooking, though I might try to get her mother while you are here. Do you think she would come?

turning to Mariequita.

Mariequita thought that perhaps Philomel's mother might come for a few days, and money enough.

Beholding Mrs. Pontellier make her appearance, the girl had at once suspected a lovers' rendezvous. But Victor's astonishment was so genuine, and Mrs. Pontellier's indifference so apparent, that the disturbing notion did not lodge long in her brain. She contemplated with the greatest interest this woman who gave the most sumptuous dinners in America, and who had all the men in New Orleans at her feet.

EDNA PONTELLIER

What time will you have dinner? I'm very hungry; but don't get anything extra.

VICTOR LEBRUN

I'll have it ready in little or no time. You may go to my room to brush up and rest yourself. Mariequita will show you.

he said, bustling and packing away his tools.

EDNA PONTELLIER

Thank you. But, do you know, I have a notion to go down to the beach and take a good wash and even a little swim, before dinner?

“The water is too cold!” they both exclaimed. “Don't think of it.”

EDNA PONTELLIER

Well, I might go down and try—dip my toes in. Why, it seems to me the sun is hot enough to have warmed the very depths of the ocean. Could you get me a couple of towels? I'd better go right away, so as to be back in time. It would be a little too chilly if I waited till this afternoon.

Mariequita ran over to Victor's room, and returned with some towels, which she gave to Edna.

EDNA PONTELLIER

I hope you have fish for dinner, but don't do anything extra if you haven't.

VICTOR LEBRUN

Run and find Philomel's mother. I'll go to the kitchen and see what I can do. By Gimminy! Women have no consideration! She might have sent me word.

Victor instructed the girl.

★ **BEAT — Edna walks to the beach — the wakeful night's resolution**

The tone shifts here entirely. Drop the comic energy of the cottage and move into Edna's interior world — quiet, inexorable, already decided. She walks mechanically; she is not thinking. Read the long interior passage slowly, with gravity but without melodrama. The key line — 'But she knew a way to elude them' — should land without inflection, almost plainly; the horror is in its simplicity. The children as antagonists: let that image settle before moving on.

Edna walked on down to the beach rather mechanically, not noticing anything special except that the sun was hot. She was not dwelling upon any particular train of thought. She had done all the

thinking which was necessary after Robert went away, when she lay awake upon the sofa till morning. She had said over and over to herself — of Arobin, of Léonce [*lay-AWNS*] Pontellier, of the children Raoul [*rah-OOL*] and Etienne [*ay-TYEN*]:

EDNA PONTELLIER

To-day it is Arobin; to-morrow it will be some one else. It makes no difference to me, it doesn't matter about Léonce Pontellier—but Raoul and Etienne!

She understood now clearly what she had meant long ago when she said to Adèle [*ah-DEL*] Ratignolle [*rah-tee-NYOL*] that she would give up the unessential, but she would never sacrifice herself for her children.

Despondency had come upon her there in the wakeful night, and had never lifted. There was no one thing in the world that she desired. There was no human being whom she wanted near her except Robert; and she even realized that the day would come when he, too, and the thought of him would melt out of her existence, leaving her alone. The children appeared before her like antagonists who had overcome her;

who had overpowered and sought to drag her into the soul's slavery for the rest of her days. But she knew a way to elude them. She was not thinking of these things when she walked down to the beach.

★ **BEAT — Into the sea — the final swim**

This is the novel's closing movement — the most famous prose in the book. Read it hushed and unhurried. No actorly heightening; no swell or surge. Chopin's images carry everything: the bird with the broken wing, the nakedness under the open sky, the serpent-coiling wavelets, the childhood blue-grass meadow that had no beginning and no end. The pace should slow further with each paragraph. The Mademoiselle Reisz remembered lines are a last flicker of irony — read them quietly, almost internally. Robert's farewell 'Good-by—because I love you' should be barely voiced, a ghost of sound. The final sentence — 'There was the hum of bees, and the musky odor of pinks filled the air' — is the last line of the novel: take a long pause before it, read it softly, and let it simply end.

The water of the Gulf stretched out before her, gleaming with the million lights of the sun. The voice of the sea is seductive, never ceasing, whispering, clamoring, murmuring, inviting the soul to wander in abysses of solitude. All along the white beach, up and down, there was no living thing in sight. A bird with a broken wing was beating the air above, reeling, fluttering, circling disabled down, down to the water.

Edna had found her old bathing suit still hanging, faded, upon its accustomed peg.

She put it on, leaving her clothing in the bath-house. But when she was there beside the sea, absolutely alone, she cast the unpleasant, pricking garments from her, and for the first time in her life she stood naked in the open air, at the mercy of the sun, the breeze that beat upon her, and the waves that invited her.

How strange and awful it seemed to stand naked under the sky! how delicious! She felt like some newborn creature, opening its eyes in a familiar world that it had never known.

The foamy wavelets curled up to her white feet, and coiled like serpents about her ankles. She walked out. The water was chill, but she walked on. The water was deep, but she lifted her white body and reached out with a long, sweeping stroke. The touch of the sea is sensuous, enfolding the body in its soft, close embrace.

She went on and on. She remembered the night she swam far out, and recalled the terror that seized her at the fear of being unable to regain the shore. She did not look back now, but went on and on, thinking of the blue-grass meadow that she had traversed when a little child, believing that it had no beginning and no end.

Her arms and legs were growing tired.

She thought of Léonce and the children. They were a part of her life. But they need not have thought that they could possess her, body and soul. How Mademoiselle Reisz [*mad-mwah-ZEL REES*] would have laughed, perhaps sneered, if she knew!

MADEMOISELLE REISZ

And you call yourself an artist! What pretensions, Madame! The artist must possess the courageous soul that dares and defies.

Exhaustion was pressing upon and overpowering her.

She remembered his parting words:

ROBERT LEBRUN

Good-by—because I love you.

He did not know; he did not understand. He would never understand. Perhaps Doctor Mandelet [*mahn-duh-LAY*] would have understood if she had seen him—but it was too late; the shore was far behind her, and her strength was gone.

She looked into the distance, and the old terror flamed up for an instant, then sank again. Edna heard her father's voice and her sister Margaret's. She heard the barking of an old dog that was chained to the sycamore tree. The spurs of the cavalry officer clanged as he walked across the porch. There was the hum of bees, and the musky odor of pinks filled the air.

— END OF CHAPTER 39 —