

'The Awakening' Act I; Scene 10

Setting: The dining room of the Lebrun house

Farival- 60-80

Victor- 19

MME. Lebrun- 40 to 50

Robert- early 20's

Adele-mid to late 20's

Lovers- M/F 20's-30's

Woman in Black - 40-60

Edna- mid 20's

Madame Lebrun, Robert, Victor, old Monsieur Farival, Adele, the Woman in Black, and the Lovers are seated down to dinner. There is an empty seat between Adele and Monsieur Farival. The diners' conversation is unusually animated and loud.

FARIVAL

The boy is leaving the country?

VICTOR

Tonight!

FARIVAL

Oh, I do not believe it!

VICTOR

Do you call me a liar, old man?

MME. LEBRUN

Victor please! These are our guests.

FARIVAL

It is allright, Madame. I do not hold you responsible for your son's highly disrespectful words.

Edna enters. There is uncomfortable silence amongst the diners.

EDNA

Please excuse me. I was sketching and I became so absorbed in my work that time completely eluded me.

She sits between Farival and Adele. A servant brings her a bowl of soup.

VICTOR/FARIVAL/ADELE

Robert is going to Mexico!

Edna sets down her spoon and looks about her bewildered. She looks across at Robert, who lifts his eyebrows with the pretext of a smile as he returns her glance. He is embarrassed and uneasy.

EDNA (*asking everybody in general, as if Robert is not there to answer for himself*)

When is he going?

THE DINERS

Tonight!.... This very evening!..... Did you ever!..... What possesses him.....

EDNA

Impossible! How can a person start off from Grand Isle to Mexico at a moment's notice, as if he were going over the Klein's or to the wharf or down to the beach?

ROBERT (*in an excited and irritable tone, with 'the air of a man defending himself against a swarm of stinging insects'*) I said all along I was going to Mexico; I've been saying so for years!

THE DINERS

Imagine! Leaving his family just like that!.... No warning whatsoever!.... Just when his mother needs him here..... Young people today! They do whatever pleases them. They have no regard for others!..... What's in Mexico, anyway?

MME. LEBRUN (*knocking on the table with her knife handle*)

Please let Robert explain why his is going, and why he is going tonight. Really, this table is getting to be more and more like Bedlam every day, with everybody talking at once. Sometimes—I hope God will forgive me—but positively, sometimes—I wish Victor would lose the power of speech.

VICTOR (*laughing sardonically*)

Thank you, mother, for your holy wish, but I fail to see how getting it would be a benefit to anyone-- Unless it would afford you a more ample opportunity and license to talk yourself!

FARIVAL

I am of the opinion that Victor should have been taken out in mid-ocean in his earliest youth and drowned.

VICTOR

It would be far more logical to thus dispose of old people with an established claim for making themselves universally obnoxious.

ROBERT

Victor, you are the most inconsiderate, self-serving, remorseless fool in modern existence. Your talent is bringing grief to everyone in your acquaintance, and were it not for my love and concern for mother and the resort I would have distanced myself from you years ago.

MME. LEBRUN

Robert, Victor.... I simply will not stand for any more of this. I cannot bear to see my sons fighting this way. Please.... If only for tonight. Now Robert, I believe our guests are still awaiting an explanation as to your abrupt departure.

ROBERT

There is nothing much to explain, mother. (*looking chiefly at Edna as he speaks*) I can only meet with a certain steamer from New Orleans on Friday. Beaufort is going out with a lugger-load of vegetables tonight. I may not have another opportunity of reaching the city before the steamer departs.

FARIVAL

But when did you make up your mind to all this?

ROBERT (*with a shade of annoyance*)

This afternoon.

FARIVAL (*with nagging determination, as if he were cross-questioning a criminal*)

At what time this afternoon?

ROBERT (*in a high voice and with a lofty air*)

At four o'clock this afternoon, Monsieur Farival.

ADELE

Robert, I do hope that when in Mexico you will exercise extreme caution when dealing with those Mexicans. They are a treacherous people, unscrupulous and revengeful, and I trust

that I am doing them no injustice in thus condemning them as a race! I admit that I have known personally but one Mexican. He made and sold excellent tamales, and I would have trusted him implicitly, so soft spoken and courteous was he... One day he was arrested for stabbing his wife!

THE DINERS

Terrible!..... I understand they are all alike, those Mexicans! You cannot trust them, Robert! The minute you turn your back on one.... Thieves and murderers!..... The whole lot of them is worthless!

"The lovers were profiting in general conversation on Mexico to speak in whispers of matters which they rightly considered were interesting to no one but themselves."

ADELE

I never did find out whether he had been hanged or not.

EDNA

At what time do you leave?

ROBERT

At ten. Beaufort wants to wait for the moon.

EDNA

Are you all ready to go?

ROBERT

Quite ready. I shall only take a handbag, and shall pack my trunk in the city.

MME LEBRUN

Robert, are you certain you have enough clothing that is appropriate to the climate?

ROBERT

I will simply have to make do with what I have until I establish myself in business, mother.

VICTOR

I was once introduced to a Mexican girl who served chocolate one winter in a restaurant in Dauphine Street. I am sure it will not surprise anyone here that chocolate wasn't the only thing she sold. *(No one is listening to Victor with the exception of Farival. The others are immersed in their own heated*

conversations about Mexico and the Mexicans) I had no sooner asked the girl if I might try a bit of her chocolate when she asked me if I would like it personally delivered to my residence later that evening! (*Farival goes into a fit of laughter-related coughing*) Bon Dieu! Those Mexican girls... Well, there are no fitting words to describe them. Wouldn't you agree, brother?

ROBERT (*impatiently*)

I am not in the acquaintance of any Mexican girls, Robert.

VICTOR

Oh no? What about Mariequita?

ROBERT

She is a servant on the Isle, and hardly a close acquaintance. And Mariequita is Spanish, not Mexican.

VICTOR

Please pardon the error, brother.

Edna emerges from the cottage, dressed in a peignoir. She sits in the doorstep and fans herself energetically, as she is overheated and irritable.

ADELE

If you will all excuse me; I wish to check on Edna.

THE DINERS

Oh, do come back!.... Yes, we must continue our conversation!... Bring Mrs. Pontellier back with you.

ADELE

I shan't be gone for more than a moment. (*she exits and crosses to the Pontellier cottage. The guests continue their chattering*) Edna... Edna, dear, whatever's the matter?

EDNA

All that noise and confusion at the table must have upset me... and moreover, I hate shocks and surprises. The idea of Robert starting off in such a ridiculously sudden and dramatic way! As if it were a matter of life and death. Never saying a word about it all morning when he was with me, reading a book to me while I sketched....

ADELE

Yes, I think it was showing us all—you especially—very little consideration. It wouldn't have surprised me in any of the others; those Lebruns are all given to heroics. But Robert has always been the exception... Are you not going to join us? Come on, dear; it doesn't look friendly.

EDNA

No... but you go on. Madame Lebrun might be offended if we both stayed away.

ADELE

Very well, dear.

Adele kisses Edna good-night and returns to the house, "being in truth rather desirous of joining in the general and animated conversation which was still in progress concerning Mexico and the Mexicans."

A light change indicates the passing of several hours. It is now nearly ten o'clock, and Robert has his bag in hand as he bids farewell to his family and friends, who mutter various well-wishes, intentions to write, and desire to be written to. Mme. Lebrun carries on as if Robert were dying instead of just going away. Robert exits and somewhat nervously proceeds to the cottage to say goodbye to Edna.

ROBERT

Aren't you feeling well?

EDNA

Well enough. Are you going right away?

ROBERT (*lighting a match to look at his watch*)

In twenty minutes (He sits upon a stool, puts on his soft hat and nervously takes it off again to wipe his forehead with a handkerchief). This heat is unbearable.

EDNA

Take the fan.

ROBERT

Oh, no! Thank you. It does no good; you have to stop fanning some time, and feel all the more uncomfortable afterward.

EDNA

That's one of the ridiculous things which men always say. If I have never known one to speak otherwise of fanning. How long will you be gone?

ROBERT

Forever, perhaps. I don't know. It depends upon a good many things.

EDNA

Well, in case it shouldn't be forever, how long will it be?

ROBERT

I don't know.

EDNA

This seems perfectly preposterous and uncalled for. I don't like it. I don't understand your motive for silence and mystery, never saying a word about it this morning.

ROBERT (*not offering to defend himself*)

Don't part from me in ill-humor. I have never known you to be out of patience with me before.

EDNA

I've grown used to seeing you, to having you with me all the time, and your action seems unfriendly, even unkind. You have yet to offer an excuse for it. Why, I was planning to be together, thinking of how pleasant it would be to see you in the city next winter.

ROBERT (*blurting out*)

So was I. Perhaps that's the ---.... (*He stands up suddenly, extending his hand to hers*) Good-bye, my dear Mrs. Pontellier; good-bye. You won't-I hope you don't completely forget me.

EDNA (*clinging to his hand, striving to detain him*)

Write me when you get there, won't you Robert?

ROBERT

I will, thank you. Good-bye. (*exits quickly*)

"Edna bit her handkerchief convulsively, striving to hold back and hide, even from herself as she would have hidden from another the emotion which was troubling-tearing-her. Her eyes were brimming with tears."

For the first time she recognized anew the symptoms of infatuation which she felt incipiently as a child, as a girl in her earliest teens, and later as a young woman. The recognition did not lessen the reality, the poignancy of the revelation by any suggestion or promise of instability. The past was nothing to her.... The present alone was significant; was hers, to torture her as it was doing them with the biting conviction that she had lost that which she had held, that she had been denied that which her impassioned, newly awakened being demanded."

Blackout. End Scene