

**'The Awakening' by Lara E. Morton (based on the novel
by Kate Chopin, 1899)**

Act II; Scene I

The Pontellier home, New Orleans

Leonce— 30's-40's

Edna— late 20's

Joe— servant, any age

Dr. Mandalet — 60's-70's

Leonce and Edna have seated themselves to dinner in their New Orleans home, several weeks after their return from Grand Isle. Edna is an ordinary house dress, rather than her usual Tuesday reception gown. A servant boy sets down two bowls of soup before them.

LEONCE (*tasting his soup and adding to it a generous amount of every seasoning within reach*)

Tired out, Edna? Whom did you have? Many callers?

EDNA

There were a good many. I found their cards when I got home; I was out.

LEONCE

Out! Why, what could have taken you out on a Tuesday? What did you have to do?

EDNA

Nothing. I simply felt like going out, and I went out.

LEONCE (*somewhat appeased*)

Well, I hope you left some suitable excuse.

EDNA

No, I left no excuse. I told Joe to say I was out, that was all.

LEONCE

Why, my dear, I should think you'd understand by this time that people don't do such things! We've got to observe les convenances if we ever expect to get on and keep up with the procession. If you felt that you had to leave home this afternoon, you should have left some suitable explanation for

your absence. *(with an expression of utter disgust)* This soup is really impossible; it's strange that woman hasn't learned yet to make a decent soup. Any free-lunch stand in town serves a better one. Was Mrs. Belthrop here?

EDNA

I don't remember who was here. Bring the tray with the cards, Joe.

LEONCE *(scanning the names, reading the disturbing ones aloud)*
The Misses Delasidas. I worked a big deal in futures for their father this morning; nice girls; it's time they were getting married. Mrs. Belthrop. I tell you what it is, Edna; you can't afford to snub Mrs. Belthrop. Why, Belthrop could buy and sell us ten times over. His business is worth a good, round sum to me. You'd better write her a note. Mrs. James Highcamp. Hugh! The less you have to do with Mrs. Highcamp, the better. Madame Laforce. Came all the way from Carrolton, too, poor old soul. Mrs. Wiggs, Mrs. Eleanor Boltons..... *(pushes the cards aside pointedly)*

EDNA

Mercy! Why are you taking the thing so seriously and making such a fuss over it?

LEONCE

I'm not making any fuss over it. But it's just such seeming trifles that we've got to take seriously; such things count.

Joe removes the soup bowls and replaces them with the entrees.

LEONCE

This fish is scorched!

EDNA

I do not mind a little scorched taste.

LEONCE

I shall not even touch it! And the vegetables! Mon dieu! How does one ruin vegetables?

EDNA

There is nothing wrong with these veget-

LEONCE *(cutting her off)*

It seems to me, we spend money enough in this house to procure at least one meal a day which a man could eat and retain his self-respect.

EDNA (*indifferently*)

You used to think the cook was a treasure.

LEONCE

Perhaps she was when she first came; but cooks are only human. They need looking after, like any other class of persons that you employ. Suppose I didn't look after the clerks in my office, just let them run things their own way; they'd soon make a nice mess of me and my business. Joe, fetch my hat and stick.

EDNA

Where are you going?

Joe returns with the requested articles.

LEONCE

I'm going to get my dinner at the club. Good night. (*exits*)

Edna sets about to finish her meal with deliberation and pleasure. As she eats, lights come up downstage on Dr. Mandalet, a semi-retired, portly old doctor who only services a few select families to whom he is united by the bonds of friendship. He is revealed to be reading at the window of his study. A knock at his door illicitly a start and a disapproving stare over a pair of eyeglasses at whomever has the temerity to disturb him at this hour of the morning.

DOCTOR

Yes!

Leonce enters, removing his hat.

DOCTOR

Ah, Pontellier! Not sick, I hope. Come and have a seat. What news do you bring this morning?

LEONCE

Oh! I'm never sick, doctor. You know that I come of tough fiber--of that old Creole race of Pontelliers that dry up and finally blow away. I come to consult--no, not precisely to consult-- to talk to you about Edna. I don't know what ails her.

DOCTOR

Madame Pontellier not well? Why, I saw her—I think it was a week ago—walking along Canal Street, the picture of health, it seemed to me.

LEONCE

Yes, yes; she seems quite well. She's odd, she's not herself. I can't make her out, and I thought perhaps you'd help me.

DOCTOR

How does she act?

LEONCE

It isn't easy to explain. *(Throwing himself into his chair)* She lets the housekeeping go to the dickens.

DOCTOR

Well, well; women are not all alike, my dear Pontellier. We've got to consider—

LEONCE

I know that; I've told you I couldn't explain. Her whole attitude—toward me and everybody and everything—has changed. You know I have a quick temper, but I don't want to quarrel or be rude to a woman, especially my wife; yet I'm driven to it, and feel like ten thousand devils after I've made a fool of myself. She's making it devilishly uncomfortable for me. *(nervously)* She's got some sort of notion in her head concerning the eternal rights of women....

Edna pushes away her plate and rises from the table. She begins moving about the room, examining everything in it.

And—you understand—we meet in the morning at the breakfast table.

DOCTOR *(lifts his shaggy eyebrows and taps the arms of his chair with his fingertips)*

What have you been doing to her, Pontellier?

LEONCE

Doing! Parbleu!

DOCTOR *(with a smile)*

Has she been associating of late with a circle of pseudo-intellectual women-super spiritual superior beings? My wife has been telling me about them.

LEONCE

That's the trouble... She hasn't been associating with anyone. She has even abandoned her Tuesdays at home. I came home several weeks ago to find that she went out without leaving an excuse for her callers, and I have now learned that she even tells our boy Joe to tell them she is out when she is in the atelier painting!

Leonce and Edna both step out of their scenes, and they meet downstage center. Mandalet reacts as if Leonce were still speaking directly to him.

EDNA

I feel like painting. Perhaps I shan't always feel like it.

LEONCE

Then in God's name paint! But don't let the family go to the devil! There's Madame Ratignolle; because she keeps up her music, she doesn't let everything else go to chaos. And she's more of a musician than you are a painter.

EDNA

She isn't a musician, and I'm not a painter. It isn't on account of painting that I let things go.

LEONCE

On account of what then?

EDNA

Oh! I don't know-let me alone; you bother me.

They step back into their respective scenes, and after some more reflective gazing about the room, Edna focuses her attention on her wedding ring.

LEONCE

Aside from abandoning her Tuesdays, she has thrown over all her acquaintances, and goes tramping about by herself, moping in the streetcars, getting in after dark. I tell you she's peculiar. I don't like it; I feel a little worried over it.

DOCTOR

Nothing hereditary? Nothing peculiar about her family antecedents is there?

LEONCE

Oh, no, indeed! She comes of sound old Presbyterian Kentucky stock. The old gentleman, her father, I have heard used to atone for his weekday sins with his Sunday devotions. I know for a fact, that his racehorses literally ran away with the prettiest bit of Kentucky farming land I ever laid eyes upon. Margaret—you know Margaret—she has all the Presbyterianism undiluted. And the youngest is something of a vixen. By the way, she gets married in a couple of weeks from now.

Edna throws her wedding ring on the ground and stomps on it, trying desperately to break it. It will not be broken.

DOCTOR

Send your wife up to the wedding. Let her stay among her own people for a while; it will do her good.

LEONCE

That's what I want her to do. She won't go to the marriage. She says a wedding is one of the most lamentable spectacles on earth. Nice thing for a woman to say to her husband! (*fumes anew at the recollection*)

LEONCE

Pontellier, let your wife alone for a while. Don't bother her, and don't let her bother you. Woman, my dear friend, is a very peculiar and delicate organism—a sensitive and highly organized woman, such as I know Mrs. Pontellier to be, is especially peculiar. It would take an inspired psychologist to deal successfully with them. And when ordinary fellows like you and me attempt to cope with their idiosyncrasies the result is bungling. Most women are moody and whimsical.

Edna picks up a vase and smashes it onto the floor. "She wanted to destroy something. The crash and clatter were what she wanted to hear."

DOCTOR

This is some passing whim of your wife, due to some cause or causes, which you and I needn't try to fathom. But it will pass happily over, especially if you let her alone.

Joe, alarmed at the din of the breaking glass, enters to discover what is the matter.

EDNA

A vase fell upon the hearth. Never mind. Leave it until morning.

JOE

Oh! You might get some of the glass in your feet ma'am.
(proceeds to pick up the fragments)

Edna slumps in her chair.

DOCTOR

Pontellier, I have a suggestion; why don't you send her around to see me.

LEONCE

Oh! I couldn't do that. There'd be no reason for it.

DOCTOR

Then I'll go around and see her. I'll drop in to dinner some evening en bon ami.

LEONCE

Do! By all means. What evening will you come? Say Thursday... Will you come Thursday? *(rises to take his leave)*

DOCTOR

Very well; Thursday. My wife may possibly have some engagement for me Thursday. In case that she has, I shall let you know. Otherwise, you may expect me.

LEONCE

Fine, fine. *(turns before leaving)* I am going to New York on business very soon. I have a big scheme on hand, and want to be on the field proper to pull the ropes and handle the ribbons. We'll let you in on the inside if you say so Doctor.

DOCTOR

No, I thank you, my dear sir, I leave such ventures to you younger men with the fever of life still in your blood.

LEONCE

(still leaving) What I wanted to say, I may have to be absent a good long while. Would you advise me to take Edna along?

DOCTOR

By all means, if she wishes to go. If not, leave her here. Don't contradict her. The mood will pass, I assure you. It may take a month, two, three months, possibly longer, but it will pass; have patience. Well, good-by, a jeudi.

Leonce exits. Mandalet does not resume his book, but sits meditatively looking out the window at "the garden," watching Pontellier pass through the gate.

JOE

I believe I've found all of the glass, ma'am. And here's your ring, ma'am, under the chair.

Edna holds out her hand, and taking the ring, slips it onto her finger.

DOCTOR

My friend, it should not surprise me greatly if there were a man in the case.

Blackout; End Scene