

THE AWAKENING

by

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Based on the Novel

by Kate Chopin

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FADE IN:

EXT. BAY, GRAND ISLE - AFTERNOON

We hear the sounds of the wind and the waves. The cries of gulls.

Then we hear the labored breathing and ineffectual splashing of someone trying desperately to swim in the open sea.

Arms and legs flail at the waves.

The face of a young woman appears half submerged in the waves, trying to keep her head above the water. Her eyes are wide with fear.

She continues to flail on, straining to stay afloat, her face expressing utter panic. We can hear her trying to cry for help and beginning to choke as her awkward strokes churn the water before her. This goes on for what seems like an eternity.

ROBERT (O.S)

Don't worry, Mrs. Pontellier. I'm here.

ROBERT LEBRUN, 28 years old and handsome, a favorite at the resort his mother owns, swims over to help EDNA PONTELLIER. Edna is also 28 and a visitor to Grand Isle. She takes his hand and stands up, still choking and breathing with difficulty.

EDNA

I'm sorry. So sorry. I panicked again.

ROBERT

Why don't we go in now. We've done enough for the day.

As they turn to go in, we can see that Edna and Robert are just two of the many bathers in the water and on the beach on Grand Isle.

Bathing machines line the shore. It is August 1890.

EXT. BEACH, GRAND ISLE - AFTERNOON

Edna emerges from a bathing machine, shy and embarrassed and now dressed as befits the wife of an investment banker. Her hair is still wet from swimming. She seems younger than her 28 years.

Then she notices a trio of swimmers racing to a buoy.

Robert comes up, also dressed in his street clothes.

Edna points to the racing swimmers.

EDNA

Look at them. They make it look so easy.

With a final burst of speed, one of the trio reaches the buoy and puts up his arms in triumph.

EDNA

Do you think I'll ever learn?

ROBERT

There's not much more I can teach you, Mrs. Pontellier.

EDNA

But I keep getting frightened, and then I can't do anything.

ROBERT

You'll get over it. Besides, the sea is very big and very powerful. There is reason to fear.

A small child runs away from a wave as it climbs up the beach.

EDNA

Then why don't you seem frightened?

ROBERT

Because my father taught me to swim when I was no bigger than that. I've learned what I can and can't do.

Edna descends the steps from the bathing machine and begins to walk with Robert along the shore past other bathers, including some young lovers and a woman dressed in black.

EDNA

I know it's silly to even think about it now. But somehow, some day I want to swim out there.

Edna points far out in the gulf to where a sailboat is silhouetted against the horizon.

Robert looks at her and smiles.

Edna turns away almost reluctantly, and the two of them start to walk back together towards a cluster of cottages surrounding a large house in the distance. Edna puts up a white parasol as they walk.

The sound of a classical piano piece begins to play at first softly and then louder as the two approach the cottages.

EXT. LEBRUN COTTAGES - AFTERNOON

A sign above the porch of the main house says LEBRUN COTTAGES: Proprietor: Aline Lebrun.

MME. LEBRUN, Robert's mother frets and flutters in the doorway. In her late 40s and still trying to appear fashionable, she has more energy than direction, as she greets her visitors and instructs her servants.

The music continues, coming from the open window of a nearby cottage.

INT. MME. REISZ'S COTTAGE - AFTERNOON

Inside that cottage, MME. REISZ, a homely woman past middle age, is playing the classical piece we have been hearing. Her dress is worn and old-fashioned. The few fixtures in her cottage all bespeak a shabby and eccentric gentility. But she plays the piano with genuine artistry and sensitivity.

EXT. PORCH OF MME. RATIGNOLLE'S COTTAGE - AFTERNOON

While the music continues to play, MME. RATIGNOLLE sits in a wicker rocking chair on the porch of another cottage with one child at her feet and another in her arms. Her full-figured and lustrous beauty remind one of nothing so much as a Victorian Madonna.

INT. MME. REISZ'S COTTAGE - AFTERNOON

Back in her own cottage, Mlle. Reisz continues to play the piano, but now the piece is more intricate and passionate.

INT. UPSTAIRS IN THE MAIN HOUSE, LEBRUN COTTAGES - AFTERNOON

Upstairs, A PRETTY BLACK CHAMBER MAID washes one of the windows. With playfully elaborate gestures, VICTOR LEBRUN, Robert's younger brother, creeps up behind her and grabs her waist, kissing her on the nape of the neck. She struggles briefly in his arms and runs away while Victor laughs.

EXT. PORCH OF THE PONTELLIER COTTAGE - AFTERNOON

At another cottage, LEONCE PONTELLIER sits in a wicker rocking chair, smoking a cigar, and flipping impatiently through the newspaper. At forty years old, he is much older than his wife, Edna, and beginning to grow gray.

As he looks up from his paper, a white parasol emerges from behind the trees. Edna and Robert approach laughing and talking.

EXT. THE PATH TO THE LEBRUN COTTAGES - AFTERNOON

As they approach, we see children playing croquet under the watchful eye of A QUADROON NURSE MAID. Two of the children point in the direction of Edna and Robert and run towards them excitedly.

ETIENNE PONTELLIER is perhaps four; RAOUL PONTELLIER is five or six. They walk along excitedly with their mother and

Robert. But hearing cries of "Etienne, it's your turn," they break away to rejoin the other kids.

EXT. - PORCH OF THE PONTELLIER COTTAGE - AFTERNOON

Leonce Pontellier looks up from his paper at Edna and Robert, regarding them with a mixture of amusement and annoyance.

LEONCE

Bathing all this time? And in this heat? Look at you, Edna, you're burnt beyond recognition.

EDNA

I'm sorry. You know how I am. I lost track of the time.

He reaches into his vest pocket for his watch and, finding Edna's rings, hands them back to her.

LEONCE

Now that you're back, you'll be wanting these again.

ROBERT

Please don't blame your wife, Mr. Pontellier. She's making progress.

EDNA

And once I've learned, I can teach Raoul and Etienne.

At that moment, a parrot cries out: "Allez vous-en! Sapristi!"

LEONCE

If your mother doesn't do something about that parrot, Lebrun, I shall have to strangle it myself. It's nearly five. I think I'll go down to Klein's to play a game of billiards. Why don't you come along?

ROBERT

And lose again? No, I shall stay here and keep company with your excellent wife.

LEONCE

Well, you know where to find me if you change your mind.

He begins to walk away.

EDNA

Will you be back for dinner, Leonce?

LEONCE

It depends... (after a moment)
don't wait for me.

EDNA

Well, here....At least take the
parasol. You're right. It's too hot
in the sun.

LEONCE

And don't forget to write to your
sister. I'll take the letter back
with me tomorrow when I return to
the city.

He resumes his walk to Klein's.

EDNA

My younger sister has just
announced her engagement.

ROBERT

And you must write her your
congratulations.

EDNA

Yes.

ROBERT

Should I go then and let you answer
her letter?

EDNA

There's no rush. When Leonce goes
to Klein's, he's usually there
late.

Edna looks out to where Etienne and Raoul are playing
croquet.

ROBERT

I wish my brother and I got along
as well as your two boys.

EDNA

They're good boys, like their
father.

At that moment, Victor Lebrun walks out of the main house,
pats the maid on the porch with a laugh, and then, noticing
Robert, makes an elaborate bow.

ROBERT

(Looking over at Victor) I don't
think Victor even remembers our
father. He died when I was about
nine. I try to stand in his place
as a kind of parent to Victor. But
with Mother spoiling him, Victor

gets more outrageous with each passing day.

EDNA

Now you sound so serious, you begin to remind me of my own father.

ROBERT

(Laughing) I hope not! Leonce has told me about him. A military man, if I remember rightly.

EDNA

(Saluting and laughing) A colonel in the army of the confederacy, sir.

ROBERT

And so you and your sisters had to be cadets in the troop?

EDNA

Do you hear that!

The sound of another classical piano piece comes from Mlle Reisz's cottage.

ROBERT

Yes. The irascible, Mlle. Reisz.

EDNA

Don't you just love her music! Sometimes I'll just sit out here on the porch, so I can listen to her practice.

Etienne and Raoul now come up to Edna, nursemaid in tow.

ETIENNE

Can we go in now? I'm tired of croquet.

ROBERT

(To the boys) Your mother and I were just talking about your Grandpa.

RAOUL

I love it at Grandpa's house. Mommy always takes me riding.

ROBERT

Really? I didn't know that your mother rode horses.

Edna looks embarrassed.

EDNA

After the war, my father settled down to breed horses, so we all grew up caring for fine Kentucky

thoroughbreds. I rode them as often as Father would let me.

RAOUL

(To Edna) Tell him about the time that you took Grandpa's horse.

ETIENNE

Yes, tell him.

EDNA

(Even more embarrassed) Oh, no.

RAOUL

Yes, Mommy, please.

ROBERT

(Smiling) I'll never tell.

EDNA

My father was away one day and not expected back 'til evening. I was probably bored or simply feeling low, I don't remember. But I went down to the stable and saddled one of his best thoroughbreds.

EXT. - COUNTRYSIDE IN KENTUCKY - DAY (FLASHBACK)

EDNA (V.O.)

I rode for hours, as far and as fast as I could, and saw parts of the country I had never seen before.

We see Edna galloping across hills and meadows. Reaching the top of a rise, she reins in her horse and looks out over a beautiful green valley.

EXT. - PORCH OF THE PONTELLIER COTTAGE - AFTERNOON

Edna gazes out from the porch of her cottage as if seeing those scenes again.

EDNA

I still remember that ride as one of the most exciting moments of my life.

RAOUL

But Grandpa was home when you came back and very, very angry.

EDNA

With good reason. I could have injured that horse!

MME LEBRUN (O.S.)

Robert! I need you.

ROBERT

(Calling over to the main house.)
In a moment, Mother. (To Edna) I
don't understand. If you love
horses, why have I never seen you
riding here at Grand Isle?

EDNA

Leonce has clients here.

Robert looks puzzled.

EDNA

The wife of an investment banker
rides in carriages. She can't
appear on horseback.

MME LEBRUN (O.S.)

Robert!

ROBERT

Coming Mother.