

"I can see why Edna doesn't want to live a conventional boring life, but I think she could sometimes have been a bit less selfish." Christina, 12



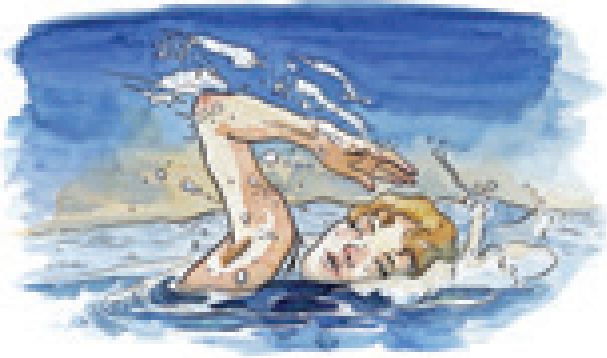
THE AWAKENING

KATE CHOPIN

What price will Edna Pontellier pay to be free?

She seems to have everything she needs – her loving husband Léonce, two beautiful children, and a wonderful home in turn-of-the-century New Orleans. But deep inside her burns a creative fire that longs to be unleashed.

One summer changes everything. When Edna meets Robert, she starts to question all that she was taught to believe. Is her comfortable marriage nothing more than a cage? Will she ever be able to explore her creativity and passion to the full? Is it possible for a woman to be responsible for the needs of others and still to live her own life to the full?



THE AWAKENING
Kate Chopin



Retold by JoAnne Drake
Illustrated by Stephen Davis

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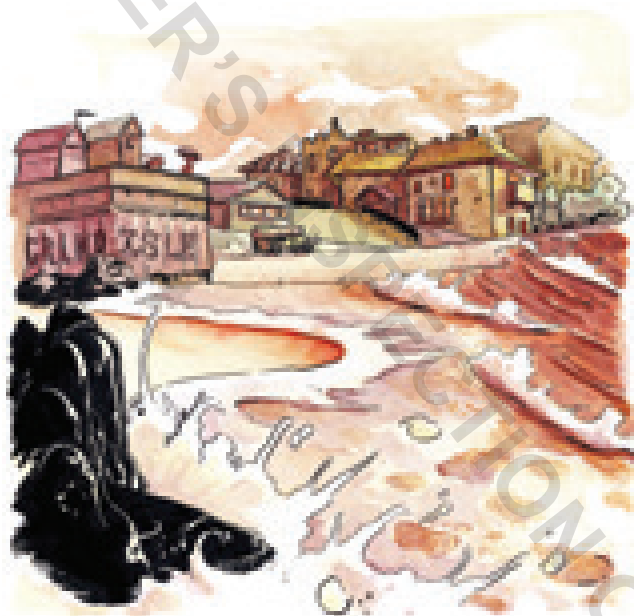
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CONTENTS

The Characters	4
The Awakening	7
Taking things further	55

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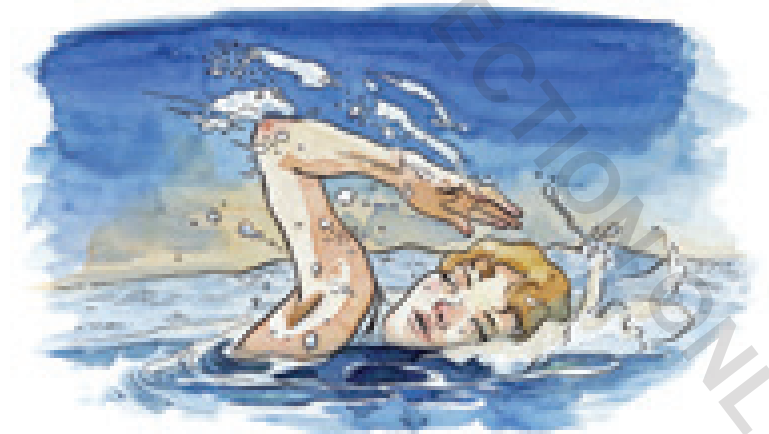
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THE CHARACTERS

Edna Pontellier

Edna is a married woman with a creative spirit. Will she follow convention and be a good wife, or will she let her artistic soul fly free?



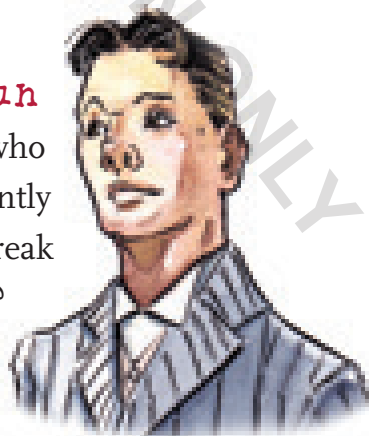
Léonce Pontellier

Edna's husband is a businessman who likes his world to be in order. Will Edna upset that order, and thereby his world?



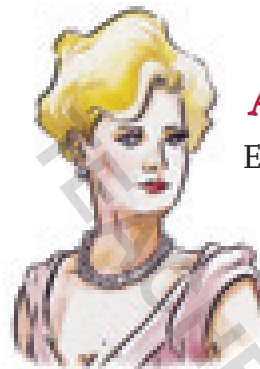
Robert Lebrun

Robert is a young man who makes Edna think differently about her life. Will he break Edna's heart?



Adèle Ratignolle

Edna's friend Adèle encourages her to make taking care of her family her first priority. Will Edna listen to her?



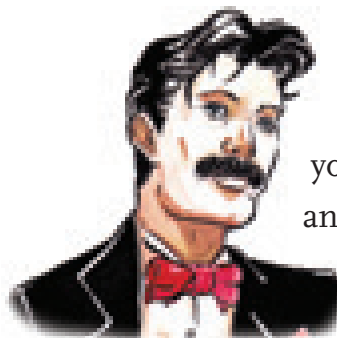
Mademoiselle Reisz

Mademoiselle Reisz is an accomplished pianist who encourages Edna to pursue her art. Will Edna have the courage to follow her advice?



Alcée Arobin

Arobin is a notorious fashionable young man who likes horse-racing and engages in an active social life. Will he bring ruin to Edna's reputation?



Doctor Mandele

The family's doctor and friend wants to help the Pontelliers, but will his cool head succeed in keeping Edna and Léonce together?



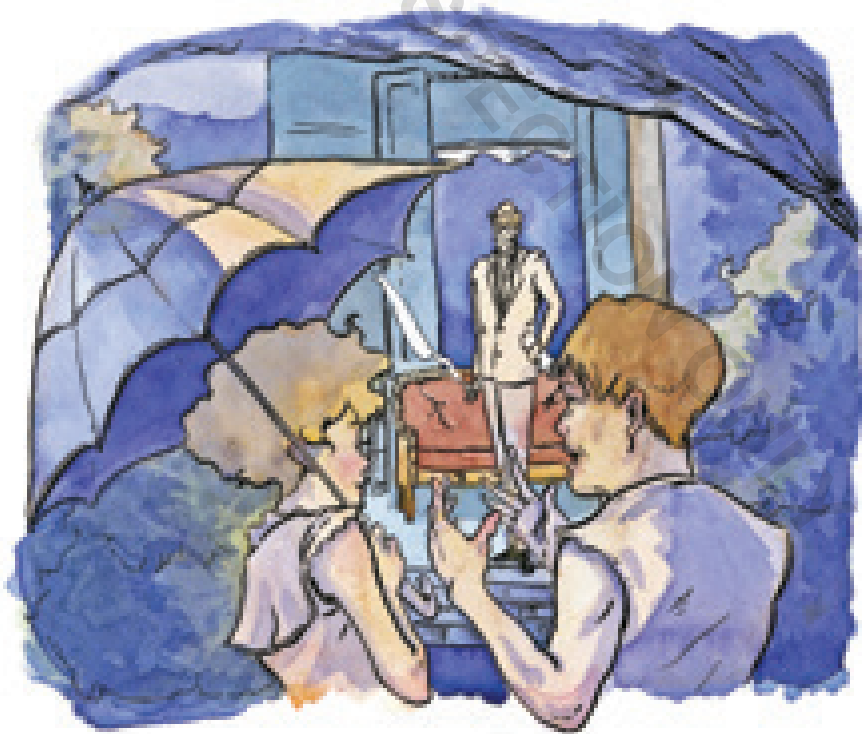


THE AWAKENING

On a warm Sunday evening, Léonce Pontellier was on the porch of the main house, trying to read the newspaper. After a week of conducting business in New Orleans, Pontellier had been enjoying the peace of Grand Isle, which was now being broken by the squawking of Madame Lebrun's parrot and the whistling of her mockingbird. He glanced up with a 'Harrumph', put down the newspaper, and turned to look out over the ocean.

The activity from the Lebrun house now seemed even louder. The two young Farival twins were playing a duet on the piano, and Madame Lebrun was giving orders to her household staff. He could see her bustling about in her white blouse with the elbow sleeves and starched skirts, and he could see his two boys, overseen by their nurse, playing with the other children under the oaks on the far side of the house.

Down on the path from the beach he spied his wife returning with her friend, Madame Lebrun's son Robert. They were laughing as they came up, and collapsed in a heap by his feet. Edna had eyes that were quick and bright, a yellowish-brown that matched her hair. What made her especially attractive was the openness of her features, and how expressively her emotions played upon her face.



'You two are foolish to be swimming so late in the day,' said Léonce Pontellier. 'I had my swim this morning. And look at you, Edna, you are burnt beyond recognition!' He looked at her critically, as if she were a valuable piece of property that might have suffered some damage. She looked back at him, and held her hand out for her wedding rings, which had been in her husband's pocket for safe keeping.

As she put her rings on, she looked over at Robert and began to giggle.

'What's so funny?' asked Léonce.

They started to tell of an adventure they had shared out on the beach, but it wasn't as amusing in the retelling, more like a private joke between them. Léonce Pontellier rose, saying he'd leave them to it; he was going to Klein's Hotel to play a game of billiards. He said he might be back for an early dinner, but Edna knew better than to expect that he would be.

her to develop her writing as a way to focus her energy, and to provide a source of income for the family.

She began to write articles for several prominent publications and literary journals, with much success. She was a keen observer of people, and was able to portray the subtleties of Louisiana society through her stories.

The Awakening was her second novel, and was published in 1899. It became the subject of some very harsh criticism, because many of the male critics of the time believed it to be morally unwholesome. They didn't like it that Edna was unhappy in her marriage and wanted something more for herself. They were also offended by the ending, since at that time suicide was not generally spoken of in polite society. In many ways *The Awakening* was very ahead of its time – in the early twentieth century these themes would come up again in other novels, but in turn-of-the-century Louisiana it was quite scandalous.

Kate Chopin was surprised and upset by these attacks; instead of writing more novels about important social issues she went on to write short stories with less controversial topics. She died in 1904, having suffered a brain hemorrhage while visiting the World's Fair in St Louis. She was only 54 when she died.

For several decades after its publication *The Awakening* was virtually ignored, until a Norwegian scholar, Per Seyersted, rediscovered Chopin in the 1960s; he wrote an important new biography and encouraged the republication of *The Awakening* in several languages. It quickly became clear that Chopin's brilliant writing was both insightful and forward-looking; from the vantage point of the 1960s it was clear that she was tackling important issues and writing realistically about them long before any other American writers were doing so.

We now take for granted many of the rights that women have in western society, but at the time Chopin was writing American women were not even allowed to vote – that would come in 1926 – and feminism as a movement had not