

The Awakening, and Selected Stories Study Guide

The Awakening, and Selected Stories by Kate Chopin

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The Awakening Chapters 1 -5

The Awakening Chapters 1 -5 Summary

Kate Chopin's *The Awakening and Selected Short Fiction* is a collection of several of Chopin's writings. *The Awakening* is the longest and one of the most controversial of Chopin's career. It details the spiritual awakening of Mrs. Edna Pontellier, a tragic heroine who embarks on a journey of self-awareness that ultimately separates her from her husband, family, and friends.

The book opens on Grand Isle, an island in southeast Louisiana. The site is a popular spot for wealthy summer visitors. Léonce Pontellier is a successful businessman, visiting with his wife Edna and their two young boys, Raoul and Étienne. When Mr. Pontellier sees his wife has gotten sunburned while out with her young friend, Robert Lebrun, he treats her like a valuable possession that has been carelessly damaged. Robert Lebrun is the son of Madame Lebrun, the woman who rents the island cottages.

In chapter two, Robert Lebrun is described as a carefree young man. Robert and Edna greatly enjoy each other's company. Robert talks often about going to find his fortune in Mexico. In chapter three, Léonce and Edna argue about Edna's "habitual neglect of the children." After Mr. Pontellier leaves Grand Isle to return to work in the city, he sends Edna a gift. Everyone agrees that Mr. Pontellier is the best husband in the world.

Chapter four includes details about Madame Adèle Ratignolle, one of Edna's friends. Edna admires her and describes the Creole woman as "the embodiment of every womanly grace and charm." Having married into a Creole family, Edna is still adapting to Creole personality traits that are different from her own. For example, Madame Ratignolle thinks nothing of discussing the births of her children in detail, even with male friends, while Edna could never bring herself to discuss such private matters.

In chapter five, Robert Lebrun begins spending nearly every day with Edna. Robert has previously attached himself to a different female guest, usually a married woman, at Grand Isle each summer. One day, as Edna sketches Madame Ratignolle. Robert rests his head against her arm.

The Awakening Chapters 1 -5 Analysis

The most important part of this first chapter of the book is the introduction to Mr. Pontellier and the setting of Grand Isle. The next several chapters will continue in this location, and Mr. Pontellier's relationship with his wife will be gradually revealed. The fact that Robert Lebrun was with Edna when she overindulged in the sun is also significant, and represents a bit of foreshadowing by the author.

In chapter two, both Edna and Robert are revealed as somewhat immature and self-absorbed. Both talk about themselves because they are "young, and did not know any



better." Chapter three is important because it begins to reveal the type of relationship Léonce and Edna have. Léonce comes home after a late night of dining and gambling with other men. Although he is concerned enough about his children to check on them, he does not hesitate to demand that his sleepy wife actually take care of their needs. He then upsets her with a lecture on her neglect of the boys. It is unclear whether the box of treats Léonce sends later in the week are simply symbolic of his usual generosity, or an indication that he often sends gifts to his wife after they have a disagreement.

Chapter four contains the author's description of the "mother-women," and states that Edna is not one of them. She does not live for or dote upon her two boys, and does not completely understand women who are devoted to their own children, even at the expense of their own sense of self. Edna is also reserved compared to the other residents of her Creole community, and feels shame after reading the book everyone else is discussing.

Chapter five reveals much about Edna's personality. She admires her beautiful friend, but cannot relate to her and what makes her happy. Edna shows disdain for Madame Ratignolle's need for attention, and suspects she is exaggerating about her delicate condition. Edna does not immediately take Robert's attention seriously, but is starting to feel confused about the young man's intentions.



The Awakening Chapters 6-10

The Awakening Chapters 6-10 Summary

Edna feels "a certain light...beginning to dawn dimly within her." In chapter seven, Edna tells Adèle she remembers being a little girl in Kentucky and walking in a large field of tall grass with her arms outstretched the way a swimmer would move their arms in the water. Edna confides that sometimes she feels as though she were back in that meadow, acting on impulse and unguided.

Edna remembers her childhood crushes. One was a "sad-eyed cavalry officer" who was engaged to another woman when Edna was a girl. Edna also used to keep a picture of a famous playwright. Edna was secretly infatuated with him and sometimes kissed his picture when no one was looking. Edna's marriage to Léonce was an "accident." Edna was flattered by his devotion, and her family's opposition to her marriage to a Catholic man ensured she would marry him.

Edna is fond of her children, but also relieved when someone else is taking care of them. In chapter eight, Madame Ratignolle asks Robert to leave Edna alone. She warns him that Edna is "not one of us; she is not like us," referring to their shared Creole background as opposed to Edna's Presbyterian Kentucky roots. She worries Edna might take Robert's attention seriously when he is simply toying with her. Madame Ratignolle reminds Robert that if the married women at Grand Isle thought his flirtations were meaningful, they could not spend time with him. Robert later apologizes to Adèle for being rude.

Several weeks later, the guests gather for an evening of music. Edna is deeply moved by the performance of one musician, Mademoiselle Reisz. In chapter ten, after the musical performances, Robert invites everyone to go down to the beach. Edna walks with her husband, but Robert walks behind the group, which Edna finds odd, since he usually walks with her. Robert has been trying to teach Edna how to swim. Tonight, Edna swims on her own for the first time and accidentally swims out too far. Terrified for a moment that she will drown, Edna recovers and swims back to the beach. She tells her husband she was afraid, but he assures her he was watching, and she was really not so far from land. Edna leaves the group and begins walking back to the cottage. Robert catches up to her, but Edna is in a strange mood. Edna lies down in a hammock at the cottage, and Robert sits beside her silently until he hears the other guests approaching.

The Awakening Chapters 6-10 Analysis

In chapter six, Edna is beginning to question her place in the world. She senses a new beginning is happening for her, and is confused by her new thoughts and feelings. Edna



is starting to understand who she is as an individual. She suddenly feels impulsive and reckless.

Chapter seven reveals Edna's tendency to become intensely infatuated with various men. Readers also learn that she married Léonce because she was flattered by his feelings for her and rebellious about her family's disapproval of him. The author again uses foreshadowing to reveal Edna's rebellious nature and her tendency to act against anyone who attempts to control her.

In chapter eight, Madame Ratignolle realizes an attraction is developing between Robert and Edna, and is concerned about it. She does not realize Robert is serious about Edna, and only warns him not to toy with her. Robert does not wish to fight social rules, so he apologizes to Madame Ratignolle for his rudeness, despite his true anger at not being taken seriously. Robert is a man who will hide his true feelings in order to protect his reputation and seek his friend's approval.

In chapter nine, Edna experiences an awakening. She is deeply moved by Mademoiselle Reisz's music, and seems to perhaps have found a kindred spirit in the musician. Mademoiselle Reisz is immediately recognizable as the first female character who is truly rebellious. She is disagreeable during a time when women are supposed to be pleasant. In this chapter, Edna experiences an awakening.

Edna first senses her independence in chapter ten, when she swims by herself. It terrifies her, and the new feelings are overwhelming. Her husband reassures her as though he is comforting a child, and she is only now acknowledging the desire she feels for Robert.



The Awakening, Chapters 11-15

The Awakening, Chapters 11-15 Summary

When Mr. Pontellier arrives at the cottage in chapter eleven, he's surprised to find Edna lying outside in the hammock. Mr. Pontellier insists that Edna go inside to bed with him, but she refuses, speaking sharply and angrily to her husband.

Chapter twelve begins the next day. Edna feels impulsive. She summons Robert to go with her to the Chênrière Caminada. During the boat ride, Robert speaks to a young Spanish girl named Mariequita. After they arrive at the church in chapter thirteen, Edna begins to feel ill and sleepy. Robert takes Edna to Madame Antoine's home, where Edna sleeps for hours. She spends the rest of the day enjoying Robert's company. Edna does not return to Grand Isle until late.

When Edna returns in chapter fourteen, Madame Ratignolle tells her that Étienne was naughty, and Léonce was very upset by her absence. Robert helps Edna put Étienne to bed, and she reminds Robert they have spent the entire day together. After Robert leaves, Edna misses him and wonders why he left.

In chapter fifteen, Edna learns that Robert is going to Mexico. When Robert comes by Edna's cottage to say goodbye, Edna complains that Robert never mentioned the trip to her, but Robert offers no explanation or excuse. Edna tells Robert she was planning to see him in the city during the winter. Robert says he was looking forward to that as well. He starts to say more, but then stops himself. He tells Edna he hopes she will not forget him, and Edna makes him promise he will write her from Mexico. After Robert leaves, Edna cries, only now realizing how infatuated she is with him.

The Awakening, Chapters 11-15 Analysis

Edna first senses her independence in chapter eleven when she swims by herself. It terrifies her, and the new feelings are overwhelming. Her husband reassures her as though he is comforting a child, and she is rebellious when he insists she come to bed with him. Edna asserts her independence when she reprimands Léonce for speaking sharply to her and telling her what to do.

Acting impulsively again in chapter twelve, Edna seeks Robert's company, although she never has before. Edna is jealous when Robert pays attention to the young Spanish girl.

Edna's exit from the church in chapter thirteen is one of the first times readers see her leaving the presence of others to be alone. Edna feels as though she is living another life, one that does not include her husband but includes Robert instead while she is away from Grand Isle.



In chapter fourteen, readers learn Edna's absence negatively affects both her husband and one of her children. Léonce initially plans to go after Edna, and Étienne is obviously missing his mother's presence as well. Edna, however, seems oblivious to the pain she has inflicted. Robert leaves Edna after she reminds him they have spent the entire day together, an indication that he is uncomfortable with their new closeness.

Robert's sudden departure in chapter fifteen is significant, especially after having spent the entire day with Edna. His lack of answers is also telling. Robert is running away, and his exit makes Edna realize how much he means to her.



The Awakening, Chapters 16-20

The Awakening, Chapters 16-20 Summary

Only swimming makes Edna happy since Robert has gone. She often talks to Madame Lebrun about Robert, and gazes at photos of him. Madame Lebrun shows Edna a letter she received from Robert, and Edna is jealous Robert did not write her instead.

When Edna learns Léonce saw Robert in the city before he left the country, she wants all of the details of their meeting. She does not feel guilty talking about Robert with her husband, deciding that her thoughts about Robert are her own and no one else's business.

Before Edna leaves Grand Isle, Mademoiselle Reisz approaches her and invites her to visit her in the city that fall. Readers learn in chapter seventeen that the Pontelliers live in a beautiful mansion in New Orleans. Edna has anything a woman could want, and Mr. Pontellier is very generous and proud of his home and possessions. Every Tuesday, Edna receives visitors at their home, according to social custom. One Tuesday, however, Mr. Pontellier learns that she did not accept visitors that day.

Edna explains that she felt like getting out of the house. Léonce scolds Edna and the couple argues. Léonce goes to the club angry. Back in her room, Edna paces restlessly. She tries to destroy her wedding ring and smashes a vase. Afterward, Edna is pleased she has destroyed something.

Beginning in chapter eighteen, Edna is losing interest in everything around her and continues to feel as though her life is now "alien" to her. When she visits Madame Ratignolle and sees her friend with her husband, Edna grows depressed. She is not jealous, however. Edna feels sorry that her friend will never experience all that life has to offer. She describes Madame Ratignolle's life as one of "blind contentment."

In chapter nineteen, Edna begins rejecting her social responsibilities. She stops receiving visitors and neglects the household. Mr. Pontellier complains that Edna spends too much time in her atelier, the art studio in Edna's home. Léonce fears Edna is becoming mentally unstable. Léonce sees that his wife is not herself, but does not realize that he is only now seeing the real Edna.

As Edna paints, she remembers the days she spent at Grand Isle with Robert, and the memories make her happy. Some days, however, Edna becomes very sad for no apparent reason. On those days, Edna questions the meaning of life itself.

In chapter twenty, Edna goes to see Madame Lebrun to get Mademoiselle Reisz's new address. Edna wants to hear Mademoiselle Reisz's music again. Madame Lebrun tells Edna about the two letters she has received from Robert. Edna is disappointed that Robert did not send her a message. After Edna leaves, Victor, Robert's brother,



comments to his mother that Edna appears different somehow. She does not seem to be the same woman he remembers from Grand Isle.

The Awakening, Chapters 16-20 Analysis

Chapter sixteen shows that Edna is now acting more impulsively than ever. She asks Madame Lebrun about Robert, and Mademoiselle Reisz asks her if she misses him. Readers can infer that many people are speculating about their relationship and Robert's sudden trip to Mexico. Edna also does not feel guilty discussing her love interest with her husband. She does not feel responsible for Léonce's happiness, and does not seem to understand how her actions might affect him.

Chapter seventeen is important because it describes New Orleans social customs and Edna's place in society. Edna's restlessness is growing, and she is becoming rebellious and feeling trapped by her marriage and place in society.

Edna's feelings after seeing her friend in chapter eighteen show that she does not desire contentment, but values independence instead. She wants to experience life outside of marriage and family commitments, and still does not understand how women like Madame Ratignolle can be happy. Edna's discontent is growing as she begins to lose interest in all of her normal activities.

Edna's awakening is painful. She grows more distant with her husband and detached from her household duties in chapter nineteen. She uses her art studio to escape, and is becoming very unhappy.

Edna is seeking out new interests as part of her awakening. Mademoiselle Reisz is unmarried and disregards many social mores. Edna is curious about her in chapter twenty and wants to feel the emotion she experienced before when she heard Mademoiselle Reisz's music. Edna's infatuation with Robert has continued, and she continues to suffer from his lack of contact with her. Victor, Madame Lebrun's problem child, flirts with Edna and notices the change in her. He is not a gentleman like Robert.



The Awakening, Chapters 21-25

The Awakening, Chapters 21-25 Summary

Mademoiselle Reisz is excited to see Edna. She tells Edna Robert sent her a letter, but that it might as well have been sent to Edna, for she was all Robert talked about.

Mademoiselle Reisz gives Edna the letter to read, and plays a piece of music Robert had requested for Edna. Before leaving, Edna asks if she can visit again. Mademoiselle Reisz later finds the letter on the floor, still damp with Edna's tears.

In chapter twenty-two, Mr. Pontellier visits his friend and family physician, Dr. Mandelet, because he is concerned about Edna. Léonce says Edna is not acting like herself, and tells the doctor, "She's got some sort of notion concerning the eternal rights of women." The doctor asks if Edna has been "associating of late with a circle of pseudo-intellectual women — super-spiritual beings." Léonce says Edna is not associating with anyone. She is not receiving visitors, and she ignores many of her old acquaintances. She spends her days away from home and often does not return until after dark.

Léonce says Edna refuses to go to her sister's wedding, saying, "A wedding is one of the most lamentable spectacles on earth." Dr. Mandelet tells Léonce to leave Edna alone, that bothering her will just make things worse. The doctor also makes plans to come to the Pontellier house for dinner later that week so he can witness Edna's behavior for himself.

Mr. Pontellier says he will be traveling to New York soon for business. Dr. Mandelet says he should take Edna only if she wants to go. The doctor wishes there were some polite way to ask Léonce if another man was involved.

In chapter twenty-three, Edna's father comes to visit. Edna takes him to Madame Ratignolle's for an evening of music. Léonce does not attend, considering the event beneath him. He complains the music is too "heavy" and difficult for an untrained observer like him to understand. He prefers to go to the club by himself instead. Madame Ratignolle tells Edna Léonce should spend more time with her. Edna disagrees, saying they would have nothing to talk about.

Edna enjoys waiting on her father and taking care of him. Mr. Pontellier notices and interprets Edna's behavior as a sign of some deep family attachment he has not noticed before. When Dr. Mandelet comes to dinner, at first he notices nothing unusual about Edna's behavior. She and the Colonel have just returned from the races, and are talking excitedly about the people they met there, including a young "man of fashion" named Alcée Arobin.

Dr. Mandelet notices that although Edna has previously seemed to be a "listless" woman, she now appears vibrant and alive, like a "beautiful, sleek animal waking up the sun." Dr. Mandelet tells a story about a woman's love, how it fades and seeks "strange,



new channels, only to return to its legitimate source after days of fierce unrest." Edna tells her own story about a woman who paddles off in a boat one night with her lover, never to return. Edna lies and says someone told her the story, but she believes she may actually be recalling a dream. When Dr. Mandelet leaves the Pontellier home, he is concerned that Edna is involved with another man and hopes it is not Alcée Arobin.

In chapter twenty-four, Edna and the Colonel argue about her refusal to attend her sister's wedding. Léonce, following Dr. Mandelet's advice, decides to stay out of the argument. The Colonel tells Léonce he is too lenient, saying, "Put your feet down good and hard; the only way to manage a wife." He says authority and coercion are necessary. Léonce does not point out that he believes the Colonel may have "coerced" his own wife to her death.

After arguing with her father, Edna is now happy to see him go, but conflicted about Léonce's trip to New York. She cries when he leaves, and fears she will be lonely without him. Léonce's mother takes the children to stay with her. Once Edna is all alone in the mansion, she begins to see the house in a new light, and notices things she has never paid attention to before. She is relieved to be alone. She savors her food and sleeps peacefully. She even works in the garden and plays with the children's little dog.

Readers learn more about Edna's new routine in chapter twenty-five. Since Edna does not feel moved to paint on overcast days, she sometimes visits her old friends from Grand Isle instead. Sometimes, Edna feels her life is unfulfilling, but other times she believes in the promise of the future and is hopeful.

Edna begins attending the races with Mrs. Highcamp and Alcée Arobin. Alcée is fond of Edna. Edna is knowledgeable about horses from her childhood in Kentucky. She gambles on the races, usually successfully. The thrill of the race is intoxicating to her. One night after attending a race and having dinner with Alcée and Mrs. Highcamp afterward, Alcée escorts Edna home. She tells him she would like to attend the races with him again. After he leaves, Edna regrets not asking him to stay.

Edna is drawn to Alcée and surprised by his attraction to her and begins spending more time with him. One night, Alcée kisses Edna's hand when they are alone. Edna is uncomfortable but excited at the same time. She asks him to leave, but does not really want him to go. Edna does not actually care about Alcée, but enjoys his attention. After Alcée leaves, Edna wonders what Robert would think.

The Awakening, Chapters 21-25 Analysis

Mademoiselle Reisz is the only woman in Edna's life who encourages her to be honest and open about her feelings. She suspects that Edna and Robert are in love, and is not judgmental about it. Reading Robert's letter shows Edna how much he cares about her. Her infatuation with him grows even stronger.

When Dr. Mandelet asks Mr. Pontellier whether Edna has been "associating of late with a circle of pseudo-intellectual women — super-spiritual beings" in chapter twenty-two,



he is making a negative reference to women's clubs that were popular at that time. Dr. Mandelet suspects that Edna may be experiencing a spiritual awakening and also accurately deduces that Edna is infatuated with another man. The fact that the doctor thinks Edna is healthy is also telling. Edna's new life is not an illness.

Edna's sudden fondness for her father in chapter twenty-three is interesting. Could it be that she now appreciates his opposition to her marriage? Since Edna is now unhappy with her marriage, she may understand her's perspective more than she did before. Could her attentiveness to the Colonel be a subtle act of rebellion against her husband?

Dr. Mandelet realizes that Edna has gone through a significant change. He sees new vitality and beauty in her. When he describes her as a beautiful animal awakening in the sun, he is appreciating her new persona. At the same time, he knows that she may no longer fit in with society's expectations of her, and is concerned about the consequences. The fact that he has already twice suspected that Edna is involved with another man is also significant, since Edna's own husband appears to be completely oblivious to this possibility.

In chapter twenty-four, Edna is suddenly all alone and free to live as she wants with no responsibilities. She takes the time to appreciate all of the things she has taken for granted. When Edna gazes at the flowers and plays with the boys' dog, she is acting as a child who sees everything wondrously for the first time.

Some of the worst parts of Edna's character are revealed in chapter twenty-five. She enjoys going to the races because she feels knowledgeable about gambling, and superior to those who are not. Edna likes spending time with Alcée because his attention is flattering to her, much as Léonce's attention was flattering to her before they married and she began to take it for granted. Edna's heart still belongs to Robert. It does not occur to her to be concerned about Alcée or any true feelings he might have toward her. Edna is still acting as a child who is starved for attention and selfish. It is interesting to note that Edna is worried about Robert's opinion of her behavior with Alcée, but appears unconcerned with her own husband's opinion of her.



The Awakening, Chapters 26-30

The Awakening, Chapters 26-30 Summary

Alcée apologizes to Edna, and she is tempted to have an affair with him. Edna tells Mademoiselle Reisz she plans to move away from her home into a smaller house nearby. Her staff calls it "the pigeon house" because it is so small and resembles a house used to keep pigeons. Edna says she is tired of looking after such a big house and so many servants, but Mademoiselle Reisz does not believe those are the real reasons. Edna plans to rent the little house with the money she receives from her mother's estate, along with her winnings from the horse races and the sale of her sketches. She longs to be free and independent, and does not want to belong to another person. She has not yet told Léonce of her plans. Mademoiselle Reisz shows Edna new letters from Robert and says the reason he does not write Edna is that he is in love with her and trying to forget her since she does not belong to him.

In one letter, Robert says he plans to come home. Edna is thrilled, and admits she is in love with him. That night, Edna writes Léonce and tells him she will move out of the house after hosting a farewell dinner. Chapter twenty-seven begins later that evening. As Alcée strokes her hair in front of the fire, Edna says she is not sure what kind of woman she is. She knows that by society's standards, she is "a devilishly wicked specimen of the sex," yet she does not feel that is who she truly is. Alcée says Edna's mind is somewhere else, and kisses Edna. Edna feels this is the first kiss to which she has ever really responded.

When chapter twenty-eight begins, Alcée is gone, and Edna cries. She feels irresponsible. She wonders what Léonce and Robert would think about her infidelity. Edna believes she can see more clearly now, and understands the meaning of life. She does not feel shame or remorse for what she has done, only regret that she did not do it for love.

Chapter twenty-nine begins the next day as Edna prepares to move. She takes only those items that she acquired on her own and leaves behind everything Léonce paid for. Edna hosts a farewell dinner in chapter thirty. Edna appears regal to her guests, like a queen who rules alone. Edna thinks of Robert and misses him.

After dinner, the guests ask Victor Lebrun to sing. Looking at Edna, Victor begins to sing a song Robert used to sing. Upset, Edna asks Victor to stop, but he continues. Edna then covers Victor's mouth with her hand, and he kisses her palm. Edna is excited by the gesture, but still disturbed by the song.

The Awakening, Chapters 26-30 Analysis

Some of the worst parts of Edna's character are revealed in chapter twenty-five. She enjoys going to the races because she feels knowledgeable about gambling, and



superior to those who are not. Edna likes spending time with Alcée because his attention is flattering to her, much as Léonce's attention was flattering to her before they married and she began to take it for granted. Edna's heart still belongs to Robert. It does not occur to her to be concerned about Alcée or any true feelings he might have toward her. Edna is still acting as a child who is starved for attention and selfish. It is interesting to note that Edna is worried about Robert's opinion of her behavior with Alcée, but appears unconcerned with her own husband's opinion of her.

In chapter twenty-six, readers see that Edna's awakening is now leading her to take drastic measures to change her life. The author's reference to "the pigeon house" is symbolic. Edna has been trying to escape, first at Grand Isle and then Chênrière Caminada, which are both places that she associates with Robert. Next, Edna began spending more time in her art studio, and now she is leaving the mansion altogether to live in a pigeon house, a house ironically, that is used to cage small birds and keep them from flying away.

Edna is thrilled when she learns in chapter twenty-seven that Robert may come back into her life. She fantasizes that he loves her and is coming back to her, and she is thinking of him even as she misleads Alcée and uses him as Robert's substitute. Edna is starting to realize that her actions will isolate her from society, but she does not care at this point. She knows people will think she is a "devilishly wicked" woman, but she does not feel she is doing anything wrong by wanting to be independent and not belong to any man.

Chapter twenty-eight begins after Alcée and Edna make love. Edna is conflicted. She does not love Alcée. She loves Robert. She knows she is using Alcée as a substitute for Robert, but she is not concerned about Alcée's feelings. She briefly wonders what Léonce would think, but her only true fear lies in Robert's reaction. He is the only one she feels loyal to, and the only one she cares about. Like her childhood crushes, she has made Robert a noble figure in her mind, and does not want to disappoint him when he comes back for her.

Edna starts a new chapter in her life in chapter twenty-nine. As she prepares to move to the pigeon house, she is beginning to sever all ties with her husband. By not waiting for Léonce's approval to act, Edna shows that she does not care what he thinks. She feels no need to meet his approval any longer. Edna is also becoming quite deluded. She thinks she and Léonce will make some kind of "arrangement" that will enable her to keep living as she pleases. Edna is now in complete denial and has lost touch with the reality she lives in and the social requirements that restrict her choices.

Edna's farewell dinner in chapter thirty is also her farewell to her old life and to fashionable society as a whole. It is interesting to note that the author describes Edna's appearance as one of a queen who rules alone, with no king in sight. Victor's behavior after the dinner shows that he is aware of Edna's awakening and emboldened by it. Singing Robert's song is his way of reminding her that she is not a noble figure. Edna is excited again by a man's attention to her, although she appears to have no interest in

Victor just as she does not truly care about Alcée. Edna now has multiple potential love interests, including her husband Léonce, Robert, Alcée, and Victor.



The Awakening, Chapters 31-35

The Awakening, Chapters 31-35 Summary

When chapter thirty-one begins, the other guests have gone, but Alcée stays behind. Edna has already dismissed the staff. Alcée and Edna lock up the mansion and go to the pigeon house together, where Alcée seduces her yet again.

In chapter thirty-two, Léonce writes Edna that he disapproves of the move and is worried what people might say. Edna enjoys living in the pigeon house. She acknowledges her descent from her high position in society, but feels she has risen in a spiritual sense. She enjoys having no obligations and being independent. Edna feels she is growing stronger and becoming more of her own person.

Madame Ratignolle visits Edna at the pigeon house. Edna promises to be with her pregnant friend when the baby comes. Madame Ratignolle wonders where Léonce and the boys will stay in such a small house, and does not like Edna staying there alone. She has heard gossip about Alcée and Edna, and warns Edna that Alcée has a dreadful reputation.

In chapter thirty-three, Edna goes to see Mademoiselle Reisz, but Robert is there instead. He has been back in town for two days, and Edna is hurt he did not immediately come to see her when he arrived. She thinks he must not really love her after all. Even now, he is only seeing her by accident, since he has come to see Mademoiselle Reisz, not Edna.

Robert explains that the Mexican people were unpleasant and the work in Mexico not any better than his work here. Edna's heart is broken when she realizes Robert may not have come back for her. She reminds Robert that he promised to write her, and asks why he never did, but Robert does not have a good answer. They go to the pigeon house, and Edna insists that Robert stay for dinner. Robert sees a photograph of Alcée, and asks Edna about it. She explains that she used the photograph to sketch Alcée, but Robert does not understand why Edna wanted to sketch him, or why she kept his photograph after she was done with it.

In chapter thirty-four, Robert says he misses Grand Isle, and felt like a lost soul while he was away. Edna says she has been feeling the same way, and Robert tells her she is cruel, but does not explain what he means. Edna comments on Robert's new embroidered silk tobacco pouch, and he explains that a Mexican girl gave it to him. Edna tries to get him to talk about the girl, but Robert seems uncomfortable. Alcée comes to the pigeon house and greets Robert and Edna. After the men leave, Edna thinks of Robert and is jealous about the Mexican girl. Edna does not know if she will see Robert again.



As chapter thirty-five begins, Edna is hopeful. She believes if Robert loves her, they can be together. She wonders why Robert was distant the night before, and dreams of seeing him again. That day, Edna receives several letters, including one from Alcée in which he pledges his devotion to her.

Each day, Edna hopes to hear from Robert, and each day she is disappointed. She decides not to try to contact him, and stops going to the places where she might accidentally see him. She begins spending more time with Alcée and stops hoping to be with Robert.

The Awakening, Chapters 31-35 Analysis

Edna is now "playing house" with Alcée in chapter thirty-one, although clearly Robert is the only one she loves. It would not have been appropriate during Edna's time for a married woman of her position to leave with another man to go into her new house alone late at night. There is no indication that Edna thinks about this consequence of her actions, or even cares what people might think or say about her. Edna thinks she is starting a new life.

Léonce's actions in chapter thirty-two show just how out of touch he is with Edna's state of mind. He may actually be in denial over the news that his wife is leaving him. It appears he does not suspect another man's involvement in her actions, although there are now at least two, Robert and Alcée, who are influencing Edna's decisions. As Edna has awakened, it appears her husband has fallen asleep and is blind to what is happening to his family.

Edna, meanwhile, is happy to live as a child with no responsibilities or expectations placed upon her. She has separated herself from her former place in society and is proud to be rid of it. Edna, however, is also in denial. She does not appear to be planning her future or considering what will happen when her family returns home.

Edna's fantasies come to an end in chapter thirty-three. Robert is back, but he is not rushing into her arms and declaring his love for her as she had imagined. Her accusations are again childlike ("You promised to write me!") and selfish. A bit of Robert's nature is also revealed when he seems uncomfortable around Edna. He is afraid to be with her, but he is also hurt when he realizes she may be involved with Alcée. He is disappointed in her behavior. He is no doubt aware of Alcée's reputation, and disappointed when he learns Edna is not the same woman he once knew.

Robert is beginning to show his true feelings in chapter thirty-four. He tells Edna she is being cruel because he believes she is mocking his comment about missing Grand Isle. What both Robert and Edna are really saying is that they have missed each other. Edna is making it very hard for Robert to remain a gentleman and act nobly. She is torturing him, and he does not understand why, since Edna is married and they cannot be together. He is accustomed to the Creole women who are chaste by nature and committed to their husbands. Those women understand his flirtations are meaningless



and do not respond to them. With Edna, his feelings are real. He is trying to be noble, but she is making it difficult. In Victorian times, women are expected to be coy and act asexual, not aggressively. Robert has not been around to witness Edna's transformation, so he does not understand her behavior or know how to respond to it.

By the same token, Edna does not understand why Robert is not being even more honest about his feelings for her. The idea that he is conforming to social rules does not occur to her, since she has stopped conforming to them herself. In her new world, she thinks that she can do whatever she wants, and so can Robert. She believes that with love, anything is possible. She does not realize that Robert is still the same gentleman he has always been. It is only she who has changed.

Edna is beginning to fall into the depths of despair in chapter thirty-five. Her fantasy of her future life together with Robert is again fading. Since he has returned, she finds his behavior unpredictable, unlike their close friendship on Grand Isle. She uses Alcée first as a substitute for Robert, but now she is becoming more honest about her feelings and turning to Alcée purely for sex and comfort. This action signals the completion of Edna's sexual awakening, in which she acknowledges her own sensuality and owns it proudly. Her refusal to respond to Alcée's question about her feelings for him is symbolic of her refusal to allow him to control or obligate her as Léonce and society have controlled and obligated her in the past.



The Awakening, Chapters 36-39

The Awakening, Chapters 36-39 Summary

In chapter thirty-six, Edna sees Robert at a café. She asks him why he has been avoiding her, and Robert is caught off guard by her directness. He tells her she is cruel for pressuring him to say things he should not say. She says he is selfish for not considering how he is hurting her. Edna does not apologize for her honesty, and says she has gotten used to speaking her mind, even if that makes her appear unwomanly.

Back at the pigeon house, Edna kisses Robert and they embrace. Robert tells Edna his love for her is what forced him to go to Mexico, and also why he came back. Robert says he missed Edna madly, and dreamed one day Léonce would set Edna free so he could marry her. Edna says Léonce does not own her, so he cannot set her free. Robert does not understand.

Edna learns Madame Ratignolle is in labor and asking for her. Edna asks Robert to wait for her and promises to return. She tells him she loves him and that nothing else matters.

Madame Ratignolle is in labor in chapter thirty-seven. Madame Ratignolle tells Edna that chatting with her helps take her mind off the pain. Edna does not want to stay and is disturbed by the birth, which she describes as torture. After the baby is born, Madame Ratignolle embraces her and tells her to remember her children.

In chapter thirty-eight, Dr. Mandelet walks Edna home. He tells Edna he knows she is troubled and says she can talk to him. Edna is grateful, but does not want to talk. Dr. Mandelet is concerned about Edna and asks her to come see him soon.

As Edna returns home, she is still thinking about what her friend said about remembering the children, but she tries to focus on Robert and their love for each other.

When Edna enters the house, Robert is gone. He leaves a note saying that he loves her and must go because he loves her. Edna feels faint when she reads Robert's words. She does not sleep that night. She does not do anything.

In the final chapter, Victor is at the main house in Grand Isle with Mariequita when suddenly Edna appears. It is an odd time for her to be visiting, and she appears tired. Edna tells Victor she will stay and have dinner, but she wants to swim first. Victor and Mariequita tell Edna the water is too cold, but Edna insists.

As Edna walks to the beach, she is not thinking about the night before, when she told herself, "Today it is Arobin; tomorrow it will be someone else. It makes no difference to me, it doesn't matter about Léonce Pontellier - but Raoul and Étienne!"



Edna once told Madame Ratignolle she would "give up the unessential, but she would never sacrifice herself for her children." Edna realizes there is nothing she wants except Robert, and one day, she will not want him, either. No matter what she does, her children will be impacted by her actions. She is enslaved to them.

Edna wades into the ocean naked. She swims far away from the shore, and remembers the night she feared she had swum too far and would drown. As she grows tired, she thinks about Léonce and her children. She does not want to be owned, possessed by them. She wonders what Mademoiselle Reisz would say. She would likely be disappointed in Edna and her lack of courage.

Edna knows Robert does not understand, and believes he never would. Dr. Mandelet might understand, but it is too late for Edna. She is already very far from shore. As Edna drowns, she imagines she is back in Kentucky. She sees the Colonel, her sister Margaret, and the cavalry officer she once loved.

The Awakening, Chapters 36-39 Analysis

When Edna asks Robert about his feelings in chapter thirty-six, he again tells her she is being cruel. He fears the repercussions of admitting his feelings for a married woman and does not see how he and Edna can be together, so why should he behave badly? Robert is struggling to do the proper thing and leave Edna alone. He admits to her that he came back for her, but then realized immediately "what a cur" he was, and admits it would have been wrong to be with her, even if she were willing. Robert does not understand when Edna explains that she does not belong to her husband or anyone else, and Edna is surprised when Robert says he dreamed of making her his wife. Edna may not want to be anyone's wife. She wants to belong only to herself.

Madame Ratignolle's insistence on her friend's presence during her delivery in chapter thirty-seven may have been intended to remind Edna of the beauty of children and life itself. Yet Edna is offended by what she has seen, focused only on the suffering a woman must endure in order to make way for a new life forcing its presence upon her. Edna does not have fond memories of childbirth herself, and watching the birth repulses her. When Madame Ratignolle embraces her and tells her to remember her children, Edna may only be thinking of the burden that children place upon their mothers.

Edna's conversation with Dr. Mandelet in chapter thirty-eight reveals the depth of her despair. Having witnessed the birth of Madame Ratignolle's baby, Edna is reminded of her own children and her obligation to them. She is so upset that she can barely respond coherently to Dr. Mandelet's questions. She forces those thoughts out of her mind in order to focus on Robert, once again believing everything will be alright as long as Robert loves her.

When Edna finds Robert's note, she realizes that he is just like Léonce. He is disregarding her feelings as though they do not matter. He is just one more person who wants to possess her and make demands upon her instead of letting her live as she



chooses. She realizes that Robert is not the answer, since she has changed but he has not. Edna also realizes that her children are dependent on her and her actions. Edna cannot do as she wants without affecting her children.

Edna's final act in chapter thirty-nine reinforces what she said to Madame Ratignolle about not sacrificing oneself for one's children. Léonce will be back soon, and Edna refuses to go back to her old life. She will not sacrifice herself for her children. She realizes that Robert is not the answer, and accepts that other men may come and go in her life. She does not care what society would think of her affairs, but she knows that her children would be negatively affected by her behavior.

She equates motherhood with slavery since it limits a person's choices and makes them belong to someone else. By killing herself, Edna is remaining independent and making her own choices. She chooses to leave her husband by dying. She chooses to leave her children. She does not consider her death to be a sacrifice, but staying with her family would be. By telling Victor and Mariequita she is planning to dine with them, she makes her suicide appear to be an accident, thereby saving her reputation and that of her children. It is her ultimate victory as a woman who is now self-aware.



Emancipation: A Life Fable

Emancipation: A Life Fable Summary

This story details the life of an animal that is born in a cage. It does not perceive the outside world, except for a sun beam that warms him. He is fed and cared for by an invisible master, and appears content and safe. One day, the door to his cage is left open by accident. At first, the animal is afraid. He crouches in the corner and does not try to escape. Finally, he looks outside the cage and sees a world he has never known. Still fearful but also growing curious, he again crouches in the corner but is no longer content to stay there. He returns to the open door to peek outside over and over again, each time seeing a bit more. Finally, he escapes from his cage and ventures out into the world and begins to experience everything life has to offer, including hunger, thirst, and danger.

Emancipation: A Life Fable Analysis

This one-page short story is symbolic of adulthood and self-actualization. Chopin's stories often depict a state of content ignorance that can only be discarded by those with courage. In this story, the unnamed, unidentified animal could represent any child or creature. A young bird venturing out of its nest will encounter both freedom and fear. Any baby animal that allows its curiosity to lead it risks danger, but Chopin implies that the potential reward is in the journey, and may be worth the risk.



A Shameful Affair

A Shameful Affair Summary

Chapter one opens with Mildred Orme, a scholarly twenty-year-old woman, who is staying at a country farm. One day, one of the farm workers retrieves one of Mildred's papers that has fallen on the ground and brings it to her. Although Mildred typically ignores the men, this one draws her attention. Mildred asks her hostess to invite him to take Mildred to church. The man declines. The next time Mildred sees him, he looks directly at her with a bold look in his eyes, surprising Mildred with his directness.

In chapter two, the next day, Mildred sees the man fishing. She asks him to let her try fishing, too, and he agrees. When Mildred senses a fish on the line, she gets excited. The man goes to help her with the fishing pole, and suddenly the two embrace and kiss. The man then leaves suddenly, and Mildred is ashamed by her actions.

Chapter three begins that night with Mildred crying. She can still feel the man's kiss on her lips, and believes it is the "most delicious thing she had known." She does not really understand why she is behaving this way with a simple farmhand.

The next day, Mildred refuses to look at the man, but watches him intently as he speaks with the farmer. Mildred then prepares to leave the farm.

That afternoon, Mildred receives a letter from her family with an amusing story about a gentleman named Fred Evelyn who is staying at the farm and working right alongside the laborers. Mildred finds no comfort knowing that the man who kissed her is not just a farmhand, but a member of her own social class. When she sees Mr. Evelyn, he apologizes. He asks if she can forgive him, and she says that maybe someday she can, if only she can forgive herself.

A Shameful Affair Analysis

During this time period, young women of the middle class were expected to be chaste and asexual, especially with men who were from the lower class. Mildred is disturbed on many levels by Fred Evelyn's actions. When she is first attracted to him, she is conflicted because he is a simple farmhand and not someone in whom she should be interested. When he kisses her, she is excited by his touch, which also surprises and confuses her.

To make matters worse, she is angered when he is revealed to be part of the middle-class like her and enjoying pretending to be someone he is not. She feels he may have been mocking her with his attention, especially since he knew who she was while his own identity remained hidden. Mildred is ashamed because she not only felt sexual feelings for Fred that she is not supposed to feel, but because her feelings misled and confused her.

At the 'Cadian Ball

At the 'Cadian Ball Summary

This story concerns two couples - Bobinôt and Calixta, and Alcée Laballière and Clarisse. Bobinôt wants to marry Calixta, but she has not yet agreed. Laballière is a successful planter who lives with his mother and cousin Clarisse, who is also his mother's goddaughter. When Clarisse learns Alcée is going to see Calixta at the ball, she follows him. She finds him flirting with Calixta and gets him to leave. On the way home, Clarisse admits she came because she loves him. At the same time, Calixta agrees to marry Bobinôt.

At the 'Cadian Ball Analysis

This story displays parallels between the two young couples who are very different from one another. Calixta is portrayed as a sensual woman of hot blood and a bit of a reputation. Clarisse is cold and icy in contrast, a proud Creole woman who knows that she does not belong at a ball filled with 'Cadians.

Bobinôt's character is written as somewhat of a loyal lap-dog. He only attends the ball after he learns that Alcée might be there because he does not want him to be with Calixta. Calixta is a free spirit and does not agree to let Bobinôt kiss her even as she agrees to his proposal of marriage. The descriptions of these characters will become more important in Chopin's sequel to the story, entitled *The Storm*.



Désirée's Baby

Désirée's Baby Summary

Désirée is adopted as a very small child by the Valmondé family. Désirée eventually marries and has a baby. Yet soon after the baby is born, Désirée's husband withdraws from her. When Désirée speaks with her husband Armand, he explains that the baby is not white because Désirée herself is not white. Désirée asks her husband if he wants her to leave. Armand says yes. Désirée takes the baby out of the house and drowns them both. The story ends with Armand burning the clothes that belonged to Désirée and the baby. He also tosses a letter in the fire. The letter was written from his mother to his father years ago. In the letter, his mother thanks God that her son Armand will never learn that she is actually black.

Désirée's Baby Analysis

One of Chopin's most popular stories, the tale of Désirée as tragic mother-heroine leaves many questions unanswered. It is unclear whether Armand knows about his mother's letter prior to the end of the story, or if he discovers it following Désirée's heartbreaking suicide. When Désirée notices the resemblance between her own child and La Blanche (the slave's) child, is she also unnerved by a resemblance so similar as to suggest both children have the same father?

This possibility is especially interesting when one observes that Armand never accuses his wife of infidelity. He acknowledges that the child is his without question, either because he already knows the truth about his own ancestry, or based on his resemblance to La Blanche's boy, who may also be Armand's son. Ironically enough, the word *blanche* in French refers to someone or something which is white or light in color.

Désirée's Baby takes place in Louisiana prior to the Civil War, a time when slave owners legally owned their slaves and were therefore permitted to have sex with them. When her mother comes to visit, Désirée remarks that the baby cries so loudly that Armand is able to hear him from as far away as La Blanche's cabin. Perhaps this is the author's way of saying that Armand continues to enjoy the company of his slave women while his wife recuperates ("The young mother was recovering slowly..." p. 156). Armand also points out that Désirée's skin is as white as La Blanche's, possibly inferring a parallel between the two mothers of his mixed-race children.

The author also uses a lot of foreshadowing to tell the story. L'Abri appears to be a desolate place, and Désirée's impending doom is sensed in the house long before it is realized. Désirée's mother is shocked by the baby's appearance much more than she appears to be shocked about the later revelation that the baby is not white. Madame Valmondé holds the baby up to the light and studies it carefully at the beginning of the



story. Zandrine, the baby's nurse, does not make eye contact with Madame Valmondé as she examines the child, perhaps already suspecting what is to come. "Yes, the child has grown, has changed," Madame Valmondé says, apparently seeing what Désirée cannot yet see herself.

The truth about Armand's mother is also subtly implied. Readers learn that she died many years ago, and that Armand's father married and buried his wife in France, an area of the world that allowed interracial marriage when it would not have been possible in Louisiana.



A Gentleman of Bayou Têche

A Gentleman of Bayou Têche Summary

Mr. Sublet is an artist visiting Bayou Têche. He asks a 'Cadian man, Evariste Bonamour, to pose for a picture to be published in a magazine. Evariste agrees, and Sublet gives him two silver dollars as advance payment. Evariste tells his daughter, Martinette, about his plans. When Martinette visits a woman called Aunt Dicey, Dicey says Sublet will humiliate Evariste by placing a caption under the picture describing him as a "low-down 'Cajun" from Bayou Têche.

Upset, Martinette returns home and asks her father not to pose for the picture. Evariste agrees. Martinette gives Sublet the money, but as she is leaving, Evariste arrives, carrying little Archie Sublet. Evariste explains that he saw the boy's boat overturned and rescued him. Grateful, Mr. Sublet tells Evariste he will make sure that Evariste's picture is identified as a hero of Bayou Têche.

Evariste protests that he is no hero. Mr. Hallet intervenes and says Evariste should choose the caption. Evariste asks to be identified as a "gentleman" of Bayou Têche.

A Gentleman of Bayou Têche Analysis

One of Chopin's lesser-known character sketches, *A Gentleman of Bayou Têche* does its best to humanize subjects that were often stereotyped by visiting writers and artists during that time period. Evariste's unselfish action in saving little Archie Sublet makes him the undoubted hero in the story, but his humility is what makes him likeable. Aunt Dicey represents the voice of reality and awareness of social constraints despite Evariste and Martinette's ignorance. Chopin also introduces irony in the fact that even simple Evariste knows that such a small boy as Archie should not have been alone in the boat by himself. Far from being portrayed as a "low-down Cajun," Chopin portrays Evariste Bonamour as someone who has more sense and warmth than the visiting artist Sublet does.



A Respectable Woman

A Respectable Woman Summary

Mrs. Baroda is unnerved by her new houseguest, Gouvernail. Gouvernail is one of her husband Gaston's old college friends. Mrs. Baroda tells her husband Gaston she will visit a relative and not return home until Gouvernail has gone. That night, however, Mrs. Baroda speaks with Gouvernail and feels attracted to him. Being a respectable woman, she resists acting on her feelings, and leaves home early the next day as planned. Mrs. Baroda does not return home until Gouvernail's visit is over. Gaston later asks if Gouvernail might return, but Mrs. Baroda objects to a second visit. However, later that year, Mrs. Baroda changes her mind and agrees to let Gouvernail come back. She promises her husband, "I have overcome everything! You will see. This time I shall be very nice to him."

A Respectable Woman Analysis

Gouvernail, a character of some intrigue from *The Awakening* and *Athénaïse*, again appears here as a noble enough, if not distant presence in the story. Prior to Gouvernail's arrival, Mrs. Baroda is content, much as *The Awakening's* Madame Ratignolle is content with her husband and family. However, unlike Madame Ratignolle, Mrs. Baroda experiences an awakening all her own. She initially does not recognize the feelings she has for Gouvernail as attraction or even curiosity, and wants to escape her home and the uncomfortable emotions she blames on his presence.

Yet when Gouvernail speaks and reads poetry in her presence on a particularly romantic and beautiful evening, Mrs. Baroda's eyes are opened. Chopin says that she "was not thinking of his words, only drinking in the tones of his voice." Since Mrs. Baroda is trying to behave respectably, she does not act on her feelings. When she changes her mind later in the year, it appears she has changed her mind and wants to explore her feelings further.



The Story of an Hour

The Story of an Hour Summary

Mrs. Louise Mallard learns her husband Brently has been killed in a railroad accident. Her sister Josephine breaks the news to her gently since Louise has a weak heart. Louise goes to her room and asks to be left alone. Louise begins to feel relief that she will now be a free woman. She imagines her future and the endless possibilities now open to her. She can now live for herself and no one else.

Josephine grows worried about her sister and gets her to come downstairs just as the front door opens. Brently Mallard enters. The shock of seeing her "dead" husband alive is too much for poor Louise's fragile heart. After her death, the doctors tell her loved ones that she died of "joy that kills."

The Story of an Hour Analysis

Prized for one of the best endings created by Chopin, this story reveals the shocking idea that a woman's grief could so quickly turn to relief after she learns of her husband's sudden death. Louise's joy excellently illustrates the plight of women during the late nineteenth century. Although Louise's husband loved her, she knew that his will dominated hers. She rejoices that "there would be no powerful will bending hers in the blind persistence with which men and women believe they have a right to impose a private will upon a fellow-creature." Similar to *The Awakening*, Chopin's heroine dies before seeing her potential fully realized.



Athénaïse

Athénaïse Summary

In chapter one, Athénaïse Miché leaves her husband Cazeau. When his wife does not return by chapter two, Cazeau goes to fetch her himself. When she returns with him, Cazeau is reminded of a slave his father once had to retrieve after he ran away. The memory of this greatly disturbs Cazeau.

In chapter three, Cazeau tells his wife he married her because he loved her, and they must make the best of their marriage. Athénaïse disagrees and asks her brother Montéclin for help in chapter four.

In chapter five, Athénaïse is gone. Cazeau decides not to pursue his wife, and instead writes her a letter in which he says he will always love her and hopes one day she can return his love and come back home to him. In chapter six, Athénaïse arrives in New Orleans and stays in a room next door to a journalist named Gouvernail.

Athénaïse needs to find a job. Athénaïse is naïve and does not know her own mind. In chapter seven, Athénaïse meets Gouvernail. In chapter eight, Athénaïse asks Gouvernail to send letters to her brother for her, and Gouvernail wonders what her secret is. She tells him the truth. In chapter nine, Athénaïse begins to depend on Gouvernail for companionship. Gouvernail is falling for Athénaïse, but he realizes he is fulfilling Montéclin's role in her life. He tries to treat her as Montéclin would.

When chapter ten begins, Athénaïse learns she is pregnant and is joyful at the news. She finally knows her place in Cazeau's life - as the mother of his child. Immediately, Athénaïse decides to return to Cazeau. Gouvernail takes Athénaïse to the train station. His heart is breaking as he tells her goodbye, but he wishes her well. In chapter eleven, Montéclin meets Athénaïse's train and takes her home. He is disappointed that Athénaïse is going back to Cazeau, and that "the affair had taken...an almost commonplace turn, after all." When Athénaïse reunites with Cazeau, she kisses and embraces her husband, and he senses that she is different. He feels she is only now responding to her passion with a passion all her own.

Athénaïse Analysis

Athénaïse's story is one of growth. In the beginning, she is a child who does childish things and thinks childish thoughts. She does not know how to resist her husband if he does not provoke her because she has not yet learned how to resolve conflict. She relies on her brother, even though it is clear that Montéclin is the "bad seed" in the family and generally up to no good.

Rather than try to resolve her problems with her husband Cazeau, Athénaïse runs away under the pretense that she is visiting her family. When she tries to explain why she left,



she cannot. Cazeau has not been a bad husband to her. She is simply unready to be married and accept the responsibilities of a wife. Rather than try to adapt, Athénaïse instead rejects her marriage without considering the consequences.

Athénaïse is in denial about her true feelings for Cazeau. Even Gouvernail sees her love for her husband when he meets her. Chopin writes that Gouvernail "knew that she adored Montéclin, and he suspected that she adored Cazeau without being herself aware of it." When Athénaïse learns she is pregnant, she suddenly "knows her own mind." The ending of Athénaïse differs from some of Chopin's other works in which the heroine undergoes an awakening and then remains alone or dies. Athénaïse's awakening occurs only as she learns she is pregnant and has a new role as a mother. Athénaïse nevertheless still matures through her own awakening only after being alone in the world. Now a woman and not just a little girl anymore, Athénaïse owns her own sexuality for the first time when she is reunited with her husband.



A Pair of Silk Stockings

A Pair of Silk Stockings Summary

Mrs. Sommers receives fifteen dollars, a very large sum for her. Her neighbors sometimes gossip about "better days" from Mrs. Sommers's past, referring to a time before she was married and had children. These days, Mrs. Sommers is focused on the needs of her children. She plans to buy several items for them with the money.

At the store, however, Mrs. Sommers buys a pair of silk stockings on impulse and puts them on. She also purchases boots, gloves, and magazines before visiting a fancy restaurant she has often admired but never entered. She savors the rich food and fine wine as she reads and feels at home with the other patrons.

Mrs. Sommers ends her day at the theatre. Seated next to gaudily dressed women nibbling on candy, Mrs. Sommers laughs and cries. When she boards the cable car to return home, she silently wishes the ride would never end.

A Pair of Silk Stockings Analysis

This story reinforces Chopin's mantra that women experience true happiness only if they learn to love themselves first. Although Mrs. Sommers plans to spend her money on things for her children, she gives into the temptation to be good to herself for a change. At the end of the story, she wants nothing more than to continue the fantasy that she is a woman of some stature and means, as she may have been earlier in life.

Although it is unknown whether the women in the theatre are mothers, the significance of their presence is that they are carefree and able to spend money freely. So in this instance, Chopin appears to be making less of a statement about mothers and lack of freedom than about the benefits of class and love for one's self. It is unclear whether Mrs. Sommers is married or widowed, or what may have caused her family to fall on hard times. An earlier life of higher class and distinction would explain why Mrs. Sommers is so at ease with the diners in the fine restaurant and the women at the theatre. One would not expect a poor woman to fit in so easily as she does. Since the gossip about Mrs. Sommers concerning her "better days" seems to be rooted in a time "before she had ever thought of being Mrs. Sommers", it may imply that she came from a middle-class or wealthy family and then lost her fortune after she married.

The silk stockings in the story are an obvious symbol of luxury. Impractical in every way, silk stockings would have been quite a luxury for a woman who prides herself on bargaining and negotiation. Mrs. Sommers plans to buy new stockings, but mainly to save on darning time in the future, which would imply that she intended to buy stockings made with a fabric far more durable, but less luxurious, than silk.



Elizabeth Stock's One Story

Elizabeth Stock's One Story Summary

This is a story relayed by the narrator after the alleged writer, Elizabeth Stock, dies. Elizabeth's story explains how she lost her job at the post office in Stonelift. One day, she reads a postcard addressed to Nathan Brightman, informing him of an urgent meeting the next day. After work, Elizabeth decides to take the message to Mr. Brightman's house herself so he will not miss the meeting. The weather is windy and cold as she walks, but Elizabeth is determined. Mr. Brightman is very grateful and concerned that Elizabeth walked in the bad weather. He immediately travels to St. Louis for the meeting. Elizabeth spends most of the next spring sick and then gets fired for reading postcards and letting people get their own mail from their box. Elizabeth's doctor advises her to spend the next winter in the South for health reasons, but Elizabeth cannot afford to travel since she has lost her job. Elizabeth writes that she wishes she could just "go to sleep and never wake up." That winter, Elizabeth dies of consumption.

Elizabeth Stock's One Story Analysis

Elizabeth Stock's One Story differs greatly from most of Chopin's other writings. Elizabeth is from Missouri, and she is already dead when the story begins. The recounting of her story begins with a fair amount of disdain. Some experts believe Chopin is recounting her own frustrations at not being taken seriously as a female writer. Ironically, Elizabeth Stock is at first depicted by the unknown narrator, as "an unmarried woman of thirty-eight," who upon being placed in the "incurable ward" of the St. Louis Hospital, gave up the fight ("all courage seemed to leave her") and did not speak again before she died.

The narrator describes a woman who was "much given over to scribbling" and describes the dead woman's desk as "quite filled with scraps and bits of writing in bad prose and impossible verse," and complains, "In the whole conglomerate mass, I discovered but the following pages which bore any resemblance to a connected or consecutive narration."

Once the story actually develops, readers can see that Elizabeth is an independent woman who sacrifices herself to help someone else, much as Evariste Bonamour in *A Gentleman of Bayou Têche* saves little Archie Sublet. She takes pride in her work and seems to be a noble character who routinely helps others and cares little about herself. She is not ashamed at remaining single her whole life, and proud of helping young Danny pay for school ("And full of ambition to study he was! It would have felt sinful of me, not to.") Elizabeth spends some of the last money she has on Danny's education instead of using it to travel to a warmer climate which might have saved her health and

ultimately her very life. Elizabeth may be one of Chopin's more likeable, unusual tragic heroines.



The Storm - A Sequel to At the 'Cadian Ball

The Storm - A Sequel to At the 'Cadian Ball Summary

Chapter one begins as Bobinôt and his son, four-year-old Bibi, are waiting out a storm at Friedheimer's store. In chapter two, Calixta sees Alcée Laballière outside her gate and allows him to take shelter inside. Calixta has not seen him very often, and never alone, since she married Bobinôt. When lightning strikes a tree outside, Calixta is afraid. Alcée tries to comfort her, but touching her awakens his old desire. Alcée kisses Calixta and they make love as the storm rages. Alcée leaves before Bobinôt returns.

In chapter three, Bobinôt and Bibi return home, and Calixta is relieved they are safe and well. In chapter four, Alcée writes his wife Clarisse, who is in Mississippi with the children. He tells her she should stay a month longer if they are happy there. He misses them greatly, of course, but their happiness is most important. Clarisse is pleased by the letter she receives from Alcée in chapter five. She is enjoying her stay at Biloxi, and the time away from her husband reminds her of the freedom she experienced before she married. She loves Alcée, but does not miss being intimate with him.

The Storm - A Sequel to At the 'Cadian Ball Analysis

In this daring story, Chopin reintroduces several characters from *At the 'Cadian Ball* and picks up the relationship between Alcée Laballière right where she left off. The predominant message in *The Storm* appears to be that even loving couples may need to explore their sexuality with others outside of the marriages dictated by social norms. Chopin makes a distinction between love and lust. She even clarifies that Clarisse is devoted to her husband but does not miss their "conjugal" moments.

Calixta and Laballière are not in love. Alcée makes sure to leave before Bobinôt returns, and does not make any claims on Calixta or swear undying devotion to his lover. It is not uncommon for a successful planter like Alcée Laballière to enjoy intimacy with a woman of a lower class during this time. Laballière clearly has fond memories of the time they spent together in previous years prior to her marriage, so perhaps he would have considered a future with Calixta if their situations were different. Chopin's final sentence in the story is classic: "So the storm passed and every one was happy."

It is worth noting that *The Storm* is much more sexually explicit than Chopin's other works, including *The Awakening*, in which another man named Alcée (Arobin) has sex with a married woman, Edna Pontellier. Edna's sex scene is merely implied in *The Awakening*, with Alcée kissing Edna at the end of one chapter and Edna feeling irresponsible after Alcée's late-night departure at the beginning of the next. Literary experts have noted that Chopin did not attempt to have *The Storm* published, and

therefore did not feel compelled to observe standard literary conventions of the time that would have censored or prohibited the sexual content. *The Storm* was actually not published until 1969, more than fifty years after Chopin's death.



The Godmother

The Godmother Summary

In chapter one, Tante ("Aunt") Elodie and her godson, Gabriel Lucaze play cribbage at her home before Gabriel goes out. In chapter two, Gabriel returns to Tante Elodie's home late that night. In chapter three, Gabriel tells Tante Elodie he has just killed a man named Everson. Tante Elodie tells Gabriel not to tell anyone, and creates an alibi for him. She cleans Gabriel up and sends him home.

In chapter four, Tante Elodie goes to the murder scene. She takes the dead man's watch and money, and the knife Gabriel left behind under the body. She burns the dead man's paper money and washes the knife before placing it in the pocket of one of Gabriel's coats that hangs in her closet. Now feeling sick, Tante Elodie finally lies down to rest, pleased she has saved her godson.

In chapter five, Tante Elodie is still sick. That night, Tante Elodie cannot sleep. She misses Gabriel and is worried about him. He is the son of Justin Lacaze, a man she nearly married when she was much younger. The next day, Tante Elodie forces Gabriel to talk to her. Gabriel is miserable, but agrees not to come forward with the truth unless someone else is falsely accused. Tante Elodie tells Gabriel to keep pretending he is innocent. Gabriel is worried he may still have blood on his coat, although Tante Elodie assures him he does not. Gabriel removes it and exchanges it for the coat hanging in her closet. Tante Elodie does not tell Gabriel the knife is inside.

In chapter six, Gabriel is suffering. A week before, he was in love with Madame Nicolas, but that feels like a long time ago. He tells her he is leaving town. Gabriel is barely aware of her anguish, having been blinded by his own pain. When Gabriel finds the knife, he realizes what Tante Elodie has done. He is disgusted, and never wants to see his godmother again. Gabriel becomes even more depressed now that he has lost Madame Nicolas and especially Tante Elodie, who was "dearer than a mother" to him. Gabriel hates being alone.

When chapter seven begins, Tante Elodie is withering away. She heard from Fifine Delonce that Gabriel had left town. Fifine assumes that Gabriel's breakup with Madame Nicolas, who is now marrying another man, is what drove Gabriel away, but Tante Elodie knows the truth. During Madame Nicolas' wedding reception, Tante Elodie learns that Gabriel has been killed by a fall from his horse. The guests leave Tante Elodie to be alone with her grief.

The Godmother Analysis

The Godmother introduces another one of Chopin's tragic and unconventional heroines, Tante Elodie. Similar to *The Awakening's* Edna, Tante Elodie is so devastated by loss at the end of the story that she sits, numb and unfeeling, as though she is transported



somewhere else in her mind, just as Edna ("never uttering a sound") does after reading Robert's farewell note to her. Unlike Edna, however, Tante Elodie has done what Edna said she never could - sacrifice herself for her children.

Tante Elodie loves Gabriel as the son she never had, or perhaps in place of his father, the man she once loved but never married. Like Chopin's Elizabeth Stock (Elizabeth Stock's One Story) Tante Elodie is grateful she never married. Her fierce devotion to God and prayer, which she does not abandon even after she does the unthinkable, lies in stark contrast to the acts she has committed. It is worth noting that although Tante Elodie does not abandon her religion during this time, she does stop going to confession.

Gabriel's reaction is also interesting. He seems most disturbed by Tante Elodie's efforts to save him. Chopin writes that Gabriel "could not believe that any man was worth loving to such length, or worth saving at such a price. She seemed, to his imagination, less a woman than a monster..." Gabriel is most disgusted that such acts could be committed by a woman, and appears to be far more wounded by what Tante Elodie has done than by Madame Nicolas's betrayal of him. A particular note of symbolism arises when Gabriel asks Tante Elodie if he still has spots of blood on his coat, possibly Chopin's nod to Edgar Allen Poe's short story, *The Tell-Tale Heart* and similar works in which murderers are obsessed with the paranoid delusion that they have not removed all traces of their crime.



A Little Country Girl

A Little Country Girl Summary

Ninette is a poor country girl who lives with her grandparents. When her grandparents do not let her go to the circus, she hopes it will rain and ruin the circus outing for everyone else.

When Jules Perrault convinces Ninette's grandparents to let her go after all, Ninette holds the Perrault's baby and can barely control her excitement. During the big show, a storm knocks over the circus tent, injuring several people and killing one of the horses. Ninette is unhurt, but Jules Perrault finds her still clutching the wailing baby and terrified she is about to die.

Afterward, Ninette admits that the circus tragedy is all her fault because she hoped for rain. Grandmother Bézeau asks the priest to speak with Ninette, and when he sees her, he teases her about being able to control the weather. "I am overwhelmed," he says, "at finding myself in the presence of a wonderful Magician! who has but to call upon the rain and down it comes. She whistles for the wind and - there it is! Pray, what weather will you give us this afternoon, fair Sorceress?"

Ninette is ashamed. Monsieur Perrault arrives to talk to the family as well. He tells Grandmother and Grandfather Bézeau that poor Ninette is a bit morbid due to all of the time she spends with old people, and needs to spend more time with people her own age. He convinces the old couple that continuing to shelter Ninette will be bad for her, and the Bézeaus agree.

A Little Country Girl Analysis

In *A Little Country Girl*, which Chopin published in a magazine read by young people, the author paints a considerably lighter picture in which the young heroine is spunky and spirited, but not so tragic and tortured as *The Awakening's* Edna or poor wretched Désirée from *Désirée's Baby*. Ninette is a poor young girl who, like some of Chopin's antagonists, feels trapped and unable to enjoy life. Ninette just happens not to be trapped by a husband or children, or even society's expectations of her as a female.

Ninette's grandparents have long forgotten the joys of youth, and it is only through others, especially Monsieur Perrault, that the Bézeaus realize the error of their ways. Perrault is presented as a man of some influence and carriage, and a male chivalrous presence reminiscent of someone like Gouvernail from Chopin's *Athénaïse*. True to form, however, Chopin is again touting the merits of encouraging a girl to enjoy herself and have adventures of her own.



Characters

Edna Pontellier appears in *The Awakening*

Edna is the main character in *The Awakening*. In her late twenties and originally from Kentucky, Edna lives in New Orleans with her husband Léonce and two young sons, Raoul and Étienne. While vacationing at Grand Isle, a popular summer resort for wealthy Louisiana families, Edna begins to experience a spiritual awakening. When she swims for the first time, she feels alive and independent. Her new independence both scares and excites her. When Edna swims out too far, she also realizes the danger associated with the risks she is taking.

Over the summer, Edna becomes infatuated with her friend, Robert Lebrun, and longs to be with him. She also grows very rebellious toward her husband and children, and views them as obligations that stand between her and the independence she craves. She pursues art as a hobby more than a profession, and explores new interests and behaviors in the way a child would. Edna appears to be seeing the world around her with new eyes and constantly testing the boundaries of socially acceptable behavior.

After leaving Grand Isle, Edna begins rejecting social customs and isolating herself from others. Edna does not want to feel that she belongs to anyone. When Edna begins going to the horse races, she gets to know Alcée Arobin and has an affair with him. Since Edna is still in love with Robert, however, she does not care much about Alcée. After Léonce goes to New York on a business trip, Edna spends most of her days painting in her art studio and visiting friends from Grand Isle, including Mademoiselle Reisz, an unusual woman with an independent spirit who inspires Edna with her musical talent and rejection of societal rules. Mademoiselle Reisz is the only person who knows about Edna's feelings for Robert.

Eventually, Edna's need for independence drives her to move out of the mansion and rent a small house where she can live alone. When Robert returns from Mexico, Edna realizes that he wants possess her just as Léonce did. Edna realizes that her independence will hurt her children, but is not willing to sacrifice her happiness for theirs. At the end of *The Awakening*, Edna commits suicide by drowning in the waters off of Grand Isle.

Mademoiselle Reisz appears in *The Awakening*

Mademoiselle Reisz is a widow who befriends Edna and speaks with her candidly about her love for Robert and desire to be independent. Mademoiselle Reisz is an excellent musician, and her music awakens new emotions in Edna. Mademoiselle Reisz pays little attention to society's expectations of women and dislikes those who are not true to themselves.



When Edna visits her for the first time in New Orleans, Mademoiselle Reisz tells her she had not assumed she would come, thinking Edna had promised "as those women in society always do, without meaning it."

When Edna admits she does not know whether she likes Mademoiselle Reisz or not, Mademoiselle Reisz is pleased that Edna is being honest instead of just saying what society expects her to say.

When Edna compliments her on her piano playing, Mademoiselle Reisz appreciates Edna's genuine sentiment. While at Grand Isle, she tells Edna "You are the only one worth playing for. These others? Bah!" Although Mademoiselle Reisz is described as "disagreeable," a part of Edna wishes she could be like her. Before she dies, Edna worries that Mademoiselle Reisz would be disappointed in her lack of courage.

Léonce Pontellier appears in The Awakening

Léonce Pontellier is Edna's husband. Although Léonce loves Edna, he does not understand why she resists doing what is expected of her. In Léonce's highly organized world, Edna's reputation is nearly as important as his own. Léonce believes in following the social customs required of someone of his considerable social status, and actually lies about Edna's reason for moving out of the mansion in order to save face.

Léonce believes it is critical to keep up appearances in order for his business to be successful. Although Léonce notices that Edna is behaving strangely before he leaves for New York, it does not occur to him that she might commit adultery or become suicidal. Léonce concerns himself principally with his business and social reputation.

Robert Lebrun appears in The Awakening

Robert Lebrun is Madame Lebrun's son and the man Edna falls in love with during her summer at Grand Isle. Robert flirts with married women all of the time, so he does not see the danger in flirting with Edna, too. Over time, Robert begins to feel true love for Edna, which is why he flees to Mexico to avoid acting on his feelings. When Robert returns, he is still reluctant to cause a scandal by getting involved with a married woman. Unlike Edna, Robert still cares about what people think of him, and what people think about Edna.

Adèle Ratignolle appears in The Awakening

Adèle is Edna's good friend. Edna describes her as "the embodiment of every womanly grace and charm." Adèle is dedicated to being the woman society expects her to be. She is content and devoted to her husband and children, and worries about Edna's relationships with Robert and Alcée. It is Adèle who reminds Edna to remember her children, which indirectly leads Edna to commit suicide.



Madame Lebrun appears in The Awakening

Madame Lebrun owns the cottages at Grand Isle. She is also the mother of Victor and Robert Lebrun.

Raoul and Étienne Pontellier appears in The Awakening

Raoul and Étienne are Edna and Léonce Pontellier's young sons.

Alcée Arobin appears in The Awakening

Alcée spends time with Edna at the horse races and has an affair with her after Edna's husband leaves town on business.

Victor Lebrun appears in The Awakening

Victor Lebrun is Robert Lebrun's younger brother and the son of Madame Lebrun. Victor is very impulsive and has a bad reputation.

Madame Antoine appears in The Awakening

Madame Antoine owns the home on the island of Chênière Caminada where Edna rests during her trip with Robert.

Dr. Mandelet appears in The Awakening

The Doctor is a friend of the Pontelliers and also their family physician. Léonce tells the Doctor he is concerned about Edna's mental health, but the Doctor thinks Edna is just going through a phase that will pass. The Doctor sees Edna the night before her suicide and tries to help her, but Edna refuses to talk about her problems with him.

The Colonel appears in The Awakening

The Colonel is Edna's father and a former Confederate military officer. He comes to visit Edna in New Orleans, and is upset when she will not attend her sister's wedding with him.



Mildred Orme appears in A Shameful Affair

Mildred is a well-read twenty-year-old woman who becomes involved with one of the farm workers while visiting the Kraummer farm.

Mrs. Kraummer appears in A Shameful Affair

Mrs. Kraummer is the mistress of the Kraummer farmhouse.

Fred Evelyn appears in A Shameful Affair

Fred is the middle-class "crank" who pretends to be a lower-class farm worker when he meets Mildred Orme.

Bobinôt appears in At the 'Cadian Ball and The Storm

Bobinôt is a 'Cadian man who falls in love with Calixta. They eventually marry and have a little boy, Bibi.

Calixta appears in At the 'Cadian Ball and The Storm

Calixta is an attractive young woman who agrees to marry Bobinôt in At the 'Cadian Ball and then makes love to Alcée Laballière in The Storm.

Bibi appears in At the 'Cadian Ball and The Storm

Bibi is Calixta and Bobinôt's four-year-old son

Alcée Laballière appears in At the 'Cadian Ball and The Storm

Alcée is a wealthy young planter. In At the 'Cadian Ball, he tries to woo Calixta but ends up with Clarisse, his cousin, instead. In The Storm, Alcée and Calixta make love.

Madame Laballière appears in At the 'Cadian Ball

Madame Laballière is mother to Alcée Laballière and godmother to Clarisse.



Clarisse Laballière appears in At the 'Cadian Ball and The Storm

Clarisse is Alcée's cousin and Madame Laballière's goddaughter in At the 'Cadian Ball. She is married to Alcée in The Storm.

Désirée Aubigny appears in Désirée's Baby

Désirée is an orphan. After she marries Armand Aubigny and has his child, it becomes apparent the child is not white. Armand tells Désirée that means she is not white and asks her to leave his home. Désirée drowns herself and the baby in her despair.

Madame Valmondé appears in Désirée's Baby

Madame Valmondé is Désirée's adoptive mother.

Armand Aubigny appears in Désirée's Baby

Armand Aubigny is Désirée's husband. After Désirée kills herself, readers learn that Armand's mother was black and may have been the reason Armand's baby was biracial.

La Blanche appears in Désirée's Baby

La Blanche is one of Armand's slaves.

Evariste Bonamour appears in A Gentleman of Bayou Têche

Evariste is a 'Cadian fisherman who poses for Mr. Sublet and rescues Mr. Sublet's little boy, Archie. Evariste has a daughter named Martinette.

Mr. Sublet appears in A Gentleman of Bayou Têche

Mr. Sublet is an artist that visits Bayou Têche and asks Evariste Bonamour to pose for a picture for him.

Aunt Dicey appears in A Gentleman of Bayou Têche

Aunt Dicey warns Martinette that Mr. Sublet will put a caption under Evariste's picture identifying Evariste as a "low-down Cajun."



Archie Sublet appears in A Gentleman of Bayou Têche

Martinette is Evariste Bonamour's daughter.

Mr. Hallet appears in A Gentleman of Bayou Têche

Mr. Sublet stays at Mr. Hallet's home in Bayou Têche.

Mrs. Baroda appears in A Respectable Woman

Mrs. Baroda is married to Gaston Baroda and attracted to his college friend, Gouvernail.

Mr. Gaston Baroda appears in A Respectable Woman

Gaston is Mrs. Baroda's husband. He went to college with their houseguest, Gouvernail.

Gouvernail appears in The Awakening, A Respectable Woman, and Athénaïse

Gouvernail is a journalist who appears in several of Kate Chopin's stories. In *The Awakening*, Gouvernail reads poetry at Edna's farewell dinner. In *A Respectable Woman*, Gouvernail visits his old college friend Gaston. In *Athénaïse*, Gouvernail falls in love with Athénaïse and is heartbroken when she returns to her husband.

Louise Mallard appears in The Story of an Hour

Louise is Brently Mallard's wife. When Louise learns that Brently has been killed, she grieves at first but is then relieved to be a free woman who can do as she pleases. When she learns that Brently is alive, she dies from a heart attack.

Brently Mallard appears in The Story of an Hour

Brently Mallard is believed to have been killed in a train accident. When his wife Louise sees him alive, she has a fatal heart attack.

Richards appears in The Story of an Hour

Richards is Brently Mallard's friend. He helps Louise Mallard's sister Josephine break the news that Brently has been killed.



Josephine appears in The Story of an Hour

Josephine is Louise Mallard's sister. She is the one who tells Louise that her husband has been killed.

Athénaïse appears in Athénaïse

Athénaïse is an immature young bride who leaves her husband Cazeau. Athénaïse returns home when she learns she is pregnant.

Montéclin appears in Athénaïse

Montéclin is Athénaïse's brother. He hates her husband Cazeau and helps Athénaïse leave him.

Cazeau appears in Athénaïse

Cazeau is a planter who is married to Athénaïse.

Sylvie appears in Athénaïse

Sylvie runs the apartments where Athénaïse stays in New Orleans. It is Sylvie who first realizes Athénaïse is pregnant.

Mrs. Sommers appears in A Pair of Silk Stockings

Mrs. Sommers is a woman of little means who spends a day living in luxury.

Elizabeth Stock appears in Elizabeth Stock's One Story

Elizabeth is a postmistress who loses her job after personally delivering a postcard to Nathan Brightman.

Nathan Brightman appears in Elizabeth Stock's One Story

Nathan Brightman is a prominent businessman who learns from Elizabeth Stock about an urgent meeting the next day in St. Louis.



Tante Elodie appears in The Godmother

Tante Elodie is Gabriel Lucaze's godmother. When she learns he has killed Everson, she helps him cover up the crime.

Gabriel Lucaze appears in The Godmother

Gabriel Lucaze kills Everson and is then disgusted when his godmother, Tante Elodie, helps him cover up the crime.

Justin Lucaze appears in The Godmother

Justin Lucaze is Gabriel's father. Justin almost married Tante Elodie when they were young.

Madame Amelia Nicolas appears in The Godmother

Madame Nicolas is a widow who is involved with Gabriel Lucaze until he kills Everson. She is also Tante Elodie's friend.

Fifine Delonce appears in The Godmother

Fifine Delonce is friends with Madame Nicolas and Tante Elodie. She is the one who tells Tante Elodie that Gabriel has left town.

Everson appears in The Godmother

Everson is the man killed by Gabriel Lucaze.

Ninette appears in A Little Country Girl

Ninette is a young girl who goes to the circus and later blames herself when a tragedy occurs.

Jules Perrault appears in A Little Country Girl

Jules Perrault is the family friend who convinces Ninette's grandparents to let her attend the circus.



Grandmother and Grandfather Bézeau appears in A Little Country Girl

The Bézeaus are Ninette's grandparents. Ninette lives with them.



Objects/Places

Grand Isle appears in The Awakening

Grand Isle is an island in southeast Louisiana, approximately fifty miles north of New Orleans

Chênrière Caminada appears in The Awakening

Chênrière Caminada is an island the Grand Isle guests visit to attend Mass. Edna and Robert go there the day after Edna swims for the first time.

Pontellier Mansion appears in The Awakening

The Pontellier Mansion is located on Esplanade Street in New Orleans, the mansion is grand and stately. Edna leaves the mansion to live in the pigeon house.

The Pigeon House appears in The Awakening

The pigeon house is a small house that the Pontellier servants believe resembles a house for pigeons. Edna abandons the mansion and moves into the pigeon house while her husband is away on business in New York.

The Atelier appears in The Awakening

The Atelier is an artist's studio in the Pontellier mansion where Edna likes to sketch and paint.

Robert's Letters appears in The Awakening

Robert Lebrun sends letters to Mademoiselle Reisz and Madame Lebrun while he is in Mexico. Edna grills both women on the details of the letters, and Mademoiselle Reisz lets Edna read the ones she receives.

The Horse Races appears in The Awakening

Edna enjoys going to the horse races often and betting on the horses. Edna meets Alcée Arobin there, along with Mrs. Highcamp.



The Ocean appears in The Awakening

After Edna learns to swim, she feels a new sense of independence when she is swimming in the ocean. Edna first senses her awakening in the water, and also commits suicide by drowning in the ocean.

Iberville appears in The Awakening

Mr. Pontellier's mother lives in Iberville and brings the children to visit. This is also where Léonce grew up.

Assumption appears in At the 'Cadian Ball and The Storm

Alcée Laballière spends romantic times at the Assumption.

The Rigolet appears in Athénaïse

The Rigolet is where Athénaïse lives with her family before she marries Cazeau.

Cane River appears in Athénaïse

The Cane River is where Cazeau's plantation is located.

Stonelift appears in Elizabeth Stock's One Story

The Stonelift is the town where Elizabeth Stock is postmistress.

Friedheimer's Store appears in The Storm

Friedheimer's store is where Bobinôt and his son Bibi wait during the storm.

The Normal School appears in The Godmother

The normal school is where Madame Nicolas teaches.

Silk Stockings appears in A Pair of Silk Stockings

Silk stockings are the first item Mrs. Sommers buys on her shopping spree.



The Circus appears in A Little Country Girl

Ninette is attending the circus when the tent collapses, which kills a horse and injures several people.

The Postcard appears in Elizabeth Stock's One Story

The postcard to Nathan Brightman that Elizabeth reads, ultimately causing her to lose her job and her life.

The Cage appears in Emancipation: A Life Fable

The cage is where the animal lives prior to his escape.

The Household Keys appears in Athénaïse

Athénaïse tries to return the household keys to Cazeau as her way of saying she does not want to be the mistress of Cazeau's household.

Gabriel's Knife appears in The Godmother

Gabriel uses the knife to kill Everson and realizes what Tante Elodie did to cover up the crime when he finds it in his coat pocket.



Themes

Rebirth through Water

Edna has a complicated relationship with the ocean. At first, she is overwhelmed by a sense of dread when she approaches the water, and does not feel safe unless someone is nearby and ready to save her. Many different men, women, and even children attempt to teach Edna to swim, but they are unsuccessful. Only when Edna separates herself from the others does she swim for the first time. On that night, Edna is described as a "little tottering, stumbling, clutching child who all of a sudden realizes its powers and walks for the first time alone, boldly and with over-confidence."

Edna is elated when she is able to swim on her own. She literally shouts for joy and feels daring and reckless in the face of her achievement. Edna feels as "if some power of significant import had been given her to control the working of her body and her soul. Edna marvels at how easy swimming suddenly seems to her, and thinks, "Think of the time I have lost splashing about like a baby!" The water is symbolic of her independence. Edna feels that until this point she has been wasting time and can only now begin to live. Edna's first swim is a vital step in her spiritual awakening, and she is forever changed by the experience. Throughout *The Awakening*, Edna returns to the ocean for solace. After Robert goes to Mexico, swimming is the only activity that she enjoys. Even Edna's final act of rebellion, her suicide by drowning, occurs in the ocean where she experienced rebirth. Dying this way is Edna's way of ensuring that her life will end in the same place she believes it began.

Caged Birds

Kate Chopin makes several references to caged birds in *The Awakening*, and it is readily apparent that Edna Pontellier is a caged bird herself. It is significant that Ellen, a maid at the Pontellier mansion and one of the staff members Edna dismisses when she abandons her husband's home, mockingly calls Edna's new house "the pigeon house," due to its small size and resemblance to a house used to keep pigeons. Ellen's choice of words is ironic in that Edna is trying to escape her confinement, but actually relocates to an even smaller cage than the one in which she already resides. The pigeon house is also very close to the mansion, so it appears that Edna is afraid to "fly the coop" completely, instead preferring to stay nearby. She is not yet prepared to spread her wings and fly away altogether.

Madame Lebrun's pet bird repeatedly commands Grand Isle guests to go away as it sits in a cage outside the door to the main house, again an allusion to Edna and her desire for solitude. Just as the bird tells visitors to go away, Edna also stops receiving visitors when she returns to New Orleans after her summer in Grand Isle. A mockingbird that hangs on the other side of Madame Lebrun's door also sings constantly, perhaps in protest of its gilded prison. Together, the two birds are so noisy and persistent that *The*



Awakening actually begins with a description of the birds and Mr. Pontellier's aggravation that they are keeping him from reading his newspaper in peace. Pontellier acknowledges the birds as "the property of" Madame Lebrun, and their right to "make all the noise they wished," but also asserts his right to stop listening to them and walk away when they "ceased to be entertaining," much as one suspects he might similarly abandon his wife if she ceases to be pleasant and conform to his wishes and expectations of her.

Immaturity

Edna's infatuation with Robert is immature and unrealistic. On the Saturday evening when the Grand Isle visitors prepare to swim, Edna is surprised that Robert walks behind the group as she walks with her husband. She is naive enough to believe that the old social norms no longer apply simply because she does not want them to. Having been reborn and now seeing the world through the eyes of a child, Edna acts selfishly and without giving much thought to the consequences of her actions.

When Edna learns that Robert will return to New Orleans, she fantasizes about him and assumes he will come rushing into her arms and declaring his undying love for her. She is surprised when he tells her he dreamed of making her his wife, since that was not the role Edna had envisioned in Robert's life. Robert sees the reality of their situation, but Edna does not, because in her new life, she is still learning and growing. She has yet to grow up, and is still finding her way as a child who simply selfishly focuses on what she wants and how to get it.

While at the beach with Madame Ratignolle, Edna secretly recalls several of her childhood crushes. She once longed for a cavalry officer who was engaged to another woman. Edna was just a girl then, barely entering her teens, and therefore not a likely partner for the young soldier. Yet Edna does not see that reality clearly. She still remembers him longingly, even as she commits suicide by drowning herself in the ocean.

Edna responds to the attentions of Victor, Arobin, and Robert with youthful excitement and animation. She also remembers that she married her husband not because she loved him, but because she was being rebellious about her family's opposition to the marriage. Edna recalls that "his absolute devotion flattered her," and describes her marriage to him as an accident. Edna feels empowered when Arobin seduces her. Although she does not actually care about him, she likes the attention, much as a young girl would. Even when Victor, Robert's brother and someone whom she has not considered a love interest, flirts with her and kisses her hand, Edna is excited and pleased.

Style

Point of View

The majority of *The Awakening* is written from Edna's point of view. However, there are occasional exceptions, such as Mr. Pontellier's visit to Dr. Mandelet and Madame Ratignolle's conversation in which she warns Robert to leave Edna alone. In these instances, Edna is not present at all, and the point of view switches from character to character. After Mr. Pontellier leaves Dr. Mandelet, for example, readers see the doctor's thoughts with no other observers present. This happens again after Dr. Mandelet leaves the Pontellier mansion and worries that Edna could be involved with another man. Although the book uses a third person perspective throughout, the unseen narrator sometimes refers to ideas that none of the characters are thinking about at that moment. As Edna approaches the water at the end of *The Awakening*, the narrator clarifies that Edna is not presently thinking about all of the matters discussed, but had considered them the evening before.

The other short stories in the collection are generally written from a third person perspective, although in some stories like *The Storm*, the perspective can shift from one character to another, and readers are often aware of the private thoughts of individual characters. For instance, *The Storm* begins with Calixta's husband and son seeking shelter from the storm in a store. This chapter is written from Bobinôt's perspective. The next chapter begins with Calixta's view, but then changes to reveal the thoughts of Alcée Laballière. The final chapters in *The Storm* are written from Alcée Laballière and Clarisse Laballière's point of view respectively. The final chapter also gives readers access to Clarisse's thoughts about her marriage to Alcée.

Setting

The Awakening takes place in several locations. It begins in Grand Isle, an island in southeast Louisiana, approximately fifty miles north of New Orleans. Robert and Edna also travel to Chênère Caminada to go to mass. Once the summer is over, Edna and many of the other guests, including Madame Lebrun, Madame Ratignolle, and Mademoiselle Reisz, return to their homes in New Orleans.

Chopin's short stories take place in several different regions. Although many depict the Louisiana area with which Chopin was very familiar, others occur in Missouri (*A Shameful Affair* and *Elizabeth Stock's One Story*). *A Pair of Silk Stockings* and *The Story of An Hour* take place in unknown locations with no hint of the French-Creole-Arcadian regional dialogue and character names present in most of the Louisiana stories.



Language and Meaning

Kate Chopin was born in 1850 and began writing professionally after the death of her husband in 1882. The language used in *The Awakening* and short stories is appropriate for that time period and therefore more difficult to comprehend than more modern works. There are dozens of vocabulary words that students must master in order to completely understand the material, and some terms are antiquated enough to be nonexistent in modern English language, or at least spelled differently.

Another distinctive feature of Chopin's work is her use of French-Creole-Arcadian language and dialects. Most characters have French names, which may be hard to pronounce, especially for non-French speakers. Chopin's depiction of slave and rural 'Cadian speech also incorporates the use of dialogue that is often written only as phonetic speech. For example, in *A Gentleman of Bayou Têche*, a minor character named Wilkins says, "Dat's who, suh. She ben standin' dah sence mos' sun-up; look like she studyin' to take root to de gall'ry." Chopin's characters frequently utter French phrases, but these terms are usually translated for readers in instances in which comprehension of the French terms is required to follow the story.

True to the time period in which Chopin's stories take place, there are also multiple references to black characters that could offend sensitive readers. They are sometimes called names like "darkies," "niggahs," and "piccaninnies," etc. Several characters, especially in *The Awakening*, are also unnamed except for a passing reference to their race, i.e., quadroons, mulatresse, etc.

Structure

The Awakening has gone through several printings and is often accompanied by a selection of Chopin's short stories. Not all versions contain the same collection of stories summarized in this guide. For purposes of this guide, the book used was "The Awakening and Selected Short Fiction" by Barnes and Noble, Inc. (Copyright 2003). This version is 256 pages long, including 133 pages devoted to *The Awakening*. The book also includes biographical information about Kate Chopin, a timeline of her life and works, and a long introduction written by Rachel Adams, a professor of nineteenth and twentieth century American Literature at Columbia University. Additional analysis of *The Awakening*, along with comments, questions, and a suggested reading list, follow the last of the short stories.

In addition to *The Awakening*, there are thirteen individual short stories which vary in length, the longest being thirty-one pages (*Athénaïse*) and the shortest comprising only one page (*Emancipation: A Life Fable*). Most of the stories are only a few pages long and can therefore be read very quickly. *The Storm* is a sequel to *At the 'Cadian Ball*, and so it may be helpful for readers to read those two stories in sequential order, although they are not presented that way in the book. *The Awakening* is comprised of thirty-nine individual chapters of varying lengths.



Quotes

"You are burnt beyond recognition." *The Awakening*, Chap. 1, p. 4

"It was like a shadow, like a mist passing across her soul's summer day." *The Awakening*, Chap. 3, p. 9

"She liked money as well as most women, and accepted it with no little satisfaction." *The Awakening*, Chap. 3, p. 9

"The mother-women seemed to prevail that summer at Grand Isle. It was easy to know them, fluttering about with extended, protecting wings when any harm, real or imaginary, threatened their precious brood. They were women who idolized their children, worshiped their husbands, and esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals and grow wings as ministering angels." *The Awakening*, Chap. 4, p. 11

"She's got some sort of notion in her head concerning the eternal rights of women." *The Awakening*, Chap. 22, p. 76

"Has she been associating of late with a circle of pseudo-intellectual women — super-spiritual beings?" *The Awakening*, Chap. 22, p. 76

"She says a wedding is one of the most lamentable spectacles on earth." *The Awakening*, Chap. 22, p. 77

"She reminded him of some beautiful, sleek animal waking up in the sun." *The Awakening*, Chap. 23, p. 81

"Put your feet down good and hard; the only way to manage a wife." *The Awakening*, Chap. 24, p. 83

"You have been a very, very foolish boy, wasting your time dreaming of impossible things when you speak of Mr. Pontellier setting me free! I am no longer one of Mr. Pontellier's possessions to dispose of or not." *The Awakening*, Chap. 36, p. 124

"I love you. Good-by - because I love you." *The Awakening*, Chap. 38, p. 129



"Well! What do you think of that delicious crank, Fred Evelyn? For a man must be a crank who does such things. Only fancy! Last year, he chose to drive an engine back and forth across the plains. This year he tills the soil with laborers." *A Shameful Affair*, p. 142

"It means that the child is not white; it means that you are not white." *Désirée's Baby*, p. 158

"But, above all, night and day, I thank the good God for having so arranged our lives that our dear Armand will never know that his mother, who adores him, belongs to the race that is cursed with the brand of slavery." *Désirée's Baby*, p. 160

"I have overcome everything! You will see. This time I shall be very nice to him." *A Respectable Woman*, p. 170

"When the doctors came they said she had died of heart disease - of joy that kills." *The Story of an Hour*, p. 173

"Devoted as she was to her husband, their intimate conjugal life was something which she was more than willing to forego for a while." *The Storm - A Sequel to "At the 'Cadian Ball"* p. 222

"So the storm passed and every one was happy." *The Storm - A Sequel to "At the 'Cadian Ball"* p. 222

"She felt like some other being, possessed by Satan. Some fiend in human shape, some spirit of murder." *The Godmother*, p. 231

"She wanted him to forget and her presence made him remember." *The Godmother*, p.238



Topics for Discussion

Edna Pontellier is a very controversial character. Do you view her as a role model for modern independent women, or a selfish woman with an idealized idea of life and love? Discuss why.

Is Edna's suicide a defeat for her, or her ultimate victory? Discuss why, and provide specific examples from the text.

Does Robert Lebrun love Edna? Is he simply infatuated with her as he has been with other women? Discuss why or why not.

In *The Storm*, Chopin presents a reality in which an adulterous rendezvous is not considered harmful to either family. Do you agree? Why or why not?

Some of Chopin's work was not well-received during her lifetime and has only recently become popular. What about her work do you believe resonates more with modern readers, specifically young women?

Who committed the worse crime in *The Godmother*, Gabriel Lucaze or his godmother, Tante Elodie? Explain why, and how Tante Elodie's gender plays a role in your answer.

From the following list, select the character or characters you believe are the noblest and most authentic and explain why: Edna Pontellier, Léonce Pontellier, Robert Lebrun, Mademoiselle Reitz, Madame Ratignolle, Dr. Mandelet, Bobinôt, Elizabeth Stock, Tante Elodie, Gouvernail, Cazeau, Evariste Bonamour, Désirée.

Now choose the most evil character in the list, and defend your choice with specific examples from the book.

List five similarities between Edna Pontellier and Athénaïse. Compare them as literary heroines, and include their final acts in your answer.