

The rise and fall of edna pontellier essay



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The Rise and Fall of Edna Pontellier To the unknowing, all seemed well for the Pontellier family. Leonce and Edna Pontellier appeared to be a picture perfect family with two young boys spending the summer at the Grand Isle, an island near New Orleans.

Mr. Pontellier was a successful business man who lavished the children and his wife with expensive gifts. Mrs. Pontellier could have been the ideal mother who tended to the children and the appreciative wife who adored her husband. Instead of those things, Edna was secretly unhappy on the inside, wanting more than what she knew. Towards the end of her time, she could not help to show how miserable she truly was.

Edna had all the material things she desired, however, it was not enough to save herself from her depression of wanting what money could not buy. Mr. Pontellier was “ a great favorite ...

” and “ the ladies all declared that he was the best husband in the world. ” (Chopin 8, 9). Edna Pontellier was the “ wife of a man who worshiped her. ” (Chopin 19). Edna’s husband seemed to give her all of himself and what he had to offer. The Pontelliers’ were well known in the social realm and money was not an object for them.

Money and social status did not satisfy what Edna Pontellier craved. Edna’s first signs of depression were shown when her husband, Leonce, returned late one night from Klein’s, a popular hotel in the area. Mr. Pontellier discovered one of their young boys had a fever and he “ reproached his wife with her inattention, her habitual neglect of the children. ” (Chopin 7). Edna knew the children had went to bed feeling fine, but kept silent.

She had “ tears come so fast... the damp sleeve of her peignoir no longer served to dry them. ” (Chopin 7).

Even though this minute altercation could almost seem unimportant, it was the starting point for Edna’s own “ awakening. ” Edna felt trapped and suppressed in her role as a mother and wife to a Creole husband. During the summer at Grand Isle, she befriended a gentleman by the name of Robert LeBrun. A deep bond formed between the two over the summer.

Edna and Robert spent countless days together, talking, bathing, and enjoying the others company. She felt deeply betrayed when he unexpectedly and abruptly left for Mexico one evening. Robert’s departure was enough to start the downward spiral in Mrs. Pontellier. Edna’s depression worsened as she admitted “ Robert’s going had taken the brightness, the color, the meaning out of everything.

” (Chopin 44). Edna also realized that “ the sentiment which she entertained for Robert in no way resembled that which she felt for her husband, or had ever felt, or ever expected to feel. ” (Chopin 46). Edna’s sadness and resentment of her own life became more apparent after the Pontellier family returned home to New Orleans. Mrs. Pontellier decided, for no apparent reason, that she no longer wanted to be at home for her normal reception of visitors on Tuesdays.

Gayle Forman states: “ A danger sign of depression is apathy; losing interest in things you use to love. ” (Forman 176). Edna, at one time, “ followed the programme religiously... ” (Chopin 48).

When Edna rebelled against her husband on the issue of receiving visitors, a heated argument ensued. Edna acted out by “ taking off her wedding ring, and flung it from her...

she stamped her heel on it, striving to crush it... ” she also “ wanted to destroy something..

. crash and clatter were what she wanted to hear. ” (Chopin 50, 51). Being “ less happy, less motivated, and less you than you use to be”, (Forman 176) is another danger sign of depression.

Edna expressed that feeling mostly when she “ felt no interest in anything about her. ” (Chopin 51). All of the signs and symptoms are what makes Mrs. Edna Pontellier’s demise inevitable. Webster’s dictionary defines depression as: “ emotional conflict, even neurological or psychological, characterized by feelings of hopelessness, inadequacy, gloominess, dejection, and sadness.

” (Webster’s Dictionary). Edna’s symptoms fit all criteria for the definition of depression when “ there were days she was unhappy, she did not know why —when it did not seem worthwhile to be glad or sorry, to be alive or dead...

(Chopin 56). Mr.

Pontellier was concerned enough about his wife’s well being that he made a trip to the family friend and physician, Dr. Mandelet. Leonce complains to the Doctor that “ she [Edna] is odd,..

. not like herself. ” (Chopin 62). Leonce even entertained the thought of wondering if “ his wife were not growing a little unbalanced mentally...

she was not herself. " (Chopin 55). Edna continued to deteriorate mentally, all the while trying to search for her absolute happiness. Mrs. Pontellier abruptly decided to gain her own independence by leaving the family home and moving into a small house of her own.

By moving into her own residence, she was trying to break her husband's possession of her. Edna had " resolved never again to belong to another than herself. " (Chopin 76). The extravagant life that Mr. Pontellier strived for was one that Edna wanted no part of anymore. One last silent sign of Edna's depression is her restlessness.

One key characteristic of depression is " difficulty sleeping or oversleeping. " (Health). Edna demonstrates both of these extremes when in one instance she " slept but a few hours...

troubled feverish hours, disturbed with dreams that were intangible... (Chopin 31). The opposite of her restlessness occurred on the island of Cheniere.

Edna became so drowsy and flushed during mass, she had to leave the service. After Robert took her to rest, Edna awoke " with the conviction that she had slept long and soundly. " (Chopin 36). Edna had unconsciously started her own personal rebellion.

Steven T. Ryan best said it when he stated: " Edna was strong enough to rebel but too weak to survive her own rebellion. " (Ryan 253). Edna did not want to succumb any more to the stereo-types of all women who lived in the nineteenth century era.

She wanted to please herself first and not be bothered by others, if she chose. In order for Edna to do that, she had to rebel at what society deemed to be women's roles. All of the different emotions and actions Edna demonstrated led to her " final act of rebellion in her suicide. " (Harmon 52). Edna's mood swings, sleeping problems, and lost interest in her normal routine was the beginning of her own destruction.

By committing the immoral act of suicide, she finally stopped her downward spiral. Edna come to realize that she would never really be considered an independent woman in the nineteenth century of Louisiana. All the money and lavish things in Edna Pontellier's world were not enough to keep her alive. Edna searched for a type of love she did not feel for Leonce. Edna did finally realize and admit her love for Robert, which he wanted to return.

Due to the simple fact of Edna belonging to another man, Robert LeBrun had to say good-bye. In her own peculiar way, Edna also said good-bye. ? Works Cited Chopin, Kate. *The Awakening*. 2nd ed.

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