# The Open Heart

*by*

EDWARD WEEKS

*An Atlantic Monthly Press Book*
BOSTON • Little, Brown and Company • TORONTO

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOG CARD NO. 55-10760

*Seventh Printing*

The author wishes to thank the following for permission to reprint selections which appear in this volume: Sir Osbert Sitwell — for permission to reprint from a letter to Edward Weeks. H. M. Tomlinson — for permission to reprint from a letter to Edward Weeks. E. B. White — for permission to reprint selections from ONE MAN'S MEAT and THE SECOND TREE FROM THE CORNER.

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ATLANTIC–LITTLE, BROWN BOOKS
ARE PUBLISHED BY
LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY
IN ASSOCIATION WITH
THE ATLANTIC MONTHLY PRESS

*Published simultaneously in Canada*
*by Little, Brown & Company (Canada) Limited*

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

*BY EDWARD WEEKS*

THIS TRADE OF WRITING

THE OPEN HEART

*Edited by Edward Weeks*

GREAT SHORT NOVELS

THE POCKET ATLANTIC

# *The Open Heart*

*For My Mother*
*Frederika Suydam Weeks*
*for her zest and faith*

# Acknowledgments

There are times when an editor needs encouragement quite as much as a writer, and my encouragement, for which I am truly grateful, came from Miss Virginia Albee, Miss Louise Desaulniers, Mrs. Emily P. Flint, Miss Penelope Greenough, Miss Margaret Mutch and Miss Nancy E. Reynolds, and from Donald B. Snyder, Charles W. Morton and Walter Lippmann.

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# *New Jersey Boyhood*

# I
# The City

TO a boy growing up in the suburbs of New York in the early 1900's the city had the drawing power of a gigantic magnet. Every visit was to see something special, and afterwards the event lived on in your mind. Even the approach was exciting: the train deposited you in the great, lofty, smoke-filled train shed of the Pennsy, and then with your parents you hurried, you ran, down the platform and into the timbered ferryhouse (this was before Mr. McAdoo had finished the Tunnel), watching out for the horse-drawn drays which were being driven onto the lower deck. A boy's place was forward on the top deck, pressed against the rail, where you could see everything in the harbor and, looking up, the pilot in his little house. The wind was sharp, the skyscrapers gleamed in the winter sunlight, and as you crossed the water the ferry would hoot at a passing tug and the tug hooted back; then you came wedging into the slip, with the timbers groaning and the cable wheels clanking melodiously as the ferry made fast.

You might be bound for the Museum of Natural History with its glass cabinets of animals and tiny ancient people. Or for the Hudson Fulton Celebration, that swarming river parade which I watched from the deck of the U.S.S. *New York.* (My Uncle Ray was one of her officers.) As the excursion boats filed by, the White Fleet fired off blank charges, and I remember a wad from one of our guns arching over the brief interval of water into the lap of an excursionist, a fat woman in a basket hat, who became so agitated that she and her campstool collapsed. Or you might be going to the Hippodrome to see *The Fall of Port Arthur,* with wounded men toppling into the water and never coming up. Later the chorus girls in spangles walked right down the stairs into that tank, and they didn't come up either. Every chandelier of the Hippodrome held more electric bulbs than we had in our entire house, as I announced to Mother in a voice that carried. On the back of each seat was a metal slot machine which released a box of chocolates when a coin was inserted. We needed these for my cousin, Alan Church, who let out a wail when the Gatling guns went off at Port Arthur and thereafter was voiceless only when he had a candy in his mouth.

The great trip with Dad was in September to see the Giants play the Athletics in the World Series. Lunch first at the Merchants' Club, with Meringue Chantilly for dessert; then the jammed, feverish ride on the Elevated to the Polo Grounds. You found your seats in the good-natured tumult; you noticed the bunting and flags, Muggsy McGraw going down to coach at third, Christy Mathewson warming up in the box, and "Chief" Meyers behind the plate. It turned cold when the sun went down, and Dad showed Rufus and me how to fold newspapers inside our coats to keep warm.

Came the year when you went in on your own. Now you were buying your own clothes on an allowance of twenty dollars a month, and I can remember as if it were yesterday the pearl-gray double-breasted, the lavender socks, and the razor-tipped cordovan low shoes which were my first investment. I went to see Hobey Baker play against Harvard in the old St. Nicholas rink, and stood up on my hockey skates all through the last period so that I could be one of the first on the hallowed ice when the game was over. I saw Montgomery and Stone in *Chin Chin* ("Good-by, Girls, I'm Through"); I saw the Vernon Castles do the Castle Walk, and heard Joseph Cawthorne and Julia Sanderson in *The Sunshine Girl* ("You Can't Play Every Instrument in the Band"); I dropped in with apparent casualness for a chop at Keen's Chop House, and the smell of beer was so saturating that I hoped the family would notice it when I got home. By such milestones do we grow up.

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# The Little Gentlemen

MARCH was the fag end and there was nothing much you could do about it; this was the glum month in which we and our teacher began our weary toil through *Ivanhoe.* March was the month for dentistry, an ordeal in which the only kind words were "Now rinse, please"; it was a month in which, if you were a good Episcopalian, you gave up candy for Lent; it was a time when in my part of New Jersey the rain and the mud made indoor sport a boy's only hope.

School with its homework kept us in drudgery for the first five days of the week, but on Friday the servitude began to let up. On Friday afternoon came dancing school. You couldn't exactly call this sport, but it was different from what we had been doing and to that extent better. We met in Arcanum Hall, a vast shiny lodge room with a number of big plush chairs on the dais where the mothers of the girls sat — the mothers of the boys, having less at stake, were infrequent.

We — the Little Gentlemen, as we were called — entered in our twinkling pumps from our separate dressing room; one by one we bowed to Miss Emma Florence, who stood graciously in the center of that vast slippery floor, and then took our seats side by side in the stag row. The young ladies made their entrance, each dropping a curtsy, while we looked on with what might be described as mild interest.

There were no crushes in this business. But once you got going it wasn't too bad. The two Miss Florences in their mauve sateens had a party air and perfume about them; and what is more, they knew how to teach. Boys on one side, girls on the other, we went through the simple exercises, warming up as we got into "Heel-toe-and-a-one-two-three"; and then, when Miss Emma said, "The Young Gentlemen will please take partners for the schottische," there was a scramble for the girls' camp. No love whatever was involved: we chose our partners for their speed, and Marjorie, who was just as skinny as I, I could trust to hold me up as we took the corners.

The waltz and the polka were the best because they worked up so easily into a race. The piano tinkled and round we twirled faster and faster, tongues out, curls flying, elbows all set, impervious to dizziness and the freshly waxed floor, past Bud, past Hump, faster and faster until with a click of the castanets Miss Florence silenced the piano and we all lurched to a stop with a look of elation as we heard her say, "The Young Gentlemen are going too fast."

For Saturday afternoons Keith's Vaudeville was one of those objectives which we didn't discuss at home. Just said we were going out. The trouble with our particular Keith's was that it had such a strong smell of disinfectants. I would overlook this between visits, but I couldn't overlook it when I was in my seat. Because of the smell and the inevitability of a lemon or two in the acts, we very seldom sat through the entire show twice — besides, we had to save time for a Hot Dusty on the way home. A Hot Dusty, as served at our favorite soda counter, consisted of vanilla ice cream coated with a thick dusting of malted milk; over the pyramid was then poured hot melted fudge in which were walnuts and pecans, with a dab of marshmallow whip on the top — total cost, fifteen cents. It was consumed with slow intensity and a gradual feeling of surfeit. Home cooking after a Hot Dusty was tasteless. And next day there were cankers.