



An Open Door

Anne Leigh Parrish

Unsolicited Press (Oct 4, 2022)

(270pp)

978-1-956692-34-1

An Open Door is a sensitive, intelligent historical novel focused on an unraveling marriage.

A wife yearns for more substance in Anne Leigh Parrish's *An Open Door*, an insightful postwar novel about reconciling one's sense of duty with their dreams.

Edith is an underemployed typist at the United Nations. Adrift in New York after her sojourn as a World War II mapmaker, she lives with a spirited, wealthy aunt. She's also separated from her husband, Walter, who attends law school in Cambridge on the GI bill, and whom she left when he discouraged her from pursuing a doctoral degree. Stifled by his placid convictions regarding what a woman's role should be, she at first resists his pleas. But resignation brings her back: Walter, after all, is "as good a choice as any and probably better than most."

As a couple in their twenties, Walter and Edith navigate everyday challenges, which are conveyed with wry pithiness. Edith's perspective is mixed: marriage has much to recommend itself, including stability. And its frustrations are drawn with agile humor that filters through the finest details, including her views about the state of her and Walter's apartment. Her minor grievances—from Walter's rushed, inexperienced lovemaking, to his personal habits and offhand remarks—all add up to a general dissatisfaction, which wars against her hidden passions.

The book's domestic exchanges are enhanced by Walter's everyman qualities. He doesn't intend to run afoul of Edith's expectations, but he does so without any awareness. This is evident across several social engagements, including a cocktail party with colleagues and a Thanksgiving dinner hosted by an aristocratic British couple. As Edith observes her husband, further facets of his character are revealed: he strives to impress others, is competitive, and holds double standards about how women should present themselves in public.

Despite her inward quibbles, Edith comes across as human, and the book's tone is light. She's no malcontent, but is a woman who struggles with the all-too-real feeling of being invisible in her marriage. (She possesses, for instance, a scholar's curiosity, yet she and Walter seldom discuss her fervor for books.) Silencing her thoughts increases her disappointment, but she's still fair-minded, noting qualities in Walter that she can empathize with. Side themes regarding Edith's parents' tough marriage and infidelities among adults hint at the many ways that people's tolerance for misaligned desires begin to wear them down.

When a chance for reprieve arrives in the form of a charming local bookshop, there's hope for Edith finding fresh resolve. But unexpected revelations about Walter, which lead to an impasse, result in an uncertain conclusion in which Edith's feelings about independence are further complicated.

In its candor about how a married couple grows apart, *An Open Door* is a sensitive, intelligent historical novel.

KAREN RIGBY (June 22, 2022)

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