



Name in English: Edith Maude Eaton

Name in Chinese: 水仙花

Name in Pinyin: Sui Sin Far

Gender: Female

Birth Year: 1865-1914

Birth Place: Macclesfield, England

Profession (s): Journalist, Author

Education: Private school, England; Public school, Montreal, Canada; homeschooled

Contribution (s): Edith Maude Eaton, known by her pen name of Sui Sin Far, was the first writer of Asian descent published in America. She was the eldest daughter and second child of fourteen. Her father, Edward Eaton, was an English businessman who had met her mother, Grace "Lotus Blossom" Trefusis, the adopted daughter of English missionaries, in Shanghai. The interracial marriage was considered an extreme social taboo in both cultures. At age seven, Eaton and her family left England and immigrated to Hudson City, New York, and in the early 1870s, settled in Montreal, Canada. Edith had gone to private school in England then to public school in Montreal until eleven, then continued her education at home. Because her father was unable to find steady work, the family moved from place to place and was unable to continue to afford formal schooling. Nevertheless, Edith and her younger sister, Winnifred (writing as Onoto Watanna), both became successful writers, and another sister, Sara, co-wrote a cookbook with Winnifred.

Edith Eaton started her career at the Montreal Daily Star newspaper as a typesetter at 18. Her first short stories were published in the Dominion Illustrated in 1888. Despite her Caucasian appearance, Edith openly identified herself as a Chinese American in her writings. She wrote under the pseudonym Sui Sin Far, a childhood nickname that means "water lily" or "narcissus flower" in Chinese. In the mid 1890s, she moved briefly to Jamaica as a journalist, where she contracted malaria, from which she never fully recovered. She also continued to suffer from an enlarged heart due to childhood rheumatic fever.

Until 1909, she lived in Seattle, Los Angeles, and San Francisco writing stories, newspaper articles, and doing secretarial work. Her work appeared in the New York Post and Good Housekeeping among other publications. In 1909, she moved to Boston where she compiled a full-length selection of short stories, Mrs. Spring Fragrance, which was published in Chicago in 1912. Many of her short stories dealt with the struggle of Chinese American women for equality or with the struggle of biracial people between hostile cultures. She said her many travels were linked to the feeling of not belonging either to East or West. In one true short story she described a society dinner party where several guests expressed extremely prejudiced views about the Chinese only to

become horrified and apologetic when Eaton quietly announced, "I am a Chinese." In 1913, Edith Eaton, stricken by bad health, returned to Montreal. She died there on April 7, 1914. The Chinese community of Montreal raised the money for a monument in her memory.

Publications

Mrs. Spring Fragrance (1912)

Chan Hen Yen, Chinese Student (1912)

A Love Story from the Rice Fields of China (1911)

The Bird of Love (1910)

An Autumn Fan (1910)

Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of an Eurasian (1909)

A Chinese Ishmael (1899)

Sui Sin Far/Edith Maude Eaton: A Literary Biography by Annette White-Parks (1995)

External Links:

http://voices.cla.umn.edu/vg/Bios/entries/eaton_edith_maude_suisin_far.html

http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?&id_nbr=7353