



**Name in English:** Winnifred Eaton  
**Name in Chinese:** 威妮弗蕾德·伊通  
**Name in Pinyin:** Wēi Nī Fú Lěi Dé · Yī Tòng  
**Gender:** Female  
**Birth Year:** 1875-1954  
**Birth Place:** Montreal, Canada

**Profession(s):** Author, Screenplay Writer

**Education:** Home schooled

**Contribution(s):** Winnifred Eaton, known by her pen name as Onoto Watanna, was the first novel writer of Asian descent published in America. Winnifred used a Japanese sounding pen name despite her Chinese ancestry because Japanese were viewed more favorably in the US until the Russo-Japanese War of 1905. She was the 8<sup>th</sup> of 14 children. 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. Her family left England and immigrated to Hudson City, New York, and in the early 1870s, settled in Montreal, Canada where Winnifred was born. Because her father was unable to find steady work, the family moved from place to place and was unable to afford formal schooling. Nevertheless both of her parents were sufficiently educated to provide their children with home schooling. Winnifred and her eldest sister, Edith (writing as Sui Sin Far), both became successful writers, and another sister, Sara, co-wrote a cookbook with Winnifred.

At 14, she published her first story in a Montreal newspaper and soon appeared with articles in popular American magazines such as Ladies Home Journal. By 17, she had left for Jamaica for a position as a stenographer. A year later she moved to the United States where she settled in Chicago, working as a typist. Her short stories began being published in the Saturday Evening Post and other periodicals. In 1899, she published the first novel by an author of Asian descent in America, "Mrs. Nume of Japan." It was an immediate success. Moving to New York in 1901 she wrote, "A Japanese Nightingale," which gained international attention, was made into a Broadway play, and then into a film in 1919.

Her 1915 novel, "Me, A Book of Remembrance," is a thinly disguised memoir. This book highlighted one woman's attempts to conceal her half-Asian ancestry and scandalously showed a biracial woman's many romances and friendships with men. In 1917, Winnifred moved to a ranch in Alberta, Canada then moved back to New York in 1924 and was hired to write and edit screenplays for film companies; credited as Winnifred Eaton Reeve or Winnifred Reeve. In 1932, she moved back to Calgary where she founded the Canadian Little Theatre movement of community theaters and served as the president of the Calgary branch of the Canadian Authors Association. Eaton died on

April 8th, 1954 in Butte, Montana while on her way back to Calgary from a vacation in California. Despite the social restrictions of her time and extreme prejudice against women, Chinese, and biracial people, Winnifred Eaton managed to overcome all obstacles and lead a successful life as an author who dared to explore themes of interracial romance, identity, and relationships.

### **Publications:**

His Royal Nibs (1925)  
Cattle (1923)  
Sunny-San (1922)  
Marion: The Story of an Artist's Model (1916)  
Me: A Book of Remembrance (1915)  
Chinese-Japanese Cook Book with Sara Eaton Bosse (1914)  
The Honorable Miss Moonlight (1912)  
Tama (1910)  
Diary of Delia (1907)  
Daughters of Nijo (1907)  
A Japanese Blossom (1906)  
The Love of Azalea (1904)  
The Heart of Hyacinth (1903)  
A Japanese Nightingale (1902)  
The Wooing of Wisteria (1902)  
Mrs. Nume of Japan (1899)

### **External Links:**

<http://www.answers.com/topic/winnifred-eaton>  
<http://www.wsu.edu/~campbelld/amlit/watanna.htm>  
[http://voices.cla.umn.edu/vg/Bios/entries/eaton\\_winnifred\\_onoto\\_watanna.html](http://voices.cla.umn.edu/vg/Bios/entries/eaton_winnifred_onoto_watanna.html)