

LEAVES FROM THE MENTAL PORTFOLIO OF A EURASIAN, SUI SIN SUI SIN FAR

SUMMARY:

Sui Sin Far is the pen name of Edith Maude Eaton. She wrote both fictional stories and journalistic observational pieces, and was one of North America's first successful novelists of Chinese-American. She was a reporter for numerous newspapers and magazines. She described her painful struggle to come to terms with her identity as a bi-racial woman in a culture rife with anti-Chinese sentiment. "Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of a Eurasian" is a brief autobiographical memoir written by her. Sui Sin Far's racial history was complex; she was British-Chinese-Canadian-American, and her experiences of never fitting into any of these ethnic groupings or communities formed the foundation of both her life and her narrative. Despite the fact that she wrote the book in 1890, it was not published until over two decades later, in 1909.

Sui Sin Far was born in a working town in the north of England to merchant Edward Eaton and missionary's daughter Grace "Lotus Blossom" Trefusis. While Edward was on a business trip in Shanghai, the two met. Sui Sin Far was the second oldest of their fourteen children. Sui Sin Far's childhood was quite nomadic, and while her experiences in each of the countries where her parents settled them were identical - always having to learn the ropes of everyday life and make new friends in each new place - they were also similar in the way Sui Sin Far sensed bias against her in each of them. They emigrated from England in the early 1870s, first to New York and later to Montreal.

The story follows writer Sui Sin Far as she grows up, beginning with her childhood, including her earliest memories of others' reactions to learning that she is Chinese. These experiences lead her to realize how differently she is viewed from other children. In one memory, Sui Sin Far is playing with a white child when a nearby girl tells the white child not to play with Sui Sin Far because her mother is Chinese. Although Sui Sin Far's playmate is still willing to play despite her heritage, Sui Sin Far feels hurt and refuses. In another memory, Sui Sin Far is at a children's party when an adult summons her to inspect her features and comment on which ones are Chinese and which are European, leading her to hide for the rest of the party.

After moving to Hudson City, New York, Sui Sin Far and her brother come across Chinese people outside of their family for the first time. At first, Sui Sin Far is surprised to find their manner of dress unusual. However, when a group of white children subsequently attack Sui Sin Far and her brother because they are Chinese she overcomes these initial thoughts and declares that she is proud to be Chinese.

In Eastern Canada, Sui Sin Far continues to face racism and attacks from white children and adults. She overhears comments from strangers who witness her family, encounters threats of violence, and faces questions about her home life and cultural habits. Throughout her childhood and teenage years, Sui Sin Far remains troubled by the racism that she faces, and she experiences internal conflict over her multiracial identity. After frequently visiting the library and educating herself on China, she gains confidence and pride in her heritage and is bothered not by her ethnicity, but by others' prejudice.

When working as a journalist on local papers, Sui Sin Far's assignments include most of the reporting on the local Chinese community, and she uses this opportunity to defend her fellow Chinese Americans. Through her reporting, she meets a variety of Chinese individuals in the

area, including those who are multiracial. Although Sui Sin Far faces a lack of acceptance from some Chinese Americans because she is multiracial, she remains optimistic for the future of multiracial Asian Americans.

While Sui Sin Far is living in a small Midwest town, her employer and co-workers begin making derogatory and dehumanizing comments about Chinese people, unaware of Sui Sin Far's Chinese heritage. When she reveals that she is Chinese, her employer immediately apologizes and realizes his ignorance. However, the truth about Sui Sin Far's ethnicity spreads to the rest of the town, so she must leave to avoid the subsequent prejudice.

Sui Sin Far becomes a journalist in San Francisco and is delegated to obtain newspaper subscriptions from Chinatown residents. However, some members of the community mistake her for white and regard her with suspicion, and some do not believe that she is Chinese even when she tells them her ethnicity. She nevertheless finds that once she gets to know these members of the community better, many are accepting.

After meeting various people throughout her career, Sui Sin Far recounts stories from two multiracial Chinese American women. One of them hid her ethnicity from her husband but was treated with acceptance once she told him. The other disliked her fiancé from the beginning and only agreed to marry him after constant pestering, but she finally left him after he became uncomfortable with her association with other Chinese people and asked her to falsely claim that she was Japanese.

To conclude her memoir, Sui Sin Far explains that she remains sincere in her writing despite pressure to pursue literary fame by subscribing to Chinese stereotypes. She describes her multiple identities as someone attached to both the East and West, and she embraces both China and America.