

My Dreams Came True

Popular Song Writer, Tells Pathetic Story

Written Exclusively for TRUE CONFESSIONS Magazine
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BETH SLATER WHITSON of Nashville, Tennessee, author of more than four hundred published songs, including the tremendous hits, *Meet Me Tonight in Dreamland* and *Let Me Call You Sweetheart*, tells her unusual story here. Many a girl has waited for just such a story – how, with a handbag full of song poems, a country maiden went out into the world and returned covered in glory. – The Editor.

Between the little frame house in the valley where I wrote my first song-poem, and the sturdy old brick building with its adjoining flower gardens where today I am trying to grow the song-poems I can no longer write, there is a long road of fifteen years. It is an upgrade road of but few level stretches, the rough and rocky road of the average song-writer.

I do not call myself a "has-been", for I have no consciousness of having failed. During the long years of striving I have, at least, "touched the hem of success; and, in a measure, consider myself one of the specially anointed. With more than four hundred songs published under by own name and various nom-de-plumes, I feel that I have something of interest to say about my subject.

In the spring of 1909, a little country girl with a one-way ticket to Chicago in her near-leather handbag boarded a train at a small Southern town. In the handbag, which was a bulky affair with nickel trimmings, there were close to fifty song-lyrics – the fruit of three years' labor.

The girl was timid and awkward and a dreamer. She wore a home-made coat-suit, which consisted of a very long skirt and a very short coat that had caused a member of the family to remark that "sister showed her collar-button whenever she leaned".

That country girl was I. I knew that my coat was too short and my skirt was too long. I knew that my shoes were clumsy and my gloves too stiff. I knew that I was a frump in appearance and that, figuratively, I did show my collar-button when I leaned. But I also knew that there were songs in my soul. There was a scrapbook in the cottage filled with my verses that had been published in old Metropolitan, Cosmopolitan, Ainslee's, Lippincott's, and various smaller publications, testifying to my gift of song – and I knew I was going to be a song-writer.

After my ticket was bought, there was left only thirty dollars in the handbag. I knew nothing about the direct route to Chicago, and the ticket-agent had sold me transportation by the way of St. Louis – more than a half-day journey out of my way, which had taken, unnecessarily, several of my precious dollars. I knew nothing about Pullman cars, and had I known, could not have afforded that luxury; so I was very, very tired when I landed in the St. Louis station at twenty minutes to midnight and learned that the Chicago train had just gone.

I made timid inquiries relative to a train's going back home. Had there been one at that hour I would have carried at least one passenger. I was desperately homesick. I thought of the little frame house in the valley, with the moon shining above it and the white mist rising, and it didn't seem poor and mean any longer, but safe and sweet. I thought of "little sister" - my chum - and the lump in my throat almost choked me. I thought of my mother and in my eyes blurred until the lights were very dim, and the ache in my heart became so intolerable that I stole with my little baggage over to a lonely seat where I sobbed myself into a state of exhaustion; but when a Chicago train pulled out seven hours later, I was on board. My tears had dried and my lips were set in a stern line of determination.

I had not gone out of the station at St. Louis, so had never been on the streets of a city until I walked tremblingly out of the old Chicago I.C. Station into the great stream of humanity ebbing and flowing there. The rush and roar of traffic bewildered me, the jostling throng pushed me here and there, but at last I made my way to a street car and managed to get on.

For hours I rode about on different cars looking for a boarding house and saw none. Finally, on Cottage Grove Avenue, near Thirty-third Street, I saw the old Warner Hotel, and decided to stay there for the night.

When I went up to the little room for which I knew in advance I should have to pay the astounding sum of a whole dollar, it was the sunset hour. I had been deeply troubled at the thought of having come to such an expensive hotel even for one night. But when I ran up the shade to one of the windows I found myself gazing spell-bound at tumbling blue waters that seemed to toss back the sunset colors --Lake Michigan in her happiest mood. That was my first realization of the fact that beauty can bring to the heart a poignant aching. The exquisite beauty of water and sky seemed for a moment to fill my own heart to the bursting point with longing. I no longer cared for the price of rooms, nor was I conscious of hunger, though I had not tasted food since leaving home. I had been lifted to new heights of understanding, my appreciation of beauty had been miraculously broadened, my capacity for pain widened.

That first night in Chicago was a sleepless night for me. I had managed to find the dining-room, and my supper - as we say in the south - had cost me forty cents. This was a matter of grave concern, considering the state of my finances. Surely there must be places where one could live more cheaply. How to find them was the problem that confronted me as I walked the floor or huddled in a chair by the window overlooking the lake, through the long hours between the dusk and the dawn.

I began to understand dimly in those hours why my family had been so unwilling for me to start out on what they considered a "Wild-geese chase". It had looked foolish and hopeless to them from the beginning. My aspirations to become a song-writer puzzled them. My determination to go to Chicago had seemed little short of lunacy to them, and this feeling was shared by our neighbors. They had made jokes about the "town poet", and when it became known that I was going to venture out to find song publishers, there were not lacking those to give advice. I was admonished to stay at home and let well enough alone. Some of them assured me that they too had had their dreams. Because these dreams had amounted to nothing, they took it for granted that it was worse than useless for anyone else to try.

Only "little sister" knew I was going to succeed in spite of people's opinions. She knew there had never been such lyrics written as those I was writing to carry with me when I could save enough money for the journey, and that music publishers would jump over one another in their efforts to get first chance at my gems. I was several years older than little sister, however, and while I had faith in my gift, I knew it was going to be hard sledding. But I did not for a moment let her suspect that I had any misgivings. I assured her gravely that once on the ground I should sell my wares I should make the publishers sit up and take notice.

With less than thirty dollars in my possession, and my expenses eating into it at the rate of, at least, two dollars a day, unless I could find something cheaper than the Warner Hotel, I know that there would be no money left for a ticket back home after a week in Chicago, with carfare and incidentals. I also knew there was no money back home to spare. Our family had never had any since the Civil War, and didn't know how to make anything except just a bare living. I knew I was not going to call on them to get me home, so I must make my plans to fit my purse.

Far into the night, as I was sitting by the window watching the blurred outline of a little boat making off into the darkness, the thought came to me that I, too, was like that – feeling my way into unknown waters; if I reached port I must steer unafraid, regardless of storm or tempest that might cross my path. Having reached this conclusion, I fell asleep.

A very kind woman had charge of the hotel dining-room, and at breakfast next morning I poured my troubles into her sympathetic ear. She promptly gave me the address of a friend that had rooms to let out near the Chicago University, and before night I and my baggage were settled in a nice room that would cost three dollars a week. At this rate I figured that I should be able to stay two weeks on the money I had left after reserving a ticket back home. I was feverishly happy, and eager for morning that I might venture forth to meet my song publishers, whose addresses I had obtained from the telephone directory.

I shall never forget my first few days in Chicago – my shattered illusions, my bitter disappointments. Chicago's uptown streets are confusing even to the initiated; to me they led everywhere and nowhere in particular. With blistered, aching feet I tramped endless blocks without finding one of the addresses I sought. To make matters worse it rained – one of those early-May, penetrating drizzles, and I had to buy an umbrella! The cold lake wind bit through my insufficient clothing, and by the end of the third day, I was ill from exposure. I took some medicine and three boxes of strawberries and stayed in for two days. Lonely and frightened and miserable, I lived through the slow-moving hours, but on the morning of the third day I woke with the sunshine in my eyes, and a real spring breeze blowing through the window – and the early postman brought me a letter from little sister!

Late that afternoon I found the Will Rossiter Music House, at that time Chicago's biggest song publisher. It was on Lake Street and I had been close a dozen times in my searching, just missing it. Not knowing where to locate the elevator, I stumbled up two flights of dark stairs, and found my way timidly into a waiting-room where a haughty blonde asked my business, and I told her, in a thin whisper, that I wanted to see Mr. Rossiter.

"He has left the office for the day", she said, giving me and the bulky handbag a withering look.

I got up courage to ask what time he would be in the next day, and the girl told me it would be sometime between nine and four o'clock, and she laughed. As I went out I heard her say to another occupant of the waiting-room: "Did you notice the latest thing in coat-suits?" I pulled the door shut hastily on the mirth that followed.

The following morning I located the McKinley Music Company on Harrison Street. It has since moved into its own building, beautiful and commodious, out near Jackson Park. But even in those days it was an important mail-order music company. It seemed tremendous to me, the glimpses I got that morning from the waiting room that appeared to have no one's presiding over it. There was a place something like a bank-teller's cage, and after a long wait, with other persons coming and going, but never stopping, I ventured to ask to see someone that bought song-lyrics, thinking thus to place myself properly.

The man person in the cage shook his head solemnly. They did not buy song-lyrics without music. Besides, Mr. McKinley, who did all the buying, was out of town. He would not be back for a week.

I thanked the man with lips that trembled in spite of me, and was turning away when he spoke again. "You might come back next week and try to see Mr. McKinley," he said kindly.

When I went back a week later, my friend was no longer in the teller's cage. A pretty little girl told me I could not see Mr. McKinley without an appointment, and that Mr. McKinley was in "conf'rence" and she would not be able to take my name that day.

In the meantime I had been going daily to the waiting-room at Rossiter's. Though the blonde person gave different excuses every day for not letting me see Mr. Rossiter, I passed the hours waiting and hopping. Sometimes at lunch-time I would see a man with a most pleasant face come from one of the doors marked "private" and pass through the waiting-room. In an hour or so he would return, and I came to feel that this might be Will Rossiter, but I hadn't the courage to stop him and make the inquiry.

Three weeks passed like this. Day after day I went first to one music house and then to the other. Between the two I made a hard-beaten track. Sometimes I would see a slightly lame man, carrying a stick, come through the tiny waiting-room at McKinley's. I noticed that this man was always happy, and concluded that he must have a very good position, or was on very good terms with the McKinley Company. It cheered me just to see him pass through. Once after this happened I got up courage to ask the girl in the "teller's cage", for the second time that day, to try to get me an appointment with Mr. McKinley. She gave me a queer look. "Why, Mr. McKinley has already gone," she said. "I can't do anything for you today."

At the end of three weeks I found that, in spite of my drastic efforts to economize, my expense-reserve was gone, and I was already making deep inroads on that set aside for my return ticket. After the first ten days I had foreseen this necessity and nerved myself for it. I had refused even to consider what might happen to me when the money was all gone" so convinced was I in my heart of ultimate success. But when three

weeks had gone by and I had, seemingly, made no headway, I knew that I could not put off facing a bad balance-sheet any longer. I knew I must sell a lyric or get a job. I decided to try for the job.

On Tuesday of the fourth week I did not go to the music houses. Instead, I tramped steadily from seven in the morning until six in the afternoon looking for employment. In not one place did I get any encouragement. The last application I made was at a little restaurant, not far from where I roomed, that advertised for a dishwasher. The manager looked me over and told me he was afraid I wouldn't do.

"But I can wash dishes," I protested.

"You couldn't here, sister," he said kindly; "there are too many with all these university boys; a little thing like you wouldn't last two days."

For ten days I had been buying a frugal breakfast and satisfying my hunger for the rest of the day with cheese sandwiches – a sort of cracker in which cheese has been mixed; but I could not eat them that night after my fruitless search for work – and even today, at times, the odor of cheese will make me a little faint and heartsick. The shock of being refused even a dish-washing job brought me to a sharp comprehension of my situation. I knew now that I simply must sell a song.

I shall always believe that I was directed to do the thing I did. As I walked about my room that night, foot-sore, and faint from hunger, trying to reason the thing out, the thought came to me like a blinding white flash that I would go down to the Rossiter offices very early and be waiting when the publisher, himself, came!

I did not question the wisdom of this inspiration. I simply set about getting myself ready. I tossed my old coat-suit in a corner and took from my grip a white wool dress that I had worn for Sunday-best a long, long while. I took the trimming from my hat, leaving a little silk shape that I had made. About this I tied a simple sash of ribbon that had done duty for a belt. There was a short black cape among my things, and I laid this out with the dress. I polished my clumsy shoes, and tossed my gloves in the corner with suit.

At five o'clock the next morning it was raining dismally, but I put on the white dress and the little black cape, and with my big cotton umbrella I started to town at six o'clock. I did not think of breakfast. I was going to see a music publisher or be walked over in the attempt.

All these weeks I had been walking up the two flights of stairs. On this morning the elevator man stopped me at the foot of them, asking why I did not ride up. I admitted that I had not known where the elevator was. Instead of being amused at my ignorance, he told me how to find the elevators in various buildings. As we were about to ascend, another passenger arrived the man I thought might perhaps be Mr. Rossiter.

I felt trembly and afraid, but I stuck close to the heels of this person when he got off. "Could you tell me – if you are Mr. Ross – iter?" I faltered.

"I am that," he answered me, with the kindest smile I ever had seen.

"I – have been up here every day – for three weeks trying to – see you," I told him.

"Oh, look here, that's a shame! What? Come in here and tell me all about it," he said.

That was my introduction to Will Rossiter, the Chicago song publisher, as he was called. The kindness and consideration he showed me in that first interview are among the treasured memories that I have laid away with sprigs of lavender and dried roseleaves. He was frankly amazed at the number of lyrics I had brought. When he had looked over a dozen or so, he went through them the second time and laid three aside, with the remark that he would take those and pay me fifteen dollars each for them.

While I sat tongue-tied and dumb he went on to say that he would give me a letter of recommendation to Mr. William McKinley of the McKinley Music Company, who would, he was confident, be glad to get some of the lyrics, as they were his sort.

Just like that, as if selling lyrics, for real money, was the most natural thing in the world. I tried to rise to the occasion when he placed forty-five dollars, real cash, in my hand; but instead I found myself saying with lips that I tried vainly to keep steady: "Mr. Rossiter, I never sold a lyric before – and I haven't had very much of anything but cheese sandwich-crackers to eat in ten days. I'm so. . ."

I didn't get any further than that before the big, immaculately-groomed Englishman had crossed the room to the door and was telling someone to go somewhere and bring a breakfast of everything good and nourishing. And there were tears in his eyes when he came back to the desk. "You poor child! How did you ever get up the courage to come to Chicago like that? Why, look here! I am all upset, what?" He spoke to me as if I had been a little child.

That was my start on the songwriter's road. The letter to Mr. McKinley introduced me to the slightly lame man whom I had seen passing through the waiting-room. He was a prince of good fellows. Out of the twelve lyrics I carried to him he selected five, for which he paid me the, to me, enormous sum of one hundred and twenty-five dollars. Ballads were his specialty, he told me, and he added that I wrote very excellent ones. I remember of that first sale: 'Mid Carolina Hills. Why Carolina instead of Tennessee – my native state – I don't now know. I suppose that it sounded more euphonious. I had a feeling for rhythm. Maybe way back in remote ages some one of my ancestors had got a sense of rhythm from the blows of his axe on a tree, and had handed it down unrecognized through the generations until it came to me. Anyway, I knew these things instinctively, and my lyrics showed the knowledge.

When I went back to my room that evening I felt as if I were walking on air. I found a letter from little sister. In it she told me that she had been digging ginseng, May-apple root, and yellow percoon, and she inclosed a money-order for twelve dollars, the amount she had received for the roots she had gathered. I laughed and wept over that letter and the inclosure. I reproached myself for having felt that I must walk the way alone. It was a night of wonderful happiness. No after-achievement during the fifteen years since has had the magic or glamour that set apart that first success. Had I not told Mr. Rossiter that I should be back at his office the next morning to talk over other lyrics I had left with him, I should certainly have started back to Tennessee that night. I wanted to go back and share my ecstasy with little sister; I wanted to show her the money that my brain-children had brought. I wanted to go out and buy presents for the

family. I wanted to sing and laugh aloud. The night before I had seemed to feel the earth's crumbling beneath my feet, and this night I could vision a long, shining road over which I should walk without weariness. That is the glorious privilege of youth, to see only the bright side, the liver lining, next year's blossoms.

At an eight o'clock appointment next morning with Mr. Rossiter, he decided to invest in two more lyrics at the munificent sums of twenty-five dollars each, after which he called up a number and told Tommy Quigley that he was sending a new song writer over to hear him demonstrate.

I found Tommy demonstrating one of Frances Day and Hunter's songs at a five and ten-cent store. He gave me a friendly greeting that set me at ease. He had a wonderful tenor voice. I found myself wondering if it should ever be my good fortune to have someone demonstrate my own songs in this fashion. Oddly enough, six months later, Tommy, at Atlantic City, was featuring one of my saddest, and, to me, most beautiful numbers, called, "Yours Is Not, the Only Aching Heart". It was what the song-pluggers called a "Knock-out". The chorus ran like this:

"Yours is not the only heart that's aching,
Yours are not the only tears that fall –
Yours is not the only heart that's breaking
Slowly, if we could but read them all.
In the evening when you're sadly dreaming,
Yours are not the only tears that start –
Yours is not the only lonely fireside,
Yours is not the only aching heart."

But on the day I met Tommy Quigley, I had not the imagination nor conceit to picture his singing my own songs. I stood at the music counter in a sort of happy trance, reveling in the wonder of having sold song-lyrics myself, feeling a vast satisfaction in having become one of the song-writing profession.

As I lingered there a man came in whom Tommy introduced as Leo Friedman, of Coon, Coon, Coon fame. He didn't appear to be greatly enthused over meeting me, even though Tommy told me that I had sold some lyrics to Will Rossiter and to William McKinley; but he did say presently that he wouldn't mind looking over some of my "stuff" if I would step over to a restaurant with him where he could get a bite while he did. Not caring what he called my lyrics, so long as there was a chance that he might approve of them, I went with him, secretly elated, and with a growing sense of my own importance.

Mr. Friedman selected four lyrics. I ran across one of the published numbers while I was getting together the data for this article. It was titled In the Sunshine and the Shadow I'll Be True. Viewed in the light of experience I have gained in the years since then, this song seems mushy and silly; but at that time I considered it a gem of "purest ray serene". Mr. Friedman said with some enthusiasm that I had talent! He gave me an address to mail other lyrics to him, and sent me on my way rejoicing. Later, he wrote to me that he had sold these numbers outright, and sent me ten dollars each for them.

With my handbag fairly bursting its sides with more than two hundred dollars, with Tommy Quigley's address and a request for song-poems, with friendly relations well established with the two song houses of note, I left Chicago that night. I was ready to go, and simply could not wait another day. It was six o'clock when I reached my room, and my train was going out at eight: I crammed the coat-suit ruthlessly into my grip; I gathered up my other few belongings and piled them upon it; and then in my white wool dress and my little black cape I made a dash for the station, and caught my train on the last jump. It was not until I was three hours out of Chicago that I remembered I had not bought presents for the family! Perhaps it was my good angel that caused the forgetfulness. Doubtless, if I had got started buying, I should have beggared myself in the delight of being able to give.

That was the beginning of my song-writing career. I had gained greater confidence from my encounter with the world, but I had not gained the canny wisdom that a song-writer must have to make a great financial success. Back at home I began turning out more lyrics. To little sister and me the sum of twenty-five dollars "per" seemed almost incredible wealth; even fifteen and twenty dollars thrilled us amazingly. Two numbers sent to a New York house brought forty dollars, which we used to paint the little frame house; and another lyric paid for the wall-paper, which we hung ourselves. I had the feeling that a fairy had passed through the house, transforming its drabness into astounding beauty, when we finished. I could not write anything for days. I wanted to feast my eyes on the loveliness that had come out of my gift. I bought white Chinese matting with a song, and covered the rough floors, and some reed rockers were the next purchases. There were many places to sell a lyric outright, and so many needs, that I went right along writing and selling for whatever the publisher offered.

There came a time when one of the songs Mr. Friedman had sent me fifteen dollars for made a hit overnight, and he, having brought it out himself, sold the rights to another publisher for seven thousand dollars. That publisher was Mr. Rossiter, and he wrote at once congratulating me on having been co-author of such a song, and submitting a royalty proposal for other lyrics, which I accepted gladly.

My disappointment over not sharing the money that came to Mr. Friedman for Meet Me Tonight in Dreamland woke me up to the foolishness of what I had been doing in selling all my songs outright and flooding the market. I came to understand that very soon there would be no demand for my lyrics, as the publishers would be stocked up with them, and there would be no money for me, for no matter how big hits they would become I should get nothing more out of them. So, thereafter, I held out tenaciously for royalties, regardless of what I was offered, which also was a mistake.

I remember having written a lyric called "Don't Wake Me Up, I Am Dreaming," and I decided that a Mr. Herbert Ingraham, who had written "Roses Bring Dreams of You", would like my number. I was wondering how to reach him when Mr. Rossiter, who was making a tremendous hit with "Meet Me Tonight in Dreamland", wrote offering me a guaranteed salary of a hundred a month, which would be paid from royalties of songs I might place with him, and he also urged me to take a trip to New York at the expense of the Rossiter Company and get new ideas for future numbers.

This fitted in with my desires, and I went to New York a fortnight later. On this trip my coat was not too short, nor my skirt too long. I rode in a Pullman car, and had my meals on the diner. I had become, I thought, quite sophisticated since my first venture out into

the big world. Now I know that I had not really changed, nor am I sophisticated even now, after all the hard knocks that have come to me with a certain amount of success.

On reaching New York, I found that the Rossiter headquarters was expecting me and had orders to do everything for me that I expressed a wish for. This was a pretty big order, or might have been had I taken advantage of it – I mean, an unfair advantage. I did have a wonderful time. Mr. Rossiter would send telegrams from Chicago saying: "See that our Dreamland Girl has tickets to the best shows," or "Take our Dreamland Girl to hear Reine Davies at the American Theater tomorrow sing 'Meet Me Tonight in Dreamland'".

I shall never forget my rapture at that performance. Beautiful girlish Reine Davies, singing my song to the accompaniment of violin and bells that chimed from all over the big theater. It was a great moment for a little country maiden, I assure you. I was thrilled to my fingers and toes. I was repaid in that performance for all the hours of suffering I had endured in those three seemingly endless weeks I suffered in Chicago trying to see publishers.

I went in search of Herbert Ingraham the next morning, and I did not have to sit in the waiting-room of the publishing house with which he was connected. My card went in, and I was promptly told that Mr. Ingraham was in Chicago, but that Mr. Maurice Shapiro would see me.

My fame as the writer of a song-success seemed to have preceded me. Mr. Shapiro was very kind and deeply interested in seeing some lyrics. I explained my errand, and my regret at not being able to show Mr. Ingraham a number that I had done with him in mind. Mr. Shapiro asked to see this lyric, and after reading it, asked me how much I wanted for it outright. I told him I didn't care to sell, and he asked if five hundred dollars would interest me. That was a big price to offer for a poem not set to music, and I was sorely tempted to accept it; but I resisted the temptation. That was a time when I showed very poor judgment; for, eventually, I received only a few dollars for the song. Mr. Ingraham died a few days after he completed the music, and my good friend, Mr. Shapiro, also died quite suddenly just after the song was put on the market, and the firm went into the hands of a receiver. Later, when the first was reorganized, and my song sold tremendously, there was no one left of the original staff to see that I got my royalties, and so I lost out again where I might have collected many thousands of dollars. Five years later I was in New York and an official of a big music house asked me what royalties I had received from the number I have just told about. He was amazed when I answered him, and after calling up a number of jobbers to corroborate his memory, he insisted on bringing a suit for me against the publishers that had taken over this song. However, we had delayed too long, and, except for a notice from the lawyer that he had sued for a certain amount, there have been no further developments.

During those intervening years I had profited from a hit written with Mr. Friedman. "Let He Ca11 You Sweetheart" was the title. It ran "Meet Me Tonight in Dreamland" a close second, and netted me what seemed like a small fortune, at the time. But try as I would, I could not write another big success. One of my bitterest disappointments was in not being able to do this for the Will Rossiter house after all of Mr. Rossiter's kindness to me.

Good counter-sellers I wrote in plenty. A number of them still are selling - just a few nights ago a friend of mine "tuned in" on the Chicago-Beach Hotel and got a program headed by one of my old songs; but I seem to have exhausted my genius during the early years of my efforts. Perhaps, if the World War had not come when it did, bankrupting so many of the big publishing houses, might have repeated myself in another hit or so. Perhaps, if I had not left the little frame house in the valley and assumed heavier and heavier obligations, that forced me to go back to the old habit of selling out everything I wrote, the end of the story might have been different. I cannot know. I like to believe I could have done better with my talent, but for four years I deliberately ground out lyrics and sold them under various nom-de-plumes for fifty dollars each in order to keep the wolf from the door; and those years of grinding called for payment. My nerves began doing queer things, and I woke up one day to the grim fact that I could grind no longer. A doctor told me cheerfully that I had been working for three years on borrowed energy, and I would have to let up.

At the insistent urging of the man with whom I had been in love a long while, I decided to lay my responsibilities on his shoulders. So I married and closed the song-tablets, and locked up the pencils, and tried to glory in my freedom from toil. But the habit of doing things was too deeply rooted, and after I had made the old brick house we had bought into a home, I wandered outside to see if there might, perchance, be work for my restless hands.

There were several acres of ground – for we had bought on the unfashionable side of town - and there were old, old hedges of old-fashioned shrubbery. I decided to dig treasures from those hedges. My lute was broken, and if I could no longer sing, I decided to grow songs in feathery lilacs, crimson English hawthorne, golden forsythia, and old-fashioned hundred-leaved roses.

Early in last year I felt my strength coming back. Mother Earth had helped to steady my broken nerves. I had dug in her soft bosom and planted beds of the poet's narcissus, and long rows of iris and tulips and hyacinths. My flower gardens were far more beautiful than any songs I ever had written, and the little field nursery I had started promised a source of income greater than my lyrics had brought.

Even as I reveled in the wonder of the growing things, and assured myself that I was contented, there seemed to be little bits of verse floating in the air. Stealthily I got out my old typewriter and locked myself away where I thought no one could hear, and I wrote a little song called "The Gingerbread Bear". It was something very different from any that I ever had done, but sent it to my old friend, the McKinley House, for which I had done many, many songs during the fruitful years, and presently I had a lovely letter. "The Gingerbread Bear" could be used if I would send five more children-lyrics to go with it.

I sent them, and the old reliable check came promptly; but once more my nerves began doing queer things. They seemed to have an aversion to my writing any more songs, so I went back to my growing ones, and I suppose my song-writing days are over.

Maybe some one else would have done better with my gift. Maybe I squandered it uselessly on mediocre stuff; but it seemed necessary. I suppose all average song-writers go the same way. Out of the many I knew in the early days of my efforts, there is only one, to my certain knowledge, still achieving success. Yet, I dare say, not one

would consider himself a failure; I say "himself", for the woman song-writer was almost unknown when I broke into the game.

I am undoubtedly a has-been, and that, too, at the age when I should be doing my best work. But I do not, as I have said before, consider myself a failure. I have made investments. One of them is little sister. She is writing juveniles for Sunday-school journals – several hundred each year. Just recently she sold a forty-thousand-word serial. If my way has been hard and rough, it has not been without its compensations. For those that feel the urge as strongly as I did there are perhaps better opportunities now, but there is no royal road for a song-writer. It is filled with ups and downs. Now and then there may be one that will find only down-grade trail; there seem to be some that are like that; but for the great host of would-be's, there is the road I have traveled, of few level stretches, and of comparatively small financial returns for the years of labor. Yet, were the choice mine again I should put on the coat-suit with the too-short coat, and the too-long skirt, and with nearly fifty lyrics in my nickel-trimmed handbag, buy a ticket to Chicago.

As I finish this, the smell of lilacs drifts through my window, the hawthorne waves a flame of blossoms, the syringas are in bud, and the bridal wreath is a sheet of snow. At the foot of the hill the plum trees are in bloom, and red-buds flaunt their banners along the border-fences – I am growing the poetry and songs that I can no longer write.*

* Beth Slater Whitson is rather modest in this assertion. she has a new song out now entitled "What's a Whole World To Me Without You?" Lovers of that old classic, "Meet Me Tonight in Dreamland" may find her latest effort a similar tenderness of sentiment.

--The Editor.

From: True Confessions Magazine
February, 1925 – page 92