

## Songless

There are no songs on the fields of North America. The fields of North America are, in fact, utterly lonesome.

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In New York, I once attended an Indian princess' concert. How much grief in her song, how much heartache! It seemed to me that the wealthy socialites in the audience would be overcome with sorrow. The words so simple and yet so sad. She sang about the wide plain, the far-off steppe, the sunrise. She sang of the morning star, dew on the grasses, the reeds growing along the riverbank. She mimicked the silvery sound of water splashing on the sides of a nimble canoe. She sang of romance and deer hunts, sunsets and the stars in the night sky.

So how could it be that this bored my neighbors? How could those city folk chuckle as they left the concert hall when the place had been filled for me with such tremendous mourning? This is the true song of America! This is the spirit of America! This is the song of the prairies and the Great Lakes, the song that nested on the banks of this land's great rivers--

*The sun fades in west*

*And so fades our glory...*

The song of the Indian—the song of the field—is dying. So too are the last Indian tribes dying out, surrendering their Mother Earth to the white race...

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It is utterly lonesome for one of our people in the cities here. There are no songs in the cities of North America.

In the city, factories rumble and machines roar. Trains fly overhead. The rhythm of life pulses too quick to carry a tune. Life here is too fast. The day ends fast, life ends fast, the breath knocked out by the constant race after the clang of that cold metal bell. And if you do happen to catch your breath then your thoughts are overwhelmed with tomorrow and not on your hour of sweet rest. Children from the Old World, who, like songbirds always chirped away their folksongs in their native lands, cross the sea, only to find their songs snuffed out.

The Italian, who seems like he sang even in his sleep back home, comes here to pave the roads of North America's great cities, to dig subway tunnels or work in the mines. Here his verses are forgotten. Here in America, you'll only hear a harsh barking. Under the tongues of heavy Italian women, the language cracks, dries up. Leaving his Fatherland, the Italian belts out his songs for the last time on the ship to America. They sing with eyes shut tight, falling into a frenzied dance. The songs resound ceaselessly until they arrive at the threshold of the New World. After that the wild songs fall silent.

It's the same with those life-loving Spaniards. On the journey they bring with them sour wine and sweet, fiery songs. They beat on tambourines, snap their fingers,

sing and dance, dance and sing until they reach the giant steel metropolis at the shore of the New World. The wine is drunk and the songs are sung for the last time.

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און אונזער אידיש ליעד, וואָס ווערט זעלטען אין כאָר גע-  
 זונגען; די ליעד פון דעם עלענדען האַרץ און פערליעבטער, פער-  
 בענקטער נשמה, וואָס ציהט זיך אין די זומער טעג דורך די אָפענע  
 פענסטער מיט ווייסע פארהאנגלאך פעהאנגען און ביינאכט פון  
 די פריזבעס, וואָס זענען אין דער זומערנאכט בעהאלטען... דער  
 נגון אָהן ווערטער וואָס קלייבט זיך פון בית מחרש-געסעל ארויס  
 אין די גרויע בעגינענס, אין די ווינטערדיגע פראַסטיגע טעג און  
 דורך זומערדיגע נעכט — שטום ווערט די ליעד און שטארבט,  
 ווי עס שטארבען פערלאנגען און יוגענד-הלומות ביים פערלאָזען די  
 הימישע שטעטעל.

Our Yiddish song is rarely sung in choir. It's the longing of lonely hearts, of love-struck, homesick souls yearning for open windows and white curtains on summer days or for cool clay benches hidden in the dark warmth of summer nights. It's a *nign*, a wordless melody that spills out from the alleyway behind the study house onto the gray, frosty winter dawn or a hot summer evening. That song is silenced here, dead like the naive hopes and dreams left behind in your native shtetl.