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Outline for a Longer Prayre

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OUTLINE FOR A LONGER PRAYRE

I can hear my dear dead grandmother saying to Joseph,
many years before she begins forgetting,
long before her first or even her fourth heart attack,
before the birth of her fourth grandchild, the one
Maurice doesn't live to know,
before the wedding of her sixth daughter, I can hear her . . .
Hear her even before the house is sold
because her brother-in-law has secretly shifted some stock,
hear her reassuring words in the yard
surrounded by ten brothers and sisters before
the ceremony of her marriage
when hard boiled eggs are served.
Yes, I can hear her proudly tell them
before her mother's fall leaning over the stove
inside the house on Deerfield Avenue
while her father closes his goatskin texts
of the ancient symbols of a dying language,
closing his eyes for a nap,
I can hear her
before her mother's mirror,
I can hear her young voice saying
as she guides Max, Joseph, and Rebecca
away from the synagogue and into the strange neighborhood,
quiet on a Saturday morning with the Sabbath awe,
decrepid, washed over by the sepia weather,
dreary under the April sky—
As the first humid complaint comes to little Joseph's serious lips,
I can hear her, and I can hear her mother
saying as she squeezes Bessie's frightened hand
on the ship's bow before the first awakening, America,
she speaks the hymn of her fathers', saying
Be happy
 for what we have.