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, decrepit, 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.