

Poem for Haruko

By June Jordan

I never thought I'd keep a record of my pain
 or happiness
 like candles lighting the entire soft lace
 of the air
 around the full length of your hair/a shower
 organized by God
 in brown and auburn
 undulations luminous like particles
 of flame

But now I do
 retrieve an afternoon of apricots
 and water interspersed with cigarettes
 and sand and rocks
 we walked across:

How easily you held
 my hand
 beside the low tide
 of the world

Now I do
 relive an evening of retreat
 a bridge I left behind
 where all the solid heat
 of lust and tender trembling
 lay as cruel and as kind
 as passion spins its infinite
 tergiversations in between the bitter
 and the sweet

Alone and longing for you
 now I do

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Source: *Directed by Desire* (Copper Canyon Press, 2005)



Born to Jamaican immigrants in Harlem, New York, June Jordan later attended Barnard College and the University of Chicago. Her experiences as the only black student at a prep school and her taboo marriage to a white man fueled the sense of discrimination in her activist writing—throughout her work, she was tireless in her commitment to civil rights and political liberty. Jordan also had a distinguished academic career, teaching at Sarah Lawrence College, Yale University, and the University of California at Berkeley. In her poem “In Memoriam: Martin Luther King, Jr.” she describes problems in American culture using a rhythmically aggressive yet free-flowing verse form.