

# POETRY OUT LOUD



## *Teach Us to Number Our Days*

by Rita Dove

In the old neighborhood, each funeral parlor  
is more elaborate than the last.  
The alleys smell of cops, pistols bumping their thighs,  
each chamber steeled with a slim blue bullet.

Low-rent balconies stacked to the sky.  
A boy plays tic-tac-toe on a moon  
crossed by TV antennae, dreams

he has swallowed a blue bean.  
It takes root in his gut, sprouts  
and twines upward, the vines curling  
around the sockets and locking them shut.

And this sky, knotting like a dark tie?  
The patroller, disinterested, holds all the beans.

August. The mums nod past, each a prickly heart on a sleeve.

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