

NATASHA TRETHERWEY

## Collection Day

Saturday morning, Motown  
 forty-fives and thick seventy-eights  
 on the phonograph, window fans  
 turning light into our rooms,  
 we clean house to a spiral groove,  
 sorting through our dailiness—  
 washtubs of boiled-white linens,  
 lima beans soaking, green as luck,  
 trash heaped out back for burning—  
 everything we can't keep,  
 make new with thread or glue.

Beside the stove, a picture calendar  
 of the seasons, daily scripture,  
 compliments of the Everlast Interment  
 Company, one day each month marked  
 in red—PREMIUM DUE—collection visit  
 from the insurance man, his black suits  
 worn to a shine. In our living room  
 he'll pull out photos of our tiny plot,  
 show us the slight eastward slope,  
 all the flowers in bloom now, how neat  
 the shrubs are trimmed, *and see here,*  
*the trees we planted are coming up fine.*

We look out for him all day, listen  
 for the turn-stop of wheels  
 and rocks crunching underfoot.  
 Mama leafs through the Bible  
 for our payment card—June 1969,  
 the month he'll stamp PAID  
 in bright green letters, putting us  
 one step closer to what we'll own,  
 something to last: patch of earth,  
 view of sky.