

● Sept. 15, 1963: A group of Ku Klux Klansmen bomb the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Ala., a center of the civil rights movement. Four young girls are killed, and at least 14 people are injured. Years later, three of the four conspirators are brought to trial and convicted; the fourth dies before he is tried.



This morning's already good — summer's cooling, Addie chattering like a magpie — but today we are leading the congregation. Ain't *that* a fine thing! All in white *like angels*, they'll be sighing when we appear at the pulpit and proclaim "Open your hymnals —" Addie, what's the page number again? Never mind, it'll be posted. I think. I hope. Hold still, Carole, or else this sash will never sit right! There. Now you do mine. Almost eleven. I'm ready. My, don't we look — what's that word the Reverend used in last Sunday's sermon? Oh, I got it: *ethereal*.

By Rita Dove

My daughter's three months old. A nightmare rocks me awake, and then fourteen words: *Brevity*.

*As in four girls; Sunday dresses: bone, ash, bone, ash, bone. The end.* 1963, but still burning. My darkening girl

lies beside me, her tiny chest barely registering breath. Had they lived beyond that morning, all the other explosions

shattering Birmingham — even some who called it home called it Bombingham — three of the girls would be 70,

the other 67. Somebody's babies. The sentences I rescue from that nightmare, I make a poem. Four names,

grayscaled at the bottom of the page:

Addie Mae Collins. Cynthia Wesley. Carole Robertson. Denise McNair.

Revision is a struggle toward truth. In my book I won't keep, *The end*. For such terrible brevity — dear black girls! sweet babies — there's been no end.

By Camille T. Dungy