

Ricky Ian Gordon (b. 1956)
Rappahannock County (2009/10)

Lyrics and Concept by Mark Campbell
Orchestration by Ricky Ian Gordon and Bruce Coughlin

Rev. Zachariah Springer / Newspaper Editor / Jed Hotchkiss, Cartographer / John Smith, Forgotten Soldier / Elias Leggett, Deserter / Member of Susan Johnson's Family, Exiled Virginian

Mark Walters, Baritone

Mrs. Laticia Saunders, Society Lady / Young Wife / Violet Fitzsimmons, Spy/Baker / Cornelia MacDonald, Volunteer Nurse / Susan Johnson, Exiled Virginian

Faith Sherman, Mezzo-soprano

Jefferson Adams, Politician / Clement Davis, Virginian / Telegraph Operator / Travis Bledsoe, Private from Louisiana / Silas MacDuffie, Embalmer / Member of Susan Johnson's Family, Exiled Virginian

Matthew Tuell, Tenor

Nameless Slave / Reuben Lark, Boy Slave / Newly Freed Slave / Joe Harris, Slave / Joshua Barnes, Union Soldier / Jones Henry, Free Person

Kevin Moreno, Baritone

Nameless Slave / Newly Freed Slave / Lily Quinn, Former Slave / Grace Beaufort, Contraband / Dorothea Henry, Free Person

Aundi Marie Moore, Soprano

CD 1

Rappahannock County

PART I. SECESSION. 1861.

[1] Sanctified by God

Rev. Zachariah Springer:

Colossians 3:2!
Leviticus 25:4!
Genesis 9:20-29!
Ephesians 6:5!
Timothy 6: 1-3!

Doubt it not, dear brethren,
Doubt it not!
From Abraham to Moses,
From Moses to Christ,
From Christ to the Reformers,
From then to today,
The Church of God stands
Where it has always stood:
That slavery is sacrosanct
And for the common good.

You will hear, my brethren,
You will hear
From some in Yankee Sodom,
That slavery's wrong,
An evil institution!
To that I must say:
Those men are Godless,
Disdainful of His laws,
And falsify the Scripture for
Their misbegotten cause!

We will not renounce our faith!
Nor desecrate our communion
With all the Apostles, Prophets, Martyrs,
For a less-perfect Union!
We will not defile His name,
Nor sanctify this transgression,
Nor violate our sacred Christian charters...
Even if it means Secession!

Cower not, my brethren,
Cower not,
From your divine convictions,
Your saintly ideals,
From all that you believe in!
Resist how you may.
Your place in Heaven
Will never be denied.
For slavery is not a sin,
It's sanctified...
By God!

A Noble Institution

Mrs. Laticia Saunders, Society Lady:

Our Negroes
Are a happy lot.
Rumors to the opposite
Are perfect rot.

All day they
Love to dance and sing
As they're never wanting of
A single thing.

They are sheltered, clothed and fed,
Given work, a roof, and a bed,
Have a station and a place,
That befits their humble race,
To upset this way of life,
Would bring undue stress and strife,
And is against God's plan!

Some masters
May be harsh or mean.
But we know that they are few
And far between.

Our Negroes
Welcome slavery –
For they feel like members of
Our family.

It's a noble institution;

It's not, as some would say, an evil bane.
And abolition
Of this tried and true tradition
Would be grossly inhumane.

It's a noble institution
That even our own Negroes don't condemn.
For abolition
Puts them in a worse position,
And we have to think of them.
We have to think of them!

States' Rights

Jefferson Adams, Politician:

We're merely protecting
States' rights.
States' rights
Have been attacked.
For the issue isn't slavery
It's governmental tyranny!

The North has rejected
States' rights,
States' rights
And that's a fact.
The North has rejected
States' rights,
OUR rights,
To be exact.
And the Union cannot be preserved
If half its people are disserved.

King Abe
Has spat upon our sacred Constitution!
King Abe
Ought to be dethroned.
King Abe
Is bringing on a second Revolution.
Our founding fathers fought in freedom's name –
Virginia's sons are set to do the same.

Rev. Springer, Mrs. Laticia Saunders,

Jefferson Adams:
We have no choice...
By God it is decreed!
We have no choice
But to secede!

[2] Recitative – Farewell, Old Dominion: Introduction

Clement Davis, Virginian:

Not all us Virginians
Feel this way.
And any Virginian
With a say
Is silenced by the rising din,
Once more
The louder voices win.

[3] Mine

First nameless slave:

Arms,
Legs,
Hands,
Feet,
...Mine.

Second nameless slave:

Eyes,
Ears,

Head,
Heart,
...Mine.

First nameless slave:

Heard tell
It might could happen,

Second nameless slave:

Heard tell
It might could be.

First nameless slave:

Say it –

Second nameless slave:

With head bowed,

First and second nameless slaves:

And not too loud:
Free.
Free.

Second nameless slave:

Imagine that.

First nameless slave:

Lord, let it shine.

First and second nameless slaves:

Land,
Work,
Love,
Home,
Life,
Dreams...
Mine.

[4] Farewell, Old Dominion

Clement Davis, Virginian:

Ugly happens mighty quickly
When war's announced.
Reason, logic, wisdom, judgment –
All get trounced.
Replaced by banners and parades,
And wildly cheering crowds,
And young men marching in brigades,
All eager for a taste of war,
Who in their madness soon forget,
What they'll be butchered for.

And woe to you who don't think gossip
A potent thing.
Soon you'll know the pain and cruel'ty
Talk can bring.
It starts with whispers on the street
And little sneers in church (church!),
But then becomes far less discreet
And now you are facing down a fist,
And spat on, called a traitor, spy...
Or worse, an abolitionist.

I don't own slaves,
Won't own slaves,
I'm a teacher –
Reading, ABCs, Division.
But I saw the war in Mexico
And know, how clearly, I know...
I questioned this decision.
And now my family lives in fear,
And thus we must flee from here.

So, farewell, Old Dominion,
Farewell, Old Dominion, and good-bye.
O Virginia, I love you so,
Perhaps too well.
Will we ever get to call you home again?
Time will tell,
Time will tell.

[5] Victory at Manassas

Telegraph Operator:

The truth is,
I was working on a nap
When the wire began to tap
With a most insistent sound.
I jumped up
And decoded what was sent.
When I found out what it meant
How my heart began to pound!

Victory at Manassas!
Praise the Lord.
Victory at Manassas!
The Yankees got their just reward.
They thought that we'd surrender,
Thought that we'd recoil,
Misjudged the proud defender,
Of our Southern soil.
And for that they had to pay.
Blessed Dixie has its day!

Newspaper Editor:

The truth is,
When that boy came running in
With that idiotic grin
Thought he'd had too much to drink.

But then when
All the facts became well-known,
Well, I spun some of my own,
And committed them to ink:

Newspaper Editor, Telegraph Operator:

"Victory at Manassas!"
As God willed.
Victory at Manassas!
And thousands of them Yankees killed.
It seems those boys got addled,
Badly put to shame,
And so they just skedaddled,
Back from whence they came.
Trowned the Puritan poltroon!
And our boys will be home soon.

Young Wife:

The truth is,
When my aunt came running by,
I was hanging clothes to dry
And I felt an awful dread.

You see,
My husband volunteered to fight,
Imagine then, my delight
When she told me what she'd read.

Young Wife, Newspaper Editor, Telegraph Operator:

Victory at Manassas!
Thanks to God.
Victory at Manassas!
He's everywhere our soldiers trod.
They viewed us with derision,
Treated us with scorn,

They rue their bad decision
Now our land's reborn.
Only eighteen sixty-one,
And the war's already done!

PART II. THE "QUICK" WAR. 1862.

[7] Being Small

Reuben Lark, Boy Slave:

Being small
Ain't all that bad.
Being small
Got some advantages.
You get to go
Where others can't.
You get to know
What others can't.

Being small
Has got some use.
Since them all
Don't let us read or write,
Some other means
Get called upon,
To figure out
What's going on.

Come three o' clock most every day,
The Master and Missus have their tea.
She sits all quiet and don't stir,
As he reads the news out loud to her.

And three o'clock most every day,
I scramble right under their old house,
Into a spot a rat might fit,
Right below the parlor where they sit.

And I listen,
While he reads.
'Tween puffs of his cigar.
And I listen,
While he reads
The news from near and far:
"Jefferson Davis did this..."
"Abraham Lincoln did that..."
"Manassas..."
"Stonewall Jackson..."
"Bombardments, blockades..."
"Cavalry, brigades..."
"Abolition..."
"Manumission..."

And she just sits there,
In her rocking chair,
Quiet through and through.
(Guess he must be her master, too.)

I know when there is something big.
I know when the news is serious.
His smoke starts getting awful thick,
And she starts in rocking real quick.

And when he's done read, front to back,
I wait till I hear them leave the room.
Then scramble to my friends and kin
Tell 'em all I heard from list'ning in.

"Jefferson Davis did this..."
"Abraham Lincoln did that..."
"Manassas..."
"Stonewall Jackson..."
"Bombardments, blockades..."

"Cavalry, brigades..."
"Abolition..."
"Manumission..."

Being small
Ain't all that bad.
Being small
Got some advantages.
And one thing I
Have learned from this:
'Bout ignorance,
It sure ain't bliss.

[8] Making Maps

Jed Hotchkiss, Cartographer:

Just imagine, if you will,
God had blessed you with a skill
For making good maps,
Fine maps.
That you had the ability
To look around and see
The yielding valleys, the thriving forests,
The crystalline rivers, the wind-sculpted ridges,
Fields, farms, paths, groves, ponds, hills –
Every facet of His sublime design –
And render it in line.

Then suppose that, in your soul,
You're aware the final goal
In making these maps,
Fine maps,
Is not to orient a man,
But parcel to a plan
For spoiling valleys, for torching forests,
For bloodying rivers, for rupturing ridges,
Fields, farms, paths, groves, all lost –
Leveled into an ashen heap.
Could you gaze upon the beauty of this day
And not weep?
The infinite beauty of this day,
Atop His mountain,
And not weep?

[9] I Seen Snow

Travis Bledsoe, Private from Louisiana:

I seen snow, Mamma.
I seen snow.
Ev'rywhere it's white,
As white as white can be
'Cepting where the blood's
All leaving me.

I seen snow, Mamma
Like we heard tell about.
Coming down near some
Virginny mountaintop
And it don't seem to want
To ever stop.

Snow....Fine snow....
So quiet now...Clean snow...

I got hit, Mamma.
Hit real bad.
Nasty mini-ball's
Done taken half my arm.
Won't be of much use
Back on the farm.

They'll be back, Mamma.
My brothers will be back.

Yankees came in fast
And put them on the run.
But they would never leave
Your hero son.

Snow....
So quiet now...
Seventeen.
Never seen the world
Outside o' Bogalusa.
Seventeen.
Never kissed a girl.
Never killed a man,
Leastways what I know,
But I been on a train
That took me through a big, big shiny city,
And I seen...

I seen snow, Mamma.
Snow.
Coming down so hard,
It could be eight foot deep.
All I want to do
Is sleep, just sleep.

Cover me, cover me
Cover me over
Cover me, cover me
Cover me over
Over over...

[10] Rappahannock

Two Newly Freed Slaves:

God, don't trouble the waters,
You do and all is lost.
God, don't trouble the waters
Wait till Your sons and daughters
Is safely, safely crossed.

God, don't raise up the river.
Don't let it break our stride.
God, don't raise up the river,
Not till You can deliver
Us to the other side.

Rappahannock, Rappahannock,
You got a bad reputation
For being temp'ramental –
Rising fast
And taking all in your wake!

Rappahannock, Rappahannock,
Offer us this one salvation:
For once be calm and gentle,
So much is at stake,
Too much is at stake.

God, keep all softly flowing,
Without a single care.
God, keep all softly flowing,
And grant us strength in knowing,
We're nearly there,
We're nearly there.

PART III. THE REALITY OF WAR. 1863.

[11] I Listen

Violet Fitzsimmons, Spy/Baker:

Them Yankees don't suspect a thing.
Not that the fools ever would!
An old biddy like me

"Oh her, she couldn't hurt a flea!"
And when I smile I smile a smile
Chock-full of motherly good.
The straggly grey hair,
Bespectacled eyes,
And my own little limp
Complete the disguise.

I'm at their camp most every day.
Weather is nice could be twice.
I been selling my wares
Since they all claimed this town as theirs.
Can get a quarter for each one,
But I don't care 'bout the price.
It's simply my way
Of doing my part
When I visit their camp
With my little cart.

Pies.
I sell pies.
Fresh-made pies.
To the adversary.
And I am happy that I do.

Pies.
I sell pies.
Sweet sweet pies.
Every kind of berry,
Though, of course, they favor blue.

And I listen as they chew
I listen
To hear such secrets like
"Monday is the day we strike..."
I listen, I listen
"The major from New York
Says we're taking Little Fork..."

I listen, just listen
"We will begin our drive
When the other troops arrive..."
How they love to chat!
And I'm glad for that.
For when the pies run out
I sweetly say good-bye
Then bring that chat right back
To my friend Rufus, the Rebel spy.
Eat 'em up (ya filthy Yanks!)
[To a soldier buying a pie:]
Oh, another, goodness, thanks!
[To the soldiers:]
Now don't be rude.
Chew your food
Before your speak!
And when you DO speak,
Please – talk a blue streak!

I'd like to kill each one of them.
Some days I just feel disgust.
And it's hard not to stop
From sprinkling ars'nic on the top.
Or adding just a bit more crunch
With shards of glass in the crust.
But leastways for now,
It has to be said,
They're more useful alive,
Than they would be dead.

Pies.
I sell pies.
Scrumptious pies.
To the adversary.

I like to see the boys well-fed.

Pies.
I sell pies.
Sweet sweet pies.
Every kind of berry
Will so till they favor red.

[12] Bound to Be

Joe Harris, Slave:

Uh-hunh...
That's right...
Yessiree...
Better believe it...
Amen, brother...
Bound to be...

When we get to that promised land,
Old Abe hisself will shake our hand.
And all them folks they gonna cheer,
"Gee we glad to have you Niggrahs here."
The Northerners will treat us fine.
"You need a job, well, please, take mine!"
They never let us read or write,
But we'll learn all that, heck, overnight.

Uh-hunh...
That's right...
Yessiree...
Better believe it...
Amen, brother...
Bound to be...

Our hearts, why, they will just explode
With all the new respect we're showed.
And in a very welcome switch
THEY'LL do all the work and WE'LL get rich.

Just as a way to show their thanks,
They're gonna let us run their banks.
And further, in this grand new plan,
Each of us be made a Congress man!

Don't get me wrong,
I'm grateful,
Can't you see?
Don't get me wrong,
So grateful,
Every part of me:
My hands are grateful
Cause they won't be cuffed,
My back is grateful
Cause it won't be lashed,
My feet are grateful
Cause they won't be chained,
My bones are grateful
Cause they won't be broke.
Damn, you'd think with all this gratitude
I'd have a better attitude!

The Emancipation Proclamation,
Ain't this just the best of times!
The Emancipation Proclamation,
So dang sweet it even rhymes!
Makes it so us folks will never again be put upon.
(And it's worth as much as the paper
It's been scribbled on.)

Ain't no more whips and auction blocks.
No chains, no cuffs, no reins, no stocks.
But those won't leave the human race,
They'll just take a somewhat different face.

So we'll be equal by and by,
When hens have teeth and pigs can fly,
Or when them devils all repent...
Or the day they name me President!

Uh-hunh...
That's right...
Yessiree...
Better believe it...
Amen, brother...
Bound to be!

[13] All I Ever Known

Lily Quinn, Former Slave:

All I ever known
Is this old house,
All I ever known.
Scrubbed its walls,
Mopped its floors,
Changed its beds,
Beat its rugs,
Made it shine,
Like it was my own.

All I ever loved
Was them home folks,
All I ever loved.
Cooked their meals,
Sewed their clothes,
Bathed their girls,
Sang them songs,
Tucked them in,
Like they was my own,
Like they was my kin.

Now they gone.
Headed South,
Outta fear.
Now they gone,
Far away,
And left me here.

And I'm sure,
Freedom's good,
Freedom's fine.
Just don't know,
Where to go,
Now freedom's mine.

All I ever had
Was this one life.
All I ever had.
Now I'm free,
And alone,
How do I,
Live my life,
Live my life,
Like it was my own?
Like it was my own...

[14] The Good Death

John Smith, Forgotten Soldier:

This is not what I had in mind.
Not quite the way I wanted to go.
A burning fever,
A churning gut,
The battle for breath...
What a mean little death.

Ending up in the typhoid tent,

Among the sickly, row after row.
The groaning voices,
The droning flies,
And what the Hell for?
What a mean little war.

All I wanted
Was to die The Good Death,
The noble death,
A death both brave and bold.
Not this slow withering away –
I could have done this getting old.

All I wanted
Was to fight the just cause,
The righteous cause.
And if I had to yield
It would not be by disease
But by a gunshot on the field.

Now the chaplain with cross in hand
Is mumbling something humbly and low.
No screaming bullets,
No streaming flags,
Not even a fife.
What a mean little life
...This was...
What a mean little life.

PART IV. THE LOST CAUSE. 1864.

[16] In Their Eyes

Cornelia MacDonald, Volunteer Nurse:

At first it was the horrid smell,
Everywhere, death and decay.
And so this former Southern belle,
Soon learned to find relief
Breathing through a camphor-scented handkerchief.

And then it was the doctor's sneers,
Showing their deep-felt dismay
At all us female volunteers.
Yet they could ill afford
Not to have us serving in this makeshift ward.

But what will haunt me all my days,
Is the light retreating from the gaze
In their eyes,
In their young eyes.

All the sorrow of this failed crusade,
And an end to all the plans they made,
In their eyes,
In their young eyes.

I write them their letters,
I read from the Good Book,
Wash their wounds,
Mop their brows,
Hold their hands,

And I smile and look on cheerfully,
And not once reflect the loss I see,
In their eyes,
Their too young eyes.

I lost a husband and a son –
Chancellorsville took them away.
I see their eyes here in each one,
And when I do I note,
What might have happened if
We women –

We widowed wives,
We sonless mothers –
Had been allowed to vote.

We might not have born this awful cost,
Nor have witnessed all our futures lost
In their eyes,
In their too young eyes.

[17] A Fine Solution

Silas MacDuffie, Embalmer:

A body goes on giving,
Even when it's dead.
God ensures His smallest creatures
Always stay well-fed.
And if I'm hired to intervene
With Nature's tried and true routine,
I'm happy to oblige.

They say that war is evil,
Brutal and unkind.
Yet wherever war is raging
I'm not far behind.
What good is pond'ring war's effect
When there is money to collect?
– And time is wasting.

It's a fine solution:
Ars'nic, mercury and creosote,
Guarantees the corpse will keep,
And at just three dollars for a jug,
Relatively cheap.

Quite a fine solution,
And when injected in their skin,
Death appears in sweet repose,
So they go back to their kin,
Looking washed of worldly woes.

Pro-slavery or anti,
Union or Secesh,
All men are created equal,
Merely mortal flesh.
Though officers of higher rank
Mean much more money in the bank,
I don't discriminate.

It's a fine solution:
Ars'nic mercury and creosote,
And with this convenient kit
One has all one needs for turning war,
To one's benefit.

Mighty fine solution.
And, after all, we all are slaves,
Who surrender to one master,
When we're tossed into our graves
...War just makes that happen faster.

[18] Hallie-Ann

Grace Beaufort, Contraband:

Didn't have all that much time
On this Earth
Did you,
Hallie-Ann?
The Good Lord picked this day
To take my baby girl away.

Sad this place was the last thing
In this world
You seen,

Hallie-Ann.
A filthy no-good scrap of land
Where they done put us contraband.

No fine pine box,
Just a wood plank.
Well, that's the best I could do
Such a shame, such a shame,
'Pon my soul.

And yet at least,
It won't be blank.
Got one of them men in blue
To write your name
With some coal.

Cover her, cover her,
Cover her over...
Cover her, cover her,
Cover her over...

Wish you had stayed on some more
In this world,
With me,
Hallie-Ann.
Supposing maybe then
You could have seen your pa again.

Carry her, carry her
Carry her upwards...
Carry her, carry her
Carry her upwards...

[19] For Love of Country

Elias Leggett, Deserter:

The first light
Squints across the ridge.
The first birds
Warble feebly.
The first mist
Floats up from the stream.
And it is dawn.
Dawn.

They want to see me beg for mercy,
Renounce my crime to Heaven above.
They want to watch me howl and whimper,
Be made a good example of.

And I'd be happy to oblige them,
Present them a performance of note.
But I just feel a sense of peace with
This tight'ning noose around my throat.

For love of country
I faced fields of carnage,
Saw young blood – oceans of it – shed.
For love of country
I trod mounds of corpses,
Watched hogs making dinner of the dead.

For love of country,
I saw men starve,
Men freeze,
Wither from disease,
Thousands fall.
And I died so many times
I felt no love for country,
None at all –
And I fled.

I know I've hurt my blessed Sarah,

But hope she can forgive me someday.
Besides the man she married only
Exists in mem'ry anyway.

In war there really is no victor,
For fin'ly only cruelty reigns.
My heart is dead, my soul has left me,
So now let's finish what remains.

The first light
Squints across the ridge.
The first birds
Warble feebly.
The first mist
Floats up from the stream.
And I am gone.

[20] I Walk Away

Joshua Barnes, Union Soldier:
Sure must be surprised to see me,
Dressed in my fine blue uniform!
That there Confederate son
At the wrong end of my gun.

Look at how he begs for his life,
Blubbering like a little child.
Asking for mercy from me,
Let's just see, uh, let's just see.

Your father mighta whupped my father,
Your uncle mighta raped my sister,
Your brother mighta sold my daughter,
And would again,
If given the chance.
But now it's me
Who's leading this dance.

Wounded, he done got left behind,
On what is left of this old field.
Not far from where I was sold.
War is cold, yes, war is cold.

I take my gun,
My Union gun,
And push it up,
Against his skull.

He whimpers loud,
His eyes go dull,
He hears the click,
He starts to pray,

Then at the last second,
I aim it toward Heaven,
Way upwards toward Heaven,
Pull the trigger,
And walk away.

I walk away.

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PART V. THE CRUEL WAR IS OVER. 1865.

[2] This Was Our House

Susan Johnson and Family, Exiled Virginians:
This was our house,
It now lies in ashes,
A lovely old house,
Gone.

These were our fields,
Now trampled and fallow,
Where once grew great things,
Gone.

And those were our sons,
Who lie with their fathers,
Under the cold, cold earth.
How hard to come back here
From two years of running.
What was it worth?
What was it worth?

This was our land,
Destroyed and defeated,
Once blessed with God's riches –
Where is He now?
Where is He now?

[3] Jumping the Broom

Dorothea Henry, Jones Henry:
Land,
Work,
Love,
Home,
Life,
Dreams...
Ours.

Jones Henry:
No more
Jumping the broom,
Jumping the broom,
We can get married
All legal-fied.
That paper's all we need.
Correctly sealed and signed,

Dorothea Henry:
You better get it soon
Before I change my mind.
We're through
Jumping the broom,
Jumping the broom,
We can get married
So step aside!
We fin'ly got the right,
A right we used to lack,

Jones Henry:
Let's use that right tonight,
Before they take it back!

Dorothea Henry, Jones Henry:
In the eyes of God,
We were always married,
And even when they split us up,
The light in my heart didn't dim.
In the eyes of God,
We were always married,
Just took some folks a little while
To catch up with Him.

Jones Henry:
It's been a long road,
Back to you,
Too many years,

Dorothea Henry:
Too many miles.
A long, long road,
Back to you.

Jones Henry:
And may I say – amen –

Dorothea Henry, Jones Henry:
We'll never walk that road again!
Time to
Throw out that broom,

Jones Henry:
I'll be your groom,
We can get married!

Dorothea Henry:
And I your bride.

Jones Henry:
We'll get dressed up in style,

Dorothea Henry:
Have our "I do's" get done,

Jones Henry:
Once we get down that aisle,

Dorothea Henry, Jones Henry:
Our life begins as one...
An officially recognized,
Government authorized,
One.

[4] April Will Return Again / Rappahannock (Finale)

Ensemble:
April will return again
To these hills,
To these fields.
April will return.
After four years of Winter
It never saw the light of day,
But April will return again
Some how, some way.

April will rebound again,
In our homes,
On our farms.
April will rebound.
So hard believing that we'll have
Nothing but eternal chill.
But April will rebound again,
It must, it will.

It may take decades,
It may take centuries,
Before it arrives.
But April will return again,
To our land, to our lives.

Rappahannock, Rappahannock,
You got a bad reputation
For being temperamental
Rising fast
And taking all in your wake!

Rappahannock, Rappahannock,
Offer us this one salvation:
For once be calm and gentle,
So much is at stake,
Too much is at stake.

God, keep all softly flowing,
Without a single care.

God, keep all softly flowing,
And grant us strength in knowing,
We're nearly there,
We're nearly there.

Late Afternoon

[5] Otherwise

I got out of bed
on two strong legs,
It might have been
otherwise. I ate
cereal, sweet
milk, ripe, flawless
peach. It might
have been otherwise.
I took the dog uphill
to the Birch wood.
All morning I did
the work I love.

At noon I lay down
with my mate, It might
have been otherwise.
We ate dinner together
at a table with silver
candlesticks. It might
have been otherwise.
I slept in a bed
in a room with paintings
on the walls, and
planned another day
just like this day.
but one day, I know,
it will be otherwise.

Jane Kenyon (1947-1995)

[6] Willi, Home
In memory

Last night, just before sleep, this: a bright daffodil
lying in bed, with the sheet pulled up to its chin.
Willi, did I ever know you? The shine
in the lamplight! of your intelligent glasses,
round and humorous.
Did I ever know myself? When I
start bullshitting I see your eyebrows fly...
This book
is dedicated to Willi,
whom I do not know,

whom I know. The words in my head
this morning
(these words came from an angel):
"It's too late to say goodbye.
And there are never enough goodbyes."
I know: the daffodil
is me. Brave. Willi's an iris. Brave.
Brave. Tall. Home. Deep. Blue.

Jean Valentine (b. 1934)

[7] "X"

*I have decorated this banner to honor my brother.
Our parents did not want his name used publicly.
– from an unnamed child's banner in the AIDS Memorial Quilt*

The boatpond, broken off, looks back at the sky.
I remember looking at you, X, this way,
taking in your red hair, your eyes' light, and I miss you

so. I know,
you are you, and real, standing there in the doorway,
whether dead or whether living, real. -Then Y
said, "Who will remember me three years after I die?
What is there for my eye
to read then?"
The lamb should not have given
his wool.

He was so small. At the end, X, you were so small.
Playing with a stone
on your bedspread at the edge of the ocean.

Jean Valentine

[8] Just Now

My brother opens his eyes when he hears the door click
open downstairs and Joe's steps walking up past the
meowing cat

and the second click of the upstairs door, and then he lifts
his head so that Joe can kiss him. Joe has brought armfuls

of broken magnolia branches in full blossom, and he putters
in the kitchen looking for a big jar to put them in and finds it

And now they tower in the living room, white and sweet, where
John can see them if he leans out from his bed which

he can't do just now, and now Joe is cleaning. What a mess
you've left me, he says, and John is smiling, almost
asleep again.

Marie Howe (b. 1950)

[9] What The Living Do

Johnny, the kitchen sink has been clogged for days,
some utensil probably
fell down there.
And the Drano won't work but smells dangerous, and the
crusty dishes
have piled up

waiting for the plumber I still haven't called. This is the
everyday we
spoke of.

It's winter again: the sky's a deep headstrong blue, and
the sunlight
pours through
the open living room windows because the heats on too
high in here, and
I can't turn it of.

For weeks now, driving, or dropping a bag of groceries in
the street,
the bag breaking,

I've been thinking: This is what the living do. And
yesterday, hurrying
along those
wobbly bricks in the Cambridge sidewalk, spilling my
coffee down my
wrist and sleeve,

I thought it again, and again later, when buying a
hairbrush: This is it.
Parking. Slamming the car door shut in the cold. What
you called
that yearning.

What you finally gave up. We want the spring to come
and the winter to

pass. We want
whoever to call or not call, a letter, a kiss - we want more
and more and
then more of it.

But there are moments, walking, when I catch a glimpse
of myself in the
window glass,
say, the window of the corner video store, and I'm
gripped by a cherishing
so deep

for my own blowing hair, chapped face, and unbuttoned
coat that I'm
speechless:
I am living, I remember you.

Marie Howe

[10] Let Evening Come

Let the light of late afternoon
shine through chinks in the barn, moving
up the bales as the sun moves down.

Let the cricket take up chafing
as a woman takes up her needles
and her yarn. Let evening come.

Let dew collect on the hoe abandoned
in the long grass. Let the stars appear
and the moon disclose her silver horn.

Let the fox go back to its sandy den.
Let the wind die down. Let the shed
go black inside. Let evening come.

To the bottle in the ditch, to the scoop
in the oats, to air in the lung
let evening come.

Let it come, as it will, and don't
be afraid. God does not leave us
comfortless, so let evening come.

Jane Kenyon