

Homage to Mistress Bradford

Out the back door I scuttle ash
and trim plantain from the creek path
where you pace, and you raise your eyes
to my face but do not speak.
You are trying to recall the sound of joy.

Your sorrow comes in feathered waves
like a bird struggling in your throat
and I picture you stretched on the grass
beside the creek, the song of flesh
beneath your silver buttons
forbidden by every dictate of my place.

And I know you fear him and that is why
you dare not speak, and I hear your breath
catch and shallow when he nears,
and I wait daylong for magic words to rise
to your lips, for you to behold me as a man
even if I am your husband's servant.

Lift your eyes in signal if you would join me.
Then step into the shadows where
I am biding to remind you who you are.

(This poem was nominated for the Pushcart Prize.)