

SYLVIA D. HAMILTON
NEXT WITNESS

Lord Dalhousie: slaves by habit and education

My name is Byna. This is my cousin Sylla. Joseph Wilson owns our bodies. He has a farm in Windsor. We pick vegetables in his fields, we pull apples from his trees. In his house we cook, we clean. We tend his children. Heal him when he fall sick. Sylla can't remember the year, I can—1776, when he wrote his death paper. We never be free. When he sleep, we go to his private room, quiet quiet pull open his drawer, find it. When he die, we pass to son Jonathan—forever and ever and ever ... I want to tear it to shreds, set it alight—until I see his name—the witness—a proper judge of this Nova Scotia.

Cousin Sylla's hand stop me. She save my life.

II

Sylla's walk that night was uneventful
at 4am she wanted it that way.
The stillness crept up behind her.
She thought maybe she should have brought Cato
for a last time before Wilson sell him off too.
At ten year, he would still walk any time
his internal clock, timeless
ignoring morning and night.
She was glad them damn heat bugs were gone.
Crickets to others—
heat bugs to her clan.
When young that's what
Uncle called them:
damn heat bugs
make so much noise person can't sleep

So here it was—she walked the path to the barn
guided by the late leaving moon.

Inside to sit, waiting for the sun
for her calm to return
for her body to give itself over
once again to the day.