

NOW LILA KNOWS by Elizabeth Nunez

EXCERPT

The students were not wrong: a professor was in trouble. Lila did not know him, could not know him; she had just arrived at Mayfield. But she was certain the man astride a woman lying on the side-walk was indeed a professor when she heard a female voice shout out to the police: “Don’t hurt him! It’s Dr. Brown, he teaches at the college.”

The remarkable thing was that the man was Black and the woman who lay beneath him was white. Perhaps the difference in their skin color would not have been as remarkable if she had seen such a man and such a woman in such a dangerously suggestive position on the sidewalk of the main street in her hometown. She would have been alarmed, of course. What would have alarmed her would not have been their color but the state of the woman, her face bloodless, almost as pale and gray as the sun-bleached concrete she lay on. But Lila was not in the Caribbean where most of the men and women were dark-skinned, and where people of mixed ethnicities were not uncommon. From the moment the taxi driver had turned out of the airport, however, she had not seen a single person of color, not brown, not Black, not Asian. Nothing changed as they entered the town of Mayfield. Like the taxi driver, the people there were all the same—all of them white, the students too who had rushed past her and again away from her. So what she noticed first, and what was remarkable to her, was that the man, the professor, was Black. And what startled her even more was that the woman trying to come to his aid, the woman begging the police not to hurt him, was Black too.

Two police cars had joined the three others that had screeched down the street behind the flashing lights of the ambulance. Sirens still blasting, the police officers jumped out of their cars, their hands clasped to the guns on their hips, and began pushing back the few students and townspeople who, in spite of the orders from the police, were still hovering nearby.

“Move out! Move out!” the officers shouted. Every-one backed away, some so quickly they stumbled upon each other.

“Don’t hurt him!” the Black woman yelled again. “I know him, I tell you. I can vouch for him.”

Lila was petrified; she could not move. From where she was, hunkered down on her knees, she could see three policemen, their guns drawn, sprinting toward the area where the man was still astride the woman on the sidewalk.

The policeman holding the bullhorn raised it to his mouth. “Get off her!” he shouted to the man. “Get up! Now!”

“Stop!” the Black woman screamed again. “He’s helping her! Stop!”

“Stay back!” the officer yelled at her.

“It’s Ron. Dr. Brown. He teaches at the college,” the woman pleaded.

“Stay back, I’m warning you. Stay back!” the officer yelled again.