

Excerpt

MY MONICELLO - JOCELYN NICOLE JOHNSON

We claimed it first, this little mountain. Me and MaViolet and a scattering of neighbors, all of us fleeing First Street after men came to set our row of tin-roofed homes on fire. The men came at dusk blaring an operatic O say can you see. White heads rose up from dusty Jeeps and dark hair thrashed in a harsh new wind like tattered flags. OURS! the men shouted. Their rifles gleamed as if they'd only just been bought: a megastore militia. Through a hasty breach in MaViolet's blinds, I even saw a boy among them, blond and sneering in a pickup window. Men leapt from back seats, sprang out of truck beds, and rushed toward the faces of our homes. White hands clutched metal canisters, swung torches spilling flames.

Bright shouts, the rising haze of smoke – all that and more roused us out. From our patchy front yards, we saw bodies blur as some of our neighbors charged forward to try to stop them. We saw a teen struck with the butt of a rifle, his temple spraying red. A toddler flailed, diapered and clinging to its mother's hip as she sank knees first to the sidewalk. What we saw in those moments riveted us, and then it set us free.

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