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## Developments

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## Rarity | Ashley Moore

“Do we *seriously* have to climb these?”

Nervous chuckles rang through the mountain air as we crossed the threshold of the cool, dark forest and ventured into the blazing midday sun. Our sneakers, dusty and scuffed with dirt from our hike, thudded onto smooth stone as we approached the last section of our climb up Lookout Mountain. Straight ahead of us was a wall of craggy rock; the footholds were clear, but relatively terrifying all the same. The rocks were all sharp edges, begging to scrape us into pencil shavings if we were to fall.

Despite what one of my friends had just groaned in panic and exhaustion, I was exhilarated. The view from the top was supposedly tear-jerking in its beauty, and I had spent the last hour trekking through the wilderness to reach it. I forged ahead, thinking only of the emotion I hoped to feel when I reached the mountain's peak. I ground my heels into the last phase of our journey. I slipped once; for a heartbreaking moment, grotesque images of my crumpled body paralyzed me. After a moment of horror, I continued to climb. Each scrape against my palm was a battle scar I earned with pride.

Sweating and embarrassingly out of breath, I glimpsed the open sky ahead of me. My heart pounded frantically. What if the view wasn't as awe-inspiring as everyone said it would be? Every blood vessel in my brain threatened to explode; my legs screamed. I scrambled up the last of the rocks and -

My heart shattered.

The sky was almost translucent in its clarity. The sun beat down on me and I realized this was probably the closest I had ever been to it; I took its scorching, blinding heat as a greeting. Welcome, small one. I wasn't expecting you.

What struck me most was the not the sky, however, but the land beneath it. The mountains flowed into one another in a way I could never have imagined. They were folds of fabric draped casually across the earth, and I wondered what was hiding in the pockets. I opened my mouth to comment to the others, my eyes on the soft creases of the world. *It's like fabric*, I wanted

to say. *Look, it's not mountains at all.*

“Wow, it's quiet up here,” someone said behind me.

A sarcastic sigh. “Ah, yes. The sound of undeveloped land.” Laughter. An unexpected tear slid down my hot cheek. They were right.



**Developments | Aubrie Salzman**  
Film Photography