BEYOND THE BAUXITE MINES

BY BARBARA ANN JUCIUS

Benedicta swung her arms slowly with the gate. Cars swept by in front of her, and behind her the Caribbean rolled onto the shore at regular intervals. The beach stretched unhindered in smooth crescents from rocky point to rocky point—a stage, she decided, set and illuminated for the most memorable drama, but devoid of actors. Benedicta looked out at it fiercely, resting her head on her arms.

Suddenly she lifted her head. A sand crab was crawling along the edge of the road, ponderously supporting its red and white body on disjointed legs. She pushed the gate open and knelt beside the crab, obstructing its progress.

In that moment, two bicycles rounded the corner. Benedicta squinted into the sunshine. In the lead was Grant, the yard boy. With him was another, compact, lithe, and heavily bearded. Benedicta surveyed them calmly. She knew that the man with the beard was named Eddy. He worked as a dancer in a nightclub and she’d heard that he could get as low as twenty inches doing the Limbo in his act.

“Look Grant, I caught something for your supper.” The crab tickled her covering hand.

Grant knelt to see what she had captured.

“He goes to the sea from the mountains,” he said, rising and boosting the crab with a hardened toe.

“And where are you going?” Benedicta stood up, smiling.

“To the town from the mountains,” Eddy said.

“You must take me with you.” Benedicta spoke as though voicing a line from a classic, and faced him solemnly, a little dazed at her own exuberance.

With much talk of his responsibility, Grant said she should ride on the back of his bike. Without another word Benedicta perched herself precariously on the rear fender, and threw her arms wildly around him as the bike lurched away over stones. Coasting down the long road that sloped into town, Grant raised his shoulders, as if to dislodge a mosquito from his neck. Benedicta became aware of her arms, and shifted her grip until she held only fists of tan shirt.