

## LA FAMILLE LEDUC

Pitou growling dans le sous-sol  
between the inflatable swimming pool  
and les bicyclettes

always a snowman—a bonne homme de neige  
smiling in the yard  
M. Leduc raking in amber-coloured leaves  
shaped like a squirrel's eyes

Pierre, says Mme Leduc,  
at night, instead of stars  
i see faces  
trying to speak

un voleur! un voleur!  
and he's through the window with son sac  
will someone call un agent de police  
au secours! le telephone sonner

across the hall M. Leduc se baigner  
he's in the salle de bain  
& hears un coup being fired

he lies back in the bath & the water cools  
repeats american words from poems once memorized  
in school

feels the eyes of squirrels watching,  
the even pink of his skin extending far beyond  
the cartooned outline of himself

M. Leduc, M. Leduc  
there's been un vol next door  
we better voyagent on nos summer vacances

in our blue car  
with Pitou our dog avec Jacques et Claire  
we're going to la plage—  
i hope Mme Leduc doesn't get the Mal de Mer!

O Pierre, says Mme Leduc  
when i look out the window  
instead of other houses  
i see only these faces  
trying to speak

the horloge says huit heures  
and it's time for travail  
M. Leduc driving la voiture down la rue des arbres

these trees are shaped like my wife's breasts  
thinks M. Leduc  
Mme Leduc cleaning up from le petit déjeuner  
making things propre that were sale

in the street directing traffic,  
it is the agent de police who a tué le voleur  
with his hands he signals arrêt  
then aller, aller

someday, says M. Leduc  
i will go back to school  
i will be one face in a class of faces  
watching americans & pronouncing their names

dans la sous-sol  
hidden behind les ancien vêtements of the Famille Leduc  
Pitou growls in la langue de dog  
there is nothing to étude de lui

### BY GARY BARWIN

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# Winners:

1987 winners of the President's Prizes for Creative Writing are: **Gary Barwin and Jim Francis**, poetry co-winners; **Michael Cohn**, fiction; **Marc Venema and Jeffery Caulfield**, screenwriting co-winners; and **David Burgess**, playwriting. Judges were bpNichol, Susan Swan, Evan Cameron, and Ron Singer. A reception for the winners will be held Thursday, April 16, 3:00 p.m., in the Vanier Senior Common Room. Everyone welcome.

## Still Life Beneath the Mandrakes

### EXCERPT

The night before our day off, me and Cass went fishing in the river nearby camp. It was good to get away from the thirty-five or forty-odd people who we planted with, ate with, drank with and slept close to in small tent-crammed clearings. It was good to look back over my shoulder and see the red, yellow and green-striped bigtop recede behind the tree-line: black spruce, white pine jack pine red cedar as we rounded the bend in the dust road. Crummies full of drunken planters gone to town.

I turned my head, rested my fibreglass fishing rod over my left shoulder like a soldier packing a rifle and squeezed Cass around her hips—into me. "Don't," she said "That tickles." Face as always when she's pretending to be mad, a serious smile. We kissed.

"Com' on," I said. I pulled her along at a speedwalker's pace, the light-footed walk a planter who's used to climbing slashpiles and mountain overhangs walks when he finds himself on paved sidewalks in big cities. "The sun's sinking fast." Pale.

Pale orange light brushed over the pastel green of the maple and poplar; it trickled through leaves the size of our outspread hands, and needles, like the sound of river over rock touching Cass's face. Orange light, pale on the grey-green of mountains, deepened each crevice with its shadows. Crevices where glaciers once and still bled icy streams down. Because of this, the rock faces seemed larger than they were planting on them in the high noon sun. But the large, neat square swaths left from clearcut logging—some areas as big as two square miles and two or three of them cut across the sloping face of a single mountain and right up to the steep, barren grey—were small now. Up close, in them, was to be dwarfed by a mess of cut and unclaimed logs. Slashpiles ten feet high, and furrows left by plows at least twice as high, ran rabid as the dried up brooks, with the true shape of the land. And if it hadn't been for the long thin lines of trees—firebreaks—separating these patches, the logged hills would be one gigantic rolling naked obscenity. As vacant as the clearcut between Prince George and Prince Rupert: visible to the nude eye from Satellite.

The water got louder. We reached the bottom of the road where the dirt highway crossed, and turned right. The bridge over the rapids was like a wooden railway trestle; on the other side a cliff, almost at right angles to the road that hugged it and to the sky, where a mountain goat crossed, sending small rocks and stones down like a meteor shower.

We slid down to the roar of the Suskwa River. The water was white, the mist cool.

"Where're we going to fish?" Cass said.  
"Up over there, there's a deep pool—just below the point where the three streams meet." I point to where the water was no longer white but a dark green. The green of carved soapstone that has been polished in seal oil.

"Is that where you and Ivan said you saw the squatters?"  
"No. They were trying their luck on the south side of the bridge. No, this is where me and André saw the Indian woman pull up a giant steelhead. When she spotted us coming, she quickly clubbed it, grabbed her fishing pole and ran off into the woods.

God she was fast! and the damned fish musta weighed twenny pounds. Forgot her salmon roe, though."

We walked up to where I'd pointed, over the rock-pierced sandbank. I tied a fisherman's knot around my coho lure. ("Five twists, one loop . . . pull through, and through again the loop you've just made," my grandfather used to tell me. My grandfather knew his knots from having built parachute looms in the Second World War. He was also a great fisherman.)

As I tightened up the knot, I thought about the Indians—Comanche or Hopi, I was too afraid to ask—who me and Cass saw fishing the Skeena on our drive into camp the first day. I remembered the twenty foot poles with gaffing hooks lashed to their ends laid out neatly along the rocks, the river roar, the sun, the smell of the blinding orange fireweed around us and the syrupy pine scent of a distant sawmill: and young Indian men my own age with tanned bare chests and veins standing in strong arms as they strained and grappled with their gaffing poles just to keep them from being ripped out of their hands by the current/undertow. Water white, like the head of a beer, to the bottom—if you could find one.

They could not see the salmon with their eyes; they felt for them the way a blindman taps the sidewalk with his stick, only it was unsolid. More uncertain. And when one Indian could feel a soft scaly form graze over the top of his hook, he'd yank it up suddenly (abruptly), then he'd pull it in hand over hand to get a look at his catch. Sometimes he would come up with nothing—deceived by the will of the coho to get back upriver to where it had been born and given birth to thousands of times over: to relieve its oxygen-starved, rock-worn body of its milt or its roe. But more often than not, the Indian would clench his teeth in a half-smile as his fish broke the surface, the pole quivering like an arrow, and knees bent, thrust it over to his left or his right, onto the rocks. Then he'd strike it once over the head with a small baseball club on leather thonging and dump it, convulsing, into a glacier-cold pool alongside the rest of his catch: ten pound, thirty pound and fifty pound salmon. The pool would redden, then settle back into its usual clarity—the blood sitting on the bottom. The clubbing of the coho brought to mind television replays of the sealhunt from the six o'clock news.

Before too long, the dead salmon would be cleaned of its guts and stripped of its roe. Bright orange roe heaped like tapioca pudding in a separate pile. Fishbait. I remember Cass photographing all of these . . . clic-k—a coho opening and closing its beak-mouth its gills broadening in the air like the opening of a flower, to swallow the sun . . . clic-k—the fisherman posed in the back of a pickup, the hatchback down to proudly show off the catch headed for the reserve . . . sna-p—and Jack, a smile underneath his handlebar moustache, buying a fish from one of them for that night's dinner, though it's illegal for people with Indian status to sell any of their catch to tourists. And now, Cass and myself were fishing the Suskwa, a river made of three separate mountain streams melted from remaining glaciers. This river, in its turn, fed the seaward Skeena.

"Alex, you wanna give me a hand with this? I've never casted an open face reel before."

"Sure. No problem."  
Cass had borrowed André's gear. André, like everyone else on Lyndon's crew save for Cass, had gone into Smithers for a night of drinking, dancing and carrying on. I worried a little, since my crew and Lyndon's had been literally brushing shoulders since the planting season had begun back in Ontario. For the first eight day stretch of this B.C. contract—eighty hours without a day off from climbing over logs, up sixty degree slopes, planting in the little exposed soil left under logging debris and after seven

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