

# EXTINCTION, SPIRIT BEAR ISLAND

BRIAN BURKE

chasing ghosts all summer  
spirit bears tumble white  
down avalanche chutes & between creek beds  
wrestle over salmon spawning in the fall  
the jaw to jaw war or rip of fist-paw  
the scarlet feast that ends a generation  
far from ice cliffs calving

in my dreams  
ghost bears strip the green branches of huckleberries  
red in their slack soft-season mouths  
plunder rotting deadfall for grubs  
they sniff the winds  
shifting  
a mother & two cubs trail through clear cuts  
test the air for alien scents  
a cathedral sky above the treeline receding  
test for the whiff of in-season  
for the retreat of out of season

spirit bears heavy with sleep  
lumber with their last hundred-plus pounds of winter salmon  
seek dens  
snow falling  
perpetual  
between the trees

snow  
fog & bears  
shifting through their ghost season

through more fog  
                    forest  
                            & fog again  
snow-fringed   & spectral   forest fading  
                    the denning season begins  
in white winter light  
a birthing of cubs  
believing  
                    in another spirit bear spring