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