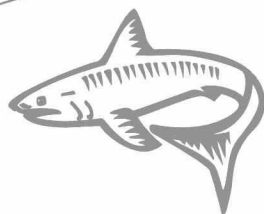


Bear v. Shark

The Novel

CHRIS BACHELDER



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NEW YORK LONDON TORONTO SYDNEY SINGAPORE



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1230 Avenue of the Americas
New York, NY 10020

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events or locales or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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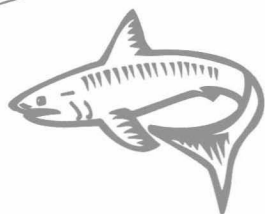
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For my mother, Linda Wilson
For my father, Allen Bachelder
and
For my sister, Lisa Bachelder

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Special thanks to Kate Moulder for all that she gave.

And most of all, thanks to my parents and sister for their love, trust, and support. I shut up and took it all.

Lord Clifford says, "The smallest worm will turn being trodden upon."

—*King Henry VI*, Part III

Kurt Vonnegut Jr. says, "This is meant to be optimistic, I think, but I have to tell you that a worm can be stepped on in such a way that it can't possibly turn after you remove your foot."

—Address to graduating class at
Bennington College

Bear v. Shark: The Preface

Bear v. Shark: The Novel is based on a *true story*.

Or, rather: It is *based on* a true story.

Imagine a true story. Imagine this true story in a solid, middle-class neighborhood, modest and truthful. Imagine its joists, its beams, the steady, cautious slope of its shingled roof. Imagine its crisp, righteous corners, those near-perfect 90-degree angles, knowing as you do that a perfect 90-degree angle—like a perfect circle or a perfect butt—doesn't really exist in the Real World, but knowing that these angles have aspired to perfection, nonetheless (or else what's a heaven for?). Imagine the clean closets, the sensible floor plan, the utter lack of luxury or flourish. Imagine that the materials are first-rate, chosen and guaranteed by men who care about doing a job right dammit. Imagine that everything checks out, yes the basement is unfinished and dank, but it's the truth, take it or leave it.

Good.

Now, imagine, based atop this monument to forthrightness and plain dealing, imagine a ramshackle unit constructed willy-nilly, catch-as-catch-can, higgledy-piggledy, all pastiched together with hyphens and the thin, colorful threads of ideas, a motley edifice, part bungalow, part high-rise, part rambler, there's stucco and brick and wood and vinyl siding, not unplanned, *not* unplanned, *charming* or *interesting* being the absolute best way to describe this place if you're standing on the bushwhacked front lawn of Truth, not unstable in its own right but perched upon, based on, the cautious, steady slope of the shingled roof of Truth and teetering, teetering, the whole damn

situation fixing to collapse into tainted wreckage, in which wreckage lie nearly equal parts Truth and Lie, Irony and That Which Is Not Irony, such that context and purity are forever lost, and the pieces are indistinguishable.

How shall I regard that naily 2 by 4? Is it a metaplank, a super-plank, a plank self-referential? A complex and ambiguous plank, and all the more so for its apparent simplicity, its garish honesty regarding its own dimensions? Has anyone even bothered to measure the 2 by 4? In short: Is this a postmodern stick?

Say, are we to look *through* or *at* that cracked window?

Linoleum: Authenticity or the death of authenticity?

Imagine that.

and now this . . .

Part One

***The Broad, Flapping
American Ear***

