

## Wilderness House Literary Review 5/2

*John Hanson Mitchell*  
**The Bear**

### Chapter Four

*John Thomas Indian*  
**Journal Entry: June, 22 1662**

Nashope is our next Praying Town, a place of much Affliction... This place lying in the Road-Way which the Mauquaogs haunted, was much molested by them, and was one year wholly deserted; but this year the People have taken courage and dwell upon it again.

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...the Teacher of the place is John Thomas, a godly understanding Christian, well esteemed of by the English: his Father was killed by the Mauquaogs, shot to death as he was in the River doing his Eele-wyers.

John Eliot

TO THE RIGHT WORSHIPFUL THE COMMISIONERS UNDER  
HIS MAJESTIES' GREAT-SEAL, FOR PROPAGATION OF THE GOSPIL  
AMONGST THE POOR BLIND INDIANS IN NEW-ENGLAND [1670]

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There was an old carriage road on the north side of Scratch Flat that led down ton a trail along the brook. I was walking there one day not too far from the place where Tom's cabin seemed to be located when I saw a couple of men standing around a tripod. They turned out to be surveyors for the new highway that everyone was talking about that summer.

"This is private property," I told them, "You can't survey this part."

"We only survey what they tell us, cutey," one of them said without looking up. He was a weather-beaten man of about fifty with dark glasses and a cigarette pack rolled into the sleeve of his white tee shirt.

"This is part of the Enders farm," I said. "You got to talk to old man Enders before you come on here, and I can tell you now he doesn't like people."

"Enders must have sold it to the state," the surveyor said. "This is the spot."

"Enders never sold a thing in his life, nor threw a thing away."

"Well then the state took it," the surveyor said.

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The other man was a man about my age with a narrow face and sad, not unsympathetic eyes. He shrugged when I looked over to him.

"Just helping out," he said apologetically.

"This is going to be the actual route for the highway, right here?" I asked.

"This is the place," the older man said.

"What do they do, clear all the trees and stuff?"

"You got it."

"They clear it all out," the younger man said. "It's like a remake of the world. You won't know this place when they're done."

"I'll be a damn site better," the man at the scope said. He straightened and wrote something down in a notebook. Then he lit a cigarette.

"What if there were something valuable here?" I asked.

"Like what?" the surveyor said.

"I don't know. Like gold."

The surveyor snorted. "No gold here, honey. This here is just the pecker woods. And if there was gold, the state'd take it. It's all theirs' now."

I looked over at the young man. He shrugged.

"I've got to find out about this," I said. "I didn't know this was going to happen."

"Calm down sweetheart. This doesn't concern you. And what are you doing out here by yourself anyway?"

Sad Eyes shrugged again. "Not my fault," he said.

"Honey, if you know what's good for you, just go home. We'll take care of this," the older man said.

"You want to know the trouble?" I said, "I'll tell you the trouble. The trouble is that no one has any respect for anyone or anything. That's it."

The older man shrugged and looked through his scope. Then he told the other man to walk down the line to the crew at the other end.

"As far as I can tell, sweetheart, there was no trouble until you came along. Why don't you run along home and get back to your sewing."

His helper walked off through the woods to the south, towards the Great Road. I followed him through the woods and caught up with him before he reached the other people in the crew.

"You work for this brute?" I asked.

"Yeah. Just summer work. I don't know what I'm doing. I just need the money. You live around here?" he asked.

"Yes, over the hill. You better watch out here. What's your name?"

"Henry. What do you mean, better watch out."

"It's not safe around here."

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### *Journal Entry 1962:*

Tom Dublet says this about the Big and Little Dippers: The three stars of the tail of the constellation the Great Bear are in fact Pawtucket hunters pursuing the two bears across the sky. The first hunter, the star just behind the big bear, carries a bow and arrow. The second hunter carries a pot to cook the bears. The third carries firewood. The hunt begins in early spring about the time when the alewives come up the stream. It is a long hunt, a quest, epic in proportion, and it never ends.

All summer the Pawtuckets chase the bears, first up, then down, all in a great circle. By late summer they begin to close in. By autumn the closest hunter is near enough to shoot. He lets fly with his arrows; the struck bears turn upside down. More arrows fly out, they strike again and all across the sky the sacred blood falls. Some comes to earth. It turns the leaves a scarlet red.

Do they catch the bears in winter? Perhaps. But the bear is eternal. You cannot kill such a being, and by early spring they rise again, the hunters still on their track.

Grandpa tells a different story: He says that Callisto, who was the daughter of the King of Arcadia and a member of the all woman hunting band of Artemis, was once seduced by Zeus. Hera discovered the liaison and so Zeus changed Callisto into a bear to protect her.

One day Callisto's son Arcas was out hunting when he came across a large bear. Seeing the hunter, the huge bear reared up, spread its paws and waddled forward. Arcas drew out an arrow and fitted it to his bow. He heaved back the bowstring as the great bear approached. In fact it was his own mother, Callisto, rearing up to greet him. But Zeus, ever watchful, dashed down and changed Arcas into a bear. Then he hurled the two bears into the sky to protect them from Hera. She got her revenge though. She persuaded Poseidon to forbid the bears to descend into the sea to rest, as do the other stars.

Aristotle says that of all the animals, the bears are the only ones that dare venture into the far north.

Homer says the Bear keeps watch from his northern den for fear of a sudden attack from the Hunter Orion. He says they never sink into the ocean.

But all this is later, Grandpa says. He claims that the story evolved from ancient Arcadian bear cult in which Callisto was a she bear and Arcas was her son. In earlier tales, Arcas, the bearchild is sacrificed at a feast of the clan.

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Behind his mask, Tom's black eyes were darting across the walls. Mingo was pacing around the cabin, Mary Louise was singing her ditties, Bulkley was swaying comfortably by her side. It was night and the fire was low, stew bubbling in the iron pot.

I was trying to tell Tom about the surveyors near his cabin site but no one was listening.

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"I think I can remember my father and uncle," Mingo said, pacing nervously. "And there was some spot that was not our village that I knew, or dreamed I knew, and there was a fat man there with a blue coat and big white buttons, black his skin, hair crinkly white, yes, and he was talking to white man, I recall, the first white man I ever did see, so white like the deathghost what used to stalk 'round the stockade of my village, the one that grandmere and the olding men would sing chants against, so white he was, and all I ever knew was that fear like a rat inside me. Swoosh." He darted his arm forward as if throwing a spear. "E'en he set me free, old man Cogswell, I shan't go back to that rancid land again, not ever."

"Mak my bed soon," Mary-Louise sang to Bulkeley, "For I'm a weary wi' hunting and I fain wuld lie doon."

She brushed his hair with her fingers.

"But we, poor devils, all chained up," Mingo said. "little ones stayed by their mothers and somewhere there, was my uncle and my father, and they were all of them broken and boney and beshitted and what was I but a child hard by his ma, children don't know anything else. It's better here, say I. Someday I buy my freedom from the Old Man like you say. Mingo's moved to Boston, eats oysters and drinks brandy every night of the year."

Tom had been distracted all evening. He didn't seem to care that we had come. His eyes were flying in all directions, and he stood up and began backing against the wall as if something else were in the cabin with us that only he could see. But he kept up that single monotonous thumping and Mary-Louise sang on, and like a great tame dog, Bulkeley lolled against her, nodding sleepily.

"Eels and eels broth mither, mak my bed soon..." she sang.

"Tom where are you?" I said. "Will you please listen to me. What's in here with us?"

He didn't answer. There was a fear in his eyes now, you could see the whites rolling, and he was beginning to make choking noises. But he kept his tambourine going steadily, as if he had no choice. Then he began to quiver and, still tapping his drum feebly, he sat down. Convulsions surged through him, he slouched forward, coughing, the jaws of his bear mask stretched open desperately, then he arched his back and shot over onto the floor of the cabin, bear mouth wide open, still trying to drum. I snatched the tambourine from him and threw it out the open door into the night, but it was too late. Suddenly we were no longer on Scratch Flat.