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Last Night in Twisted River

Written by John Irving

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LAST NIGHT IN TWISTED RIVER

John Irving



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I had a job in the great north woods
Working as a cook for a spell
But I never did like it all that much
And one day the ax just fell.

—Bob Dylan, 'Tangled Up in Blue'

I
COOS COUNTY, NEW HAMPSHIRE, 1954

1
Under the Logs

The young Canadian, who could not have been more than fifteen, had hesitated too long. For a frozen moment, his feet had stopped moving on the floating logs in the basin above the river bend; he'd slipped entirely underwater before anyone could grab his outstretched hand. One of the loggers had reached for the youth's long hair – the older man's fingers groped around in the frigid water, which was thick, almost soupy, with sloughed-off slabs of bark. Then two logs collided hard on the would-be rescuer's arm, breaking his wrist. The carpet of moving logs had completely closed over the young Canadian, who never surfaced; not even a hand or one of his boots broke out of the brown water.

Out on a logjam, once the key log was pried loose, the river drivers had to move quickly and continually; if they paused for even a second or two, they would be pitched into the torrent. In a river drive, death among moving logs could occur from a crushing injury, before you had a chance to drown – but drowning was more common.

From the riverbank, where the cook and his twelve-year-old son could hear the cursing of the logger whose wrist had been broken, it was immediately apparent that someone was in more serious trouble than the would-be rescuer, who'd freed his injured arm and had managed to regain his footing on the flowing logs. His fellow river driver ignored

him; they moved with small, rapid steps toward shore, calling out the lost boy's name. The loggers ceaselessly prodded with their pike poles, directing the floating logs ahead of them. The rivermen were, for the most part, picking the safest way ashore, but to the cook's hopeful son it seemed that they might have been trying to create a gap of sufficient width for the young Canadian to emerge. In truth, there were now only intermittent gaps between the logs. The boy who'd told them his name was 'Angel Pope, from Toronto,' was that quickly gone.

'Is it *Angel*?' the twelve-year-old asked his father. This boy, with his dark-brown eyes and intensely serious expression, could have been mistaken for Angel's younger brother, but there was no mistaking the family resemblance that the twelve-year-old bore to his ever-watchful father. The cook had an aura of controlled apprehension about him, as if he routinely anticipated the most unforeseen disasters, and there was something about his son's seriousness that reflected this; in fact, the boy looked so much like his father that several of the woodsmen had expressed their surprise that the son didn't also walk with his dad's pronounced limp.

The cook knew too well that indeed it was the young Canadian who had fallen under the logs. It was the cook who'd warned the loggers that Angel was too green for the river drivers' work; the youth should not have been trying to free a logjam. But probably the boy had been eager to please, and maybe the rivermen hadn't noticed him at first.

In the cook's opinion, Angel Pope had also been too green (and too clumsy) to be working in the vicinity of the main blade in a sawmill. That was strictly the sawyer's territory – a highly skilled position in the mills. The planer operator was a relatively skilled position, too, though not particularly dangerous.

The more dangerous and less skilled positions included working on the log deck, where logs were rolled into the

mill and onto the saw carriage, or unloading logs from the trucks. Before the advent of mechanical loaders, the logs were unloaded by releasing trip bunks on the sides of the trucks – this allowed an entire load to roll off a truck at once. But the trip bunks sometimes failed to release; the men were occasionally caught under a cascade of logs while they were trying to free a bunk.

As far as the cook was concerned, Angel shouldn't have been in *any* position that put the boy in close proximity to moving logs. But the lumberjacks had been as fond of the young Canadian as the cook and his son had been, and Angel had said he was bored working in the kitchen. The youth had wanted more physical labor, and he liked the outdoors.

The repeated *thunk-thunk* of the pike poles, poking the logs, was briefly interrupted by the shouts of the rivermen who had spotted Angel's pike pole – more than fifty yards from where the boy had vanished. The fifteen-foot pole was floating free of the log drive, out where the river currents had carried it away from the logs.

The cook could see that the river driver with the broken wrist had come ashore, carrying his pike pole in his good hand. First by the familiarity of his cursing, and only secondarily by the logger's matted hair and tangled beard, did the cook realize that the injured man was Ketchum – no neophyte to the treachery of a log drive.

It was April – not long after the last snowmelt and the start of mud season – but the ice had only recently broken up in the river basin, the first logs falling through the ice upstream of the basin, on the Dummer ponds. The river was ice-cold and swollen, and many of the lumberjacks had heavy beards and long hair, which would afford them some scant protection from the blackflies in mid-May.

Ketchum lay on his back on the riverbank like a beached bear. The moving mass of logs flowed past him. It appeared as if the log drive were a life raft, and the loggers who were

still out on the river seemed like castaways at sea – except that the sea, from one moment to the next, turned from greenish brown to bluish black. The water in Twisted River was richly dyed with tannins.

'*Shit*, Angel!' Ketchum shouted from his back. 'I said, 'Move your feet, Angel. You have to keep moving your *feet*!' Oh, shit.'

The vast expanse of logs had been no life raft for Angel, who'd surely drowned or been crushed to death in the basin above the river bend, although the lumberjacks (Ketchum among them) would follow the log drive at least to where Twisted River poured into the Pontook Reservoir at Dead Woman Dam. The Pontook Dam on the Androscoggin River had created the reservoir; once the logs were let loose in the Androscoggin, they would next encounter the sorting gaps outside Milan. In Berlin, the Androscoggin dropped two hundred feet in three miles; two paper mills appeared to divide the river at the sorting gaps in Berlin. It was not inconceivable to imagine that young Angel Pope, from Toronto, was on his way there.

Come nightfall, the cook and his son were still attempting to salvage leftovers, for tomorrow's meals, from the scores of untouched dinners in the small settlement's dining lodge – the cookhouse in the so-called town of Twisted River, which was barely larger and only a little less transient than a logging camp. Not long ago, the only dining lodge on a river drive hadn't been a lodge at all. There once was a traveling kitchen that had been permanently built onto a truck body, and an adjacent truck on which a modular dining hall could be taken down and reassembled – this was when the trucks used to perpetually move camp to another site on Twisted River, wherever the loggers were working next.

In those days, except on the weekends, the rivermen rarely went back to the town of Twisted River to eat or sleep. The

camp cook had often cooked in a tent. Everything had to be completely portable; even the sleeping shelters were built onto truck bodies.

Now nobody knew what would become of the less-than-thriving town of Twisted River, which was situated partway between the river basin and the Dummer ponds. The sawmill workers and their families lived there, and the logging company maintained bunkhouses for the more transient woodsmen, who included not only the French Canadian itinerants but most of the river drivers and the other loggers. The company also maintained a better equipped kitchen, an *actual* dining lodge – the aforementioned cookhouse – for the cook and his son. But for how much longer? Not even the owner of the logging company knew.

The lumber industry was in transition; it would one day be possible for every worker in the logging business to work from home. The logging camps (and even the slightly less marginal settlements like Twisted River) were dying. The wanigans themselves were disappearing; those curious shelters for sleeping and eating and storing equipment had not only been mounted on trucks, on wheels, or on crawler tracks, but they were often attached to rafts or boats.

The Indian dishwasher – she worked for the cook – had long ago told the cook's young son that *wanigan* was from an Abenaki word, leading the boy to wonder if the dishwasher herself was from the Abenaki tribe. Perhaps she just happened to know the origin of the word, or she'd merely claimed to know it. (The cook's son went to school with an Indian boy who'd told him that *wanigan* was of Algonquian origin.)

While it lasted, the work during a river drive was from dawn till dark. It was the protocol in a logging operation to feed the men four times a day. In the past, when the wanigans couldn't get close to a river site, the two midday meals had been trekked to the drivers. The first and last

meal were served in the base camp – nowadays, in the dining lodge. But out of their affection for Angel, tonight many of the loggers had missed their last meal in the cookhouse. They'd spent the evening following the log drive, until the darkness had driven them away – not only the darkness, but also the men's growing awareness that none of them knew if Dead Woman Dam was open. From the basin below the town of Twisted River, the logs – probably with Angel among them – might already have flowed into the Pontook Reservoir, but not if Dead Woman Dam was closed. And if the Pontook Dam *and* Dead Woman were open, the body of the young Canadian would be headed pell-mell down the Androscoggin. No one knew better than Ketchum that there would likely be no finding Angel there.

The cook could tell when the river drivers had stopped searching – from the kitchen's screen door, he could hear them leaning their pike poles against the cookhouse. A few of the tired searchers found their way to the dining lodge after dark; the cook didn't have the heart to turn them away. The hired help had all gone home – everyone but the Indian dishwasher, who stayed late most nights. The cook, whose difficult name was Dominic Baciagalupo – or 'Cookie,' as the lumberjacks routinely called him – made the men a late supper, which his twelve-year-old son served.

'Where's Ketchum?' the boy asked his dad.

'He's probably getting his arm fixed,' the cook replied.

'I'll bet he's hungry,' the twelve-year-old said, 'but Ketchum is wicked tough.'

'He's impressively tough for a drinking man,' Dominic agreed, but he was thinking that maybe Ketchum wasn't tough enough for *this*. Losing Angel Pope might be hardest on Ketchum, the cook thought, because the veteran logger had taken the young Canadian under his wing. He'd looked after the boy, or he had tried to.

Ketchum had the blackest hair and beard – the charred-black color of charcoal, blacker than a black bear's fur. He'd

been married young – and more than once. He was estranged from his children, who had grown up and gone their own ways. Ketchum lived year-round in one of the bunkhouses, or in any of several run-down hostelries, if not in a wanigan of his own devising – namely, in the back of his pickup truck, where he had come close to freezing to death on those winter nights when he'd passed out, dead drunk. Yet Ketchum had kept Angel away from alcohol, and he'd kept not a few of the older women at the so-called dance hall away from the young Canadian, too.

'You're too young, Angel,' the cook had heard Ketchum tell the youth. 'Besides, you can catch things from those ladies.'

Ketchum would know, the cook had thought. Dominic knew that Ketchum had done more damage to himself than breaking his wrist in a river drive.

The steady hiss and intermittent flickering of the pilot lights on the gas stove in the cookhouse kitchen – an old Garland with two ovens and eight burners, and a flame-blackened broiler above – seemed perfectly in keeping with the lamentations of the loggers over their late supper. They had been charmed by the lost boy, whom they'd adopted as they would a stray pet. The cook had been charmed, too. Perhaps he saw in the unusually cheerful teenager some future incarnation of his twelve-year-old son – for Angel had a welcoming expression and a sincere curiosity, and he exhibited none of the withdrawn sullenness that appeared to afflict the few young men his age in a rough and rudimentary place like Twisted River.

This was all the more remarkable because the youth had told them that he'd recently run away from home.

'You're Italian, aren't you?' Dominic Baciagalupo had asked the boy.

'I'm not from Italy, I don't speak Italian – you're not much of an Italian if you come from Toronto,' Angel had answered.

The cook had held his tongue. Dominic knew a little about *Boston* Italians; some of them seemed to have issues regarding how Italian they were. And the cook knew that Angel, in the old country, might have been an Angelo. (When Dominic had been a little boy, his mother had called him Angelù – in her Sicilian accent, this sounded like an-geh-LOO.)

But after the accident, nothing with Angel Pope's written name could be found; among the boy's few belongings, not a single book or letter identified him. If he'd had any identification, it had gone into the river basin with him – probably in the pocket of his dungarees – and if they never located the body, there would be no way to inform Angel's family, or whoever the boy had run away from.

Legally or not, and with or without proper papers, Angel Pope had made his way across the Canadian border to New Hampshire. Not the way it was usually done, either – Angel hadn't come from Quebec. He'd made a point of arriving from Ontario – he was not a French Canadian. The cook hadn't once heard Angel speak a word of French *or* Italian, and the French Canadians at the camp had wanted nothing to do with the runaway boy – apparently, they didn't like English Canadians. Angel, for his part, kept his distance from the French; he didn't appear to like the Québécois any better than they liked him.

Dominic had respected the boy's privacy; now the cook wished he knew more about Angel Pope, and where he'd come from. Angel had been a good-natured and fair-minded companion for the cook's twelve-year-old son, Daniel – or Danny, as the loggers and the sawmill men called the boy.

Almost every male of working age in Twisted River knew the cook and his son – some women, too. Dominic had needed to know a number of women – mainly, to help him look after his son – for the cook had lost his wife, Danny's young mother, a long-seeming decade ago.

Dominic Baciagalupo believed that Angel Pope had had some experience with kitchen work, which the boy had done awkwardly but uncomplainingly, and with an economy of movement that must have been born of familiarity – despite his professed boredom with cooking – related chores, and his penchant for cutting himself on the cutting board.

Moreover, the young Canadian was a reader; he'd borrowed many books that had belonged to Dominic's late wife, and he often read aloud to Daniel. lt was Ketchum's opinion that Angel had read Robert Louis Stevenson to young Dan 'to excess' – not only *Kidnapped* and *Treasure Island* but his unfinished deathbed novel, *St. Ives*, which Ketchum said should have died with the author. At the time of the accident on the river, Angel had been reading *The Wrecker* to Danny. (Ketchum had not yet weighed in with his opinion of *that* novel.)

Well, whatever Angel Pope's background had been, he'd had some schooling, clearly – more than most of the French Canadian woodsmen the cook had known. (More than most of the sawmill workers and the *local* woodsmen, too.)

'Why did Angel have to die?' Danny asked his dad. The twelve-year-old was helping his father wipe down the dining tables after the late-arriving loggers had gone off to bed, or perhaps to drink. And although she often kept herself busy in the cookhouse quite late into the night, at least well past Danny's bedtime, the Indian dishwasher had finished with her chores; by now, she'd driven her truck back to town.

'Angel didn't have to die, Daniel—it was an *avoidable* accident.' The cook's vocabulary often made reference to *avoidable* accidents, and his twelve-year-old son was over-familiar with his father's grim and fatalistic thoughts on human fallibility – the recklessness of youth, in particular. 'He was too green to be out on a river drive,' the cook said, as if that were all there was to it.

Danny Baciagalupo knew his dad's opinion of *all* the things Angel, or any boy that age, was too green to do. The cook also would have wanted to keep Angel far away from a peavey. (The peavey's most important feature was the hinged hook that made it possible to roll a heavy log by hand.)

According to Ketchum, the 'old days' had been more perilous. Ketchum claimed that working with the horses, pulling the scoots out of the winter woods, was risky work. In the winter, the lumberjacks tramped up into the mountains. They'd cut down the trees and (not that long ago) used horses to pull the timber out, one log at a time. The scoots, or wheelless drays, were dragged like sleds on the frozen snow, which not even the horses' hooves could penetrate because the sled ruts on the horse-haul roads were iced down every night. Then the snowmelt and mud season came, and – 'back then,' as Ketchum would say – all the work in the woods was halted.

But even this was changing. Since the new logging machinery could work in muddy conditions and haul much longer distances to improved roads, which could be used in all seasons, mud season itself was becoming less of an issue – and horses were giving way to crawler tractors.

The bulldozers made it possible to build a road right to a logging site, where the wood could be hauled out by truck. The trucks moved the wood to a more central drop point on a river, or on a pond or lake; in fact, highway transport would very soon supplant the need for river drives. Gone were the days when a snubbing winch had been used to ease the horses down the steeper slopes. 'The teams could slide on their haunches,' Ketchum had told young Dan. (Ketchum rated oxen highly, for their steady footing in deep snow, but oxen had never been widely used.)

Gone, too, was railroad logging in the woods; it came to an end in the Pemigewasset Valley in '48 – the same year one of Ketchum's cousins had been killed by a Shay

locomotive at the Livermore Falls paper mill. The Shay weighed fifty tons and had been used to pull the last of the rails from the woods. The former railroad beds made for firm haul roads for the trucks in the 1950s, although Ketchum could still remember a murder on the Beebe River Railroad – back when he'd been the teamster for a bobsled loaded with prime virgin spruce behind a four-horse rig. Ketchum had been the teamster on one of the early Lombard steam engines, too – the one steered by a horse. The horse had turned the front sled runners, and the teamster sat at the front of the log hauler; later models replaced the horse and teamster with a helmsman at a steering wheel. Ketchum had been a helmsman, too, Danny Baciagalupo knew – clearly, Ketchum had done everything.

The old Lombard log-hauler roads around Twisted River were truck roads now, although there were derelict Lombards abandoned in the area. (There is one still standing upright in Twisted River, and another one, tipped on its side, in the logging camp in West Dummer – or Paris, as the settlement was usually called, after the Paris Manufacturing Company of Paris, Maine.)

Phillips Brook ran to Paris and the Ammonoosuc – and into the Connecticut River. The rivermen drove hardwood sawlogs along Phillips Brook to Paris, and some pulpwood, too. The sawmill in Paris was strictly a hardwoods operation – the manufacturing company in Maine made toboggans – and the logging camp in Paris, with its steam-powered sawmill, had converted the former horse hovel to a machine shop. The mill manager's house was also there, together with a seventy-five-man bunkhouse and a mess hall, and some rudimentary family housing – not to mention an optimistically planted apple orchard and a schoolhouse. That there was no schoolhouse in the town of Twisted River, nor had anyone been optimistic enough about the settlement's staying power to plant any apple trees, gave rise to the opinion (held chiefly in Paris) that the logging camp

was a more civilized community, and less temporary, than Twisted River.

At the height of land between the two outposts, no fortune-teller would have been foolish enough to predict success or longevity for either settlement. Danny Baciagalupo had heard Ketchum declare certain doom for the logging camp in Paris *and* for Twisted River, but Ketchum 'suffered no progress gladly' – as the cook had cautioned his son. Dominic Baciagalupo was not a storyteller; the cook routinely cast doubt on some of Ketchum's stories. 'Daniel, don't be in too big a hurry to buy into the Ketchum version,' Dominic would say.

Had Ketchum's aunt, an accountant, truly been killed by a toppled stack of edging in the lathe mill in Milan? 'I'm not sure there is, or ever was, a lathe mill in Milan, Daniel,' the cook had warned his son. And according to Ketchum, one thunderstorm had killed four people in the sawmill at the outlet dam to Dummer Pond – the bigger and uppermost of the Dummer ponds. Allegedly, lightning had struck the log carriage. 'The dogger and the setter, not to mention the sawyer holding the band-saw levers *and* the takeaway man, were killed by a single bolt,' Ketchum had told Danny. Witnesses had watched the entire mill burn to the ground.

'I'm surprised that another of Ketchum's relatives wasn't among the victims, Daniel,' was all that Dominic would say.

Indeed, another of Ketchum's cousins had fallen into the slasher in a pulpwood slasher mill; an uncle had been brained by a flying four-foot log at a cut-up mill, where they'd been cutting long spruce logs into pulpwood length. And there'd once been a floating steam donkey on Dummer Pond; it was used to bunch logs for the sawmill entrance at the outlet dam, but the engine had exploded. A man's ear was found frozen in the spring snow on the island in the pond, where all the trees had been singed by the explosion. Later, Ketchum said, an ice fisherman used the ear for bait in the Pontook Reservoir.

'More relatives of yours, I assume?' the cook had asked.

'Not that I'm aware of,' Ketchum had replied.

Ketchum claimed to have known the 'legendary asshole' who'd constructed a horse hovel upstream of the bunkhouse and mess hall at Camp Five. When all the men in the logging camp got sick, they strung up the purported legend in a network of bridles in the horse hovel above the manure pit – 'until the asshole fainted from the fumes.'

'You can see why Ketchum misses the old days, Daniel,' the cook had said to his son.

Dominic Baciagalupo knew some stories – most of them not for telling. And what stories the cook could tell his son didn't capture young Dan's imagination the way Ketchum's stories did. There was the one about the bean hole outside the cook's tent on the Chickwolnepy, near Success Pond. In the aforementioned old days, on a river drive, Dominic had dug a bean hole, four feet across, and started the beans cooking in the ground at bedtime, covering the hole with hot ashes and earth. At 5 A.M., when it would be piping hot, he planned to dig the covered pot out of the ground for breakfast. But a French Canadian had wandered out of the sleeping wanigan (probably to take a pee) when it was still dark; he was barefoot when he fell into the bean hole, burning both his feet.

'That's it? That's the whole story?' Danny had asked his dad.

'Well, it's kind of a *cooking* story, I guess,' Ketchum had said, to be kind. Ketchum would tease Dominic on the subject that spaghetti was replacing baked beans and pea soup on the upper Androscoggin.

'We never used to have so many *Italian* cooks around,' Ketchum would say, winking at Danny.

'You're telling me you'd rather have baked beans and pea soup than pasta?' the cook asked his old friend.

'Your dad is a *touchy* little fella, isn't he?' Ketchum would say to Danny, winking again. 'Constipated Christ!' Ketchum

had more than once declared to Dominic. 'Are you ever *touchy*!'

Now it was that mud-season, swollen-river time of year again. There'd been a strong surge of water coming through one of the sluice gates – what Ketchum called a 'driving head,' probably from the sluice gate at the east end of Little Dummer Pond – and a green kid from Toronto, whom they barely knew, had been swept away.

For only a while longer would the loggers increase the volume of water in Twisted River. They did this by building sluice dams on the tributary streams flowing into the main driving river; the water above these dams was released in the spring, adding torrents of water volume to a log drive. The pulpwood was piled in these streams (and on the riverbanks) during the winter and then sluiced into Twisted River on the water released from the dams. If this was soon after the snowmelt, the water ran fast, and the riverbanks were gouged by the moving logs.

In the cook's opinion, there were not enough bends in Twisted River to account for the river's name. The river ran straight down out of the mountains; there were only two bends in it. But to the loggers, particularly those old-timers who'd named the river, these two bends were bad enough to cause some treacherous logjams every spring – especially upstream of the basin, nearer the Dummer ponds. At both bends in the river, the trapped logs usually needed to be pried loose by hand; at the bend upriver, where the current was strongest, no one as green as Angel would have been permitted out on a logjam.

But Angel had perished in the basin, where the river was comparatively calm. The logs themselves made the water in the river basin choppy, but the currents were fairly moderate. And at both bends, the more massive jams were broken up with dynamite, which Dominic Baciagalupo deplored. The blasting wreaked havoc with the pots and

pans and dangling utensils in the cookhouse kitchen; in the dining hall, the sugar bowls and the ketchup bottles slid off the tables. 'If your dad is not a storyteller, Danny, he is definitely not a dynamite man,' was how Ketchum had put it to the boy.

From the basin below the town of Twisted River, the water ran downstream to the Androscoggin. In addition to the Connecticut, the big log-driving rivers in northern New Hampshire were the Ammonoosuc and the Androscoggin: Those rivers were documented killers.

But some rivermen had drowned, or been crushed to death, in the relatively short stretch of rapids between Little Dummer Pond and the town of Twisted River – and in the river basin, too. Angel Pope wasn't the first; nor would the young Canadian be the last.

And in the compromised settlements of Twisted River and Paris, a fair share of sawmill workers had been maimed, or had even lost their lives – no small number of them, unfortunately, because of the fights they got into with the loggers in certain bars. There weren't enough women – that was usually what started the fights – although Ketchum had maintained that there weren't enough bars. There were no bars in Paris, anyway, and only married women lived in the logging camp there.

In Ketchum's opinion, that combination put the men from Paris on the haul road to Twisted River almost every night. 'They never should have built a bridge over Phillips Brook,' Ketchum also maintained.

'You see, Daniel,' the cook said to his son. 'Ketchum has once again demonstrated that progress will eventually kill us all.'

'Catholic thinking will kill us first, Danny,' Ketchum would say. 'Italians are Catholics, and your dad is Italian – and so are you, of course, although neither you nor your dad is very Italian, or very Catholic in your thinking, either. I am mainly speaking of the French Canadians when I refer

to Catholic thinking. French Canadians, for example, have so many children that they sometimes number them instead of name them.'

'Dear God,' Dominic Baciagalupo said, shaking his head.

'Is that true?' young Dan asked Ketchum.

'What kind of name is Vingt Dumas?' Ketchum asked the boy.

'Roland and Joanne Dumas do not have twenty children!' the cook cried.

'Not together, maybe,' Ketchum replied. 'So what was little Vingt? A slip of the tongue?'

Dominic was shaking his head again. 'What?' Ketchum asked him.

'I promised Daniel's mother that the boy would get a proper education,' the cook said.

'Well, I'm just making an effort to *enhance* Danny's education,' Ketchum reasoned.

'*Enhance*,' Dominic repeated, still shaking his head. 'Your vocabulary, Ketchum,' the cook began, but he stopped himself; he said nothing further.

Neither a storyteller nor a dynamite man, Danny Baciagalupo thought of his father. The boy loved his dad dearly, but there was also a habit the cook had, and his son had noticed it – Dominic often didn't finish his thoughts. (Not out loud, anyway.)

Not counting the Indian dishwasher – and a few of the sawmill workers' wives, who helped the cook in the kitchen – there were rarely any women eating in the cookhouse, except on the weekends, when some of the men ate with their families. That alcohol was not permitted was the cook's rule. Dinner (or 'supper,' as the older rivermen used to eating in the wanigans called it) was served as soon as it was dark, and the majority of loggers and sawmill men were sober when they ate their evening meal, which they consumed quickly and with no intelligible conversation – even

on weekends, or when the loggers weren't engaged in the river drives.

As the men had usually come to eat directly from some manner of work, their clothes were soiled and they smelled of pitch and spruce gum and wet bark and sawdust, but their hands and faces were clean and freshly scented by the pine-tar soap that the cavernous washroom of the cookhouse made readily available – at the cook's request. (Washing your hands before eating was another of Dominic's rules.) Furthermore, the washroom towels were always clean; the clean towels were part of the reason that the Indian dishwasher generally stayed late. While the kitchen help was washing the last of the supper dishes, the dishwasher herself was loading the towels into the washing machines in the cookhouse's laundry room. She never went home until the washing cycles had ended and she'd put all the towels in the dryers.

The dishwasher was called Injun Jane, but not to her face. Danny Baciagalupo liked her, and she appeared to dote on the boy. She was more than a decade older than his dad (she was even older than Ketchum), and she had lost a son – possibly he'd drowned in the Pemigewasset, if Danny hadn't misheard the story. Or maybe Jane and her dead son were from the Pemigewasset Wilderness – they may have come from that part of the state, northwest of the mills in Conway – and the doomed son had drowned elsewhere. There was a bigger, uncontained wilderness north of Milan, where the spruce mill was; there were more logging camps up there, and lots of places where a young logger might drown. (Jane had told Danny that Pemigewasset meant 'Alley of the Crooked Pines,' which conjured to the impressionable boy a likely place to drown.)

All young Dan could really remember was that it had been a wilderness river-driving accident – and from the fond way the dishwasher looked at the cook's son, perhaps her lost boy had been about twelve when he drowned.