

Once or twice Clinker half turned moaning. Then later the last bit of candle went out and left us alone in the darkest dark before the morning.

I could not see her face or the figure over the fire-place. Then, by-and-by, through the window the white light began to steal in.

The cabin stood right near the lake where the river joins it. As I looked out, a mist lay on the water, chill and white, but the cold dawn still left the room half in shadow.

The old man in his chair slept in the shadows. But on Clinker's face the light crept.

I drew nearer to her and watched in a kind of apathy.

It seemed hard to recognise this pale, dying child with the saucy paper-seller; harder to imagine that this paper-seller was the unfailing support of that unknowing old man.

Anyway, I watched as more light stole in.

Then I saw Clinker as it were wake up. She opened her eyes and fixed them on me, but with no look of recognition.

The recognition came in a minute, and a lurking, tired smile played on her lips as her eyes closed again.

I leant over and whispered, 'Well, Clinker, how do you feel now?'

She did not answer for a minute.

Then the lips quivered again beneath the little laughter playing on them.

Then—'Please sir, I have nine little brothers, and five——'

But that was too much for her, and she seemed to have lost consciousness a moment, for her face was so still, and I was getting uneasy, when she

opened her eyes again and turned a little.

Then her eyes grew large and questioning.

'You mustn't talk, Clinker.'

'Pa and Ma,' she said, slowly.

I answered nothing. Then I saw the lips moving again, and the ghastly shadow of a smile stirred her mouth once more.

I put my face very close, and heard the words she was trying to whisper.

'The nine little brothers—there.'

'Where?' I was going to ask, but watched her eyes instead where they wandered away from me and over to the dark corner where the old grandfather lay crouched in his chair sleeping.

I looked, and her meaning was quite plain as her eyes and lips both repeated 'there' over again.

'Oh! he is your Pa and your Ma and your nine little brothers,' I said to myself, wonderingly.

Then I looked back at Clinker. She lay perfectly still now, with her eyes closed, but that ghastly little smile still on her lips.

She did not move for many minutes.

I put my hand on her forehead suddenly, and then rose hastily and went to the window.

The mist was rising from the lake as the sun-rise breeze came over and drove it up the river. And some of the clouds above were getting a flush of red on their skirts.

The old man still lay sleeping in his chair. Clinker, too, lay wrapt in sleep with that strange smile on her mouth.

But Clinker's sleep was a longer and a stiller one than his!