

# Home Circle.

## Her Own.

BY HARRIET LUMMIS SMITH.

People said a great many pleasant things about Clarissa. That is likely to be the case where a girl has a comfortable little fortune in her own right. They said she was interesting, fascinating. They emphasized the fact that she was so individual. They laid stress on her intellectual ability. If there had been any need for it, everybody agreed Clarissa could have done brilliant work in school. But no one ever said she was agreeable, and if anyone had made that rash assertion, his listeners would have smiled.

Distinctly Clarissa Blair was not agreeable. She was too convinced of her own importance for that, to say nothing of her consistent purpose always to have her own way. Some excuses were to be made for her. Both father and mother were dead, and the cousin of her mother's who brought her up realized only too well that the big house they occupied was Clarissa's, that John and Mary and the rest were her servants, that the money which ran the estate all belonged to Clarissa. And unfortunately, Clarissa realized it, too.

"My own." They were two words of which Clarissa was becoming increasingly fond. If she took a fancy to change something in the running of the establishment, Cousin Margaret's timid protests influenced her very little. The place was her own. Why shouldn't she have her way about it? If she made up her mind to drop the study of German and devote herself to French, her tutor's objections were waved indifferently aside. It was her own business. Those two words were coming very near to spoiling Clarissa.

Cousin Margaret and Clarissa went to the country one year a month earlier than ever before. Clarissa had made up her mind as usual without consulting anybody, and Cousin Margaret consented to be hurried away, as she was ready to consent to anything Clarissa really wanted. Clarissa was quite excusable for her impatience to reach her summer home, which was ideally located on an arm of the sea, into which so many rivers emptied that the water was brackish, rather than salt. The grounds about the house was ample with green lawns and handsome gardens, while the trees that shaded it were veterans which had faced the storms of many a winter.

Clarissa loved the outdoor world. She played golf, rode horseback, and went rowing and sailing, till a fine coat of tan effectually disguised her original complexion. And then one day came a letter from one of her poor relations. Clarissa read it frowning, and tossed it over to Cousin Margaret to read.

It was a rather pathetic letter. The writer was a cousin of Clarissa's, some years older than herself, and the mother of two children. Both of the little folks had been sick, and were recovering but slowly. The doctor said they needed country air. That was all the letter said in words, but it was easy to read between the lines.

"I suppose she expects I'll invite her here," said Clarissa, shrugging her shoulders. "Of course I'm not going to do it."

"But Clarissa—"

"Why should I? It's my house, isn't it? And I've come here to enjoy myself. I'm going to have some of my friends down after awhile, but it would spoil everything to have two sick babies whimpering around."

"Poor Jennie—" said Cousin Margaret, but she did not get any further. Clarissa turned impatiently on her heel. How absurd it was of people, just because they were unfortunate, to expect that other people were going to share with them! "If we did that," Clarissa reflected, "what would be the use of having anything?"

At dinner Cousin Margaret was distinctly bad company. She was a sympathetic little woman, and the thought of Jennie, and Jennie's sick children, took away her appetite. When the

rather silent meal came to an end, Clarissa went out without taking the pains to explain where she was going. She felt rather out of temper with Cousin Margaret. Clarissa liked to have cheerful people about her, and since this was so, it was clearly Cousin Margaret's business to be cheerful.

She strolled down to the boat-house and Ned brought out the little row-boat fashioned in as graceful lines as those of a water-bird, with cushioned seats and shining oar-locks. Ned held the boat for Clarissa to take the seat in the stern. She surprised him, by seating herself at the oars. "I'll row myself," she said briefly.

"But aren't—aren't you going to take me along, Miss Clarissa?" asked the boy, flushing awkwardly. He was new to the place, and dreadfully afraid of the peremptory Clarissa. "It's going to get dark pretty soon," he added.

"I sha'n't need you." Clarissa pushed herself away from the pier with her oar. But Ned did not surrender.

"Miss Clarissa, I don't b'lieve it's safe for you to go off by yourself, this way, 'thout nobody."

An amazed color rose in Clarissa's cheeks, but her only answer was a dip of the oars. What did ail everybody? First Cousin Margaret had seemed to forget that the place was hers, and that she had a right to do as she pleased, and now Ned! It was not to be endured.

She forgot her irritation, in course of time, in her enjoyment of the evening. As the sunset colors faded out, the stars pricked through the dark, and were mirrored in the water. The splash of her oars blended pleasantly with the music of the summer night. Along the opposite shore rows of light flashed out. A tug was coming up the bay, puffing hard, the black smoke showing distinctly against the night's blackness.

Clarissa pulled on nearer to the tug, that the waves caused by its swift progress might rock her own little craft. The waves struck the boat with more force than she had expected, and it took all her seamanship to keep upright. She was thinking with a sense of relief that it had become too dark for Ned to see her plight from shore, when she looked up into a red eye, glaring cruelly from out of the dark. It took her a moment to realize what she should have known from the start. The tug was coming up the bay with a tow, a scow against whose square end hung a red lantern, to give warning.

Clarissa pulled for her life. But the awakening had come too late, and the waves which tossed the little boat about hindered her progress. The scow passed over the frail little skiff as unconcerned as one treads an ant under foot. Clarissa, struggling up through the black water, struck the bottom of the clumsy craft. In that hideous, suffocating moment, she thought fast.

She was going to be drowned. She was drowning even then. The things she had called her own were hers no longer. She remembered that Cousin Jennie would have a share of the property, and that the babies could go to the country. And Cousin Margaret could help the poor as she had never before been able to do. Clarissa Blair would no longer have anything to say in the matter. Nothing was hers, not even the life of which she had been so complacently sure. And the most terrible thought of all, down in the suffocating darkness, was that so many people would be made happier by the change.

While strange fancies flooded her mind, and a crushing weight seemed pressing upon her lungs, instinct was forcing her to fight for her life. Clarissa was a good swimmer. She felt along the bottom of the scow with groping hands. Her thoughts began to grow confused. The pressure on her chest was becoming unendurable, and strange, vivid lights flashed before her eyes. Then suddenly she rose like a cork into an open space, and drew an agonized breath. Something clanked

just ahead of her. It was a dragging chain, and she caught it, and so supporting herself, drank in draught after draught of the heavenly air. She had never fancied that mere breath could be such a luxury.

When she was strong enough for the effort of screaming, she raised her voice and called for help again and again. Her voice gave back a hollow echo which she did not understand till later when the moon had risen. Its light revealed to her the fact that she was in a square, wooden box, open at the top. A little reflection made it plain. The scow had passed over her and she had come up in one of the "pockets." There must be men not far away. With the help of the chain, the probability was that she could keep afloat till she was discovered.

The life she thought lost, had been given back to her, almost by a miracle. There was something most inspiring in the thought. She had been made to realize how frail was her hold on the things of whose ownership she had boasted. Her own! How little that meant, when a moment of time could snatch from her all claim to all she prized. But her life had been given back to her. She took it humbly, as something given in trust. It was hers, but not hers as she had thought it; it was hers to make helpful and beautiful.

"Help! Help! Help!"

The sound of a whistle gave Clarissa strength for the cry. Her voice rose penetratingly. She heard a rush of feet, shouts, confused commands. Then a knotted rope dropped beside her, and she was pulled to the deck, where the excited scow-men plied her with questions, and looked at one another as if doubting the evidence of their senses.

A telegram from one of the city hospitals brought distracted Cousin Margaret hurrying to Clarissa's side. Cousin Margaret's love was like a mother's. The night she had thought Clarissa drowned, when her capsized boat had been brought ashore, was the most terrible of all her life. She knelt beside the cot, where a weak and pale-faced girl smiled rather wanly, and sobbed with an ecstasy of relief that touched even the nurses, hardened to all forms of emotion.

Clarissa aroused herself to protest. "Cousin Margaret, you mustn't! There's nothing to cry for. The doctor says I can go home in the morning. And oh, Cousin Margaret!"

"Yes, my darling," sniffed Cousin Margaret, pressing her handkerchief to her wet eyes.

"Can't you telegraph to Jennie some time this morning, and tell her to come down and bring the children? Tell her not to stop to get them ready, but to bring them just as they are."—The Girl's Companion.