

**Mrs. Scarrow's Mistake.**

AT the top of the first flight of stairs Mrs. Scarrow put down her basket and leaned against the wall. She was large and stout, and her basket was heavy—so heavy, indeed, that she had brought it to the corner of the block on the street car.

Such an expressive basket! There was a great roast of pork at the bottom and a sack of flour at one side. This paper contained sugar, that cornmeal.

"Corn-bread's good enough for me," said Mrs. Scarrow, "and if I can eat it I reckon they can." Therefore a generous supply of cornmeal was never lacking in her numerous baskets.

There were links of sausage, a roll of pudding, a kettle of lard, what not?—in this capacious receptacle.

Mrs. Scarrow was a district visitor of the Ladies' Charitable Organization. She tried to be just in all her dealings; an angel of mercy to the deserving, a terror to the deceiving poor.

"Three more flights," she said. "Last floor, first door to the right. It beats my time! What makes people live in perches like this? Not but what folks live where they must, not where they please. I suppose if we all had our way, Mount Vernon Place wouldn't accommodate us."

She reached the last landing and paused for breath, leaning as usual against the wall. The place was very still—so still that from the first room to the right there came distinctly the sound of knives and forks in rapid motion, and then—oh, the depravity of these people!—these words came to Mrs. Scarrow's ears:

"Have another piece o' turkey, a big piece, do! I cut this a-purpose for you. Reach over your plate now."

"I had so much already I can't hardly breathe," answered a voice, as if the repletion of the feast had affected its utterance.

"Turkey," thought Mrs. Scarrow, holding up her hands, "at this time of the year! Never less'n twenty-two cents and a half a pound. Turkey!" To think that she had carried that basket up all those steps for this!

She resolved to wait and listen, and report the case to the Board.

"You have another piece o' turkey, Miss Ganz, an' some more pertatoes an' gravy an' stuffin' an' things."

"Me-a-ow!"

There was a shrill laugh, followed by a sound of disapproval.

"Miss Ganz don't perfer no more. Keep right where you are till I bring the plum-puddin'."

Plum-pudding, indeed! There were people of Mrs. Scarrow's acquaintance, well-to-do at that, who thought themselves lucky if they got plum-pudding at Thanksgiving and Christmas, with some left over to be warmed for next day.

"This here plum-puddin's good," said a critical voice in gruffest tones.

"Give me some more of the gravy."

"Taint gravy."

"What then?"

There was a moment's pause. Then the answer came doubtfully: "Sauce, seems to me, like. Don't you want some more, Miss Ganz?"

"Me-a-ow!" followed by the same shrill laughter and reproach.

"Now I'll get the ice-cream, Jinny, if you and Lucy's had enough. There's as much as ever you can eat."

Ice-cream! Ice-cream of a week-day! Mrs. Scarrow could scarcely restrain her anger. And not satisfied with one plate, not two plates even, but as much as ever they can eat! The Board should know of this!

"Then we'll have the oranges an' nuts an' candies. Them oranges ought to be sweet—they cost enough, goodness knows! Miss Ganz don't eat oranges, poor thing! Well, I can't help that."

Mrs. Scarrow's patience could endure no more. She picked up her basket and marched down stairs.

Midway of the first flight she met a woman coming in from the street—a small, thin woman, in a faded shawl and a shabby black hat, who smiled feebly when she recognized the visitor.

It was a chill October day. A blast of wind swept down the staircase, and closed the door at the foot with a loud noise.

"Mrs. Ruggles," said Mrs. Scarrow, severely, "I've just been up to your room, ma'am."

"Yes, ma'am," answered Mrs. Ruggles, regarding the basket with anxious eyes. She had had a previous acquaintance with that generous basket, and although she inwardly rebelled against cornmeal, she was grateful for assistance.

"Yes, ma'am, I've just been up to your room."

"Dear me, Mrs. Scarrow, I'm awful sorry you've had all that trouble for nothin'. An' you such a weight, too, to get up all them steps, let alone the basket. I says to Judy this mornin', 'Judy,' says I, 'don't you leave the room by no means.' An' she said she wouldn't. I hope you'll excuse me for mentionin' it, but are you sure you knocked loud enough, Mrs. Scarrow?"

"I didn't knock at all! Mrs. Ruggles, this has gone far enough! You can't deceive me any longer! Can you stand there, knowing what is going on up-stairs in your room, and look me in the eye?"

Now Mrs. Ruggles had been looking straight into her visitor's eyes, but immediately upon being asked if she could do so, she found it impossible to continue. She shifted her gaze uneasily, and clasped her hard little hands under her shawl, too much astonished to know what else to do.

"Turkey!" said Mrs. Scarrow. "And not only turkey, but potatoes and gravy and cranberries and things. Celery, too, no doubt. And if this isn't enough, what more?"

"Mrs. Scarrow!" Mrs. Ruggles struggled to protest.

"Plum-pudding," went on Mrs. Scarrow, raising her hand and her voice, "and to-day neither Christmas nor yet Thanksgiving day. Not even pancake day! Plum-pudding and ice-cream, ma'am!"

"Mrs. Scarrow!"

"Yes, and oranges, too,—sweet ones,—and goodness knows what all. Now, Mrs. Ruggles, what I want to know is, who pays for all this? How many charitable organizations do you belong to, ma'am? I'll go this minute and report this case to the Board, and you'll get no more help from me. Good morning, Mrs. Ruggles. I hope you'll enjoy your dinner! It's a better one than I shall sit down to!"

She was as good as her word. Worse still, she carried away that ampie basket, leaving nothing but a spicy odour of groceries in its place.

Worse than all, an order for wood and coals, enough to keep poor, chilled Mrs. Ruggles warm for a month, went away with the district visitor. Mrs. Ruggles looked after her in dismay.

"She wouldn't listen to nothin' from me," she said, "not one word. Turkey! Who's got turkey, I'd like to know? An' plum-puddin'! Folks don't