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MONICA; OR, WITCHCRAFT.*

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CHAPTER X.

It was nightfall. A clear fire was burning on the hearth, in the basket-maker's cottage. The coarse white cloth was spread for the evening meal; and the pot containing the good-man's supper, was hissing and boiling on the fire.—Two boys were lounging upon a bench, lazily watching the white dumplings, as they bounced, every now and then, with the action of the water, to the surface of the vessel.

"My eye! but I'm hungry, Mat! I wonder where Dolly is, at this time o' night, and what keeps father so long at the town? I'm for fishing out of the pot, one of them ere white bobbles, Doll will never miss it, and if she do—why I don't care."

"That's your sort!" cried the other imp, as Master Mark thrust a long sharp pointed piece of saw into one of the dumplings and hooked it out upon the floor. "Half parts now, or I'll tell Dad, when he comes home."

"Well, and if you do, you mean goose-head—and father should lump I, why, I tell you what I'll do——"

"What?" quoth Master Mat.

"Lump you, to be sure. I know where there's a right good oak whacker. My eye! It would make your bones crack."

After the twain had gobbled up the dumpling, they held a long consultation as to the possibility of stealing another. But Mark thought it would be hardly prudent, so they contented themselves with watching the evolutions they made in the pot as before.

"Doll's a rum un—isn't she, Mat? If father knew what I knows, she'd catch it."

"Why, what do you think he'd do to her?" said Mat, opening his large round eyes very wide.

"I do think he'd tie her up to a stump all day, and give her no wittles."

"Oh, lud! lud!" said the other, "would'nt that be dreadful!"

"There's a fine chap comes here every afternoon to see Doll, when Dad's away at the town," said Mark, "and I heard neighbour Brod say to Gammer Goff, as I sat behind the hedge yesterday, that if father caught them, he would soon put a stop to such goings on. Doll boxed my ears to-day for nothing. I've just a good mind to peach. She tells lots of tales of me."

"It would serve her right—the nasty cat!" replied the other affectionate brother.

"Only I'm afraid, Mat, that we would get the worst of it, when Dad's away; and that tall fellow might give us both a licking."

The entrance of the basket-maker put a stop to the dialogue. He was a stout middle-aged man, with a stern, but in other respects, prepossessing countenance. After putting his wallet into the cupboard, and depositing his cudgel behind the door, he glanced around the mud-walled apartment, and asked for Dolly.

"She's out," said Mat.

"And who's cooking the supper?"

"It's cooking itself," said Mark. "Doll has been away the whole afternoon, and we be as hungry as hawks."

"Who laid the cloth, then, and put the platters on the table?" asked the old man.

"Oh, a' did that, before a' went away."

"Tell me no lies, boy," said the old man, with a frown. "She must have been here very lately. What is she doing abroad the night?"

"Talking to her sweetheart, to be sure," said Mark. "He comes here most every day."

"What is this you tell me?" said the old man rising from his chair. "Your sister talking with a strange man in the dark! Reach me my hat and stick."

With a knowing grin, the boys handed him

*Continued from page 69.