



A SPRIG OF HOLLY.

Yes; I am only a sprig of holly—only a little piece of wood, with five glossy leaves and three red berries. I had four once, but a small robin with a sharp beak flew upon me one fatal day, and pecked it off. How helplessly I watched him as he complacently demolished it on the gravel walk below, turning his head from side to side every now and then, and glancing up at me, as if he meditated another raid among my leaves. Whatever his intentions were, they were speedily put to flight, and himself as well, by somebody coming along the path, and I need not say with what relief I marked the tip of his tail vanishing over the garden wall, for it is not pleasant to have one's greatest treasure eaten before one's very eyes without being able to prevent it.

I wonder what made him take a fancy to one of my berries, half hidden, as I am, amongst a goodly company of relative sprigs—my sisters and my cousins and my aunts, etc. Many of these berries surpass my own in size and brilliancy, but there is no accounting for birds' tastes, and when I told Aunt Noberry so, she gave me a prick with one of her leaves, and said I ought to be glad I had fed the poor thing, as my fine berries were of no use besides! Of no use but to be eaten! I think she only said that out of spite, though, never having possessed any at all herself. She is a cross old stick altogether, and is always chiding me about something or other. It was only to-day she called me foolish for hailing with delight a dear little soft white feather that dropped right down from the clouds, and nestled so lightly on one of my leaves. She said it came as a warning, and that we may expect to be cut down any day now, and carried goodness knows where!

I am sure I hope I shall be cut down. I am tired of being half-smothered among my relatives—pricked and scolded by Aunt Noberry, and having my berries

eaten by the birds. I am of a venturesome turn of mind, and want to be independent, and see more of the world in which mortals live and move, and have their being. Ah! here comes another little white feather. How cold it is! I wonder whether it is glad to leave its home in the clouds. Why, it has vanished—it has wept itself away. Aunt Noberry says it is an evil omen, and that I, too, shall come to grief if I am cut down. Well, I shall see something of life first—a little more of the mysterious things they call human beings, and that is all I desire.

Yes, I am only a sprig of holly, but surely I may possess a history as well as anything else.

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I have had my wish. I have seen something of the world, though not perhaps to the extent I at one time desired; but now I am content.

The very next day after the arrival of those little feathers we were all put in a flutter of expectation by the appearance of a man with a small chopper, and a young girl with golden hair and lips as red as my berries, coming along my path. The agitation Aunt Noberry was in was something awful; she administered no less than a dozen of her characteristic pricks upon my poor devoted stem; when I reproached her with cruelty she said she could not be responsible for the movements of her leaves when the wind was so high. And all the while there was not a breath stirring.

Well, of course, the man with the chopper and the girl with the golden hair and lips as red as my berries, stopped opposite us, and then the work of "cutting down" began. Branch after branch fell lightly at the young lady's feet, each one having been previously pointed out by her delicate white fingers. I was terribly afraid they would leave me after all—but no, among the last to be placed upon that