

Holly Day and the Influencer

(Holly Day #2)

Holly looked over the rim of her budget latte at Malcolm, her lovely blue eyes astonished. “He said what?”

Malcolm took a sip of his coffee. He was stalling. He knew he was wading into deep waters. “He said no one needs a blonde bimbo these days.”

Holly rolled her eyes. “Robart.” She shook her head. “Smug bastard. I only rescued him from disaster last week.”

“He’s hired some other guy,” said Malcom sadly.

After gazing at the crestfallen ruin of a soufflé produced together in cooking class, they’d become fast friends. He was a novice food writer, always on the hunt for a good story, hoovering up information anywhere he could find it. He often hung out with the chefs to get the latest scoop.

She fingered the tiny diamond winking at her throat.

“How do we outsmart them at their own game? What’s the one thing these guys want the most?”

“Fame, fortune, fawning fans on Instagram,” mused Malcolm.

“That’s the easy stuff. What else do they want?”

“You mean cookbooks, movie contracts, TV shows?”

“Yeah. How do they get the profile to do that?”

“Influencers.”

“Who?” A faint line appeared between her perfect brows. This whole influencer thing had passed her by. Maybe it hadn’t happened in the Midwest.

He listed the world's top ten food influencers, pulling the information out of the arcane filing cabinet in his head.

She looked at him. "How do you even know this?"

"Just doing my job," he said modestly. He crossed his scrawny legs, admiring his spectator shoes. Then he launched into a sound bite on food influencers, their blogs, brands, followers, impact on food trends, and whopping incomes.

"So how do we meet them?"

Malcolm laughed. "If I knew that, Babe, my career would be golden. You think Gordon Ramsay wants to meet the likes of us?"

"Oh." She thought for a moment. "We could start a bit smaller, I guess. Who's a famous influencer around here?"

"Scarlett Brown."

"Well, let's start with her."

Scarlett was the daughter of a famous restaurateur. She had grown up in the food industry and was certainly no bimbo. She had two degrees in food science and had apprenticed under a well-known chef. Though she was now a local legend, she didn't have the star quality Holly had expected. Online, she looked plain, broad, and short. Still, she had a killer smile.

Malcolm continued. "She's well informed and has great people skills."

"You've met her?"

"I heard her speak at an L.A. Times event last year. She's very down to earth. You'd never know that she's a millionaire."

'A millionaire?' Holly's hopes plummeted. Her grandmother's money had gone to a foundation for homeless horses. She was on her own.

He grinned. “She’s having a news conference next week to announce her new book. I can get tickets.”

“Now I know why I like you.”

At the news conference, Holly drank in the buzz. Lights, cameras, milling journalists, pulsing crowds, this was the life for her. After Scarlett finished speaking, Holly squeezed her way to the front of the room. In the skirmish, an elbow rammed her back, propelling her into Scarlett’s arms. Rearing back in surprise, Scarlett punched her in the jaw. Holly stumbled to her knees, pain ricocheting through her head. She heard a series of clicks.

Cameras!

Her sparkle fled. She crouched in horror, her plans deflating like sad, wrinkled balloons flapping in the breeze. Still, the shockwave washed away her anger with Robart, the chefs, and everyone else who had disparaged her talents. She felt lighter somehow.

“I’m so sorry,” she gasped, looking up at Scarlett through her tousled natural blonde hair. “I wanted to meet you but not in a contact sport way.”

Scarlett grinned. “I used to play field hockey. I have a mean right hook.’ She pulled her up. “Are you okay?”

Holly rubbed her cheek, blurting, “Can we have coffee? You owe me.”

Scarlett guffawed. “Well, that’s one way to get my attention. Okay, let’s do it. I’ll have my assistant contact you.” A young woman in tall boots took Holly’s information.

The video went viral. ‘Influencer Punches Starlet.’ There was even a clip from Holly’s Christmas show.

The journalist whose elbow propelled her into fame had been struggling with his camera bag when his arm flew back. He apologized. His network apologized. Scarlett's public relations manager apologized. They offered money. Holly refused.

"I earn my own money," she said.

She scurried to work shrouded in a large scarf, while the swelling on her lovely face bloomed purple and green, later subsiding to yellow. By the time she sat down with Scarlett, her camera crew in tow, the bruises had disappeared. After taking some shots of the new best friends, the crew took off. Scarlett looked at her expectantly.

"It's all because of my famous grandmother," Holly confessed.

Scarlett looked blank.

She described the years of acting, tap dancing, and singing lessons, the fact that she was destined to be a star.

"Good luck," said Scarlett. "Hollywood streets echo with the sound of failed starlets trudging the other way. You'll never make it here as an actor. Everything's international now."

Holly slumped in her chair.

"The food industry is a better choice. Look at me, I have my own blog, a national food column, a couple of cookbooks. But despite my famous father, I still work all the time to get any attention." She thought for a moment. "You could start your own blog, but you need a hook. Something special that people want."

"Whatever that is," sighed Holly.

"What are you talking about? Nostalgia is in. There's got to be a connection."

Holly played with her necklace, her eyes thoughtful.

“Anyway,” said Scarlett, glancing at her phone, “I’ve got to go. Keep in touch. I want to know what happens.”

“You do?”

“Sure, why not. I was in your shoes once.”

Holly sparkled.

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