

Holly Day's Christmas Adventure

by

Gail Vallance Barrington

Of course, Holly had expected a warm welcome when she stepped off the bus in Hollywood, but the fickle California winds had erased her grandmother's footprints long before. Movie producers were not interested in a Midwestern starlet with natural blonde hair, an upturned nose, and a perky can-do attitude. Oh, how she wanted to sparkle. Instead, she survived on mind-numbing gigs, a stand-in for "real" actresses, or an extra on dreary commercials wearing a Viking costume or silly pyjamas. Sometimes people would stop her in the street saying vaguely, "You remind me of someone. I just can't remember who." She'd sparkle at them and walk on.

Eventually Holly landed a job as a chef's assistant in a low-budget cooking show, prepping equipment and ingredients, and cleaning up after the so-called celebrity chefs. They were an arrogant bunch with roving hands who couldn't remember her name. Whenever she got the chance, she slipped around them to sparkle into the camera.

When she was hired on a national cook-off show, she rented her own apartment. It was a former Airbnb and had a designer kitchen. "I can do better than those guys," she said, whirling around the marble-topped island, admiring her reflection in the stainless-steel appliances. "I just need to learn how to cook."

Every night she mimicked the recipes they had prepared that day. Often, the charred and smoky remains made her perfect nose wrinkle, but she was not discouraged. She haunted cooking classes at the local college. Once she'd figured out the difference between mixing, beating, whipping, and so on, she was actually pretty good. She grinned at her cooking partner through the daubs of pastry sticking to her shining hair. "Just wait," she said. "My time will come."

When the Cooking Network finally hired her, the director stared at her and frowned. "You remind me of someone," he said. He couldn't remember who. The chefs were as disreputable as ever, but she was experienced now and steered a clear course around them, her eye catching the camera whenever she could.

The day before their Christmas show, one of the chefs was killed in a car crash. Sweat poured down the producer's face. Sponsors were demanding a solution. Who was available on such short notice?

"I'll do it," said Holly. The crew members blinked. Who was she again?

"Huh," sneered one of the chefs. "What do you know?"

"I'm a trained actress. Whatever I don't know, I'll act," she said firmly.

They eyed her thoughtfully. She still looked pretty good. And didn't she remind them of someone? The question pinged aimlessly against the barren surfaces of their minds. The next thing she knew, she was in the makeup studio getting polished, brushed, dressed, and generally pouffed up for public consumption. On the sound stage at last, Holly looked into the camera and smiled. The camera sparkled back.

#

Dear Reader:

Feel free to share this story! It's licensed under the Creative Commons. This means you can copy and distribute it in any medium or format for non-commercial purposes, as long as you give credit to me.

[Pop-up Stories](#) © 2025 by [Gail Vallance Barrington](#) is licensed under [CC BY-NC-ND 4.0](#)

Feedback? I'd love to hear from you at <https://gailbarrington.ca/contact-us/>