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ALL U CAN  
EAT

# EMMA HOLLY



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***Emma Holly***



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All U Can Eat

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For information address:

The Berkley Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Putnam Inc.,  
375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014.

The Penguin Putnam Inc. World Wide Web site address is  
<http://www.penguinputnam.com>

ISBN: 0-7865-7738-X

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BERKLEY Books first published by Berkley Publishing Group,  
a member of Penguin Putnam Inc.,

375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014.

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Electronic edition: May 2006

## *Acknowledgments*

I'd like to express my appreciation to the Orange County chapter of RWA for your warm welcome. Your invitation was too tempting to resist, and you gave me a chance to visit an area not so very different from my fictional Six Palms—minus my fictional shenanigans, of course!

Special thanks to Jen Crooks, Susan and Dennis Johnson, and Leiha Mann for being great company and guides.

*Muchas gracias* to Deb Dixon for the book trade. *When You're the Only Cop in Town* definitely got this story started.

Roberta Brown, I'm always happy you're my agent, but I'm especially thankful you were able to work your mojo for this book.

Cindy Hwang, thank you for inviting me to play on your team. Here's wishing us many happy collaborations.

Finally, thank you, readers! Many of you have followed me from way back. I am honored, grateful, and very happy about that!

# Chapter 7



On nights like this, diner owner Frankie Smith loved her life. She lay on her side in her big, firm bed in her pretty house hanging on the hill in the southern California beach town of Six Palms. The cantilevered structure was a gift from her gambler dad, its design a reminder that the West Coast was cutting edge. No matter what complaints she had against her mostly absent father, Frankie loved every inch of this house—especially the eyrie that was her room.

Above her hung her prized possession, an outrigger canoe oar her mother had raced with as a teen. Out on her balcony, a potted banana tree whispered a lullaby to the sea-scented summer breeze. Frankie was young, relatively blond, and perfectly healthy. She'd put in a long day serving tourists and had brought in a decent take. Now she was ready to enjoy the good night's rest every hard-working stiff deserved.

That is, unless the hardworking stiff slipping in behind her had other plans.

Frankie's long-time boyfriend, Troy, must have thought she was asleep. She could tell he was trying not to disturb her as he eased beneath the freshly laundered sheets. He was hours later than he'd promised, no doubt kept chained in the office by his overly ambitious boss.

A former model, Troy was as laid back as they came, more at home in flip-flops than a suit. His trademark hollow cheekbones had earned him a small fortune, and she still couldn't believe he'd been talked into switching to real estate. But Troy had always been at the mercy of more forceful personalities. For all her good points, his boss, Karen Ellis, was definitely that. Troy was doing well, at least, and Frankie knew he was proud.

Troy's parents, on the other hand, thought he should have stuck to playing polo and mooching off friends whose families hadn't run through their fortunes yet. Laid back or not, Troy's blood was a very American shade of blue.

It always gave Frankie a private kick that he'd ended up with her instead of some debutante.

She grinned into the darkness as he achieved his favorite snuggling spot. His head was tucked over hers, and his arm draped her ribs with his hand coming up to cup. Troy was a breast man, and hers were just full enough to get him going. His sigh of pleasure was as involuntary as it was relieved. Naturally, he was naked; Troy was too gorgeous and too vain to wear a stitch to bed. He must have showered in the downstairs bathroom, because he smelled as good as he felt—six lean feet of gym-sculpted muscle and polished skin.

Frankie wore cotton panties and a strappy T-shirt, but the places he was warmest were impossible to mistake. His chest was as board-hard as it had been when he was twenty, and his lower body curved around her ass like it was born to fit. Always easy to rouse, his cock stirred against her bottom as if it, too, were wondering whether sleep was what it wanted most.

His body's reaction heated her deep inside, making up for his lateness, making up for all the familiar guy faults he had in abundance. Troy could be an idiot, but he was hers.

Frankie decided the moment was too nice to ruin with a scold. Instead, she wriggled her fanny backward and bit her lip as he hardened more.

This time, he hummed instead of sighed, though he seemed not to realize she was awake and teasing him. His arm tightened around her as his hips pressed forward. In seconds, his erection had reached full length. He was a good-sized man, with a healthy appetite for release. Since Frankie liked sex as much as he did, this had never been one of their problems. Twice a night wasn't too much for either of them, and only rarely had she turned him down. He was good in bed: straightforward but not selfish, and always appreciative. She knew a girl could do worse.

He moaned low in his throat. One of his more endearing traits as a lover was an inability to prevent himself from making noise. A rush of sultry moisture slid from her sex.

Then Frankie's eyebrows rose. The hand that had cupped her breast had moved to the strip of belly skin her T-shirt bared, preparing—she was certain—to slip into her panties and coax her clit awake. Troy's usual mode of rousing her for a quickie was to nudge her shoulder and say her name. This slightly daring change of pace delighted her, but to her surprise, he'd barely brushed her pubic curls when he hesitated, pulled back his hand, and rolled away.

*Oh, for goodness sake*, she thought, wondering at his scruples. Did he honestly think she'd be mad? It wasn't like she'd sleep through the whole thing.

She was about to let him know she was conscious when she realized what he was doing with his back to her.

His breathing had changed, and his arm moved in a rhythm as

distinct as it was personal. He was jacking off, the slightly wet, clicking sound of his fist pushing his cock skin just audible above the rustling sheets. She could tell how much he wanted a release because, as always, he couldn't stay silent. He was swallowing back little grunts of need. Heat flushed through her like the sun blazing through a window on a summer day. Despite her annoyance that he'd rolled away from her, she knew it was the sexiest thing she'd ever heard.

If she hadn't been so aroused, she'd have listened to it to the end.

"Hey," she said softly, rolling to fit her front to his lightly sweating back. "Want some help with that?"

He stiffened in surprise, then moaned with flattering loudness as she slid her fingers down the taut cords of his forearm. When she reached his fist and the rigid pole it held, she stroked between his knuckles suggestively.

"Frankie," he breathed. "I didn't want to bother you."

He might have been considerate enough not to wake her, but not so considerate that he didn't shift her hand under his. Now his hot, pulsing bounty was in her palm. Clearly, this made him happy. He gripped her tightly, pushing her hold up and down his shaft.

Frankie laughed against his shoulder. "No bother, big guy. I was awake the whole time."

"Jesus," he said, the knowledge making him twitch and surge. When she reached the flare of his penis, the pressure of his hand increased. Knowing he liked the stimulation, she turned her grip back and forth as if his cockhead were the lid to an especially sensitive and stubborn jar.

His groan of pleasure had her slinging her leg over his. The muscles of his narrow buttock were hard enough to get off on.

"So," she said, rocking her groin against him until he couldn't miss how wet she was. "You want to finish like this, or would you rather come inside me?"

He rolled her onto her back so quickly she lost her breath.

More excited noises caught in his throat as he switched on her reading lamp. He looked down at her shaking, sharp-nippled breasts, wagging his head as if he didn't know how he'd got so lucky. Frankie felt pretty much the same. Troy sure was something to stare at. His chest hair glistened gold in the light, and his cock was standing up and thrumming as if she'd tied a string to its rim. A tiny drop welled from its slit. She couldn't resist reaching out to touch, and once she'd touched, she couldn't resist rubbing the wetness around. When his knob was suitably shined up, she brought her fingertip to her mouth.

Watching her suck it was too much for Troy.

"Oh, babe," he groaned, making quick, almost desperate work of her panties. "You're too good for me."

As soon as the cotton was dragged down her legs, he was over her, his knees pushing her thighs wide enough to feel the stretch. Troy was taller than she was, and he liked room. He planted one hand beside her shoulder and used the other to steer his cock to its goal.

"Hey!" she said as the broad, curved tip of him split her labia. He was hot as fire, and she was definitely good to go, but even so she hadn't lost her mind. "Protection?"

"Shit," he said and fumbled for the bedside drawer.

He was quick to cover himself, his graceful model's fingers making him a treat to watch. His jaw was ticking with impatience, his straight streaked-blond hair falling forward as he looked down. Admiring his concentration—not to mention the extreme state of his arousal—as soon as he was done, she smoothed the latex to his root. His shudder of response was worth the delay.

"I'm going to fuck you like you've never been fucked," he warned, swinging into position again on both arms. "You're never going to forget Troy Wilcox took you tonight."

He looked deadly serious, so she bit her lip against her laugh. He might not have had anyone to compete with for the last five years, and he would very likely be taking her tomorrow, too, but she knew it was sometimes better to allow men their vanities.

“Do it then,” she said, letting a wisp of smoke color the words. “Put that big, thick cock in me and ride me hard.”

He knew her well enough to read the twinkle in her eye. “I will,” he said, grinning a bit himself. “You had fucking better hold on.”

He wasn’t kidding. She gasped and reached for the headboard as he nearly took her with a single shove. She was lucky it didn’t hurt because, grunting, he set his knees and shoved again. When this brought him to his limit, he cursed in thanks. She knew exactly why that was. They couldn’t usually do this so fast. She was always wet for him, but she was built tight and getting him in completely could take time. Happy to have him inside her without waiting, she hugged him close with her arms and knees.

He leaned down to nip her ear. “You want me bad tonight.”

“Maybe you’re shrinking.”

He laughed. “Bitch.”

“Weenie-man.”

He nudged his hips back and forth to let her register just how not-weenie he was. His teeth were bared in a wolfish grin. “You want me because you heard me beating off. Face it, Frankie, you’re a pervert.”

“Want to hear *me* beat off?”

He did. His face flushed dark even before she worked her hand between them. But she really got him when he felt it move.

“Oh, God,” he said, his eyes squeezing shut as he swelled inside her. “Oh, God let me see.”

He pushed up again, and she let him, aroused by his unexpected intensity. They’d been together so long they did sometimes make love on automatic pilot. Not tonight, though. As she ca-

ressed herself—only a bit self-conscious—he began to thrust in slow, deep strokes that didn't interfere with her show. Her fingers bumped him as he pushed in and out. He was really hot tonight. Frankie's breath came faster, but not as fast as his. His diaphragm was lurching with every gasp, his hands clenched white-knuckled in the sheets. She'd never seen him so caught up, so heedless of how desire was twisting his handsome features out of shape. This was different from anything they'd done before, and his reaction rubbed off on her. She was swollen like he was, hard as a little almond under her finger's pad, nearly drowning in her own juices.

His gaze rose and burned into hers. "Tell me, Frankie, does what you're doing feel good to you?"

"I'm too slippery."

Her voice was husky, and he had to swallow before he spoke. He looked down again to watch her hand. "Dry your fingers on my stomach."

She was embarrassed but she did it, loving the way his six-pack jerked as he sucked a breath. The friction on her clit was better than—perfect—especially when he added the tug and slide of his own hardness. He must have known she was climbing fast. The muscles of her sheath gripped him greedily.

"Oh, boy," he sighed as if this were his idea of heaven. "Don't come yet. Make it last until I go."

*There's a switch*, she thought but couldn't say because she was moaning. She wasn't actually sure she could wait for him.

"Not yet," he insisted, leaning down, his lips brushing soft across her collar bone. "Not fucking yet."

He lasted longer than she'd ever known him to, lasted until she was dripping sweat and trembling and literally hanging on by her fingernails. Every thrust drove her closer, and she'd given up on stroking herself. All she wanted now was to help him get as deep as he could. His back was going to have scratches, but he didn't

complain and or even gloat. As she rode the edge, something new swam into his eyes, into the perfect muscles of his perfect face. His irises were as blue as a summer sky.

“What?” she asked, touching the groove his ready smiles had etched by his mouth.

He gave her a harder thrust. “I love you,” he said. “You’re the best friend I’ve ever had.”

His sweetness stung behind her eyes, but his cock was hitting her precisely how she liked it, high and fast and strong. She went over before she could say a word, the orgasm throwing back her head the same as if he’d shaken her. The climax was groaning good, and the sound of her pleasure sent him over, too.

His shout of ejaculation was louder than usual.

When his hips finished shaking against hers, he sank down on top of her. He was heavy, but being covered by a man was a sensation she had always liked. His hand went to her hair, stroking it gently out over the pillow.

“Phew,” she said. “That was good.”

He grunted—possibly in agreement—half-landed a kiss on her mouth, and pushed off her enough to sit up. The condom was easily disposed of, after which he raked his fingers through his golden locks and tossed his head, a habit he’d hung onto from his days of photo shoots.

“Pretty boy,” she teased, but he only patted her thigh absently.

“I need a shower,” he said, his gaze on the drapes swelling in and out of her balcony’s sliding doors. Frankie trailed her hand down his spine.

“Want me to scrub your back?”

“I’m leaving,” he said.

She rubbed her nose. “You have a house to show out of town?”

He looked at her. “I’m leaving. I was going to tell you tomor-

row morning. After you'd had coffee. This isn't working for me anymore."

"It isn't *working for you?*"

Understanding now, and hot and cold with it by turns, Frankie sat up. She tugged her clinging T-shirt down to her waist. "Exactly which part of it isn't working? The great sex? The hot meals? Me picking up your socks? Or maybe the part where you tell me you love me and I'm your best friend?"

"I knew you'd be like this."

"Fuck, Troy, a ten-year-old could tell you I'd be like this! We've been together five years. I put up with a lot from you—"

"I know you have."

"You're damn right I have, and now out of the blue, after you *make love to me*, you tell me this?"

He was standing now, his face as red and surly as a teenager. "Making love was your idea." He grimaced at her gasp of outrage, but he didn't take it back. "I was trying not to. That's why I was jacking off. You know I can't lie down with you and not want to . . . Anyway, it isn't out of the blue for me."

"Who is she?"

"It's not about anyone else."

"The hell it isn't! We both know you've cheated on me before."

"You don't respect me," he said. She opened her mouth to lash out again, but the glitter of tears in his eyes stopped her cold.

"Of course I respect you," she said, her urge to yell fading. "I'm incredibly proud of everything you've achieved."

"You say that like you would to a slightly dim-witted kid who got an honorable mention at a science fair. I love you, Frankie, I do, but I want a partner who'll look up to me."

Frankie folded her arms. "I know you, Troy. You wouldn't be leaving if you hadn't already found my replacement."

Even if what she said was true, she hated how shrewish she sounded then, hated the way her scorn made his tears spill down. He wiped them angrily away.

“My leaving isn’t about anyone but you and me. I hope—” He gritted his teeth, maybe so he wouldn’t cry again. “I hope you’ll realize that when you cool off.”

“When I cool off,” she repeated, shaking her head in disbelief. Did he think five years down the drain was something any woman could “cool off” from? Hell, knowing Troy and his general cluelessness, he probably thought she’d be “best friends” with his new girl, too.

Forgetting the shower he claimed to have needed, he retrieved the starched tan chinos he’d dropped to the floor. She watched him pull on each leg with a sense of unreality. For five occasionally tumultuous years, she’d seen this stunning body strip and dress. In some ways, she knew everything about it, down to the way he’d cup himself before he zipped because he rarely wore underwear. His shirt was next, an off-the-shelf Perry Ellis that looked as good on him as if it were tailored. Just like always, he buttoned it up from the tails.

She told herself he was leaving, trying to get the fact to register in her mind. He’d reach the collar, and she’d never see him do this again.

His head was lowered when finally he spoke. If he had the courage to meet her eyes, she couldn’t see it through his fallen bangs. “I’ll come by later to pick up my things.”

“Forget it.” Frankie reached for the cheapest victory. “I’d be delighted to pack up everything you own.”

She didn’t cry herself until he’d shut the door.



## Chapter 2



Broken hearts—or furious ones—didn’t stop people from wanting food. Frankie spent the weekend alternately fuming and crying at home. Then, when the surf came up in San Clemente, and her beach boy cook skipped out, she bowed to the inevitable and returned to work.

Naturally, everyone knew she and Troy had split. Six Palms was a small town, and Frankie’s All U Can Eat diner was its social hub. Most of city hall ate breakfast there, as did the chief of police. Her insistence on good, plain food even drew local rich folk tired of nouvelle cuisine. Frankie usually worked the register or served, but she still remembered how to flip a burger. For the next six days, she was grateful to hide in the kitchen annex. At least there she missed the bulk of the “poor-Frankie” talk.

On the seventh morning, she woke feeling almost normal. Troy was gone, life went on, and if her customers’ pity annoyed her, at least it was well meant.

The day that greeted her was equally kind. Marine gray, of

course—Coastal mornings were prone to that—but the air was cool and refreshing, the ocean indigo with bright whitecaps. Her beloved queen palms waved above her as she enjoyed the mile-and-a-quarter walk down the road to town. Two doors past her diner, Main Street Burritos was already open, but not the post office across the park. Though she'd only been wallowing a week, Frankie felt as if she hadn't seen the world in months. Her diner gleamed with bands of stainless steel and pink porcelain enamel, as fifties-perfect as if Elvis had swivelled his hips in front of it yesterday. Sweet yellow plumeria bloomed beneath the streamlined windows. The thrill of ownership warmed her like a blessing she'd forgot she had.

Jean Yi, her chain-smoking, sixty-year-old Chinese waitress, ground out her stub in the grass by the still-locked door.

"Bout time," she said in her gravelly, porn star voice. Her arms were crossed in disapproval across her pink uniform.

Frankie looked at the cloudy sky. "Am I late?"

"No, honey. I mean, it's about time I saw that smile on your face again."

Frankie hugged the woman's wiry shoulders and unlocked the door for them both. Jean was part friend, part bossy surrogate mother. Frankie had gone through a tough time when her real mother died three years before. Her mother had been her touchstone, the one person who believed in her without question, whose warm, tight hug could make a bad day good. Troy had tried to help, but it was Jean's tart sympathy that pulled her out of her grief. Without it, Frankie wasn't sure she would have survived.

"I feel lucky today," Frankie said. "Maybe I'll try my hand at that new Mexican omelet."

But as it turned out, she wasn't lucky. Her backup cook showed up an hour into breakfast, and Frankie very stupidly decided to work the front.

The place was packed, every stool and booth occupied. The

scent of syrup and bacon was homier than her home, but the atmosphere was misleading. Despite the crowd, her gaze zeroed in on what it least wished to find. Troy and his boss, Karen Ellis, sat at the very last of the twelve red booths. Frankie's stomach clenched. She could tell they hadn't ordered yet. They were leaning toward each other across their menus.

Karen Ellis was the consummate businesswoman, her outfits always put together, her dark hair perfectly waved and bobbed. This morning she looked uncustomarily soft in a flowered sundress—uncustomarily pretty, too. Her cheeks glowed with a wash of pink that damn well looked natural. A pair of Louis Vuitton sunglasses were perched fetchingly on her head. Even as Frankie stood there frozen, Karen reached across the table to tenderly take Troy's hand.

The gesture said everything Frankie hadn't wanted to know. This wasn't an employer and employee sharing a friendly meal, and Troy hadn't been working late just to get ahead.

*Shit*, Frankie thought. She's *who he left me for?* She's *the woman he thinks will look up to him?*

Obviously, Troy was further out his mind than she'd imagined. Women like Karen Ellis didn't look up to anyone but themselves.

Frankie couldn't move, though she knew people were staring. This was better than dinner theater for the gossip junkies in Six Palms. From the corner of her awareness she saw heads turn: regulars, the counterboy, even the perpetually laconic chief of police. Her face was hot and her fingers cold. She barely had strength to blink when Jean came up to rub her arm.

"I'll take those two fools, honey. You serve that nice Chief West."

Frankie shook her head. "It's all right. I'll have to face them sometime. Might as well let the folks have their show."

Somehow, her feet took her down the old-fashioned tilework

floor to the new lovebirds. She couldn't bring herself to look at Troy, but Karen was laughing softly when she came up. Frankie gripped her order pad more tightly in the hope that it wouldn't shake.

"Hey," she said just as Karen turned to her and smiled.

It was the same genuinely friendly expression that had made Ellis Real Estate a success. It said Karen was bright and honest and would do everything in her power to get you a deal. While Frankie respected the smile, and Karen had always been nice to her, she knew she had no chance in hell of returning it.

For the first time, she noticed how attractive Karen was. She wasn't like Troy, whose beauty you couldn't miss from a mile away, but her cheekbones were strong and her skin nice and smooth. Her mouth was great, even if it probably wasn't the one she'd been born with. Her nose was bland—too small, Frankie thought—but her eyes more than made up for it. They were a mix of gray and gold: big, dark-lashed orbs that looked as intelligent as they were warm.

Grudgingly, and with no particular pleasure, Frankie admitted she could see why Troy might want to wake up to them.

"Frankie," her replacement said with a slightly embarrassed moue to acknowledge that this was awkward. "We were hoping to see you today."

"Uh-huh," said Frankie, because she really wasn't good at faking things. "Are you ready to order now?"

"I think so," Karen said and picked up the menu again.

That was when Frankie saw it: a rock the size of a freaking planet on the fourth finger of Karen's left hand. Little rainbows shot out of the thing, the stone so clear it rivaled the water sparkling in her glass. Frankie's mind stuttered to a halt. For a moment, she was impressed that Troy could afford it. Then she was simply sick with a depth of humiliation she hadn't known she could feel.

Troy didn't believe in marriage. He'd made sure he told her that the first night they shared a bed.

She couldn't help herself. She looked at him. She could tell he knew what she was thinking. His face was flushed, his eyes pleading. Her own expression must have been pretty stormy, because he hung his head and wagged it at the tabletop.

*You little shit*, she thought a second before her pencil snapped.

"Oh," Karen said, never slow to figure things out. "I'm sorry, Frankie. I guess I shouldn't have worn this here."

"Forget it." Frankie waved a hand in dismissal. "If I owned a rock like that, I expect I'd never take it off."

Her voice was as tight as a widow's corset, which—come to think of it—was how she felt. She ignored the sound of Troy murmuring her name.

"Well," said Karen. "I guess I'll, um, have the Frankie's Special with whole-wheat toast."

Frankie gritted her teeth at the obvious response to this. From the looks of it, Karen had been having "Frankie's special" for quite some time. "Coffee?"

Karen hesitated. "Not today. Maybe just a glass of milk."

"And you?" said Frankie, turning to Troy. She hadn't thought he could get any redder, but blotches of embarrassment stained the flush already on his cheeks. Even that couldn't make him ugly. He was still the best-looking man she'd ever met.

"Plain scrambled eggs and bacon," he said in a slightly strangled tone. "Black coffee. No toast."

They both knew he didn't have to tell her what he wanted. For the last five years he'd only ever ordered this. She even understood why he was back in here so soon. She *was* his best friend, or she had been. The warmth of this place had been a big part of their good times. She doubted Troy had the imagination to think where else he should go.