



Summer Rental: A Novel

By Mary Kay Andrews

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Sometimes, when you need a change in your life, the tide just happens to pull you in the right direction...

Ellis, Julia, and Dorie. Best friends since Catholic grade school, they now find themselves, in their mid-thirties, at the crossroads of life and love. Ellis, recently fired from a job she gave everything to, is rudderless and now beginning to question the choices she's made over the past decade of her life. Julia--whose caustic wit covers up her wounds--has a man who loves her and is offering her the world, but she can't hide from how deeply insecure she feels about her looks, her brains, her life. And Dorie has just been shockingly betrayed by the man she loved and trusted the most in the world...though this is just the tip of the iceberg of her problems and secrets. A month in North Carolina's Outer Banks is just what they each of them needs.

Ty Bazemore is their landlord, though he's hanging on to the rambling old beach house by a thin thread. After an inauspicious first meeting with Ellis, the two find themselves disturbingly attracted to one another, even as Ty is about to lose everything he's ever cared about.

Maryn Shackelford is a stranger, and a woman on the run. Maryn needs just a few things in life: no questions, a good hiding place, and a new identity. Ellis, Julia, and Dorie can provide what Maryn wants; can they also provide what she needs?

Mary Kay Andrews' novel is the story of five people questioning everything they ever thought they knew about life. Five people on a journey that will uncover their secrets and point them on the path to forgiveness. Five people who each need a sea change, and one month in a summer rental that might just give it to them.

Summer Rental is one of *Library Journal's* Best Women's Fiction Books of 2011

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Summer Rental: A Novel By Mary Kay Andrews Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #40247 in eBooks
- Published on: 2011-06-07
- Released on: 2011-06-07
- Format: Kindle eBook

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Editorial Review

Review

Praise for "Summer Rental" "Mary Kay Andrews spins a beach-blanket sizzler around three lifelong friends . . . a warm-weather treat that has a lot going for it, not least the sunny forecast that summer love can blossom into a four-season commitment." --"Publishers Weekly" "Andrews writes another charmer with a picturesque Southern setting and winsome female characters." --"Booklist" "[R]eaders of "Summer Rental" will stay glued to their sandy beach chairs waiting to see what happens next." --"The "Christian Science Monitor" "Secrets are shared, a mystery woman appears, love may be in the air." --"People "magazine" "[T]his is prime beach-read material" --"Daily Record "(Gannett newspapers)" "Summer Rental" is like a great day at the beach. You don't want it to end. Enjoy a vacation any time of the year with the ever-delightful Mary Kay Andrews." --"Susan Elizabeth Phillips, author of "Heroes Are My Weakness" "The bright and breezy plot of "Summer Rental" delivers just the right combination of sexy romance and warm friendship." --"Chicago Tribune" "Summer Rental" is just a delight to savor. The lively cast of characters is complex, genuine, and strong, and the interplay between the long-term friends is heartwarming." --"Times Record News (Texas)" "You will relate to the women and their relationships as you laze through the pages . . . and you will smile, chuckle, and maybe even get a little misty eyed." --"Examiner.com"

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About the Author

Mary Kay Andrews is the *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Fixer Upper*, *Deep Dish*, *Blue Christmas*, *Savannah Breeze*, *Hissy Fit*, *Little Bitty Lies*, and *Savannah Blues*. A former journalist for the *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, she lives in Atlanta, Georgia.

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It was not an auspicious beginning for a vacation, let alone for a new life. The rain chased her all the way down the East Coast, slashing at the windshield, pounding her car from every angle. Between the backwash from a continuous stream of eighteen-wheelers blowing past her at eighty miles an hour (in contrast to her own sedate fifty-five mph) and violent gusts of wind from the storm, it was all she could do to stay on the roadway.

It was her own fault, Ellis decided. She should have stuck to her original plan. She should have gotten up at a sensible hour, at least waiting until daylight to start the drive from Philadelphia to North Carolina. Instead, on some insane impulse, she'd simply locked up the town house and driven off shortly after midnight. It was a most un-Ellis-like decision. But then, her old life, back there in Philly, was gone. And somewhere, on that long drive south, she had subconsciously decided that the seeds of a new life must be waiting, at the beach. In August.

Ellis took a deep breath and rolled her shoulders, first forward, and then backwards, trying to work out the kinks from six hours of driving. She reached for the commuter mug of coffee in the Accord's cup holder and took a long sip, hoping it would clear the fatigue fog.

An hour later, she saw the sign: Nags Head, 132 miles. She smiled. The rain had slowed to a light drizzle. She should arrive at the house, which was called Ebbtide, by around seven.

Her smile faded. What had she been thinking? Check-in was at 2 P.M., according to the renter's agreement she'd signed.

She composed a mental e-mail to herself: To: EllisSullivan@hotmail.com. From: EllisSullivan@hotmail.com. Subject: Failure to plan = plan to fail.

But the memo would have to wait. The highway rose and she found herself on a long, gently arching bridge. One more damned bridge. Surely it was the last. The Chesapeake Bay Bridge had nearly done her in. She felt her jaw clench tightly. Her fingertips clamped the steering wheel, and her heart raced. A bead of sweat trickled down her back.

Nags Head was on the Outer Banks of North Carolina. She'd studied her guidebooks, maps, and AAA Triptik for weeks now. She knew the island's geography, even its topography, intimately. But she'd refused to allow herself to focus on the bridge issue. Because the fact was, as the girls knew all too well, bridges—even wimpy little bridges like the Sam Varnedoe that separated Whitmarsh and Wilmington islands back home in Savannah—scared the living bejeezus out of Ellis Sullivan.

She kept her eyes straight ahead, not daring to look right or left at the water flowing under the bridge. When she'd finally crossed the bridge, her hands were clammy, her T-shirt sweat-soaked.

Now she was on the Outer Banks proper. Signs for the little towns flashed by: Corolla, Duck, Southern Shores, Kitty Hawk, Avalon Beach. The sun rose, and she was somehow shocked at how densely developed the beachfront was here. She'd expected to see clumps of sea oats silhouetted against sparkling blue water; sailboats bobbing at anchor; great, gray shingled houses staring moodily out to sea; the occasional lighthouse. The reality was that, so far, what she'd seen of the storied Outer Banks could just as well have been the Jersey shore, Myrtle Beach, Fort Lauderdale, or any other East Coast tourist resort—meaning miles and miles of hotels and motels, restaurants, and strip shopping centers lining both sides of the road, and a shoreline packed with cheek-to-jowl condo complexes and huge, pastel-painted beach houses.

She followed Route 12 south, and when the GPS computerized voice instructed her to turn left and then

right, she knew she was getting close. Virginia Dare Trail was the beach road. Here, at least, there was a little bit of elbow room between the houses. Once or twice she actually caught a glimpse of sand dunes and sea oat plumes. Finally, the well-modulated woman's voice announced cheerily, "Arrive at destination, on left." Ellis slowed the car and stared. A long crushed-shell drive led through a weedy patch of sand. There was a mailbox at the curb, with a sun-bleached cedar sign in the cutout shape of a whale. EBBTIDE was painted on the sign in faded white letters. The driveway ended at what looked like a two-story garage. The wood-shingled structure was a weathered grayish-brownish affair. Through a set of open wooden garage doors, she spotted a beat-up tan Bronco with a red surfboard strapped to the rooftop rack.

To the side of the garage, a rambling three-story wood-frame house arose from a set of wooden stairs. Stretched across the front of the house was a long, open porch. A row of rocking chairs marched across the porch, and a gaudy striped beach towel was draped carelessly across a railing. From the sandy side yard, a wooden walkway led up and over a towering sand dune.

On an impulse, she pulled the car into the next driveway. Here, there was no house at all, only the charred remains of a concrete-block foundation, along with some blackened timbers. A black-and-orange NO TRESPASSING sign was posted on a block wall. Ellis put the Accord in park and got out of the car, her cramped legs and back screaming in protest. The air was already hot and muggy. She did a couple of deep knee bends, scanning the yard next door for any signs of life. Had the earlier renters already checked out? Or did the Bronco in the garage belong to somebody who was still enjoying a last hour or two on the beach before it was time to head home?

She strolled over to the mailbox and peered up at the house. Their house, at least for the month of August. Ellis intended to make every hour of this month count.

"Ebbtide," she said aloud, satisfied that the exterior of the house, at least, seemed to match the photo she'd spotted in the Vacation Rentals by Owner listing. Of course, that photo had also shown an inviting green lawn dotted with billowing blue hydrangeas and a hot-pink bicycle built for two with a charming wicker basket leaning up against a rose-covered picket fence. None of these were in evidence now. In fact, the only thing in evidence in what passed for a yard, besides a bumper crop of weeds, was a busted-up Styrofoam cooler full of empty malt liquor cans and a sodden heap of yellowing newspapers, still in their plastic wrappers.

She glanced down at her watch. She had half a day to kill until check-in. Being Ellis, she'd already planned to arrive hours before the others. The extra time would give her a chance to go to the grocery store, prepare their first night's dinner, get the house situated. Linens were not included in the house rental, so she'd brought enough sheets and towels for everybody, just in case. And yes, she would have first crack at choosing her bedroom, but since she *had* done all the legwork finding the house and planning this trip, would anybody really mind?

Well, maybe Willa would mind. She was only older than the others by twenty months, but really, she could be so pushy and bossy. It would be just like Willa to accuse Ellis of hogging the best bedroom. Which she had no intention of doing. She just didn't want a bedroom facing the street and a lot of noise. She was a light sleeper—and she had a lot of thinking to do. And anyway, as the only single woman in the group, she was used to her own space. Too used to it, she thought wryly.

She was dying to see Ebbtide up close. She glanced up and down the road. There was no sign of traffic. Just another sleepy summer morning at the beach. Maybe it wouldn't hurt to walk up the driveway of the burnt-out house to see what she could see. Technically, she knew, it was trespassing. But it wasn't like she was looting the place. What was left to loot?

Quickly, before she lost her nerve, Ellis trotted up the crushed oyster-shell drive. Another wooden boardwalk and a set of stairs leading up and over the sand dune, just like the one at Ebbtide, seemed to have survived the fire that had taken this house. She trod the steps quickly, not wanting to be seen from the road.

There was a shed-roofed deck at the top of the dunes. At one time it would have been an amazing place to sit and sip a cocktail and enjoy the ocean breezes. But not now. Some of the decking had rotted out, and the railings missed pickets in several places. A couple of broken plastic lawn chairs lay sprawled on their side,

but it was the view that captured Ellis's attention. From here she could see the Nags Head she'd imagined. The dunes, covered with sea oats, beach plums, and shrubs whose names she didn't know, sloped down to meet a wide, white beach. The tide was out, and the Atlantic Ocean sparkled gray-blue below. Here and there, people walked along the shore, stooping to pick up shells.

"Perfect!" Ellis exclaimed. Just then, she heard the slap of a wooden screen door. Turning, she saw movement from the second-floor apartment over the garage at Ebbtide. That apartment had a small wooden deck wrapping around the sides and back of it. As she watched, a man walked out onto the deck. She could see him clearly—good Lord—he was in his underwear.

The man was barefoot, deeply tanned, with unkempt sun-bleached brownish hair. A pair of baggy white boxer briefs hung low on his slim hips. He turned, faced the water, yawned and stretched. And then, while Ellis watched, slack-jawed with amazement and disgust, he quite casually proceeded to pee off the edge of the deck.

He took his own good time about it too. Ellis was rooted to the spot where she stood, her face crimson with embarrassment. When he was finally finished, he stretched and turned. And that's when he spotted her, a lone figure in hot pink capris and a white T-shirt, her long dark hair blowing in the breeze coming off the beach.

The man gave her a nonchalant smile. His teeth were white and even, and from here she could see the golden stubble of a days-old beard. He waved cas...

Users Review

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Gerald Patton:

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Anthony Koch:

Playing with family in the park, coming to see the ocean world or hanging out with good friends is thing that usually you could have done when you have spare time, subsequently why you don't try factor that really opposite from that. A single activity that make you not sensation tired but still relaxing, trilling like on roller coaster you already been ride on and with addition of information. Even you love *Summer Rental: A Novel*,

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