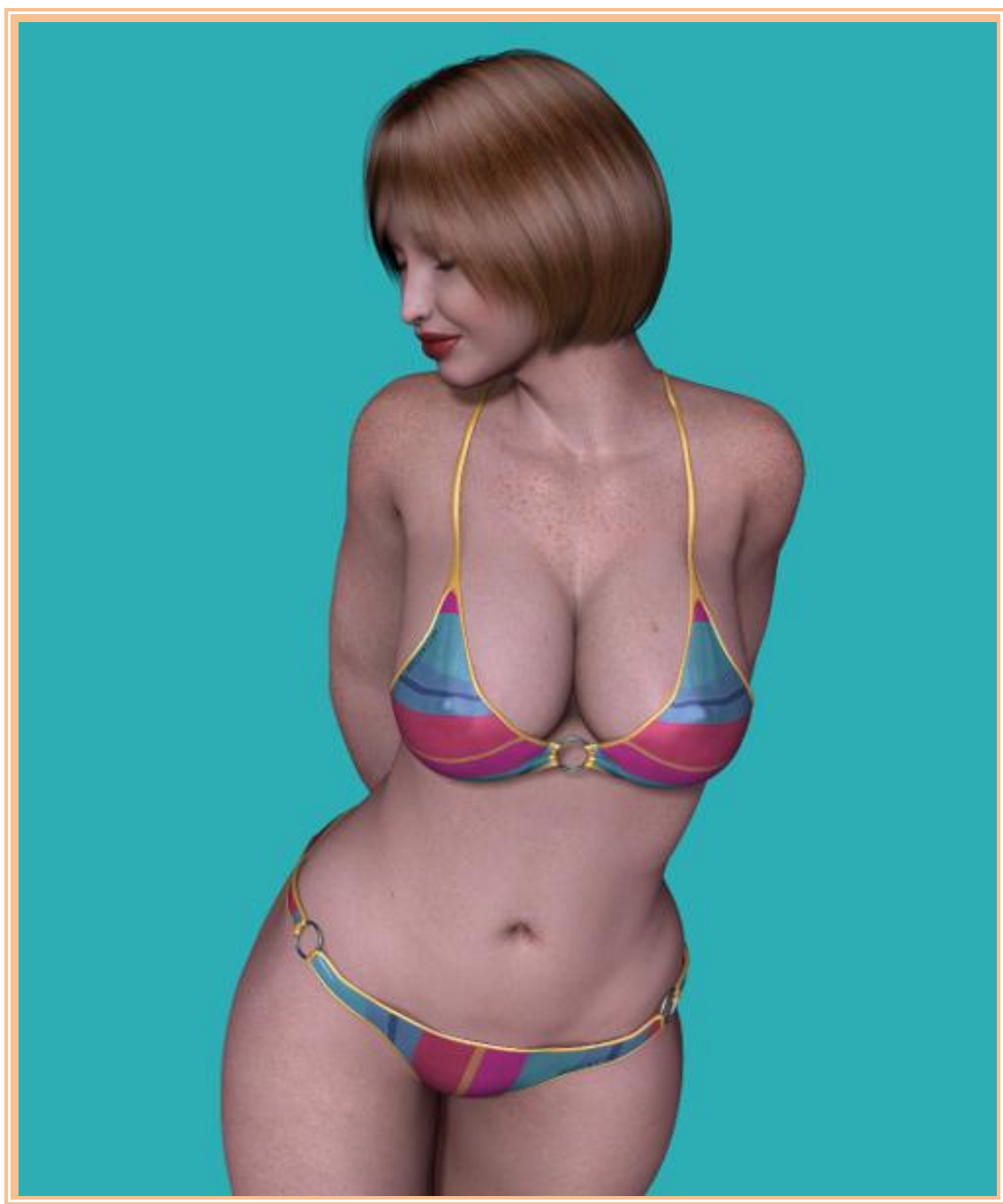


# New Summer Outfit

**Bradley Stoke**



Ginny knew that buying her new summer outfit had been a mistake. It seemed fine when she tried it out in the shop, hidden by the heavy brown curtain. Perhaps a little skimpy for a woman in her early forties, but didn't she have a new spurt of youth since her separation? In fact, in the shop, twirling around, patting her bum, pushing up the heave of her bosom, pulling in her stomach, she reflected that she really didn't look bad at all. Many younger women looked much worse than her.

But other women who were the same age as her looked much better, Ginny reflected, regarding the woman beside her. They were both taking refuge from the unexpected Tunisian downpour beneath a low timber roof designed to shelter deck chairs: not two women shivering in their swimsuits.

When the rain had started, Ginny made no attempt to run for the shelter of the hotel. Too much was happening in her Anne Tyler novel at that moment to justify that. And, anyway, the rain would soon stop.

But it didn't. It got heavier and heavier, graduating from tiny dimples in the sand to an overall marshy greyness. Finally, there was no choice and Ginny was the very last person on the beach to collect her towel and wicker bag, her novel shoved hastily to the bottom, and run towards the nearest approximation to shelter.

Only, she wasn't the last one after all.

Just when she'd ducked under the low-roofed shelter, pulled her knees up to her chin, bag to one side, another pair of bare feet splattered through the damp sand and she was joined by not just anyone but, of all the people it could be, by *her*, in her elegant one-piece swimsuit and huge green towel.

"You don't mind if I join you, do you?" she asked.

Ginny shook her head, but inwardly fumed. Why did it have to be this woman?

Why anyone at all?

When Ginny arrived at the resort, she had none of the energy to socialise she thought she might have. Nor was she engulfed by the eligible bachelors who populated her fantasies. She had no enthusiasm at all for the sixties or seventies discos. Nor was she inclined to go on excursions to ancient Roman temples. She would rather stretch out on a towel on the beach, novel in hand, and dressed only in Factor 15 and her new summer outfit.

Perhaps her unsociability was a delayed shock after Brian had left her, although it had been a fairly amicable separation really. Things had sort of petered out over the years, and when Brian confessed that he had fallen in love with Melissa, well, it was almost a relief. Ginny had sometimes wondered what would bring their marriage to its final demise. And, anyway, in different circumstances Ginny might even have quite liked Melissa. She was a cheerful woman only slightly younger than Ginny and one, judging by her daughter, who might bring to Brian's life that bundle of joy that Ginny had failed to do.

However, wherever Ginny went to read her novel, on the beach, by the hotel swimming pool, even on the hotel balcony, there was always this other woman: the one now sitting next to her under the shelter. A woman who fit her swimsuit so much better than Ginny. How could it be that some women aged in such a more dignified fashion?

Perhaps it was because she had smaller breasts than Ginny. Although no expert on lingerie, Ginny was sure this woman was a B cup. Something, anyhow, much less

pendulous than Ginny's own D cup. Her bosom had once been a source of teenage pride, but as it lost its natural lift it was becoming more of a burden than a boon. Of course, the swimsuit provided flattering support, but as soon as Ginny removed that top, her breasts just drooped like old grocery sacks.

She should have chosen a one-piece!

And her companion didn't just have the better preserved bosom. Her face had none of the wrinkles and creases that even Oil of Olay hadn't cleared from Ginny's own. And her waist! Not as taut and slender as a teenager's waist (of which there were plenty on the beach to compare), but still no sign of the bulge that Ginny sported above her bikini bottom and whose contrast made her regret even more her ill-advised purchase of a two-piece.

Of course, now that she was up close to this other woman, a Sarah Waters novel gripped in one hand, Ginny could identify creases and lines on her face, but on such a round face with such a broad smile they somehow enhanced rather than detracted from her beauty.

And beauty it was, Ginny had to admit. At first, Ginny was frightened of expressing such an opinion. It wasn't right to admit that another woman was 'beautiful'. What she wanted was another man like Brian, if she could ever be bothered with a relationship ever again (and sometimes she was not sure that she did).

As the Tunisian days passed by and she saw more of this woman, with her neatly square-cut bob, her elegant small-rimmed spectacles and her sparkling, toothy smile, Ginny's judgment of this woman changed. In fact, she had almost sought her out, just to catch a glimpse of her. Or maybe rather more as she hid her gaze behind

the shield of dark sunglasses, her novel balanced on her knees and a huge floppy sun-hat over her floppy bush of hair.

“Will the rain never stop!” her companion wondered.

She turned her head and smiled again at Ginny, who swallowed to keep some part of herself from rising to the back of her mouth. Ginny averted her eyes from those warm green eyes, the tinted glasses now removed, but she didn’t know where else to look.

“I didn’t think it rained like this in Africa,” Ginny at last remarked.

“It quite obviously does!” her companion exclaimed. “Actually, my name’s Sally. And you’re...?”

“Ginny!”

“I’ve seen you around. You’re on holiday by yourself? Like me.”

Ginny nodded.

And then they started talking, Ginny and Sally, and it was almost as if they’d always known each other. And, outside, the rain continued to fall onto the freshly raked sand.

It was strange. All that Ginny knew about Sally before were her long legs, her slim waist, her tasteful choice of clothes, her beautiful smile, and now those piercing green eyes. But Ginny felt a stronger bond towards Sally than she’d ever felt towards anyone.

Anyone, that is, since her husband Brian.

As they spoke, and Ginny perhaps more so than Sally, Ginny divulged more about her feelings towards Brian and Melissa than she’d ever done to anyone except

her older sister. So intent was she in her discussion that she didn't really notice the slow descent of the strap of her new summer outfit that supported her left breast gradually sliding, millimetre by millimetre, down her upper arm, but so intent was she in her discussion that she'd not really noticed its slow descent.

And then she noticed a look in Sally's eyes directed not towards her face but towards her bosom. And she detected also a peculiar gleam in those eyes and a corresponding brightening of her face. Ginny glanced down and was alarmed to see that the cup of her bikini top had somehow fallen loose and almost all her breast, including the nipple, was on display.

"Goodness! My new swimsuit!" exclaimed Ginny, about to adjust herself.

"Leave it like that," Sally said softly.

Ginny looked at Sally with alarm, one hand hooked on her strap and the other still grasping her beach bag.

"What did you say?"

"Leave it like that."

"But my new summer outfit... It's not right..."

"That's all right, Ginny. Your swimsuit is fine. It's perhaps a little young for you, but it fits you well. I've noticed you, Ginny, you know... Looking at me. From beneath your shades..."

Ginny blushed.

"You have a much better swimsuit than me," was all she could think to say.

"Nonsense!" said Sally.

And at that moment, with the rain still beating on the shelter above, Sally

leaned forward and placed her lips tenderly on Ginny's breast, just above the areola.

Ginny gasped.

"You have beautiful breasts, you know," said Sally, kneeling in front of Ginny, her arms around Ginny's shoulders, her bag tipped to one side and her towel half outside the shelter where it was soaking up the rainwater that continued to fall.

Ginny wanted to reciprocate, to reply in the same fashion, to say that Sally was the most beautiful woman she'd ever known, that age had matured rather than diminished her beauty, that her own bosom was just perfect.

The words didn't come. Instead, Ginny's mouth and Sally's met in a slobbery, animal urgency and from thence on conversation with Sally would never again be the same.