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Plus Size

By Deena Gomersall

Stan was panting and wheezing as he neared the top of the hill that led to the town centre; he used a chubby arm to wipe across his forehead, removing the perspiration that was forming. It was a regular chore, one that never got easier as, try as he might, he could not lose weight.

At just nineteen years of age, Stan weighed in at 371 lb. He was born to an overweight family; his Mum, his Dad, his older brother, and two aunts on his mother's side were all large. Only his younger sister Lillian had escaped obesity... she had almost a perfect figure for a seventeen-year-old.

Growing up had been a nightmare as he was constantly bullied for being fat. Even the family home was targeted several times, but it was more a medical condition that ran through the genes of the family; basically, problems with the thyroid glands. It didn't help that the problem caused tiredness which led to lack of exercise which led to not burning calories.

At nineteen, when other boys of his age were dating often, Stan had had just one short-term girl-

friend, Beryl, a girl who other boys regarded as being "ugly." She was a little overweight herself, wore big round glasses, squinted, her face was covered in freckles and she had 'goofy' teeth, but even she didn't last after just a few months..

His mum had sent Stan out shopping whilst she and his father relaxed in front of the television and his brother Mark tinkered with the engine of his car, which had stopped running the weekend before. Stan had missed the bus to town by just a couple of minutes. It had stopped at the bus stop for other passengers and he had tried running for it but stopped as his heart had started pounding and he began wheezing, breathlessly.

So he had taken the twenty-minute walk up the hill. His destination, a supermarket, was in sight when he heard someone running after him and shouting.

"Hey, Sir! 'scuse me, Sir..!"

Stan turned around and saw some long-haired guy with round glasses perched on the end of his nose running towards him. He was dressed, Stan thought, like some hippie.

"What do you want?" Stan asked directly, wondering what this was all about.

"Hello sir, I noticed you last week, in the supermarket. I noticed how nice your hair was, you keep it nice and clean and there is a healthy gloss to it. I noticed how nice your skin is, such a nice complexion; clear and unblemished, you hold your body perfectly with poise and grace and you have such clear and beautiful hazel eyes and I..."

Stan felt himself go cold. "Look mate, I appreciate all of the nice compliments and all but if you are coming onto me, let me tell you, I'm straight. I don't have any interest in guys," he stated, cutting the man off promptly.

The rather thin man suddenly laughed. "Oh! I'm not coming onto you, sir, I mean, I am homosexual, and proud to be out, but, no... Look, could I invite you for a drink at the café just up the road?"

Stan straightened himself up. "It seems to me like you are coming onto me. I have things to do, can you stop pestering me?"

"I'm not doing very well at this. I'm better with women. Look, here's the thing, I'm a scout. Half an hour of your time is all I ask; I have a proposition for you, one that you may find very lucrative."

"What do you mean by lucrative? Doesn't that mean worth a lot of money?"

"Indeed so, in fact it could be very profitable to you. We could be talking quite a lot of money. How much do you currently earn in your employment?"

"I'm not employed; I'm out of work at the moment," Stan answered honestly. He was now becoming interested. He had been trying to get a job for as long as he could remember and he and the rest of his family were all unemployed and hard-up except for Lillian who had a job in a local care home.

"Well, yeah, okay. I can give you half an hour." Stan was going to be grateful for a sit down after his long walk and, whoever this man was, he could buy the cuppas.

"Would you like coffee or tea?" the man asked as they entered the small café.

"Tea please, white with three sugars, please, mate."

"And could I buy you anything to eat?"

Stan was beginning to think that all his birthdays had arrived together. "Oh, that's very noble of you; I'll have a bacon and egg butty please." Sam returned with a smile on his chubby face.

As the man returned to the table with a tray laden with two cups, one of coffee and one of tea, a large bacon and egg sandwich in a bread bun and a small cheese and pickle sandwich, he reached out a slender hand with long fingers.

"So, Hi, My name is Winston Kingsley. I'm an agent working for Big Is Beautiful clothing, UK. Basically I'm a scout on the look out for new models to model the clothing that we sell. I wondered if you would be interested?"

Stan tried to clear his mouth from the extra large bite he had taken. "Modelling? I've never done anything like that. Don't you have to do cat walks and crap? I don't think I would like walking and posing in front of people."

"Oh no... it's nothing like that, I don't expect you to be Britain's next Kate Moss. No, this is all studio work and you really don't need any experience. You just put on the clothing from our new ranges, our photographer will instruct you how to pose and take some photos of you."

Stan thought only briefly on why Winston had used a female model to illustrate what he didn't expect of him. "So, why have you come to me?" Stan asked before taking another big bite.

"Well, like I said. I noticed you last week. Whilst you don't need experience, we do go for people with a certain look, someone who we feel will look good in the clothes and sell to the consumer."

"What? You think I look good enough to sell clothes? I can't even pull a bird, mate."

"Trust me, you have a very nice face... and no, I am not coming on to you, I have a boyfriend. So, would you be interested in finding out more?"

"Well yes, I guess so. What do I have to do?"

"We have a regional office up in Carlisle where you would meet the marketing manager, Mike... Oh, you have some egg running down your chin... just there."

Stan wiped a chubby hand where Winston had indicated. "Carlisle, that's a bit out of the way."

"If you are interested, I will run you up there in my car. Mike will tell you the terms, tell you how much you would earn per shoot and everything and, if he thinks you would be a good candidate, he will give you a contract. Here's my card, just ring that mobile number underneath to let me know if you are interested and I will then arrange a meeting and come pick you up."

It all sounded rather too good to be true but Stan was already thinking that getting himself exposed as a model in a glossy catalogue could have the girls flocking to him.

Stan took a large gulp of tea, finished his sandwich and wiped his hands up his jeans. "Well, it sounds okay. I'll have a chat with Mum and Dad when I get home, see what they think, then get back to you. Is that okay?"

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"So, just tell me again, Stan, this man said he wanted to use you as a male model?" Stan's mum, Gwendolyn, asked sceptically as the family ate their evening meal at the table. "But, don't you have to be fit and with a great body to be a model?"

"No Mum, they have to sell larger people's clothing too and in order to do that, they need plus size models," Stan replied as he cut into a slice of beef on his plate.

"I heard that all these male models are homos. You better watch your arse, kid, if you start that game," Stan's older brother, Mark, warned him with a grin.

"Don't be silly. Yeah, I guess some of the top models look a bit effeminate but there are a lot of them that are straight and super fit. You hear about them marrying some of the gorgeous super models," Stan's sister Lillian joined in."

"Yeah, and some of those sexy models could even be attracted to me," Stan suggested.

"You? You fat twat! Those babes would never look twice at someone like you when there are all those, I suppose, well-built and handsome male models to choose from," Mark laughed.

"Talk for yourself, I'm just big boned and you are bigger built than I am," Stan responded indignantly.

"Oy! You two... This is the table and I'm trying to eat my meal in peace. If you want to bicker, go outside and do it," Stan's father, Percy, joined in.

"What do you make of our Stan being one of them there models, Percy?" Gwendolyn asked.

"Far as I'm concerned Gwen, he can do what he chuffin' well likes. So long as he is bringing in some money, won't be too soon."

"Well then, maybe Mark can get a job with them as well because he isn't working either; all he does is mess about with that stupid car which hardly ever works," Stan had to opine.

"Button it, dweeb, nobody asked you for an opinion about me. If I am going to do a job it would be a man's job, not some ponce strutting up and down a cat walk. I don't need to belittle myself like that to pull the chicks," Mark retaliated.

"How much did they say you would earn, Stan. Modelling is supposed to bring in big money," Lillian asked.

"I'm not sure, Lil. That will all be sorted out if I go with that Winston bloke up to Carlisle and see their marketing manager. Mark I think his name is."

"Well, it can't hurt any, Stanley. I think you ought to go and at least find out what is on the table." Stan's mum gave her seal approval with Lillian nodding her head in agreement.

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"I think you have made a very wise decision in coming back to me," Winston told Stan as he changed the gears of his red Vauxhall Astra. "Honestly, man, there is an absolute mountain of work for someone like you in the clothes modelling industry, but it doesn't stop there because, once your face gets published, other companies needing people like you will come forward as sub-contractors."

"I can't believe that my face is anything special to stand out from a crowd or that my being well overweight would have people interested in me for modelling clothes," Stan pondered aloud.

"It's like I said to you last week, Stan, lots of larger people are shy of their body even when they are targeted, many others would never even think of pursuing a career in modelling as, like you have just alluded, they believe nobody would ever be interested in them. That gives a shortfall of people we can use... and amongst the ones who do, there are other requirements. Again, I told you last week that you have a very good face. Just call me a talent spotter."

Stan noticed the 'Welcome to Carlisle' road sign as Winston spoke; they were almost at their destination.

The building, when they arrived, didn't meet Stan's expectations. To be fair, he wasn't sure what his expectations were but he had kind of imagined quite a large, multi-floor, multi-roomed place, possibly quite modern. The premises of Big Is Beautiful

Clothing was actually a unit on a business park, it was single-storied but it did have a few different rooms and offices.

And Mike, the marketing manager, wasn't anything like what Stan expected either. Stan had thought a youngish trendy-looking man, a bit like Winston; Mike looked like your more average businessman. He was tall, over six feet, quite well-built and healthy-looking with short curly black hair. He was wearing a blue shirt with grey tie and grey slacks. He reached out a hand to greet Stan; he had a vicelike grip.

"Hi, welcome, you must be Stanley, yeah? I hope you had a good trip up here, Stanley, come on through to my office. Do you do tea, coffee?"

"Tea would be nice," Stan replied a little nervously, "three sugars."

"How you like it, buddy. Black? White? Strong? You look like a sweet white medium kind of guy to me," Mike guessed. "Laura, put the kettle on, honey, two coffees and a tea for Stanley lovey."

For the first time Stan noticed a young blonde girl sitting behind a desk where she had been typing. She rose from her seat with a disinterested look and disappeared into a small room just behind her.

Stan was sat down in an office cluttered with files, paperwork and some photo images pinned to the walls, though he didn't have time to take any proper notice.

"So, Stanley, I'm Mike of Big is Beautiful Clothing. Basically we are marketing, we do not make our own ranges but we buy off manufacturers and sell either from our website or hard catalogues; we work with other companies throughout Europe and some places over in the States. We have nine premises dotted around the UK; this is our most Northern office. There may be times, if you take the job, that you are

asked to go to one of our other premises. We transport you, of course, and provide digs."

Stan couldn't help the feeling, as Mike spoke, that he was being scrutinised. It stood to reason, he supposed, if it was his body and face that they were interested in. He was pleased that he'd had an extra close shave that morning. Not that he had a heavy beard growth; light and patchy, the most stubborn whiskers being concentrated around his chin.

"Now I am guessing that Winston has told you that, in our industry, there is rather a dearth of plus-size models?" After Stan nodded, Mike continued, "We do have a couple of black female models and about five white females, that are very stretched. Melanie has just gone on maternity leave, whilst Rose has just found a new boyfriend whom she is besotted with and she is now going to Slimming World as well as using our own weight loss plan as she wants to lose a lot of weight for him. She has already lost 34 pounds and decreasing rapidly.

"We are fortunate in having quite a few male models as they are not as conscious about their weight as women are. In fact we probably have more than enough males and with a much smaller range of clothing for men to model..."

Mike's words almost seemed to be fading out of Stan's hearing. He screwed his face up, furrowing his brow as he tried to digest and reason what Mike had been saying.

"Uh, could I just stop you there for a moment Mike?" he asked.

"Sure, fellah, what is it?"

"Well, you seem to be telling me that there are a lot of vacancies in the larger ladies market but you have more than enough men. I can't figure that out. Why are you interviewing *me* then?"

Mike interwove his fingers on the desk in front of him. "Winston has a very good eye for talent. He contacted me a week ago saying he had spotted someone he was very interested in. He said you had good posture for a person your size and that you had flawless skin and a good head of healthy hair. Your facial bone structure was, in his words, beautiful."

Inwardly, Stan let out a sigh of relief even though he wasn't sure why he was so relieved.

"So, you think I could be better than some of the other guys on your books?" he queried. "I guess that's quite a compliment," He continued with a smile.

"We-ll, yes, I guess. You do have what they don't have, that's for sure."

Stan waited, getting his ego further massaged.

"You have feminine features."

Suddenly the crest that Stan had been developing atop his head crashed to the floor. "I've what?"

"I'm pretty damn sure, Stanley, that you could be placed higher in the pecking order of the guys we have on our books but what we really need is female models, desperately. Yes, I could put you in the mid-section of the guys we have, but the one you knock further down the pole would then be of no use to us because he doesn't have what you have. Does that make sense to you?"

Stan now felt indignant. "I don't know what you see when you look at me, Mike, but I assure you, I am all man. I'm certainly not a woman. I, I can get my pick of the chicks in my town, I'm a real stud."

"Stanley, Stanley, Stanley... I'm not doubting your prowess with the ladies here, I'm not doubting your masculinity. What I am saying is, we could work with you as a female model."

"So, you are suggesting I wear women's clothing, dresses, skirts and all of that shit? I'm not a transvestite. Bollocks to that, you can keep your chuffin' job, mate."

"If you are confident in your masculinity, then it really shouldn't be a problem for you. Look at how many macho actors have dragged up for film rolls. It's not a problem to them because their fans know it's all just a façade, that beneath the powder and the skirts, they are still the buff masculine blokes they have always been,"

"No... if my family and people that I know know what I am doing, see pictures of me... I would die of shame."

"My catalogues do not sell clothing to transvestites and drag queens, Stanley... though of course they are free to buy what we sell. We sell to real, oversize women. What I am saying here is, we don't want to shoot photographs of an obvious male model wearing female clothing. We are looking at you because you would make a very convincing woman. With makeup and a wig, nobody would recognise you."

It made no difference to Stan. Wearing women's clothes and makeup was just so wrong, he would feel effeminate, like some sissy. No. He wasn't the manliest man in the world but he had his male pride. "No, no deal. I'm not doing something like that. You lured me up here on false pretences. I'd like to be taken home now," he demanded.

Mike went into a drawer in his desk and brought out a check book. "Stanley, don't let a golden opportunity pass you by because of male pride. Go home and think about it. I am ready to give you a contract here and now, without even doing a photo shoot test on you," Mike calmly replied as he scribbled a pen on a check. He lifted the check book and showed it to Stan. "This. This, Stanley, is what you could expect to be receiving every month of an initial six-month contract. And I'm pretty sure that once you start ap-

pearing in glossy catalogues, that sub-contractors will be making inquiries for your services, too."

Stan's eyes widened as he looked at the figure that Mike had written.

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"You should have told me, Winston. You should have said what it was that you had in mind for me before driving me all the way up here. I could have been home now playing Death Valley with my sister; that's the new computer game I just bought."

"You'll get a check in the post for your time today, Stan, but you really ought to think on what you could be missing out on just for putting on a few items of cloth that aren't quite the norm for you," Winston replied.

"Would you do it?" Stan asked.

"I have already dressed up for my boyfriend a couple of times but if I had your bone structure and complexion, hell yeah. Without hesitation. We could even start you off easy."

"Easy? How do you mean by easy?"

"We don't have to do face shots until you are a little more comfortable. We could start you off by modelling jeans and trousers, hardly any different from what men wear. They all still need modelling...shoes, nothing above the hips... you wouldn't receive as much but it's still an income and, to me, far better than slouching out at home on some gaming console."

Stan's family questioned him unmercifully when he got home. The main question was had he got the job and, when he replied he had, they asked whether he wanted it. The next question was how much it paid, that coming from his practical father. He didn't reveal what he had seen but said that pay was negotiable and dependent on how many times he was modelled and how many photographs were used in catalogues.

"Why do you say you've got a job if you want it?" his more attentive mother asked.

Stan was all ready with an answer. He did not, under any conditions, want to tell them the job entailed dressing up in female clothes. Mark would have mocked him unmercifully. His dad, thinking on the practicality of bringing money into the house, would probably scorn and yet suggest he take it.

"The thing is; it's a long way to commute. I could have to travel to Carlisle maybe five days a week and possibly go to other places in the country as well," he explained to them.

"Did you see many hunky half-naked men?" Lillian then asked.

"It's a plus-size catalogue studio, Lil. If I'd have seen any models at all, they would be all large like me, but other than Winston who drove me up there, I only saw and spoke to the manager."

"Don't let this job slip away, Stan. It could be years before you get another job opportunity," Percy prompted.

Stan went up to his room, he needed to think. If Winston was right and he could only have lower half-body shots taken, then that wouldn't be so bad. Maybe Mike would allow him just to do that. It may not pay as well but it would pay more than he was getting and keep his male pride and dignity intact. What would he model? Likely jeans and pants, possibly leggings and maybe even skirts... but surely he could bare to wear a few skirts.

His mind kept playing over the size of that check though... for just six months. And he had to consider his parents. They had struggled all of his life but never failed him or his siblings. There was always food on the table, always presents at Birthdays and Christmas. It was a chance at paying them back. But could he bring himself to put on skirts and be photographed in them?

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"Nice to see you again, Stanley," Mike greeted as he reached over his desk to shake Stan's hand.

"Good morning... Mike. Do I still call you Mike? or Mister Lambing, Sir?

Mike laughed. "Mike is fine, Stanley. I'm glad you have given this job opportunity some thought, I feel you will do well in the industry."

"Winston was saying something about how you could just photograph the bottom part of me," Stan spoke out hesitantly.

"Yes, yes, we could do that to start, kind of bring you into it slowly but I really will be looking at full-body shots. Let's give it a two-week trial, shall we, and see how you go. Oh, and Stanley, I'm going to present you with a small carrot to help you further think about signing a contract with us. I know that you live over fifty miles away so I'm going to throw in the use of a company car. How does that appeal to you?"

"Well, I, uh, I haven't got a driving licence yet... but I do know how to drive," Stan admitted.

"That's cool, that's cool. I can put you through a crash driving test; we can have you driving in no time, so long as you feel like joining us. So, do you want to try a two-week trial?"

"When do I start?" Stan asked.

"Well, how about today? You've travelled all the way up here; you may as well get something for your efforts. What do you say?"