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LIGHT INDUSTRY

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Running late, as usual, Yolanda Trinidad was racing her red Toyota down Indian Creek Drive at 50 mph, desperate to get to the fashion shoot for Paris Match, when she glanced at the dashboard and groaned: The needle on the gas gauge was riveted below E.

"Come on, Little Ruby," she pleaded, patting the dashboard, her long brown hair trailing wildly behind her, blown by the wind streaming through the open window. "You can make it!"

A model being late to a shoot was, like, a major no-no. And Paris Match was big-time -- everybody told her so. As big as you get in Europe. That's what they said. Even if she was posing for free, it didn't matter. Here she was, already 22, middle-age for a model, and time was no longer on her side. A Miami model can work all year on the German catalogs at \$1,500 a day, and what would it get her? To get into the stratosphere -- to move from being merely a "top girl" to becoming a "top top girl," Yolanda needed a great fashion shoot in a great European magazine. Like Paris Match.

This was the perfect opportunity: The French magazine had sent a team of journalists to Miami, because Miami was the hottest spot in the world for models. And so she could be the hottest model in the hottest spot in the world. If she wasn't too late. So: Should she pray that Little Ruby would run on fumes and risk absolute disaster?

No!

She swung into a gas station, jumped out and marched up to the attendant, a young guy in an oil-smeared baseball cap. He stared at her floral-print minidress, which accentuated her dazzlingly long legs. She handed him \$5 and flashed her wondrous, wide smile. As if transfixed by a magical spell, the guy's sour, sweaty face burst into a goofy grin.

Though Little Ruby was parked at the self-serve island, the attendant rushed to the pump and grabbed the nozzle. He unscrewed the gas cap and pumped the gas for her. When he was done, he opened the door with a flourish and smiled: "Come back soon!"

Yolanda gets this all the time, and she just shouted a quick "Thanks!" as she cranked up Little Ruby. She zoomed down to South Beach, parking illegally in an alley behind the Avalon Hotel. Glancing at her silver-bracelet watch, she saw she was a half-hour late as she rushed into the lobby, where the Paris Match team had assembled.

One model -- a raven-haired girl with a brooding face -- was sitting in a chair by the window as a woman worked on her makeup. Nearby, a girl with long brown hair sat in another chair as the hair man sprayed and brushed.

Yolanda flopped down on a sofa, crossed her arms in a mini-sulk and waited, staring blankly out the window at the palms across Ocean Drive. A balding, paunchy man stared at her. He was Jean-Claude Zana, a Paris Match reporter dressed in the height of French fashion: tattered blue jeans, black high-top sneakers and a sleeveless black shirt. Speaking in an accent that sounded like Peter Sellers doing Inspector Clouseau, Jean-Claude said he was ecstatic about the modeling business in Miami. "For French pipul iz dream. Sun! And bich! And sex! But beautiful sex! I see wonderful guls! As wonderful as in Paris!"

For a Frenchman to admit that women from anywhere else can be as good-looking as French

women is unheard of, as astounding as if the monsieur opined that French wine had its peers in California.

But even more astounding is Miami's new, worldwide reputation as a modeling capital, alongside New York and, of course, Paris. Jean-Claude explained that he knows many of these wonderful girls -- in modeling there are no women -- are not really from Miami. They come here from London and Germany, San Francisco and New York, Finland and Kenya. They come here to join one of the 10 modeling agencies located in South Beach.

They come because the work is here: At the height of the season -- November through May -- about 100 photo teams will be shooting in Dade daily, each using several models. The vast majority of the teams are European, and the big money comes not from the Glamorzines like Mademoiselle or Vogue, but from the proliferating catalogs that flood into mail slots around the world unbidden. Most of the catalog shoots are German, followed by the French and British. They're the cake. Then there's the icing: an assortment of European fashion magazines from Italy to Stockholm, clicking away at their own gorgeous models. Each of the catalog teams spends \$15,000 to \$20,000 apiece per day. That means more than a million bucks a day on fashion shoots in Miami -- numbers that impressed even an urbane Frenchman like Jean-Claude. "Thiz iz zeh place," he said.

The Beautiful Backdrop

As the Paris Match guy rambled on about the virtues of Miami, the hair stylist finished with one model and started on Yolanda, plopping gobs of white greasy stuff in her long locks. After her hair was brushed, she was sent off to the makeup chair, where she sat staring straight ahead, as the makeup woman worked on her face as if it were a canvas.

From a back bathroom, the other two girls marched -- the raven beauty in a tight black dress with a skimpy top that revealed a Grand Canyon of cleavage, and the brunet in a yellow evening dress that was slightly larger than a swimsuit. With full makeup on, their faces had become sharper, the cheekbones and eyes accented so that they looked haughty, even defiant.

Chins up, the girls strode past gawking tourists on the sidewalk and out to the beach, where a large black backdrop was being held up by two brawny, shirtless guys.

A black backdrop? Paris Match had come all the way to Miami, with its waving palms, neon and Art Deco details to use a backdrop of black canvas?

"Uv cuhs," said Jean-Claude, smiling.

But the famous hotels of Ocean Drive are less than 100 yards away. Why not use them for the backdrop?

"That iz not what this iz about," he said through his Gallic nose.

On the beach, one Paris Match photographer, a photojournalist, was shooting another French photographer, a fashion specialist, who was in turn shooting the Raven-haired beauty. The fashion photographer didn't like something about Raven Hair's makeup, and he summoned the makeup artist, who abandoned Yolanda in the Avalon lobby and rushed out to the sand with her satchel of magic paints.

Miffed, Yolanda sulked at the hotel bar and sipped an orange juice. It was already 6 p.m. The light was at its prime, and she wasn't even made up yet. The Avalon maitre d' tried to engage her in conversation, but Yolanda wasn't interested.

Twenty minutes later, she was summoned to the beach, where the makeup person sat her on a chair and resumed working on her face. The photographer kept shooting Raven Hair and Brunet. Yolanda couldn't help notice that Brunet had embarrassingly fleshy thighs -- not nearly as good as Yolanda's taut legs -- but there was Yolanda, still waiting to go before the cameras.

Finally, the light fading, her makeup was finished. Her face was stronger now, her eyes gleaming dark beacons, her lips full and pouty. She went back to the dressing room in the Avalon and emerged in a gold top and skin-tight orange slacks.

As she strode out of the hotel, the maitre d' stood on the porch with some tourists. "Hi, Yolanda!" he shouted. "How are you, darling?"

She marched away, ignoring him, just as she ignored the two young men by the seawall who hooted at her with admiration.

As she crossed Ocean Drive, the forlorn maitre d' blustered: "I'm just trying to impress these people by showing them I know you!" Like all the entrepreneurs in South Beach, he tries to attract

models to his establishment, to borrow some glitter from the Beautiful People.

Yolanda ignored him. She was worried because the sun had already disappeared behind the hotels. The beach was engulfed in shadows; the wondrous Miami light was gone. Still, the fashion photographer kept shooting. Yolanda stepped on the set, and his motorized camera whirred as she went through quick poses: hugging herself, arms spread wide, head bowed, head up, smile, sulk.

"OK, OK," the photographer kept mumbling. Yolanda sensed he was just going through the motions.

A policeman pulled up in a beach cart. He found that the group didn't have a permit to shoot on the beach, and insisted the photo session had to end. The photographer stopped shooting. The Paris Match group huddled, trying to decide what to do.

Yolanda knew what to do. The light was gone. So was she. "This is ridiculous," she said, marching through the sand. "I'm leaving. I've never seen anything like this."

She walked back to the hotel, oblivious to the people staring at her wondrously long legs as they struggled across the sand.

A Beautiful Business

It's a funny business, this business of beauty. So abstract, yet so physical. Why is one person considered beautiful, and another isn't? Who decides? The way that models look in pictures -- in ads, in catalogs, in newspaper and magazine features -- determines in at least a subconscious way what we think about our own appearance. That's the implication built into the twin senses of the word "model": A person who poses for an artist or photographer, or a person or thing to be imitated, a standard of excellence. This article has something for everyone. For women, we are going to offer a cogent explanation as to why, as soon as they reach 18, they start feeling vaguely dumpy. For men, we will offer a section about the most beautiful girl in Miami. We'll also discuss why Frenchmen have come close to destroying the nature of female beauty in the Western World, the mystery of a beautiful woman sitting in a sidewalk cafe, and the myth of Miami Vice. First, a little history.

Nudes On Top

In the beginning, there was Otto. Before Miami Vice, before most of the world had ever heard of Art Deco, there was Otto. Otto is a massive German company specializing in mail-order catalogs. (One small part of the organization is the huge American catalog company, Spiegel.) Otto is to catalogs what General Motors is to cars.

Back in 1981, Otto had a problem. Or, more specifically, Ger Vrielink, Otto's creative director, realized that Otto had a problem. A Dutchman working in Hamburg, Ger often had 30 or 40 photo teams shooting all over Europe. What he needed was sunny weather. An overcast day was a lost day: \$10,000 or \$20,000 down the drain. In the winter, when he needed warm weather to show the upcoming spring and summer fashions, he flew the teams -- including models -- to Spain or the Canary Islands. When the teams returned to Germany, Ger inspected the photos.

Sometimes, he had to send the teams back out for re-shoots. This was an expensive process. Ger dreamed of finding one area where he could shoot all of Otto's work. It didn't really have to be scenic in a traditional sense, but it had to have a lot of different "tones." Catalog backgrounds were always slightly out-of-focus -- vague spots of color suggesting some place sunny and happy. The backgrounds had to imply a setting -- big-city, country, beach -- but could not be so clear that the German housewife would look at them and say, "Oh, that's Barcelona!" The perfect place would also be warm in winter, have a lot of sunny days -- and be cheap.

In 1982, Ger began working with Bruce Orosz of ACT Productions, a New York-based company that provided support for fashion shoots. The dollar was slumping. America was cheap. At first, they tried Southern California. But it was too far from Germany, the locations too spread out. The next year, they tried Miami.

Miami had plenty of sun, lots of empty hotel rooms that were cheap by German standards, and plenty of sites for shooting: the greenery of the Everglades, the modern big-city look of Brickell Avenue, the Mediterranean feel of Coral Gables, the beaches of Key Biscayne, the farmland of the Redland. Elegant evening gowns could be shot in the mansion-like surroundings of the Biltmore or Vizcaya. West of the Palmetto, there was even a whitish rock quarry that could approximate a snowy background.

The only place that didn't impress Ger was Miami Beach, especially the southern part of the city. The Art Deco hotels on South Beach were rundown. The area was crammed with old people. There seemed to be quite a bit of crime.

In 1984, Ger began flying in photo teams. They stayed in hotels in the center of Miami Beach, like the Fontainebleau, or on Key Biscayne. Almost all the models were brought in from Europe. Ger and Bruce Orosz didn't think models employed by local agencies were up to European standards. When the girls came in from Europe, Bruce tried to persuade them to stay a few weeks, and he pressured local agencies to recruit better talent.

With 30 or more teams on the streets of Miami, Otto became a massive presence in the community. Photo labs began expanding. Side businesses -- location finders, makeup people, companies providing props (vintage cars, furniture) -- began springing up. New York models heard about all the work available in Miami and started coming down. New York agencies like Ford Models and Zoli opened offices here.

In the mid-'80s, Miami Vice became a hit in Europe. The TV show gave Miami a magical image, in a pop-culture kind of way, and European magazines started doing features on South Florida. Tourists followed. But even with the catalog shoots and the tourists, Miami lacked the special imprimatur that would attract the aristocracy of the high-fashion world.

That changed in November 1986, when Bruce Weber, a widely respected fashion photographer, shot an ad for the Calvin Klein perfume Obsession in Miami Beach. He draped several nude models over the top of the Breakwater Hotel on Ocean Drive. Seen throughout a world that had already been primed by Miami Vice, the ad gave the Art Deco of South Beach a sudden authenticity, and photographers from the big-time fashion magazines -- Vogue, Elle, Mademoiselle, Glamour -- began arriving to give their photos the Art Deco look.

Some South Beach hoteliers, notably Don Meginley of the Cavalier Hotel, began catering to the fashion teams. Europeans loved South Beach, where they could walk to anything, just as they could in European cities. And the old hotel rooms -- small by Holiday Inn standards -- seemed perfectly acceptable to them. Attracted by the cheap, artsy area, support groups moved in. The two main South Florida modeling agencies -- **Irene Marie** of Fort Lauderdale and Michele Pommier of Coral Gables -- moved their main operations to the Beach. A small strip -- from Fifth Street to 15th Street, from Ocean Drive west two blocks to Washington Avenue -- became the center of an industry.

From all over, models came in for shoots. They worked a few days, then found that there were photographic teams desperate for models. So they stayed, renting Ocean Drive hotel rooms by the week. Then by the month. The world's top models -- Lauren Hutton, Elle MacPherson -- were flown in for Miami shoots.

The Height Of Fashion

High noon at a South Beach cafe. A fabulously beautiful young woman works on a \$7.95 salad with exotic red-tinged lettuce. Her makeup is perfect, her minidress the latest style, and she's talking about a new person at an agency.

A lot of tourists figure a woman like this must be a model. These days, so many beautiful women can be seen on South Beach that some people think of the area as the new St. Tropez, the French village that Brigitte Bardot made famous.

But was this woman really a model? Describe the above to various people in the modeling business, and they will ask for one more piece of information. Then they will render their decisions:

"Definitely not a model. Maybe a wannabe." Meaning the South Beach hangers-on who dream of being models but will never make it.

"Perhaps a makeup person. Or hair stylist."

"A tourist."

"Anybody -- except a model."

Models don't usually dress up when they're not working -- certainly not in midday. You usually see them striding along Ocean Drive in baggy Bermudas and huge T-shirts. But that wasn't what made the experts certain that this woman wasn't a model. This conclusion was based on the missing fact: The gorgeous woman was about five-foot-five.

If a talent scout went looking for models, he probably would never go to a modeling school

(virtually none of the South Beach models are modeling school grads). He would go to regular schools, junior highs and high schools. He'd skip the beauty queen types -- the princesses in the homecoming queen's court. He'd go straight to the gym, seeking out the basketball and volleyball players.

At a bare minimum, models are five-eight. Some agencies won't take girls below five-nine. The average is closer to 5-foot-10.

Designers love the tall models with their super-long legs: That's what they design the fashions for. As a result, many women who are ordinary five-fives, or less, feel squat.

Many men, of course, prefer shorter women. They feel threatened by Amazons who look like they might pick up a guy and stick him in their backpack as a souvenir. In the artfully arranged frame of a photograph, the women don't look so tall, just wonderfully proportioned. Besides, models aren't chosen to appeal to men. A woman who most men consider extremely sexy is not necessarily someone who would be a successful model. It's women who study the fashions, who buy the clothes.

And that's a problem for male models. Modeling is basically a female field. The biggest agencies are run by former female models. The average woman gets paid \$900 to \$1,500 a day for catalog work -- roughly twice what a male model gets. And there are no male equivalents of the female superstars. Women like to look at women's fashions; men do not spend a lot of time studying men's fashions. There are plenty of male models in South Beach, and many of them have secondary jobs -- as bartenders, waiters -- as they wait for modeling assignments, or to get older. For male fashions, mature is better. Many males don't start getting much work till their late 20s, and can continue into their 30s and even 40s.

With women, it's different. Youth is everything. Models are called "top girls" -- not "top women." There is such a premium on youth, that being called a woman would be an insult, an implication that a model is over the hill. Besides, a lot of top girls are really . . . girls. And since this is a business of superlatives, the very best models are called "top top girls."

Which brings us to the "top top girl" in Miami.

Why Every Woman Over 18 Feels Vaguely Dumpy

Niki Taylor has been on 30 covers, including all the top fashion magazines. She earns \$5,000 to \$10,000 a day for fashion shoots. She is in the modeling stratosphere. She is the most beautiful girl in Miami -- or at least the highest paid. She just turned 16.

Niki was born and reared in South Florida. While many models here come from elsewhere, a surprising number are home-grown. In fact, several of the world's top-tops have come from here, including Christy Turlington and Hunter Reno, a niece of the Dade state attorney, Janet Reno.

"Maybe it's the water," said Niki's mom, Barbara Taylor, on the phone.

Barbara does the talking for her daughter. She's extremely protective of the girl's privacy: She says Niki is a sophomore, but refuses to say where she goes to school in South Florida or to answer any questions about Niki's personal life. "She's just started dating," Mom says, but when the writer asks what 16-year-old guys think about taking out a worldwide top-top, Mom clamps down: "No personal questions!"

Barbara Taylor allows a few facts on the personal life: Niki started modeling when she was 14. She was five-nine then, and growing. Friends kept saying what a great model she would make. Mom started sending photos of the girl around to the agencies. The rest, as they say in Hollywood show biz stories, is history.

These days, Niki jets all over the world for fashion shoots -- New York, Paris, Baja California -- always accompanied by a parent or family member. Mom turns down quite a few assignments, "just so we have a halfway normal family life."

In photos, Niki has a magical, genuine smile. Her skin is flawless. Her body is now a slender 5-foot-11. With makeup, she looks the super-sophisticate, but still youthful. Most of her covers -- for magazines like Vogue, Glamour, Mademoiselle -- were shot when she was 14 and 15. Most of the top-top cover girls are that young: Ladies, this is what you are comparing yourself with.

Though she wouldn't allow a direct interview -- Mom said Niki was too busy with homework -- Barbara did agree to a photo opportunity of Niki with **Irene Marie**, the head of Niki's agency. Niki was late. Other models were coming and going, but the most beautiful girl in Miami was not to be seen. Finally, there appeared a willowy girl with dishwater blond hair. She was wearing jeans and

a pumpkin-colored T-shirt, and looked pretty much like the other tall, slender models. She was accompanied by an older woman who was almost as tall as she was.

In unison, several agency employees saw the pair and shouted, "Niki!"

After quick kiss-kisses, a blowup of one of her covers was placed on the wall. As the photographer's motor drives whirred, the writer decided to ignore Mom's warnings and risk a direct question to this super model: "What was your oddest photo assignment?"

Not exactly hardball, but Niki flushed and looked uncertainly at her mother. Mother whispered to daughter. Daughter shrugged.

"Make it your most exciting," said Mom. "Wasn't your most exciting in the Keys?"

"Oh yeah!" Niki's little-girl face brightened. "Swimming with dolphins. I was swimming with dolphins. That was very interesting!" She flashed her huge, genuine, top-top girl smile.

Miami Uber Alles!

Now that we're a modeling capital, we should have our own "look" -- The Miami Look. So what is it? Well, it's . . . Aryan.

Like everything else about this industry, it makes complete sense -- economic sense. Because German catalogs are such a large part of the Miami modeling market, and because German catalogs are aimed at the German housewife, and because -- to put the matter with considerable understatement -- Germany has certain historic tendencies in its attitudes toward physical beauty, Miami models tend to reflect the German ideal.

Listen to Tjioe, a Chinese photographer from Munich who spends eight months a year here. He understands how his German catalog clients think: "A blond girl always sells better. She's an angel, the perfect girl. Black hair is associated with the devil, with gypsies. A redhead is dangerous, the kind that takes a man away from his wife. Blond is the one that sells. They should look like Doris Day. Doris Day was loved by everybody."

So now it's Miami, beautiful, blond Miami, that everyone loves. But even Doris Day gets old eventually.

One might imagine that at some point in the next several years, every art director in Europe would rise up and, in a single voice, shout: I am tired of Art Deco. I am tired of beaches. I am tired of Miami! And that would be the end of it.

Of course, since you've read this far, you understand why that won't happen: The backgrounds are usually out of focus; those wonderful Art Deco hotels are just spots of color.

Bruce Orosz, the ACT Productions man who first brought the Otto catalog shoots here: "We've taken great pains to make this a long-term industry. We have in excess of \$1 million involved, invested in one building, just to serve photographers and the clients. This isn't a flash-in-the-pan." Orosz just returned from a six-week trip through the Orient, promoting Miami as a place for fashion shots. One Japanese crew has already heeded his sales pitch and come for a shoot. "This," says Orosz, "is going to be a continuing business."

The Miami light, of course, will always be here. The models will be here as long as the photographers are here.

That leaves only one uncertainty: The Deutschmark. Now Miami is cheap, by European standards. It won't necessarily stay that way. Some German catalog people are whispering that if the old East Germany continues to be a financial drain on western Germany, the mark could get weaker and the dollar stronger. Miami would no longer be a bargain.

art art please send to tropic

Why French Men Should Be Shot

Like the Paris Match crew, Etienne Philonenko, of the Marilyn Agency in Paris, had come to Miami because of its growing international reputation, but he retained the snobbish attitude that French men are the best judges of pulchritude in the world. "Beach girls, that's not our market," he said.

Sitting on a small sofa in the Michele Pommier agency, Etienne did quick interviews with 20 models who want to work in Paris during Miami's slow summer season. He gave each model a five-second stare, then flipped through her book of photos. His comments were crisp.

To a girl who was five-eight: "Maybe you should start in Italy. You're not too tall. Paris might be a little too competitive."

Interview over. Next. The younger the better, the thinner the better, the taller the better. The more a girl tended toward the bony and gangly, the more he seemed to like it.

"Ah, you have to come," he said, embracing one especially skinny young woman. Then came Diana Mossie. She had long, straight blond hair and a perfectly chiseled face. Her legs were long and slender; she was 5-foot-10. She wore a tight minidress. She had a full bust without being top-heavy. Her stomach was flat. The majority of American males would consider Diana just about perfect, maybe a little on the tall side.

Etienne looked at her hard for five seconds. Then he said: "You should lose a little weight." Most American males would think him crazy. Upon further reflection, after considering that men like Etienne have inordinate power to shape the attitudes of women, they would probably conclude that, in the interests of humanity, he should be shot.

But Diana, a tough young cookie with big ambitions, stared him in the eye and said: "No problem."

Etienne frowned: He didn't believe her.

"I really want to move to Paris for a while," Diana said matter-of-factly. She's 20, from San Francisco. Her father is an IBM executive. Her mother devotes herself to working with the homeless. To Diana, modeling is a no-nonsense business. For the past eight months, she has rented a room on Ocean Drive, but she's gone out nightclubbing only three times. Generally, she shuts all the windows and cranks up the air conditioner to keep out the South Beach blare. She saves almost all her income from her German catalog shots -- which is considerable. She doesn't have a TV, doesn't have a car, spends her spare time painting. She finds South Beach "too plastic," with "too many models." She's aggressive: To move up in America, she needs European editorial work.

"I really want to come," she told Etienne, leaning forward. "Maybe in May."

Etienne shook his head. "May is not a good month now. You have to lose a little weight first." She gave a vigorous nod. "I agree with you. I expected you to say that."

"Your face looks definitely round. Your structure would come out better. I would love to see you again." But, he warned, she should lose the weight before she came. As she walked out, Etienne shouted after her: "Don't become anorexic."

The next girl was wearing a figure-hugging white jump suit. She was as shapely as Diana.

Etienne looked carefully at her face. "How old are you?" he asked.

"Twenty-six," she said. She may have been fudging by a couple of years, but even 26 was way too old.

"You're not right for Paris," Etienne said bluntly.

"I didn't think so," she replied quickly, picking up her book and leaving.

The Unbearable Lightness Of Beauty

On a Monday morning, because she wasn't working that day, Yolanda Trinidad went on a "go-see." Her big portfolio in hand -- her "book" -- she walked into the German catalog guy's office. Unlike most models, Yolanda likes to dress up: She had on a minidress with a fashionably flared skirt.

"Hi," she said, flashing her huge smile, "I'm Yolanda." She handed over her book.

The catalog guy gave her a thin smile and the standard five-second stare, the kind that a butcher might give to a stack of steaks.

Yolanda just kept smiling -- receiving stares like this is as much a part of what she does for a living as operating a cash register is for a supermarket clerk. Then the guy flipped through her book and glanced at her card of vital statistics: "Height 5-8- 1/2, Bust 35B, Waist 25, Hips 35, Dress 6, Shoe 9, Eyes Dark Brown, Hair Dark Brown." Her height was the only problem.

The catalog guy made a minuscule notation on her card -- too small for her to see what it was.

"Thank you very much," he said.

She wandered out. If the catalog guy liked what he had seen during her two-minute audience, she might end up with \$1,200 a day. If he found her hair too long, her legs not long enough, well, that's the kind of instant decision that happens all the time.

"If a girl gets bothered by that," she said, maneuvering Little Ruby through the narrow South Beach streets, "they shouldn't be a model."

Yolanda doesn't get bothered by things. Life flows to her, not away. Gas station attendants, waiters -- they all rush to serve her, and she never really thinks much about it. Old guys on South Beach stare, and she shrugs: "Whatever they get out of it doesn't make any difference to me." Introspection usually comes from failure, pain, defeat. These are not experiences she has had to

deal with.

She is 22, and she says she makes about \$80,000 a year, and though she knows the career won't last forever, that she should be thinking about her future, she doesn't. She buys clothes instead. She has a closet stuffed with shoes at \$100 to \$200 a pair. It's hard for her to resist a sale. When she saw a pair of perfectly shredded jeans in London for \$60 -- "I could never rip jeans that good myself" -- she jumped at them. Recently, she spent \$1,000 on two outfits she liked in Coconut Grove. "I know I should save more," she said, "but . . ."

Somehow, she believes, everything will work out. It always has.

After the catalog place, she dropped by a laser-copying shop and selected some photos from her book for a new card -- a four-page mini-brochure of her photos that serves as her business card.

"I want the color exactly like this," she ordered a pretty young woman behind the counter.

Yolanda's skin -- a light tan color -- is a delicate matter. She is what the industry calls an "exotic," meaning that she is slightly out of the girl-next-door mainstream. Which usually is bad news in Miami, but Yolanda gets a lot of work. Maybe it's the smile.

Yolanda paid for the cards -- \$212 for 100, just one of the costs of doing business. Then she zoomed Little Ruby over to one of her favorite restaurants, Key East on Lincoln Road Mall. The place was packed. A pair of sunburned tourists was looking around desperately for a waiter to take their order. Yolanda had no problem: A waiter rushed over, took her order and served up a dish of Jamaican chicken curry while the tourists were still craning their necks.

"Thank God, I have a high metabolism," she said, plowing into her dish. "My weight never varies more than five pounds."

As she ate, she talked about her past. Her parents were

from Puerto Rico. She grew up in Philadelphia. When she was barely a teen-ager, she appeared in a local beauty pageant, and she loved the applause. When she was 15, a photographer happened to see her in a mall. He said she'd be a great model, and offered to take some pictures so she could show them to modeling agencies. The price: \$100. That was too steep for a girl living in a Philadelphia row house.

A year later, she saw him again. This time he was so enamored of her he offered to do the photos for free. When a local modeling agency saw them, it signed her to a contract. She did local department store ads. Then a Milan agency wanted to bring her to Italy. She was 17, with a regular boyfriend. Her beau was adamant: She shouldn't go to Europe. But other models told her that Milan was essential: Many Italian magazines were based there, and though they didn't pay much, they provided a lot of work. Milan tear sheets were a novice's ticket to the big-time.

What they didn't tell her was that for every model who makes it, there are dozens of women who shuffle from one go-see to the next, suffering constant rejections, working perhaps a couple of days a month until -- at 26 or so -- they're deemed "too old," or their agencies simply dump them. Yolanda's boyfriend didn't even drive her to the airport. In Milan, she found a tiny, dark room in a pension. She set her suitcase on the floor, flopped on the bed and cried.

The Seduction

Milan was a horror. The agency Yolanda had signed up with wasn't ready to promote her, or was a second-rate agency -- something was wrong. She got almost no work. Terrified, lonely, bored, she sat in her room and read the Bible.

She avoided what is called "The Scene": The fast life in the Milan clubs, where models were allowed to eat and drink for free, to attract the Fellini-style leches. Many of the models who went to the clubs were 14- and 15-year-old girls who, with vague assurances from the agencies, had been sent to Europe without supervision. Especially because they were tall, the teen-agers tended to be taken for adults, and many of them slipped into a world of free cocaine, cheap booze, sleazy sex. A lot of pretty girls have gotten lost in Milan -- burned out on the high-life while still a teen-ager.

But Yolanda sat in her room, until she got a break: An agency in Zurich picked her up. In Switzerland, suddenly, almost miraculously, she was in demand. For some reason, her exotic looks wowed the Swiss. She worked so many days in a row -- straight through weekends -- that she finally had to beg for days off.

Armed with the European clippings, she hit New York, catching on with Elite, one of the top agencies. For two years, she worked well there.

Several times, she was flown down to Miami for special shoots. In January, she realized she was

getting more work in Miami than New York, so she sent photos to some of the big Miami agencies. One of them, **Irene Marie**, called her immediately and begged her to come down. She worked her second day in Miami, and she has been working steadily ever since. At first, like most models, she lived in a South Beach apartment. But there was so much music blaring from the clubs and other apartments, she found it difficult to sleep. One time, when she and a girlfriend were leaving her apartment, her friend said, "Don't forget to turn off your radio." It wasn't her radio -- just the noise from the street. Finally, she moved to an apartment in Sunny Isles, a 15-minute drive from South Beach. Recently, she did a Budweiser shoot in an old Fort Lauderdale incinerator where she was sprayed with hoses as she gave a cool, fresh smile. The photographer shot 75 rolls of film. She caught a cold. But the photos will be included in a calendar and, she hopes, a nationwide billboard and poster campaign. If so, they could earn her tens of thousands of dollars.

Like virtually all models, Yolanda has had to deal with her share of sexual pressure: "Like this guy, he says, 'Oh, I'm looking for a girl like you. Come on out on my boat with me and get to know us.' There's this myth that models are dumb. But I'm not going to fall for something like that." She told him what she tells everybody: Talk to my agency.

Another time, in an ad campaign for sportswear, a client took out an option for her for two weeks-plus. "We should go out sometime," the ad guy told her. She said she had other things to do. Then the guy had a party at his house. Yolanda, like others interested in the ad campaign, went. "It was a big party, and I'm walking by him, and he slaps me on the ass and makes some comment. And I told him, in front of everybody, 'I don't like that. You don't own me. I don't want you to do that again.'"

The guy didn't pick up the option. Her decision not to put up with his advances lost her two weeks of work for which she could have earned \$20,000-plus.

The Nightlife Of Fabulous Women

Most working models -- including Yolanda -- don't go out much on weeknights. This is a reality that frustrates South Beach's clubs, which would love to exploit the fact that hundreds of the world's most beautiful women live and work within blocks of them.

The clubs want the models -- young, dressed just right, gorgeous, hip -- because they figure they would attract the older guys with the bucks to buy the magnums of champagne. In one walk up Ocean Drive, a model might get handed a half-dozen cards promising free admission to clubs with no cover charge, and no waiting at the door like ordinary folk. The cards are almost never used.

The reason is simple. Models have to get up early, sometimes around 5 or 6, because photographers want to catch the morning light, and an exhausted face is an ugly face. But one recent night after a friend returned from a few days out of town, Yolanda made an exception.

Since it was a Wednesday night, they went to Semper's. Semper's is the spot on Wednesdays; everybody knows that. It's "Karaoke Night," when a deejay plays the background music of hit songs, and customers pick up mikes and do the singing. The club is run by Louis Canales, the grand poobah of South Beach nightlife, who has had the place decorated in a wretched excess of heavy curtains, marble, and tasseled lamp shades, all of which are supposed to be reminiscent of how an English eccentric would decorate an Italian villa.

As usual, Yolanda was running late, and didn't arrive until 11 p.m., in the heart of the performance. Jimmy, her friend, is a few years older than Yolanda. He's a handsome, broad-shouldered guy who runs a wholesale furniture company. He drives a Mercedes and, on weekends, a Harley.

"Harleys are very in," said Yolanda. Yolanda is a student of ins and outs. Padded shoulders are out -- absolutely out: "Nobody wears them any more. Headbands are in. Very very short skirts are in. Long fingernails are out. Clothes should be either very tight or very baggy -- anything in between is out. Roller blades are in. All models have roller blades."

In the crowded club, the noise level raised by people who have had a few drinks, Yolanda sipped a club soda as she watched a succession of awful singers. A balding guy in a blue blazer and red tie crooned Besame Mucho. Then three husky women sang These Boots Are Made For Walking. This was it, the glamorous model's fabulous night out. At midnight, Yolanda looked around the

room crammed with perhaps 200 people and could spot only three or four models. Down the block, at The Clevelander, there were considerably more models: Twenty or 30, males and females, sat around the bar by the pool, making up perhaps a quarter of the crowd. Some were drinking. Some just sat. No one pressured them to order a drink. Despite models' big-bucks reputations, many are struggling to pay the rent while they dream of the big hit. They hang out at The Clevelander because on a Wednesday night, they can get a beer for \$1.

Illustration:color photo: Yolanda Trinidad (2), Tinidad waits for makeup, Niki Taylor and **Irene Marie**, Trinidad gets a pedicure, Iren Marie with Peggy Bremner and **Miana Grafals**, Rochell Relyea with Tonie Putton and Heather Davis