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The Hatbox Brigade

by MAURICE ZOLOTOW

SOME 20 YEARS AGO, advertisers discovered that in selling a particular brand of automobile, cigarette or kitchen fixture, it was extremely helpful to show a picture of a girl in the advertisement—even though her pretty face had not the remotest connection with the product. This epochal discovery created a new industry: modeling. And today, models have become the most publicized and most praised women since the voluptuous *houris* of Mohammed's paradise.

The girls who grin at you from the front covers of national magazines are models. The girls who get the best tables in such famous night clubs as The Stork or El Morocco are models. The girls who are invited to the socially significant parties in New York are models. Models also are the annual Miss Rheingold and the Chesterfield-girl-of-the-month. Columnists often print more gossip items about models and their romances than they do about showgirls.

It is even impossible for a model to marry one of the sober common people—even if she does. Not long ago, a Powers girl was engaged to a member of the middle class, a chap who owned a butcher shop on Lexington Avenue. It was reported in a Broadway gossip column that she was going to marry a "Chicago meat-packing king." Another time, a model married a young passenger agent on the New York Central; columnists had her wed to a "railroad executive."

But the romances of the models are no more accurate than the other illusions which surround them like a hazy halo. Models are generally believed to be persons of stupendous beauty, with perfectly proportioned bodies, glistening hair and small-featured soft-complexioned faces, as tall and willowy as a weeping-willow

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tree. Some of the models, such as Powers girl Georgia Carroll or Conover model Choo-Choo Johnson, fit this mold. But the really successful models, the ones you rarely hear about, the ones who get the best-paying assignments, hardly resemble this imaginary ideal. Harry Conover says the jobs do *not* go mainly to the girls with symmetrical shapes, baby-blue eyes and vapid expressions.

"We are getting away from the candy-box type of beauty," he says. "It's the well-scrubbed American type I look for. A girl can be gorgeous by every masculine standard, and still be a failure in modeling. It's more important to have an expression of mystery, than a Venus-like figure."

Models like Meg Mundy or Helen Bennett—who rarely earn less than 150 dollars a week and are in the upper brackets—are the sort of girls that the average male would pass by without a second look. The most successful models don't have voluptuous curves nor sensual faces. They have skinny bodies and hollow gaunt faces with prominent cheekbones. They may not look ravishing when you see them in the street, but the camera puts 15 pounds on a person's body, and when these gaunt models pose for a fashion photograph in *Vogue* or *Harper's Bazaar* their faces—in the photograph—take on radiance.

The big three of the modeling industry—John Powers, Harry Conover and Walter Thornton—do an annual gross business of over five million dollars. The agencies keep 10 per cent of this as their fee, and turn over the balance to the girls. Although the individual models fluctuate rapidly in and out of the industry, there are always from 12 hundred to 14 hundred full-time models working out of New York City, which is the center of the industry. New faces continually try to swim into focus. About 100 thousand new girls try to crack the modeling profession every year. Less than one out of one hundred succeeds in being registered by an agency, and of this minority fewer than 50 will ever earn an income comparable to that of an experienced stenographer.

To understand the bitter facts about modeling, you must know about "high fashion" and "low fashion." High fashion refers to the slick type of style sponsored by, let's say, *Vogue*, and low fashion refers to the styles pictured in the *Sears Roebuck* and *Montgomery Ward* catalogues. It is important to bear in mind that the bread-and-butter basis of modeling is posing for high fashion and low fashion, and to click in fashion modeling a girl must be abnormally tall, and the really successful fashion model is often six feet.

This extraordinary height makes it almost impossible for a successful model to mate with the average man—let alone a millionaire, and it also makes it difficult for her to succeed in Hollywood, as it would be very embarrassing for George Raft, say, to

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play a love scene opposite a lady who was nearly six inches taller than he was, even in Adler Elevator Shoes. For this reason good models rarely make good in Hollywood. In recent years, Alexis Smith and Marguerite Chapman are the only exceptions.

It is difficult to generalize about the "typical" model, because each agency tries to build up a diversified roster of feminine faces and figures. But the *successful* model usually has a high order of intelligence, and she is often a college graduate with a sensitive mind and personality. She probably comes from Texas, California or the Westchester section of New York. She is between 18 and 25. She earns an average of 40 to 50 dollars a week, and is forced to spend a disproportionate amount of her income on clothes. A typical model's wardrobe might include at least four evening gowns, 12 afternoon dresses, five tailored suits, five coats, an evening wrap, a fur jacket, several housecoats, at least two slack outfits, a half dozen bathing suits, about 10 hats and 22 pairs of shoes. A model is expected to furnish her own clothes when she keeps an appointment with an artist illustrating a short story, or with a photographer posing a layout for a cigarette advertisement. On fashion poses, of course, the clothes are loaned to the model during the sitting.

Most models share an apartment with two other girls in order to cut down expenses. In New York, they can usually be found lunching in a drugstore at 44th Street and Vanderbilt Avenue. Most models receive five dollars an hour for posing, and a few get seven fifty or 10 dollars an hour. The aristocrats—who can be counted on the fingers of two hands—such as Anita Colby or Jinx Falkenburg, receive 25 dollars an hour. Models detest modeling deodorants, brassieres, girdles and panties even though they receive double pay on such assignments. They prefer to do catalogue work. When they are working on a catalogue job, they are hired by the week and receive a minimum of 150 dollars a week.

From a strictly physical aspect, a fashion model would tend to meet the following specifications: five feet nine inches in height, weight 110 pounds, bust 33, waist 24, hips 34. She will probably have blonde hair or a light shade of brown, as this photographs more sharply. She will have quick, clever eyes, and a very expressive face. This last is very important when you are modeling for fiction illustrators. A model must be able to express at least four emotions: anger, joy, sadness and wistfulness.

From the viewpoint of their personalities, the Manhattan models are often a devious and subtle group. The competition is so devastating that an ambitious model must be on her toes

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every moment, elbowing her colleagues out of the way, putting her best face forward, meeting the right people at the advertising agencies and the studios, and taking advantage of every opportunity to place herself in the limelight. For this reason, invitations to the famous shindigs thrown by Jules Glaenzer, the proprietor of Cartier's, the jewelry establishment, or Sherman Fairchild, the aircraft manufacturer, are greatly in demand. Both Glaenzer and Fairchild give several parties every year to which a dozen or so models are invited, and here they meet all sorts of influential persons. The models are always trying to wangle their dates into taking them to the Stork Club. They know it gives them a stamp of prestige to be seen sitting at a ringside table in the Stork. I once asked Sherman Billingsley, the suave director of this bistro, why he always gave the best tables to these attractive but unknown girls. "You've got to dress your room," he explained. "People like to go to a place where the best-dressed, best-looking and brainiest people go."

A MODEL's professional life is short—between two and four years. "When the advertisers reach the point where they have used one face constantly in advertisements spread all over the world, they believe that the public becomes tired of seeing that face," Conover says. There is, therefore, a constant search to replenish the supply of models. John Powers says he receives 100 thousand applications a year from prospective models. Conover gets 35 thousand pleading letters a year. The agencies prefer prospective models to send a brief letter about themselves and enclose a realistic, candid snapshot. Since the secret springs of personality, and not mere comeliness, is the requisite, they don't go by retouched studio photographs in sizing up a new girl. Almost any interesting-looking girl may secure a personal interview. Interviews with Powers, Conover or Thornton are brief and to the point. The girls are put at ease and drawn into conversation. They are asked to show their right and left profiles. They walk up and down the room. If there is any possibility, they are sometimes asked to take a series of test photographs, which cost the prospective model seven and a half dollars. The photographs are taken under "flat lighting," which is deliberately calculated to bring out every flaw in the face. If a girl passes this test, she is then registered—her physical dimensions and her personality type are listed on a small card, filed with hundreds of other cards. The new model now invests 50 dollars in studio photographs showing herself in profile, in three-quarters, full-face, standing up, facing the camera, looking away.

The new model—and the veteran, also—must find most of her jobs herself! In the morning, she is furnished with a list

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of artists, photographers and magazine editors, and she grimly trudges about all day, smiling at one and all, and handing out sample photographs of herself. It is grueling, arch-breaking labor. Modeling is definitely not recommended to girls who dream of a life of luxurious ease. The average model, even one who is fairly famous in the business, will hike about 10 hours a week to make sure she's not forgotten in the shuffle of new faces.

To the outside world, models like to keep up the illusion that they're in a glamorous, carefree profession. But talk to them when they are depressed and their defenses are down, and they will laugh a very hollow laugh when you remark that modeling must be such a glamorous business.

Many of the models are bitter, unhappy girls inside. They soon grow disillusioned with their dream of modeling as a gateway to theatrical glory; they learn their height is against them. Perhaps they feel they are breaking into show business when they are hired for a chorus line at a swanky night club. Today, showgirls at such night spots as the Versailles and Copacabana are plucked from the freshly-groomed types in the model agencies. Here, too, is disillusionment. The model meets neither an honorably intentioned millionaire nor a rising young corporation lawyer.

Modeling, taken all in all, is hard work which is poorly paid. As the model sees it, she must suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous photographers who browbeat her, and rude fashion editors who are inconsiderate of her feelings. A famous model summed it up this way: "If you want to be a success in modeling, you've simply got to forget you're a human being and pack your pride away in your hatbox."

Meg Mundy

Marguerite Chapman

Anita Colby

Jinx Falkenburg

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