

# BOSS MODELS

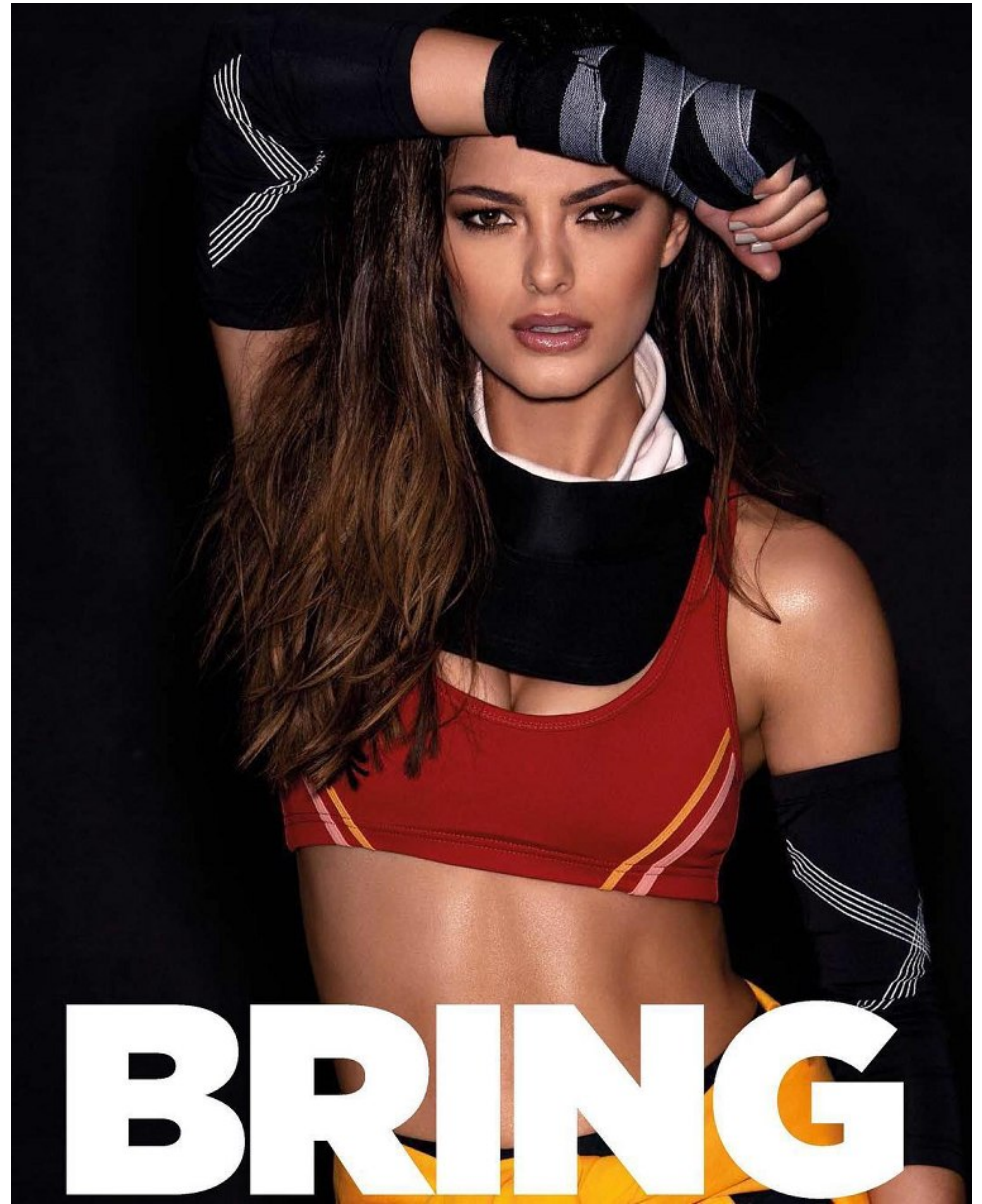
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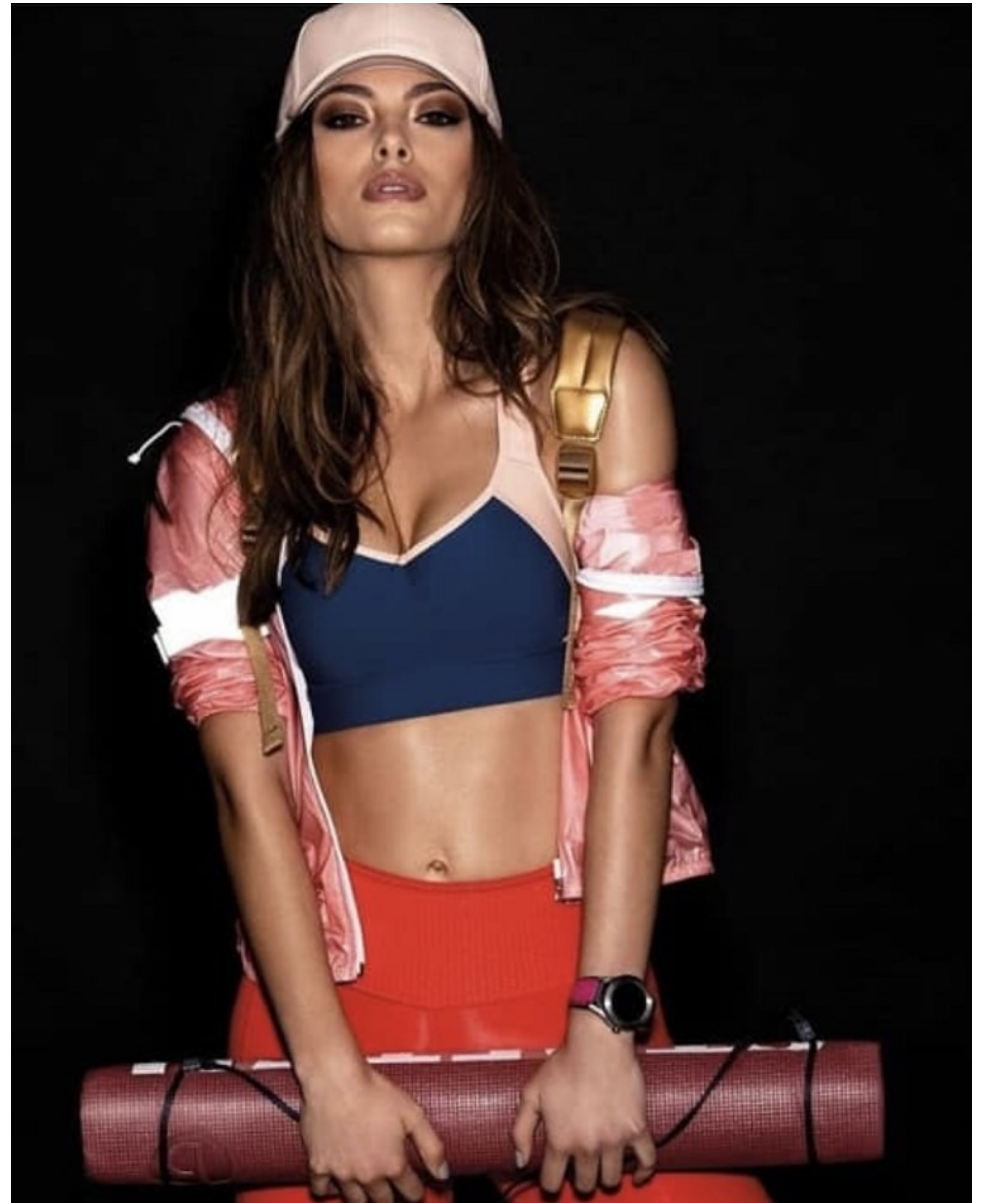
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# Demi-Leigh

On the surface, she's every inch a beauty queen. Inside, she's fierce and full of the right kind of fight. Demi-Leigh Nel-Peters gives us her rule book for life

BY HOLLY MEADOWS PHOTOGRAPHY NIQUITA BENTO FASHION CLEO MARCOPOULOS



Rewind to a year ago, and not so much. Demi, who grew up in the small Western Cape town of Sedgefield and has a degree in business management, was being hijacked at gunpoint. After she handed over the car keys, the men tried to push her back into her car and take her with them. 'I made the decision that I would not go to the second destination,' she says. She punched one of the men in the throat and managed to run away to get help. Since that terrifying incident in June 2017, Demi's been on a mission: her campaign #Unbreakable kicked off with a powerful black-and-white video and the words, 'Sexy does not mean yes. No means no.'

'It focuses on empowering women with skills and knowledge on how to handle threatening situations, such as carjackings, toxic relationships – any abusive or violent act.' Demi works with an organisation called Woman Empowered, co-hosting workshops around the country

that are designed to give you the mental and physical ability to make a choice. 'What I want to achieve with #Unbreakable is to open a conversation for women, because I think many of us are afraid to speak up,' she says. 'When I was hijacked, I felt so weak – I didn't want the story to get out. But I realised that asking for help doesn't make you weak. It's not your fault.'

Following #MeToo and #TimesUp, Hollywood's set a worldwide stage that says it's okay for women to speak up (and out) against gender-based aggression. Demi joined the movement at the Golden Globes in January, wearing black in solidarity and posting a photo with the caption: 'The time of tolerating injustice is up.' And this is just the beginning: she says she wants to use her platform (check out @togetherunbreakable on Instagram and Facebook) to continue rallying support locally. 'I think it speaks to a global issue that women face every single day,' she says.

After being crowned Miss Universe 2017 (she's only the second winner from South Africa since Margaret Gardiner took the title in 1978), Demi has been catapulted into the spotlight, with fan art and a glam squad following her around the world. She's rubbed shoulders with Kendall Jenner, walked the runway at New York Fashion Week for designer Sherri Hill, jetted off to Jakarta and Manila for pageant duties, been snapped on the red carpet alongside Ciara and Lea Michele at the Super Bowl, and posed for selfies and lols with Usain Bolt during her homecoming appearance at the Sun Met. With her sights set on a career in the entertainment industry – modelling, acting and presenting – and a makeup or clothing line in the pipeline (she says she's always fancied herself an entrepreneur), at 22, Demi-Leigh is ambitious AF.

As a young woman who knows what it's like to be under immense pressure, she shares the six life lessons she's learnt on her journey to success so far.

## Rule No 1

**'The timing might never be 100% right. Just start!'**

'If you're reading this, you're so fortunate to have the ability to read, see and comprehend. My half-sister is my biggest motivation in life. She was born without a cerebellum, and is physically and mentally disabled. She will never be able to do even one percent of the things I get to do daily.'

'Life is too short not to use your full potential. Stop waiting for the perfect moment to take the first step towards making your dreams come true – the moment might never be perfect.'

Her sister is one of the biggest reasons Demi always wants to give 100%. 'I feel like I want to do everything and enjoy everything twice as much, so I can do it for her sake as well,' she says. ▶

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## Rule No 2

**'It's okay not to be perfect. Just be yourself.'**

'Learning and gaining experience is part of growing up – as long as you learn from your mistakes, and always give it your best shot.

'In general, all people have fear. They have a fear of taking a chance, of not being successful in what they've decided to do. That fear keeps them back from getting out there, making that jump and actually going for it. Don't be imprisoned by fear. What's the worst that could happen? That you might not make it? That it might take a long time? Just take the leap. If you really want something, you'll find a way to make it happen.

'I've been told many times to just be myself. We hear that daily – be yourself, don't hide who you are. It gets difficult in situations where you compete with other people – you try to put your best foot forward, but then you go back and realise that you are where you are because of who you are. I've been chosen as Miss Universe because somebody saw something in me that they like – and that is why I'm here today. And that is why I never want to change that.'

## Rule No 3

**'If you believe in something, believe in it all the way.'**

'I think becoming Miss Universe is a perfect example. I know how much I wanted this since I was a little girl, so when I got to that stage – with 91 other gorgeous, intelligent, smart women to compete against – I kept telling myself what all my strengths were, why I was there, why I wanted it, and why I wouldn't give up even when I was tired. It's very challenging and it can be emotionally draining – but it's so wonderful.'



SHOP DEMI'S LOOKS WITH FOREVER NEW

ADDITIONAL PHOTOGRAPHY: JESSICA BLOOM, GETTY IMAGES, JASON MERRITT, INTERVIEW: NICKY HARRIS AND NICKY HARRIS, HAIR: LUCY WATKINS, MAKEUP: JESSICA BLOOM, STYLING: JESSICA BLOOM, DRESS: FOREVER NEW

Jump suit R1499 and earrings R99, FOREVER NEW

COVER STAR

My #MCM:

He knows who he is & 

And my #WCW:

Slo!!!

The weirdest thing in my bag RN:

9 boarding passes

Three young women I admire:

Shay Mitchell } Boss ladies  
Halima Aden }  
Khosi Nkosi }

My message to COSMO readers on Youth Day:

We are not the leaders of tomorrow.  
We are the leaders of today.



## Rule No 4

**'Your tribe is your vibe. There is solidarity in sisterhood.'**

'Something I went through as a teenager and that had a huge impact in my life is women – especially teenage girls – not wanting the best for other women. We're powerful as individuals – but can you imagine how strong we would be if we joined hands and fought together?

'It starts with deciding that we don't always have to compete with one another. I really like this saying: "A rose will never be a sunflower, and a sunflower will never be a rose." Each is beautiful in its own way – and so are we as women. I think that's what it's all about: it's knowing who you are, becoming happy with yourself as a person, and being content with that. It all goes back to respect, accepting one another, and embracing our differences.'

## Rule No 5

**'I don't believe in luck. I believe in hard work.'**

'Nothing has ever fallen in my lap. And nothing ever will. Everything I've ever accomplished took a lot of hard work, dedication and sacrifice – but it's always been worth it.

'I once arrived at a literature test unprepared. I didn't have a clue what the last three chapters were about. I told myself that day that I never ever want to feel that unprepared or embarrassed again. I have a fear of looking back and saying I could have put in more effort or I should have done more. That's why I treat every opportunity as though there will never be a second.

'One of my favourite quotes goes something like this: "The woman who follows the crowd is likely to go no further than the crowd. The woman who follows her own footsteps is likely to find herself in places no-one else has ever been before."

## Rule No 6

**'Never underestimate the power of positivity.'**

'Small mind-shifts can make the biggest difference. Don't be afraid or ashamed of speaking about what you want in life. From the moment I became the South African Miss Universe contestant, I never said, "if I become Miss Universe" – I said "when I become Miss Universe". If you don't believe in yourself, how can you expect others to believe in you?

And when it comes to negative trolls and cyber-bullies, block them out. I try not to read the comments much. It does get to you. Everybody has an opinion of what you should and shouldn't do, and it's easy to lose yourself by trying to please everyone constantly. So I try not to read or to get involved. If you are going to react, think it through – and don't act in the heat of emotion.' ■

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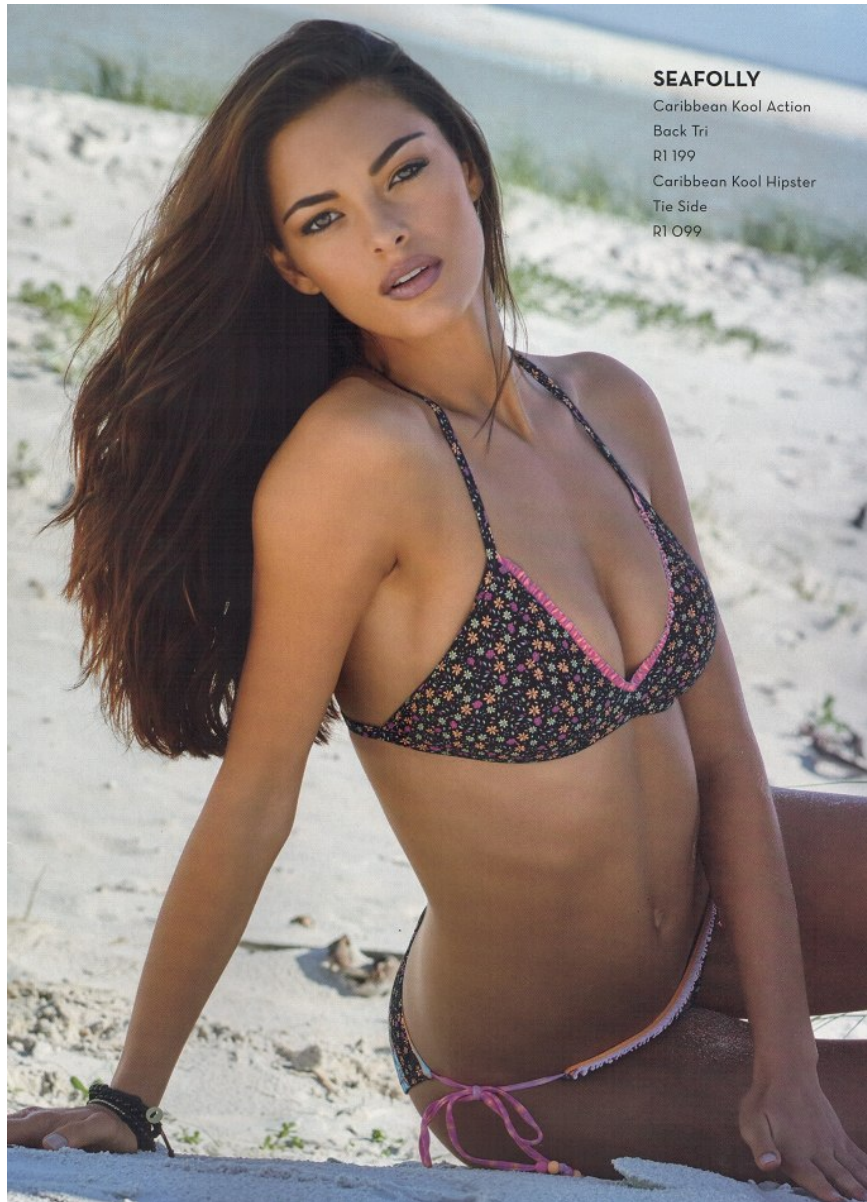


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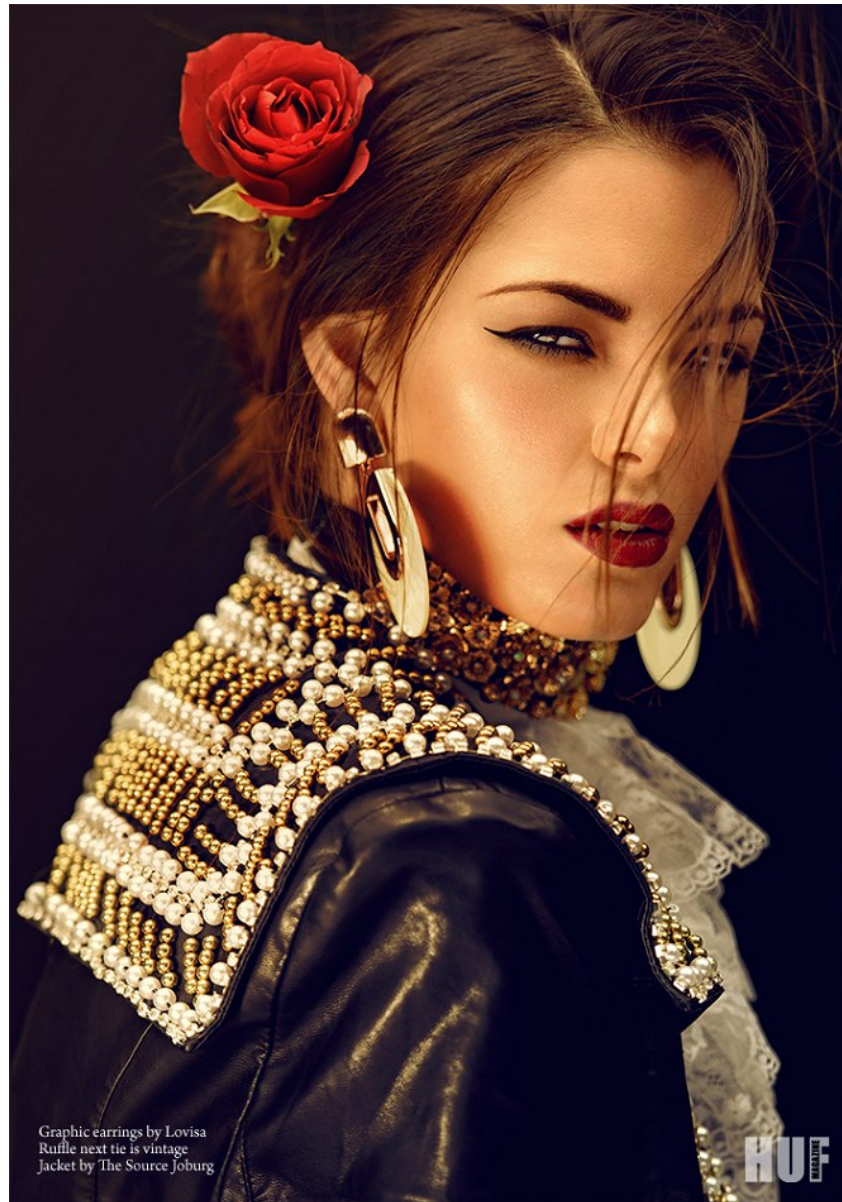


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Black high waisted bottoms by Wolfed  
Jacket by Zara  
Badges and earrings by The Source Joburg

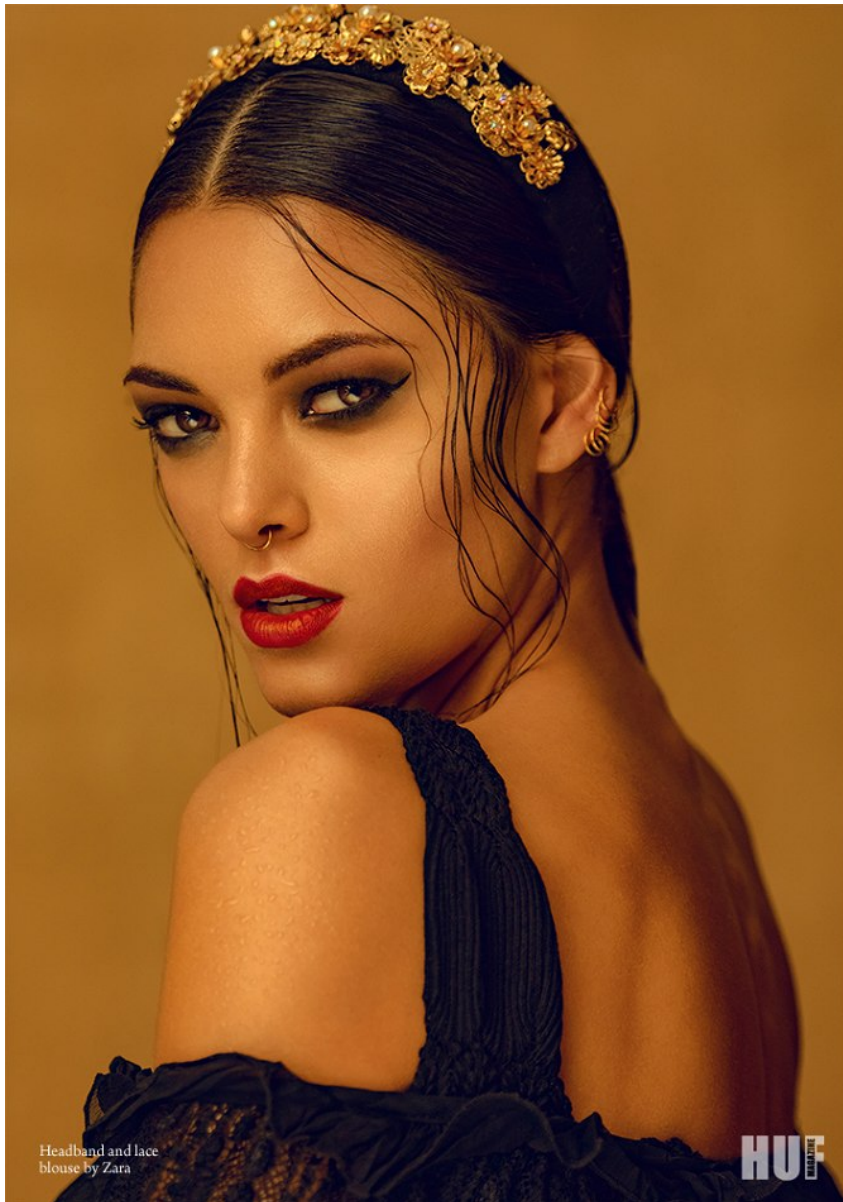
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