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BEAUTY BY THE YARD

Courage Is Needed



IF a thing of beauty is a joy for ever, in what better way could an afternoon's entertainment be found than in watching a bathing beauty contest? It has the glamour, if that's what you want, of the films, yet it has the personal appeal that goes with all flesh-and-blood shows. There's pathos in it and there's comedy, there are intrigues and futilities. The brazen jostle the timid, conceit jostles modesty. It's kind, and it's cruel. In fact it's a slice of life parading in bathing togs.

Then there are the spectators — a richer collection even than a Saturday night gathering in a back-town theatre filming Mae West and a cowboy thriller. There are sailors and old men with opera glasses, children and Chinese, fashion plates and factory girls, old old women and babies, drunken soldiers and fat businessmen; people with cameras and people with sketch books; but always a preponderance of men, and always a more vociferous crowd than at a race gathering with high stakes to be won or the first in on opening day, at a bargain sale.

Then competitor number one mounts the steps and swings across the platform and a hush falls on the gaping thousands. But not for long. Soon they climb on their seats, they stamp and they shuffle. Policemen move in to stop the hopefuls from insinuating themselves round and about the platform and from thronging the steps. It is difficult for competitor number one. She doesn't

know which way to walk, which way to sit. She flops into the end chair. Then on come the rest. One by one they walk this way, then that way—tall ones and short ones, thin ones and fat ones, blonde ones and black ones.

There's the pale one in lemon who wishes she hadn't come. "Too shy" is the comment. There's the long-haired blonde, turning the corners with a toss that sets her streaming hair flying. "Lady Godiva," yell the witty ones. And the poses. How they pose. Some favour a hand lightly on hip, vamping smile on scarlet lips; some are embarrassed and tug at their bathing suits. Some of them are charming, and the crowd whistles and cheers. "Ten to one on number twenty-eight" someone shouts. But however they comment there is scarcely a spectator with enough courage to parade on that platform as these girls are doing. Give them a good clap for their courage.

Then up step the judges. Fates hang in the balance. "The winner of the bathing beauty contest is competitor twenty-eight." Shame on shame, the wrong girl stands up. The crowd murmurs with pity as she quickly sits down again. Then the right girl stands up.

"Hurrah, them's our sentiments too," shout the people.

"Let's have a beer," the other girls murmur.



COMMENTATORS' SYMPOSIUM: Columnists and radio news analysts whose voices have been heard in the re-broadcast session "What the American Commentators Say." In this composite photograph are seen (reading clockwise from upper left): Raymond Clapper, Washington columnist; Fulton Lewis Jr., who specialises in the human interest side of home-front news; William L. Shirer, author of "Berlin Diary"; Raymond Gram Swing, well known to the BBC's listeners; Bill Henry, a reporter who is popular as a speaker in America; John Gunther, author of "Inside Europe," etc.; and H. Baukhage, NBC Washington representative. In the centre is Dorothy Thompson.