

THE PERFORATED ENCYCLOPEDIA

by

Ernest Langford

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BATTLE STREET BOOKS

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People in the Play:

Woman wife of a logger

Man encyclopedia representative

Dollman fantasy figure

Setting

A wet day anywhere on the coast of British Columbia.

(The curtain rises to reveal a square room. The walls are made of narrow tongue and groove boards. The entrance is at the upper left corner. There is a door to the bathroom at the lower left

and a door to a bedroom at the right. Both doors are open. The room gives the impression of being cluttered. Anyone entering it would instinctively walk sideways, much as people do in furniture and appliance stores in order to avoid smashing expensive glass and china plates which have been deliberately placed, so it seems, in the most precarious spots, like heroines in exciting films. To the right of the entrance is a refrigerator. On the left side and close to the entrance is an old oil-burning stove which appears out of place, since everything else in the room is composed of gleaming metals and plastics. Indeed, the discrepancy between the electrical appliances and the shabby walls is most noticeable. On the chrome-framed, plastic-topped table, which has chairs to match in a most loathsome colour, stand a six-slice toaster, an automatic coffee maker, an electric kettle, and an electric coffee grinder. Immediately beside the stove is a hot water tank, and next to that a gleaming stainless steel sink. Over the sink is a small window, which is being washed and beaten by furious wind-driven rain.

In the angle at the back and right hand walls stands an immense television set. (For practical purposes, a sixteen millimetre screen, framed to resemble a television set can be used, and the required film projected from the lower left corner of the stage) Between the set and the bedroom door is a couch. Above the stove a wire is suspended, and on it hang women's underclothes, all very frilly, lacy, and flamboyantly coloured.

A woman sits at the table, eating toast, drinking coffee, and avidly watching the screen, on which a baby-faced, over-fleshed man is interviewing a collection of dowdy women and piling useless articles onto their stiffly held arms. No sound issues from the set, so that the antics and almost indecent posturings of the man contrast with the apathetic immobility of the women who do not seem to understand what is happening. The interviewer, with frantic, orgiastic gestures, swings away from the camera, and as he does so the nose of a car appears on the screen. The camera recedes, and the gigantic conveyance is completely seen with the man standing beside it, radiating synthetic sexuality. On top of the car is a pile of fur coats, hats, dresses, and clothing of every description, varied in colour and style to meet the requirements of any occasion. Ten suitcases have also been thoughtfully provided in which to pack this miniature Sears store.

The interviewer skips over to the waiting ladies, and after looking them over, grabs the arm of one woman whose legs, through no fault of her own, happen to be slightly bowed. He guides her towards the vehicle, moving beside her with the prancing, fat-haunched gait of a rutting stag. When the car is reached, he opens the door and practically throws the woman into the driving seat, where she reclines like an expensive corpse in a select funeral parlour, waiting to receive final homage from bleak-eyed visitors.

The interviewer stands to one side, gesturing with a phallic arm and forefinger, while scantily clad attendants, each measuring 40-23-36, push the car and woman out into limbo.

The woman at the table has been so fascinated by this performance that she has forgotten to eat her toast or drink her coffee. She has also failed to notice a persistent knocking at the door.

The TV show ends with the disappearance of the car. For a few seconds the screen is blank. During this time, the woman hears the knock. She crosses to the door and opens it. While she is doing this, an alert, urgent-looking individual pops onto the screen. He sits at an important desk. Behind him is a plastic map of the world on which lights dash, flash, and glow, while sheets of paper appear on the desk out of nowhere, to be dramatically retrieved by the man, perused, and the contents gabbled off at a terrific speed. To augment the impact of whatever it is he is reading, he glances up every ten seconds to scan the audience, much as stage lawyers do, while reading the fatal will.

Standing on a narrow step outside the door is a meagrely built man. His overcoat and hat would be natty if they were not saturated with water. He carries a shiny briefcase. After rapidly examining the room, he raises the soggy hat, and producing a smile of frightful amiability, speaks with appalling eagerness.)

MAN: Good afternoon.

WOMAN: Hello.

MAN: Encyclopedia

WOMAN: I didn't know it had started to rain.

MAN: Encyclopedia Humanities is conducting

WOMAN: Lord! What a downpour. Would you like to come inside? It looks awful wet out there.

MAN: Thank you. It is wet. If I had known it was going to rain today, I would have put on my raincoat and galoshes. (He stands by the table, looking around the room.) As I was saying, we are conducting a survey to determine

WOMAN: Give me your hat, I'll put it over the stove.

MAN: Oh, thank you. That is kind of you. However, as I was saying, Encyclopedia Humanities is making a survey of this district to determine the reading

WOMAN: Take off your coat. You look kind of damp. I'll put it on a hanger by the stove to dry out.

MAN: Oh. Well, perhaps I will take advantage of your offer. Now, returning to what I was saying (Slips off his overcoat.)

WOMAN: Maybe you should take off your shoes and socks. They look saturated to me. I'm

sure your wife would feel terrible if you caught cold.

MAN: To tell the truth, I'm not married. However, I think I will remove my shoes and socks. My feet are damp, and once I catch a cold I have considerable difficulty getting rid of it. It goes to my chest.

WOMAN: I'm always wishing something'd go to my chest. But it never does.

MAN: As I was saying, Encyclopedia Humanities is doing a survey to determine

WOMAN: I'll get some coat hangers and a pair of slippers for you to put on. (She leaves the room. While she is absent the man removes his shoes and black socks which he wrings out over the sink before pattering to the stove to hang them beside scarlet, lace-trimmed underwear. The woman returns with coat hangers and fur-lined slippers.)

WOMAN: You sit down. I'll do that. Slip these on. (He sits, puts his feet into the slippers, which are too big for him.)

MAN: It's very good of you to go to all this trouble. Had I known it was going to rain I would have

WOMAN: Are your pants wet?

MAN: Pants? Oh . . . no. No.

WOMAN: They look damp to me. You'd best dry them out. I'll get a bathrobe for you.

MAN: Please don't bother. It's nothing. I'm grateful for

WOMAN: Don't you have an automobile?

MAN: Ah . . . I didn't bother to bring it.

WOMAN: Then how did you get out here?

MAN: I came out by bus. To return to the purpose of my visit. Encyclopedia Humanities is carrying out a

WOMAN: I thought all salesmen had cars.

MAN: I'm not a salesman. I'm a representative. In carrying out house-to-house surveys

WOMAN: It's a long walk between houses out here. You're sure you don't want me to dry them

pants?

MAN: No. No, thank you. As I think I said before, I am carrying out a survey

WOMAN: I'll make you a cup of coffee in a minute.

MAN: . . . to quantitatively assess the reading habits of people in this area.

WOMAN: Make yourself a piece of toast. Go ahead. Gee, this coat is sure wet. Is your jacket damp?

MAN: (Waving toward a couple of magazines.) I see you do a lot of reading.

WOMAN: (Crossing and feeling the shoulders of his cheap sports coat.) It is wet. You take that off. Quickest way to get a cold is to sit around in wet clothes. (Feels his narrow-legged trousers.) And those. I'll get you a bathrobe.

MAN: But, I assure you (The Woman has already gone into the bedroom. He opens his briefcase and examines the contents to find out whether they are still dry. The Woman returns carrying a large, tartan-weave bathrobe.)

WOMAN: Take them things off, and slip this on. It's my husband's. I bought it for him two Christmases ago. But he's never home to wear it, so you might as well get a bit of use out of it. Let's have your jacket. (He slips out of his jacket. She immediately feels his shirt.) My lord! You're wetter than a pig in a duck pond. Take that shirt off too. Then slip the bathrobe on, and take your pants off underneath. (He obeys, first removing a patent tie, then unbuttoning the shirt, and slipping it off to reveal thin white shoulders.) Is your undershirt wet?

MAN: No, no.

WOMAN: Now, put this on. Then let me have your pants. I'll make some coffee soon as I get these things hung up. No, wait . . . I'll give you some hot whiskey and sugar. My husband swears you can't take cold if you drink hot whiskey. He should know. He's a logger. Works in some place nobody's ever heard of up the north end of Vancouver Island. (She busies herself with the clothes.)

MAN: Ah yes. Logging. A fascinating business. Fascinating. (He removes his pants beneath the robe, hands them to her.)

WOMAN: My husband sure likes it up there. I only see him two or three times a year. Gee! You're as wet as a fish in the sea. That bathrobe warm?

MAN: Very nice. Well, as I was saying

WOMAN: Sixty dollars it cost me. I wouldn't let him take it to camp and ruin it. No, sir, I said, go buy yourself some cheap thing.

MAN: No doubt you often wish you understood a little more about the logging industry.

WOMAN: I couldn't care less. I wish every tree on Vancouver Island had been cut. Then maybe I'd see more of my husband.

MAN: Does your husband know of your indifference?

WOMAN: Sure. But what's it matter to him! He'd rather hold a power saw than me. I had it out with him one time. He admitted he gets a bigger kick out of seeing them trees fall than he does out of me.

MAN: That's interesting. Very interesting . . . from a psychological viewpoint.

WOMAN: It isn't from my viewpoint. (Brings a bottle of whiskey and two glasses to the table.) Feel warmer? Pour some whiskey and heat the water while I get them pants hung up. (She goes into the bedroom. The Man puts the kettle on the stove and pours whiskey into the glasses. Drinks what is in his glass, then pours more as the Woman returns with a pants hanger. Steam is already rising from his clothes. She neatly folds the trousers and hangs them by the stove.) You're not very big. My husband'd make three of you. Six four in his socks. Two hundred and fifty pounds. And all of it wasted on wet hemlocks and cedars. (Sits at the table.) How about a bowl of soup? I was going to have one with my toast, but I can't finish a whole can, so I never opened it.

MAN: Well, it's extremely

WOMAN: Which do you like? (She goes to a cupboard, opens it to reveal row upon row of canned soup.) How about Scotch Broth? That's real substantial.

MAN: This is most kind of you, though I hate to bother you, unless you're also making it for yourself.

WOMAN: For both of us. For both of us. Are you making the toddies? (She opens the can with an electric opener. Empties it into a copper bottomed pan, adds water, and places it on the stove, which she also turns up.) There's not much use doing anything for one person. There has to be two, don't you agree? Y'know, I dunno why I keep this oil stove. I guess I must be sentimental, because I don't really need it. I've got electrical appliances for everything. Mind you, it heats the place real good. Nice heat, like arms around you. Of course, the house isn't very big, but then one person don't need much room. (The kettle boils.) The water's boiling now. (The Man pours water into the glasses.)

MAN: How much water do you take?

WOMAN: Half and half. That's fine. There's the sugar. Soup'll be ready in a couple of minutes. You look more comfortable now.

MAN: (Hands glass to her.) I feel more comfortable, and I am most appreciative.

WOMAN: (Downing half the contents of the glass.) Well, what's the use of living if you can't have yourself a halfways decent time? You look pretty good in that bathrobe. Pity it's so big, or I'd give it to you. My husband wouldn't care. All he cares about is power saws and hemlock trees . . . the bigger the better. Know what I mean? Let me get at the sonofabitching thing. I'll topple it! It's like he hates every tree that grows.

MAN: I suppose there has to be an elemental drive to conquer in men who work in primary industries like logging. The psychological aspects of indirect sexuality are dealt with by Professor Hans Slobitch . . . whom you have undoubtedly heard of . . . in Encyclopedia Humanities. Do you have an encyclopedia?

WOMAN: Would you rather have bread or crackers with your soup?

MAN: Whichever is convenient.

WOMAN: I've got both. Which'd you like?

MAN: Then I'll have crackers, thank you.

WOMAN: (Pours soup into large bowls. Brings out a box of crackers.) Come to think of it, I could've fixed you a steak. There's a side of beef in the back. Never thought of it.

MAN: This soup will be perfect. I feel I'm imposing on you too much as it is.

WOMAN: I like being imposed on. Know what? I wouldn't mind a small steak myself. You start on the soup, and I'll get a couple. It's first class beef. My husband won't eat nothing except Canada Choice. It's what he gets in them camps, for cutting down wet hemlocks and cedars. Help yourself to another shot of whiskey.

MAN: But I assure you, it's not necessary. I called to outline Encyclopedia Humanities' unique educational program. (She has gone out. He hungrily swallows the soup and crackers, and makes another toddy. Occasionally looks at his clothes which are steaming from the heat of the stove. The Woman returns with two large thick steaks.)

WOMAN: How do you like the look of these?

MAN: They look perfect. Though really I feel I'm imposing

WOMAN: I'll fix a salad to go with them. How's the soup?

MAN: Very good.

WOMAN: Have my bowl. I won't have time to eat it, what with making the salad and getting the electric broiler out. Go on, eat it. I don't like to see things wasted.

MAN: I agree. Waste is a terrible crime, isn't it?

WOMAN: That's what I feel. I tell my husband, I'm being wasted. But he'd rather skeedaddle off with a power saw and cut down a hemlock. Goddamn it, if I could change myself into a hemlock he might take a second look at me. (Finishes her drink.) Make me another toddy, will you?

MAN: Certainly. It's a pleasure.

WOMAN: Half and half, with a teaspoon of sugar.

MAN: (Measuring quantities according to directions, makes drink.) I'm sure you'll be enthralled by Encyclopedia Humanities' revolutionary approach to the presentation of knowledge.

WOMAN: How do you like your steak?

MAN: Medium-rare. (Hands the glass to her.)

WOMAN: Thanks. (Sips her toddy.) Hm . . . Five minutes a side should be plenty.

MAN: I am sure a well-informed person like yourself (Mixes himself another drink.) is familiar with ordinary encyclopedias. Though please don't think I'm saying anything derogatory about them.

WOMAN: Salt . . . pepper. Do you prefer mayonnaise or French dressing on your salad? (Takes a sip.)

MAN: French dressing, thank you. No, the point I wish to draw to your attention is the entirely new concept of what an encyclopedia should and can be. Encyclopedia Humanities has taken a tremendous step forward, as I'm sure you'll agree when I've outlined the program to you. (She slaps the steaks onto the portable broiler. The man has finished her bowl of soup. She busies herself, heating the plates, preparing a lettuce, and drinking.)

WOMAN: Eggs, bacon, pancakes, toast and coffee for breakfast. Liver and what-have-you at

noon. Steak for supper. Then the beer joint afterwards and home hog-drunk. That's my husband when he's home. What good's that to a woman?

MAN: None. You would find Professor Slobitch's contribution very enlightening. You've probably read his modern classic "How To Enjoy Your Unhappy Marriage." I'm sure you have. Every well-informed person has, because every well-informed person is unhappily married owing to their being so well-informed on how much happier they should be. So it follows that every well-informed person is bound to have a copy of Professor Slobitch's great work in his or her home. This remarkable book, as you are probably aware, sold six million copies in the U.S.A., one million in Canada, seven hundred thousand apiece in Ireland, Germany, and Spain, three hundred thousand in Italy; and so on and on through the catalogue of nations, to fifty in Russia, thirty in China, two in Antarctica, and one in France. The French as I'm sure you are aware, would never admit to anything as mundane as marital misery. And I am sure you know of Professor Slobitch's second great work, which he completed immediately before immersing himself in the vast Editor-Compilation-Vat of Encyclopedia Humanities.

WOMAN: Pepper and salt. Say, do you like sauce with steak?

MAN: Thank-you, no. A good steak requires nothing.

WOMAN: Like a good woman. It's the bad ones that needs the trimmings, eh?

MAN: Quite, quite. Slobitch's second masterpiece is "How to Make Your Marriage Unhappy In Order To Enjoy It." The impact has been fantastic! However, the point is this. In Encyclopedia Humanities you get the essence of Professor Slobitch without the necessity of having to wade through hundreds of pages and boring casebook histories of couples who could not, or would not, comply with the obligations and duties of marriage.

WOMAN: (Shovelling the steaks onto plates.) There! My, they look real good. (She places the thicker one before him. It fills the plate.) You start. I'll see to the salad. (Takes the soup bowls away.)

MAN: This is a wonderful treat. Ah . . . could I have a . . . ?

WOMAN: Knife and fork. Stupid of me. I forgot all about them.

MAN: Not at all. Believe me, this looks so delicious I could pick it up with my bare hands and rip it with my teeth.

WOMAN: (Laughing) Well, you go ahead, if you'd like to eat it that way.

MAN: I meant that I would rather do that, than let the steak lie there untouched. Normally I prefer to eat with a knife and fork. It's simpler and cleaner. (The woman goes to a cupboard and

takes a case from it. The case contains steak knives and forks.)

WOMAN: A birthday present from my husband. This is the first time they've been used. He puts in an order at the office, they sent it on to the Vancouver office, the Vancouver office sends a girl out to the Hudson Bay or Woodwards, and I get a fine gift.

MAN: It's beautiful cutlery. Hm. Fine Swedish craftsmanship. (Cuts the steak.)

WOMAN: Is it tender?

MAN: Perfect. Fantastically tender. Oh heavens . . . it melts in the mouth. I've never had such a marvellous steak. Do sit and eat yours. (Gobbling the meat down at a remarkable rate.)

WOMAN: I'll just finish making the salad.

MAN: This is a steak in a million - in ten million. Cooked to perfection. Ah! And three inches of tenderloin.

WOMAN: You did say you preferred French dressing, didn't you?

MAN: Yes, yes. French dressing. (Speaking between rapid cuts and chews.) Encyclopedia Humanities rounded up all the finest editorial talent in France. Historical France, Military France, Artistic France, Cultural France, Culinary France. (Slicing the final bit of meat from the bone.) That was glorious. Wonderful.

WOMAN: Eat the other.

MAN: No, no. I couldn't. I simply couldn't.

WOMAN: Go ahead. I ate a lot of toast before you arrived.

MAN: (Staring at the steak.) Don't you want it?

WOMAN: I can cook another. You go ahead.

MAN: Well, I . . . if you insist, I certainly will. There's nothing I hate so much as waste.

WOMAN: I'm that way too. Wasted, that's me. (He exchanges the plates. Starts on the other steak.)

MAN: Actually, it was seeing the immense areas of wasted intellectual effort and general labour which first inspired the publishers of Encyclopedia Humanities to develop the revolutionary concept of what an encyclopedia should and could be. This steak is fabulous . . .

absolutely fabulous.

WOMAN: I'm glad you like it. I like watching people enjoy things. It makes a person feel good.

MAN: Doesn't it. It's a good thing I'm wearing a voluminous robe, or I'd surely be popping buttons.

WOMAN: I can see you're having a fine time. (Places two bowls filled with dressed lettuce before him.)

MAN: Aren't you having one of those?

WOMAN: I can make another. I have plenty of lettuce. You eat all you want. (He tries the salad.)

MAN: It's just right. The perfect combination of olive oil and vinegar.

WOMAN: My husband has to have wine vinegar for his salad dressing. That's what they use in the camp where he slices down hemlocks and cedars. Everything's the best. They have showers and flush toilets, they have a library with ten thousand volumes. They have a movie house that has showings of films before the big cities get them. They have closed-circuit television that lets them see things ordinary viewers don't get. All that . . . for cutting down wet hemlocks and cedars to make paper cups, comic books, and toilet paper. (The Man pushes the second steak bone away, and starts on the salads.)

MAN: Have you ever thought of the polar wastes in ordinary encyclopedias. I'm not talking about one volume encyclopedias. In them, universal fact and national fiction is reduced to an absolute minimum. I am referring to large encyclopedias, those highly publicized and much-touted sets which repose for generations in public libraries and private homes until silver-fish and mildew have completed their subversive work. (Finishes the salad.)

WOMAN: How about a dish of ice cream, just to round things off?

MAN: That would be perfect. Though I hate putting you to the trouble.

WOMAN: It's no trouble. No trouble. Have another toddy while I'm getting the ice cream. Don't forget you have to get the damp out of our system. (She goes to the refrigerator, then to the cupboard.)

MAN: (Mixing another toddy.) Shall I mix you one?

WOMAN: Please. It's pretty good, don't you think?

MAN: A wonderful drink, perfect for all weather.

WOMAN: My husband won't buy nothing but the finest eight-year-old whiskey.

MAN: Very sensible. (Mixes drinks, then contentedly sips his toddy.) As you are probably aware, ordinary encyclopedias are sold in sets of around twenty-four volumes, give or take a volume or two; and each volume contains approximately one thousand pages. Thus . . . (The Woman places a dish before him piled high with a Himalaya of multicolored ice cream.) Good heavens, what delicious ice cream! Surely it's made with pure cream.

WOMAN: I make it myself. My husband won't eat store stuff. At the camp where he slices down hemlocks and cedars they make all their own ice cream.

MAN: (Eats some.) I've never tasted anything like it before. However, getting back to our belated discussion on encyclopedias . . . (She stands by the table, watching peaks and valleys disappear beneath his relentless spoon.) As every well-informed person knows, an ordinary encyclopedia contains around twenty-four thousand pages, give or take five thousand pages. And thus individuals seeking the well of knowledge might wade and cull in this unending morass for a lifetime, and still not find what they are looking for.

WOMAN: That's true of most things, isn't it? I mean, it's only luck when you get what you want.

MAN: It was mere chance once upon a time. But now, the publishers of Encyclopedia Humanities have taken that element of chance from life, and at this moment are bringing to you certainty and success for . . . next to nothing.

WOMAN: That seems kind of hard to believe.

MAN: Truth is always difficult to believe at first. Just as revolutionary concepts and processes are difficult to accept until we perceive how much they can contribute to our lives. To get what you want, you must understand yourself, what it is you are after, and the methods by which you can attain it. Isn't that so? Of course, it is.

WOMAN: Would you like more ice cream? There's plenty.

MAN: Not at the moment, thank you.

WOMAN: Help yourself to the whiskey.

MAN: I intend to. Ordinary encyclopedias corral, let us say, a thousand editors to produce twenty-four thousand pages of uneven material which is eventually re-edited by another thousand editors, whose merit and dedication, let me add, are not questioned . . . since the world

recognizes that editors are, with the possible exception of Salvation Army personnel, the most dedicated and self-effacing of all living creatures. No, the issue lies in the impossibility of their task. Consider for a minute the gigantic problems involved when they come to re-edit out and re-edit in what has been re-edited in and out on innumerable occasions in obsolete editions. Wearily, though tenacious and with amazing fortitude, they sit at desks, unaware they are succumbing to an incurable disease known as "edititis." It was the realization of what these men and women suffered that impelled the publisher of Encyclopedia Humanities to develop this revolutionary concept of what an encyclopedia should and could be. As I have said, ordinary encyclopedias use around a thousand editors and contributors to produce twenty-four thousand pages. Encyclopedia Humanities has assembled, not one thousand editors and contributors, nor five thousand, not ten, nor fifteen thousand, or even twenty-four thousand, though you might imagine that this would be the figure I would give you. No. Encyclopedia Humanities has gathered two hundred and forty thousand editors of all races, ages, sexes, and creeds, and has distilled from this . . . as it were . . . immense cauldron of editorial skill and knowledge, just three hundred and sixty-five small pages, one for each day of the year. One page is taken and assimilated into your system every day, so that by the time a year has passed you have within you the concentrated wisdom of ten thousand years. All, all yours for one dollar . . . a day. Furthermore, each page has a different, quite delicious flavour, ranging from high protein meats to carbohydrates such as sugar and candy and also exotic tropical fruit flavours seldom met within our latitudes.

WOMAN: You mean, you eat it!

MAN: Precisely. Think of what you will know after you have consumed Encyclopedia Humanities' Educational Program. You will be able to expertly discuss anything, with anyone, in any language. But of even greater importance, you as a living creature, filled with needs and frustrations, will understand yourself, and grasp the methods by which you, a complex modern woman, can achieve individual fulfilment. All for less than you spend on cigarettes.

WOMAN: It doesn't seem possible that just eating something could do so much.

MAN: Stop! Think of what you are assimilating into your system. You will not be eating animal or plant food to sustain your physiological requirements. You will be consuming the extracted wisdom of two hundred and forty thousand editors and experts.

WOMAN: It sounds too good to be true. (Mixes more toddies.)

MAN: It is true, and even better than good. There is no advertising superlative capable of describing Encyclopedia Humanities' Educational Program.

WOMAN: You mean, I'll get all the things I want!

MAN: All you want . . . and more!

WOMAN: It don't seem possible.

MAN: But it *will* be possible when the distillations of two hundred and forty thousand editors pulsate within you!

WOMAN: One pulsating editor'd suit me.

MAN: You will be vibrant! Sensitive as a Stradivarius stroked by the loving hand of a master violinist.

WOMAN: That's what I need, a master fiddler! How did Stradi-what's-her-name manage to keep her violinist? The lucky girl.

MAN: People of every nation, colour, creed, and political conviction will meet to hear you discuss subjects ranging from thermodynamics to abstract art. You will teach and lecture enthralled audiences in modern auditoriums at advanced centres of learning. You will write enlightening articles for progressive magazines. And who knows, you may eventually become an editor and contribute yourself to a new edition of Encyclopedia Humanities.

WOMAN: I don't want to teach. I just want to do.

MAN: You will do everything! And in a blaze of publicity! You will go everywhere, meet all the people who are worth meeting. (On the screen various repellent and unnecessary products have been imperatively offered to the viewer. Now a kaleidoscope of speeding cars which always seem to crash, boats that inexplicably sink, aeroplanes that plummet from the skies, and men who punch and shoot each other by day and night, flickers over the screen. Occasionally an unsuitably dressed woman appears in night-shrouded streets to coyly exhibit her physical assets, at the same time attempting to portray popeyed terror. There is also a hero who spends most of his time walking from hotel entrances to cars, and from cars to hotel entrances. Encyclopedia Humanities enables you to dispense with the material objects people gather around themselves to compensate for spiritual hollowness. Encyclopedia Humanities will enlarge you.

WOMAN: I wouldn't mind that part.

MAN: Whatever you gather around you will be used, as a craftsman does his tool. You will no longer be a dissipated loafer who feverishly buys palliatives and aphrodisiacs to compensate for a hopeless future. (Flicking a small book from his briefcase. It looks as though it could be made of rice paper or parchment.) Encyclopedia Humanities brings everything within your reach at a fantastically low cost. This is made possible because of the technical perfection of the processing - all carried out, I should add, in the most sanitary conditions. No longer will you sit here, waiting and growing older and more hopeless. No. You will stride out and demand homage from the world, and the world will honour you by surrendering.

WOMAN: I'm the one that wants to do the surrendering.

MAN: And all this can be yours for a dollar a day for exactly one year. You will note how the pages are perforated to facilitate easy detachment.

WOMAN: Can I look at it?

MAN: Certainly. (He hands the book to her. She examines it. He speaks while she leafs through the book.) Consider what will happen when your husband returns from camp. Your knowledge of forestry will amaze him. You will discuss arboreal pests and their control, using the latest scientific terminology. You will turn to the world lumber trade and weigh the merits of hard and soft woods. You will briefly and effectively cover the pulp and newsprint industry, pouring upon him a deluge of fact and pertinent observation until he gasps with awe and cries out . . . why didn't I realize what an incredible little woman I have for a wife! Come with me to Vancouver Island! We need you to solve the production difficulties that are poisoning our entire operation.

WOMAN: It ain't them guys that have production difficulties. It's me.

MAN: You will suggest new incentives to increase production.

WOMAN: They got all the incentives there they need. The more wet hemlocks and cedars you topple the more money you make.

MAN: There will be some area in which you can assist them.

WOMAN: If they're anything like my husband they won't be interested in my assistance area.

MAN: The lumber company will be grateful, and will spontaneously write you a cheque for several thousand dollars.

WOMAN: I wouldn't want no payment. I'd help out of pure charity.

MAN: All this will be yours once you have completed Encyclopedia Humanities' Educational Program.

WOMAN: It sure sounds wonderful. But is that all there is to it?

MAN: That is all.

WOMAN: But there's nothing on it! They're empty pages.

MAN: Nothing! Did you say nothing! Those pages are saturated with the distillations of two hundred and forty thousand editors. The knowledge of eminent lawyers and doctors will course through your veins. You will practice medicine . . . law . . . engineering . . . dentistry . . .

WOMAN: I just want to practice. Period.

MAN: You will change. After you have completed Encyclopedia Humanities' Educational Program you will be walking hospital wards, followed by a trail of interns.

WOMAN: I wouldn't object to that.

MAN: They will stand around beds listening while you diagnose obscure diseases with incredible skill.

WOMAN: What else will they do?

MAN: They will scatter across the world to develop and practice your diagnostic techniques.

WOMAN: Is that all?

MAN: That is the peak of any teacher's career.

WOMAN: Then I don't want it.

MAN: Do you realize what you are carelessly rejecting? It lies within your grasp to be an authority on Anatomy, Astronomy, Accelerators, Advertising, Aeronautics, Agriculture, Ballistics, Bandicoot, Banjo, Banking, Bankruptcy, Baroque, Biology, Blackmail, Boilers, Burners, Bulgaria, Caesar Gais Julius, Calculus, Caligula, Calvin, Carbon, Childbirth, Chipmunks, Dacheau, Dallas, Dali, Dardanelles, Death, Dentistry, Detergents, Diatoms, Differentials, Dreams, Dumplings, Economics, Ecumenical Council, Eczema, Ego, Eggs, Eliot, Ellipses, Endocrinology, Engels, England, Enzymes, Epidemiology, Epilepsy, Episcopacy, Ethics, Exogamy, Faith, Feldspar, Fishes, Fossils, Gasterosteus pungitius, Genesis, Genetics, Geography, Geology, Gravity, Guinness, Gyves, Haggis, Hannibal, Harps, Heredity, Hitler, Hormones, Hydrogen, International Law, Ireland, Iron, Islam, Isotopes, Japan, Jesus, Jurisprudence, Kant, Kepler, Kidneys, Kennedy, Labour, Labrador, Lakes, Landlords, Later Day Saints, Learning, League of Nations, License, Limestone, Liquid, Lobsters, Logic, Luther, Lupercalia, Macbeth, Maidenhead, Mars, Marriage, Masonry, Medicine, Meteorology, Microscopy, Migration, Mortgages, Mysticism, National Debt, Negroes, Oedipus, Olfactory System, Ozone, Paper, Palsy, Penitence, Penis, Periodic Laws, Phonetics, Poe, Pork, Property, Quartz, Quotas, Radio, Resurrection, Senates, Shaw, Sodium, Stratigraphy, Sun, Synthetics, Syphilis, Tap Dance, Tariffs, Textiles, Trees, Tuberculosis, Unemployment, Ungulates, Universities, Urine, Values, Vermeer, Vertebrates, Vitamins, Virginity, Volcanism, War, Watercolours, Weights, Wilson, Worms, Yellow Fever, Zoology, Zygotes. (While the Man

spouts the list, on the screen a car speeds along a palm tree-lined street, turns into a drive, and halts before a vast white mansion. The hero steps from the car and dashes into the house. In no time at all he reappears on the other side, dressed in a swimming suit, beach jacket and sandals. After lighting a cigarette, he strolls across a lawn to stand beside an English perambulator, which is guarded by a nursemaid who stimulates the worst instincts in masculine viewers. Fortunately the hero is without bad instincts, though it would be impossible to deny him a total instinct-deficiency, since he is tenderly eyeing whatever is reposing in the perambulator. It could be a crocodile for no one is allowed to look inside. After bestowing a smile of nauseating paternalism on the contents of the perambulator, he proceeds over more turf, followed by the perambulator, which glides after him like a well-trained dog. He reaches a little headland where glistening wavelets pat golden sands. Then what happens? Why, up from the ocean depths pops the erstwhile fear-stricken beauty, now clad in a brief bathing suit, flippers, mask, and oxygen tanks. As a compensation she holds up a twenty-pound frozen Ling Cod bought especially for the occasion at the local Superstore. But what does this pelagic Diana do now? Why, the nincompoop drops next Sunday's dinner and swims at Olympic Trials-speed to the beach, where she casts herself into the arms of the hero. The facts are now clear. Somewhere or other along the way, these two have met before. The hero's life is not completely taken up with entering and exiting cars, nor is the beauty always running pop-eyed along fear-haunted streets. Proof lies behind them, somewhere in the vast English perambulator. The end of this cathartic drama is a shot of the happy couple wandering hand in hand along the beach, followed by the faithful perambulator being pushed by the nanny.) Don't you want to be an expert in all these fields?

WOMAN: No.

MAN: Then what do you want? You unnatural creature . . . what do you want?

WOMAN: (Pointing to the cinematographical pair who are looking blissfully out across the sea with their perambulator.) That's what I want. See it? That's what I want.

MAN: (Glancing briefly at the screen.) That is impossible. You are looking into the future, towards a perfection that Encyclopedia Humanities is helping to build.

WOMAN: Go away.

MAN: Have you thought of the immense sense of attainment you will experience at the end of your life, once you have become a subscriber to Encyclopedia Humanities? You will feel within yourself that glow, that spiritual exuberance which fills those who know they have contributed more than their fair share of toil to the caissons on which the future will be erected. (Polishes off his toddy.)

WOMAN: Go away.

MAN: We must all come to terms with the present. After completing Encyclopedia

Humanities' Educational Program, you will realize that personal problems, such as yours, are of minor importance. (Pours more whiskey, mixes a toddy.)

WOMAN: Go away. (Picking up a steak knife.) Or I'll kill you.

MAN: For instance, your psychotic tendencies would be eradicated. (She throws the knife. It misses him by a hair's breadth.) And your marksmanship would be improved as the result of assimilating into your system the world renowned artistry of jugglers and knife-throwers.

WOMAN: Go away. (The Man stands.)

MAN: I do not understand how any individual can reject the opportunities Encyclopedia Humanities offers merely because our program does not guarantee you immediate happiness. Though as I have previously explained, Professor Slobitch's embracing studies will permit you to live contentedly with your unhappiness. Surely that is the equivalent of happiness and should be preferred by intelligent people to mere animal satisfaction.

WOMAN: (Holding the book out for him to take.) Have you eaten one these?

MAN: Not yet.

WOMAN: Then how can you be so sure of what it will do?

MAN: I have taken an enlightening course offered by Encyclopedia Humanities to all its representatives (She throws the book at him. He catches it and slips it into his case which he then closes.) I shall become a subscriber the moment my financial position allows it. (Goes to the stove, proceeds to dress beneath the robe which surrounds him like a nineteenth century beach tent.) I have no illusions about myself, the past or the future. I wish to escape from the necessity of having to meet with people like yourself who live in a world from which all reality has flown. Therefore, if a daily ration of compressed brain in which memory has been retained offers me a path to freedom, I will gladly swallow it. I will not sit and howl to the moon. (He moves the bathrobe. His clothes have shrunk to half their former size, though he apparently does not notice the discrepancy. He perches his hat, now a miniature porkpie, on the crown of his head, takes up his briefcase and marches to the door.) I hope you do not live to regret the day you rejected Encyclopedia Humanities. (She throws the other steak knife. It pins his hat to the wall as neatly as William Tell pinned the apple to the tree behind his darling son's head. The man removes the knife, slips the hat from the blade, re-inserts the blade into the wall, pops the hat on his skull, opens the door and marches forth into the rain. The Woman does not bother with his departure. She is now staring at the screen. At last she goes into the other room, moving as people do when they suffer from acute exhaustion of body and agony of mind. She returns carrying a large doll which measure three feet in height. The doll has plump, masculine features and wears a perfectly pressed suit. She props the doll against the screen, returns to the table where she sits staring fixedly at the artificial body. Finally she speaks, lovingly, persuasively.)

WOMAN: Honey . . . honey. Come out of your prison, honey. Come and stay with me for a little while, just a little while. (The doll appears to grow larger and larger, until it is the size of a man who bears a close resemblance to the manipulator on the Give-Away Show.) Honey Are you going to stay with me? Just for a while. I'm so lonely, sitting here. (The man-doll moves away from the screen using a prancing haunch-jerking walk. It does not speak; indeed, it does not seem to move its hands or head. It circles the table, apparently not seeing the woman. finally it speaks.)

DOLLMAN: How've things been?

WOMAN: Horrible. I just wait.

DOLLMAN: What did that guy want?

WOMAN: He was selling something.

DOLLMAN: Who isn't? Did you buy?

WOMAN: No.

DOLLMAN: Didn't have what you wanted, eh?

WOMAN: No.

DOLLMAN: You can't beat good old reliable me. (Laughing)

WOMAN: Yes, that's true.

DOLLMAN: Good old reliable me. Good old reliable . . . Me! (He jumps at her, pulls her from the chair. Holds her a moment, while tearing some of the clothes from her back. Then he half carries, half drags her into the other room. The expression on the woman's face is part ecstasy, part revulsion. On the screen two men and a woman discuss Art Appreciation with the aid of slides as the curtain falls.

The End