Theophilus North

Matthew Burnett

Based on the novel by
Thornton Wilder

A Samuel French Acting Edition

SAMUEL FRENCH
FOUNDED 1830

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ISBN 978-0-573-63041-5

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THEOPHILUS NORTH was originally produced by Geva Theatre Center, Rochester, New York (Mark Cuddy, Artistic Director) and Arena Stage, Washington, D.C. (Molly D. Smith, Artistic Director; Stephen Richard, Executive Director) with an opening night performance on January 24, 2003. It was directed by Mark Cuddy, with choreography by Terry Berliner, set and costume design by G.W. Mercier, lighting design by Ann G. Wrightson, original music by Gregg Coffin, dramaturgy by Marge Betley, stage management by Kathleen Horton Mahan, assistant stage management by Joseph Knight, and technical direction by Jim Glendinning. The cast was as follows:

THEOPHILUS NORTH . . . . . Matthew Floyd Miller
WOMAN 1 . . . . . Siobhan Mahoney
WOMAN 2 . . . . . Valerie Leonard
WOMAN 3 . . . . . Lynn Steinmetz
MAN 1 . . . . . Michael Laurino
MAN 2 . . . . . Andrew Polk
MAN 3 . . . . . Edward James Hyland

The New York City premiere of ***THEOPHILUS NORTH*** was produced by Keen Company (Carl Forsman, Artistic Director; Wayne Kelton, Producer) at the Clurman Theatre, Theatre Row, with an opening night performance on September 14, 2006. It was directed by Carl Forsman, with scenic design by Beowulf Borritt, costume design by Theresa Squire, lighting design by Josh Bradford, sound design by Daniel Baker, and stage management by Erin Grenier. The cast was as follows:

THEOPHILUS NORTH . . . . . Giorgio Litt
WOMAN 1 . . . . . Virginia Kull
WOMAN 2 . . . . . Regan Thomspson
WOMAN 3 . . . . . Margaret Daly
MAN 1 . . . . . Joe Delafield
MAN 2 . . . . . Brian Hutchison
MAN 3 . . . . . Geddeth Smith

CHARACTERS

Theophilus North
Man 1
Woman 1
Man 2
Woman 2
Man 3
Woman 3

The "men" and "women" in the play will portray all characters that come in contact with Theophilus in this story. The actor playing Theophilus should play *only* Theophilus. The breakdown of roles for the six Men and Women is as follows:

Man 1 *(Late 20s)*
Man 1
Bill Wentworth
Charles Fenwick
George Granberry

Woman 1 *(Mid 20s)*
Woman 1
Eloise Fenwick
Diana Bell

Man 2 *(Mid 30s)*
Man 2
Henry Simmons
Hilary Jones
Willis

Woman 2 *(Mid 30s)*
Woman 2
Mrs. Fenwick
Myra Granberry
Mrs. Sarah Bosworth

Man 3 *(60s)*
Man 3
Father
Josiah Dexter
Augustus Bell
Dr. James Bosworth

Woman 3 *(50s)*
Woman 3
Mother
Mrs. Cranston
Cora Cummings

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The set should be simple, offering an easy, uncomplicated playing area, in order to move the action from one location to another rapidly.

Props should be minimal or mimed. Furniture should be minimal and not necessarily realistic. However, a real period stationary bicycle for Theophilus and actual books should be utilized. Costumes, as well, should be as simple as possible. A basic costume suggesting the time and place of the piece are necessary for each of the "Men" and "Women." But as there are multiple roles for each of these actors and quick changes will be necessary, I suggest simple accessories (or even *one* accessory) which will readily identify the character. The ability for fast alterations to the basic costume is also desirable. As representatives of the various areas of Newport, it may be assumed that the Men and Women speak "Out."

Translations of the scenes conducted in French can be found following the text of the play.

THEOPHILUS NORTH was written to be performed by seven professional actors. However, recognizing that some community, amateur, or other nonprofessional groups with larger casting needs may desire to have characters played by individual actors, I approve of it entirely. At that point the division of roles, as well as the lines for "Men," "Women," and places, is at the discretion of the director.

ACT I

Scene 1
The Nine Ambitions

(WOMAN 1 appears.)

WOMAN 1. It was the spring of 1926. Slowly and wonderingly one raises one's head.

(She goes.)

THEOPHILUS. *(Entering)* I quit! I quit, I quit, I quit! I, Theophilus North, quit my job! *(Out)* Haven't you ever wanted to? I feel like I've been released from a hospital after a protracted illness. For thirty years I've been plagued by a life of auxiliary verbs: "should" and "ought." The time has come for me to dive into the world and rejoice at the ripples I make. My mind is alive with options, as well as with the voices of my parents and their inevitable reactions.

(MOTHER and FATHER appear.)

MOTHER. You did what?
FATHER. Have you been drinking?
MOTHER. How could you do that?
THEOPHILUS. Easily. I walked into the main office and

said, "I quit."

FATHER. Watch your tone.

THEOPHILUS. *(Out)* My father. His overstanding underwhelms me.

MOTHER. But you love teaching.

THEOPHILUS. Teaching is a safety net for indeterminate natures.

MOTHER. But you have such a gift for it.

THEOPHILUS. *(Out)* My mother will now recite an "Ode to Complacency."

MOTHER. Maybe if you asked nicely they'd give you your job back.

THEOPHILUS. I'm almost *thirty*. I have been teaching and tutoring at this damn—

FATHER. Language—

THEOPHILUS. —prep school and summer camp in New Jersey for four years.

FATHER. Four and a half.

THEOPHILUS. *(Deferential sarcasm)* Thank you. I don't know what I want to do, but I don't want to be *there* anymore.

MOTHER. But you love those boys.

THEOPHILUS. You try sleeping in a tent with ten urchins—

FATHER. Tone—

THEOPHILUS. —during the phase when everything forbidden obsesses them. Giggling for half an hour every time one of them—

FATHER. Language—

THEOPHILUS. —well, every time some little physiological accident occurs.

FATHER. Quitters never prosper.

THEOPHILUS. No, Poppa, *cheaters* never prosper. Quitters

never *win*.

FATHER. So that makes you...

THEOPHILUS. Unencumbered.

FATHER. *(To MOTHER)* He *has* been drinking.

MOTHER. What will you do?

THEOPHILUS. I don't know. Something. I don't know! I have ambition. *(Out)* As a matter of fact—

FATHER. Oh, God...

MOTHER. Language...

THEOPHILUS. *(Out)* At various times I've been afire with nine Life Ambitions. I'll tell you about them.

FATHER. Must you?

THEOPHILUS. Yes. In random order they have been: Anthropologist, Archeologist, Saint, Detective, Magician, Actor—

FATHER. Sweet mercy...

THEOPHILUS. Lover, Rascal. Which all lead to my last and overriding ambition: to be a Free Man.

FATHER. What's wrong with being a banker?

MOTHER. Or a lawyer?

THEOPHILUS. I don't want any career bound up with directorates and boards of governors. I want no boss over me. After four-and-a-half years of confinement I want adventure, risk, fun, danger. I want to comb the earth, read a million faces, intervene in life.

FATHER. And how do you intend on accomplishing this "circumnavigation of fun?"

THEOPHILUS. I've bought a used car from Eddie Linley for twenty-five dollars. Her name...

HANNAH (WOMAN 2). *(Appearing)* Hannah. From the song. *(Sings)* "Hard-Hearted Hannah!"

THEOPHILUS. Feeling up to a trip, Hannah?

HANNAH. I long to lie down in a New Jersey gully, but Eddie keeps resuscitating me.

THEOPHILUS. And now you are my chariot to real life!

HANNAH. All right. Where to?

THEOPHILUS. Well, I have been to Paris, but I long to visit so many other major cities: Rome and Budapest, Hong Kong and Shanghai, London, Berlin...

HANNAH. New York is close. How about New York?

THEOPHILUS. New York! The most wonderful city in the world. Persons living there are animated by a galvanic force.

HANNAH. I think I could manage New York.

THEOPHILUS. Yes, but Hannah, convenience rarely leads to adventure. I've already *been* to New York. I've got my own car, no obligations, and the roads of the entire planet before me.

HANNAH. So?

THEOPHILUS. I'll be true to my name... and go north!

Scene 2
Newport

(THEOPHILUS sees a sign.)

MAN 1. "Newport, 30 Miles."

(He goes.)

HANNAH. Newport?

THEOPHILUS. Why not? Yes. I'll swing through Newport, where my brother served ten years ago in the Coast Artillery. So it's off to Newport on the island of Aquidneck. Ah, sweet freedom!

(Sees another sign.)

WOMAN 3. "Welcome to Newport."

(She goes. HANNAH begins to cough violently.)

THEOPHILUS. Come on, Hannah.

HANNAH. Nope, I'm done. Stop me over there.

(JOSIAH appears.)

JOSIAH. "Josiah Dexter's Garage. Repairs."

THEOPHILUS. Will you examine her while I use a telephone?

MAN 2. *(Appearing)* Young Men's Christian Association.

THEOPHILUS. I am inquiring if there is a room available. My name is Theophilus North. I am thirty, was christened in the First Congregational Church of Madison, Wisconsin, I am fairly sociable—

MAN 2. That's all right buddy, calm down. Fifty cents a night.

(He goes.)

THEOPHILUS. *(To JOSIAH.)* How much?

JOSIAH. Fifteen dollars looks like.

THEOPHILUS. Do you buy old cars?

JOSIAH. Yes.

THEOPHILUS. I'll sell it to you for twenty if you'll drive my luggage to the "Y."

JOSIAH. Agreed.

THEOPHILUS. Good-bye, Hannah. No hard feelings on either side.

HANNAH. Happens to the best of us, dear.

THEOPHILUS. "Balde ruhest du auch."

(HANNAH goes.)

JOSIAH. Had the car long?

THEOPHILUS. Seven hours and thirty-five minutes.

JOSIAH. May I ask what it was you said to the car?

THEOPHILUS. Goethe. "Balde ruhest du auch." "Soon you too will rest."

JOSIAH. Do you get that worked up about everything you own?

THEOPHILUS. Mr. Dexter, I have been in Newport for a quarter of an hour. I'm happy to be anywhere other than where I was. I'm a little light-headed.

JOSIAH. Where you from?

THEOPHILUS. New Jersey.

JOSIAH. Where you headed?

THEOPHILUS. Off to see the world.

JOSIAH. Well, congratulations. You've seen 180 miles of it.

THEOPHILUS. Who rents bicycles around here?

JOSIAH. I do.

THEOPHILUS. Would you pick one for me?

JOSIAH. All right.

THEOPHILUS. Has my light-headedness offended you, Mr. Dexter?

JOSIAH. We New Englanders don't go in for light-headedness much, but I've heard nothing to be offended at. There's your bicycle. *(A bicycle appears. It is stationary.)* Good day to you.

(He goes.)

THEOPHILUS. *(Hopping onto the bicycle and peddling. Out)* Down Main Street and out!

(MEN 1 and 2, WOMEN 1, 2 and 3 appear and go, in turn.)

MAN 1. Over here, Theophilus! Ride on the Avenue, peddle down Thames Street!

WOMAN 2. To me: the Ten-Mile Drive along the bay. Each mile more sublime than the last.

MAN 2. Here, Theophilus! Ride beneath these!

WOMAN 3. *(As they open green umbrellas.)* The trees of Newport.

MAN 2. Brought from exotic locations around the world by scientists and yachtsman.

THEOPHILUS. Remarkable!

WOMAN 1. To me, Theophilus. The Brenton Point Light-house. Climb the steps to the viewing deck. Feel the wind in your face as you gaze across the glittering sea. On a clear day, what can be seen will amaze you!

THEOPHILUS. Yes, I see! What is it?

WOMAN 1. Portugal.

THEOPHILUS. What a remarkable thing is a lighthouse!

Raised high above the world to see the arc of the horizon and recognize limitless options! Now there's an example to hold close at hand.

WOMAN 1. Indeed. Where are you going?

THEOPHILUS. To call on an old friend of the family.

(She goes as scene shifts to Bill Wentworth's office.)

BILL. *(Out)* Bill Wentworth, Superintendent of the Newport Casino and Tennis Club. A friend of his brother's who once won a tennis tournament here. *(To THEOPHILUS)* Theophilus, great to see you. What brings you to our fair island?

THEOPHILUS. Off to conquer the world, Mr. Wentworth.

BILL. Bill.

THEOPHILUS. Bill. But I'm waylaid here for a week or two, so I'm going to try and earn some money. I find myself like Columbus, seeking funds in Ferdinand's court before the great voyage.

BILL. Hey, why don't you sit here and type up an advertisement of your skills. We can call it in to the newspaper and I'll tack a copy of it on the Casino's bulletin board.

THEOPHILUS. Oh. Thanks.

BILL. Sure. We always have young people during the summer who need tutoring. We have another group that might be eager for your services, too. Would you be ready to read aloud to older people with poor eyesight?

THEOPHILUS. Certainly.

BILL. And could you coach tennis to children between eight and fifteen?

THEOPHILUS. I suppose.

BILL. Good. I'll start collecting a class for you. A dime an

hour for each youngster. If you didn't bring any tennis gear with you, there's a room back there filled with racquets, flannels and shoes. Type up your ad. I've got to go and see what my carpenters are doing. *(Out)* Kindness is not entirely uncommon.

(BILL exits.)

THEOPHILUS. *(Out)* But imaginative kindness can give a man a shock. Within four days I have pupils on the courts and I sound like I know what I'm doing, thanks to some old copies of

MAN 2. "Tennis for Beginners"

THEOPHILUS. which I found at the Casino. Within a week telephone calls arrive, my advertisement having exposed me to "the lunatic fringe" of the general public.

LUNATIC (MAN 3). We know you are a German spy and we have our eyes on you.

2nd LUNATIC (WOMAN 1). Mr. North? This is Mrs. Denby's secretary speaking.

THEOPHILUS. *(Out)* For some reason, I am more outspoken and even rude over the telephone than in person.

2nd LUNATIC. Mrs. Denby wishes to know if you would be able to read aloud to her three children between the hours of 3:30 and 6:30 on Thursday afternoons?

THEOPHILUS. Thank Mrs. Denby and tell her that it is impossible to hold *one* child's attention on a book for longer than forty minutes. I suggest they be encouraged to play with matches.

LUNATIC. Oh!

SARAH BOSWORTH. Mr. North? *(With great arrogance)* This is Mrs. Sarah McHenry Bosworth. *(Pause. Out)* I pause to let him savor the richness of his privilege.

THEOPHILUS. Yes, ma'am.

SARAH. My father would like to discuss with you the possibility of your reading to him. Philosophy and the *Bible*. The entire *Bible*. He has read it eleven times and wishes to know if you are able to read rapidly. He would like to break his record of forty-eight hours.

THEOPHILUS. Tempting as it is, Mrs. Bosworth, I fear that a vocal sprint through the "Book of Joshua" is an invitation to injury, and I must decline. Goodbye. *(He hangs up on her. Out)* My days are soon filled with tennis lessons and readings. I find myself cycling up and down the Avenue like a delivery boy beneath the shade of Newport's greenery.

(MAN 3 appears.)

MAN 3. Across the street from the Tennis Casino you will find me: a small public park. I comprise nine beech trees, three poplar, and an odd stone structure. Most mistake it for some abandoned project, but look closely. It is a stone round tower, built by the Vikings—or by Benedict Arnold's grandfather. There's still some disagreement. Either way, it is one of the few remaining vestiges from the 17th century village of Newport's first settlers.

Cities and persons are like trees: the sap first rising in the early years becomes its future contour. Small traces allude to the mystery of what things were, are, and what they may become.

(He goes.)

THEOPHILUS. "The mystery of what we may become..."

Scene 3
The Fenwicks, i

THEOPHILUS. *(Out)* But there is no mystery about who my favorite pupil is in the early morning tennis class: Eloise Fenwick.

(ELOISE is revealed.)

THEOPHILUS. She is fourteen. Which means, of course, she can be any age between ten and sixty, as the spirit moves her. Some days on the court I have to drag her to the back line. Other days she precedes me, Countess of Aquidneck and the Adjacent Isles. She is intelligent, deep and able to keep her counsel; beautiful and shows no signs of knowing it. It's like having a friendship with one of Shakespeare's heroines at the age of fourteen.

ELOISE. I wish my brother Charles would take lessons with you.

THEOPHILUS. But Charles is sixteen. Mr. Dobbs teaches that age group.

ELOISE. He doesn't like Mr. Dobbs. He doesn't like anybody. He just practices against the wall over there by himself. No —I wish you would teach him something.

THEOPHILUS. Well, I can't until I'm asked, can I?

ELOISE. I know. Mama wants you to help Charles with his French. She's going to ask you today after the lesson. She's over there, in the gallery. The one wearing all the veils.

(MRS. FENWICK is revealed.)

THEOPHILUS. *(With suspicion)* Eloise.

ELOISE. She's motoring today. Come on, I'll introduce you. I just hope you're better at French than you are at tennis. Mama, this is Mr. North. The gentleman I was telling you about. Mr. North, this my mother.

THEOPHILUS. Very pleased to make your acquaintance, Mrs. Fenwick.

MRS. FENWICK. My pleasure, Mr. North. Eloise, go tell your brother to wait after he's through. *(ELOISE exits.)* Mr. North, you have an interesting approach to teaching tennis.

THEOPHILUS. Do you think so?

MRS. FENWICK. I do. At what point will you begin demonstrating to Eloise how to get the ball *over* the net?

THEOPHILUS. Don't worry. The regular coach returns in June.

MRS. FENWICK. *(Smiling)* It doesn't really concern me, Mr. North. Your name is often mentioned in my house. Eloise admires you very much.

THEOPHILUS. I had dared not hope so.

MRS. FENWICK. I wanted to talk to you about my son Charles. I was hoping that you could find time to coach him in French. He speaks the language, but has a "bloc" against genders and tenses. He admires everything French.

THEOPHILUS. Mrs. Fenwick, I have taught French to many students. It is like dragging stones uphill. I would like to have a short talk with Charles and hear his own expression of interest.

MRS. FENWICK. That is a good deal to ask of Charles Fenwick... I find it difficult to tell you this—to describe certain... traits... in Charles. But I feel I must.... He has a disdain, almost a contempt for everyone he has come in contact with, except perhaps Eloise and a few priests. I have found the courage to give it a name. *(Pause)* He is a snob. An unbounded snob.

THEOPHILUS. I see.

MRS. FENWICK. He has never said "Thank you" to a servant, not once, and the few times he has thanked his father or myself have been barely audible. He takes no interest in any subject but one—our social standing. Is his father in the best clubs? Are we invited to important occasions? He is driving us mad.

THEOPHILUS. Can Eloise persuade him to talk to me now for a few minutes?

MRS. FENWICK. Eloise can persuade him to do anything.

(She exits. CHARLES appears.)

THEOPHILUS. *(To CHARLES)* Mr. Fenwick—I shall call you that at the beginning of our conversation, then I shall call you Charles—Eloise tells me that you have had several years of French? *(Silence)* Well, probably all you need is a few weeks polishing the irregular verbs. *(Silence)* I have been told a number of things about you, do you have any questions about me?

(Pause)

CHARLES. Is it true that you went to Yale?

THEOPHILUS. Yes.

(Pause)

CHARLES. If you went to Yale, why are you working here?

THEOPHILUS. To make some money.

CHARLES. You don't look... poor.

THEOPHILUS. Oh, yes, I'm very poor, Charles.

CHARLES. I know why. You're the worst tennis instructor

I've ever seen.

THEOPHILUS. I may be poor, Charles, but I'm cheerful.

CHARLES. Did you belong to any of those fraternities or clubs at Yale?

THEOPHILUS. A few, but I was not a member of any of the Senior Societies.

CHARLES. *(Looking at THEOPHILUS)* Did you try to get into one?

THEOPHILUS. Trying has nothing to do with it. They did not invite me. What kind of clubs would you like to be a member of, Charles? *(Silence)* You know, there's a famous club in Baltimore, that must be the most delightful in the world and the hardest to get into.

CHARLES. What is it?

THEOPHILUS. It's called the "Catgut Club." Around Johns Hopkins Medical School there are great doctors and eminent professors who belong to the "Catgut," because they're also accomplished musicians. Every Tuesday night they play chamber music.

CHARLES. What?

THEOPHILUS. Chamber music. Do you know what that is? *(CHARLES reacts.)* Charles, are you unwell? Your neck has turned red. I said chamber music, not chamber pots! *(CHARLES reacts.)* Charles, there's another club, also very select, at Saratoga Springs, whose members own racehorses, but very seldom ride them. They call it the "Horses and Asses Club"—the members don't sit on their horses, they sit on their asses. *(CHARLES reacts.)* Which club would you rather belong to?

CHARLES. The... I, uh... Uh—

THEOPHILUS. Never mind, I'm wasting your time. Are you ready to say that you'll work with me on the finer points of

French? Be frank with me, Charles.

CHARLES. *(Swallowing)* Yes, sir.

THEOPHILUS. Fine. I'll wait until your mother returns. I don't want to interrupt your practice any longer. *(He puts out his hand; CHARLES shakes it.)* Don't tell that little story about Saratoga Springs where it might cause any embarrassment. It's all right, just among men.

(CHARLES exits as MRS. FENWICK enters.)

THEOPHILUS. Charles feels that he'd like to try a little coaching.

MRS. FENWICK. Oh, I'm so relieved!

THEOPHILUS. Mrs. Fenwick, my next lesson begins shortly. May I be brief?

MRS. FENWICK. Please.

THEOPHILUS. And somewhat blunt?

MRS. FENWICK. I have been married nearly eighteen years and have two children, Mr. North. I don't shock the way I used to.

THEOPHILUS. I was speaking to Charles about music, and said the word "chamber."

MRS. FENWICK. Yes?

THEOPHILUS. Having worked with young boys I believe that every slightly suggestive word is invested with the horror and excitement of the forbidden.

MRS. FENWICK. What has this to do with my son? He's sixteen.

THEOPHILUS. Precisely. Does Charles have any association with boys his own age?

MRS. FENWICK. Practically none.

THEOPHILUS. Does he giggle?

MRS. FENWICK. Charles?!

THEOPHILUS. Whisper?

MRS. FENWICK. Hardly.

THEOPHILUS. Shout?

MRS. FENWICK. Never.

THEOPHILUS. Horseplay?

MRS. FENWICK. None.

THEOPHILUS. Mrs. Fenwick, Charles is trapped in a phase of development he should have outgrown by twelve.

MRS. FENWICK. I see. And what I called his "snobbery"...

THEOPHILUS. Is an escape into a world without embarrassment.

MRS. FENWICK. My dear Charles.

THEOPHILUS. Don't be too upset, Mrs. Fenwick. I can assure you that Mozart had the same problem.

MRS. FENWICK. Charles and Mozart!? Do you believe that Mozart outgrew his childishness?

THEOPHILUS. No.

MRS. FENWICK. Oh, Mr. North, I've hated every word you've said, yet I can see that you're probably right. But do you know what to do?

THEOPHILUS. Absolutely. I know exactly what to do. *(Out)* I have no idea what to do. But when in doubt, act twice as certain.

MRS. FENWICK. How can you be so sure, Mr. North? You are not a doctor.

THEOPHILUS. No, Mrs. Fenwick, I am not. But I don't think Charles needs a doctor. What he needs is a slightly older friend to help guide him through some murky territory. That is a role I am willing to play. May I go forward with my plan, even if

it is unorthodox?

MRS. FENWICK. I must discuss it with Mr. Fenwick and Father Walsh. Mr. North, this has been a painful conversation for me. You will hear from me. Good morning.

(She exits.)

Scene 4
Herman's

THEOPHILUS. *(Out)* Having breathed the rarified air of Charles Fenwick's presence, I need some grounding among my fellow "commoners." And this is where I land:

HERMAN (MAN 3). *(Out)* Herman's Billiard Parlor. Seven tables and a bar dispensing licit beverages, but any strong drink you bring in your own pocket is winked at. Most of the customers here are servants of one kind or another. *(Indicating THEOPHILUS)* Except that one. None of us is sure about that one.

(He goes, as HENRY SIMMONS—a Cockney—appears.)

HENRY. You there, professor!

THEOPHILUS. What?

HENRY. You kind of stand out. Feeling ostrich-sized?

THEOPHILUS. There is a tangible coolness.

HENRY. How about a drink with me? What's your name, cully? Ted North?

THEOPHILUS. Theophilus. How did you know that?

HENRY. *(Taking a flask from his pocket)* New face, saw your ad... and servants like to talk, Ted. Mine's Henry Simmons.

THEOPHILUS. How do you do, Henry?

HENRY. Alright, I guess. A little idle, which drives a man crazy. You see, I'm a "gentleman's gentleman" and Mr. Forrester is in Tierra del Fuego taking pictures of birds. And my lady-friend, Edweena, is a lady's maid on a yacht right now going through the Bahamas. Now who are you, Ted, and are you happy and well?

THEOPHILUS. *(Out)* I don't know why, but I tell him the story of my life, ending up with my being temporarily stranded in Newport.

HENRY. Teddie, there's a lot of suspicion, distrust, of newcomers in Newport. Types we don't want around here. Let's pretend that I don't know you're all right, see? I'd say, "Mr. North, are you a flicker?"

THEOPHILUS. A what?

HENRY. A detective.

THEOPHILUS. I've never had anything to do with such things.

HENRY. I know that. I knew early you were no flicker. When I saw in the newspaper you were ready to teach Latin, that did it. There's no flicker ever been known that can handle Latin. You talk for a while.

THEOPHILUS. Well, I've got some ideas about the trees of Newport. And then there's my theory of "The Nine Cities of Newport."

HENRY. What's that?

THEOPHILUS. Well, I believe Newport may be like the old Trojan city, its treasures buried and unearthed—

HENRY. Stop right there. This is something Mrs. Cranston will want to hear.

THEOPHILUS. Who's Mrs. Cranston?

HENRY. Who's Mrs. Cranston?! Mate, if you don't know Mrs. Cranston, you don't know Newport. She's got a line on everything that happens here. You can bet you weren't in town for two hours before she knew you'd arrived.

THEOPHILUS. Is she a servant, too?

HENRY. Not any more. She was for much of her life. Climbed the ladder from scullery maid to upstairs maid to downstairs maid. But she has a fine place of her own now.

THEOPHILUS. And Mister Cranston?

HENRY. Who?

THEOPHILUS. If she was a maid, where did she get the money for her own place?

HENRY. What does that matter, Ted? It found its way to her. And every cook, valet, seamstress or doorman in Newport knows they can turn to her and be better for it. She wants to meet you. That's a very special honor, as she usually only likes to see servants in the house.

THEOPHILUS. But I am a servant, Henry!

HENRY. All these houses where you're gonna have students—you plan on going in through the front door?

THEOPHILUS. Well, yes, but—

HENRY. Then you're not a servant. She'll be very happy if I bring you to call. *(Hands THEOPHILUS a card)* Meet me at this address tonight, ten o'clock—unless that's past your bedtime.

(HENRY exits.)

THEOPHILUS. *(Out)* My spirits buoyed, I decide to treat

myself to a first-class lunch. I infiltrate the sanctum of the restaurant at the elite Muenchinger-King Hotel.

Scene 5
Myra, i

GEORGE. Mr. North?

THEOPHILUS. Yes.

GEORGE. My name is George Granberry. I should say George *Francis* Granberry because I have a cousin in town named George Herbert Granberry.

THEOPHILUS. Yes, Mr. Granberry.

GEORGE. I need your help. I'm told that you read aloud in English. English literature and all that.

THEOPHILUS. Yes, I do.

GEORGE. I'd like to discuss you reading aloud some books to my wife Myra. She's sort of an invalid this summer, and it would... kind of... help her pass the time.

THEOPHILUS. I see.

GEORGE. Mr. North, Myra is the brightest girl in the world. Quick as a whip. But when she was young she had teachers that were terrible bores; you know what schoolteachers are like. As a result of this she hates reading a book. Poetry, *The Three Musketeers*, Shakespeare...

(MYRA is revealed.)

MYRA. I just can't stand nonsense.

GEORGE. She's a very realistic girl. But she likes to be read to, for a while. I've tried to read aloud to her, and her nurse, Mrs. Cummings, does too, but after about ten minutes...

MYRA. Oh, stop. Let's talk instead.

(She goes.)

GEORGE. Mr. North, she's had two miscarriages. We're expecting a child again in about six months. The doctors have ordered her to spend all her afternoons on the sofa. I love Myra, but I can't spend all my afternoons just listening to her. Besides, I'm sort of an inventor. I have a laboratory in Middletown.

THEOPHILUS. An inventor, Mr. Granberry?

GEORGE. Oh, I tinker at some ideas I have. I keep it pretty secret. Mr. North, you may have to be a little patient with Myra at the beginning. She's strong-minded and very sincere. If you put her before a firing squad and asked her to name five plays by Shakespeare...

MYRA. *(Reappearing)* Go ahead and shoot.

GEORGE. She's got it against Shakespeare.

MYRA. He's piffle.

(She goes.)

GEORGE. She was born in Wisconsin and up there they don't allow anybody to tell them anything.

THEOPHILUS. I was born in Wisconsin.

GEORGE. *You were born in Wisconsin?*

THEOPHILUS. Yes.

GEORGE. You're a Badger!

THEOPHILUS. Yes.

GEORGE. Oh, that'll be a big recommendation. Myra's very proud of being a Badger. Well, do you think you could try it?

THEOPHILUS. All right, I'll try.

GEORGE. Thank you. *(More quietly.)* And you won't say a word about this to anyone?

THEOPHILUS. I make it a rule to never talk about my employers.

GEORGE. Well done. The thing is, we may meet at the house... or you may see me here with a "friend" of mine, a Miss Desmoulins. I'd appreciate it if you didn't mention it... in certain quarters—you see what I mean? Excuse me, Mr. North, I believe "my party" has just arrived; but I'm awfully glad that you're willing to give this reading a shot.

(He exits.)

THEOPHILUS. *(Out)* I return to the "Y" to construct a potential reading list personalized for Mrs. Granberry, have supper, then head out to meet Henry Simmons at the instructed address.

Scene 6
At Mrs. Cranston's, i

(WOMEN 1 and 2, MAN 3, and MRS. CRANSTON appear.)

WOMAN 1. Mrs. Cranston's: we are a large establishment
MAN 3. in the shadow of Trinity Church

WOMAN 2. consisting of three houses

WOMAN 1. built so close together

MAN 3. that it required merely making openings in the walls to unite us.

WOMAN 2. We are the unofficial hub of an indispensable section of Newport: the Servants' City.

WOMAN 1. A temporary boardinghouse for many servants

MAN 3. and a permanent residence for a few.

MRS. CRANSTON. But I do not run an employment agency.

WOMAN 2. Within our walls gossip is kept within bounds.

WOMAN 1. Mrs. Cranston says that it is unprofessional for hired help to discuss the private lives of those who feed them.

MRS. CRANSTON. But certain events may be alluded to... in confidence.

(The MAN and WOMEN go.)

HENRY. Mrs. Cranston, I should like you to make the acquaintance of my friend Teddie North.

THEOPHILUS. Theophilus, Ma'am.

MRS. CRANSTON. I'm very pleased, Mr. North.

THEOPHILUS. Thank you.

HENRY. He has only one fault as far as I can know, ma'am, he minds his own business.

MRS. CRANSTON. That recommends him to me, Mr. Simmons.

THEOPHILUS. I try not to get involved in situations beyond my control.

MRS. CRANSTON. Such as a marathon reading of the *Bible* to a certain eccentric's father, perhaps? *(To HENRY)* Mr. Sim-

mons, you'll excuse me if I ask you to go into the bar for two minutes while I tell Mr. North something he should know.

HENRY. Yes, indeed, gracious lady.

(He exits.)

MRS. CRANSTON. Mr. North, as a young man who asserts himself, I feel you will most likely get involved in some situations "beyond your control" while you are here. If complications should present themselves to you, I hope you will get in touch with me, and that I may approach you if I hear a kettle boiling, as it were. Will you remember that?

THEOPHILUS. Thank you, Mrs. Cranston.

MRS. CRANSTON. Mr. Simmons, rejoin us and let us break the law a little bit. Please bring with you three gin-fizzes. Mr. North, there have been many rumors circulating regarding who you are.

HENRY. *(Returning)* Some think you're a scandal hound, Teddie. A newspaperman after dirt.

MRS. CRANSTON. During the season they're thick as flies. They are one element of a most dubious segment of Newport, filled with parasites, fortune-hunters and prying journalists.

HENRY. You were also suspected of being a "Jiggala!"

MRS. CRANSTON. Henry Simmons, you have your own language. The word is "gigolo."

HENRY. Thank you, ma'am. That's French for dancing partner with ambition. At first we thought you were one of them.

MRS. CRANSTON. Thank you, Henry.

HENRY. Nevertheless, Mrs. Cranston, we wouldn't think the worse of Mr. North here, if he found a sweet little thing in copper mines or railroads, would we?

MRS. CRANSTON. I advise against it, Mr. North.

THEOPHILUS. I have no intention of doing so, Mrs. Cranston. I believe that a keen mind can inoculate one against such pedestrian involvements. I hope to survey the world from a higher plane. But may I ask your reasons against it?

MRS. CRANSTON. I'll say no more. By the end of summer you'll have made your own observations.

HENRY. Mrs. Cranston, you should hear this idea Teddy's got about Newport.

MRS. CRANSTON. I would very much like to hear it.

THEOPHILUS. Well, one of my ambitions growing up was to be an archeologist. I was enthralled by Schliemann's discovery of ancient Troy—those nine cities one on top of the other. I think maybe Newport, Rhode Island has its own cities: variously beautiful, absurd, impressive, commonplace, all to be discovered by the simple turning of a stone.

HENRY. You're like a dictionary come to life, Teddy. Did you write that down somewhere?

MRS. CRANSTON. Mr. North, you may have the muse of a poet within you.

THEOPHILUS. No, Mrs. Cranston, I believe writing is a sedentary pursuit, and I long to see the world right now. But I have considered keeping a journal this summer...

MRS. CRANSTON. I propose a toast. To *you*, Mr. North.

THEOPHILUS. To *me*?

MRS. CRANSTON. You are a welcome surprise cast upon our shore.

THEOPHILUS. *(Out)* I am Gulliver, shipwrecked on the island of Aquidneck, and I could not have fallen on better luck.

Scene 7
The Fenwicks, ii

THEOPHILUS. *(Out)* Two days later Eloise approaches me at the end of my class.

ELOISE. Mr. North, I have a note from Mama. *(Giving it to him)* Aren't you going to read it?

THEOPHILUS. I'll wait. Just now I'd rather take you to the La Forge Tea Rooms for a hot fudge sundae. And perhaps every week—after I finish my lessons. Do you think this note engages or dismisses me?

ELOISE. *(Laughing)* I shan't tell you.

THEOPHILUS. You just have. You really do know a lot about what's going on, don't you?

ELOISE. Well, no one ever tells a young girl anything, so she has to be sort of a witch. She has to learn to read people's thoughts; she has to learn how to know things. Mr. North, I'm going to tell you a secret: Charles thinks he's an orphan, that he's adopted. That's what he thinks—that he's a prince from Poland or Hungary.

THEOPHILUS. Does he think that you're from royal birth, too?

ELOISE. I don't let him. Do you always tell the truth?

THEOPHILUS. I do to you. It's so boring to tell the truth to people who'd rather hear the other thing. Eloise, please read this letter to me, but don't ask me to explain it to you.

(He hands her the letter.)

ELOISE. "Dear Mr. North, Father Walsh says to tell you that

when he was young he had worked as a counselor in a boys' camp, too. He told me to tell you to go ahead. It comforts me to think of our composer from Salzburg. Sincerely, Millicent Fenwick." *(Handing him back the letter.)* Thank you. Wasn't Mozart from Salzburg?

THEOPHILUS. Is it hard to be a witch, Eloise? Does it make living harder?

ELOISE. No! It keeps you so busy. You have to be on your toes. It keeps you from going stale.

THEOPHILUS. Oh, is that one of your worries?

ELOISE. Isn't it everybody's?

(She goes.)

Scene 8
Myra, ii

THEOPHILUS. *(Out)* On the appointed afternoon I wheel up to the door of George and Myra Granberry's home, Sea Ledges.

(MAN 2 appears.)

MAN 2. I am Sea Ledges; a vestige from the city of Newport's Empire Builders. They once erected their castles here, having suddenly awakened to the realization that inland New York is crushingly hot in summer. With them came fashion, display and ornate façade. I get the name Sea Ledges from my vast lawn and

gardens which gently slope to a low cliff above the ocean.

(He goes.)

THEOPHILUS. *(Out)* I am led to Mrs. Granberry's "afternoon room," the placid grace of a woman with child awaiting me, within. *(MYRA and MRS. CUMMINGS are revealed.)* Good afternoon, Mrs. Granberry. I am Theophilus North. Mr. Granberry has engaged me to read aloud to you. *(Long pause as she gazes at him in astonishment and rage.)* Will you kindly introduce me to your companion?

MYRA. Mrs. Cummings, Mr. North.

THEOPHILUS. Are you from Wisconsin, like Mrs. Granberry and me?

MRS. CUMMINGS. Oh, no, sir. I'm from Boston.

THEOPHILUS. Are you also fond of reading?

MRS. CUMMINGS. Oh, I love reading, but I don't get much time for it, you know.

THEOPHILUS. Surely some of your patients like a bit of reading? Something light and amusing?

MRS. CUMMINGS. We have to be careful, sir. When I was in training the Mother Directress told us that she had once read *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* to a surgical case. They had to restitch him.

THEOPHILUS. It's a lovely book. Ladies, we certainly don't want to read anything that's boring, do we? So I suggest we draw up some rules.

MYRA. What kind of rules?

THEOPHILUS. I suggest that I start reading a book and that you let me read it for a quarter of an hour without interruption. Then you give me a sign that I may go on for another quarter of

an hour, or to start some other book. Does that seem reasonable to you, ma'am?

MYRA. Don't call me "ma'am." Let me make it clear to you, Mr. West, that there's something behind all this that I don't like. I don't like being treated as an idiot child.

THEOPHILUS. *(Rising)* Oh, then there's been some misunderstanding. I'll say good afternoon. Mrs. Cummings, I hope I may meet you at another time. Please recall me as Mr. North, not Mr. West.

MYRA. *(Sharply)* Mr. North, it's not your fault that I don't like the whole idea. You've been asked to come here and read to me, so please sit down and begin.

THEOPHILUS. Thank you, Mrs. Granberry. *(He opens a book.)* This is *Daisy Miller*. It was written by a man who lived in Newport when he was young. Not far from this house.

MYRA. Then why did he write books?

THEOPHILUS. I beg your pardon?

MYRA. If he was so rich why did he take the trouble to write books? Was he feeble-minded?

THEOPHILUS. *(Slowly)* No, I think he got tired of buying and selling railroads, and building hotels and naming them after his family. So he wrote it all down—how people behave in the world, the happy and the unhappy. When he died, his last book—still unfinished on his desk—was a novel laid in Newport, called *The Ivory Tower*, about the emptiness and waste of life here.

MYRA. Mr. North, are you trying to make me look ridiculous?

THEOPHILUS. No, ma'am.

MYRA. What do you mean "emptiness and waste of life?"

THEOPHILUS. Those were not my words. I was reporting what Henry James said.

MYRA. In Wisconsin we don't quibble. You said it and you meant it.

THEOPHILUS. I don't know Newport life well enough to make any judgment about it. I come and go on a bicycle.

MYRA. Don't contradict a pregnant woman. Stop running away from my questions.

THEOPHILUS. Mrs. Granberry—

MYRA. Don't call me "ma'am" and don't call me "Mrs. Granberry!" Call me Myra!

THEOPHILUS. Mrs. Granberry, I make it a rule that in all—

MYRA. *We're from Wisconsin.* Don't be such an *Easterner.*

MRS. CUMMINGS. Oh, Mr. North, I wish you would make an exception in this case, seeing that... you're both Badgers.

MYRA. You and your rules. Very well, I'll forget the "emptiness of life" comment if I can make a rule, too: after the first forty-five minutes we take half an hour to talk.

THEOPHILUS. As you wish.

MYRA. You may begin.

THEOPHILUS. *Daisy Miller. (Out)* After exactly forty-five minutes—

MYRA. Time! Theophilus, tell us about your life here—your friends, enemies, good times, and if you're making any money.

THEOPHILUS. I would much rather an account of those things in your life.

MYRA. *(With consideration)* Well, I grow older. I wait for my baby. I eat breakfast. Then the doctor calls and asks if I've been good. He gets ten dollars for that. If it's a sunny day Cora and I go to Bailey's Beach. We sit well wrapped up in a corner so as not to have to talk to people, and we watch the old boots and orange crates drift by. My father was the richest man in Wisconsin. He owned hundreds of lakes, and if any one of them was as

dirty as Bailey's Beach, he'd drain it and plant it with trees. What else do I do, Cora?

MRS. CUMMINGS. You go to luncheon parties, Mrs. Granberry.

MYRA. Yes, I do. Ladies. Men there only on Sundays. All named Granberry. I come home early and rest and I can't think of anything else to tell you. *(To MRS. CUMMINGS)* Cora, do you know if Mr. Granberry is home yet?

MRS. CUMMINGS. No, I don't believe so, ma'am.

MYRA. Oh. Mr. North, that will be all for today, I think. Leave that here and bring some others next time. It's starting a book that kills me. I'll finish that on my own.

Scene 9
The Fenwicks, iii

THEOPHILUS. *(Out)* I now have a plan in mind for my meetings with Charles: the lessons will contain the day's grammatical problem and a "dynamite word:" coucher, *derriere*... All lessons are conducted in French, which, for the most part, will be translated here. But now and then, we'll test your skills. *(To CHARLES, entering)* Bonjour, Charles. It's a lovely day. How are you today?

CHARLES. Fine.

THEOPHILUS. What a handsome sweater. Where did you find such a handsome sweater?

CHARLES. Gift.

THEOPHILUS. *(Pause)* Charles, today we're going to work with the second person singular "tu," which is used with children, your very old friends, and your family. Of course, lovers call each other "tu"; all conversations in bed are in the second person singular. *(Charles reacts.)* Charles, what are those odd-looking kiosks in the streets of Paris called—those constructions for the convenience of men only? *(Pause)* Charles?

CHARLES. Pissoirs!

THEOPHILUS. Yes. *(Out)* It took him ten minutes to recover from that.

CHARLES. Monsieur North, my mother would like to invite you to an informal supper with the family on Sunday.

THEOPHILUS. Yes, that sounds— Actually, no. That is very kind of your mother, but I make a rule not to accept invitations from any employers. It's very hard to refuse this kindness from so remarkable a mother. I hope you are finding a hundred delicate ways of expressing your admiration to her, as all French sons do, and—I'm sorry to say—all American sons don't. You do, don't you, Charles?

CHARLES. Oui... oui, monsieur le professeur.

(He goes.)

THEOPHILUS. *(Out)* There is still much work to be done. Back at the desk of the "Y," a telephone message is given to me:

SARAH BOSWORTH. *(Appearing; out)* From Mrs. Sarah McHenry Bosworth. *(Aside.)* Privilege, privilege.... Mr. North: it is a fortunate occurrence for you that the position of personal reader to my father is still available. Nine Gables awaits your call.

THEOPHILUS. *(Out)* Very well, Fate, I place myself in your

hands. So next on my dance card will be Mrs. "Privilege-Privilege" Bosworth, and her father. At the library I retrieve *Notable Families of Eastern Society, 1925,* and with it ride to my appointment.

(He gets on his bike with book open.)

Scene 10
Nine Gables, i

THEOPHILUS. "The Honorable Dr. James McHenry Bosworth:..."

(DR. BOSWORTH is revealed.)

DR. BOSWORTH. *(Out)* "74, widower, father of six and grandfather of... many. Has served as attaché and ambassador to several countries on three continents. Lives in Newport year-round and several of his children have homes in the vicinity. Mrs. Sarah McHenry Bosworth is his daughter." *(Whispering)* She's divorced.

SARAH. *(Out)* I have no children, and have resumed my maiden name.

(SARAH and DR. BOSWORTH go.)

THEOPHILUS. *(Out)* Friday morning is radiant. Has each

Friday been like this? Have I noticed? I ride my bicycle under the grand entrance arch and up the improbably lengthy drive towards the front door.

(WOMAN 1 appears.)

WOMAN 1. Nine Gables. I am a long rambling cottage. Weather-silvered shingles, wide verandas, turrets and gables from which you can see the beacons of six lighthouses at night. I am an example of nineteenth-century intellectual Newport; families from Cambridge, professors from Harvard, philosophers and novelists. Through my latched screen door on any given day you can see a platoon of servants polishing floors, and dusting the books of one of the greatest private libraries in America.

(WOMAN 1 goes. THEOPHILUS rings the bell. A butler, WILLIS, opens the door.)

THEOPHILUS. Mr. North to see Mrs. Bosworth.

WILLIS. In general, sir, this door is not used in the morning. You will find the garden door around the corner of the house at your left.

(He shuts the door. THEOPHILUS rings the bell again. WILLIS answers.)

THEOPHILUS. Mrs. Bosworth asked me to call at this address.

WILLIS. *This* door is not generally used.

(He shuts the door. THEOPHILUS rings the bell again. WILLIS

answers.)

THEOPHILUS. Thank you, Mr. Fezziwig. I assume that you are expecting the piano tuner?

WILLIS. What?

THEOPHILUS. Or the chiropodist. What a lovely day, Mr. Fezziwig. Kindly tell Mrs. Bosworth that I have called.

WILLIS. My name is not Fe—Sir, take your bicycle to the door I have indicated.

THEOPHILUS. I knew Dr. Bosworth well in Singapore. Raffles Hotel, you know. We used to play fan-tan.

WILLIS. What? I refuse to be engaged any further in this ridiculous twaddle.

THEOPHILUS. Temple bells and all that. Punkahs swaying from the ceiling—

WILLIS. I've had enough of you. I am shutting the door again. Deranged. Positively!

THEOPHILUS. When the Queen arrives, please remind her she still has the ice tongs I loaned her.

WILLS. Demented scalawag, go away before I am forced to call the authorities!

(Enter SARAH BOSWORTH.)

SARAH. And what is going on out here?

THEOPHILUS. *(Out)* Mrs. Bosworth is the type of person who enjoys beginning sentences with the word "and."

SARAH. And who are you?

THEOPHILUS. Theophilus North.

SARAH. I am expecting you for *some* time, Mr. North. Follow me into my sitting room.

THEOPHILUS. *(To WILLIS)* Thank you for your help.

SARAH. I am Mrs. Bosworth, Dr. Bosworth's eldest daughter. I do not know what caused that commotion, nor do I want to. You will sit down, please.

THEOPHILUS. Thank you, but I prefer—

SARAH. Sit. My father's eyes tire easily. His readers have proved unsatisfactory. I know his tastes. As I mentioned some time ago, he has a strong interest in philosophy and also the *Bible*, which he would like to have read to him in its entirety.

THEOPHILUS. I see. At my rate that would be a considerable sum of money.

SARAH. Yes, I would like to know if you are able to make special reduced terms for such a reading.

THEOPHILUS. I could read the Old Testament in Hebrew. There are no vowels in Hebrew. That would reduce the time by about seven hours.

SARAH. But he wouldn't understand it.

THEOPHILUS. What has understanding got to do with it? He's already read it eleven times.

SARAH. Perhaps we should focus on Philosophy.

THEOPHILUS. I'll offer you a budget plan and read it in Aramaic. Very terse, very condensed.

SARAH. Thank you, Mr. North. *(She lowers her voice.)* I am sorry to have to tell you that my father finds readers with conviction such as yours very tiring. I don't think you should waste your time any longer.

DR. BOSWORTH. *(Off)* Sarah! Sarah!

(WILLIS appears.)

SARAH. *(Holding out her hand)* Thank you, Mr. North.

Good morning.

DR.. BOSWORTH. *(Off)* Sarah!

SARAH. Willis, go about your work, this is none of your affair!

(WILLIS exits. DR. BOSWORTH enters.)

DR. BOSWORTH. Let me see that young man, Sarah. Finally we have found someone with resonance! God help us, the only readers you've ever found are retired librarians with mice in their throats.

SARAH. Father, you *will* see Mr. North directly. Go back to your desk at once. You mustn't get agitated. *(He exits.)* For the second time in fifteen minutes, Mr. North, you have introduced discord into Nine Gables. You really must change your ways. In the event that Dr. Bosworth approves of you as a reader, there are some things you should know. My father is not well. He is easily excitable, and prone to occasional... flights of fancy. Any encouragement from you over such things will only lead to difficulty.

DR. BOSWORTH. *(Off)* Sarah!

SARAH. I want you to remember what I've said. Have you heard me?

THEOPHILUS. Thank you, Mrs. Bosworth.

SARAH. Any further trouble from you and you go out of this house at once. *(Calling him in as she exits)* Father, this is Mr. North.

DR. BOSWORTH. Please sit down, Mr. North. I am Dr. Bosworth.

THEOPHILUS. Indeed, I know of your distinguished career, Dr. Bosworth.

DR. BOSWORTH. Very good. Where were you born?

THEOPHILUS. Madison, Wisconsin.

DR. BOSWORTH. What was your father's occupation?

THEOPHILUS. He owned and operated a newspaper.

DR. BOSWORTH. How many languages do you speak?

THEOPHILUS. I speak—

DR. BOSWORTH. What have you done since leaving school? What are your plans? How much money do you make? Do you get enough to eat?

THEOPHILUS. *(Standing)* Dr. Bosworth, I was told that you have had many unsatisfactory readers. I foresee that I shall disappoint you also. Good morning.

DR. BOSWORTH. What? What?

THEOPHILUS. *(Exiting)* Good morning, sir.

DR. BOSWORTH. Mr. North! Kindly let me explain myself. *(THEOPHILUS re-enters.)* Please sit down, sir. I did not mean to be intrusive. I have not left this house for seven years except to visit the hospital. We who are shut in develop an excessive curiosity about those who attend us. Will you accept my apology?

THEOPHILUS. Yes, sir. Thank you.

DR. BOSWORTH. Thank you... Are you free to read to me until twelve-thirty?

THEOPHILUS. I am.

DR. BOSWORTH. Good. I have a first edition philosophy by George Berkeley here. Perhaps that's a good place to start.

THEOPHILUS. Very well, Dr. Bosworth.

DR. BOSWORTH. By the way, young man, that Getting-Up-and-Leaving-the-Room trick is very effective, isn't it? I did it to William McKinley all the time. Read the inscription.

THEOPHILUS. *(Taken off guard)* What?

DR. BOSWORTH. The Berkeley, read the inscription.

THEOPHILUS. Yes. "From George Berkeley, To my esteemed friend, Dean Jonathan... Swift." *(He looks at DR. BOSWORTH and they both begin to laugh.)* Dr. Bosworth, it will take me some time to recover from my astonishment over holding this book.

DR. BOSWORTH. I know! I know! You are aware that Berkeley lived three years in Newport? A glorious cottage called "Whitehall," where they say at night the groaning of the tree branches in the wind tells secrets of the universe. My plans have been to— *(Whispering.)* Mr. North, I do believe this house has ears. Will you climb up on the chair and see if there's some kind of listening devise hidden in the lighting fixture?

THEOPHILUS. No, Dr. Bosworth. I was engaged as a reader, not an electrical engineer.

DR. BOSWORTH. Good choice. Edison once asked me if I knew anything about electricity. I lied and said "yes." Want to see the scar?

THEOPHILUS. Perhaps later.

DR. BOSWORTH. Time! Time! They tell me I am not well. Sh! *(Whispering)* We must not discuss this any more.

(He goes.)

Scene 11
The Fenwicks, iv

THEOPHILUS. *(Out)* And so from avoiding a topic in one place, to actively pursuing one in another... *(To CHARLES)* Bonjour, Charles.

CHARLES. Bonjour, monsieur le professeur.

THEOPHILUS. Charles, you've been in Paris. After dark you must have seen certain women addressing gentlemen in a low voice from doorways and alleys. What do they usually say? *(Out)* The scarlet flag is high on the mast. I can wait.

CHARLES. Voulez-vous coucher avec moi?

THEOPHILUS. Good. Charles, you're sitting alone at a bar and one of these petites dames slides up beside you. "Tu veux m'offrir un verre de champagne?" How do you answer, Charles? I'm waiting...

CHARLES. Non, mademoiselle... merci.... Pas ce soir.

THEOPHILUS. Très bien, Charles! Could you make it a little more easy and charming? In France there is universal respect for women of every age and at every level of society, even when she's a prostitute. I have an idea. I'm going to pretend I'm one of those girls. You are strolling behind the Paris Opera. I think this will be good! *(Out)* I hope this doesn't damage him. *(CHARLES stands petrified.)* Come on, Charles. It's a play, not a cage of tigers. Bonsoir, mon chou.

CHARLES. Bonsoir, mademoiselle.

THEOPHILUS. Tu es seul? Want a little amusement?

CHARLES. Je suis occupé ce soir...Merci. Perhaps another time. Tu es charmante.

THEOPHILUS. Ooo! Mais, cheri, I have a lovely room!

CHARLES. How do I get out of this?

THEOPHILUS. I suggest you make your departure quick, but cordial.

CHARLES. Mademoiselle, je suis en retard. J'ai besoin de partir. Mais au revoir. *(He pats THEOPHILUS's elbow.)* Bonne chance, chère amie.

THEOPHILUS. Magnifique, Charles! Magnifique! *(Out)* On days when the lessons begin with heavy dynamite, Charles is quick. He laughs; he skates over depth bombs; he uses his own past in stories—

CHARLES. *(Out)* And my complexion is clearing up.

Scene 12
Myra, iii

THEOPHILUS. *(Out)* As for Myra, by now we have also read the openings of *Ethann Frome, Jane Eyre, The Scarlet Letter*, and *Tom Jones.*

MRS. CUMMINGS. Oh, Mr. North, she reads all the time. She'll ruin her eyes.

THEOPHILUS. But you never learn how the stories turn out.

MRS. CUMMINGS. She tells me, sir; it's as good as a moving-picture! Jane Eyre! Oh, what happened to her!

MYRA. All right, back to the books.

THEOPHILUS. What did you think of *The Scarlet Letter*?

MYRA. I don't know. She should've just torn the thing off and moved to Chicago.

THEOPHILUS. And what else?

MYRA. You wouldn't understand. They're all so new to me, those lives and people doing things. Sometimes they're more real than life. What were your feelings about the books, when you first read them?

THEOPHILUS. Well, I thought that many of—

MYRA. I didn't ask what you *thought*, Theophilus, I asked what you *felt*. It's always the same with you: rules and thoughts. I'd go mad.

(There is knock. Enter GEORGE GRANBERRY.)

GEORGE. How's my little squirrel today?

MYRA. *(Coming alive.)* Very well, thank you.

GEORGE. Excellent. *(Starting to exit.)* Well, then, I'll just—

MYRA. George, I want you to buy all the books I've read. Mr. North has to go and get them at the People's Library. They're not very clean and people have written silly things in the margins. I want my own books, so that I can write my own silly things in the margins.

GEORGE. All right, Myra.

MYRA. I'm a little tired and I think I'll ask Mr. North to cancel the reading today. But we'll pay him just the same. But don't you go, George. Please.

Scene 13
Nine Gables, ii

THEOPHILUS. *(Out)* Back at Nine Gables, Berkeley and Leibniz, Halley and Swift surround me in the great study, which seems the heart of nineteenth-century Newport.

DR. BOSWORTH. Come here quickly, Mr. North! Something astonishing!

THEOPHILUS. What, Dr. Bosworth?

DR. BOSWORTH. At our last meeting Isaac Newton was mocking dear Berkeley's doctrines of Christianity.

THEOPHILUS. Yes?

DR. BOSWORTH. Read how Berkeley responds to him in *The Analyst.*

(DR. BOSWORTH hands THEOPHILUS a book.)

THEOPHILUS. "Newton's fluxions are obscure—"

DR. BOSWORTH. Take that!

THEOPHILUS. "Repugnant and precarious—"

DR. BOSWORTH. Smashed! Demolished!

THEOPHILUS. "They are neither finite... nor yet nothing."

DR. BOSWORTH. That's our boy! Pulverize him! I must dance to Berkeley! *(He dances. A jig?)* I also have a great respect for Garibaldi. Tomorrow we must dress like Italians to honor him.

THEOPHILUS. I'll wear a pork-pie hat.

DR. BOSWORTH. Perfect! Bless my heart, Mr. North, it is *nice* to have a young man around who appreciates these things. My daughter couldn't be less interested.

SARAH. *(Offstage)* Father! Are you dancing in there?!
DR. BOSWORTH. She used to love to dance....

(DR. BOSWORTH exits; CHARLES appears.)

Scene 14
The Fenwicks, v

THEOPHILUS. Bonjour, Charles.

CHARLES. Mr. North, I have an idea! May we do another play?

THEOPHILUS. Absolument, Charles. Who are you?

CHARLES. The King of France!

THEOPHILUS. Very good. But let us say that you are the King of France, who in modern times is not permitted to use that title or wear the crown. He is called the Prétendant, "the Pretender." We'll set it in a great restaurant of Paris, of which I am the proprietor, Monsieur Véfour. Now... vous entrez!

(CHARLES enters, hands imaginary cape and top hat to THEOPHILUS.)

CHARLES. *(With some arrogance)* Bonsoir, Monsieur Véfour.

THEOPHILUS. Charles, just a moment. The French have a word for cold, condescending self-importance: morgue. You would be horrified if you thought your subjects attributed that quality to you.