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*The Arctic Circle*  
*(and a recipe for Swedish Pancakes)*  
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## **More Great Plays Available From OWP**

### **The Charm of Preparedness**

**by Jorge Ignacio Cortiñas**

4 Males, 3 Females

No intermission

**Synopsis:** A college is turned inside out when a pre-med student begins to organize a campus-wide preparedness drill. Is this guy for real, or is this all just a ruse to impress Greta, the nursing student? Will the students who volunteer to play chemical burn victims be able to earn extra credit? Does college actually prepare anyone for anything? A very droll comedy about growing the frack up.

### **Mitzi's Abortion**

***A Saint's Guide to Late-Term Politics***

***and Medicine in America***

**by Elizabeth Heffron**

4 Females, 3 Males

**Synopsis:** With humor, intelligence and honesty, *Mitzi's Abortion* explores the questions that have shaped the national debate over abortion, and reminds us that whatever we may think we believe, some decisions are neither easy nor simple when they become ours to make. A generous and compassionate comedy with serious themes about a young woman trying to make an intensely personal decision in a system determined to make it a political one.

The Arctic Circle  
(and a recipe for  
Swedish pancakes)

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A play of length by  
Samantha Macher

## A DEDICATION

If I had to write a list of all the people who contributed to the writing, the readings, the productions, and eventually the success of "The Arctic Circle..." it would be longer than the book, so here is a thanks to everyone who made this play a reality:

Thanks, everyone!

Additionally, I would like to especially thank Bob Moss, for asking all the right questions, and never making me answer them. The original cast and crew of the play for being brilliant, generous collaborators and friends. Matt Marshall and Charlie Boswell for your unending support of my budding career. The City of Roanoke Virginia, and the Playwright's Lab at Hollins University for giving playwrights the infrastructure to make their art. My parents for not forcing me to go into a more practical field of study (not all writers can say that, so thanks, guys!). Kris Knutzen and Adam Hahn for struggling through First Drafts class with me. And finally, Todd Ristau without whom this play, its first production, and this publication would not exist.

You have all inspired me more than you know.

THE ARCTIC CIRCLE (and a recipe for Swedish pancakes) was originally produced at the Mill Mountain Theater on February 14, 2012. It was a co-production with the Playwrights Lab at Hollins University. The production designer, dramaturg, and technical director was RM Quirk, Stage Manager was Taylor Marun, associate producer was Rusty Thelin. It was directed by Bob Moss.

The cast was as follows:

Musician: Shay Mullins

Elin: Susanna Young

Narrator: Todd Ristau

Paul: Chad Runyon

Random Boyfriends/Baristas: Drew Dowdy

On February 21<sup>st</sup> the production transferred to The White Box Theater at 440 Studios in New York City.

**SETTING:** Elin's Past, Present and Future.

**CHARACTERS:**

**ELIN:** Who doesn't know what she wants when she's young, and hasn't figured it out yet when she's older, either.

**HER HUSBAND:** Paul

**HER RANDOM BOYFRIENDS:** Noah, Preston, John and Colin

**HER WOMANFRIEND:** Taylor

**AND FINALLY, TWO BARISTAS:** One American, and one Swede

**Note:** You don't actually need to be in Sweden to perform the last few scenes, but I think it would help.

**Note:** All excessive boyfriends/baristas can be doubled. Elin and Paul in their incarnations should be played by the same people, who can look like a thirty year old or a fifteen year old. As a result, you could easily have a cast of only four people.

**Note:** The Swedish in the play is meant to be inaccurate, and played for comedy.

**VITAL NOTE:** The stage directions can and should be read as a character in whatever way the director sees fit. All stage directions that are meant to be read will be ***bolded and italicized.***

## **A Recipe for Swedish Pancakes (needed for last scenes):**

### **Ingredients**

4 eggs  
2 cups milk  
1/2 cup all-purpose flour  
1 tablespoon sugar  
1 pinch salt  
2 tablespoons melted butter

### **Directions**

1. In a large bowl, beat eggs with a wire whisk. Mix in milk, flour, sugar, salt, and melted butter.
2. Preheat a non-stick electric skillet to medium heat. Pour a thin layer of batter on skillet, and spread to edges. Cook until top surface appears dry. Cut into 2 or 4 sections, and flip with a spatula. Cook for another 2 minutes, or until golden brown. Roll each pancake up, with lingonberry butter or lingonberries and serve.

**Note:** For lingonberry butter recipe, please consult the internet.

## THE ARCTIC CIRCLE

### PROLOGUE

*Adult Elin. She is in Sweden. She is eating Swedish pancakes. People walk by her, and nod and smile, but she isn't sure what to say to them. She wants to say that she has run away from home. Instead, she inhales a plate full of pancakes.*

### SCENE ONE

*Teenagers in Virginia. ELIN and NOAH standing only a breath apart. They don't caress. They don't gaze into each other's eyes, only stare longingly at the other's body, hands inching up from their sides but unsure of what to touch. This continues for long, agonizing moments.*

ELIN: How do we do this?

NOAH: I don't know.

*They finally look each other in the face, swallowing gasping breaths.*

ELIN: I think this is how we start.

*She tenderly puts her hands on his sides and leans into his body. She aches.*

NOAH: Alright.

*He reciprocates, resting his lips at the nape of her neck, sighing endlessly. Their movements are slow and painful. She kisses his face everywhere except his lips.*

ELIN: This isn't--

NOAH: No. I don't know. I don't think--

*He grabs her hands and holds them with wavering conviction.*

ELIN: We can't.

NOAH: Why?

ELIN: We can't.

*She embraces him. His arms fall to his sides.*

We can't.

*She stops.*

I might love you.

That's too much.

## SCENE TWO

*Elin, now grown, would like to know what happened to her misspent youth.*

ELIN: I would like to know what happened to my misspent youth.

*A Barista looks up from her fancy coffee machine. She is foaming milk. CHHH CHHH.*

BARISTA: What?

ELIN: I said, I would like to know what happened to my misspent youth?

*CHHH CHHH.*

BARISTA: WHAT?

ELIN: Never mind. I think I figured it out.

*Elin drinks a four dollar cup of coffee. There is an inspirational quote on the cup. CHHH CHHH.*

Who comes up with these quotes?

BARISTA: Corporate.

ELIN: Oh.

BARISTA: Anything good?

ELIN: Nothing relevant.

BARISTA: Have you considered getting a second cup?

ELIN: Is it four dollars?

BARISTA: Yes.

ELIN: Then no.

***Barista goes back to the grind. CHHH CHHH. She ignores Elin. Elin does not much care for being blatantly ignored, particularly by women. She clears her throat.***

BARISTA: Yes?

ELIN: "A kiss is a lovely trick designed by nature to stop speech when words become superfluous."

BARISTA: Oh?

ELIN: Ingrid Bergman.

BARISTA: The Seventh Seal?

ELIN: *Ingrid* Bergman.

BARISTA: There's a difference?

ELIN: There's a penis.

BARISTA: Oh.

ELIN: Both Swedes.

BARISTA: I don't know much about Sweden.

ELIN: It's a lovely country.

BARISTA: You've been?

ELIN: Many times. I have family there.

BARISTA: Lucky you.

ELIN: I don't know how lucky I am. She was married three times you know.

BARISTA: Who?

ELIN: Ingrid Bergman.

BARISTA: I don't know that I would take her advice on love then.

ELIN: Love nothing. Kissing is a completely different animal. Besides, I think it takes at least two practice marriages to get it right.

BARISTA: How many have you had?

ELIN: One.

BARISTA: Have you gotten it right?

ELIN: I don't know yet.

BARISTA: How long have you been together?

ELIN: Thousands and thousands of lifetimes. In this one, only ten short years.

BARISTA: Congratulations.

ELIN: Congratulations?

BARISTA: On your marriage.

*Elin is confused by this. She pauses. She walks to the garbage and throws the cup away.*

ELIN: Thank you.

### SCENE THREE

*Teenage Elin. She is looking at herself in the mirror. She takes off her shirt and looks down at her developing breasts through a conservative bra.*

ELIN: Damn.

*She begins to rifle through a drawer of feminine undergarments. The floor becomes awash in lace and satin. She finds the perfect bra. It is eighty-six percent lycra, fourteen percent spandex. She puts it on over the other and deftly removes the other from underneath.*

Better.

*She decides that it is not, in fact, better. She rifles again through the drawer. The undergarments are less provocative. This is the section all women have in their drawers. Underwear specifically reserved for church and menstruation. She finds a second sports bra. She puts it on over top of the first.*

Much better.

*She looks at herself in profile in the mirror, pleased with her flattened curves. She puts her top back on and leaves.*

### SCENE FOUR

*Adult Elin is sitting on the couch next to her husband, PAUL. He looks like a Paul. He is reading the paper. She is mindlessly crocheting another pair of baby booties for the infants of people she doesn't much care for, but doesn't have anything against in particular. She holds up the booties.*

ELIN: It's booty time.

*He rustles the paper. But doesn't look up.*

PAUL: Excuse me?

ELIN: Booty time.

*She looks at him.*

It's booty time.

*He finally looks up after ages of indifference.*

PAUL: Whose booties are they?

ELIN: They are for the fruit of Jack and Colleen's loins.

PAUL: Jack and Colleen--

ELIN: From choir.

PAUL: Oh. Well. Does this fruit have a name?

ELIN: I think they named it Siobhan. (Sha-Von)

PAUL: Siobhan?

ELIN: S-I-O-B-H-A-N.

PAUL: I hate the Irish.

*He picks up his paper and begins thumbing through it. She goes back to crocheting.*

ELIN: I was thinking--

PAUL: Hmm?

ELIN: Have you-- never mind.

PAUL: What?

ELIN: It's nothing.

PAUL: What's wrong?

*He puts down his paper.*

Hmm? What is it?

ELIN: Do you think-- do you think we'd be good parents?

PAUL: This again?

*He picks the paper back up.*

ELIN: Yes, this again. I ache for motherhood.

PAUL: Take an aspirin.

ELIN: But--

PAUL: We've talked about this. We would be horrible parents. You in particular. You don't know anything about children.

ELIN: That's not true. I once *was* one.

PAUL: You don't *like* children.

ELIN: I've always liked children, I just told you I didn't so we'd have something to talk about.

PAUL: The misery of parenthood.

ELIN: The joylessness of reproduction.

PAUL: The expulsion of a fetus from your womb--

ELIN: And the inevitable damage to my most tender places.

*Their silence is a vacuum.*

PAUL: What should we have for dinner?

ELIN: I don't feel like cooking.

PAUL: You never feel like cooking.

ELIN: Let's go out.

PAUL: Fine.

ELIN: Where do you want to go?

PAUL: Coach Stop.

ELIN: I went there yesterday.

PAUL: We can go again.

ELIN:

*She folds the booties in her lap.*

I'll get my coat.

#### SCENE FIVE

*Teenage Elin and her high school boyfriend, John. He cannot hear her. Her voice is tinged with the anguish that accompanies car repair. He is, as always, working on a motor he'll never use.*

ELIN: I have not loved you for three weeks now.

*He tinkers, meaninglessly.*

I have not loved you for three weeks now.

*He proceeds with more love than efficiency. She is so engrossed in the drama of this moment that she forgets how funny she can be.*

Don't you care, that I have not loved you for three weeks now?

That I have entwined myself longingly in the arms of a one hundred and seventeen pound *junior*? That I have never let him kiss me but have waited on bated breath for him to try, just try and fill the chasm between us with lips so soft and saliva so sweet it would taste like honey on my lonely tongue?

*He injures himself with the auto part.*

That we stood in my father's driveway and whispered poetry of flesh to one another only for my mind to turn to you and regret his touch?

*He looks at her and tips his cap.*

I self-immolate on a pyre which burns for you. A pyre lit by my sense of duty. My skin turned to fire under his fingertips.

*She stomps.*

You aren't listening to me!

JOHN: What?

ELIN: You aren't listening to me.

JOHN: Sorry, Babes. Just got to get this motor going.

ELIN: Did you know that you are a cliché?

*By this point, her fancy French word is lost on him. He tinkers again, this time with more zeal. This will continue for one year.*

#### SCENE SIX

*Elin. Frustrated. Frustration made worse by being outside in the rain. She decides to think of the most romantic thing she can do at this moment. Since there is no one to touch, to kiss, to hold, she dances.*

*She wonders if anyone can see her. She decides she does not care. She knows that if they do, they're thinking "Isn't that the most romantic teenager you've ever seen? Isn't she beautiful?"*

#### SCENE SEVEN

*Adult Elin is in one of those moods where you feel particularly bitter for no particular reason and wish that everyone else in the room was dead, or had perhaps died at birth. Both of these options would be acceptable.*

ELIN:

*She opens a package of oral contraceptives.*

Seriously?

*Agitated contemplation ensues.*

Paul?

*If voice could be atonal, it would be in this moment.*

Paaauwwll?

PAUL (OFF): What?

ELIN: I'm going off birth control.

*Paul enters.*

PAUL: Okay.

ELIN: I'm out. And I don't want to buy any more of it.

PAUL: Then I won't have sex with you.

ELIN: No, you see, it is *I* who won't have sex with *you*.

PAUL: Then why do you need to be on birth control anyway?

*The words she needs to assert this decision rest on the top of her tortured tongue. She settles for:*

ELIN: I don't know.

*She is surprised by the question. She only had answers to "why should you go off birth control?"*

I'm getting fat.

*She motions to her center.*

My breasts also. They have become unfeasible.

PAUL: Unfeasible?

ELIN: Unwieldy. Soft mounds of jiggly-ness. Bouncing ironically as I run through the park.

PAUL: Elin, you're being--

ELIN: Ridiculous?

PAUL: Asinine.

*She pauses for a moment to figure out what asinine means in this context.*

ELIN: Asinine?

PAUL: Asinine. You don't even jog through the park.

ELIN: Don't I?

*She pulls out a pair of white and orange sneakers that look only gently used.*

These don't give me shin splints. I started running again.

PAUL: Good for you.

ELIN: It is. Good for me. I'm hoping the exercise will shrink my rippling womanhood.

PAUL: Don't shrink it too much. Even if we don't have sex anymore, I still find them pleasurable enough to stick my face in from time to time.

*He motor boats the air.*

INTERLUDE:

*Adult Elin looks at a painting and it breaks her heart.*

## SCENE EIGHT

*College-aged Elin is moving into a dormitory. She spies PRESTON, son of a Latin Teacher, a football hero. She finds him attractive. She develops the rash she gets when she finds someone attractive. She wishes wistfully that she had more control over her endocrine system.*

PRESTON: Hi. I'm Preston.

*He reaches out to shake her hand. No dice.*

ELIN: You are far too eager to touch me. Does this strike you as odd?

PRESTON: I-- umm

*He is confused as he is not developing a rash for her.*

I think you know my roommate. Dan. Dan Foster?

ELIN: Oh yes, Dan Foster.

*She does not know Dan Foster.*

Nice fellow.

PRESTON: Engineer.

*They make eye contact. The first person to break it loses. Wait, wait. Elin loses.*

ELIN: My name's Elin.

PRESTON: That's a good solid name.

ELIN: It's Scandinavian. E-L-I-N. Ellen.

PRESTON: Nice to meet you, Elin.

ELIN: Nice to meet you, Preston.

*She covers her rash with her left hand. On her left ring finger is a Claddagh Promise Ring she has no intention of being faithful to the meaning of. He notices the ring.*

PRESTON: Well, I'd best be off.

ELIN: What are you doing tonight?

PRESTON: Moving in my stuff. Organizing books for classes. Why? Did you have something in mind?

ELIN: No.

*She thinks of an excuse to see him again.*

It would be nice though, if maybe I had someone to go to the dining hall with.

PRESTON: Sure. I'll see you around six.

ELIN: Super town.

PRESTON: Super town?

ELIN: It's a colloquialism.

PRESTON: Of where?

ELIN:

*Washington, D.C.*

Washington, D.C..

PRESTON: Oh. Alright. Super town. See you at six.

*She finally agrees to shake hands.*

*Preston exits with the dignity of at least three princes. Elin is scratching her neck as the rash has spread from her breasts up her neck and behind her ears.*

## SCENE NINE

*Paul and Elin are organizing a box of pictures. They remember the past and forget it as quickly as one would forget the air as they breathed it. They look at each picture carefully. The ethereal nature of this moment is palpable. They go through this box as if they are searching for reasons, after all this time, to love one another enough. Enough is relative. Enough is enough. When they are through, a mi-*

*nor act of love is shown and acknowledged. They consider a kiss, but it is suspended in midair, miles and miles above them.*

#### SCENE TEN

*Elin and Preston are in his bedroom. Layer by layer, clothing is shed like scales until Elin takes off her first bra and Preston is in a tee shirt and boxers. They sit on the bed.*

ELIN: I will start by kissing you with closed lips.

*She leans to him and comes within millimeters of his handsome face.*

I will start by kissing you with closed lips.

*She becomes a trout.*

PRESTON: We don't have to kiss at all. We can talk. You can stay here tonight. We can watch a movie, a movie you've already seen and you can wittily quote all the lines. Or maybe a different movie. We can watch a movie I've seen and you can be impressed by all the things I know about Ingmar Bergman.

ELIN: Casablanca?

PRESTON: *Ingmar* Bergman.

ELIN: There's a difference?

PRESTON: There's-- yeah. One's a man and one's a woman. Both Swedes.

ELIN: My people.

PRESTON: A beautiful, Nordic people.

ELIN: So encased in ice, they can barely feel themselves.

*She leans in once more to kiss him and can't.*

I'm seeing someone else.

PRESTON: I know.

ELIN: You do?

PRESTON: Your ring.

ELIN: Oh that. A Claddaugh ring, *not* from Ireland. Fake garnet. Cheap silver. It changes shape in the heat of my hand.

PRESTON: From a lover?

ELIN: From someone--  
Someone far away.

PRESTON: The heart faces towards you and you're spoken for.

ELIN: You turn it out and it means you're free.

*She takes the ring and turns it toward Preston. The burden of guilt lifts from her like a heavy winter coat.*

I will start by kissing you with closed lips.

#### SCENE ELEVEN

*Elin and Paul. They are thinking about whether they need to talk today, as silence has become the language of their world. They decide it is alright to talk.*

PAUL: I found the button for your coat earlier.

ELIN: It came off?

PAUL: I was wondering if you wanted me to sew it back on.

ELIN: You sew?

PAUL: Not admittedly. Although I've been known to hem a pant leg or two from time to time.

*Elin is stunned. In all the years she's known him, loved him, she did not know of this secret gift. It is like opening the last present on Christmas morning.*

ELIN: I would be annoyed that I've been keeping the tailor in employ for so many years, but I'm tickled to death you can fix my button.

PAUL: I ought to be good for something.

*Stinging like nettles.*

ELIN: You're good for so many things that I dare not begin to name them for fear I would never be able to quiet myself.

PAUL: Elin.

ELIN: What did I do?

PAUL: Nothing.

ELIN: Are you quite angry with me?

PAUL: I've never been angry with you one day, not one day in my life.

*He gets her coat and gently lays it somewhere that he can mend it.*

Can you get me thread? A needle?

ELIN: Yes.

*She retrieves a sewing box with the world's most important thread.*

Here.

*She hands it to him the way one would give a newborn child.*

PAUL: Do you want me to affix an anchor button to the back side?

ELIN: I want you to do what's best. I trust you. I trust you will be able to mend my clothing.

PAUL: I haven't done this in awhile.

ELIN: I can wait.

*She holds her breath.*

May I watch you? May I see you work?

PAUL: If you promise to be very still, yes.

ELIN: I promise.

PAUL: Alright. Here we go.

*The coat is mended in time. Paul becomes an artist in this moment and he is so brilliant, it makes the whole room shine.*

## SCENE TWELVE

*Teenage Elin. Her boyfriend, John sits with his car parts and tinkers mindlessly for excessive amounts of time.*

ELIN: John?

*He does not hear her.*

John?

*He barely sees her.*

I have not loved you for one year now.

*Nada. He is lost in his own worthless enterprise.*

I have not loved you for one year now.

*Nichts. His transmission is more important than she ever was.*

Don't you care that I have not loved you for one year now?

*He cleans his ear with a screwdriver.*

That I have found guilty bliss in the arms of some guy from my dorm who is roommates with my roommate's friend? That he and I lay beside one another exchanging soft, sweet, closed-mouthed kisses? That I tried desperately not to think of you, or *Olivia* the girl whose naked pictures I found on his computer while I was checking my email?

***He wipes whatever was on his screwdriver on his pants.***

The shame, John. The shame of it all is that you are the world's worst boyfriend, but because I fucked you first, I have to *keep* you?

***He goes back to fixing whatever he fixes.***

We sat up the other night, Preston and I, late in my hallway, and he was wearing this *ugly* sweater and before we could leave for fall break I think he told me under his breath he *loved* me and I wanted so badly to say it back but you're here. You're here on my finger and I knew, I knew if I could just make it back home, I would come up with a reason to tell myself why I loved you so damn much that I couldn't let you go for a beautiful man, with beautiful thoughts, with naked pictures of a beautiful girl in a place not well hidden on his hard drive.

***The task at hand is heavier than love.***

You will ruin me for all other men.

***He finds success. He celebrates. This continues for another year.***

INTERLUDE:

***Adult Elin looks at a painting and it breaks her heart.***

**SCENE THIRTEEN**

***College-aged Elin and a young lady, TAYLOR. Taylor is as smart as she is beautiful. They sit beside each other on a bench.***

TAYLOR: I was reading this book on the nature of blah blah blah blah blah blah blah--

ELIN: If you don't mind, I think I'd rather just sit quietly.

TAYLOR: I have lots of thoughts on blah blah blah blah blah blah blah--

ELIN: You are smart.

TAYLOR: And sad.

ELIN: Smart and sad.

TAYLOR: Have you given much thought to your post graduate work? I recently took my LSATs and I scored in the ninety-eighth percentile! Can you believe it? The ninety-eighth percentile!

ELIN: I've always thought the world should have more lawyers.

TAYLOR: I was thinking about going into public policy. Start from the bottom. Fight social injustice blah blah blah blah blah blah--

ELIN: I liked you more when you were less idealistic.

TAYLOR: Idealistic?

ELIN: You're a vegan and I can't handle your self-righteousness.

TAYLOR: You're blunt.

ELIN: (*Curiously:*) Do you like this in a person?

TAYLOR: I'm not confrontational.

ELIN: You're going to be a lawyer.

TAYLOR: But I'm doing this for the good of blah blah blah blah blah blah-- And as for being a vegan, you can hardly fault me for that--

ELIN: I see.

TAYLOR: I mean, how would you like it if you were a baby calf ripped away from you mother, only just having learned to suckle from a teat that would be pumped for the benefit of some other, parasitic species?

ELIN: My mom didn't breast feed me so--

TAYLOR: That's not the point--

ELIN: I mean, she didn't even try to breast feed me, so I know she wouldn't have let anyone pump her breasts for the benefit of some other species--

TAYLOR: Well--

ELIN: I really think she'd have sooner cut them off.

TAYLOR: It just makes you think--

ELIN: About how the woman couldn't even give me her breast! The epitome of motherhood--

TAYLOR: You aren't listening to me.

*She looks at Taylor as one might fondly look at old shoes that will never be worn again.*

ELIN: I think cows are stupid anyway.

TAYLOR: You are so cruel when your blood sugar drops.

ELIN: I'm tired of turbinado.

TAYLOR: I don't think this is going to work for me.

ELIN: And sometimes the food you cook makes me sick, physically.

TAYLOR: I don't know that I can do this anymore.

ELIN: I might be allergic to soy.

TAYLOR: I think we need to see other people.

ELIN: I am seeing other people.

*She points to her ring.*

You, for example.

It's not all that great.

TAYLOR: Scoff!

*She leaves to go find a cause to align herself with.*

ELIN: (*Yelling*;) I still think cows are stupid! And *delicious*!