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*Mitzi's Abortion*

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**THE ARCTIC CIRCLE**

**by Samantha Macher**

3 Males, 2 Females

**Synopsis:** A Brechtian comedy about a woman in a troubled marriage who travels through time, space and Sweden to reexamine her past relationships for solutions to her newly found troubles. Unable to get the clear answers she needs, she must look inside herself to find what she is looking for.

**NURTURE**

**by Johnna Adams**

1 Male, 1 Female

**Synopsis:** Doug and Cheryl are horrible single parents drawn together by their equally horrible daughters. The star-crossed parental units journey from first meeting to first date, to first time, to first joint parent-teacher meeting, to proposal and more. They attempt to form a modern nuclear family while living in perpetual fear of the fruit of their loins and someone abducting young girls in their town.

# **MITZI'S ABORTION**

*(A Saint's Guide to Late-Term Politics  
and Medicine in America)*

**By  
Elizabeth Heffron**

The World Premiere of *Mitzi's Abortion* was presented by ACT Theatre, July 2006. It was directed by Kurt Beattie. Sets were designed by Narelle Sissons, costumes by Sarah Nash Gates, lights by Chris Reay, sound by Dominic Cody Kramers, and the stage manager was JR Welden. The cast was as follows:

MITZI	<i>Sharia Pierce</i>
CHUCK, THE EXPERT, SERGEI	<i>Sean Cook</i>
VERA	<i>Kit Harris</i>
AQUINAS, TIM, THE GENETICIST	<i>Eric Ray Anderson</i>
RECKLESS MARY, SHEILA LUFFINGTON	<i>Leslie Law</i>
NITA, NURSE	<i>Shelley Reynolds</i>
RUDOLFO, DR. BLOCK, UNCLE TUB	<i>Richard Ziman</i>

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

<b>MITZI</b>	22
<b>CHUCK</b> <i>also plays</i>	24 THE EXPERT SERGEI, an ultrasound technician
<b>VERA</b>	Mitzi's Mom, early 50s
<b>RUDOLFO</b> <i>also plays</i>	Mitzi's Stepdad, 50s DR. BLOCK, an OB/GYN UNCLE TUB, Vera's brother, late 50's
<b>THOMAS AQUINAS</b>  <i>also plays</i>	13 <sup>th</sup> -century Catholic Saint, late 30-40s TIM, friend of Mitzi and Nita A GENETICIST
<b>NITA</b> <i>also plays</i>	Mitzi's friend, 30's NURSE
<b>RECKLESS MARY</b>  <i>also plays</i>	17th-century Charred Midwife, 30-50s SHEILA LUFFINGTON, an insurance worker

### TIME

Winter, 2002, through Summer, 2003.

### PLACE

Burien, Washington, and other Seattle locations.

**PLEASE NOTE:** The play is intended to run without an intermission. All scenes changes should be brisk and minimal. Although some of the characters may sound harsh or funny, they should not be played as caricatures. They are all human beings just doing the best they can.

## MITZI'S ABORTION

*(Lights up on Saint Thomas Aquinas, all 350 pounds of him, swathed in Dominican robes. He lays sprawled over a black leather, self-massaging chair from the Sharper Image.)*

THOMAS AQUINAS: *(his voice quivers from the effect of the vibrating chair)* Ahhhhhhhh. Hallelujah. Now this... is sin. *(he shifts his weight luxuriously)* 4 'human touch' rollers deviously replicating professional massage techniques... pummeling my backside like a band of Swedish chiropractors. If the Sharper Image had existed in 1272, I would never have finished my opus, the *Summa Theologica*. Not in a million years. *(he finds the control panel, starts to punch buttons)* My God! How does one handle this panoply of consumer temptations, shaking their electric doo-dads before you like digital strippers? Oh! Not to mention Anderson Cooper! I know he's a Vanderbilt, but I think I'm in love! There he is, every evening at 10... dishing out the most heinous atrocities with such audacious panache! Such arousing directness... makes you just want to kiss the screen.

*(Hitting the 'off' button, rising from the chair, getting down to business.)*

AQUINAS: But, we're not here to ogle Anderson Cooper. No we are not. We're here to begin a play about a late-term abortion. Downer subject, don't you think? Moist and slightly repellent, like most female issues. The Church has had the better part of 2,000 years to come to terms with that sex, and just when you think you've got a handle on them, they show up to the party attached to the Evil Three... (continued)

AQUINAS (Cont'd): Ta-ta's, Tush, and that bloody bowl of infinite contention, the Uterus. There they are, walking around, drinking martinis, laughing in our faces, like this... *(he demonstrates a female giggle)* "A-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!" And once again, we are forced to consider the nature of those biological items. The outlandish, conceptual function they advertise like cheap underwear. It is so distastefully tawdry to know that all human life -- even Anderson Cooper's -- begins in just such a dark and festering cavern. If I weren't such a saint, it would really grate on the old ego. Imagine... Andy Cooper in utero! It's pornographic really. But. What can one do? God is great, and yet he seems to extract a rather carnal pleasure by working in such mysterious ways. Anyway, you didn't come here to be lectured by an old Catholic fuddy-duddy, like Thomas Aquinas, no-no, you came to meet Mitzi. May Yahweh be with you...

*(Lights down on Aquinas and up center stage. Mitzi sits on a toilet. Chuck, in a U.S. Army uniform, stands patiently nearby.)*

MITZI: I mean it's not like I'm never gonna make it back to Seattle U, right Chuck? I can keep working at Subway and saving up and studying and stuff. Kids nap, and there's day care. And my Esperanto group, I'm not gonna stop doing Esperanto.

CHUCK: You don't have to stop doing Esperanto. Here.

*(Chuck hands Mitzi a pregnancy stick. She takes it and sticks it under her, between her legs.)*

MITZI: How long?

CHUCK: Uhhh, (*reading the box*) Mid-stream. 5 to 10 seconds.

MITZI: (*waiting for pee*) So. Anyway. It's good to be clear, right?

CHUCK: Yeah. Are you peeing?

MITZI: Shhhh...

CHUCK: What?

MITZI: Don't talk about it.

CHUCK: Why not?

MITZI: If you talk about it, I can't do it, you know?  
Shuts me right down.

CHUCK: You mean, like, with sex.

MITZI: Yeah. Exactly.

(*Chuck considers this.*)

CHUCK: Maybe we should get married.

MITZI: Married? Why?

CHUCK: Insurance. You have insurance?

MITZI: I don't know. I probably checked 'no' on that box.

CHUCK: Yeah, that's what I thought. That's why it's good I'm in the Army. I got good insurance. It'll cover a baby and stuff, but we'd have to –

MITZI: Whoa, hang on. Here it comes... *(he moves closer)* No, not so close. Don't look at me. Turn around, okay?

CHUCK: Sure.

*(Chuck turns around. Mitzi concentrates on the stick.)*

MITZI: Okay, now start counting.

CHUCK: Uh. One. Two. Three. Four. Five... *(turning back)* Okay stop.

MITZI: Stop? I can't stop. Don't look, turn, turn. This is like really personal...

*(She finishes, wipes, flushes, pulls up her pants.)*

MITZI: Okay.

*(Chuck turns back around. Mitzi hands him the stick.)*

MITZI: So... is there a blue dot?

*(He holds it slight away, tries to scrutinize it.)*

MITZI: Maybe we shouldn't try for this now, you know? I mean I'm still paying off that DVD player, and we got a lot going on, with you going to the Middle East and everything...

CHUCK: There's a blue dot.

MITZI: There is? No way! It's supposed to take a couple of months or something.

CHUCK: Blue dot. Right there.

MITZI: Lemme see.

CHUCK: Fuck, I'm good!

MITZI: Maybe it's... like, a negative, you know? Maybe it means --

CHUCK: Nope, it means I got the juice, baby! Oh yeah!

MITZI: Lemme see the box.

CHUCK: Sperm-o-matic!

*(She reads the box, concedes he's right.)*

MITZI: Yeah... you're good.

CHUCK: Fuckin' One-Shot-Sam, that's me! Gimme-gimme, baby.

*(Chuck pulls her to him, they kiss.)*

CHUCK: Damn, I oughta sell my squirt. One of those sperm banks. You hungry? Let's go out!

*(The news is sinking in for Mitzi.)*

MITZI: Pregnant. Wow...

CHUCK: How 'bout eggs? Let's hit Huckleberry's.

MITZI: Hey Chuck...

CHUCK: You seen my Nikes?

MITZI: Chuck, what if... I mean, not that I'm saying this but, what if... right now... isn't exactly --

CHUCK: It's what we want. We talked about it, remember? You're 22 and I'm 24.

MITZI: But, I mean, what if it's like what we thought we wanted on the surface, you know? Like a coat of paint or something? But what if the house isn't ready to be lived in yet? You know?

CHUCK: You're scared. Afraid it's gonna change your life.

MITZI: Yeah.

CHUCK: C'mon, let's go eat.

MITZI: And what about my Beginning Catholicism Forum, and my Great Books Group, and that Copier Repair class? I mean, maybe I haven't completely funneled my future down yet.

CHUCK: You can keep funneling, baby. Do your book group. You can read and still have a kid. You can copy, talk Esperanto, all-a-that. They're simpatico.

MITZI: I don't know...

CHUCK: Wear your pink sweater. You look like a  
momma in pink.

*(Mitzi slowly puts on her pink sweater, as Chuck disappears. She checks to make sure that nobody's looking. She hits herself in the stomach. She hits herself in the stomach several times. She throws herself to the ground, gets up, and throws herself to the ground again.)*

*During the above, lights go up on a charred midwife, Reckless Mary. She leans against a rather authentic-looking stake. Her scorched appearance should indicate she's been the victim of a witch-hunt. Mitzi does not see her.)*

MARY: Aye, leap, sister. Leap off a fekkín cliff if it helps. Bound around like a wild boar 'till ye limbs go slack. Ets one method, 'course if ye kin climb atop that boar and ride 'til it throws ya, that's even better. Hippocrates himself'd tellya the same. But there be other ways too. Might I commend ya ta rub down your vagina with wine, then insert a wad comprised of two parts grated pomegranate peel and one part oak galls. Some would add to that a bit of stinkin' iris, but I say that's best chewed and swallowed.

*(MITZI, exhausted, sits slumped on the ground.)*

MARY: You just listen to me, sister. I've been midwife to both life and death. They call me 'Reckless Mary' for I did wantonly proclaim my healing arts and burned fer it. They don't like cunning, the prick-ed ones. They don't like skirts what don't produce neither, so you'd best not mention your ponderings, specially to the one that did the prickin'...

*(MITZI pulls herself together and gets up, adjusting her clothes. As she does, VERA approaches, wiping down a dish.)*

VERA: Knocked up, huh? How long?

MITZI: Couple weeks. Maybe... four or five. Eight.

VERA: Took your time telling us.

MITZI: We wanted, you know... to be sure.

VERA: Uh-huh.

MITZI: We're getting married tomorrow. Downtown. *(showing Vera her ring)* See? From the Shane Company! Chuck went all out, and we don't have to make any payments until 2005.

VERA: Uh-huh. *(calling downstairs)* Rudolfo! Mitzi's here. You were right. *(to Mitzi)* He had you pegged right away. I said you weren't that short-sighted. You had your plans. You were gonna go back to that college.

MITZI: I'm still going back.

VERA: Uh-huh. *(she yells down for Rudolfo again)* Rudolfo! She's pregnant and getting married!

MITZI: And moving into his apartment next week.

VERA: What's the rush? Hope you got a good feel for this guy.

*(Rudolfo appears with a remote. He hands it to Vera.)*

RUDOLFO: This ain't the right remote, Vera.

VERA: I thought it was.

*(Rudolfo hugs Mitzi.)*

RUDOLFO: Hey baby.

MITZI: Hey daddy.

RUDOLFO: *(looking around)* So where's your man?

MITZI: Out in the car. Wanted to break it to you first.

VERA: Well, you broke it to us. Bring him in.

MITZI: *(calling out the door)* Hey Chuck! *(BIG WHISTLE)* *(she waves him in)*

*(Rudolfo and Vera size him up from afar.)*

RUDOLFO: *(impressed)* Nice Taurus.

VERA: *(nervous to meet him)* I just hope he's not gonna be one of those do-it-yourselfers that camp out right there in the hospital. That's the most annoying thing I ever heard. The bozo that got Jeanette's daughter pregnant had a stopwatch, the whole nine yards. She said when it came Lynelle's time, the guy practically stuffed his arm up her muff and yanked the kid out. *(re: Chuck)* What's he getting out of the trunk?

MITZI: Flowers, for you.

VERA: Huh. Yeah, any man who stands there and watches his wife give birth, *that's* a guy who suddenly can't get it up. Ought to be against the law. He keeps his hair nice and short.

MITZI: He's in the army.

VERA: He's got a good stride too. Huh...

*(Chuck comes up, holding flowers.)*

MITZI: Chuck, these are my parents. Vera...

*(Chuck hands Vera the flowers.)*

CHUCK: Mrs. Mendoza...

VERA: Well, aren't you sweet! These are just lovely.

MITZI: And Rudolfo.

*(The two men shake.)*

CHUCK: Mr. Mendoza.

RUDOLFO: Call me Rudolfo. I'm Mitzi's stepdad –

VERA: You're her dad, Rudolfo.

RUDOLFO: I know that Vera, I'm just tryin' to explain things to the man. We had her name changed to Mendoza, uhh... when Vera?

VERA: What?

RUDOLFO: How old was Mitzi when she became a Mendoza?

VERA: Had to have been, three. Three and a half. 'Cuz let's see... she was 6 months when I snuck out of Fresno, and around two, when you and me met at that AA meeting in Federal Way.

RUDOLFO: That wasn't AA, that was NA.

VERA: NA? Rudolfo --

RUDOLFO: I remember, baby, that was before we switched over to AA.

VERA: NA, AA, what's the difference? It was the one at St. Pat's.

RUDOLFO: That's right.

MITZI: So --

VERA: She was a Putzmeier, originally, but boy, was that ever a mistake.

MITZI: Mom, you don't have to get into all of that.

VERA: I know I don't. Whaduya think? I'm gonna sit here and tell him my whole sad story?

MITZI: I don't remember my real dad.

VERA: That's 'cause he OD'd in a Target parking lot, 'bout 8 months after me and Mitz left California.  
(continued)

VERA (Cont'd): And you know -- not to wish death on anyone -- but it sure as hell was a relief to know that that guy's cratered-up face wasn't gonna pull a 'Heeere's Johnny!' on me some rainy night down the line. Fact, when I heard from my ex-girlfriend Lucinda, 'bout how he'd passed and all, I swear it felt like I'd just taken the biggest fuckin' *dump* of my life. Such relief, I cannot describe.

*(Short pause.)*

RUDOLFO: So. You're in the infantry, huh? I did two years in the Navy myself.

CHUCK: Yessir.

VERA: And where you from?

CHUCK: Missouri.

VERA: Missouri? What's the religion there?

MITZI: Mom, what do you care about his religion?

VERA: We're talkin' about the future of my grandchild, are we not?

CHUCK: They got pretty much everything in Missouri, lotta Baptist.

VERA: Baptist. That's good. Rudolfo here's training Mitzi to be a step-Catholic. Now, I was raised Four-Square Evangelical myself, although I've been lapsed awhile. In the Four-Square Church, they don't spend a whole lotta time picking things apart. (continued)

VERA (Cont'd): What does this mean? What does that mean?' Just give 'em a psalm and they start thumpin'. So where's this apartment of yours?

CHUCK: Lakewood, near the base, block or so off 99.

MITZI: It's really cute! It's gotta garbage disposal.

VERA: (*pulling Chuck towards the kitchen with her*)  
C'mon in the kitchen. We got tacos.

RUDOLFO: Uhhh... that's quite a haul, Burien to Ft. Lewis.

VERA: (*as she exits with Chuck*) Oh hell Rudolfo, we're down in Fife all the time gettin' parts for the RV.

RUDOLFO: (*has to concede this*) That's true. (*turns to Mitzi, a private moment*) So... you caught yourself a Taurus-man, eh...?

MITZI: (*beat, smiles*) Yeah. I guess I did...

(*Mitzi and Rudolfo follow the other two into the kitchen, as lights rise on an empty podium. The Expert hurries on, he's late, still putting on his shirt and tie, as he begins the lecture.*)

THE EXPERT: Okay! Welcome everybody, to Psych Tuesday. Our case today is a primigravida, 22, named Mitzi. And what we have just witnessed are classic early scenes from a psychological progression of the first trimester. Note Mitzi's marked ambivalence toward her condition. This is quite typical of the first 2 months of pregnancy. (continued)

THE EXPERT (Cont'd): From an evolutionary standpoint, this noncommittal stance is quite advantageous, due to the extremely high rate of spontaneous abortion that occurs during this time frame. Somewhere between 50 to 75% of all fertilized eggs are flushed from the body by week 8. And this figure doesn't include those ejected deliberately. So, obviously, were the female to invest psychologically every time she conceived, she'd be an emotional dish rag by the time she was 30.

*(The Expert's cell phone rings, he answers it.)*

THE EXPERT: Yes? *(holds up a finger to his audience, as if to say this'll just take a minute, turns slightly)* I'm in the middle of a lecture. *(he listens)* Well, which type of bark did they deliver? *(he listens)* But we asked for the shredded... *(listens)* Well, I know but we ordered the shredded. They'll have to take it back. *(listens)* They've got shovels, don't they? They can shovel it all back in the trucks. *(his caller objects)* Jen... Jen. I'm just not into clumps. *(listens)* Yes. Okay.

*(The Expert closes up his phone.)*

THE EXPERT: *(no apology, picking right up)* So. As Klaus and Kennell have outlined in their text, Mitzi will now begin the process of attachment. This emotional change is characterized by passivity, a deepening introversion -- with concurrent loss of interest in external activities -- and most significantly, an overwhelming primary narcissism. In the late first trimester, the female does not yet perceive the fetus as separate from herself, but rather as an extension of her own body.

*(Mitzi appears in her Subway uniform. Her hair's different, more done up. As she wipes down the counter, Nita and Tim approach her station.)*

MITZI: Welcome to Subway. What'll you have?

NITA: I'm gonna have your ass.

TIM: She doesn't get your ass. I get your ass.

MITZI: Hey Nita, Tim.

NITA: You missed my birthday party!

MITZI: I'm sorry –

NITA: You don't call! You stop coming to Esperanto!

MITZI: I haven't stopped, I just -- *(switching to Esperanto)* “*Mario diras, ke la kato estas malsana.*” (In English, this means: “Mary says the cat is sick.”)

NITA: Well, “*Paulo skribas al sia patrino*” (Paul is writing to his mother.), so screw you. I mean, we're like thinking, what did we fucking do?

MITZI: I knew you'd be pissed at me.

NITA: I AM pissed!

TIM: I'm not that pissed.

NITA: You're an idiot! You meet the one guy at Game-Works with his shoes tied. You fuck him, you get pregnant –

TIM: Nita.

NITA: You move IN with him, all in what? Like FOUR months?!

TIM: Nita.

NITA: I mean why didn't you just go to the drugstore and 'Plan B' it? It's easy. I've done it like 3 times and I'm bisexual.

MITZI: I know... but Chuck wants it, and I... kinda want it too.

NITA: You 'kinda want it too'? You're twenty-two, you can't possibly want it. I'm thirty-one, and I don't want it.

TIM: Honey, I got news for you. You may never want it.

MITZI: Look, Nita, you know? I'm just. I'm really sorry.

*(Nita sighs heavily. The Expert finishes up.)*

THE EXPERT: This narcissistic thinking has survival significance for the fetus, as by caring for herself, the mother assures that the fetus is well-cared-for too.

TIM: Did you cut your hair? It looks good.

MITZI: I had it cut, styled, and henna'd. You like it?

TIM: Yeah.

MITZI: It was weird. I was at Southcenter returning something, and like boom, I walk into the Gene Juarez Salon and order everything! I didn't even have any money! Can you tell I had a makeover?

TIM: Absolutely.

MITZI: Turns out my skin tone isn't peach-based, it's actually part of the pink spectrum!

NITA: Whatta shocker.

TIM: How's the apartment?

MITZI: Totally nice. I'm painting everything yellow, you know? Really, really like this warm, cervical yellow. You gotta come down and see it.

*(Pause. Tim nudges Nita. She bats him off.)*

NITA: You know, everybody's getting their forms together for the Esperanto World Congress in Poland this summer.

MITZI: We can still go together.

NITA: Will Chuck let you?

MITZI: I'll only be like eight months or something, Nita. I'm not giving up my life.

*(Tim nudges Nita again. She looks at him and then digs into her bag, pulls out a wrapped package, and puts it on the counter.)*

NITA: Here. It works. I tried it out last night.

MITZI: What is it?

NITA: Open it.

TIM: Oh honey, you don't know the torture we went through to get this! I actually walked into that breeder den-of-iniquity, Babies-R-Us.

NITA: He did. I got a picture. He was amazingly brave.

TIM: Oh my Looooord, what were they thinking? I've never seen primary colors abused to such a disastrous extent!

*(Mitzi opens the package. It is an electric breast pump.)*

MITZI: Whoa...! *(beat)* What is it?

NITA: Don't you know anything? It's an electric breast pump! You don't have to lift a finger.

TIM: Just a boob.

NITA: My sister has two, one for each tit. Saves time. Awesome, huh? Absolutely top-of-the-line.

TIM: *(turning it on)* Listen to this puppy!

*(There is a loud motor sound.)*

NITA: You didn't get one yet, did you?

MITZI: No.

NITA: Good, 'cause the motor on this thing, it's like BMW quality. And you're gonna LOVE the way it vibrates. (*she puts it up to her crotch*) Oh yeah...

TIM: Darling, please, you're at Subway.

MITZI: Wow. Thanks, you guys. This is like my first shower gift.

NITA: Yeah? (*this is an endearment*) Well, fuck you, sweetie.

MITZI: (*smiles*) Fuck you too.

(*Tim and Nita disappear. Mitzi takes off her Subway hat. Chuck approaches with a duffel bag over one shoulder. He hands her the pregnancy stick.*)

CHUCK: Here.

MITZI: What is it?

CHUCK: It's the stick we used, you know, to find out.

MITZI: What am I 'sposed to do with it?

CHUCK: You're the wife. You keep the mementos. He'll want this later. We gotta start a box. My mom's got one for me, back in St. Louis. Box full of my stuff, she saved everything. Even my first shit.

MITZI: Right.

CHUCK: She did. She said it didn't stink.

MITZI: (*teasing*) Oh, it didn't stink?

CHUCK: Well, according to her.

MITZI: (*sexy*) According to her, it still don't.

CHUCK: (*pulling her to him*) Noooo it don't... (*they kiss*) She said it smelled like vanilla. (*he rubs her lower tummy gently*) You mind if I feel him like this?

MITZI: Nope.

CHUCK: He's like a little rock in there.

MITZI: Yeah.

CHUCK: Harder than I thought he would be. You know, you see pregnant women, and their bellies look like they'd be soft, like pillows. But this is...

MITZI: Solid.

CHUCK: Yeah.

MITZI: Stubborn, like me.

CHUCK: Exactly. You sure this is how it's supposed to feel at 4 months?

MITZI: Nobody's raising any flags.

CHUCK: Huh.

MITZI: And I don't even puke up anymore.

CHUCK: You know, when I feel this, I think about being 8 years old and riding my dirt bike 'round and 'round this circuit we'd built in a vacant lot off Skinker Boulevard. We'd 360 off this plywood ramp, come down, surf the mud puddle, then up and over the hood of an old La Sabre, back down, around, do it again. Over and over, all day long. Just stop every so often to drink water out of this guy's hose. *(beat)* Sometimes I think those were the best days of my life... *(beat)* I got my orders. We move in 36 hours.

MITZI: What...?

CHUCK: They said they'd give us more notice, but they moved us up or something.

MITZI: 36 hours...?

CHUCK: Yeah, but they got this service now. We can talk to each other on TV or something. When you pick up the phone, you actually see who you're talking to. So I'll be able to watch you get all fat and happy.

MITZI: Great.

CHUCK: So, you know, it won't be so bad...

MITZI: No...

CHUCK: And you got your Copier Repair class and your Esperanto, right?

MITZI: Yeah.

CHUCK: And Subway and your Great Books and stuff.

MITZI: Sure.

CHUCK: Damn! I hate missing all this! I wanna know right away, right? I wanna see him first thing. Even if it's not your day, push your way to the front of the line. Tell the C.O., he'll understand, just get my kid in front of that camera for me, okay?

MITZI: You think you'll be gone that long?

*(Chuck shrugs. They hug, a bit awkward, and release. Chuck sniffs the air in the direction of Reckless Mary's stake.)*

CHUCK: I smell bacon again.

MITZI: Yeah. Me too...

*(They ponder this a moment. Then Chuck walks off with his duffel bag. Mitzi puts on her Subway hat, takes a pair of tongs and messes absentmindedly with her tomato slices, as Thomas Aquinas thunders ponderously up to the counter.)*

AQUINAS: Girl! Bring me a 12-inch Club before I faint!

MITZI: Mr. Aquinas...?

AQUINAS: And chips, by God!

MITZI: I thought you were on the Jared Diet Plan. You're supposed to order the 6-inch sandwich.

AQUINAS: *(waving this off)* 6-inch? That's like eating a flea.

MITZI: (*matter-of-fact*) Actually a 6-inch Club provides... (*she reads from a flyer*) '24 grams of protein, 46 grams of carbohydrates, and 6 grams of fat.

(*She tries to hand the leaflet to Aquinas, he bats it away.*)

AQUINAS: Blasphemy! I'm hungry! Super-size it.

(*Mitzi makes him a sandwich. He watches her work.*)

AQUINAS: My God, you people are infatuated with statistics. Do you know, where I come from, when we went to cook an animal, we cooked the WHOLE animal. We didn't dilly-dally with calorie counts. Take roast mutton. We'd go out to the fields, find a ram, kill it, skin it, slice it down the middle, clean it out, stuff it with breadcrumbs, oil, eggs, pepper, ginger, pounded almonds, braised chickens, pigeons, doves, other small fowl, rodents, whatever hadn't gone bad. Whatever would add to the succulence of the thing, you see. Then we'd sew the bloody thing back up and roast it until it was done! And when it was done, we pulled it out and WE ATE IT. No second thoughts. No regret, whatsoever! So, I urinate on Jared. I urinate on his diet. I would've fainted at prayers this morning if I'd continued to follow his anemic advice.

MITZI: Extra dressing?

AQUINAS: You bet. (*beat*) You've stopped coming to my Beginning Catholicism Forum. And you're pregnant.

MITZI: (*beat*) How do you know that?

AQUINAS: Twitch on my left side.

MITZI: Oh. Wow... Well, now that I'm having a baby, everybody says I've got to start, you know, making targeted life choices.

AQUINAS: Who says that?

MITZI: Nita. Chuck. My mom...

AQUINAS: And Esperanto seems more 'targeted' than Catholicism?

MITZI: It's not that I'm not interested in Catholicism, Mr. Aquinas. I am. I guess I just figured for right now -- given what's going on in the world and how everybody's shouting at one another, and misunderstanding their points and everything -- I thought a universal second language might be more practical.

AQUINAS: Ah. *(beat)* I suppose it's just as well... I almost quit last week.

MITZI: Catholicism?

AQUINAS: No-no, the forum. Walked right out the door. Left the little neophytes clutching their brand new plastic rosaries. *(shaking his head)* Converts. These days all we attract are the nitpickers. The ones that fixate on the details, like those calorie counts. But Catholicism is a metaphorical ANIMAL, you know? It's about big, messy ideas, like... Faith! And Love! And Eternal Damnation! Toss me a bag of Tim's Sea Salt and Vinegar. *(she throws him a bag of chips)*

MITZI: So what happened?

AQUINAS: It's not what *happened*, it's what's *happening*. Everything is so two-dimensional I can't stand it. For example, you should hear all the sanctimonious yakkity-yak about 'immediate hominization'.

MITZI: What's that?

AQUINAS: It's this inane position the church has taken lately that gives an embryo moral standing as a 'human person' from the moment of conception. It's ludicrous, but these new puppies are eating it up like kibble. Do you know, they actually began to argue with me – ME – when I tried to explain this was a recent, and in my opinion, theologically flawed change for the Church. They practically threw me out of my own classroom!

MITZI: Wow.

AQUINAS: I tell you, it's been quite difficult, hovering in the ether-world, watching some of our most enlightened principles get swept away.

MITZI: I think you'd be really good at Esperanto.

AQUINAS: I am Saint Thomas Aquinas! One of the most influential Catholics of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Millennium.

*(Reckless Mary charges across the stage with a Subway bakery tray.)*

MARY: Fresh-baked wheat rolls, comin' through!

AQUINAS: My writings form the basis for much of what is considered standard Catholic theology.

MARY: Fie! There he be... bonin' on again. (*shouting at Aquinas*) I don't give a hoot about the Manichees, ya dumb ox!

AQUINAS: So why is it that one of my most profound insights has about as much appeal with the Vatican today as a case of small pox?

MITZI: What insight is that?

MARY: The fact that he shits out his arse.

AQUINAS: Delayed ensoulment.

MITZI: Delayed ensoulment?

AQUINAS: Yes.

MITZI: That's not in the pamphlets.

AQUINAS: My point exactly. You've never heard of it because it's been buried like a corpse. Shuttled quietly out of the room like the clergy's illegitimate offspring. Can I have a Coke, please?

MITZI: Pepsi okay?

AQUINAS: (*shrugs his agreement, not thrilled with this option*) Delayed ensoulment concerns the timing of when a potentially human conceptus becomes a human being, by receiving – from God – a soul.

MITZI: That happens, like, ASAP, right?

AQUINAS: No, no! You see? NOT at conception. God can only bestow such a gift on a being that has the faculties in place to receive it. I spell all of this out quite clearly in my seminal book: *Summa Contra Gentiles*. In which I agree with Aristotle and St. Augustine, that the human embryo must go through a series of stages; beginning with a vegetative state, leading to an animal state, and finally reaching a point at which it is physiologically ready and able to receive a human soul. Thus DELAYED -- not immediate -- ensoulment. This was confirmed as doctrine by the Catholic Church at the Council of Vienne, in 1312, and has been the dominant tradition in Christianity up until this blasted century. It is why we refused to baptize miscarriages and stillbirths. Because in the eyes of the church, they had not yet been endowed with the moral status of a human person.

*(Mitzi is quiet a moment, she finishes making his sandwich.)*

MITZI: I'm keeping my baby, Mr. Aquinas.

AQUINAS: I'm not suggesting you do anything else.

MITZI: *(putting his sandwich down)* 12-inch Club, extra dressing.

AQUINAS: Thank you, my dear. It's a masterpiece.

*(Aquinas eats his sandwich with relish. Mary returns to the safety of her stake and eyes him warily.)*

MARY: Look at ‘im. You know why he’s such a glutton? He’s sexually frustrated. God’s truth. Joined the fekkin’ Dominican Order at seventeen, to burn us heretics and witches. But his mother, the Countess Theodora, couldn’t stand his obnoxious piety, had ‘im kidnapped and brought back home, where he was imprisoned in the family tower for over a year. (*dropping a little ancient gossip*) Some say his brothers sent a naked prostitute in, to tempt ‘im with sins of the flesh. Poor dumb ox was so traumatized, he drove the drab out with a hot poker. After that, God took pity on ‘im, sent two angels down with a chastity belt that would henceforth stop his lower regions from their divel yearnings, only to leave his mouth as open as you please...

MITZI: So when does it change?

AQUINAS: What?

MITZI: When is the fetus ready to receive a soul?

AQUINAS: Well, it depends.

MARY: Aye, “it depends.” Takes 40 days fer males, but we females — bein’ as how we spring from deformed male embryos — we stew a good *90 days*, before God grants us the dregs of a soul.

AQUINAS: But approximately, at quickening.

MARY: Quickenin’, aye.

MITZI: Quickening.

*(Mitzi takes a sudden, surprised breath in, and looks down at her belly. The Expert and his podium light up.)*

EXPERT: So. Let's quickly recap fetal development. *(he may use some visual aid here)* Day 1. Sperm meets egg. 32 hours later the resulting zygote begins to divide and travel down the fallopian tube, where it will attach itself to the uterine wall around Day 8. At 6 weeks LMP, a rudimentary heart, head, and tail have formed, and the embryo is indistinguishable from the embryos of other mammals, including mice, pigs, and elephants. By 14 weeks arms, legs, feet, and hands are fully formed, and the fetus begins reflexive movements. At approximately 18 weeks, we have quickening.

MARY: Aye, quickenin'.

EXPERT: The point at which the mother can feel the movements of the fetus. Weeks 20 through 22, see the first synapses developing among neurons in the cortex, the area of the brain that deals with perception and thought. Questions?

AQUINAS: Is anything wrong?

MITZI: Oh. No. No, everything's actually... okay. *(beat)* Chuck's been gone two months already. I finished painting the apartment, it's all yellow now... the doors, the ceilings, the baby's room... everything... *(beat)* I've been thinking about moving back to my folk's place. At least 'til Chuck gets back.

AQUINAS: No disgrace in that.

MITZI: No, I guess not.

AQUINAS: There's something more...?

MITZI: *(there is)* No. Not really...

*(Aquinas waits. Mitzi wipes down the counters. The Expert starts up again.)*

EXPERT: In the weeks after quickening, we see a dramatic psychological shift in the gravida. As the fetus now begins to assert its individuality, with movements the mother can neither stop nor start, a gradual acceptance of, and love for, this new independent being begins. The female now endows the fetus with its own unique 'personality'.

MITZI: Mr. Aquinas, can I ask you something?

AQUINAS: Certainly.

EXPERT: Fantasies about who the baby is, its sex, and a wish for it to be perfect, are quite common. At the same time, fear of producing a defective child is universal. This fear is most often expressed through dreams of dead, deformed children, or scenes of mass destruction.

MITZI: What are you doing here?

AQUINAS: Why do you ask?

MITZI: Because... I'm just kind of wondering about my sanity. I'm having a lot of weird dreams. Like, I keep seeing this girl, right? In my dream. This girl with slurred speech and one side of her face droops, you know? (continued)

MITZI (Cont'd): Like maybe someone poured battery acid on her or something. And she's so angry at me, like I did something to hurt her, or... I don't know. *(beat)* And I'm seeing an awful lot of you.

AQUINAS: That's not so scary, is it?

MITZI: It's not exactly normal.

AQUINAS: Yes, well, I understand your anxiety. But I've spent my life deliberating this question of existence, and the one thing I can tell you, Mitzi, is there's more play in the system than would appear.

MITZI: More play...?

AQUINAS: I'm talking about actual, flesh-and-blood, matter — by matter I mean you, those salami slices, that hat you're wearing. It's all really only a very small part of the entire existence equation.

MITZI: *(not seeing what this means)* Okay...

AQUINAS: So, it seems to me, given that the world is on such a shaky foundation, that I can be as real as you need me to be.

*(The way Aquinas says this makes Mitzi nervous.)*

MITZI: I don't understand. What does that mean?

*(Mitzi's cell phone starts to ring. MITZI waits for more of a response from AQUINAS but he picks crumbs from his plate, so she goes to answer the call, and when her back is turned, AQUINAS disappears.)*

MITZI: (*answering her cell phone*) Hello...?

DR. BLOCK: (*VO, on the phone*) Mitzi Mendoza?

MITZI: Yes?

DR. BLOCK: Mitzi, this is Dr. Block.

MITZI: (*not sure who this is*) Dr. Block?

DR. BLOCK: Yes. Your OB. You're pregnant, correct?

MITZI: Oh yeah, Dr. Block. Wow. Haven't seen you in awhile.

DR. BLOCK: Sorry about that. It's been quite hectic.

MITZI: That's okay. Thanks for checking in. Things are really humming along, she's kicking up a storm in there! And now that I'm pretty sure she's a girl, I've decided to re-paint her room a kind of dusky, intellectual purple. I'm not sure what Chuck's going to think, but I don't know... the color just speaks to me, you know?

DR. BLOCK: Yes, well --

MITZI: And that nurse of yours, Song? Very on-the-ball. She's totally hip to everything that's happening, like all the stuff about my nipples being inverted? She's got me on this whole nipple-training program --

DR. BLOCK: (*breaking in*) Which is why I'm calling Mitzi. Song tagged your last measurements, and we're a little concerned.

MITZI: (*beat*) Concerned? Why?

DR. BLOCK: Well, at 6 months, we should really be seeing higher numbers, sternum to pelvic bone.

MITZI: Higher numbers...?

DR. BLOCK: More growth.

MITZI: Uh-huh.

DR. BLOCK: The baby should be bigger.

MITZI: I'm not as big-as-a-house, but Song said that's normal for a first pregnancy.

DR. BLOCK: I've gone ahead and scheduled you for an ultrasound.

MITZI: I thought you said I was young enough, I wouldn't need one?

DR. BLOCK: That was before. We just need to see what's going on in there.

MITZI: Yeah, but --

DR. BLOCK: Don't worry, ultrasounds are a piece of cake.

MITZI: But I'm not sure that TriCare covers that kind of thing, Dr. Block. They're not very big on the extras. And me and Chuck, we're on a pretty fixed income. I've already spent a lot more than I should've on paint.

DR. BLOCK: I'm sure it's covered if I order it, and I've ordered it. Roxbury Ultrasound. They're one floor down from my office. 10 am, tomorrow.

MITZI: Tomorrow? Isn't that kind of soon?

DR. BLOCK: I don't want you to worry about this, Mitzi. 'Failure to Grow' can be attributed to any number of things, not all of them significant.

MITZI: She's failing to grow?

DR. BLOCK: Go home, rent a movie, get your mind off it. Come in tomorrow and we'll see what's up. Okay?

MITZI: *(beat)* Sure. Okay.

*(Mitzi hangs up the phone. Reckless Mary pops her head up from behind her stake. Mitzi still doesn't hear her.)*

MARY: Sure... they got you now. They know how to sow the seeds of fear... He's made you a pawn on his chessboard, and now they get to start pokin'... Once they start that, sister, it's all over. Like pickin' a scab, they just pick, pick, pick.

*(Sergei, an ultrasound technician, sails toward Mitzi wheeling an ultrasound machine and an examining table. He wears a big, enthusiastic smile. Except for his medical terminology, his English is limited.)*

SERGEI: Ah! You are Mitzi?

MITZI: Yes.

SERGEI: Good! I am Sergei, yes? You will lie down please... *(indicating the examining table)* Shirt up! *(she does this, exposing her belly, he looks at her chart)* So! You are 22, yes?

MITZI: Yes.

SERGEI: Good! Very good time for babies, yes? Best time for babies, before 30! More energy, yes? More milk! My wife. 3 babies before 30. Good thing. Lots of energy! Lots of milk! *(pouring a clear gel onto her stomach and spreading it around)* This will feel cold!

MITZI: Ah!

SERGEI: *(eyeing her belly)* You are... four months, yes?

MITZI: Almost six.

SERGEI: *(surprised)* Six! Ah. Yes... *(he gets quieter, but keeps smiling)* Okay... Now I must look. No talk.

*(Sergei starts to move the probe around Mitzi's stomach. He watches his monitor intently, becoming anxious by what he sees, but he still continues to smile. Mary talks directly to Sergei, who does hear her.)*

MARY: Look at ya, grinnin' like an imp at the divel's tit...

SERGEI: *(still grinning at Mitzi, but talking to Mary)* What to do? You tell me? I am probing this Mitzi...

MARY: Incubus! Satan's barfly.

SERGEI: Low growth, it says, yes? No problem. Many times, this is nothing. But sometimes, it is not nothing. Sometimes, it is something. In this case... it is something. *(he rattles off a list of the anomalies he sees)* Cranial vault absent. Rudimentary brain tissue covered by membrane, not bone. Head flattened. Face has frog-like appearance, prominent bulging eyeballs. Associated polyhydramnios. High fetal activity.

MITZI: Whoa... are you catching that? She's kicking up a storm right now.

SERGEI: *(to Mitzi, big smile)* Yes! *(back to Mary)* And what to do? For me, Sergei? Keep smiling? I came in smiling. I am happy person. But now I see. Her baby severely deformed, yes? But how can I stop smiling? If I stop... she will know. Something very wrong! So I smile, yes?

MARY: Like a child of Bedlam.

SERGEI: This smiling, I hate. I hate this smiling.

*(Mitzi focuses on the technician as he works.)*

MITZI: Can you tell if it's a boy or girl...?

SERGEI: *(big grin)* No!

MARY: Ruddy liar.

MITZI: Really? I thought you guys could. *(he doesn't respond, just smiles, keeps working)*

MITZI: Well... she's okay, right? Just small or something. Maybe she'll be a gymnast. Dr. Block said --

SERGEI: I cannot diagnose, yes? (*he taps his name badge*) Technician! Not doctor!

MITZI: But, you must be seeing something...

SERGEI: No problem! Your doctor, explain everything!

MITZI: (*leaning forward*) Can I take a look...?

SERGEI: (*taking rapid, precise picture/clicks*) Just! Few! More! Points!

(*Mitzi watches Sergei more intently, she seems to know.*)

MITZI: (*quietly*) What are their names?

SERGEI: What?

MITZI: Your children. You said you have three.

SERGEI: I'm sorry. No...

MITZI: I'll bet they have great names.

SERGEI: Posterior fossa. (*click*) Cerebellum. (*click, click*)

MITZI: Something's wrong.

SERGEI: Spine.

MITZI: (*worried*) Something's wrong with my baby?

SERGEI: Done!

*(Sergei wipes down the probe and places it beside the machine.)*

SERGEI: *(finally removing the smile, touching her arm)* I phone. Dr. Block.

*(The technician disappears, as Mitzi wipes the goop from her belly and slowly buttons her shirt. Mary comes over and examines the ultrasound probe.)*

MARY: This be the new model, I fathom. Old one was longer, forged with Spanish iron. The one that cam to my village with the White Coat already had a babe's blood on it. He startin' pokin' it up womyn who were havin' hard birth. "Be out of my way, hag! I bear the forceps," he cried. Army 'a White Coats sproutin' tools like chicken claws, smothered the land, killed off the midwife's magic. Took from us our work, ourselves. Those that turned a breech, they cut off their hands. Those that spake the recipes, they ripped out their tongues. Those that refused to cower in their skirts, that kept alive in their souls the wisdom of herbs and breath, those... they burned.

*(Mary goes back to her stake. Mitzi has finished getting dressed, but she doesn't get up to go out. She seems frozen, staring off. Lights down on her and up on Vera, with a magazine, in the waiting room. Nita comes in.)*

NITA: Vera...?

VERA: Well, hello there!

NITA: How's it going?

VERA: (*happy to have someone to talk to*) Oh, who the hell knows! I've been sittin' here in this waiting room for hours, reading about the next damn tragedy for Nicole Kidman. Mitz came outa that door white as a sheet. And suddenly everybody's got somethin' real important to do. They can't seem to spare the time to even look at us. Finally the receptionist hears from the good doctor. He tells us some definite concerns have arisen. He says get some lunch and meet him upstairs in their conference room in an hour. Get some lunch...

NITA: Where's Mitzi now?

VERA: (*pointing down a hall*) Peeing again. I remember this kinda limbo. I felt it years ago the night Putzmeier almost killed me with my own fuckin' iron. I was quick-like-a-bunny runnin' up the steps to the deck with him right on my tail, when he slips, and falls back down to the cement, flat on his back. I remember lookin' down at him, holding my breath... waitin' to see if he was gonna rise again.

(*A conference table shows up center stage. Mitzi, Vera, and Nita move to sit around it. Dr. Block enters, followed by Sheila Luffington, an overworked insurance administrator. She's loaded down with files.*)

DR. BLOCK: Ah. Mitzi. There you are...

SHEILA: (*to Mitzi, shaking her hand*) Hi. Sheila Luffington, with TriCare. (*turning to Vera, doing the same*) Sheila Luffington, with TriCare.

VERA: Uh-huh.

SHEILA: (*shaking Nita's hand*) Sheila Luffington --

NITA: TriCare. Gotcha.

DR. BLOCK: Well, let's get started. Mitzi, we have some very bad news, so I'm not going to beat around the bush. The fetus you're carrying is textbook anencephalic. This was alarmingly clear to the Ultrasound Tech and caused quite a stir in their research department.

NITA: Anencephalic?

DR. BLOCK: Anencephaly being the congenital absence of the skull, the scalp and the forebrain or cerebral cortex. The brain stem is present and operating efficiently, controlling the autonomic nervous system. The basic functions. Heart beat, breathing, that sort of thing. Technically, the fetus is alive, but... with this level of deformity... without the cortex, it can't see, hear, or feel anything. And never will. In short, Mitzi, the diagnosis is fatal.

MITZI: (*barely audible*) Oh.

VERA: (*trying to catch up*) Are you saying her kid doesn't have a brain?

DR. BLOCK: Basically, yes.

MITZI: Well... that can't be right. I mean, maybe that guy made a mistake or something? He wasn't from here.

NITA: What about one of those shunts? My neighbor's kid had water-on-the-brain, they did one of those shunts.

DR. BLOCK: Unfortunately, in this case, there's nothing to shunt. If this fetus does survive to term, it will die within days.

*(Dr. Block gives Mitzi a moment to absorb this.)*

MITZI: But... Dr. Block, this doesn't make any sense. I mean, she's so healthy, she's kicking me all the time.

DR. BLOCK: That's quite characteristic. The remnants of it's brain are exposed and... well, there's often a high level of reflexive muscle movements.

NITA: Oh my God.

DR. BLOCK: *(clearing his throat, forging ahead)* Our best course, at this point, is to induce labor now, before we wind up with further complications.

*(Sheila finally speaks up.)*

SHEILA: Ah, Dr. Block.

DR. BLOCK: Yes?

SHEILA: Hi. Um, I'm Sheila Luffington with TriCare? We don't work with you much, so you may be unaware of our current policies.

DR. BLOCK: What policies?

SHEILA: Well, I know this may sound a bit... inopportune, but, if termination is your recommendation regarding this pregnancy, then we're going to have a problem on the insurance front.

DR. BLOCK: What do you mean? What kind of problem?

SHEILA: Well, you see Mitzi is only insured through her husband, John –

MITZI: Chuck. His name is Chuck.

SHEILA: Chuck. And therefore she's a military dependent covered by TriCare Management Activity.

DR. BLOCK: (*impatient*) Yes.

SHEILA: So... and I personally hate this, I really do. In fact, I spit on this policy. See? (*Sheila spits on her files*) Spit. Right there. But it's a rising tide, you know? What can one worn-out PCM do? When the folks up in HRA are putting out this kind of high-level restrictive MDR guidelines? We're all just SOOL.

NITA: Shit out of luck.

SHEILA: Exactly.

DR. BLOCK: I still don't see what you're getting at.

SHEILA: Here's the deal, Doctor. You're ordering Mitzi's labor be induced.

DR. BLOCK: Yes.

SHEILA: Well, technically, that's considered a late-term abortion.

MITZI: An abortion? I don't want an abortion.

DR. BLOCK: This is a medical decision, Mitzi. Remember that. (*to Sheila, a warning*) The semantics here are very important for the mental health of my patient, Sheila.

SHEILA: I understand, Dr. Block, but technically, this is an abortion, and according to the coverage rules set down by the 106<sup>th</sup> Congress, TriCare is prohibited from funding abortion services for any reason, including fatal prenatal anomalies, unless -- or until -- that anomaly puts the woman's life in danger.

DR. BLOCK: Ms. Luffington, this diagnosis is incompatible with life. Not only that... but it's the maturing fetal cortex that instigates the onset of labor. Without a forebrain, and no ability to induce, Mitzi's pregnancy could last over a year.

SHEILA: I know that.

DR. BLOCK: So, you're asking her to knowingly continue to carry a dying fetus for 3 months *or longer*? This has got to be an exception!

SHEILA: No, unfortunately, it's not. There aren't *any* exceptions. Now, as far as I can tell... although grievous and abominably sad, Mitzi's pregnancy will not kill her. (*trying to be helpful*) I should mention that this 'denial of coverage' could be – and has been – successfully contested in court a few times, but only on a case-by-case basis. (continued)

SHEILA (Cont'd): This means Mitzi would need to find and pay for an attorney willing to fight for her right to abort.

DR. BLOCK: Induce.

SHEILA: Whatever. Mitzi, do you have an attorney?

MITZI: My head hurts.

SHEILA: And, as this condition is quite severe, there's also the chance the anomaly will wind up in demise before the legal entanglements have been fully resolved.

MITZI: Anomaly...

SHEILA: So, in short, I would suggest Mitzi, that you try and find a way to cover this procedure out-of-pocket. A realistic cost-estimate for an induced prostaglandin delivery -- assuming two days in the hospital and no serious complications -- is about \$10,000.

NITA: Ten thousand dollars?!

SHEILA: Give or take.

VERA: So... whoa, whoa, whoa. Are you sayin' my daughter's gotta carry this thing around like a sack of rotting potatoes until she actually drops it?

SHEILA: If you'd asked me about the initial ultrasound, we would have denied it, and then you wouldn't have known there was anything wrong with it until birth.