

**Cycle**  
**FRONT PAGE THEATER**

**TERRI AND THE**  
**POPE**

A Theater Play

Author: **Pablo Perel**

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***I fervently dedicate the English version of “Terri and the Pope” to Adela Inés Alonso for her loving generosity***

***My greatest acknowledgement to Eugenia Noriega Plancarte for her dedicated work translating the text into English.***



## About the Author

**Pablo Perel** came into this world in Buenos Aires, Argentina, surrounded by mystical circumstances.

Very early in his life he was immersed in painting, writing, music and physics. He discovered that the sum of these disciplines results in filmmaking, and since then he has devoted himself to all in equal measure. The Beatles, counterculture, the theater, the opera, and the TV impregnate his creations and his international achievements.





# **TERRI AND THE POPE**

The play

Pablo Perel

## **Overview**

One night, in an imaginary intensive care unit in a hospital, located in some nonspecific place of a nonspecific world, there are only two beds; Terri Schiavo lies in one and the Pope John Paul II in the other.

The heart monitors indicate that vital activity has ceased. A nurse comes in the room and unplugs the monitors, leaving the two recently deceased patients until the chief physician of the ICU gets there in the morning.

It is then that an encounter between two worlds takes place, in a respectful (but not solemn) comedy tone, represented by two beings that, in different ways, have been forced to live beyond their will.

Meanwhile, the world debates about these two characters; the characters debate about the world, they toy with it and transcend it from their place, which is already a step beyond reality.



## THE FRONT PAGE THEATER CYCLE

The cycle **FRONT PAGE THEATER** is comprised of a series of plays written by Pablo Perel and refers to highly topical events that agitate the public opinion and approach transcendent subjects that stir different positions, attitudes, and even passions.

*The society of our century is immerse in a flood of journalistic information that comes from the most remote places on the planet and through the most diverse means of communication and technology.*

*This high dose of information creates anxiety, social tension; and the society needs spaces of representation and contemplation of the themes that bring into play its cultural principles, its rules of conduct, its models for daily life, and even its spiritual values.*

**FRONT PAGE THEATER** proposes a show and art offer that is intimately related to the current events that persist on front pages and in collective thought.

The criteria on which **FRONT PAGE THEATER** bases the selection of topics to be approached are very precise and were defined with a clear objective: to entertain and at the same time encourage and enrich the public debate, to trigger and provoke the audience's opinions, mobilize thinking, and provide a great incentive for people to come see the plays. The first title of this new theater series is **Terri and the Pope**, previewed in Spanish language and only for the press on April 23, 2005 in the Centro Cultural Borges, Buenos Aires, Argentina, with Diego Cosín as *The Pope* and Vanesa Motto as *Terri*.

**FRONT PAGE THEATER** sets out to recover the original social spirit of the theater, by putting genuine and renowned artistic resources at the service of the transmission of ideas and the dramatic exposure of events that are a part of the audience's real, day-to-day world.

# **TERRI AND THE POPE**

The play

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# TERRI AND THE POPE

## CHARACTERS

THE POPE

TERRI

## BIT PARTS

Cleaning lady

Doctor

Nurse

*Music and prerecorded sound and effects track  
composed by Gabriel Chwojnik and Wolfgang A. Mozart*

*Sole setting: hospital room*

*Time: Late March, 2005*

*Number of acts is director's choice.*



# TERRI AND THE POPE

## The Play

*The stage is clear of unnecessary objects. On each side, almost facing each other, there are two hospital beds angled at about 30° towards the audience, with white linens, an IV bottle, and other hospital accessories next to them. In the center, at the back of the stage, a window with closed curtains.*

*On the right side bed lies Terry, with a gastrointestinal tube in her hand. On the left bed lies the Pope, connected to a nasogastric tube.*

*Musical opening.*

*Monitor beeping and distant sounds. A distant ambulance siren comes closer and stops. Beeps alternate, a high one from Terri's monitor, a low one from the Pope's monitor, at counterpoint, like a monotonous ping-pong match.*

*The Pope lifts his head and looks around. He takes a tissue from the nightstand and wipes his mouth. He throws the used tissue to the garbage can and misses. The monitor makes a "foul" sound.*

*The Pope's eyes fall on Terri and he watches her. Suddenly Terri turns around in her bed and exposes her backside, which is not covered by the hospital gown. The Pope's monitor speeds up, disrupting the counterpoint. Terri turns over again, covering her body, and the Pope's monitor goes back to normal. Both monitors slow down until they end in a continuous sound, announcing that both patients' hearts have stopped.*

*A cleaning lady walks in, sees the flatlined monitors, and calls a nurse. The nurse comes in and turns off the beeping. She takes Terri and the Pope's pulse.*

NURSE: Terry and the Pope just died.

*(Takes a deep breath)*

This is too complicated for me. Let's just leave everything like this and wait until the head doctor comes in the morning and does what needs to be done.

*The nurse leaves.*

*Terry and the Pope slowly wake, as from a long sleep.*

TERRI: Are they gone?

*The Pope sighs deeply, with a moan.*

TERRI: Are you asleep?

POPE: Maria?

TERRI: No.

POPE: Faustina?

TERRI: No.

POPE: Teresa?

TERRI: Uh... yeah. But no one calls me that...  
I'm Terri... Are they all gone?

POPE: No... yes. I think they are. But they must be  
close...

TERRI: *(sitting up with some effort)*  
Oh! ...yes, too close.

*Terri tries to look at the Pope from her position.*

TERRI: You look like someone important.  
From the Church, right?

POPE: I have a great responsibility, yes.  
*(Heavily sitting up)*  
You don't know who I am?

TERRI: I've been in here for almost 15 years.  
I don't know anything about the outside world.  
But you look like the Pope, like John Paul...

POPE: John Paul II, that is the name I chose.

TERRI: Yes... I remember, John Paul.  
*(She livens and sits up straighter)*  
So, tell me, where are George and Ringo?

POPE: Yes... I can tell you haven't been in the world for some time. That joke is as old as my papacy.

TERRI *(lying back down, scowling)*  
I was just trying to be nice.

*The Pope gets up with an effort. He struggles with the tube in his nose until he gets it off. Steadying himself on the IV bottle stand, he walks over and sits on Terri's bed.*

POPE: Forgive me. I didn't mean to slight you.  
You're not Catholic, are you?

TERRI: *(pulling the covers over her head)*  
No! Anglican.

POPE: Aha. I see. It's been so long since someone talked to me without saying Holy Father or Your Holiness or something like that...  
Why are you here?

TERRI *(she turns to the Pope and uncovers her face a little)*  
Several years ago I had a heart attack, just like that, and it stopped blood from getting to my brain. I was 26 years old.

POPE: And you've been here ever since?

TERRI: Yes.

POPE: Do you have a family? Parents? A husband?

TERRI: Yes, all that. And they've been fighting over me all these years. Trials, courts, a huge mess!

POPE: And why are they fighting?

TERRI: *(she sits on the bed and puts the tube on her stomach)*

My husband says I don't want to live like this, like a vegetable, and he told them to pull the plug and let me die. My parents disagree. They want the doctors to keep me alive as long as they can.

POPE: Yes... I understand. But...what do you want?

TERRI: Me? Ha! Finally, someone's asking me! I've been dead for 15 years!

POPE: *(pensive)*  
What a coincidence...

TERRI: What?

POPE: I died a while ago too. I've died so many times!

TERRI: Really?

POPE: Yes. First it was the Nazis, during the war. I was born in Poland. I made it, they didn't kill me because God had other plans for me, it seems. Then it was the communists. The Nazis threatened my body; the Stalinists, my soul. In 1981, when I was already Pope, in the Vatican, in front of 20,000 people...

*(The Pope makes the sound of four loud shots with his mouth, bang, bang, bang, bang!)*

...they wounded me firing four shots. A few years later, in Croatia, my room had been rigged with bombs, and they found them by chance just a little while before I got there. And do you know how long they have been keeping me here with hospitals and medicines?

TERRI: It sounds like there are people that need you to stay alive.

POPE: Exactly. Some want me dead and others want me to live, at any cost. No one's asked me what I want either.

*Terri gets out from under the covers and sits on the edge of the bed, next to the Pope. The tube is connected to her stomach.*

TERRI: Well, it's not a bad start. We already have something in common.

*The Pope feels awkward and starts toward his bed.*

TERRI: I'm sorry. Did I offend you?

*The Pope stops between the two beds and turns to Terri.*

POPE: It's just that I'm not used to sitting next to a woman...  
*(He keeps walking)*  
...and least of all, one that still has her umbilical cord! Ha ha ha!

TERRI: Well, you won't laugh at my jokes but at least you laugh at your own.

*The Pope sits on the edge of his bed.*

POPE: The thing is I've been hearing that John Paul, George and Ringo joke for 26 years.

TERRI: Well, it's no wonder. You chose the names of the most prolific half of the Beatles, you're the Pope, and you're the successor of Peter, who's known as the rock of the Church, right? There you have it: John, Paul, Rock and Pope! It sounds more like a radio station than something religious!

POPE: *(harsh)*  
Mind your words! The fact that we're dead does not entitle you to disrespect my office.

TERRI: *(ashamed)*  
I apologize. It's the first time I've ever shared a room with a Pope.

*Terry starts playing with the tube until she removes it from her stomach.*

POPE: What are you doing?

TERRI: I'm just not hungry... To that such an easy thing to do became a topic of national debate.

POPE: It's not easy deciding over the life of other people, and not all of us have every right to decide for ourselves. The beginning and the end of life are decisions that only God can make.

TERRI: Aha. So, according to you, we wouldn't be able to decide whether we wanted to go on living or not, even if we could communicate.

POPE: I have no problem communicating.

TERRI: You're really lucky. I can't. If I could only utter a few words, I'd tell them to put an end to this torture. It's torture for me, for my husband, for everyone. This vegetable of a body isn't me. Like I said, I died 15 years ago.

POPE: So you think the doctors did you a disservice by saving your life.

TERRI: They didn't save my life. They used their technology to keep a set of organs running, just a part of me. Too bad they left the brain out.

POPE: But your soul is alive.

TERRI: My soul? Wasn't my soul in my smile, in the way I looked lovingly at my husband, the way I hugged my mother, my laughter? Where do you see a soul in this motionless body?

POPE: That body breaths thanks to the Divine Breath. Your presence in this world serves a purpose that you do not need to be aware of.

TERRI: That is your assumption. Also, *(she gets up, annoyed)* I don't have to serve any purpose that I am not aware of or that I don't want to serve... Excuse me, I haven't done my morning exercise in 15 years.

*Terri begins a rather bizarre exercise routine.*

POPE: Good idea! I'm going to use this quiet time do my spiritual exercises.

*The Pope stands next to Terri and begins praying out loud. Terri watches him and continues exercising. The Pope tries to get Terri to join in his rites, he chants a Gregorian melody and gestures so Terri will sing along. Terri tries to follow the melody without interrupting her exercise.*

*The Pope and Terri chant a Gregorian melody. Still singing, Terri tries to get the Pope to imitate her movements and work out with her. The situation goes back and forth until the Pope is exercising and Terri is praying, until the Pope is completely exhausted and, out of breath, lies back on the bed.*

TERRI: *(interrupting her exercise)*  
Are you alright?

POPE: *(breathing heavily)*  
Yes, yes, it's just the lack of habit...

TERRI: That's odd! With all those Retreat Houses you support for people to go do their exercises...  
*(in a reproachful, maternal tone)* Hmm... seems to me like you don't practice what you preach...

POPE: They're spiritual exercises! May I remind you that I am the Pope!

*Terri walks toward the window, slightly pulls back the curtain and peeks outside.*

TERRI: Oh, look! There's thousands of people out there! All those candles! And look at those children singing; I bet it's all for you.

*The Pope gets up heavily and peeks out the other side of the curtain. Terri is still pointing out everything she sees outside, the parishioners, the crowd looking up to the window, the chanting.*

POPE: All I see are a couple of dozen demonstrators with their signs. It looks like they're talking about you... they don't want them to let you die.

TERRI: Yes, and the people on the square down there don't want you to die.

POPE: Mine pray to God. Who do yours go to?  
The State?

TERRI: The State... God... I guess people just go to whom ever they think is more powerful. *(pause)*  
And the persons standing out there aren't "mine". I have nothing to do with them. I don't even know who they are.

POPE: And those who are praying for me, I don't know if they want me to live or to die in peace.

*Suddenly Terri stops looking out the window and stares at the Pope.*

TERRI: And tell me... Do you feel you died in peace?

*The Pope sinks into a meditative state and slowly walks to his bed. Terri's gaze follows him.*

POPE: I wish I knew why I'm here, why you're here with me, what is this place...

*Terri sits next to the Pope.*

TERRI: Good! Now we're getting somewhere...  
It seems you don't have all the answers anymore.

POPE: Do you have the answer?

TERRI: No, but I don't claim I have it. I wouldn't dare to say I know what God wants from me, or anybody else.

POPE: But it's obvious God wants us here, for us to go through this.

TERRI: Go through this? What is this?  
Is it a punishment to you? A test?

POPE: In light of everything, I would like to believe this is a threshold of some sort.

TERRI: Oh, I get it, like this is Purgatory and I'm a demon who's here to mortify you.

POPE: Well, I wouldn't put it in those terms.

TERRI: Let's see, so what would this be for me? What do you think? I just died too.

POPE: Don't set that trap for me. You're very clever. If you expect me to tell you that you are in front of a saint and in the threshold of Heaven, even I don't believe that anymore.

TERRI: So you don't think I'm a demon either.

POPE: No, I don't. There are some who think I am.

TERRI: Well... I don't think the communists have your picture hanging on the wall. How involved were you with the fall of the Berlin Wall?

POPE: The Berlin Wall fell like the Walls of Jericho! But that doesn't make me a demon in your eyes, I hope.

TERRI: No, to the Republicans you were a hero.

POPE: And what am I to you?

TERRI: A man who fulfilled the mission he was entrusted with. A man who missed out on a woman's caress. A man... that's it, a man.

POPE: I had my share of caresses, the children, the youngsters, my conscience...

TERRI: That's all good and well, but they're no substitute for a woman's touch.

POPE: And my mother's caress, while I had her.

TERRI: How old were you when you lost her?

POPE: Just a boy, far too young.

TERRI: I'm sorry. What was her name?

POPE: Emilia. She taught me to pray. She knew I would become a priest...

“...On this, your white grave,  
the flowers of life in white...

Oh, mother, can such loving cease?”

TERRI: What was that?

POPE: The first poem I ever wrote.  
I was 19 years old.

TERRI: A love poem, a love that hurts...

POPE: Ten years of pain, ten years she'd been dead,  
poor thing. I was at school... I'm scared!

*The Pope falls to his knees and prays, trembling like a frightened boy, at Terri's feet. They compose a pictorial "Adoration". Terri puts her hand on the Pope's head in a motherly gesture.*

POPE: *(sobbing)*  
I knew something was going to happen...

TERRI: I feel weak.

POPE: Read me the Jericho story again, mom.  
The part where the walls crumble down.

TERRI: You're going to be a great man when you  
grow up, Karol, a holy man.

*Terri takes a Bible and reads the Jericho passage in a soft voice.*

POPE: Why didn't father come to tell me?  
Why did he have to send the teacher  
to tell me you were dead?

*Terri drops the arm that was holding the book.*

TERRI: I can't go on; my chest hurts.

POPE: I'm scared, mom, I'm so scared! Don't leave me  
alone. Everybody leaves me! Edmund, my  
brother, he left too, mom. The fever took him,  
and I wasn't there with him. ...and father!  
Daddy too, he was all I had left, my companion  
in everything, he closed his eyes and left, and  
I wasn't with him either... and the war came,  
mom! And they were taking everybody, putting  
them in trains, killing them in the streets, mom!  
They left me alone!

TERRI: *(sniffing the air)*  
What's that smell? It smells like something's  
burning.

POPE: It's them. Auschwitz is near, and the wind  
carries the smell from the ovens to Wadowice.  
It is the smell of my friends, burning. Do you  
remember them? The boys from school!

*The Pope buries his face in his hands and breaks down crying, on his knees. Terri gets up and marches around the room, imitating the Germans' goose step.*

TERRI: *(in a voice of command and with a German accent)*

Come on, Pole, where are they hiding?  
Tell me one Jew's hiding place and  
I'll give you a sack of potatoes.

POPE: *(with a childish, fearful voice)*

I don't know anything, sir. I work at the quarry.  
I'm strong, hardworking, sturdy...

TERRI: *(German accent)*

You're not a part of the resistance, are you?

POPE: *(working the quarry)*

No, sir. I'm a good Christian, that's all.

TERRI: *(German accent)*

A filthy Pole, that's what you are.  
Keep working or I'll send you to the camp  
with your Jew friends.

*The Pope keeps working with a pickaxe against the floor.*

*Terri interrupts her military march abruptly. She watches the Pope working and comes near him, limping and looking very weak, until she is on her knees next to him and pretends to be working.*

POPE:     *(whispering)*  
How did you get here?

TERRI:    I escaped Auschwitz. I put on men's clothes and hid among the quarry workers.

POPE:     When the siren sounds and we finish work, walk next to me, don't leave my side.

TERRI:    If they find out I'm a woman and a Jew they'll kill me right away, or if I'm lucky they'll send me back to the concentration camp. If they find out you're with me, you might suffer the same fate.

POPE:     Keep quiet and do what I tell you.

*The Pope keeps working. Terri gets up and looks towards the audience.*

TERRI: When we left the quarry, Karol Wojtyla carried me on his back and took me to the train station. He got me on a train and a while later he brought me food. My name is Edith Schiere, I live... and I never had the chance to thank the Pope for what he did for me.

*Terri walks towards her bed, connects the tube to her stomach and lies down in a fetal position, sucking her thumb. The Pope comes out of his quarry-working trance and watches Terri.*

POPE: What's wrong?

TERRI: I want my mom.

POPE: And from what I know, your mother wants you too.

*Terri sits on the side of the bed and throws a tantrum.*

TERRI: Yes, they want me. They want me!  
They want me for themselves. They want me to eat, to eat everything and clear the plate!

*The Pope sits on her bed and looks at her sternly.*

TERRI: And I ate everything and cleared the plate, like they wanted. And they still want me to eat! To be plugged into this damn machine!

*Terri rips out the tube and tosses it aside.*

TERRI: They want me... even if it's in pieces. All that love made me "gorgeous". Just picture me, 5 feet tall and weighing 200 pounds. Look at all the Terri they had for themselves! You can't imagine how hard it was to lose 60 pounds and find a boyfriend. I was so pretty!

POPE: Aha. And what did you do to lose weight?

TERRI: First dieting. Then the other thing.  
I never wanted to be fat again.

POPE: What's "the other thing"?

TERRI: Nothing... I didn't want to be fat, I told you. I wanted to be pretty for my husband and for myself, but they didn't care.

POPE: Do you know the commandment "Thou shalt honor thy father and thy mother"?

- TERRI: Do you know how far they were willing to go to keep me with them? A doctor they got from I don't know where told them if they amputated my arms and legs I might recover. Some recovery. They would have them mutilate me completely rather than let me go. Thank goodness my husband got the judge to stop them from hacking me to pieces. These are the parents I should honor? This is how my parents honor life? Letting them cut off my arms and legs? Driving my husband away from me? Making us spend every dollar we had on a bunch of absurd lawsuits and trials?
- POPE: They responded to the mandate to honor life.
- TERRI: What life? Breathing and eating through a tube? You think that is life?
- POPE: You know I mean the spirit and the right to life. I told you not to set traps.
- TERRI: But, Your Holiness, don't you believe that the spirit transcends the body and matter? What are we right now, you and I?

POPE: You called me "Your Holiness".  
Is it possible or was it a mistake?

TERRI: Now you're the one setting traps.

POPE: Come, look out the window again, look at the crowd out there.

*Terri opens the left side of the curtain again.*

TERRI: Yes, there's thousands of them.  
What's your point?

POPE: Each one of those dots you see there is a life, a universe, with problems, sufferings, hopes. If you see them from afar they're just little moving dots. If you came closer you could see their eyes, hear their breath, know that there's a whole world inside of them.

TERRI: And, tell me, do you know what each of those little dots wants to do with its life, individually?

POPE: No, of course not.

*Terri sits on her bed, facing the Pope. They are face to face, looking at each other.*

- TERRI: So why do they assume they know what I want to do with my supposed life? Because, surely, the people there in the square think the same that those who are standing in front of my hospital room holding signs.
- POPE: No, that's just it, Terri. I don't know what you want, just as I don't know what each of those persons spending the night in vigil in the square wants. But I do know that God wants us to do with our lives and those of our neighbors. And that is what the protesters are demanding with their signs. They don't think they have a right to know what you want; they want God's word to be upheld.
- TERRI: And how do they know if God actually wants that?
- POPE: Terri, my child, that knowledge, that answer you keep asking of me, is called "Faith". Without faith, the transcendent does not exist, and without the transcendent, there is no hope of survival for the human species. Every totalitarian regime that ruled the 20th Century only prevailed because the people lost touch with the transcendent.

TERRI: That answer doesn't work on me. I believe in God, I have faith. But it's precisely that faith that is telling me that God can't want me to live by force, like a vegetable and against my will.

POPE: God gave us the life we have to follow the path of Jesus.

TERRI: So which is it, then? Is life a divine gift or a loaner from God?  
*(Terri plops down on the bed and covers herself with the pillow)*  
Your contradictions are driving me crazy!

*The Pope turns around immediately so as not to see Terri's half-naked body.*

TERRI: *(Cont.)* On one hand, you preach the truth of reason and logic, and on the other you defend the mysterious and inexplicable; you defend individual rights but at the same time you impose a dogma that goes against all those rights! How can you be at Harvard University talking about science one day, and the next praying at the grave of a worker who performed the miracle of being two places at the same time?

*The Pope perches himself on the edge of his bed and stays silent. Terri gets up and walks toward him to scold him.*

TERRI: Now I see why you travelled so much.  
You wanted to be everywhere, like God, right?  
Be The Pope of every religion, that's why you  
went all the way to India, Israel, China...

POPE: Do you plan to keep attacking me for  
much longer?

TERRI: I'm not attacking you. At most, I'm defending  
myself. I'm defending my right to choose how to  
live and how to die. A right nobody gave me.  
And I'm just putting you in front of yourself,  
of who you were for the entire world, not just  
those praying for you in the square. I want to put  
you in front of yourself just like you want to put  
me in front of myself.

*The Pope stands majestically.*

POPE: Do you think I ignore my critics? Can you really  
think, even for one minute, that I am foolish  
enough not to know how they mercilessly  
saddle contradictions and sins on me?

*Terri feels intimidated by The Pope's presence and backs down.*

POPE: I could recite for you each and every accusation and censorship that my detractors have uttered.

I can also add the praise that is not at all flattering. Ha! There are those who try to flatter me saying my travels reveal my past as an actor, as if they were artistic tours! Do you know what I think of that?

TERRI: Really? You were an actor? What kind of actor?

POPE: The most observant, the most curious, the least star-like, if you will. The theatre was more than a vocation to me. It was a refuge, a battle field, a way of resisting the Nazis' oppression. I was in the Theatre of the Word and then in the Rhapsodic Theatre, underground.

TERRI: I don't get it, what good is an underground theater? How many casualties did it cost the Germans?

POPE: You should ask how many Polish lives were saved, how much of Poland was saved.

POPE        *(Cont.)* The Theatre of the Word was exactly that: the exercise of the word, of the Polish language. The same at the Rhapsody. Polish authors, Polish literature, Polish history.

TERRI:     I don't know anything about the theater.  
              But fighting a war in a theater?

POPE:       *(laughs)*  
              Hahaha! The same question Stalin asked  
              *(imitates Stalin)*  
              "How many divisions does the Pope's army have?"

TERRI:     I don't know what you're laughing about.

POPE:       Go to the Kremlin and tell me how many communists are left to ask the same question.

TERRI:     You're proud of your victory, huh?

POPE:       You know what fills me with pleasure?  
              The French Revolution was the empire of terror. If anything was gained, it was at the expense of many lives.

POPE (Cont.) The Russian Revolution was the same, the Czar's family murdered in some dark corner, the pogroms... But the Cold War ended without shedding a single drop of blood.

TERRI: And do you think it was a revolution, a step forward or backward towards regaining lost ground?

POPE: History never goes backwards.

*Terri paces the room as if trying to memorize.*

TERRI: "History never goes backwards"... "History never goes backwards"... "History never goes backwards"... "History never goes backwards." "History never goes backwards."... "History never goes backwards."... "History never goes backwards..." Isn't that how an actor memorizes his lines?

POPE: You already confessed you know nothing about the theatre.

TERRI: Yes, I have... had two theater books at home: "Hamlet, Prince of Denmark" was one, and the other had a similar title... a king from one of those old countries...

POPE: A king from an old country...?

TERRI: That's it! I remember, it was "Hamlet, Prince of Denmark" and "Oedipus the King of Sophocles".

POPE: But... Sophocles was not a country... bah!

*The Pope makes a gesture of giving up and walks away, his back to Terri.*

POPE: I often asked myself if by putting a demon to sleep, I didn't wake a monster...

TERRI: What do you mean?

POPE: That sometimes the proud ignorance with which most Americans go about the world these days frightens me.

TERRI: *(ironic)*  
We may not be as cultured as Europeans, but you buy all our movies and records.

POPE: I'm not in a mood for a Byzantine discussion on markets and consumption.

TERRI: That "Byzantine discussion" thing brings to mind some issues that are still being debated at the Vatican, even in the 21st Century...

POPE: I should tell you I'm sleepy, but it's odd, I'm not sleepy, or hungry, or in any pain...

TERRI: We're dead, remember?

POPE: Dead in one life, but about to be reborn into another.

TERRI: I hope I'll have better luck this time, because the one that just ended...

POPE: Yes, you won't catch me saying "all past time was better".

TERRI: Well, you've nothing to complain about, you lived a pretty long life, 84 years, right? You had a good job...

POPE: A good job? I had to work until the last day of my life!

TERRI: Ha! But with all expenses paid and without having to worry about your children's inheritance.

POPE: Why don't we open a circus in our next life?  
We would do well as clowns.

TERRI: Well, relax a little. We have a lot ahead of us.

POPE: Do you think we'll be in this room for all eternity?

TERRI: I haven't really made plans yet, but I don't think they'd stop us from leaving.

POPE: That's so funny!  
Do you think we're invisible to mortals?

TERRI: And what would you do if you were invisible?

POPE: I don't know, I'd roam the world and help people without them knowing. That would strengthen their faith in God.

TERRI: You can't stop working for one second, can you?  
I told you, relax. Someone will take over your job in a few days.

POPE: And what would you like to do?

TERRI: Let's see... Well, there's something weird that I love...

POPE: What is it?

TERRI: Dancing! I'm dying to dance.

POPE: No, please don't die again.  
We'd have to start all over again.

TERRI: Don't try to evade me by being funny. Are you going to disappoint a lady who wants to dance?

POPE: I'm probably not the best dancer.  
I don't even know how to dance.  
It's an art they didn't include in the cult.  
We've got singing, oratory, poetry, theater,  
even plastic arts, but no one thought to include  
dance in Christian liturgy.

TERRI: And you've never wondered why that is?

POPE: I suppose to draw a difference from pagan rituals.

TERRI: Jews dance, and nobody could be less pagan, right?

POPE: True, but only since Hasidism. Our reformers were more severe and austere.

TERRI: Okay, okay... we know I can't beat you when it comes to culture. But I believe I mentioned the word "dancing". Remember?

POPE: And what would you like to dance?

TERRI: As far as I can remember, I used to love to swing.

POPE: I fear you're expecting me to ask you to dance. Don't even dream about it.

TERRI: Come on. What have you got to lose?

POPE: My self-esteem. I may be a lousy dancer, and I don't want to make a spectacle out of myself.

TERRI: Come on, I'll teach you.

POPE: And what do you want me to do?

*Terri comes up to the Pope, takes one of his hands, and puts the other one on her waist.*

TERRI: There. See how easy it is!

POPE: I'm not supposed to do this.

TERRI: You know the moral rules for life after life?

POPE: I think touching you is highly inappropriate.

TERRI: I think we'll both have to redefine our ideas of what is and what isn't appropriate in the future.

*A swing orchestra theme begins.*

TERRI: Just let yourself flow with it. Let the music sound in your head, in your body, down to your feet.

*Terri starts moving, setting a rhythm for the Pope, who remains motionless at first, until Terri makes him move so as not to lose contact with her. Clumsy at first, but improving fast, the Pope ends up leading Terri as an accomplished dancer, until he ends up falling on his bed when the song ends. Terri looks at him, standing and laughing.*

***(This dance may optionally be used as entr'acte.)***

TERRI: So? That wasn't so terrible, was it?

POPE: *(out of breath)*

I never thought it would be terrible. Just inappropriate.

TERRI: And do you still think that?

POPE: I had a very strange feeling when I touched your waist and your hand. I didn't sense sin or temptation in the touch.

TERRI: Wow, you really know how to flatter a lady.

POPE: Would you be flattered if I felt guilty, under the weight of a transgression?

TERRI: I'd be flattered, as a woman, if I could arouse a certain male restlessness in you that you didn't know how to handle.

POPE: If you're looking to become the woman who made the priest renounce his vows and his principles, overcome by passion, forget it.

TERRI: No, that might have seemed fun when I was a teenager. Now I have higher motives.

POPE: Such as?

TERRI: I'm not letting you in on all my secrets.

*Terri takes a mirror from the night stand, kneels on her bed and begins to groom. The Pope watches her and sits on his bed.*

POPE:       *(stroking his face)*

I should shave. They're going to come see me  
in a few hours.

*While Terri does her hair and makeup, the Pope shaves,  
combs his hair and hums sacred hymns.*

POPE:       It's strange... I don't miss anyone from  
the earthly world, you know?

TERRI:      *(still grooming and without paying much  
attention)*  
Yeah...

POPE:       Seriously. It's a sensation of lightness  
I'd never felt before. I just stopped  
caring about everybody.

*The Pope finishes grooming and paces around the room,  
feeling better now that he's cleaned up.*

POPE:       And I'm ready to reunite with those  
who are coming.

TERRI:      Who? The doctors?

POPE: No, my loved ones, who are on this side.  
I can't wait to embrace each of them!

*Terri reacts and stops grooming. She sits, thoughtful.*

TERRI: I hadn't thought of that. Do you think our dead  
will come to greet us?

POPE: It's not just that I think they will, I feel it!  
They're already on their way.

*Terri goes back to her makeup, making little of the matter.*

TERRI: Well, I don't think there will be anyone waiting for  
me. My grandparents, maybe...  
*(reacting)* Oh! Elvis! I'll get to see Elvis!

POPE: No, Elvis isn't dead.

TERRI: *(grabbing her head)*  
Oh, no! Not another one!

*The Pope looks into nothingness, as if in a trance, with his eyes welling up with happiness, and he falls to his knees facing the audience 3/4.*

POPE: Thank you, Lord, for your kindness, for your magnificence, for your generosity!

*The Pope lies face down with open arms, forming a cross, and prays quietly. Terri looks at him and continues doing her makeup.*

POPE: Mother! Father! Edmund! Friends! It's Lolek!  
I'm here!

*Terri gets down from her bed, crouches down next to the Pope and tenderly caresses his head.*

TERRI: Poor angel! Does he really think they're all coming?

POPE: *(sitting on the floor and with his hands on Terri's shoulders)*  
Yes, I know, yes, Terri, Teresa, Teresa Schiavo, Teresa Slave, they're coming! I know it!

*Terri looks at the Pope, bewildered and confused. She gets up and walks away from him.*

TERRI: Do you think that rattling me will make me come round to your faith?

POPE: I just feel your soul is numb, lethargic.  
Maybe you need a good jolt to wake up.

TERRI: I told you, I have faith. What you can't seem to accept is that my faith can be different from yours.

POPE: Aren't you Christian?

TERRI: Yes, but that doesn't mean I'm going to kneel at your feet to get your blessing.

POPE: I don't know what would be so wrong about that. Thousands of people kneel before me every day.

TERRI: Oh yeah? Now I see where President Clinton got his inspiration.

POPE: *(taking a deep breath)*  
If it weren't because you spent 15 years in a vegetative state, I'd say you've been watching too much TV.

TERRI: Well, it's basically the same thing. And you made quite a few appearances in the silly box yourself. I might as well have spent these 15 years sitting immobile in front of the television.

POPE: If electronic pastors can use the TV,  
why shouldn't I? Now you're criticizing me  
for being up to date?

TERRI: Yes, advanced technology for retrograde ideas.  
You regressed on a lot of things that even  
Paul VI had moved along.

POPE: Aha. Such as?

TERRI: For instance, let's say I accept to kneel  
at your feet. Would you make me a cardinal?

POPE: Don't be stupid!

*The Pope turns around, enraged. Terri falls to her knees at  
his feet.*

TERRI: Holy Father! Make me a cardinal.  
You named 200 of them, what's one more?  
Go on, be a good sport.

POPE: You're trying my patience.

TERRI: So, you won't make me a cardinal?

POPE: No!

TERRI: A bishop?

POPE: I believe our audience is over.

TERRI: Even to say mass at the altar?

POPE: I see you are determined to irritate me.

TERRI: Why won't you let me do any of these things?

POPE: These are not tasks for a woman. If you want, take your vows and enter a novitiate.

TERRI: Oh, a novitiate. And how far up can a nun go?

POPE: That ambition that's driving you is not a good counselor.

TERRI: Don't call it ambition. Let's call it admiration, let's say I want to become Pope, like you, because I admire you.

POPE: That's impossible. Would you like to take my place?

TERRI: *(jumping around the room, amused)*  
What a great idea! Let's switch roles!

POPE: The role you're offering me doesn't seem very fun.

TERRI: Yes! Come on! Just imagine it.  
What would you do if you were a woman?

POPE: Don't even think about it! *(pause)* It's funny to think about what you would do if you were Pope.

TERRI: I'll tell you if you play with me. You're Terri, before I got sick, of course, and I'm you, that means I'm the Pope.

POPE: *(withdrawing to his bed)*  
Don't insist. It's ridiculous.

TERRI: Well, suit yourself. I'll play anyway.

*Terri takes a sheet from her bed and wraps it around herself like a papal tunic.*

TERRI: *(Imitating a papal attitude)*  
Today, that I stand before a woman, I shall speak of woman's role, since the Church wishes to contribute to defend the dignity, role, and rights of women...

*The Pope nods his head, without looking at Terri.*

TERRI: First, I would like to express my deep gratitude to women for the immense, extraordinary, selfless way in which they help mankind.

POPE: *(turning towards Terri)*  
Very good! That's right.

TERRI: So if I thank the women for helping mankind, it means that for me mankind are just the men.

POPE: *(gets up angrily)*  
I didn't say that!

TERRI: Didn't you? Are you sure? I'll continue...  
*(assumes papal attitude again)*  
The dignity and rights of women, in the light of God's word... In the Book of Genesis, 2:18, seeing Adam's loneliness, God intervenes and says: "It is not good that the man should be alone, I will make him a helper fit for him", end of quote. So the creation of woman is based on the principle of help, but his help is mutual, complementary, each acting in his or her specific role.

POPE: *(nodding)*

That sounds a lot more like what I said.

TERRI: Let me get this straight, women of the world:

Don't even think of taking our roles!

POPE: *(menacing)*

You are twisting my words!

*Terri puts a sheet over herself like a ghost.*

TERRI: You can't intimidate me. See? I'm dead, and

I can turn into a ghost if I want.

*(twirling around the room)* Boooooo!

*The Pope sits on his bed and watches her.*

TERRI: *(in a ghost voice)*

I continue. The Church would like to thank the Holy Trinity for the "mystery of woman", booooo!

POPE: Yes, of course. The divine mystery.

TERRI: *(takes off the sheet)*

The mystery of how women have endured for centuries with their mouths shut!

POPE: Women with their mouths shut?  
You won't stop talking.

TERRI: Didn't you use to be an actor? Don't you like the  
game? I've still got plenty of text to deliver.

POPE: Go on, go on. I'm not listening, anyway.

TERRI: I most certainly will, thank you very much. "The  
mystery of woman", "the mystery of life".  
So many mysteries, so few truths.  
I understand the game now, whatever you say  
is a "Truth", and annoying questions are  
"mysteries".

POPE: (*contemptuous*)  
I'm not listening.

TERRI: I'm listening to you. You're saying:  
"I emphatically condemn sexual violence.  
But raped women should be capable of an heroic  
love and they cannot have an abortion."

POPE: Then do you realize how mysterious  
the Universe is?

TERRI: It's not the Universe. It's you who won't let them get an abortion.

POPE: I told you at the beginning. I have a serious responsibility.

TERRI: *(almost begging)*  
Exactly! You had the world in your hands! You could've changed the course of history, take that seven-league step, and instead you decided to turn back.

POPE: That is not why I was called.

TERRI: Many are called, few are chosen.

POPE: I was chosen.

TERRI: Yes, but once you were chosen you could have kicked the board, changed the game.

POPE: Your innocence is sweet.

TERRI: Why? Who chose you? What for?

POPE: *(Meditates)*  
Well, at this stage I guess I could tell you.

*The Pope moves towards Terri and whispers in her ear.*

TERRI: Oh... *(pause, then hesitating nervously)*  
Uhm... should we look out the window and see what the weather is like? I wouldn't want it to rain tomorrow, it would ruin my funeral.

POPE: *(smiling)*  
See? We can be at peace, and not at each other's throats.

TERRI: Do you know why I'm not at your throat?  
Because you're not the Pope anymore. You were until you stopped breathing in that bed an hour ago. I told you, you're just a man to me.

POPE: Aha. You're pardoning my life...  
bah, what my life was.

TERRI: And what answers could you give me? I still have plenty of ammo: the Crusades, the Inquisition, the conquest of America, the Indian genocide, the WWII genocide...

POPE: No, please, don't.  
I've talked to death about all that.

TERRI: Yes, but you didn't give a straight answer.

POPE: And what would you have me do?  
Sacrifice myself in public?

TERRI: That's exactly what you spent the last 26 years doing, throughout the entire planet.  
It was a sorry sight, watching you on the news, dragging your years, your Parkinson's and your guilt all over the world.

POPE: My guilt?

TERRI: Didn't you ask for forgiveness and understanding for all the calamities the Church has been committing for centuries? That's a guilty plea.  
You're so haughty you didn't even stop to wonder if they forgave you.

POPE: I wanted to reach the Catholics' conscience.

TERRI: Catholics are a small part of humanity, 700 million in a world of six billion.  
I think you were aiming a little higher than that.

POPE: Terri... What's your point? Did you make sure you're without sin before casting the first stone?

TERRI: I told you, I'm not confessing  
all my secrets to you.

POPE: At this time, confession might be  
your only way out.

TERRI: Confess to whom? A bundle of contradictions?  
The infallibility of the Pope?

POPE: *(smiling ironically)*  
Ha! Papal infallibility... You, Terri, are capable of  
dismantling a castle that took centuries to build.  
Why do you do it?

*The Pope embraces Terri tenderly, who receives his contact  
with surprise and bafflement. Immediately Terri bursts into  
tears and falls to her knees at the Pope's feet.*

TERRI: Father, I want to confess! I want to confess  
before a father, before a man who will hold me!  
You're not the only one who missed hugs!

*The Pope kneels before Terri and holds her.*

POPE: I am your brother now, Terri, your father... a  
man. Let it out.

TERRI: I... *(she builds courage and looks him in the eye)*  
I lied to you, Holy Father. I am a Catholic.

POPE: And why?

TERRI: My life was a lie, my death was a lie. I couldn't stand my body, being fat, and lying was the only way out I could find. When I was little I ate in secret, so no one would humiliate me with their advice. Then I discovered the treatments, the pills, and I never wanted to be fat again. So I became a liar... and bulimic. After every meal I'd excuse myself to go to the bathroom and make myself throw up. I threw up in the face of the whole world, my parents, the cheerleaders at school, who got all the best boyfriends. I became bulimic and no one could help me. I had married, I wanted kids but I couldn't get pregnant in that state. I sought medical help, and it was worse. Until my body just said enough, and when I was coming out of the bathroom I fell to the floor and everything went dark...

*The Pope lifts Terri and holds her like a child. Terri weeps.*

POPE: And why did you lie to me too?

TERRI: Because you called freedom a "culture of death" and submission "a culture of love". Because you're just like those fools who stand in front of the hospital holding signs and want to decide everything for everyone. Because you use the word "life" to sow pain. Because you're like the crusaders, who destroy and kill in the name of Jesus. Because... I told you, Holy Father, I died 15 years ago and I could see the world of men from there. Because you have also known pain and I hoped you would realize the only truth there is: that the eyes of the soul open for the first time the moment you die.

*Terri walks to her bed and lies down.*

TERRI: (Cont.) To be accepted, to be loved, I had to face my compulsive craving for food. Now the craving is gone, and they want to force-feed me.

*Terri throws the feeding tube next to the bed. The Pope runs and kneels at the feet of Terri's bed.*

POPE: *(after a silence)*

Terri, Teresa Slave, I kneel before you and humbly request the sacrament of confession.

*The Pope bends forward and Terri, kneeling on the bed, holds the Pope's head to her chest.*

POPE: *(to Terri)*

I believe with perfect faith in the Incarnation, the Death and the Resurrection. In this final trance, having found you an instant after dying, Terri, you showed me that incarnation exists, it happens, it is the past, that death is the present, and resurrection the only future.

*(to Heaven)*

Lord, I ask that you forgive my sins, that whoever succeeds me may correct my mistakes, that the right to life may return to the hands of its legitimate owners, and that you free me from my vows so that I may leave this world in the arms of a woman, those arms that life took from me.

*Terry and the Pope get up, each pushing their bed towards the center of the stage.*

*They each lie in their bed, the Pope face up and Terri puts her arms around him from her bed. The Pope holds her too.*

*The light of dawn comes in through the window.  
Music starts softly.*

*The cleaning lady comes in the room, sweeps the floor and returns the beds to their original position, without looking at the dead patients.*

*The doctor comes in with the nurse. The cleaning lady leaves. The doctor goes to Terri and takes her pulse.*

DOCTOR: Nurse, prepare a press release informing of  
Terri's death.

*The doctor moves to the Pope's bed. The nurse follows him.  
The doctor looks solemnly at the Pope.*

DOCTOR: Have the hospital director call the Vatican and tell them His Holiness has returned to the Lord's side. And absolute discretion. They might want to take some time before they make the news public.

*The doctor and the nurse leave.*

*Terri wakes up gently and looks around.*

TERRI: Are they gone?

*The "Lacrimosa" from Mozart's Requiem sounds.*

*Terri listens, she gets up and goes to the right end of the window. She opens the curtain a little.*

TERRI: There seems to be a funeral at the Vatican.

*The Pope gets up from his bed, goes to the left side of the curtain and looks. Both are hidden by the curtain.*

*The Pope and Terri come out from behind the curtain with angel wings. They walk toward their beds and stop halfway. They look at each other silently. Like a mirror reflection, they both make a naughty gesture, joyous, smiling. They run to their beds and put them back together in the center of the stage. They lie down and hold each other, angelically, tenderly. The music plays louder. Mozart's choir sings: "Amen".*

*Curtain.*

**THE END**

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