

The Pope and the Witch

(1989)

by Dario Fo

*Liberated from
capitalist control
to educate the masses
by
Socialist Stories*

Act One

Scene One

The corridor outside the POPE's apartments inside the Vatican. A CARDINAL walks on, deep in prayer. This is the POPE's private secretary, CARDINAL VIALLI. There is a warbling sound. He stops the prayer, raises his cassock and takes out a mobile phone. He raises the aerial.

VIALLI: Vialli. Yes? Yes, yes, I know he's late. But I don't know where he is! I'm only his private secretary, Schillaci, how the hell would I know? *(Crosses himself quickly)* The Sisters, you know what they're like, they protect him like he was the Turin shroud. Here's one of them now, hold on.

A NUN comes out of the POPE's apartments in a tearing hurry. She is SISTER GABRIELLA, the POPE's closest domestic aide.

Oh Sister!

But SISTER GABRIELLA does a little curtsy to VIALLI on the run.

GABRIELLA: Can't stop, your Eminence.

VIALLI: Oh she's far too busy to talk to a mere Cardinal. Next time there's a conclave why don't we simply ask Sister Gabriella to choose a new Pope. She runs the place anyway. Yes, yes, alright, don't panic. I'll look in his apartments, he's probably hiding in a cupboard.

VIALLI puts his mobile phone under his cassock but sees SISTER GABRIELLA appear before he has time to put

2 THE POPE AND THE WITCH

down the aerial. She's carrying a tray with a jug and glass on it, covered by a tea towel.

Sister Gabriella!

GABRIELLA: Can't stop, your Eminence.

She's about to run into the apartments but stops dead in her tracks when she sees his raised cassock.

AAH!

VIALLI looks down and simply pushes the aerial down through the cassock – which looks quite rude and clever at the same time.

Good God! (*Crosses herself quickly*)

VIALLI: Cardinal Schillaci.

She gives him a look.

GABRIELLA: I must go, Eminence. Emergency.

But VIALLI steps in front of her.

VIALLI: Where is the Holy Father? He's required downstairs.

GABRIELLA: (*anxious*) He's . . . he's . . . contemplating.

VIALLI: He contemplates from five-thirty in the morning until twenty-five to six, even I know that! Now where is he and what's this under here you're so keen to deliver?

VIALLI takes the tea towel off the jug.

GABRIELLA: The Holy Father will be fine . . . honestly.

VIALLI: Sister. For the first time in the history of the Church, for the first time since our Lord (*They both cross themselves*) stood on a rock, turned to St Peter and said . . .

VIALLI can't quite remember what our Lord said, so

GABRIELLA discreetly prompts him.

GABRIELLA: 'Upon this rock –'

VIALLI: 'Upon this rock – I know, I know – you shall build

my church.' For the first time since then, a Pontiff has called a press conference. To address the world's media. Live. Face to face. The press. The radio. The television.

As he talks VIALLI absent-mindedly pours himself a drink from the jug and starts to drink, much to GABRIELLA's discomfort. She's also getting anxious about the POPE, looking continuously offstage, but she is a junior to VIALLI and cannot simply leave.

GABRIELLA: I wouldn't drink that, your Eminence.

VIALLI: And why? He wants to be up to date, he says. He wants to be accessible, he says. People don't want their Popes 'accessible'. They want their Popes mysterious, remote, aloof – dignified. They don't want a chummy Pope chatting away on daytime television. 'Good Morning, housewives, this is John Paul the Second with another edition of *Cooking the Catholic Way*.'

VIALLI drains the glass and starts to pour himself another one.

GABRIELLA: No, really –

VIALLI: So where is he, Sister Gabriella? Take me to him immediately.

GABRIELLA: Supposing . . . supposing something unexpected was to happen?

VIALLI: Any day but today, please. You know what these journalists are like. (*Drinks*)

GABRIELLA: The Holy Father's gone into spasm.

VIALLI: WHAT??

GABRIELLA: He's in crisis, he's trembling all over.

VIALLI: But how? Why? The press conference, of course! I told him it was a stupid idea. And now he's got stage fright! But we've planned it, there's nothing to worry about. We receive the questions in advance, we work out the answers. Easy! Tell him, Sister! Tell him that . . . that his Holiness is

4 THE POPE AND THE WITCH

not suddenly going to be asked to lift his cassock and join in a chorus of 'I'm forever blowing bubbles' with a lot of toothless old ladies who only want to show their knickers on television!

VIALLI gulps down another glass.

GABRIELLA: No, your Eminence. He's in a state about the children.

VIALLI: Whose children?

GABRIELLA: The assembly of the innocents. The children gathering in the square outside. That's what's brought this fit on.

VIALLI: But he loves children.

GABRIELLA: There're thousands of them out there. Tens of thousands. The Holy Father can't cope. Who brought them all here?

VIALLI: They're orphans mainly. Abandoned children from all over the world shipped to Rome by a charitable organisation – the International Movement for the Protection of Abandoned Children – IMPAC – IMPAC.

GABRIELLA: Orphans? Abandoned? No mummies and daddies?

VIALLI shakes head. Both go 'Aaah'.

VIALLI: Sister, stop that. When did the Pope go into spasm?

GABRIELLA: About two hours ago.

VIALLI: Two hours ago and you only tell me now?

GABRIELLA: It was his Holiness, your Eminence. 'Don't tell anyone,' he said. 'Not with all these media types around.'

VIALLI: I'm not anyone! I'm his private secretary! And private secretaries – as a general rule – tend to be informed if their superiors are having a nervous breakdown!

CARDINAL SCHILLACI hurries on from the other side.

He comes from New York and is in charge of Vatican security. He has a strong New York accent. The characters in the play who are Italian speak without specific accents; others who are 'foreign', ie non-Italian, speak in their respective accents.

SCHILLACI: Vialli! Whadya . . . whadya . . . whadya doin' with the Holy Father, whadya . . . whadya playing at, where is he?? I got . . . I got . . . y'know what I got? I got a gross of meddling trouble-making interfering pinko scumbag journalists downstairs, that's what I got, y'hear me? I got . . . I got enough of them to fill the concrete pillars of an entire freeway intersection flyover, y'know what I mean???

GABRIELLA: (*Respectfully*) Cardinal Schillaci, good morning.

SCHILLACI: How are ya? (*To VIALLI*) So?

Suddenly there is a sound of warbling again.

VIALLI: Excuse me.

He takes out his mobile phone and answers it.

Vialli. Yes?

But the warbling continues. SCHILLACI pulls out a mobile from inside his sleeve and answers it.

SCHILLACI: Yo, talk to me.

But the warbling continues. GABRIELLA coyly lifts her gown and pulls out her mobile phone. The other two look on, suitably surprised.

GABRIELLA: Sister Gabriella's mobile, good morning. Ah. Splendid. Thank you. I'll come and collect them.

She puts her phone away and starts to leave in the opposite direction from the apartments, carrying the tray. But VIALLI still holds the glass half full of liquid.

VIALLI: Sister!

GABRIELLA: I won't be a moment. (*Exits*)

6 THE POPE AND THE WITCH

VIALLI: It's a catastrophe, Schillaci. The Pope's having a fit, today of all days.

SCHILLACI: Having a fit? That is terrific, I'm telling you, that is terrific! I tell you what, I'm about to have a fit! There's some press guy down there, right? You know what he says to me? He says to me 'Cardinal Schillaci, when are you going to step outside Vatican City to face the charges held against you?' 'What charges are those?' I protest. 'The charges brought against you by the Milan police,' he says. 'And the Rome police, and the New York police, the Drug Enforcement Agency, the FBI and Interpol. Of fraud, corruption, embezzlement, tax evasion, extortion, conspiracy to pervert the course of justice and driving without due care and attention.'

VIALLI: Tsch, tsch, interfering busybodies.

SCHILLACI: Thank God for Vatican immunity.

They both cross themselves.

VIALLI: Now what about these children, Schillaci?

SCHILLACI: What children? Lying bitch.

VIALLI: The Pope is in spasm because there are a hundred thousand sprogs in St Peter's Square all expecting a few loving words this afternoon and his Holiness doesn't want to see them.

SCHILLACI: A hundred thousand, huh? Imagine the good time Herod woulda had! But never mind them, whadabout this press conference?

GABRIELLA comes back on, still carrying her tray. She ushers on the PROFESSOR. The PROFESSOR is smartly dressed and carries a briefcase.

VIALLI: Who is this man, Sister?

GABRIELLA: Professor Ridolfi, your Eminence.

VIALLI: I didn't authorise visitors – Ridolfi? Ridolfi? The TV shrink? The prime-time psychiatrist? Is that you?

PROFESSOR: One and the same your Eminence. Though I am actually a neurological surgeon, an Emeritus Professor of Advanced Psychiatry and the world's leading expert on rare and complicated nervous disorders. My card.

VIALLI: Brenda Smith?

PROFESSOR: My agent. (*To GABRIELLA*) But where is my assistant, Sister? She must have got lost down a corridor or somewhere.

ELISA: (*offstage*) Take your hands off me. (*ELISA enters, dressed as a nun*) There you are Professor! Dear, oh dear, those Swiss guards wouldn't let me through. First the metal detector alarm was set off by my fillings and then they wanted to know what this was all about. (*She holds up a bow and arrows*) Well, it's a sacred bow and arrows, obviously. A present for the Pope. But, the guards blunted the tips of the arrows and put little rubber stickers on the ends. I mean, who would want to shoot John Paul II with a bow and arrow? A machine gun, maybe.

PROFESSOR: Sister!!

VIALLI: Who are you, Sister . . . erm?

ELISA: That's right.

PROFESSOR: Where's the patient?

VIALLI: One moment, Professor. You are not an approved Vatican doctor.

GABRIELLA: It was his Holiness who asked for the Professor by name your Eminence. He'd seen him on television.

VIALLI: Oh well, in that case . . .

The PROFESSOR looks at the glass that VIALLI has been holding all the while.

PROFESSOR: Two teaspoons every four hours. At most.

VIALLI: Really? What is it? It's very tasty.

VIALLI drains the glass and puts it back on

8 THE POPE AND THE WITCH

GABRIELLA's *tray*. PROFESSOR *looks at GABRIELLA*.

GABRIELLA: The Holy Father's laxative.

They all look at VIALLI who has drunk four full glasses of the stuff. He forces a smile and tries to get himself offstage with as much decorum as he can muster, running the last few steps. SCHILLACI, who earlier had been taking a careful look at ELISA, steps forward.

SCHILLACI: One moment. Don't I know you?

ELISA: Not unless you've served time in Burundi, your Eminence.

SCHILLACI: I ain't served time anywhere! Anybody says I have's in serious trouble, Sister!

GABRIELLA: (*Discreetly*) I think the Sister meant time spent serving our Lord, your Eminence.

SCHILLACI: Oh, okay. I'm sure we met anyways. Excuse me. Listen, you guys, do what you have to do with his Holiness double quick, alright! I got the world's media downstairs expecting him any minute. I got a hall full of press guys to keep happy and you know how much they drink. I don't wanna have to break into the communion wine and wafers.

SCHILLACI leaves. GABRIELLA smiles at the other two and leads the way. The scene changes into the POPE's apartments.

Scene Two

The POPE's apartments. Large windows leading onto the balcony overlooking St Peter's Square. Several columns.

Upstage right there is a large curtain. The stage is empty. GABRIELLA leads PROFESSOR and ELISA into the middle of the room.

GABRIELLA: Your Holiness? Your Holiness?

No reply. GABRIELLA speaks quietly.

He's here somewhere, don't worry.

GABRIELLA puts down the tray and pours a small portion of the liquid into the glass. Suddenly the figure of the POPE appears to one side of the large curtain, giving ELISA a start.

ELISA: Ah!

And then the real POPE appears from the other side of the curtain. An uncanny likeness. The POPE remains half hidden by the curtain.

AAH!

PROFESSOR: Who are you?

ELISA: There's two of them!

PROFESSOR: A schism!

GABRIELLA: Here you are, your Holiness.

GABRIELLA gives the POPE his medicine and oversees his taking of it. The POPE takes a tiny bit and pulls a face. GABRIELLA talks to him like a child.

I don't want to see a drop left. Come on.

She helps him take the medicine by holding his nose while he finishes it.

POPE: Eeergh.

GABRIELLA: Well done.

GABRIELLA takes the glass away and puts it back on the tray. The POPE comes out from behind the curtain wheeling

10 THE POPE AND THE WITCH

his lookalike mobile dummy. The PROFESSOR and ELISA are a little nervous.

POPE: *(To dummy)* Who are they?

PROFESSOR: Professor Ridolfi, Holy Father. My assistant and most valued collaborator, Sister Elisa.

They both sort of curtsy clumsily, not quite sure of the protocol.

POPE: Never heard of you.

The POPE looks at his dummy and puts his ear to the dummy's mouth. He turns back to them.

Neither has he. Who are these people, Sister Gabriella?

GABRIELLA: This is the Professor from the television who you specifically asked for, Blessed Father.

POPE: Right! Of course he is! Welcome, Professor!

The POPE suddenly turns on his dummy and slaps it round the face.

Stupid idiot!

The dummy starts to move so GABRIELLA catches it and puts it behind the curtain. The POPE shakes the PROFESSOR's hand.

POPE: I need your help, Professor.

Suddenly the POPE takes a quick look at ELISA and then pulls the PROFESSOR away sharply.

POPE: *(Quietly)* That woman, I've seen her.

PROFESSOR: Sister Elisa? Really?

POPE: Tell her to take her wimple off.

PROFESSOR: But why?

POPE: She's not a nun, I'm telling you, she's not a nun, I've seen her before.

ELISA can hear and starts to look worried.

PROFESSOR: Of course she is, you are in a bad way, Holy Father, you are suffering from acute paranoia.

POPE: Acute paranoia? No I'm not. What? (*Looks behind*) Who says that? Ssssh! Ssssh!

The POPE suddenly creeps up on the curtain, pulls it quickly to one side and punches the dummy in the face. He turns back to the others.

Just because I'm paranoid, Professor, doesn't mean they're not listening. (*Chuckle*) I'm a little on edge, that's all.

He starts to grind his fist into the palm of his other hand and then punches it hard and speaks through gritted teeth.

Just . . . just . . . tense . . . nervous because . . . because of . . . them.

The POPE points over his shoulder in the direction of the window without looking that way.

PROFESSOR: The children?

POPE: AAAAH!

The POPE drops to his knees and covers his ears. The others exchange worried looks.

GABRIELLA: Can you do anything, Professor?

PROFESSOR: I'm sure we can. Open the windows.

GABRIELLA and ELISA open the windows to the square. There is the sound of all the children outside.

GABRIELLA: Goodness, the square's almost full! There's thousands of them!

The PROFESSOR bends down to the POPE and gently takes his hands away from his ears and lifts him up.

PROFESSOR: Listen to the children, your Holiness. Innocent voices. We were all that age once. How we would laugh and sing and shout and play and –

12 THE POPE AND THE WITCH

POPE: Yes, even me! Even the Pope! Even the Pope was a snotty nosed little brat once!

PROFESSOR: That's right, even you.

POPE: A little scamp who'd play the fool!

PROFESSOR: Like we all did.

POPE: A short-trousered terror who tortured cats!

PROFESSOR: Exactly . . . What??

POPE: Hung them up by the ears and threw darts at them.
Oh, those were the days. And with hedgehogs, I used to –

PROFESSOR: Yes, yes, your Holiness.

POPE: Oh, to be a boy again instead of the most important person in the entire universe with eight hundred million people knowing me to be so utterly perfect, AAH!

He has walked round unintentionally near to the balcony and suddenly catches sight of the masses of children in the square. He runs away from the window. GABRIELLA quickly closes up the windows. The sound of voices outside stops.

(Pointing to outside) It's a trap, you see. A plot. A devilish plot.

PROFESSOR: I don't follow you.

POPE: You don't? You're not a Catholic?

PROFESSOR: Yes, but –

POPE: Oh I see, sorry, 'I don't follow you', I thought you meant . . . Professor, it's a conspiracy.

PROFESSOR: By the children?

POPE: Not *by* them. *With* them. Why are they all here?
There's more children out there than in a TV advert for Coca-Cola.

ELISA: I think I'm getting the picture.

POPE: Who said that?

ELISA: I was walking across the square on my way here to meet the Professor and I noticed that most of the kids were black, Asian, Oriental or Hispanic.

POPE: Exactly!

ELISA: From the Third World.

POPE: (*To PROFESSOR*) You see, you see.

But the PROFESSOR doesn't see at all.

ELISA: Which reminds me your Holiness, I've got you a present. I was talking to some of the kids out there and one of them asked me to give you this. A sacred bow and arrow from Zambia.

POPE: How wonderful! (*To PROFESSOR*) I'd occasionally use a bow and arrow on the cats as I was saying earlier.

ELISA: Asking around I also discovered that they are almost all orphans.

POPE: Bingo!

ELISA: Brought to Rome, so it says in all the papers, by a rich and powerful organisation, the International Movement for the Protection of Abandoned Children. IMPAC.

POPE: Bastards!

PROFESSOR: Orphans aren't necessarily bastards.

POPE: Not the kids, IMPAC. They're the bastards. Why would they want to fill my square with a hundred and fifty jumbo jets worth of half-starved, miserable toddlers?

PROFESSOR: For the same reason millions of Christians come here every year, I imagine. To see the Pope in person, to receive his blessing.

POPE: For a Professor you're a half-wit, do you know that? Suddenly the world's full of abandoned children who all

14 THE POPE AND THE WITCH

have this irresistible urge to see the Pope?? (*Sings*) 'I want to see the Pope! I want to see the Pope!'

ELISA laughs at the POPE's singing and then joins in.

ELISA/POPE: (*Sing*) We're going to see the Pope, we're going to see the Pope, ee-ay-adio, we're going to see the Pope! Italia! Italia! Italia!

They're both chanting like football supporters whilst the PROFESSOR looks on in consternation.

PROFESSOR: (*Shouts*) I'm sorry but I just don't see what you're both getting at!

ELISA: Does it not occur to you, Professor, that IMPAC might be a bogus organisation?

POPE: Absolutely! (*To ELISA*) I like you.

PROFESSOR: Ridiculous!

POPE: Posing as the protectors of abandoned infants, IMPAC is in fact nothing less than a movement of fanatical supporters of . . . birth control!

PROFESSOR: Oh, for heaven's sake!

POPE: Pill peddlers, diaphragm dumpers, condom canvassers!

ELISA: Sponsored by Richard Branson!

POPE: 'Mates.' Precisely!

ELISA: And by the pharmaceutical companies: ICI, Hoffman Laroche.

POPE: You're right, I hadn't thought of them.

ELISA: And Sirono.

POPE: Them too?

ELISA: Why not?

POPE: Do they make contraceptives?

ELISA: Certainly.

POPE: That's a shame. The Vatican Bank is a major shareholder.

As the POPE whips out his mobile phone and punches in a number, the PROFESSOR whispers to ELISA.

PROFESSOR: What are you playing at?

ELISA: Trust me.

POPE: Aah! Archbishop Marcinkus I want you to sell our shares in Sirono. It could be embarrassing if the wrong people found out, that's all. Like the time I was denouncing apartheid while you were lending South African government agencies a hundred and seventy-two million dollars, remember? Let's not get greedy, Archbishop, we don't want the wrong people nosing into our finances all over again.

He puts his mobile phone away.

Where was I?

PROFESSOR: You are seriously paranoid, Holy Father, my original diagnosis was right. What I didn't know before now though was (*Turning to ELISA*) that you are as well!

ELISA shakes her head at the PROFESSOR in frustration.

POPE: Oh, really? And I suppose the security services of the Pontifical state are paranoid too when they provide me with hourly updates on the very latest plans of these 'agents provocateurs'? Take a look at those!

The POPE thrusts into ELISA's hands a pile of papers off the table which she begins to look at.

So detailed and so thorough that I know exactly what is going to happen the very instant I appear on my balcony.

GABRIELLA: What, Blessed Father, what?

ELISA pulls a face at the PROFESSOR about the papers and is about to show them to him when the POPE grabs them back.

POPE: As soon as they see me, they'll produce this massive loudhailer and chant like some diabolical chorus 'Hail Father-er-er-er.' (*Like an echo*) There'll be an echo obviously. 'You told us to love one another, to proliferate-ate-ate-ate and to have many children-en-en-en. It doesn't matter if they die like flies-ies-ies-ies!'

GABRIELLA: No!

PROFESSOR: (*Believing it*) Is that really what's going to happen?

POPE: (*Referring to papers*) That's what it says! 'It doesn't matter if thirty-five million children die of starvation every year, forty-eight million abandoned, a hundred and fifty million kept in slavery, none of these things matter because the important thing is that they are born because life is sacred-sacred-sacred-sacred!'

ELISA: That's right!!

POPE: What?!

ELISA: I-I mean, that's right, that's what they'll say, that's what's written in the reports!

ELISA tries to discreetly take the papers off the POPE but he moves away with them.

PROFESSOR: But surely the police can stop them? Seize their loudhailer? Arrest the ringleaders?

POPE: Of course! But then they put their master plan into action. They send up an enormous banner, suspended from hundreds of balloons, visible to the entire city, to the entire world!

PROFESSOR: What does the banner say?

POPE: It says . . . I can barely bring myself to read it to you, Professor . . . it says (*Reading*) 'Holy Father. You wanted all these children. You said "Suffer the little children to come unto me." Here they are. Suffering.'

Can you imagine? A hundred thousand children dumped in

St Peter's Square, what am I supposed to do with them?? Pray that Ronald McDonald turns up, gives them each an individual apple pie and scalds them to death??

The POPE is almost having a fit. GABRIELLA rushes to his side to comfort him. ELISA grabs the opportunity to take the papers out of his hand which she then gives to the PROFESSOR.

GABRIELLA: Blessed Father, please try to calm yourself!

POPE: Calm myself?? How? How?

GABRIELLA: Pray! Pray to the Lord.

POPE: I'm praying, I'm praying.

The POPE mumbles loudly a prayer which GABRIELLA tries to join in with. The PROFESSOR takes ELISA to one side. He refers to the papers.

PROFESSOR: There's nothing about any plot in here.
(Reading) 'Adriatic, winds nor' nor' east variable to light', these are weather reports!

ELISA: Exactly!

PROFESSOR: You mean he was making it all up?

ELISA: No, no, he believed he was reading them. It's all in his mind, he's completely paranoid.

PROFESSOR: But that's what I said! I told him, didn't I?

ELISA: I know you did, you know nothing about curing, Professor, do you? You don't tell someone who's paranoid that they're paranoid!

PROFESSOR: Don't you?

ELISA: Of course not, you tell them that they're right! I have an idea, come on.

POPE: It's not working!! I am still unbelievably anxious!
(Looking up to heaven) I'm sorry but I am.

ELISA: Holy Father, may I have a word?

POPE: Of course, Sister.

ELISA puts her arm through his and speaks to him quietly and confidentially like an old friend.

ELISA: This is a wicked business. I'm wondering whether you ought not to contact your . . . erm . . . friends . . . and have these . . . IMPAC people . . . these subversive terrorist plotters . . . dealt with. You get my drift? Your friends in the Christian Democrats, your friends in the security forces and of course your friends in the . . .
(Mouths clearly) the Mafia.

She winks at him.

POPE: You mean my friend in . . . *(Mouths clearly)* the Mafia?

ELISA winks again, even more purposefully. The POPE winks back. Suddenly ELISA looks alarmed, holds the POPE's face and stares at him. GABRIELLA and the PROFESSOR look anxiously on.

ELISA: Do that again.

POPE: What?

ELISA: Wink. Go on.

The POPE winks.

Just as I thought. Opticalisosis. Professor, my bag.

ELISA takes the POPE and sits him down whilst the PROFESSOR collects her bag, confused.

POPE: Opticalisosis? What's that?

ELISA: Inflamed irises leading to myopia and cataract within twelve hours. Commonly known as instant blindness.

POPE: What??

PROFESSOR: *(Disbelieving)* Really??

ELISA throws the PROFESSOR a look for not 'twigging' her play which he then does.

(To POPE) Really. Awful. Incurable.

POPE: Incurable??

ELISA: (*Throws another look to PROFESSOR*) No, not incurable! I can cure it.

PROFESSOR: Almost incurable. Sister Elisa can cure it of course.

ELISA has taken out a small bottle of eye drops from her bag.

ELISA: Head back.

She more or less forces his head back.

No, no, keep your eyes open. Look at me. Look into my eyes. Look into my eyes . . . while I put the drops in.

ELISA and the POPE stare into each other's eyes barely inches apart while ELISA also unscrews the top on the eye dropper. It's quite clear that she is in the process of hypnotising him. She is about to put some drops in his eyes when VIALLI comes rushing on in a state of some anxiety.

VIALLI: Holy Father!

The POPE leaps up from his chair. ELISA is also furious at the interruption.

POPE: Not now, I'm going blind.

ELISA: He's going blind!

PROFESSOR/GABRIELLA: He's going blind!

VIALLI: Going blind??

ALL: Yes!!

ELISA: But I can cure him – if I'm not interrupted!

VIALLI: But what about the press conference? We have to prepare for it, your Holiness, and start it as soon as we can. Incredible as it may sound one or two of the journalists are actually threatening to make up your replies to the

questions. To actually fabricate an answer rather than print what you say!

ALL: Unbelievable!

POPE: It is unbelievable, isn't it!

VIALLI: Isn't it.

ELISA: His Holiness is in no fit state to face the world's media, Cardinal Vialli. Not for at least an hour. Better still, postpone the press conference until this afternoon.

VIALLI: But he has to speak to the children in the square this afternoon –

POPE: AAH! I'm going blind.

ELISA: See what you've done! You've made his irises worse! Now look at the dropper, look at the dropper, there.

ELISA roughly pushes the POPE back into the chair to continue her treatment. She takes out the drop applicator from the bottle and starts to move it slowly across the POPE's eyeline. At the same time VIALLI takes out his mobile phone and speaks into it.

VIALLI: (*Into phone*) Schillaci, it's me. Postpone the press conference until after lunch, the Holy Father's going blind.

VIALLI holds the phone away from him because of the obvious abuse coming from SCHILLACI.

POPE: I feel dizzy.

The POPE becomes cross-eyed as he tries to look at the dropper with both eyes as ELISA actually puts the drops in. ELISA stands aside. The POPE is still cross-eyed.

ELISA: His eyes are locked up. He needs something a long way away to focus on.

VIALLI: That's no language for a Cardinal. Even one from the South Bronx. (*Hangs up*)

ELISA: Open the windows, Sister Gabriella.

VIALLI: (*To PROFESSOR*) D'you know what he said? He said if the Pope would only get rid of all this 'celibacy crap' then none of us would ever have to go blind again.

(*Chuckles*)

PROFESSOR: I don't get it.

GABRIELLA quickly opens the windows as ELISA gently leads the POPE towards the balcony.

POPE: W-what about the loud-hailer and the banner?

VIALLI: Loud-hailer and banner??

ELISA: Not to fret, your Holiness, we're just going to take a quick glimpse at the horizon to get the old eyeballs back into synch.

The POPE stands near the window but out of sight from anyone outside. He peeks round the corner and looks out of the window.

VIALLI: (*To GABRIELLA*) He's worse than I thought, this is terrible.

ELISA: Can you see better now?

The POPE steps away from the window.

POPE: Oh yes, much better. (*Rolls his eyes to test them*) Much better, Sister, thank you so much. So I'm not going blind then?

ELISA: Twenty-twenty vision, your Holiness. But take another look outside to make sure.

The POPE looks quickly outside the window and back in. He smiles but then double-takes another look outside the window. He looks back at ELISA in horror.

POPE: The children! They're climbing up the columns!

VIALLI: What?!

ELISA: So they are! Look!

VIALLI and the PROFESSOR rush to the window.

22 THE POPE AND THE WITCH

VIALLI: Where? I don't see them!

POPE: There, you blind ignorant cleric!

PROFESSOR: I don't see them either!

ELISA kicks the PROFESSOR on the shins.

Oh there, of course!

ELISA: One of them's fallen!

POPE: And another! But still they keep climbing!

VIALLI: Where? Where?? I can't see anything!

ELISA kicks VIALLI on the shins.

ELISA: They're brave, they're street kids, nothing frightens them!

POPE: Look, they're attacking the priests, oh my God!

GABRIELLA is too far away from the window to see for herself.

GABRIELLA: Attacking the priests?? (To VIALLI) Your Eminence, do something!

ELISA: And biting the nuns, look!

GABRIELLA: Biting the nuns?? Oh Hail Mary, Mother of God . . . (*Mumbles audibly through a penance*)

VIALLI: I still don't see anything!!

ELISA kicks VIALLI on the same shin again.

PROFESSOR: They're pulling the heads off chickens!

ELISA: (*Quietly to PROFESSOR*) Pulling the heads off chickens?

PROFESSOR: (*Quietly*) It's all I could think of.

POPE: They're scaling the walls! **THEY'RE STORMING THE VATICAN!**

The POPE turns back into the room with a look of complete horror.

They're coming to get me! The revenge of the unwanted children! The Third World strikes back!

PROFESSOR: They're coming over the balcony!

VIALLI: There's no one coming over the balcony!

ELISA is about to kick VIALLI on the same shin for the third time so VIALLI offers her his other leg. She smiles but kicks him on the first shin again. VIALLI almost crumples to his knees.

VIALLI: AAH!

ELISA: Be brave your Holiness! We'll see them off! Take that you little hooligan!

ELISA mimes hitting someone. The PROFESSOR joins in. VIALLI and GABRIELLA also look at them in complete confusion.

PROFESSOR: Get down you bastard!

The PROFESSOR mimes picking someone up and throwing them over the balcony. And now the POPE joins in the melée.

POPE: Out! Out!

ELISA hands the bow and arrows to the POPE.

ELISA: Here, you have a go Your Holiness.

POPE: Yes! Yes!

POPE strings an arrow on the bow, waves the bow and arrow around causing the others to duck etc, then fires arrows through the window.

ELISA: Bull's eye. There's another one.

The POPE dashes his pretend victim against the wall and spins round twice and hurls him out of the window like a

hammer thrower at the Olympics – even to the extent of keeping inside an imaginary circle at the end of the throw.

It's a world record!

PROFESSOR: One's gone behind the curtain!

POPE: Stop him! Catch him!

The PROFESSOR rushes behind the curtain and mimes a tussle. ELISA stands nearby.

ELISA: Careful, he's got a knife!

The PROFESSOR stops miming and puts his head round the curtain.

PROFESSOR: A knife?

ELISA: A pair of scissors then!

ELISA quickly hands him a pair of scissors out of her bag and pushes him behind the curtain and disappears behind there herself. They mime the tussle. The PROFESSOR staggers out from behind the curtain with a pair of scissors sticking in his chest. He does a theatrical death as ELISA comes back out.

Professor!

PROFESSOR: Aaaaaaaaah.

POPE: I'll get him!!

The POPE rushes behind the curtain. There seems to be a ferocious fight going on behind there.

VIALLI: Are you alright, Professor?

The PROFESSOR opens an eye and sees that the POPE isn't there.

PROFESSOR: Of course I'm alright. Aaaah!

He stands up but falls down again immediately when the POPE appears behind the curtain having a fight with his

dummy. The POPE and the dummy disappear again behind the curtain.

VIALLI: What in the name of a smoke-filled conclave are you two total maniacs playing at??

ELISA: We're curing the Holy Father of his phobia. If he [^]acts out his worst possible fears then those fears become manageable, right? It's simple therapy, your Eminence, role-playing psychosis management, that's all.

VIALLI: So we're supposed to play along with the fantasy of the children coming over the balcony?

ELISA: Well done.

VIALLI: Can I have a go?

ELISA nods 'yes'. She takes the scissors out of the PROFESSOR's chest and hands them to VIALLI. Just then there is a final shout from the POPE behind the curtain as he pulls the curtain to one side and reveals the dummy lying on the floor.

POPE: (*Calmly*) He won't be troubling us again.

VIALLI then goes into a spectacularly violent mime with the scissors and an imaginary victim.

VIALLI: You scum! You vermin! You street urchin piece of gutter debris! Die! Die a painful death!

VIALLI is getting completely carried away with his gruesome mime as she stabs his victim over and over again.

Death to street children! Death to all small people! Death to everybody!!

POPE: (*Calmly*) Cardinal Vialli, what are you doing?

VIALLI stops stabbing the 'child' and stands up.

VIALLI: That's him seen to, Holy Father.

He hands the scissors back to ELISA.

POPE: That's who seen to?

VIALLI: Him. Here. This street urchin from . . . from Brazil.

POPE: Who are you talking about?

VIALLI: The boy lying there.

POPE: There's no boy lying there.

VIALLI: (*Chuckles*) Right. There's no boy there. That's because . . . I threw the corpse over the balcony. As an example to the other delinquents outside.

POPE: You threw the corpse over the balcony?

VIALLI: Yes, your Eminence. Like you did.

POPE: Like I did?

VIALLI: Yes, Holy Father. A Sri Lankan I think it was.

POPE: A Sri Lankan?

VIALLI: Could have been. Right?

VIALLI looks to the others for corroboration but they stare back at him.

POPE: Are you saying, Cardinal Vialli, that I, the Pontiff, I, Pope John Paul the . . . the . . .

GABRIELLA: (*Discreetly prompts*) Second.

POPE: John Paul the Second would throw a teenage Sri Lankan over my balcony??

VIALLI: Yes! No! You pretended to, your Holiness!

POPE: I pretended to?? I pretended to take a defenceless, impoverished, pitiful child who has come half way round the world to see me and hurl him to his death??

VIALLI: Yes, you did! Like a hammer thrower!

POPE: Like a hammer thrower?? You're insane, Vialli! I'll excommunicate you!

VIALLI: You did! Didn't he??

POPE: I didn't!!

VIALLI: You did, I saw you!

POPE: You didn't see me!

VIALLI: I did see you, I swear it!

POPE: Even if you saw me, you didn't see me!

VIALLI: What????

POPE: Even if you're right – you're wrong!

VIALLI: What??

POPE: Even if I'm wrong – I'm right!

VIALLI: WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT??

POPE: I'M THE POPE! I'M INFALLIBLE!

The POPE slumps into chair and falls asleep instantly.

ELISA: We did it! We did it! Well done, everybody. Cardinal Vialli –

ELISA approaches VIALLI who instinctively protects his shins.

You especially did a very good job. He's cured.

GABRIELLA: *(By window)* All the children are leaving the square.

VIALLI: Of course they're leaving the square, that's part of their programme. They'll come back. What d'you mean, he's cured? He's as daft as a brush!

ELISA goes over to the POPE. She clicks her fingers in front of his eyes. The POPE wakes up instantly.

POPE: Good morning. Good morning, Sister Gabriella. Good morning, Cardinal Vialli. Good morning . . . who are you? Ah yes, you're the Sister . . . with the Professor here. Good morning, Professor Ridolfi, I am a very big fan of yours.

SCHILLACI rushes on.

SCHILLACI: Holy Father, please, I don't mean no disrespect

but if we don't deal with these no-good interfering media types, somebody's gonna get hurt down there and it ain't gonna be one of us, right? Holy Father?

POPE: Of course, Cardinal Schillaci, whatever you say. Vialli why have you not come to collect me earlier? You have been dilly-dallying all morning, obviously causing the Cardinal here much stress.

VIALLI: I . . . I . . .

POPE: Come, Sister Gabriella, we have to change for the press conference. And this afternoon I shall address my flock of children in the square. What a perfect day this is! A perfect day for an utterly perfect Pontiff! (*To the dummy*) What are you staring at?

He punches the dummy in the face and exits. GABRIELLA catches the falling dummy and wheels it off with her.

VIALLI: It's incredible, he doesn't remember a thing.

ELISA picks up her bag and heads for the exit. She doesn't want to hang around longer than necessary, especially as SCHILLACI is looking at her intently.

PROFESSOR: Of course he doesn't, he was in a trance.

ELISA: Time to go, Professor.

VIALLI: (*Shocked*) Trance? What trance? Who put him in a trance.

PROFESSOR: (*Proud*) She did of course.

ELISA: Professor!

PROFESSOR: She can cure almost anything.

ELISA lets out a very loud whistle which surprises the others.

ELISA: Let's go!

SCHILLACI: (*To ELISA*) You were never a hooker in Brooklyn, were you?

ELISA: How dare you?

She goes to slap him, but he steps away unintentionally just in time.

SCHILLACI: (To VIALLI) I know this broad, I'm telling you, I know this broad.

ELISA: I am not a broad, I'm a Bride of Christ, you hoodlum!

ELISA kicks SCHILLACI on the shin.

SCHILLACI: Ow!

VIALLI: One moment! How did you put his Holiness into a trance?

ELISA: I hypnotised him, how do you think? When I put in the eye drops, which are only water anyway. (*Wanting to go*)

VIALLI: You hypnotised him? You hypnotised the Pope??

PROFESSOR: Elisa has considerable powers of exorcism. She led him through his state of paranoid hysteria, cleansing his Holiness of the demons within him.

VIALLI: 'Exorcism'? 'Demons'? This is the Vatican, for Christ's sake, and you've been practising black magic???

ELISA: Don't be so paranoid yourself, Cardinal Vialli. Black magic has nothing to do with it. I have powers of healing, that's all. Natural powers common to most women. We women of the world were the curers for thousands of years, we were the ones who made the sick well. Until Science took over. Until Medicine became the domain of the men. Until Reason determined that a sick person could only be cured by scientifically identifiable substances or physical rearrangement. Drugs or Surgery. When curing became synonymous with medical engineering, gentlemen, when curing was separated from caring, the world turned its back on the healing powers of women and the world is the poorer for it. (To PROFESSOR) Vamoose!

SCHILLACI: That's the weirdest nun I ever heard.

VIALLI: Well, weird or not, she sorted out the Pontiff for these press people. Thank you, Sister Elisa.

ELISA: Why, thank you, your Eminence. Professor, shall we?

ELISA indicates the exit. The PROFESSOR turns to VIALLI.

PROFESSOR: Any time you need me, your Eminence, you have my agent's number. Return dates always welcome.

ELISA and the PROFESSOR start to leave. But VIALLI is still anxious.

VIALLI: But what happens if he relapses, Professor? What do we do if he starts up these paranoid delusions again?

The PROFESSOR looks at both the CARDINALS.

PROFESSOR: My candid opinion, your Eminences, is that the Holy Father is on the very teetering edge of total mental collapse. I fear the worst unless he takes a complete rest. Relieved of all duties, for, say a month. Come, Sister Elisa.

VIALLI: A month? He can't take a month off, he's the Pope!

ELISA: Of course the only real cure would be to give up being Pope. That'd sort him out.

VIALLI: He can't 'give up' being Pope, honestly Sister. Popes are Popes. You can't sack a Pope or pension him off!

ELISA: Why not? You got rid of the last one quick enough.

PROFESSOR: Elisa –

SCHILLACI: What d'you say?

PROFESSOR: Nothing, she said nothing, we must be going.

ELISA: Poor old John Paul One. You certainly sacked him, didn't you? When he decided to clean out the Vatican Bank, kick all the Freemasons out of Vatican City, liberalise the Church's position on birth control, oh yes, you certainly pensioned him off then, didn't you!

PROFESSOR: Elisa! She's overworked, your Eminences, under a great deal of pressure. Come, Sister.

VIALLI and especially SCHILLACI are incensed at ELISA's words.

SCHILLACI: Are you oudda your mind? What is this?? Are you insinuating that John Paul the First was . . . disposed of? I mean, like, deliberately??

VIALLI: John Paul the First, our friend Albino Luciani died from natural causes, Sister Elisa. I will not permit you to make these poisonous insinuations. In the Pope's private apartments, what's more.

ELISA: It would be a shame as I've taken a bit of a liking to this Pope, but as natural causes worked so well last time, why don't you try them again?

SCHILLACI: That's it, I ain't gonna hear no more.

SCHILLACI starts to move towards ELISA, reaching inside his cassock, but VIALLI holds him back. The PROFESSOR tries to pull ELISA out of the room at the same time.

VIALLI: No, Schillaci, don't!

PROFESSOR: Elisa, come on!

ELISA: Thirty-three days, that's all you gave the poor bastard. A month and then you topped him!

SCHILLACI: WHAT?!

ELISA: Luciani was a good man! John Paul the First was the best thing that ever happened to the Church and you poisoned him!

SCHILLACI: He was a communist!

ELISA: No, he wasn't! But he wasn't a Freemason either, was he, Schillaci?

SCHILLACI: No more, Sister! Or you'll get it too!

VIALLI: Schillaci, shut up!

PROFESSOR: Let's go!

ELISA: You and Marcinkus and your friends in P2, the whole caboodle of you, you certainly organised some 'natural causes' didn't you?

SCHILLACI pulls out an enormous gun from under his cassock.

PROFESSOR: AAH!

VIALLI: Don't!

VIALLI grabs SCHILLACI again.

ELISA: And where were you, Cardinal Vialli, the night he died? Asleep?

SCHILLACI: Let me do it, Vialli, let me do it!

ELISA: Go on, do it, I dare you! Like the old days, Schillaci, eh? The Bishop of Atlantic City liked to break a few legs didn't he?

PROFESSOR: Elisa! Enough!!

SCHILLACI: You're a whore!

ELISA: You're a gangster!

VIALLI and the PROFESSOR are each hanging on to SCHILLACI and ELISA who are shouting abuse at each other. All four of them are hollering until VIALLI manages to silence them with a terrific shout.

VIALLI: THIS IS THE HOLY SEE, FOR FUCK'S SAKE!

The others calm down a bit.

Schillaci, put the gun away. Professor, I suggest that you take this very strange Sister away.

ELISA, trembling, lights up a cigarette.

You're smoking??

ELISA: It helps my asthma.

SCHILLACI: What kind of Sister is she anyways?

PROFESSOR: You'll have to make allowances for her, your Eminence. She's been working abroad. In Africa. I do hope there's no hard feelings.

VIALLI: Quite right, Professor. (*To ELISA and SCHILLACI*) I want you two to shake hands. I order you to.

ELISA and SCHILLACI tentatively stretch out their hands.

PROFESSOR: That's where I met her actually. In Burundi.

ELISA and SCHILLACI shake hands.

When she ran the leprosy colony.

SCHILLACI looks in horror and tries to take his hand away instantly but ELISA hangs onto it with a smile. He eventually pulls it away and starts to wipe it on his cassock.

And then she took up curing people who had been possessed and then people with bubonic plague. And –

VIALLI: Well that explains her curiously uncivilised behaviour, like an African witch or some such –

ELISA: Watch who you are calling a witch, Cardinal, or I'll turn you into a baboon. Then you can wear your red skull cap on your red bum.

VIALLI: What?!

SCHILLACI: Take her out of here, Professor, before I change my mind and take her out myself. And I mean 'take her out'.

PROFESSOR: Yes, yes, of course. Sister Elisa's not really cut out for Vatican politics, ha ha. Much happier with her drug addicts, aren't you?

ELISA: Sssh.

SCHILLACI: Drug addicts?

ELISA: Nothing. Let's be going, Professor.

SCHILLACI: What's this with 'drug addicts'? Whadya saying? This nun's a junkie as well as a Marxist??

PROFESSOR: Ha ha, no, no, not at all. This lovable Good Samaritan here runs a drugs centre –

ELISA: Not important, your Eminences, we must be off –

SCHILLACI: What kind of drugs centre?

ELISA: It doesn't matter! Let's go!

ELISA starts to pull the PROFESSOR but he resists.

PROFESSOR: No, Sister Elisa, I want to tell them! Tell them what a wonderful job you do. She's so modest, really.

SCHILLACI: Yeah, I noticed. What kind of 'drugs centre'?

ELISA begins to be very anxious. She lights another cigarette from the butt of the first.

PROFESSOR: The Sister here runs a rehabilitation centre for drug addicts. The Council were on the verge of closing it down. So I pulled a few strings with one or two friends in the Town Hall and they changed their minds.

ELISA: I'm sure their Eminences are riveted, Professor. Time for lunch!

PROFESSOR: And then – I like this bit – I blackmailed her. I did. I said to her – this morning it was – I said to her, 'Elisa, I've been summoned to the Vatican to help the Pope recover from his mental turmoil. There is only one person who can cure him, my dear, you.' 'And if I refuse?' she replied. 'I'm making you an offer you can't refuse,' I said. I've seen that film too, with the horse's head business, true story that apparently –

SCHILLACI: (*Instinctively*) No, it ain't, what really happened to that guy with the horse's head –

VIALLI: Schillaci!

PROFESSOR: Anyway, I said to Elisa 'I wouldn't want you to go to prison for having known drug addicts on the premises who may be in possession of illegal substances.' So here we are.

PROFESSOR *looks pleased with himself.* **SCHILLACI** *looks on in horror.*

VIALLI: (*To the PROFESSOR*) Are you completely out of your mind??? You bring a criminal nun here to cure the Pope??

PROFESSOR: She's not a criminal, your Eminence.

ELISA: Goodbye everybody.

ELISA is about to leave but SCHILLACI grabs her.

SCHILLACI: Where is this drug centre, Sister?

ELISA: Let go of my arm!

SCHILLACI: Where is it??

ELISA: Why do you want to know?

SCHILLACI: I wanna know, that's all!

VIALLI: Why do you want to know, Schillaci?

SCHILLACI: Uh . . . uh . . . because . . . because . . . maybe one day I wanna drop by and . . . and . . . congratulate the little lady on the good social work that she does with these smack freaks, y'know what I mean?

ELISA: (*To SCHILLACI*) My centre is on the other side of the Tiber, your Eminence. Outside Vatican City. Where 'someone' would be arrested if they so much as put a toe, (*New York accent*) 'y'know what I mean?'

SCHILLACI glares at ELISA and then runs after her to hit her. But she escapes. As she runs past VIALLI she gives him her cigarette to hold. She stops suddenly and spins around. SCHILLACI almost collides with her but she expertly deflects him like a judo black belt and he collides with SISTER GABRIELLA who appears, wheeling the dummy,

closely followed by the POPE. The POPE and the dummy are dressed identically but differently from before, ie, whatever the POPE wears, the dummy wears too. The POPE looks in horror at the sight of SCHILLACI with his arms around GABRIELLA.

POPE: Schillaci!

SCHILLACI: (*Disentangling himself*) I apologise, your Holiness.

POPE: Nobody but the Pope gropes the Sisters in the papal apartments, d'you hear me?

SCHILLACI: I hear you, Holy Father. I was after Sister Elisa.

POPE: (*Sniffing*) Who's that? Smoking, Vialli??

VIALLI: It . . . it helps my asthma.

POPE: How dare you? I cannot stand tobacco smoke as you well know, your Eminence! Indeed my very next Encyclical, to be entitled 'Cigarettes et omnia nicotinus substancias', will render smoking a sin! I can't wait to see the face of those tobacco company bosses when half a billion smokers suddenly kick the dreaded weed!

As the POPE laughs in glee at the prospect, SCHILLACI quickly whispers something in his ear. The POPE stops laughing instantly.

Really? How many shares?

SCHILLACI *whispers quickly.*

(*Quietly*) Two billion lira?? In *one* tobacco company? (*To others*) On the other hand, some more reflection on the subject may be required. (*To VIALLI*) But I still won't have smoking in my apartments! The next person I find smoking in here will be excommunicated!

The POPE grabs the cigarette from VIALLI and passes it to SCHILLACI who passes it to the PROFESSOR who passes it to GABRIELLA who takes an enormous drag before stubbing it out but . . .

(To PROFESSOR) Stay for lunch, won't you, Professor?
And you too, Sister, of course. Sister Gabriella –

. . . she is caught with a mouthful of smoke as the POPE turns to her. She can't blow it out while he's looking. He puts his arm around her.

Have a word with the kitchen and ask them to rustle up some . . . erm . . . what do you recommend?

GABRIELLA *shrugs nonchalantly as she turns slightly purple.*

ELISA: We really ought to be off, Holy Father. Come, Professor.

POPE: Nonsense. I want you both at this press conference, it'll be an education. Which reminds me. Vialli, didn't you say you were going to give me a preview of the questions?

VIALLI: Yes, of course, Blessed Father. I'll summon the press officer immediately.

SCHILLACI: Don't worry, I'll go get him. Besides, I have one or two other matters to attend to.

He stares for a moment at ELISA before leaving which worries her. The POPE still has his arm around GABRIELLA who is in increasing difficulty.

POPE: What a loyal staff I have, Professor. Take Sister Gabriella here, what would I do without her? How long have you been with me, Sister? Ten years? Eleven?

GABRIELLA: Mmmmmmm.

POPE: Not once has she ever let me down. Not once has she failed in her unswerving devotion to her Papa. Because I am, y'know? Her Papa. What I love about her more than anything is her sense . . . of stillness. That quality of . . . tranquillity. Sister Gabriella is –

Whatever device that can be conjured up ought to be used here. Favourite would be smoke coming out of

GABRIELLA's ears. *The others look on in complete surprise.*

It's Saint Joan!

They all kneel. GABRIELLA takes out her mobile phone.

GABRIELLA: No, Blessed Father. It's only my cellnet caught fire!

She bangs the phone pretending to 'extinguish' it. The others get to their feet as the Vatican Press Officer, MONSIGNOR BAGGIO, comes on, talking into his mobile phone.

BAGGIO is a yuppie official who looks about twelve years old.

BAGGIO: (*Into phone*) Tell your people to contact my people, ya? And my people will tell them that your people's Papal papers are precariously below par, right? Personally speaking I can pronounce that the Pope's people, that is my people, are projecting different people to peruse the Papal papers unless certain people pull their proverbial protrusions out, ya? (*Hangs up*) Holy Father, good morning, right?

POPE: Who are you?

BAGGIO: Monsignor Baggio, VPO.

POPE: VPO?

VIALLI: The new Vatican Press Officer, Holy Father.

POPE: Couldn't we get one who talks properly?

BAGGIO takes out various sheets of paper.

VIALLI: The younger generation I fear.

BAGGIO: I have here some modest model answers I've written up to some pretty immodest questions that are about to be exocetted in your direction, Holy Father. We have some seriously searching sorties here into the senior issues of the day, ya? To begin with, the pen pusher from the *Frankfurter Allgemeine* – and I'm not talking about a

magazine for hot dog sellers, right? – he wants to ask you for your reaction to the statement from one of your senior people, no less a seriously subversive satrap than the Bishop of Cologne, one Gruber Kutter, who says – and I quote, right? – ‘I find it ridiculous that on the threshold of the year 2000, Catholics are still tearing themselves apart over the question of contraception. It is no business of the Pope to hand down instructions about contraceptive methods’ – can you believe this Kraut Bishop making such an off the wall pitch? He is seriously out of order, right? ‘Contraception is none of the Church’s business.’ Wow!

POPE: None of the Church’s business?! Well you can tell Gruber Kutter that at the next Vatican Assembly he’ll be transferred to a cosy little parish in the mountains of Upper Bavaria where he can spew his seditious filth to whichever sheep shagger he can persuade to listen!

BAGGIO: Oh ya, I’m behind you on that one!

VIALLI: Calm down, please, your Holiness! There’s nothing the journalists would like more than for you to lose your temper!

BAGGIO: I can get my head around that concept, ya!

POPE: Who do these Bishops think they are? Shouting their mouths off about all manner of subjects which they know absolutely nothing about! They should be so lucky, this is the Church of Rome, I’m telling you!

BAGGIO: Too right! Major stuff!

POPE: If I was the Ayatollah I’d have them all – (*Strangles the dummy*) He’s a lucky bastard that Ayatollah!

ELISA: Why don’t you say that at the press conference, that’d stir things up a bit?

POPE: I just might!

BAGGIO: Wow, ya, right!

40 THE POPE AND THE WITCH

VIALLI: (*To BAGGIO*) Shut up, you pillock. (*To POPE*) Please relax, your Holiness!

POPE: I'm relaxed! I'm just tense that's all. Next question.

BAGGIO: Okay, right, let's go with the scum from that liberal libellous rag, *Le Monde* – or *Le Kleenex* I'd call it, right? – now she wants to know what you feel about the statement made by Herr Keller, the Deacon of Holland, who said – and I quote again – 'In the last century Pope Pius the Ninth denounced doctors who vaccinated people against cholera –'

POPE: Give me that.

BAGGIO: Oh, sure, right.

The POPE grabs the papers and reads.

POPE: ' . . . people against cholera . . . stating that vaccination was a crime against nature. However, when many priests started to catch cholera the Pope changed his mind and said that vaccination is not a question of dogma!' I see what Keller's getting at. If Pius the Ninth changed his mind about vaccination then John Paul the . . . the . . .

GABRIELLA: (*Discreetly prompts*) Second.

POPE: Second can change his mind about contraception, right?

BAGGIO: Right, wow, right!

POPE: Wrong, you short-trousered little cockroach!

The POPE punches the dummy in anger although he would have preferred to punch BAGGIO.

VIALLI: Please calm down, your Holiness!

POPE: Calm down? I'll calm down when I've seen off these jumped-up journalists, gimme another question, Baggio, that one!

The POPE pulls out a sheet of paper from the pile that BAGGIO is holding.

(Reading) 'What is the Pontiff's considered response to our exclusive revelation that his predecessor Pope John Paul the First did not in fact die in 1978 but is alive and well, had a sex change, is now living with a lesbian in Cricklewood?'
What??

BAGGIO *takes the piece of paper back.*

BAGGIO: *Sunday Sport*, right?

The POPE grabs the bunch of papers from BAGGIO and tears them in half.

POPE: How dare they question me? How dare these upstart Bishops challenge the Pope? How dare these so-called progressives with their so-called modern attitudes and their so-called liberation theology question the authority of Rome? How dare they??

VIALLI: Please, Holy Father, you mustn't get yourself worked up.

POPE: The Pope rules, okay? What he says goes, right?

BAGGIO: Right, too much!

BAGGIO cowers in case the POPE tries to hit him.

POPE: What in God's name is the point of all us Archbishops sitting in a sealed room for a week to elect one of ourselves Pope, with the added ridiculous spectacle of the entire world staring at the chimney waiting for a wisp of smoke, if once he's been elected his every bloody proclamation is going to be challenged??

VIALLI: Quite right, Holy Father, now why don't we –

POPE: Either I'm infallible or I'm not! I'm not a little bit infallible. I'm not infallible on some issues but only moderately informative on others. Good grief, Vialli, if I wanted to be part of a Church where you can believe in just about anything you want to believe in I'd have joined the Church of England! If I wanted to be the Head of a Church who is totally ignored by just about everybody beneath him

I'd have become the Archbishop of Canterbury! (*Mocking effete voice*) 'Oh please join our Church why don't you? The Church of England is super. You don't have to believe in God of course. And you certainly don't have to believe in the virgin birth and the resurrection, oh dear me no. No, no, we're really only interested in Jesus Christ as a *symbol*. We're not even absolutely sure that he ever lived but he might have done and that's good enough for us. Oh yes, you can pray if you want to, but we don't make a big thing about it, cup of tea and a biscuit?'

I am the Pope! First it was Peter. Then all the rest. Now it's me! John Paul the Third.

GABRIELLA: Second.

POPE: Second, Second! I AM THE CHURCH! I WILL NOT BE ARGUED WITH! CONTRACEPTION IS A SIN!!

The POPE, completely fired up, throttles his dummy.

Suddenly the POPE seizes up with his arms outstretched and his hands around the dummy's neck, his legs apart and rigid.

AAH!

VIALLI: What's happened?

POPE: I'm stuck! I can't move!

VIALLI: What?

GABRIELLA: Holy Father!!

VIALLI and the PROFESSOR rush over to the POPE. GABRIELLA starts praying again.

POPE: I've seized up!

BAGGIO: Oh, too much, right?

VIALLI tries to wrench the POPE's hands free of the dummy.

POPE: Don't touch me! Ayee! Don't touch my skin, it's like sandpaper!

PROFESSOR: (*To VIALLI*) Take the dummy!

VIALLI grabs the dummy round the waist as the PROFESSOR grabs the POPE round the waist.

POPE: Careful, careful!

PROFESSOR: Ladies, help us!

ELISA puts her arms around the PROFESSOR's waist and GABRIELLA puts her arms around VIALLI's waist. The tug-o-war lasts for a few moments.

BAGGIO: Wow, tug-o-pope! One, two, three, heave, right?

POPE: AAHH!!

They come apart and collapse onto the floor. They all get up except the POPE who's lying on his back rigid, with his arms straight out in front of him and his legs in the air.

PROFESSOR: Help him up!

They all help the POPE to his feet. He's bent double with his arms and legs still outstretched so they straighten him up. He makes a loud creaking noise. GABRIELLA helps the dummy to its feet and tidies its clothes.

POPE: What is it, Professor? What's happened to me??

PROFESSOR: Don't panic, your Holiness, whatever you do, don't panic.

The PROFESSOR, in a state of near panic himself, attempts to diagnose the POPE by pushing and pulling different parts of his totally stiff body.

Classic causalgia urente . . . with a sciatic complication, anchilosant spondylitis of the upper vertebrae . . . weakening of the ganglia of the sympatic . . . oh no, it couldn't be worse!

POPE: Encourage me why don't you?!

PROFESSOR: (*To others*) A lombo-sciatiology!

OTHERS: A lombo-sciatiology??

PROFESSOR: Yes!!

OTHERS: WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT??

PROFESSOR: The Witches' Stroke.

The PROFESSOR sinks to his knees as the others look on in awe.

POPE: The Witches' Stroke? Me? The Pope? The Scourge of the Feminists has been struck down by the Witches' Stroke??

ELISA: You haven't lost your sense of humour, Holy Father.

POPE: AAAAH!

BAGGIO: I guess I'll postpone the press conference, right?

A disdainful look from all the others.

(To POPE) Wow, I really hope you get your arms to go all floppy again, ya?

POPE: I'm going to strangle that idiot.

The POPE starts to walk towards BAGGIO who flees offstage. The PROFESSOR gets to his feet.

PROFESSOR: No, don't excite yourself any more, your Holiness. Let's sit him down.

The PROFESSOR and ELISA sit the POPE down in the chair.

POPE: Do something, Professor. For God's sake, cure me of this evil lombo thing!

PROFESSOR: I'm not sure I can!

VIALLI and GABRIELLA sink to their knees, deep prayer.

VIALLI: *(Chants)* God in Heaven, Holiest of Holies, you have deemed it necessary to render the Holy Father stiff as a board. You have prostrated him as a sign of your love. You have turned him into Pinocchio as a test. What penance must we do, Oh Lord, to satisfy you. Give us a

sign, oh Lord, that we may obey. Tell us what to do.
Amen.

POPE: I'll tell you what to do! Stop that bloody nonsense for a start and get another doctor! In fact, get several doctors. In fact, alert the entire medical profession until someone turns up who can take away my stiffness! (*A rebuke to the audience may be required here if they snigger immaturely at a completely unintentioned double-entendre*)

PROFESSOR: That won't do any good, your Holiness. In the whole area of neuro-symphatology and sciatiologies in general, western medicine is basically at point zero. I'm sorry.

POPE: Brilliant. And what am I supposed to do like this for the rest of my life? Employ an army of servants to feed me, dress me, scratch my nose and wipe my botty??

ELISA: You do already, don't you?

PROFESSOR: However! There may be one way out.

POPE: Yes, yes, anything!

PROFESSOR: Modern medicine has no cures, like I say. But any witch doctor in Africa, any benevolent voodoo practitioner in Haiti or even any Tibetan shaman has at their disposal a whole range of diagnostic techniques and natural cures far, far more effective than anything we in the west can muster up. Any one of these could deal with your blockage.

POPE: Blockage? I've got the prune juice for that.

PROFESSOR: I have heard of cures for the Witches' Stroke. Sister Elisa here has actually seen them in Africa. Burundi.

POPE: Bless you. How? How did they do it?

ELISA: Well . . . they took the patient – with his arms and legs just like yours – and they covered his entire naked body with honey!

POPE: Oh, I like honey.

ELISA: And they laid him gently down on the grass and –

POPE: And a dozen virgins licked it all off!!

Suitably shocked looks from the others. GABRIELLA surreptitiously takes a notebook and writes.

GABRIELLA: (*Quietly*) One jar of honey.

ELISA: May I continue?

POPE: Of course, so he's lying on the grass naked, covered in honey. What next?

ELISA: And then he has emptied all over him an earthenware jar full of . . . red ants.

POPE: Red ants??

ELISA: Yup. That cured him, alright. He leapt to his feet and ran half a mile in about fourteen seconds and jumped in a river!

POPE: Dear, oh dear. Well, at least he lived to fight another day.

ELISA: 'Fraid not. He couldn't swim.

POPE: Well I can swim but I'm not having red ants poured all over me, I'm not.

PROFESSOR: That may not be necessary. There are other less painful cures, aren't there, Sister Elisa?

POPE: Then fetch an African witch, Professor, what are you hanging about for? Vialli, pop to Tibet and collect a couple of showgirls, showmen . . .

PROFESSOR: Shaman, but Holy Father –

POPE: Gabriella, fax my old friend Papa Doc and tell him to ship over a voodoo or two.

PROFESSOR: None of that's necessary Holy Father. During her years in Africa, Sister Elisa here learned the ways of the natural healers. As you experienced yourself earlier.

POPE: I did?

PROFESSOR: I'm sure she can cure you of the lombosciatology.

POPE: She can??

ELISA backs away.

ELISA: No, no, no, I couldn't possibly. I'm not qualified.

The PROFESSOR leads her away from the POPE.

PROFESSOR: Please Elisa.

ELISA: Why the hell should I? Reactionary old sod.

PROFESSOR: Think what it will do to my ratings. Professor 'I cured the Pope' Ridolfi.

ELISA: (*Breaking away*) I'm very sorry, your Holiness. I am not able to help you.

The POPE begins to cry.

PROFESSOR: Elisa, be reasonable!

VIALLI: We can make it worth your while, Sister Elisa. We can see to it, for example, that your centre has no more trouble. From any quarter.

PROFESSOR: (*To ELISA*) Listen to the man, listen to him.

POPE: Centre? What centre?

VIALLI: Sister Elisa here runs a rehabilitation centre for drug addicts.

POPE: Drug addicts??

ELISA: Jugged rabbits!

POPE: What?

ELISA: Jugged rabbits. You've heard of jugged hare, haven't you? Well some people like to jug rabbits . . . but if the rabbits are lucky enough to escape being jugged then they come and stay with me. Where they'll be safe.

POPE: I really must get out and about more. Rehabilitating rabbits, what an imaginative people us Romans are, eh?

VIALLI: Quite, your Holiness. And I was saying to Sister Elisa what a shame it would be if one night – like tomorrow night – the centre was to burn down. Or if the police were to take the building apart brick by brick because they had been misinformed that it was once used as a safe house by the Red Brigade!

He stares at ELISA. ELISA turns to the POPE.

ELISA: (*Smiling*) Let's see what we can do with you, eh?

ELISA goes over to the POPE.

What I really need is some way of suspending the Holy Father in mid-air. If only somewhere in these Papal apartments was a chandelier that could be easily transformed into a kind of harness.

A chandelier suddenly appears and is lowered to the perfect height.

VIALLI exits and returns immediately with two SWISS GUARDS.

The power of prayer. (*Clicks fingers*) Gentlemen.

POPE: What are you going to do to me?

VIALLI, GABRIELLA, the SWISS GUARDS join ELISA to get the POPE into his harness. The POPE is astride his harness with his hands and feet on the floor. The SWISS GUARDS collect the ropes from the side of the stage and pull on them gently until the POPE is about five feet off the ground.

Aaaaaaah.

ELISA collects a chair and stands on it behind the POPE.

ELISA: Try to relax, your Holiness. Think of me as your friendly local Bantu witch. Relax . . . relax . . .

She starts to massage the POPE's back and gently push him forward and backward like a swing.

Imagine . . . imagine you're in the warm sea . . . the Caribbean . . . and the sky is blue . . . and you are floating . . . swimming gently . . . swimming . . .

The POPE starts to try to make swimming movements but his arms and legs are still stiff so he looks utterly ridiculous.

POPE: How am I doing?

ELISA: Mmm, not bad. You need a bit of help, a bit of atmosphere. Some seagulls. Cardinal Vialli?

VIALLI starts to make seagull noises.

Waves breaking on the shore. Sister Gabriella?

GABRIELLA makes suitable noises.

*The PROFESSOR starts to make an extraordinary sound.
ELISA looks at him.*

PROFESSOR: I'm a submarine.

ELISA: (To POPE) How are you feeling?

POPE: Not bad, better.

ELISA: Relax some more. Good boy. Splendid. You sing your Holiness, sing.

POPE: Sing?

ELISA: Good for the soul.

The POPE, still 'swimming', starts a tuneless dirge of a chant in cod Latin.

POPE: Aleus domine fulgitur.

ELISA: I said 'sing', not impersonate a stomach ache!

POPE: It's a Gregorian chant, it's the only song I know!

ELISA: What about a song from your childhood then. Even you were a little boy once.

PROFESSOR: Don't, you'll start him off on torturing hedgehogs.

The POPE suddenly sings some appalling ditty in cod Polish, a tuneless upbeat piece of nonsense.

POPE: Strado je hobje alonideja
Acuni bonja inanolijae madi (Etc.)

VIALLI, GABRIELLA and the PROFESSOR all cover their hands with their ears. The POPE gets carried away, making ever more vigorous swimming movements and shouting his song. ELISA massages him ever more roughly and swings him back and forth.

VIALLI: Tell him to stop, please!

GABRIELLA/PROFESSOR: We beg you, please.

ELISA signals to the SWISS GUARDS to raise the harness which they do until the POPE is about fifteen feet in the air, as happy as a lark. His movements become looser and looser.

POPE: I'm cured! I'm cured! Strado no hopjibala. (Etc.)

SCHILLACI comes rushing on with two more SWISS GUARDS.

SCHILLACI: Freeze!! NOBODY MOVE!!

Everybody freezes and shuts up instantly, including the POPE whom SCHILLACI has not noticed suspended above him. SCHILLACI goes to ELISA who is still standing on the chair.

Okay, sister, the game's up.

ELISA: What do you mean?

SCHILLACI: Listen, sister, you're no Sister, sister. I know the Sisters and you, sister, are –

ELISA: If we don't continue the therapy, Cardinal Schillaci, the lombo-sciatology will return!

SCHILLACI: What?

ELISA: The Pope will seize up again, he'll be as stiff as a board!

SCHILLACI: The Pope will seize up again??

POPE: You heard her, Schillaci, get out of here!

SCHILLACI turns round expecting to see the POPE but he doesn't.

SCHILLACI: Who said that?

POPE: I did! Get out!

SCHILLACI looks round the room, still not noticing the POPE suspended in the air above him. Suddenly SCHILLACI settles on the dummy which he assumes is the real POPE. He is extremely worried. He drops to his knees in front of the dummy.

SCHILLACI: Holy Father! Oh my God, look at you! (*To ELISA*) He is as stiff as a board, you ain't kidding!

ELISA: I told you, didn't I?

SCHILLACI: Oh Blessed Father, talk to me, tell me you're going to be okay!

POPE: I will be if you stop interrupting, you prannock!

SCHILLACI: He never moved his lips! He talks but his lips don't move! (*To ELISA*) It's you! You put a curse on him, you witch! (*To GUARDS*) Take her away!

VIALLI: (*To GUARDS*) Stay where you are! Schillaci, what do you want?

SCHILLACI: She runs a centre for drug addicts.

VIALLI: We know that, you idiot!

POPE: Not drug addicts. Jugged rabbits!

SCHILLACI: (*To dummy*) Jugged rabbits?

POPE: Correct. A rehabilitation centre for rabbits. Kindly leave my Papal apartments.

SCHILLACI: (*To others*) That's incredible, I can't get over it. Holy Father, please. Take a look at this photograph.

He produces a photo of ELISA and shows it to the dummy.

It's the Sister here, right? Only she ain't wearing no habit. And you wanna know why? (*To VIALLI*) D-did he nod his head or what? (*To dummy*) I'll take that as a 'yes'. She ain't wearing no habit because –

POPE: I've seized up again! Oh no, I've gone!

The real POPE goes rigid up in his harness.

Help me Sister! Help me! Strado je jobje . . .

The POPE starts frantically to sing again as he tries to do the swimming motions.

SCHILLACI: He's singing! (*Referring to dummy*) It's incredible, he's singing!

POPE: It's not working!

SCHILLACI: No, no! It's working! I saw your lips move! I did! (*To VIALLI*) Did you see them move! (*To dummy*) They moved, I swear it, like that! (*Sings through pinched mouth*) Strndligi hurstelmage . . . Come on, come on!

ELISA: Stop! Enough!

POPE: It's your fault, Schillaci, you imbecile!

SCHILLACI: But –

POPE: Get out of here this instant! And stay out until you're summoned!

SCHILLACI walks past the dummy and once behind it he makes a threatening punching movement as if he'd love to smack the dummy in the face.

POPE: I saw that! Out!

SCHILLACI: Jesus, eyes in the back of his head.

SCHILLACI is about to skulk off.

ELISA: If I may be so bold, I'd like the Cardinal to stay.

POPE: If you think it's necessary, Sister.

SCHILLACI: (*To dummy*) That's what I'm trying to tell you, dummy! This broad here ain't no –

POPE: Your Eminence!

SCHILLACI: Okay, okay.

ELISA: We'll need all the voices we can get for this next cure!
Lower his Holiness down!

The SWISS GUARDS with the ropes start to lower the POPE down. SCHILLACI suddenly sees him.

SCHILLACI: What?!

SCHILLACI looks round the room at the others. With a venomous look for allowing him to make such a monkey of himself. His eyes fall upon the dummy last. As the GUARDS help the POPE out of the harness, SCHILLACI can't resist the temptation to smash the dummy in the face when the real POPE's back is turned. He smacks the dummy and turns to the others with a satisfied grin. Unfortunately the dummy springs back and clobbers SCHILLACI on the back of the head. The POPE manages to stand on his feet even though he's completely rigid again. ELISA gets a sheet of paper out of her bag.

ELISA: Okay everybody! Gather round.

All the others, except the POPE but including the GUARDS, gather quickly round ELISA.

I want you all to learn the words of this song. Quickly.

They all very quickly glance at the piece of paper, make a few mumbling noises as if learning and as a group back away after a mere five seconds.

ELISA: Everybody learnt them?

OTHERS: Yes, Sister Elisa!

ELISA: (*To POPE*) This'll sort you out. Join in when you feel yourself loosening up a bit. Music!

The music from offstage starts up. The whole cast, apart from the POPE, goes into a song and dance routine worthy of '42nd Street' and they sing The Vatican Rag by Tom Lehrer.

By the last chorus the POPE is cured and has joined in. The song finishes with everyone on one knee à la Al Jolson.

The Vatican Rag by Tom Lehrer

First you get down on your knees,
Fiddle with your rosaries,
Bow your head with great respect, and
Genuflect, genuflect, genuflect!

Do whatever steps you want if
You have cleared them with the Pontiff,
Make a cross on your abdomen,
When in Rome do like a Roman,

Everybody say his own
Kyrie eleison,
Ave maria,
Gee, it's good to see ya,

Doin' the Vatican
Gettin' ecstatic an'
Sort a dramatic an'
Doin' the Vatican Rag!

Get in line in that processional,
Step into that small confessional,
There the guy who's got religion'll
Tell you if your sin's original.

If it is try playin' it safer,
Drink the wine and chew the wafer,

Two, four, six, eight,
Time to transubstantiate!

POPE: I'm cured! I'm cured! Strictly within the confines of Papal Protocol and ecumenical etiquette – I love you!

ELISA: Be careful! You may relapse, you must take it easy!

POPE cavorts around stage obviously not totally cured.

POPE: Look, perfect! Well, nearly – it'll do me!!

Suddenly SCHILLACI grabs ELISA and pulls off her wimple revealing flowing locks.

ELISA: Ah.

SCHILLACI: You see! She ain't no Sister!

POPE: So why did you bring her here dressed up as a nun??

PROFESSOR: I had to find some way of getting her into the Vatican. You wouldn't have accepted her otherwise, would you?

POPE: But you were a missionary, though?

ELISA: 'Fraid not.

POPE: You don't even come from Burundi?

ELISA: Ah, that bit was true.

POPE: So who are you then?

ELISA: A witch like he said.

POPE: Oh my God, you're joking!

PROFESSOR: Of course she is Holy Father. She does have a very bizarre sense of humour.

ELISA: Let's cut the pretence, Professor. (*To POPE*) Yes, I am a witch. A classic witch. My life story is so fascinating they're going to make a one hundred and twenty-three-episode mini-series about it starring Jayne Seymour. That's right. I was born in Africa to white parents who were killed on a big game hunt, obviously. So I was raised by a Bantu

witch doctor. Well, by two Bantu witch doctors. They were married. To each other. By the time I was nine I was walking on burning coals. By eleven I was walking on water – trying to cool my feet from the burning coals mainly. When I was twelve I stopped a herd of wild elephants in their tracks who were about to trample through our village, by screaming ‘Ashoaoogo’ which is elephant for ‘Where do you think you’re going??’ Did I tell you about the time I met Tarzan?

POPE: Did anyone follow that?

SCHILLACI: She ain’t no nun, she may be a witch but she’s definitely a known criminal.

ELISA: I am not, you ignorant bigot.

SCHILLACI: Elisa Donadoni, drug trafficker.

POPE: Drug trafficker?

SCHILLACI: Operating out of Leoncavallo Street, right? I heard about a broad who runs a drugs centre but until now I didn’t know where it was. Or who she was. But now I know, right?

VIALLI: Why are you pleased to find all this out, Schillaci?

SCHILLACI: Because I am, that’s all, Vialli, that’s all. I like to see loose ends tidied up, that’s all.

POPE: What happened to the little juggled rabbits?

ELISA: I do not traffic in drugs! I help drug addicts!

POPE: Well, that’s not such a bad thing to do, Cardinal Schillaci.

SCHILLACI: But that ain’t all, Holy Father –

POPE: And she certainly cured me.

SCHILLACI: SHE ALSO DOES ABORTIONS.

The POPE immediately seizes up as before, he can barely talk.

ELISA: Whoops, that's blown it.

POPE: Abortions!! You do abortions?? (To PROFESSOR)
You brought a woman into the Vatican – into the Papal
apartments – into my bedroom – who does ABORTIONS!!

PROFESSOR: Please, please, Blessed Father, let's retain a
sense of proportion.

POPE: A SENSE OF PROPORTION??

PROFESSOR: Elisa works in a therapeutic community centre
where professional fully-trained gynaecologists carry out the
occasional abortion, that's all.

POPE: The occasional abortion?? Only the occasional murder
is it, Professor? Only the occasional mortal sin is it,
Professor. Well that's alright then obviously. You allow this
wretched woman to put her hands on me?! Hands that have
killed innocent unborn children! You butcher!

ELISA: And only a minute ago he said he loved me. (To
POPE) Let's get one thing straight! Personally speaking I
am not mad about abortions either. But better some young
kid comes to our centre than pays some real butcher a
quarter of a million lira to mangle her insides, right? Better
a teenage girl sees us than tries to miscarry herself and wind
up in intensive care. Better she lets us help her than give
birth to a child she can't afford and can't cope with so she
then smothers! Wise up, Holy Father, join the real world!

POPE: GET HER OUT OF MY SIGHT!

ELISA: And never mind my hands! It never worried you to
shake the hands of *real* murderers, did it? Marcos of the
Philippines or General Pinochet from Chile. Goodbye –
enjoy your seizure.

PROFESSOR: ELISA!!

POPE: I'm stuck!!

PROFESSOR: Call her back, Holy Father, she's the only
person who can cure you.

58 THE POPE AND THE WITCH

POPE: HELP!!

ELISA comes straight back on.

ELISA: Can I be of assistance?

POPE: GO AWAY!!

ELISA lets out a loud screech. All the others suddenly become convulsed and seize up in exactly the same outstretched position as the POPE. ELISA exits, singing the Vatican Rag.

Interval.

Act Two

Scene One

ELISA's centre. A run-down, sparsely furnished large room. Though basic, it is nevertheless clean and reasonably tidy. ELISA, dressed in simple jacket and skirt or trousers, is massaging an emaciated looking youth, ALFREDO, on a long table. To one side are a couple of other youths, a slow, lugubrious type, ROBERTO and a punk, FRANCESCA. They are quietly painting on some canvases on the floor. ELISA has an assistant, CLAUDIA, upstage preparing some medicinal material. The atmosphere is quiet and calm. ELISA quietly hums the Vatican Rag to herself as she massages. She chuckles.

ELISA: I wish you'd been there, Claudia. (*Imitating SCHILLACI*) 'I'm gonna take you out.' And did you see the Pope on the TV? Talking to the children in St Peter's Square. With his arms outstretched the entire time. (*She mimics the POPE and they both laugh*) I wonder if they managed to cure him.

There is a loud knock on the upstage entrance door. ROBERTO and FRANCESCA leap up and rush for the door. Even ALFREDO on ELISA's table tries to get up but ELISA stops him.

You'll get your turn.

FRANCESCA opens the door and there is the PROFESSOR.

PROFESSOR: Good morning, Elisa –

ELISA turns round, surprised. FRANCESCA and ROBERTO suddenly yank the PROFESSOR through the doorway and slam the door shut behind him.

Ah!

FRANCESCA: Where's the stuff?

ROBERTO: You the courier, man?

PROFESSOR: Let me go!

ELISA: Leave him! It won't be him, he's a professor.

FRANCESCA: Why shouldn't it be a professor who brings it?

ELISA: Let him go!

*The youths let him go and wander back to their painting.
ELISA goes back to the massage on ALFREDO.*

PROFESSOR: What's all that about? What are they after?

ELISA: Nothing, nothing, a misunderstanding. What do you want?

PROFESSOR: Oh, I'm very well, Elisa, thank you. And how are you?

ELISA: Busy. *(To ALFREDO)* That's you done. Next. *(To PROFESSOR)* Yes?

ALFREDO gets off the table. FRANCESCA climbs up onto the table.

PROFESSOR: I only dropped by to say hello. See how you are.

ELISA: As you can see, I'm fine. Goodbye.

PROFESSOR: Elisa. I thought we were friends.

ELISA: We were. Until yesterday. I presume you've come here for a reason, Professor. I sincerely hope you don't expect me to make a return visit to Mister Paranoia with the cute line in dresses.

PROFESSOR: *(Laughs)* Good God, no!

ELISA: So you needn't stay then. Mind the step on your way out.

ELISA gently pushes the PROFESSOR towards the door.

PROFESSOR: Elisa! I need your help, please! The Pope's at his wits' end, all seized up like that. I've tried everything – electric shock, acupuncture, a key down the back of the neck. Nothing! Sister Gabriella even gave him two verses of 'Dominica' by the Singing Nun. (*Sings a bar or two*) It made him worse! He's as stiff as a board and he's absolutely desperate. He's even asked for you again. He's even said he'll forgive your mass murder of unborn children!

ELISA: Out!!

They arrive by the door.

PROFESSOR: I beg you!

ELISA: There is no way I am ever going to set foot in that creepy place again!

PROFESSOR: I know that!

ELISA: So why are you here?

The PROFESSOR opens the door and there is the POPE in the door-frame. He is holding above his head a huge basket of laundry – to disguise the fact that his arms are stuck in the air. He also wears a cloth cap and rough working clothes.

POPE: Good morning, my dear.

ELISA: (*Quietly to PROFESSOR*) You brought the Pope here???

ROBERTO: Here he is, guys!

The three youths are up and heading towards the door as ELISA is quickly checking that no one outside in the street has seen the POPE arrive.

ELISA: Come in, come in.

ELISA pulls the POPE in causing him to trip over the step

and fall over. His basket flies through the air and is caught by one of the youths. The POPE ends up face down on his knees with his outstretched arms on the floor in front of him. The other youths stop in front of him.

ROBERTO: (To POPE) You facing Mecca, man?

FRANCESCA: It must be in the basket!

The three youths start to rifle through the laundry in the basket.

POPE: (Quietly) I'm stuck.

ELISA and the PROFESSOR help the POPE to his feet and place him on a chair.

ELISA: (To PROFESSOR) You must be insane, bringing him here.

POPE: I instructed him to. The laundry basket was Sister Gabriella's idea.

PROFESSOR: What are they looking for?

FRANCESCA: It's not in here, it must be *on* him!

The three youths set about searching the POPE and inadvertently knock his chair over. The POPE is back on the floor, this time with arms in the air.

POPE: Aah!

ELISA: Stop that! He's nothing to do with it, he is not the courier!

ELISA and the PROFESSOR get him up again and the chair upright.

FRANCESCA: It's usually here by now.

ELISA: Just hang on a while, alright?

ROBERTO: (To POPE) Why have you got your arms in the air, man? Are you some kind of Hindu holy man? Have you ever been to Poona? I have.

POPE: How interesting. Did you come back with enlightenment?

ROBERTO: No, man, I came back with dysentery.

ELISA: Roberto, go back to your painting.

ROBERTO: I don't feel too good, Elisa. In fact I feel pretty awful.

ELISA: Stop complaining. This gentleman doesn't complain, does he? And he's obviously in a worse state than you are.

ROBERTO: I'm not a holy man like him though, am I?

POPE: Who are they waiting for, Elisa?

ELISA: Oh nothing, a delivery of something, that's all.

POPE: It wouldn't happen to be the packet in my jacket would it?

ELISA: You've got a packet in your jacket?

POPE: This fella leapt off his bike just now, slipped it into my jacket and says 'Give this to Elisa'. Who was he? What is it?

ROBERTO: Hey, man, the Hindu's got the gear!

The youths dive on the POPE, pushing him over onto the floor again, in an effort to search him.

POPE: HELP!

ELISA pushes them off him and helps the POPE to his feet again.

ELISA: Stop that! You assault this man again and I'll throw the lot of you out!

POPE: Lord help the next person who so much as breathes on me.

FRANCESCA: Who d'you think you are? God Almighty?

POPE: As good as.

ELISA: (*To youths*) Go back to your paintings!

ROBERTO: Yeah, sorry, Elisa. Come on, guys, be cool.

POPE: In my inside pocket.

ELISA takes out the transparent packet from inside the POPE's jacket, goes over to CLAUDIA and gives it to her.

What is it anyway?

ELISA: Grade 'A' heroin.

PROFESSOR: Heroin?

POPE: HEROIN??

ELISA: Uh uh.

ELISA and CLAUDIA prepare the mixture for the injections with various bottles, test-tubes, instruments and a small spirit lamp.

POPE: The packet put into my pocket contained heroin. So for two . . . maybe three . . . minutes . . . I, that is me, numero uno, stood in a public street with a laundry basket on my head and Grade 'A' heroin in my pocket!!

ELISA: Looks like it.

This time the POPE keels over in the chair without any assistance. The PROFESSOR helps him up again. The POPE stares out front, eyes wide open, in a state of shock.

Okay, kids. Come and get it.

ELISA gets the syringes ready for the first injection as the youths line up. (ELISA and CLAUDIA should administer the injections to the youths in a totally matter-of-fact unobtrusive way. Each youth quietly goes over to the painting area after his or her fix and carries on painting or whatever. Nothing special should be made of this activity.)

PROFESSOR: Are-are you about to inject these-these . . . adolescents with-with drugs?

ELISA: Under medical supervision, of course. Claudia here is a doctor. A heroin addict but a doctor nevertheless.

PROFESSOR: You-you actually administer grade 'A' heroin on these premises??

ELISA: Not quite, Professor, no. Full-strength, it would blow their minds, of course, so I make up a mixture. I add a vein-dilating Arsenofix, some Merenal and one or two other ingredients. But I thought you knew all this when you put in a good word for me at the Town Hall.

PROFESSOR: No, I did not! You talked about therapy! I thought you meant basket-weaving! You never said anything about . . . administering the evil drug yourself.

ELISA: You never asked.

CLAUDIA puts the medicinal gear away and ELISA goes over to the POPE who has been staring, eyes wide open, in a state of shock. ELISA snaps her fingers in front of his eyes. He immediately wakes up, stands up, still with his arms outstretched.

POPE: Goodbye.

He turns around and walks purposefully towards the door. The PROFESSOR runs to stop him.

PROFESSOR: Stop! Elisa's the only one who can cure you!

POPE: I don't care. I am not having my body touched again by a drug-crazed witch who traffics in grade 'A' heroin!

ELISA: I do not traffic! We supply drugs at a controlled price, at a fraction of its street value, and that includes a clean needle and medical supervision! Goodbye!

POPE: Goodbye!

ELISA is furious and turns away. The POPE is furious and turns away. They turn back to each other at the same moment.

POPE/ELISA: And another thing –

ELISA: What?

POPE: You promote crime. Vice. Corruption!

ELISA: Cobblers! If Alfredo wasn't here he'd thieve to finance his habit. He'd also have to find other kids to deal to. If Francesca wasn't here she'd be on the game. If Roberto wasn't here – he'd be thieving too –

ROBERTO: No, I wouldn't. (*ELISA looks at him*) 'Cos I'd be caught and I'd be in prison. Sorry, I was only trying to help your argument. (*To POPE*) You're not a mate of the Baghwan, are you?

POPE: Hardly. Goodbye.

The PROFESSOR stops the POPE leaving again.

PROFESSOR: Let Elisa cure you, please.

POPE: Why should I?

PROFESSOR: (*To ELISA*) Cure him, please!

ELISA: Why should I?

PROFESSOR: You should help each other!

POPE/ELISA: Why should we??

PROFESSOR: You must love each other!

POPE/ELISA: Why must we??

PROFESSOR: BECAUSE YOU'RE CHRISTIANS!

The POPE and ELISA look a little sheepish.

ROBERTO: I'm more of a Buddhist myself . . .

OTHERS: Shut up!!

ELISA: (*To POPE*) On this table.

ELISA rolls her sleeves up as the POPE lies down on the table with his arms sticking out. She massages him roughly.

Sing.

The POPE tries to sing but it's very difficult with ELISA pulling him about so roughly.

D'you think I enjoy injecting heroin into these kids? It makes me feel sick every time. Sing, I said.

POPE: Ow! Sopke janglike . . . ow! So why do it?

ELISA: Keep still! Sing. 'Cos while they're here they're not going to be arrested or catch AIDS or get beaten up and maybe, just maybe, they can stay alive and reasonably healthy long enough to give up drugs and rebuild their lives, get it?

POPE: We have to show compassion of course but – ayeee!

ELISA turns him roughly onto his front. His arms are now stuck out to the sides.

But you encourage these youngsters to take drugs! You virtually give the stuff away, you said so yourself. If this place didn't exist maybe these young people wouldn't know how to obtain heroin. Maybe they'd stay away from drugs for fear of ending up in prison. Ayeee!

ELISA sits him up bolt upright and starts tugging at his arms in an almost frantic way.

For God's sake, what are you doing to me??

ELISA: RELAX!!! SING!!

POPE: Lombradjike . . . AAH!

ROBERTO: (*To POPE*) No, man, you got it all wrong. Heroin grows on trees these days. Well, not literally obviously . . . that'd be too much . . . no, but you can get the stuff on any street corner, man . . . except if there's the Carabinieri there . . . unless it's the Carabinieri who's actually dealing . . . no, what I mean is we don't come here for a free fix . . . we come here 'cos we want to get off the stuff, right? . . . and Elisa helps us do that, y'know? Right? Ravi Shankar.

ELISA: (*To POPE*) Off!

ELISA steps away from the table and lights up a cigarette. The POPE sits up, still with his arms stretched out.

POPE: I'm not cured!

ELISA: I can't do it. I can't heal when I've been upset. You'll have to stay like that for a bit. You were happy to ten minutes ago anyway.

POPE: My bloody arms are falling off!

ELISA: Hang off that bar there, should be the right height.
The PROFESSOR helps the POPE off the table.

PROFESSOR: (To ELISA) Where do you get the heroin from, as a matter of interest?

ROBERTO: We get a packet every day, man. But we don't know who from, right?

PROFESSOR: Really?

The PROFESSOR hangs the POPE off the bar. His feet just about touch the ground.

ELISA: Really. An unknown benefactor has it delivered every morning. Sometimes through the letterbox, sometimes in a carton of milk, once it was tied to the leg of a carrier pigeon!

PROFESSOR: Good grief!

They laugh but the POPE stands there, holding onto the bar above his head, in a miserable mood.

POPE: Only today it was stuffed into Mister Stiffy's jacket! How long do I have to stay like this? I feel like a bat.

ROBERTO: Hey, good one.

Suddenly a DRUNK crashes through the door from the street.

POPE: Oh Jesus!

DRUNK: (Sings) Nessun Dorma . . .

The POPE looks away quickly so as not to be seen. The PROFESSOR quickly stands in front of the POPE to hide him as the DRUNK staggers further in. CLAUDIA collects him and sits him down.

Where's my wine?

ELISA: *(To PROFESSOR)* One of our regulars. Been in every day for a fortnight.

PROFESSOR: Get rid of him.

ELISA: No. He's a patient of mine.

POPE: I'm a patient of yours.

PROFESSOR: *(To POPE)* Quiet. *(To ROBERTO)* Stand there and don't move.

ELISA: *(To DRUNK)* What do you fancy, Signore Baresi?

ELISA ignores the PROFESSOR's anxiety about the POPE being recognised.

DRUNK: Today . . . I shall try a Bulgarian Sauvignon . . . pre-Chernobyl preferably.

ELISA: No problem. I have the corkscrew here.

ELISA starts to move her hand in front of the DRUNKS's eyes.

POPE: *(Unable to see)* What's going on?

PROFESSOR: I think she's hypnotising him.

The DRUNK looks away and sees the PROFESSOR.

DRUNK: Hello.

ELISA: *(To PROFESSOR)* Idiot.

The DRUNK gets up and walks towards the PROFESSOR who has the POPE's arms appearing over his head. He looks carefully and turns back to ELISA.

DRUNK: That man's got four arms.

ELISA: No he hasn't.

The PROFESSOR hides his own arms behind his back as the POPE lets go of the bar and drops his stiff arms alongside the PROFESSOR's body. The DRUNK takes one of the POPE's hands and shakes it.

DRUNK: How do you do?

ROBERTO: How do you do?

PROFESSOR: How do you do?

DRUNK: How do you do?

POPE: How do you do?

ELISA takes the DRUNK back to his seat. The POPE holds on to the bar again.

ELISA: Look at the corkscrew. You feel light . . . light as a feather . . . good.

The DRUNK is well away. ELISA mimes opening a bottle of wine which she then hands to the DRUNK.

Take the cork out. A tall glass for a Sauvignon, I think.

The DRUNK struggles with the imaginary bottle as ELISA mimes polishing a glass. The DRUNK succeeds in opening the bottle and he holds it up. ELISA hands him an imaginary glass. He pours into and tastes it.

How is it?

DRUNK: Not bad. A cheeky little wine, presumptuous of it to think it could travel . . . but not bad! My friend, join me!

The DRUNK goes to the PROFESSOR again who nudges the POPE who drops his arms down by the PROFESSOR's side again. The DRUNK pours out another imaginary glass and puts it in the POPE's hand. But the POPE hasn't seen him do it of course because he's hidden behind the PROFESSOR.

(Drinks) Cheers!

ROBERTO: Cheers!

Nothing happens so the PROFESSOR whispers out of the corner of his mouth to the POPE.

PROFESSOR: Glass in your hand.

ROBERTO: Cheers!

The POPE moves a stiff arm up.

PROFESSOR: (*Whispers*) Wrong arm.

The POPE moves the other arm up. The PROFESSOR tries to drink out of the imaginary glass in the POPE's hand without revealing the POPE behind him but of course he can't reach it because the arm is stiff. After a few moments

...

ELISA: Come, Signore, time for your afternoon walk.

ELISA collects the DRUNK and leads him towards the exit.

PROFESSOR: You've actually convinced him he's drinking wine?

ELISA: That's nothing. I once convinced a fella that he was actually throwing children over a balcony.

The POPE's head appears.

POPE: (*Impressed*) You're kidding? Wish I'd seen that!

ELISA: (*To DRUNK*) Goodbye, Signore.

DRUNK: Volare, oh, cantare, oh, oh, oh, oh. Arrivederci Roma. Goodbye.

ELISA opens the door for the DRUNK who leaves. ELISA closes the door. The PROFESSOR moves towards her.

PROFESSOR: Can he be cured with hypnosis?

ELISA: I can stop him drinking, but I can't do a thing about his voice!! Last week he was miming four bottles a day. Now he's down to two.

PROFESSOR: So why not try it with your addicts?

ELISA: It doesn't work. Sod's law eh? Cheers.

She mimes drinking a glass of wine. Suddenly the door crashes open again. The DRUNK comes in backwards being pushed by two POLICEMEN. One in plainclothes, one in uniform. The first flashes ID.

FIRST POLICEMAN: Drug Squad.

ELISA: Holy Mackerel!

POPE: Holy Shit!

PROFESSOR: Holy Father!!

Quick as a flash the PROFESSOR grabs a sheet from the laundry basket that the POPE brought with him, and throws the sheet over the bar which the POPE is hanging from. It covers him up . . . almost. The feet are still visible. The DRUNK passes out. The three youths cower nervously to one side.

FIRST POLICEMAN: Detective Sergeant Zoff. Who's in charge here?

ELISA: I am.

FIRST POLICEMAN: We have reason to believe that illicit drugs are being used on these premises.

PROFESSOR: Absolutely not true, Sergeant!

FIRST POLICEMAN: And who are you?

PROFESSOR: Professor Ridolfi. Neurological Surgeon, Emeritus Professor of Advanced Psychiatry and the world's leading expert on rare and complicated nervous disorders. My card.

The FIRST POLICEMAN reads the card and gives it back.

FIRST POLICEMAN: (*Reading*) 'Brenda Smith.' (*To PROFESSOR*) Okay, Brenda, where's the smack?

PROFESSOR: Ha ha, no, no, Sergeant, you've got it all

wrong. Perhaps you've seen my hugely successful prime time television programme? 'Watch Out, Ridolfi's About!'

FIRST POLICEMAN: What you doing here, Brenda? Buying or selling?

PROFESSOR: I'm . . . researching!

SECOND POLICEMAN: Look at this lot, Sarge.

The SECOND POLICEMAN has been rummaging about at the back and found some new syringes.

FIRST POLICEMAN: Aha! *(To youths)* And these are the users. *(To ROBERTO)* You, up!

ROBERTO gets to his feet. The FIRST POLICEMAN goes up to him and examines the pupils.

Just as I thought. Dilated pupils. Smack freak.

PROFESSOR: He's not a smack freak, he's . . . a diabetic.

FIRST POLICEMAN: A diabetic?

ROBERTO: No, I'm not, I'm a smack freak. Oops, sorry. Done it again, haven't I?

FIRST POLICEMAN: *(To PROFESSOR)* You're in trouble, Brenda. *(To ELISA)* You're in trouble too. Where's the stash?

Suddenly the FIRST POLICEMAN sees the POPE's feet sticking out from under the sheet. He goes over.

(To sheet) Who's behind there then, eh? *(No reply)* Who's this twinkletoes then, eh?

The FIRST POLICEMAN puts his heel on the front of one of the feet and grinds it. ELISA and the PROFESSOR squirm. But no sound from behind the sheet. The FIRST POLICEMAN bends down and carefully holds onto both shoes. He stands up and suddenly pulls them. But the shoes are empty so he goes flying back and lands on his backside. He gets up, angry, and turns to ELISA.

Is that your idea of a joke?? To make me think that there's somebody hiding behind that sheet?

The FIRST POLICEMAN takes his gun out and points it at the sheet.

ELISA: Don't shoot!

ELISA runs over and pulls the sheet off the POPE who's hanging there with his stockinged feet off the ground.

FIRST POLICEMAN: Well, well, well. Who have we here?

ROBERTO: It's a Hindu holy man, man.

FIRST POLICEMAN: A Hindu holy man, man, eh? And why is he hanging from that bar?

ELISA: Getting fit. He's in training.

The POPE suddenly tries to do some exercises but falls off, lands on his feet with his arms still in the air. The FIRST POLICEMAN looks at him.

FIRST POLICEMAN: I know you. What's your name?

ELISA: He can't talk, he's dumb! And deaf!

FIRST POLICEMAN: Deaf and dumb, eh?

The POPE nods 'yes' and goes back to his bar.

(To ELISA) Okay, where's the gear? If you don't tell me, you and your pals are in serious shit.

PROFESSOR: Honestly, Sergeant, you've got it all wrong –

ELISA: Don't deny it . . . Brenda. The cops know we use drugs here, I don't know why they've raided us now, they never have before.

ELISA has collected a small quantity of heroin from the trolley at the back.

Here. Take it and go.

The SECOND POLICEMAN takes it and puts it in his pocket.

FIRST POLICEMAN: And the rest?

ELISA: There isn't any more. It gets delivered by the day. A few grammes at a time.

FIRST POLICEMAN: Who by?

ELISA: We don't know.

FIRST POLICEMAN: You don't know??

ELISA: No!

The FIRST POLICEMAN grabs her by the arm.

FIRST POLICEMAN: Santa Claus bring it, does he?

PROFESSOR: Leave her!

The SECOND POLICEMAN holds back the PROFESSOR.

ELISA: Honestly, we don't know!

FIRST POLICEMAN: Express delivery from the Tooth Fairy, is it?

ELISA: Aaaaah!

FIRST POLICEMAN: I know! It's the Easter Bunny!

ELISA: Aaaaah!

PROFESSOR: Stop that, you brute!

The SECOND POLICEMAN puts his hand across the PROFESSOR's mouth.

FIRST POLICEMAN: Don't tell me! Your next stash'll be delivered by the Pope!!

ELISA: Aaaaah!

POPE: Leave her alone, you . . . pig!!

Everyone stops dead. They all look at the POPE.

POPE: I can talk! It's a miracle, I can talk! (*Suddenly*) And I can hear! I can hear!

He lets go of the bar and jumps for joy. The FIRST POLICEMAN grabs the POPE.

FIRST POLICEMAN: I don't like people taking the piss. Put your arms down.

POPE: I can't.

The FIRST POLICEMAN puts a gun to his temples.

Really, I can't. I've got the Witches' Stroke.

FIRST POLICEMAN: Three seconds. One.

POPE: No, really, I can't honestly. (To ELISA) I had no idea the Roman police were this unpleasant, I'm going to do something about it when I get . . . get home.

FIRST POLICEMAN: Two.

POPE: Was that a-a 'two'?

PROFESSOR: Put your arms down!

POPE: I can't!

FIRST POLICEMAN: Two and a half.

POPE: You wouldn't shoot me, would you?

OTHERS: PUT YOUR ARMS DOWN!!

The FIRST POLICEMAN cocks his pistol. Suddenly the POPE puts his arms down.

POPE: Another miracle!

The POPE goes for the door, flexing his arms to make sure that they're back to normal.

'Bye 'bye, everybody, sorry I can't stay but one or two matters to attend to –

FIRST POLICEMAN: Hold it!

POPE: – but they can wait of course. Now, Sergeant –

FIRST POLICEMAN: Shut up! (To ELISA) Where is it?

SECOND POLICEMAN: Yeah, where's our stash?

ELISA: 'Our' stash?

SECOND POLICEMAN: Fifty kilos we've had nicked!

FIRST POLICEMAN: (*To SECOND POLICEMAN*) Shut up, idiot!

SECOND POLICEMAN: Half a hundredweight!

FIRST POLICEMAN: BE QUIET!

ELISA: You're not police!

ELISA goes to protect CLAUDIA and the other youths.

POPE: Really? Who are they?

ELISA: Gangsters!

PROFESSOR/POPE: Gangsters!!

The FIRST POLICEMAN takes out his gun again and the POPE and the PROFESSOR put their arms in the air.

FIRST POLICEMAN: Nobody move!

PROFESSOR: We surrender!

ELISA: Why bother about the few grammes we dole out here? The amount you people handle, I'm surprised you'd notice!

The FIRST POLICEMAN goes to the trolley as he takes a small phial from his pocket. He fixes up a syringe with the substance he brought and some heroin.

FIRST POLICEMAN: It's the principle of the thing. You've set a dangerous example here, Miss Donadoni, it could spoil our trade. What with one or two other centres like this opening, the bottom has begun to drop out of the market. The rot stops here. (*He squirts the syringe which is now ready.*)

POPE: I've been so blind, so stupid! Of course! Give the

drugs away! That'll get rid of the gangsters and the AIDS and the prostitutes and the . . . I've misjudged you.

FIRST POLICEMAN: Shut up baldy. And another thing, a couple of weeks ago a courier was unloading a sizeable quantity of heroin – our heroin – when he was held up at gunpoint and relieved of his cargo. Now I'm going to find out where it is. What's left of it that is. (To **SECOND POLICEMAN**) Roll her sleeve up.

ELISA: No!

*The **SECOND POLICEMAN** grabs **ELISA**.*

PROFESSOR: No! Stop that!!

ROBERTO: I'll have it, man, if you want.

ELISA: Get off me!!

*There's a general melée with **ELISA**, the two **POLICEMEN**, the **PROFESSOR**, **CLAUDIA** and **ROBERTO**. The **POPE** stands nearby, anxious, with his arms still in the air. As everyone is shouting the **FIRST POLICEMAN** is accidentally pushed over and his syringe goes straight into the **POPE**'s arm. Everybody freezes. The **POPE** is horrified.*

FIRST POLICEMAN: Oh dear.

POPE: What's in there?

FIRST POLICEMAN: Heroin and pentothal.

ELISA: Oh my God!!

FIRST POLICEMAN: He'll be singing like a canary on speed.

***POPE** climbs up scaffolding tower.*

POPE: I . . . I . . . don't feel so . . . brilliant!

FIRST POLICEMAN: Alright, Hindu holy man, man, let's see what *you* know!

POPE: Hello . . . hello . . . can you hear me?

FIRST POLICEMAN: So who are you?

POPE: I'm the holy man.

FIRST POLICEMAN: What's your name?

POPE: H-H-Holy . . . His Holiness. Holy Father.

FIRST POLICEMAN: Do you know anything about a consignment of heroin from Calabria?

POPE: It was stolen. And distributed free. Or nearly free. At a fraction of its street value. To take away the market's bottom. Under medical supervision. Free syringe in the bottom. Good idea I think. Yes I do. Naughty Mafia! Naughty!

FIRST POLICEMAN: (*To SECOND POLICEMAN*) Looks like we struck lucky. (*To POPE*) Who do you work for?

POPE: The Vatican.

FIRST POLICEMAN: The Vatican??

POPE: The Vatican.

FIRST POLICEMAN: Whose idea was it to give away free drugs?

POPE: The Vatican's.

FIRST POLICEMAN: The Vatican's??

POPE: The Vatican's.

SECOND POLICEMAN: The Vatican's??

ELISA: The Vatican's! You heard him!

FIRST POLICEMAN: Who organised the hijack of our cargo?

POPE: The Vatican.

FIRST POLICEMAN: The Vatican??

POPE: The Vatican.

FIRST POLICEMAN: The Vatican??

ALL: THE VATICAN!!

80 THE POPE AND THE WITCH

FIRST POLICEMAN: Okay, okay.

SECOND POLICEMAN: (*To* FIRST POLICEMAN) That Schillaci double-crossed us!

FIRST POLICEMAN: SHUT UP, IDIOT!

ELISA: (*To* PROFESSOR) D'you hear that? Cardinal Schillaci.

FIRST POLICEMAN: (*To* POPE) Tell me, holy man, man, *whose* idea in the Vatican was it to steal the drugs and distribute them free?

SECOND POLICEMAN: Ask him if it was Cardinal Schillaci?

The FIRST POLICEMAN *is* sorely tempted to shoot his partner.

POPE: It's a crazy Utopian idea . . .

FIRST POLICEMAN: Yes, yes, gimme a name.

POPE: There's going to be a terrible fuss . . .

FIRST POLICEMAN: Name!

POPE: I've misjudged you Elisa.

FIRST POLICEMAN: WHOSE IDEA WAS IT?

POPE: Mine!!

FIRST POLICEMAN: AND WHO ARE YOU??

POPE: I'm the Pope!

FIRST POLICEMAN: Pope?? Which Pope? What are you talking about?

POPE: *The* Pope. John Paul the . . . the . . .

ELISA: Second.

POPE: Second, right! That's me! (*Into radio mode*) A Vatican spokesman announced today that the Pope has stated that the Mafia will never be defeated unless the drug market is liberalised under the control of the state . . .

ELISA: Bravo!

FIRST POLICEMAN: (*To ELISA*) Why does he think he's the Pope?

ELISA makes a 'loopy' gesture.

POPE: (*Continuing*) . . . and the military dictatorships of the cocaine producing countries of South America will soon collapse if the market in the United States is liberalised too . . . bravo, yes . . . And now sport – Juventus are on target for another league championship . . .

FIRST POLICEMAN: Shut him up, for God's sake!

POPE: . . . that's right, for God's sake . . . (*Makes radio noises as if the channels are being changed quickly*) . . . Wind speed 3 to 4 gale force later . . . And that was last week's number one, pop pickers and now . . . Zaga-de-do-do . . . by a rabid dog in Pisa . . .

The POPE carries on switching channels, muttering away.

SECOND POLICEMAN: (*To FIRST POLICEMAN*) What's happening? Schillaci's set us up, there's probably cops about! Let's get out of here!

FIRST POLICEMAN: Shut up! (*To POPE*) Shut up or I'll shoot!

The POPE ignores him and carries on. The FIRST POLICEMAN raises his gun.

ELISA: No, don't! He is the Pope!!

The SECOND POLICEMAN grabs ELISA.

SECOND POLICEMAN: Who is he? Is he a cop??

POPE: . . . and the guests on 'Any Questions' are the Pope . . .

DRUNK: 'Any Questions'! My favourite!

The DRUNK suddenly arises from his slumber.

Is it opening time yet?

FIRST POLICEMAN: Shut up or you'll get it too!

SECOND POLICEMAN: They're all crazy, let's go!

FIRST POLICEMAN: We can't leave them, they know too much – thanks to you, you prat! (*To ELISA*) Get over by the others! (*To the PROFESSOR*) You too! Brenda.

ELISA: Are you going to shoot us in cold blood?

FIRST POLICEMAN: 'Fraid so. But this bald lunatic first!

The FIRST POLICEMAN turns to the POPE.

OTHERS: NO! HELP!

DRUNK: You can't shoot us, old boy. Drop that gun.

The DRUNK points his finger as if it was a gun.

FIRST POLICEMAN: (*To DRUNK*) So you want to be first, do you?

OTHERS: HELP! HELP!

The FIRST POLICEMAN raises his gun and is about to fire when there's a shot. The FIRST POLICEMAN is hit and crumples to the floor – much to his surprise. Smoke wisps out of the DRUNK's sleeve. The others look on in complete consternation, especially the SECOND POLICEMAN who pulls his gun out. The POPE meanwhile is oblivious to all this and is dribbling on.

POPE: . . . fresher breath with Revolax, now in handy capsule form . . .

SECOND POLICEMAN: Who fired? Who's got the gun? (*To DRUNK*) You??

The DRUNK nods 'yes' and points his finger at him. The SECOND POLICEMAN is about to shoot when there's another shot and the SECOND POLICEMAN crumples to the floor. The others stand there, amazed, as the DRUNK takes off his tatty old raincoat, revealing a pistol attached to his forearm on a kind of track. He talks in a U.S. accent and is also completely sober.

DRUNK: Little invention of mine. Clever, huh?

ELISA: Who are you?

DRUNK: Pete Johnson, ma'am. Drug Enforcement Agency. I've been waiting for these guys to show for a while. Since you and your friends held up their truck as a matter of fact.

ELISA: How did you know??

DRUNK: I'm an American. I know everything.

PROFESSOR: *You stole the Mafia's drugs??*

ELISA: Not me personally, no. Some people I know.

PROFESSOR: So they're the ones who send you the daily consignment.

ELISA: Right. We're opening quite a few of these centres, like he said.

DRUNK: Of which we don't approve, little lady. Jesus, you liberalise the drugs market and I'm out of a job, right? I'm sorry I'm going to have to arrest you.

ELISA: You can't arrest me!

DRUNK: I'm American. I can do anything. (*Gives her money*) But here's some money, it's what I owe you.

ELISA: What's that for?

DRUNK: I must have had two dozen bottles of wine here, Elisa.

They all laugh, except the DRUNK.

What's so funny?

ELISA shrugs and takes the money. Suddenly there's a shot and the DRUNK falls to the floor. The SECOND POLICEMAN has stayed alive just long enough to kill the DRUNK and then finally die himself. The others scream. The POPE dribbles on.

ELISA: That was a close shave!!

Blackout.

Scene Two

The corridor outside the POPE's apartments inside the Vatican. BAGGIO comes on, reading some newspapers. He is very pleased with himself.

BAGGIO: *(To himself)* Oh ya, this is major. Front page coverage in every serious newspaper in every serious country, wow! 'Pope Sanctions Dope', oh ya, pithy. 'Contraceptives condoned.' 'The Pope no longer firm on condoms.' Oh, too much, 'firm on condoms', oh incredible pun! What's this, *The Sun*: 'Bonk! God says OK!' Luigi, you are one senior press officer. You are one major Monsignor about to make serious waves in Vatican City. You are about to be VIP. Very important to the Pontiff! Oh ya!!

BAGGIO laughs and stamps his foot in pleasure as VIALLI comes on in a hurry.

VIALLI: What are you so happy about?

BAGGIO: Oh, your Eminence, I-I-I'm sorry, I-I-I-I . . .

VIALLI: Have you seen the Professor? He should be here by now?

BAGGIO: Negative, your Eminence.

VIALLI: This is a complete catastrophe! How on earth are we ever, ever going to put this right?

BAGGIO: Sure, right, but . . . but don't you think there is an up-side to all this, your Eminence?

VIALLI: An up-side?? The Pope goes on walkabout in the streets of Rome, shows his bare arm and says 'I too have taken heroin' – an up-side?? The Pope goes to the Via Dolorosa, sets up a market stall and gives away free condoms – an up-side??

BAGGIO: Oh sure, right, I get where you're coming from on this one, your Eminence. Very major down-side, right?

A warbling sound. BAGGIO takes out his mobile phone.

VIALLI: If the end of the world can be described as a 'major down-side' then yes.

BAGGIO: (*Into phone*) Okay, right. (*To VIALLI*) The Government's fallen, wow.

VIALLI: We knew that this morning.

BAGGIO: The United States Government. (*Listens again*)

VIALLI: WHAT??

BAGGIO: And the German Government.

VIALLI starts praying loudly as SCHILLACI rushes on, holding a newspaper.

SCHILLACI: Have you heard the news??

VIALLI: Just now. It's unbelievable!

SCHILLACI: Ain't it? Killed by a drunk!

VIALLI: What? What are you talking about?

SCHILLACI: That crazy witch says in the paper here that two gangsters bust into her centre disguised as police and were shot dead by a drunk . . . How d'you like that, huh? How could a drunk have killed those guys? I reckon that witch must have killed them with some black magic or something.

VIALLI: Is that all you can think about? At a time like this?

SCHILLACI: Yeah, well, if I ever seen the Professor and that broad again . . .

VIALLI: Which you will. They're on their way here.

SCHILLACI: They're coming here??

VIALLI: I've summoned them both. Someone's got to cure the Pope! Someone's got to stop his insane ranting! We can't do it!

SCHILLACI: Oh yes we can!

VIALLI: How?

SCHILLACI: It's in hand, don't worry!

SCHILLACI goes to leave as ELISA and the PROFESSOR come on. ELISA is in her nun's habit.

ELISA/SCHILLACI: You!!

SCHILLACI leaves.

PROFESSOR: We came as quickly as we could, your Eminence.

ELISA: What is *he* still doing here?? (*Referring to SCHILLACI*)

VIALLI: At last! Miss Donadoni –

ELISA: Didn't the Holy Father tell you that it was Cardinal Schillaci who sent the gangsters to murder us all?

VIALLI: Whatever are you talking about?

ELISA: When the Pope came to see me and there was a shoot-out.

VIALLI: His Holiness never mentioned any shoot-out. He remembers very little from his visit to your centre except that it was his road to Damascus, that he has now seen the light. So you are responsible for this disaster, Miss Donadoni, you are the one who has filled his head with this madness, so you are the one who is bloody well going to get him back to normal!

ELISA: And then what? Burn me as a witch?

VIALLI: You are a witch, that's right. You possessed him with this madness.

PROFESSOR: What 'madness' are you referring to?

VIALLI: (*To PROFESSOR*) And who brought the witch here in the first place? You did!

ELISA: That's it, I'm fed up with this abuse, I'm fed up with having to wear this stupid habit every time I come here! I was in such a hurry to answer your Eminence's summons that I even put the wrong shoes on! I had to cross St Peter's Square like this. (*Crouches down*) 'Look' they shouted 'a dwarf nun.' Well, that's it, I'm off.

VIALLI: I'm sorry, I'm sorry, please, please, we're all under a strain here, I'm sorry. Please.

ELISA: That's better. So you want the Holy Father back to what he was like before?

VIALLI: Yes. Please. I beg you.

ELISA: You'd rather he threw imaginary children over his balcony?

VIALLI: I'd rather he danced in St Peter's Square wearing a tutu! Anything, anything other than this!

PROFESSOR: Excuse me, but I've been in an operating theatre for the past thirty-six hours, would one of you kindly tell me what everybody is getting so hot under the collar about?

VIALLI: The Encyclical, of course!

PROFESSOR: What Encyclical?

ELISA: Haven't you heard?

BAGGIO: 'Heroinum et Omnia Medicamenta', right.

PROFESSOR: I beg your pardon?

BAGGIO: (*Reading from newspaper*) 'The Pope has initiated a

campaign for the legal distribution of drugs by all national governments.'

ELISA: Isn't it wonderful?

PROFESSOR: Amazing! He took you literally!

BAGGIO: (*Reading*) 'The Pope has promised to excommunicate all drug traffickers, in particular the Mafia and those who support or protect them. Immediately, three Government ministers and the Head of the police declared themselves Muslim. The Church is being torn apart. Schism is the order of the day. Bishops are revolting.' (*Laughs*) I can get behind that, sorry, your Eminence. 'The entire Dutch and Brazilian clergy have declared for the Pope whereas most of the remaining European and north American clergy have decided to elect an anti-Pope. The Archbishop of Canterbury, speaking for the Anglican church, has said that he's not quite sure about the whole thing one way or the other.'

PROFESSOR: I don't believe it!

VIALLI: Madness, I told you!

BAGGIO: (*To VIALLI*) It could be, y'know, that this apparent madness is, y'know, like a pitch from God, right?

VIALLI: Shut up, you imbecilic adolescent toad!

BAGGIO: Oh, sure, right, but-but there's more in the papers, like about accidental pregnancies and unwanted children and things like that, right?

PROFESSOR: Read it, read it!

BAGGIO: 'The Pope goes on to say that contraception is not a question of dogma. Every child ought to be a wanted child. The condom is not the devil's raincoat.' Oh wow, I just love that bit!

VIALLI smacks BAGGIO round the face. ELISA is laughing.

ELISA: The first Pope in history with a sense of humour!

The CAPTAIN of the Swiss Guards and another GUARD rush on.

CAPTAIN: NOBODY MOVE!

The others freeze in fear. The CAPTAIN and the GUARD start to search the PROFESSOR and VIALLI like American TV cops search suspects, kicking their legs apart, etc.

VIALLI: In heaven's name what are you doing?? I'm Cardinal Vialli, the Pope's private secretary!

PROFESSOR: Help, I'm innocent!

The POPE comes on, wearing only sack-cloth. He wears cheap plastic sandals and whips himself gently on the back with a fly swat every now and again. He is accompanied by a short MONK.

POPE: (To CAPTAIN) Stop that, idiot! (The GUARDS stop their search) Sorry about that, the Captain is very concerned for my safety for some reason. How are you, my friends?

ELISA: Extremely happy, Holy Father. Here. A small token of my appreciation of your spiritual conversion. But why is Cardinal Schillaci here? You heard what those gangsters said –

She has handed him a small box of chocolates which he is opening. VIALLI is looking at the POPE's clothes with some concern.

POPE: Chocolate covered fruity bon-bons! My favourites!

Suddenly the MONK grabs the chocolates out of the POPE's hands, opens the box and starts to eat the chocolates by the handful.

(To CAPTAIN) Is this really necessary, Captain?

CAPTAIN: 'Fraid so, Holy Father. Better safe than sorry.

POPE: He has to taste everything first. Ridiculous. He sips my tea – and complains there's no sugar. He shaves before I do

– with my razor. But I've told him – there is no way he is using my toothbrush!

The MONK gives the chocolate box to the POPE.

MONK: They're clean.

POPE: When do I get to eat? I'm starving.

ELISA: I can understand the Captain's caution. After your courageous Encyclical they must be queuing up to kill you.

POPE: Nonsense! I'm the Pope, who could possibly want to kill me!

SCHILLACI comes on with a broad smile.

SCHILLACI: Holy Father. How good to see you looking so well. Did you enjoy your walkabout in the city?

POPE: I loved it! Except when someone took a shot at me, of course! Bang!

SCHILLACI: Yeah, I heard about that. There are wicked people about.

POPE: They can't kill me, I'm infallible.

ELISA is anxiously trying to draw the POPE's attention about SCHILLACI.

ELISA: Holy Father –

VIALLI: Whatever are you wearing your Holiness?

The POPE flagellates himself gently with the fly swat and shows off his clothes.

POPE: Do you like it? The 'poverty' look. From tomorrow everyone in Vatican City – and I mean everyone, Cardinal Vialli – will wear sack-cloth. Because tomorrow I shall publish a supplement to my Encyclical –

VIALLI: A supplement? Oh no!

POPE: Yes, a supplement! Encyclical Two – John Paul's

Revenge. And do you know, your Eminences, what will be in it?

VIALLI: Please, Holy Father, spare us more surprises!

POPE: The Church is to become poor again! All of the Church's worldly wealth will be distributed to the destitute. Every bank deposit belonging to every Order and every Bishopric will be closed down. The Catholic banks will be reorganised by Statute obliging them to conduct their entire financial transactions out in the open. Peter's Pence will be abolished!! How does that strike you gentlemen?

VIALLI, SCHILLACI and BAGGIO are locked in a catatonic trance.

ELISA: They obviously like the basic idea.

She clicks her fingers in front of them. Suddenly there's a warbling sound from BAGGIO's mobile which he answers.

VIALLI: It's completely insane! Don't you realise, Holy Father, that if we offload our entire portfolio of shares in one fell swoop the Italian economy will collapse??

SCHILLACI: Not only the economy, our entire democratic institutions will fold up like a pack of cards. Your Holiness, the Christian Democratic party has already split, the Communist Party that has already split has already split, Opus Dei has dissolved itself, even NATO is a little shaky. Now, we are reasonable men, Holy Father, and business is business . . .

BAGGIO: *(From telephone)* The Irish Government has fallen! The British Government blames the Pope's absurd change of heart on the Labour Party. Hey, I better fax my people about your sequel Encyclical. The Papal palace is gonna be in serious turnaround on this progressive poor pitch, right? 'The People's Pope poops Peter's Pence' – that'll be the pitch, press-wise, right? Right! *(Exits)*

POPE: Were that boy's mother and father cousins, d'you think?

SCHILLACI: As I was saying, Blessed Father, why don't you and me talk one or two things over, huh? Out in the garden would be nice. We can spray the roses at the same time because I've noticed there's terrible greenfly out there.

SCHILLACI produces a large flyspray from under his cassock.

Try it out, why don't you?

The POPE takes the spray.

ELISA: Don't! It's him!

SCHILLACI: You keep out of it!

But the MONK grabs the spray, turns away and sprays a little. It's been doctored so that the spray itself comes out of the back and not the front, straight into the face of whoever holds it.

ELISA: You see! Schillaci wants to kill you!

POPE: Nonsense!

SCHILLACI grabs the spray back.

SCHILLACI: Damn thing's broken, goddamit!

MONK: (*Sniffing*) Mmm, touch of almonds. Kippers too.

POPE: Cardinal Schillaci I would entrust with my life.

ELISA: Exactly!

Suddenly the MONK grabs his throat.

MONK: AAH! Cyanide!

ELISA: See??

SCHILLACI: That greenfly's a plague already!

The PROFESSOR catches the falling MONK.

PROFESSOR: Bathroom, hurry!

POPE: He's not dead, is he?

PROFESSOR: Not if we're quick!

The PROFESSOR and the GUARD carry the MONK off. SCHILLACI looks at his watch.

SCHILLACI: Your Holiness, forgive me for reminding you, but is it not time for you to feed your favourite parrot? She must be hungry by now.

ELISA: What??

POPE: I'd almost forgotten in all the excitement.

VIALLI: Is this really the time for feeding hungry parrots?

POPE: Feeding the hungry is what this Church is going to be doing a great deal more of.

SCHILLACI: Hurry, your Holiness! (*Turns away and mimics parrot*) 'Where's my dinner?' (*Turns back to POPE*) See?

ELISA: No, wait!

Scene Three

The scene changes into the POPE's apartments. There is the dummy dressed in the same sack-cloth and plastic sandals.

SCHILLACI looks anxiously at his watch. He starts to push the POPE.

SCHILLACI: Hurry, Holy Father. That parrot must be dying of starvation.

POPE: Yes, alright, your Eminence.

ELISA looks on anxiously. The CAPTAIN meanwhile is taking a look round the apartments. VIALLI follows anxiously.

SCHILLACI: (*Turns away again*) 'Where's my dinner??'
Quick!

ELISA: (*Suddenly*) Don't go! It's a trap!

Suddenly ELISA grabs the POPE. She and SCHILLACI are pulling him in different directions.

POPE: Let me go! What are you doing??

SCHILLACI: She hates parrots, she told me so!

ELISA: He wants to kill you, he told me so!

SCHILLACI: I never did!

ELISA: You sent those gangsters round!

SCHILLACI: I didn't know *he'd* be there, did I??

POPE: Gabriella, help! Where are you??

GABRIELLA: (*Offstage*) About to feed Ermintrude, your Holiness!

SCHILLACI suddenly lets go and spins round, extremely worried. ELISA lets go, sees SCHILLACI's expression and realises what's about to happen.

ELISA: Don't feed the parrot!!

A loud explosion from offstage. Some colourful feathers flutter gently onto the stage.

POPE: Ermintrude!

The POPE holds some feathers and bursts into tears. He picks up a piece of cloth that has floated in with the feathers. He cries louder.

Gabriella!! My favourite nun and my favourite parrot – gone! In one sitting!

SCHILLACI: (*Praying*) Let us say a prayer for Ermintrude and Gabriella. Dear God upstairs, what d'you have to bump off them two birds for?

ELISA: You hypocrite! (*To POPE*) He tried to kill you, can't you see that?

POPE: I see only my trusted Cardinal at prayer, Sister Elisa.

SISTER GABRIELLA enters, her habit in tatters and her face blackened from the explosion. She's carrying the remains of a length of millet.

GABRIELLA: The millet was tampered with.

POPE: So I see. (*Looks at her habit*) Who are you, Sister? Which order are you from? I don't recognise the habit. A touch of the Mary Magdalene tatters, an interesting concept don't you agree, Vialli? From tomorrow all the nuns will wear this habit and blacken their faces like this nun here with this symbolic dirt of the poor. Excellent. Now what's your name, Sister?

GABRIELLA: It's me, Blessed Father, Gabriella.

The POPE drops to his knees.

POPE: A resurrection! A miracle!

He starts to pray. VIALLI turns to ELISA.

VIALLI: Please, Elisa, please get him back to normality!

There is the sound from outside of St Peter's Square full of people calling for the POPE.

ELISA: Listen to that!

She rushes to the balcony.

It's amazing! There's tens of thousands of people! They're clamouring for you, Holy Father!

POPE: Not children I hope, I'm still not quite over that.

ELISA: They're priests and nuns and seminarists from the Christian base communities! They've come here from all over the world, from Africa, from Latin America, from the Philippines! Holy Father, out there is the real church, the church of the poor! There are the true disciples! There are

the real saints who have waited centuries for a Pope who is the real 'descendant of Peter'! Speak to them! They love you!

POPE: (*To VIALLI*) So I'm not quite as isolated as some people would have me believe, hmmm?

VIALLI: Don't speak to them, Holy Father! I beg you. Those people out there are rascals, fake Catholics, Marxists in disguise, Jesuits for God's sake! They want to split the Church, they want a schism!

POPE: Maybe a schism might be no bad thing.

VIALLI: Aaah!

VIALLI exits.

SCHILLACI: Go ahead, Holy Father, speak to them hippies. That's a very good idea.

SCHILLACI leads, almost pushes, the POPE towards the balcony. ELISA is suddenly worried about the POPE going onto the balcony so she grabs him.

ELISA: Don't go out there! It's a trap.

POPE: Oh no, not again! What is the matter with you?? You just told me to go out there!

ELISA: Snipers!

POPE: Don't you swear at me, young lady.

SCHILLACI: Yeah! Shut your face you. Hurry, Holy Father, they want to see their hero!

ELISA grabs the POPE again. She and SCHILLACI are about to start another tussle. But the POPE breaks free.

POPE: Not again thank you! My arms are perfectly long enough! (*Indicating balcony*) Captain, may I?

CAPTAIN: Only hand-picked marksmen from the Vatican's special services are on duty today to protect your Holiness.

ELISA: That's exactly what worries me.

The CAPTAIN walks to the balcony.

CAPTAIN: Every man is utterly trustworthy.

A shot rings out.

Almost every man. (*Dies*)

GABRIELLA *moves the POPE away from the balcony.*

ELISA: A hand-picked marksman alright. Hand-picked by whom though, that's the question!

SCHILLACI: What you looking at me for? Is it my fault the dumb schmuck with the rifle can't tell the difference between a Swiss Guard and a Pope??

ELISA: What??

SCHILLACI: I mean . . . I mean . . . I mean it's time for me to take confession.

SCHILLACI exits in a hurry.

ELISA: That's three times the Cardinal's tried to kill you in the last ten minutes.

POPE: No, no, no, no, my dear. Schillaci is a servant of Christ.

ELISA: Well somebody's giving the orders to bump you off.

POPE: The saints will protect me, I must talk to my people.

The POPE is about to go out on the balcony. ELISA and GABRIELLA both pull him back.

GABRIELLA: No!

ELISA: I've an idea! Let's put the dummy out in your place. Rig up a microphone, hey presto!

POPE: Yes! We'd need a volunteer to hold it up though.

GABRIELLA: Volunteer? It would be a suicide mission.

ELISA: Who can we get to do it?

The MONK comes back on.

MONK: I'm back, Holy Father. The Professor saved my life.

POPE: Another miracle. How wonderful.

The POPE goes to the MONK and puts his arm around him. At the same time he signals to ELISA to bring the dummy over. GABRIELLA exits.

My dear Brother Monk. To see you fit and well gives me such joy.

The MONK suddenly sees the CAPTAIN lying on the floor.

MONK: What happened - ?

The POPE turns the MONK's head away from the corpse.

POPE: You know how Christ gave His life so that others may live?

MONK: Yes, but - (*Looks at corpse again*)

POPE: Brother Zebedee, how would you like to be Pope for five minutes?

MONK: Oh, Holy Father, to be Pope for five minutes would leave me nothing to live for!

POPE: That's absolutely right.

GABRIELLA comes back on, carrying a large Papal tunic and a mitre.

GABRIELLA: How about these, Holy Father?

POPE: Whatever for?

GABRIELLA: Better than have the Brother here hold the dummy, why not have him wear the robe and hold the dummy's head above his own?

GABRIELLA has taken the head off the dummy and given the robe to the MONK to hold around himself.

POPE: Excellent!

ELISA: Let's give him a breast-plate to wear underneath.

MONK: Why?

GABRIELLA: I'll get one off the guards. Come.

GABRIELLA leads the MONK off, carrying the robe, the mitre and the dummy's head. ELISA wheels the headless dummy behind the curtain as the PROFESSOR comes back on.

PROFESSOR: Holy Father – ah! Good God he's dead.

The PROFESSOR sees the CAPTAIN's dead body.

What happened?

The PROFESSOR has stepped too near the balcony. A shot rings out.

ELISA: They're trying to kill the Pope.

PROFESSOR: We must stop them – who are?

ELISA: The Mafia.

PROFESSOR: It's none of our business – let's go.

ELISA: No!! Keep down, your Holiness! Why don't you borrow the Captain's breast-plate and helmet, just in case. Here, Professor, help us.

PROFESSOR: I really ought to be at the studio – I really ought to be having lunch with Brenda. Oh, alright then.

POPE: To wear a dead man's tunic. Bad luck isn't it?

ELISA starts to drag dead body behind curtain with PROFESSOR.

Another shot rings out.

But I'm not superstitious. Quick!

The POPE, the PROFESSOR and ELISA disappear behind the curtain with the CAPTAIN. GABRIELLA and the MONK enter. The MONK has the head of the dummy attached to his own head, with the mitre on, and the robe

around him. He holds open the robe, just enough for his face to be seen.

GABRIELLA: Wait here while I fetch the Holy Father.

GABRIELLA exits. The MONK, now on his own, wanders towards the balcony and a shot rings out. It pings off the breast-plate under his robe.

MONK: FUCKING HELL!!

He freezes in shock for a second, his face disappearing behind the robe, when SCHILLACI rushes on, carrying a briefcase.

SCHILLACI: Holy Father, look!

But there's nobody there except the MONK whom SCHILLACI assumes to be the dummy.

Shit, where is he? *(To dummy)* What are you staring at, dummy? Ha ha ha. Hey, you know what this is? Calvi's briefcase. That's right. The Head of Abrosiano Bank who was hanged under the bridge in London, England? The famous briefcase with all the documents fingering everybody involved in the big scandal of the Vatican Bank, the death of John Paul One, etc, etc. Except that it ain't really that briefcase, but the Holy Father ain't to know that, is he? But it sure has got some 'explosive' documents in it!! Tic toc tic toc! *(He listens to briefcase and puts it down next to dummy)* Now where the hell is he?

SCHILLACI turns away and the MONK takes a step away from the briefcase.

POPE: *(Offstage)* Your hands are cold!

SCHILLACI turns back and stares at the MONK.

SCHILLACI: I ain't gonna be caught twice with that one.

SCHILLACI looks up, expecting to see the POPE. He looks around and back at the MONK.

Where is he?

SCHILLACI *steps nearer to the balcony and a shot rings out.*

Jesus Christ! (*Shouts over balcony*) NOT ME, IDIOTS! (*To MONK*) Where's your lookalike, dummy? (*Looks around*) I been itching to do this for weeks.

SCHILLACI *laughs and then head-butts the MONK really hard. But then he turns around and the MONK kicks him very hard up the backside sending him flying. SCHILLACI, somewhat surprised, is still lying on the floor when GABRIELLA comes back on.*

GABRIELLA: Cardinal Schillaci, have you seen the Holy Father?

SCHILLACI: Er . . . no, Sister. But-but tell him, would you, that Calvi's briefcase has turned up.

SCHILLACI *scampers off.*

GABRIELLA: Calvi's briefcase?? That truly is a miracle.

The MONK's face appears through the robes.

MONK: Don't touch it, Sister! It's a . . .

The POPE appears, dressed as the CAPTAIN, with ELISA and the PROFESSOR from behind the curtain.

GABRIELLA: Elisa, where's the Pope?

POPE: I'm here, Gabriella, this is me.

GABRIELLA: Goodness! Look, Blessed Father. Calvi's briefcase has turned up!

OTHERS: Calvi's briefcase??

They all freeze for a moment while the POPE turns to the audience.

POPE: CALVI'S BRIEFCASE??

The POPE grabs the briefcase and is about to open it.

MONK: B-b-but -

ELISA: Open it, open it!

GABRIELLA: Cardinal Schillaci brought it.

ELISA: Don't open it!

ELISA grabs the briefcase and throws it offstage. There is a huge explosion.

ELISA: Now will you believe me??

POPE: Suspicion is not proof, Sister Elisa.

MONK: B-b-but –

POPE: (To MONK) On to the balcony with you. Gabriella, fetch the microphone.

MONK: M-must I, Holy Father?

SCHILLACI rushes on.

SCHILLACI: I heard an explosion! Is the Pope dead?

He sees the MONK, waving his arms about, being pushed by the POPE and thinks it's the real POPE being pushed by a GUARD.

ELISA: You murderer, Schillaci!

SCHILLACI: Thank God! He's still alive! (To himself) Shit!

SCHILLACI exits quickly. The POPE pushes the MONK towards the balcony, keeping very low himself.

MONK: Help!

POPE: Try not to be frightened, dear Brother. Raise your arms like I would do.

Shots start to ring out as the MONK approaches the balcony. Some ping off his breast-plate. Everybody ducks for cover.

It is a far, far better thing that you do now than you have ever done!

MONK: HELP!

The MONK is on the balcony and visible to the ecstatic

crowd below who roar when they see him. More shots ring out.

GABRIELLA *appears with the microphone which has a lead that goes to the balcony. The POPE grabs the microphone and is about to talk to the assembled masses when the MONK comes in off the balcony.*

It's dangerous out there!!

POPE: What do you think martyrdom costs, you buffoon? A toothache??

Suddenly a Brazilian nun rushes on. It is obviously SCHILLACI in disguise. He puts on a very poor Latin American accent.

SCHILLACI: Blessed Father, finally I meet you!

He throws himself at the feet of the MONK, thinking him to be the POPE.

POPE: Not now! Who is this?

MONK: (To SCHILLACI) Let me go!

SCHILLACI: I am a poor nun from Brazil, here prostrate, to show my gratitude for your Encyclical.

The PROFESSOR tries to intervene.

PROFESSOR: His Holiness is busy, you must ask for an audience.

ELISA: He has to go on to the balcony, Sister.

SCHILLACI: No, Sister. He has to go to hell!

SCHILLACI pulls out a gun, stands up and faces the MONK thinking him to be the POPE.

Die, communist bastard!!

MONK: Aaah!!

SCHILLACI is about to shoot but he's not quite sure so he prods the MONK.

SCHILLACI: (*To MONK*) Are you the Pope?

MONK: (*Inside cloak*) Yes! Help!

SCHILLACI: (*Normal voice*) So you can talk without moving your lips!

ELISA: YOU AGAIN!

SCHILLACI shoots the MONK and rushes out. The others are dazed except the poor MONK who falls down. The PROFESSOR and GABRIELLA go to him.

(*To POPE*) It was Schillaci!

POPE: Who was?

ELISA: The Brazilian nun!

POPE: You really have got it in for the Cardinal, haven't you?

PROFESSOR: He's dead!

ELISA/POPE: What???

GABRIELLA: The Brazilian nun shot him in the head.

ELISA: But it's a dummy!

GABRIELLA: In his own head!

POPE: Oh my God, it's all my fault! I'm the one they want dead and I'm the one who's still alive! Stop! Stop this massacre!! Take my clothes off him. Help me off with this, Gabriella. (*Referring to his breast-plate*)

ELISA: No, wait! Stay as a Swiss Guard, it's safer for the time being. Leave Brother Zebedee here as you. He wanted to be you so badly. His martyrdom won't be in vain.

POPE: But whatever for, Elisa?

ELISA: Trust me, I beg you! You must understand how much they hate you. Schillaci and his Freemason friends.

POPE: No really -

ELISA: You've turned the world upside down! Only now it's the right way up. So stay as a Swiss Guard.

A shot rings out from outside.

POPE: Good idea.

SCHILLACI rushes on in panic.

SCHILLACI: Is it true what I heard??? (Sees dead MONK)
Aaaaah! Holy Father!

SCHILLACI throws himself across the corpse.

He's dead! They wasted him!

POPE: No, Cardinal –

But ELISA stops the POPE saying anything as SCHILLACI runs to the balcony and shouts into the microphone.

SCHILLACI: The Holy Father's been bumped off!! They've killed the Pope!

The crowd outside roars its disapproval as SCHILLACI exits quickly.

POPE: (To ELISA) How could you doubt him? Now I must let the people know the truth.

The POPE moves towards the balcony but ELISA stops him.

ELISA: Don't your Holiness. Let people think you're dead. Just for a while.

POPE: But why?

ELISA: You're about to see.

SCHILLACI, VIALLI, BAGGIO enter with some MONKS and NUNS carrying a bier, some candles, etc. chanting Latin.

VIALLI: Oh, Holy Father! How could they take you from us??

He seems genuinely upset as the MONKS and NUNS lay out the dead MONK on the bier, with the candles, etc.

SCHILLACI: Yeah, they really took him, huh?

BAGGIO: A seriously dead Pope, I mean, that's really out of order, right?

VIALLI: How did it happen?

POPE: *(In mock Swiss accent)* Ja, zer bad situation, ja? Ze Pope he vas shot by ze mad nun from Brazil! A Brazil nut! Ha ha ha.

SCHILLACI: Are you okay, Captain?

POPE: Zer zer gut! I mean zer zer bad because of the ze Pope he being dead, of course!

ELISA gives the POPE a confused look.

(Quietly) I'm a Swiss Guard, aren't I?

The MONKS have laid out three large cushions upstage of the bier which VIALLI, SCHILLACI and BAGGIO kneel on. The MONKS and NUNS stand behind them, still chanting in Latin.

VIALLI: Oh what a test you have put us through, oh Lord.

BAGGIO: That's right Lord, you have. I mean, to have a Pope killed, that's a serious first, right?

VIALLI: No, it happened before.

SCHILLACI: More than once, too. But those were Pontiffs who deserved everything they got, believe me.

BAGGIO: Really?

VIALLI: Yes, those previous deaths were not entirely unwelcome, Monsignor Baggio.

BAGGIO: Wow. But not this one surely, he is a martyr, right?

SCHILLACI: *(Chuckles)* He sure is. He couldn't wait to be a martyr!

The POPE is about to speak but ELISA holds him back.

VIALLI: He was positively looking for martyrdom.

BAGGIO: I'm getting behind you on this one, your Eminences.

SCHILLACI: Let's face it, the guy flipped, right? One minute he's cool – though a little strung out with the stiff arms and all – the next he's talking like he's joined the goddamn Red Brigade! (*To MONK*) Censer!

The POPE begins to seethe. The crowd outside makes more angry sounds. The MONK collects the censer.

VIALLI: Listen to them.

SCHILLACI: Them commie hooligans. Captain! Disperse the crowd in the square, that's an order, okay?

POPE: (*Angry*) Jawohl, Herr Cardinal! If you don't mind my saying, vat a pity you did not give us Swiss Guard some tanks, ja? Zen ve could really disperse the crowd! Ha ha ha!

VIALLI: Really, Captain, I don't think that's quite appropriate.

SCHILLACI: You got a point there, Captain, I'll look into that. But in the meantime we oughta begin the process of beatification of our Holy Martyr here, right? (*Chuckles*)

The POPE is tempted to hit SCHILLACI but ELISA holds him back again. The MONK receives the censer and gives it to VIALLI.

VIALLI: Of course, it'll take a little time.

VIALLI hands the censer to SCHILLACI.

SCHILLACI: We don't want to rush it, no way. A transitional period.

VIALLI: A pause before the Conclave . . .

SCHILLACI hands the censer to BAGGIO.

BAGGIO: . . . a serious black smoke from the chimney situation . . .

VIALLI: . . . and a new Pope will be elected . . . a sensible Pope . . .

BAGGIO: . . . a middle-of-the-road type Pope, right? . . .

SCHILLACI: . . . and maybe a Pope who's not too well, y'know what I mean?

POPE: Oh ja, absolutely, ja! Ze good Popes are ze ones vich don't last long! Und ze best Popes are those vich die more or less straight away!

SCHILLACI: Captain, I told you to clear the square. Do it!

VIALLI: Really, Captain, that is hardly the sort of language to use in front of our Holy Martyr.

POPE: Vat do you mean, 'Holy Martyr'? He vas a fanatic, a lunatic! How could he take on ze Mafia? Ze corrupt Government? Ze Freemasons and ze P2!

VIALLI: Okay, okay, that's true, but –

POPE: A bloody good job he vas killed, ja?

SCHILLACI: Yeah, Captain, that's right but this is no place –

POPE: Absolutely! Bang! That Brazil Nut sure saved our bacons!

SCHILLACI: Calm down!

SCHILLACI gets up and goes to the POPE who flings his arms around him and hugs him. ELISA and the others in the background are becoming alarmed.

POPE: I love you, Cardinal! You saved us all from ze red Pope!

SCHILLACI: Thank you, Captain, but –

POPE: It vas you, no? Ze Brazil Nut?

SCHILLACI: Sure, but cool it!

The POPE takes off his captain's helmet and reveals himself.

POPE: Aha!

The CARDINALS, BAGGIO and the CHORUS are amazed.

(To SCHILLACI) You assassin! Schillaci, you will be excommunicated, vilified, arrested and imprisoned! You, Vialli, will simply be transferred to Tierra del Fuego! And you, Baggio, will return immediately to a seminary wherein you will be taught to speak properly!

BAGGIO: Oh right, ya, I'm with you in that ball park situation –

POPE: Shut up!

ELISA: You shouldn't have shown yourself, Holy Father.

The POPE puts the mitre from the dead MONK on his own head.

POPE: Nonsense!

The POPE grabs the microphone and goes to the balcony.

(Into microphone) I am alive, my children!

A huge roar goes up outside.

The Church is cleansed! The Church is renewed! *(Roar)*
The Church this day sends a message to the world. The message is –

A shot rings out. The POPE is hit. ELISA, the PROFESSOR and GABRIELLA gasp in horror as the POPE clutches himself and falls back into the room. He stiffens for a moment with his arms outstretched. He dies. VIALLI and BAGGIO cross themselves quietly. ELISA kneels over the body whilst the PROFESSOR and GABRIELLA stand by – in a formation that reminds us of Christ when taken down from the cross. SCHILLACI stands to one side, smiling to himself.

110 THE POPE AND THE WITCH

SCHILLACI: The message is . . . business as usual.

ELISA: 'Woe betide that man of power who takes the side of those who have no power.' St Augustine.

Curtain.