



JOOP ADMIRAAL



You Are  
My Mother

THEATRE IN TRANSLATION

6.60



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# You Are My Mother

TRANSLATED BY  
CATHERINE HOLLAND-CUNNINGHAM

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Joop Admiraal, *You Are My Mother*

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## ABOUT THE ACTOR/WRITER

Joop Admiraal was born in 1937 in Ophemert, Gelderland in the Netherlands. In 1955 he entered the School of Drama in Amsterdam, graduating in 1959 when he immediately joined the *Nederlandse Comedie*. Although he concentrated on doing primarily experimental theatre work with theatre groups such as *Centrum* and *Studio* in the Sixties, he also did extensive television and film work in that period.

In 1972, he joined *Werkteater* as an actor and stimulator for the next thirteen years. *Werkteater* was a theatre collective which only performed pieces written by the members, using improvisation as a basis for the performances. Many of the pieces, in which Joop Admiraal often played female roles, were derived from personal experience. The most famous of these is 'You Are My mother', which he wrote and performed solo (with his dog Kino), debuting in 1982, in which he played both himself and his mother. He performed 'You Are My mother' extensively to packed theatres throughout the Netherlands, winning the Louis d'Or (best actor) for that year. In 1985, he performed his German-language version of the play in Germany, Switzerland and Austria, winning in Germany the Wilhelmina Lupke Prize, the Adolf Grimme

Prize (best television performance), and the Best Actor of the year award. 'You Are My mother' has since been performed in Scandinavia, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Israel and Spain by 30 different actors, including one actress in Cologne.

Since 1987, he has been a member of the theatre group *Toneelgroep Amsterdam*.

## THE PREPARATION

We used to rehearse in the evening and at night at Joop's place, eight months long, two or three times a week. Interrupted only by the summer tour of the *Werkteater* in Germany and by the work on poems Joop "had to say for the Queen". I used to come at half-past six from the shop<sup>1</sup> or from school<sup>2</sup>. Joop had cooked. We dined sumptuously about nine. We discussed life, love, that day, death and the play, about how difficult it was and also how pleasant it was at times. Then we moved from the kitchen to the living-room. There was Joop's oversized bed on an enormous, two-step high rostrum, our rehearsal platform. We messed around with a scene until about one or two o'clock. Round about three o'clock we brought Kino for a walk. At my car or bicycle we fed each other courage. "Do you still like the look of it?" Joop asked me then. "Of course," I replied, "we're going to make something very special."

I was fed as in "Mother" (Joop used to call it "You Are"), in which Joop almost continuously indulges his mother with goodies. It was always

<sup>1</sup> *International Theatre & Film Bookshop*

<sup>2</sup> *Theaterschool*



delicious and an extremely pleasant reciprocal service; you help me with the play, and I cook for you. We subsequently realized the extent to which the meal influenced the personal, quiet style of the play. This service-in-return underlined our motivation at the start of each rehearsal. It also saved us from that important – yet painfully difficult – start. Eating together served not only as a warming-up which fulfilled the natural needs of the stomach but also of the work.

We took the same time over dinner that we took for rehearsal. We allowed each other long periods in which we hardly made progress. Sometimes Joop was not able to play his mother for a few weeks and I didn't know what to do about it. We just messed around then. Joop set the task of performing a scene again while paying strict attention to one of the roles. What turned out to be a sovereign remedy at another time, now failed. Sometimes I played a scene to show Joop how beautiful it could be, but I didn't succeed either, and if it worked it demoralized him even more. The best thing to do in these periods was to agree that we no longer had to *act*, but only to *say* what "Joop" or "Mother" would say.

I consider one of the strongest aspects of the

rehearsal process to be that we could bear these unproductive weeks from each other without doubting one another. Also without panicking and simulating progress with cheap discoveries, ideas or manoeuvres to disguise the painful confrontation with one another's incapability. We knew that we wanted to tell an honest story in an honest way. So there was no choice left but to be honest with each other. Once you start using a gimmick, however nice it is, your further thinking becomes affected and will imperceptibly determine the style of the play. We were searching for a more simple, almost painful presence for Joop's performance. Besides two difficult roles to play, that of a mother and a son, Joop had to remain present in an extremely tangible way so that the performance would take on a topical suspense.

I called it "theatre with the excitement and suspense of the trapeze act high under the big top of the circus".

We were continuously thinking about the question of how personal we could be without becoming embarrassing. The form given to a personal situation or act can prevent embarrassment. But too much form can remove that needed touch of suspense. This was the essence of our work. How essentially personal Joop dared to be attributing in it with some

form, without becoming too sentimental. We often said to each other: we have to take it as far as we can, but it has to remain worth watching.

When we started it looked as if there wasn't much material. Joop showed me the first five minutes. This ended up running over by almost half an hour. Of this there were moments we never changed, others were drastically cut or disappeared.

These first 'five' minutes turned out to be a good foundation. As he was rehearsing, Joop found new situations and remarks by his mother.

Or rather, Joop gradually and with moderation, little by little, dared to give more information.

We only added events and text which had actually happened and were spoken.

Nothing was invented. But we did reduce reality to its simple essence.

I sometimes tried to make a confrontation between Joop and his mother take on more passion. Joop seldom wanted to do that ("Mother never does it that way"), but he understood my need for drama and translated this with a more subtle or sharper development of the improvisations. This brought changing tempo and surprise to the rhythm of the performance. We used to try out all of each other's suggestions, even when the other foresaw nothing good in it.

Joop often thought that I wanted to put too much 'art' into it, and I thought that Joop sometimes forgot that coarse reality in a performance needs some distortion.

Nevertheless all my suggestions for saying a dialogue just a bit too loudly, or for performing an act just a bit too slowly, or for changing real time with theatre time were all tried. We did not often come to an agreement that same evening. On the basis of our common inheritance, the form we felt happy with was suddenly there a few evenings later. Through this the improvisations became more and more sharp and the musical sequences of the dialogues more and more varied.

The power of the improvisations also depended on the extent to which Joop dared to show his intimacies. This gave him quite a lot of difficulties. When I entered in a bad mood after an unpleasant day, I immediately asked him on the stairs if he had already found a solution for the latest problem. If I didn't change my mood, we could forget about a useful rehearsal. My cool entrance earned a cool rehearsal. It was different when we discussed fear and life during the meal. When I told him something, for instance about my mother who died when I was four, it gave Joop wings.

On these evenings Joop dared to make new suggestions for the play, suggestions which he thought were too private. It never went far enough for me, but I let Joop make the decision. A few evenings later the scene was tried for the first time.

The private character of this deeply personal story has always been a never-expressed concern for me. Joop didn't know how far he could go without abusing his mother, and I did not know how far I could go with this kind of theatre which sometimes resembled therapy. It had to do with my self-respect. I did not want people to say that I used Joop, nor that he used me for his private satisfaction. We were both aware of this problem and we could only handle it because of the strong belief that we were making theatre. We wanted to be clear in the presentation. Yet Joop often wondered if he wasn't going too far, but his performance has so much integrity and skill that personal feelings take on an articulated form.

There was one moment that approached the limits of my self-respect. That was when Joop, very late on, proposed to have his dog Kino be cast, too. I found this to be almost too corny. But as with all suggestions this was tried as well. Kino had attended all the rehearsals, since we

rehearsed at home. He is a quiet, intelligent, disobedient dog. During his first rehearsal, he immediately did it perfectly. Only a wink or a little movement without emphasizing his presence, but there was always the chance that he would do something odd. This uncertainty gives the performance a suspense which Joop finds pleasant. Kino knows the text, he has heard it a hundred times and he loves it. Fortunately he is not the only one.

Jan Ritsema



KINO

## THE PLAY

I put flowers on the back seat, detach Kino from my waist and fix him to a bollard, and help Charles load up. In the car, the three of us sit in front, Charles behind the wheel. When we arrive, we unload together. While Charles is doing the lights, I prepare everything, Kino inspects the room thoroughly, most properly for food...

I unwrap the flowers, arrange them in a vase, rewrap the bouquet and put it back in the vase, one or two flowers sticking out from the paper.

I put Kino's basket and a bowl of water under the table, I hang the clothes on the hall stand and make the bed; the sheets, the two pillows with Mother's pyjama jacket between them, the blanket, the white hospital spread and, on top of that, the cream spread (which suggests Mother's room), I turn the sheet half-way down the pillow. I make a dent in the pillow with my fist and pull the turned-down sheet up a little higher, as if some one is lying there. On the foot of the bed, I put Mother's skirt and blouse.

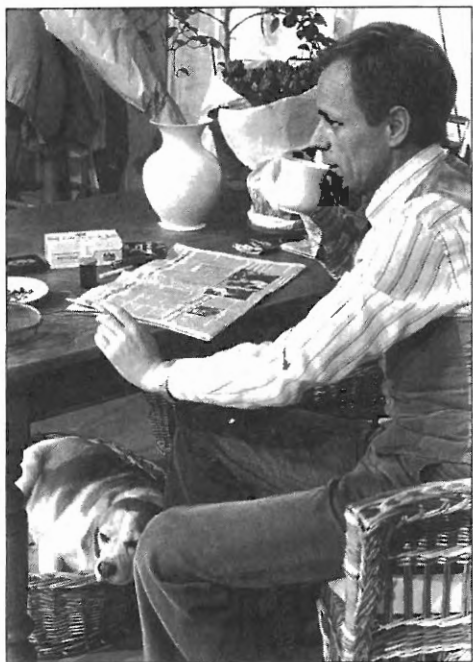
I put the handbag with the chocolate drops and tissues onto the chair next to the bed, I put the spectacles in front of it. Under the chair I put Mother's shoes with the toes towards me. I put my own shoes under the chair near the table.

I put the chestnut in the left pocket of Mother's coat. I hang a plastic bag containing chocolate



milk, a mug, the chipolata pudding, a dish and a little spoon on the hall stand. I run through everything once again from a little list I keep in Mother's handbag. I put the list on the table. Later, before the performance, I'll check it for the last time. I put the marihuana stalks and my jacket backstage. Just before the beginning of the performance I'll put my cigarettes and my lighter in it. In the dressing room I hang Mother's underwear, elastic stockings, tights, my shirt, tie, waistcoat, trousers and socks, and prepare dinner for Kino. I do all this very calmly with pleasant concentration, once in a while stopping to lie on the floor in front of the bed in the blue light and to sit in the kitchen chair, pushed slightly forward to the "sunlight": Charles calls these the "specials". When we're both finished we go over the light settings, only thirteen all together, and we check the sound tapes for volume, then we're ready. In the meantime, Kino has gotten tired too and wants to get onto the bed. Because I'm afraid he will also do it during the performance, I'm stricter than I am at home. Meanwhile it's five o'clock. We climb into the empty Mercedes van again and drive to the park to let Kino run. Charles can throw far, so Kino has fun. All three of us are having fun. Performing without a dog, you wouldn't make time for that. Afterwards we go eat somewhere, most of the time it's Chinese.

I eat little, I'm afraid I'll get tired. Kino gets his food just before the performance in the hope he'll be quiet during it. Back in the building where we're performing I get dressed while Kino eats: first mother's vests with padded breasts (made by Ria), panties and over that the tights, then shirt, tie, trousers and socks. I have difficulty buttoning the waistcoat over the costume to hide all mother's shapes. Charles puts a cup of hot coffee with sugar on the table and comes to say that we can start. We wish each other a good performance. Kino has to go into the basket. Most of the time he first walks forward, looks at the audience and wags his tail slowly, smiles, then goes into his basket. I look at Kino from the side, he looks back, the house lights go out and the theater lights on, I stick the plug in the socket, on stage the 'radio' goes on, Kino sighs and goes to sleep, the performance has begun. At 'three times every six weeks', I come on and take a sip of coffee, turn the radio a little softer, look for cigarettes, go away again. I come on again with waistcoat, take some cigarettes out of it, light one of them and put waistcoat on, straighten my tie in the mirror which isn't there, sit down, drink coffee, smoke, and look vacant. When 'you can expect the following' sounds, I turn the knob on the radio, a children's choir is singing, I put on one shoe. They sing 'Paradise', I count to eleven and



change the channel again. After looking long time for station, Peggy Lee sings 'Me and my shadow'. I put other shoes on, drink coffee, smoke, and look vacant. Peggy Lee has finished singing, 'very special', says Willem Duys, I look with surprise at the radio and then at the audience and hope that they laugh. Take a newspaper, look in my handbag, find a pair of scissors and go off with both. Willem Duys talks about Frank Sinatra who is already singing 'we had a good thing going' when I come back carrying cut up marijuana stalks on the paper. Put scissors back in my handbag. I sit down, take the leaves off the stalks, scrub them a bit fine, rub them through a sieve onto the same paper, fold it and, while Frank Sinatra is singing 'while it's going along', I let the sieved marihuana slide into an empty photo box. I take a cigarette casing with filter and put it in my mouth, suck the marihuana carefully from the photo box into the cigarette. 'What a hoarse voice he's got, by the way', says Willem Duys. I light the cigarette, inhale deeply and blow the smoke as far as possible into the audience. I think: now they smell that it is real and no oregano, as Mrs. Keuter thought. 'Not only a beautiful voice but also beautiful looks', Willem Duys announces. I smoke, Carly Simon sings 'not a day goes by'. I think: I hope I don't get stoned. At 'I keep thinking: when does it end', I look at my watch,

take flowers out of vase, adjust the paper around them and let the plant slide into a plastic bag. Carly Simon sings very loudly 'and until we die', I turn off the radio, hang my bag around my neck, take flowers and plant of the table, and the bag with chocolate milk and pudding off the hall stand and sit on my heels for Kino.

### Joop

#### *Fondling Kino*

So long, dearest boy... I'll be back very soon...  
be patient now... have a good sleep... I'll be back soon...

*I leave the kitchen and walk up and down  
at the front side of the stage. Charles puts  
on the Cantabile Mobile by Haydn. That  
helps me, it's cheerful...*

Now I'm on the way to see my mother...

I go by underground...

The first time I revolted against my mother

I must have been twelve or thirteen... since I was already in high school... I had to do the shopping every Saturday afternoon. Saturday mornings, in my time, you still had to go to school... and in the afternoon I had to do the shopping. The other kids were free. But I wasn't. And then, on my bike, from school in Tiel, to Buren I thought: Now I'm going to say it, that I won't do it anymore!

Mother was in the living room. I said "Mother, I'm not doing the shopping on Saturday afternoon... never again!"

She walked slowly to her chair... She sat down very slowly... as if in a Greek tragedy...

She was broken.

**MOTHER**

"How dare you say that to your mother?"

**JOOP**

Now I'm sitting in the train... usually I sit in the restaurant car... just tables... normal chairs... you can see everyone in the car... there are no high-backed seats to block the view from any of the windows... If you travel at night, and especially in winter... the window panes suddenly become mirrors... and give double, triple reflections... It's like you're riding in three trains at the same time... you can watch people inside by supposedly looking out.

I ran out of the house... jumped on my bike and rode into the fields outside Buren... and there, under a big tree... I cried... and cried... but I didn't give in!

I'm on the station platform in The Hague... where I have to change trains... I always have to wait... but I don't mind... I look at people and at things... it always changes... there's always something different.



I really like public transport. You're taken from one place to another and you don't have to think about it... it's good for me 'cause I've never been very good in traffic. And I'm terrible at trying to cross a street... I always use the pedestrian crossing. My mother doesn't. I was eighteen, and already lived in Amsterdam... and one day she came to do some shopping...

When my mother has to cross the street she doesn't even look for the zebra-crossing... there weren't any zebra-crossings then, of course... She seized my arm, dragged me across the street and said: "They never run over and kill two at the same time." And one time we were almost run over by a tram which could barely stop. So all those people were thrown forward because of us. And the first thing my mother said was: "Don't tell at home". And I didn't. I thought I was right, but I was a coward. I was already eighteen.

Later I was angry with my mother. When my father was still alive. Because she let him do all kind of things that weren't necessary. Mother couldn't stand it when people weren't doing anything. So when my father was sitting in the living room, she said: "Now you have to sweep the stoop, it needs to be done". But we had someone to do those things, so it wasn't



necessary at all and my father got more heart trouble and he told me this. It was on a Saturday night and I was really angry with my mother, I said that she couldn't go on like that. And the following morning, because I stayed the night, I came downstairs and mother was sitting in the kitchen with red eyes and a face distorted by a headache. I said: "Mother, but I can say that, after all I am right".

**MOTHER**

"Not you, not you, you are my God".

**JOOP**

Now I'm sitting in the bus, in Delft. The bus goes to other hospitals besides the nursing-home. There are mostly elderly people in the bus. And mothers with children, because the fathers don't feel like going. Or maybe they are in hospital themselves. More to the back of the bus some counterculturists with a dog on a rope, and me.

*I get up from the chair, walk forward, turn around and play: this is Mother's room. She is still asleep. I think: Now it really begins, throw yourself into it. I walk towards the bed, bend over her and kiss her awake*

**JOOP**

Are you still asleep?  
Didn't you know it was Sunday...  
that I'd be here? Did you forget?

**MOTHER**

Joop... Joop...

I can't walk anymore!

**JOOP**

Mother, you fell. You've forgotten.

You broke your hip... that was six months ago.

You exercise a lot and every Sunday you walk a little better...

**MOTHER**

I don't want to live anymore...

Siena also took pills...

**JOOP**

But Aunt Siena had so much pain, Mother...

**MOTHER**

I also have pain... in my head. I don't want to live anymore. Piet can get me those pills.

He's a doctor. I can't anymore...

I want to die...

I can't... I can't... I can't talk anymore...

**JOOP**

Calm mother... Calm yourself. You only make yourself worse. It will pass when you stay calm. You have had this before... Just be calm and it will go away. Believe me. It's not serious. And don't think of anything, only of nice things, that I'm here and that we're going into the garden together and breathe deeply. Then it'll pass. Do you believe that? Don't worry, really, it'll pass. I'll just take off my coat, alright? Stay in bed, now. I'll stay in the room.

*While playing the following text I take off  
my coat, get a plant out of plastic bag.  
Put it on the table. Unwrap flowers and  
put them in the vase*

**JOOP**

It's very nice weather. So we can go into the garden. That's nice, isn't it? You don't have to answer me, you know, because I know you can't yet. I brought you some very beautiful flowers. Just take a look at them later. An azalea. When this happened to you the first time, I was terribly scared as well, Mother. So I do understand that you're scared, because you think that it's the first time. And it isn't. I was scared then as well and I immediately called Piet to tell him that you suddenly couldn't talk anymore. And when I came back from the phone you were already so reassured that I called Piet, that in fact it was almost better. And afterwards it happened again a few times. It always passes, you have to believe that.

*I sit down on the bed. Bend over the pillow*  
Is it better now? Don't you want to come outside? Just put your legs down.

*I am getting up again, for the first time  
really physically my mother*

**MOTHER**

Where am I?

**JOOP**

In Delft.

**MOTHER**

Delft? How did I get there? In Delft?

**JOOP**

Through Piet. He arranged everything.  
He lives only a stone's throw away...

**MOTHER**

And you knew how to find me here?

*I start to undress 'Joop'*

**JOOP**

Of course, Mother. You've been living here for  
the past three years...

And I come to see you every Sunday...

That's why I always bring flowers with me...

so you can see that you get visitors.

It's so sad for you that you always forget...

Wait, I'll take this off.

And Miss Keuter comes on Wednesday...

**MOTHER**

Who is Miss Keuter?

**JOOP**

She's the woman with the happy face!

Remember?

**MOTHER**

Oooh yes... she's such a darling...

She's a very attractive woman... in her way!

**JOOP**

Yes. And Piet comes twice a week...

And Willemiek...

**MOTHER**

Oh, yes, Willemiek...

She was born in our house.

**JOOP**

Yes. In Buren...

**MOTHER**

Buren?

**JOOP**

Yes, that's where we lived. And before Buren we lived in Ophemert.

**MOTHER**

Ophemert... yes...

Tap?

**JOOP**

Yes. He lived across the street.

**MOTHER**

And Bonstra...

**JOOP**

Yes... they lived next door...

**MOTHER**

Bonstra was such a clown... so funny!

You remember how he'd put his teeth on the top of his head? Your father would laugh so hard...

Tears rolled down his cheeks...

And the Mayor...

**JOOP**

Can you still remember his name?

**MOTHER**

No.

**JOOP**

De Bruyn Tengbergen.

**MOTHER**

Oh yes, De Bruyn Tengbergen.

Oh, that man was such a gentleman! When he became Mayor you presented him with flowers. We still have a picture from the newspaper in our album.

**JOOP**

No... that wasn't me, that was Piet.

**MOTHER**

Where were you then?

**JOOP**

I wasn't born yet, Mother.

**MOTHER**

Weren't you born yet?

**JOOP**

No... And now will you try to stand up and I'll take this off. Can you do that?

**MOTHER**

Certainly I can stand. I hold my legs against the bed and that way I'll never fall.

**JOOP**

You can sit down again.

**MOTHER**

Can I sit down?

**JOOP**

Oh, you left your pantyhose on...

**MOTHER**

Oh, I always leave them on in the afternoon when I take a little nap.

**JOOP**

But at night you take them off...

**MOTHER**

Naturally. At night I take them off!

**JOOP**

Now this leg... so.

And now your socks.

**MOTHER**

Socks? Do I have socks on?

**JOOP**

I don't understand it either, Mother...

but I definitely see socks...

So, now let's take them off...

**MOTHER**

My glasses...

**JOOP**

Here they are...

Can you put them on yourself?

**MOTHER**

So. Now I can see you.

You've grown... it seems!

It's because of your suit. What a beautiful suit you have on!

**JOOP**

I've had this suit for years.

Do you want to put your blouse on again?

**MOTHER**

Oh, yes. This is beautiful. It came from Maison de Vries. We bought it there together, didn't we? In Amsterdam?

**JOOP**

Yes, in Amsterdam. Remember?

And now your arm... into the armhole.

**MOTHER**

What?

**JOOP**

Your arm. You have to put your arm a little behind you.

**MOTHER**

Yes...

**JOOP**

More, Mother. It has to go... it has to go behind you... more.

**MOTHER**

Aaaauwww...

**JOOP**

Sorry... but Mother, it doesn't work... your hand... can't you make believe your back is itching?

**MOTHER**

My back is itching? Have I got an itch on my back?

**JOOP**

I don't know, Mother... but you have to put this blouse on.

**MOTHER**

Yes, why didn't you say that from the start?

**JOOP**

Shall I button the blouse for you?

**MOTHER**

Yes... Pleuntje is dead, eh?

**JOOP**

Yes, Aunt Pleuntje has been dead a long time... She was the eldest...



**MOTHER**

Siena... she took pills...

**JOOP**

Yes, but Aunt Siena was in so much pain...

**MOTHER**

And how is Sonnie?

**JOOP**

Aunt Sonnie is not aware of anything anymore...  
She's in a home now.

**MOTHER**

And Marie?

**JOOP**

Aunt Marie... is not aware of anything either...  
She lives in the same home as Aunt Sonnie  
does.

**MOTHER**

Ah! Marie... She was the prettiest one.

**JOOP**

Yes.

**MOTHER**

Piet and Klaas are also gone...

**JOOP**

Yes.

**MOTHER**

And Janna? How is Janna?

**JOOP**

Aunt Janna is still alive... but she lives in  
America.

**MOTHER**

Does Janna live in America?

**JOOP**

Yes, Mother, for the past thirty years...

You know that...

Do you want your skirt on?

**MOTHER**

That's a beautiful skirt. I believe it is also from  
Maison de Vries. They have such quiet colours.

**JOOP**

They are certainly not lively. You can step into  
it now. One leg... Yes... now the other leg.

Can you stand up?

**MOTHER**

Yes. I can stand. I hold my legs against the bed  
and that way I'll never fall.

**JOOP**

Alright, but... I can't pull the skirt up...

you have to lean forward a bit...

I'm standing in front of you... just stand still.

So. Now the zipper.

There... Now it's straight.

You can sit down again.

**MOTHER**

Can I sit down again?

**JOOP**

Yes. And now your shoes.

**MOTHER**

Beautiful shoes!

**JOOP**

Yes. So, this one. This foot.



Yes... No... No, not that way... It won't go...  
We have to try again...

**MOTHER**

Again?

**JOOP**

Yes, Mother... we'll do it all over again...  
Your heel. Oouuww, my finger!  
Yes... alright. The other shoe.  
No Mother... bend your toes downwards...

**MOTHER**

Downwards?

**JOOP**

Yes, Mother, you have to bend your toes...  
Wait, it's alright this way. There.

**MOTHER**

Oh... how I used to play with you...  
when you were little. Now when you stand up  
you're so big... We look alike... or can't you say  
that about yourself? You are so different...  
You have never been like Piet...  
Good thing it isn't a girl! Was it you who said  
that?

**JOOP**

No, it was Piet. He said that when I was born.

**MOTHER**

Good thing it isn't a girl!

**JOOP**

Yes. Can you stand up now... and I'll get your  
coat.

**MOTHER**

I can stand... I hold my legs against the bed and that way I'll never fall.

**JOOP**

So... here's your coat.

**MOTHER**

Oh, that's a beautiful coat! Did we buy this together as well?

**JOOP**

No, I don't think so.

**MOTHER**

This one is from Tiel isn't it, from Blijdestein.

**JOOP**

Yes, yes you bought it yourself. Are you alright?

Yes. Just put your hand in. Right.

**MOTHER**

Why do I have to put on my coat?

**JOOP**

Because we're going outside.

**MOTHER**

Do I have to put on my coat then?

**JOOP**

Yes, you could of course put on your cardigan as well, but it isn't really cold. It's possible, do you prefer to put on your cardigan?

**MOTHER**

Yes I do prefer my cardigan.

**JOOP**

Well, we'll take off the coat again and I'll go and get the cardigan.... So, here you are.

**MOTHER**

That's a beautiful cardigan. Pure wool.

**JOOP**

Yes.

**MOTHER**

This was Siena's.

**JOOP**

Yes.

**MOTHER**

Siena took pills.

**JOOP**

Yes, but Aunt Siena was in a lot of pain.

**MOTHER**

Yes. Just why do I have to put on this cardigan.

**JOOP**

Because we 're going outside.

**MOTHER**

I never go outside in my cardigan.

**JOOP**

Normally you put on a coat. I thought that you didn't want to put your coat on.

**MOTHER**

Why not? Oh yes. I do want to put my coat on. You think a coat is better than a cardigan too, don't you.

**JOOP**

Oh yes. We'll take off the cardigan again. I'll take your hat as well. It doesn't go with a cardigan after all... Right.

**MOTHER**

This is a beautiful coat. It's from Tiel, from Blijdestein.

**JOOP**

Yes.

**MOTHER**

Did we buy it together?

**JOOP**

No, I think you bought it by yourself in Tiel.

**MOTHER**

Where is that music coming from?

**JOOP**

From the living room... They're playing records.

**MOTHER**

"I have such a longing for Dreamland..."

That's beautiful, isn't it?

**JOOP**

Yes...

**MOTHER**

I don't know the rest of it...

**JOOP**

Wait, I'll get your handbag and this for outside.

Are you coming with me?

**MOTHER**

Yes.

**JOOP**

Look, here are the ladies, you see.

**MOTHER**

Hello, this is Joop, that's my son, Joop. Do they already know you?

**JOOP**

Yes mother, they already know me a long time.  
Hello ladies. We're going for a little walk, we'll  
be back soon.

**MOTHER**

What pour wretches they are. I'm still one of the  
best. You think so too, don't you? Well, it's very  
cold here.

**JOOP**

Yes this is a cold corner, Mother, but when we  
walk a little further the sun will shine. You'll see,  
the sun is shining over there.

**MOTHER**

Oh, what beautiful berries. Do you see those  
berries. What beautiful berries.

**JOOP**

That's a firethorn, we had one in Buren as well,  
at the hindmost barn. Do you remember that?

**MOTHER**

Buren?

**JOOP**

Yes.

**MOTHER**

It's beautiful here. Have I been here before?

**JOOP**

Yes, on Sunday we come here when the sun  
shines. Wait, stand still for a while. I'll take that  
chair. Right, please sit down here.

**MOTHER**

Fine.





May I sit down? Oh, are you going to sit there...  
Doesn't the sun blind you? It's shining so  
brightly...

**JOOP**

No, I don't mind the sun.

**MOTHER**

I wanted to ask you something but now I don't  
know what it was... That happens a lot lately.  
That's because if I don't tell myself beforehand:  
I must remember this, I forget it. In a way I was  
always forgetful... but then I could write it  
down... on one of those little pieces of paper  
that were always on the kitchen table.  
Remember? Now I can't even write anymore,  
because I shake so much... The past few days  
I've been shaking horribly... But let's talk about  
something else... because you are here now.

**JOOP**

I don't know what to talk about.  
You... you want some chocolate milk?

**MOTHER**

Do you have some?

**JOOP**

Of course. I always bring it with me because you  
like it so much. Let me shake it first. Oh yes...  
I know something to tell you.  
I shook hands with the Queen.

**MOTHER**

Oh.

**JOOP**

Don't you think that's nice? The old one and the new one. Both of the Queens shook hands with me!

**MOTHER**

Do they still exist? Siena was always such a lady too... wasn't she?

**JOOP**

Yes... but far from being a Queen.  
Do you want it?

**MOTHER**

Mmmmmmmm, mmmmmmm, mmmmmmm...

**JOOP**

You do like it, don't you?

**MOTHER**

Oh yes. Mmmmmm. mmmmm, mmmmm.  
Yes, this is the best taste of all.  
The person who invented this, should get a...

**JOOP**

A medal?

**MOTHER**

Yes. A Medal. Mmmmmm, mmmmm,  
mmmmm... What does this remind me of?

**JOOP**

Of us. Of Piet and me... when we were babies.

**MOTHER**

Oh, I already told you that.

**JOOP**

Yes... but that doesn't matter.

**MOTHER**

My mouth is dirty...

**JOOP**

Here's a handkerchief.

**MOTHER**

Ah, now I remember what I wanted to ask you.  
A woman was here who acted as if she knew me.  
But I don't know her.

**JOOP**

Sister Dolorosa.

**MOTHER**

That's right. Sister Dolo... Doloro...  
Just like you said. But how do you know...

**JOOP**

Well, Piet phoned me.

**MOTHER**

Yes, she acted as if she knew Piet too...  
But I don't know her!

**JOOP**

Yes, Mother, you do. She's a nun.

**MOTHER**

A nun? No... she was no nun!

**JOOP**

She doesn't dress like one, but she is a nun.

**MOTHER**

And how do I know her then?

**JOOP**

When Father was dying, you got ill and had to  
go into hospital, and you were all alone there  
because we were all with Father in Buren.  
And then Sister Dolorosa took you over to the  
chapel.



**MOTHER**

To a chapel? To pray?

**JOOP**

Or cry... It was done out of love, Mother.

**MOTHER**

Oh, yes. She was so sweet. So kind...

And I didn't even know she existed...

**JOOP**

What is it, Mother? Why are you crying?

**MOTHER**

I wasn't good for Father.

**JOOP**

Of course you were.

**MOTHER**

No, I wasn't. Your father was such a good man...

but he was so active... he wanted it all the time...

And... I couldn't do it...

I was completely raw!

**JOOP**

Calm, calm yourself, Mother...

**MOTHER**

And then all of you were so angry with me,

because I asked Piet for some pills...

so your father would be less active.

And then you, you were also so angry with me!

**JOOP**

You're right, Mother. That was rather stupid of us. Life is really very difficult...

Do you want some chipolata pudding?

**MOTHER**

Do you have some?

**JOOP**

Mother, of course...

Otherwise I wouldn't have asked you!

So, then... let's open it.

**MOTHER**

How are things at home?

**JOOP**

Good. Oh, yes, Ramona sends you her best wishes. You know who that is, Ramona?

**MOTHER**

She's Juan's mother.

**JOOP**

That's right.

**MOTHER**

Una, dos, tres, cuatro, cinco, seis, siete, ocho, nueve, diez. That's ten!

**JOOP**

You still know that well, huh!

**MOTHER**

Oh, that you never forget! We went to school in Spain with the nuns, when we lived there.

I was nine and Sonnie was ten. You didn't learn very much there, only to pray...

And then one day a priest came into the class and wrote a very difficult multiplication problem on the blackboard and asked Sonnie to work out the answer. Naturally she did it easily, because she was already in the fifth grade. The next day

she was the teacher. You should have seen the nuns' faces.

**JOOP**

They naturally thought they had an Einstein in the class.

**MOTHER**

Einstein? Who is Einstein?

**JOOP**

That... oh... he was a scientist.  
He was all mixed up in time.

**MOTHER**

Just like me.

**JOOP**

Yes... just like you.

**MOTHER**

It's beautiful here. Do you hear the blackbird?

**JOOP**

Yes.

**MOTHER**

And the chestnut tree!  
So beautiful, isn't it? It's always so dark under chestnut trees, that's beautiful.

**JOOP**

Shall I see if there's a chestnut? Wait a minute.  
...Look.

**MOTHER**

What a beautiful one. You used to do that, didn't you, you used to make those little dolls from them, with those matchsticks, and little animals and such. What shall I do with it?



**JOOP**

Well, you could keep it. That brings luck.

*Mother throws chestnut carelessly away*

**MOTHER**

Is this an estate?

**JOOP**

A what?

**MOTHER**

With a baron or a duke.

**JOOP**

No, Mother. It's a garden, it's part of the home.

It all belongs to the state.

**MOTHER**

Delicious...

Mmmmmm, mmmmm, mmmm.

What does this remind me of? Of you both.

When you were babies nursing at my breast.

Then you'd lay there, sucking. Mmmmmm,

mmmmm, mmmmm.

Oh... they're so dependent then...

That's the most beautiful thing there is...

How's your work going?

**JOOP**

Good... good. We're rehearsing a new play.

**MOTHER**

Oh, yes... You're an actor.

**JOOP**

Yes, Mother.

**MOTHER**

With the *Nederlandse Comedie*.

**JOOP**

No... No. Mother, that was long ago.  
Now I'm with the *Werkteater*...

**MOTHER**

But you were with the *Nederlandse Comedie*!  
You played in the National Theatre.

**JOOP**

Yes. But now we play in an old renovated factory.

**MOTHER**

An old factory?

**JOOP**

Yes, you've been there with Father.  
Do you remember?

**MOTHER**

You were doing such a beautiful play in the  
National Theatre. What was the name of it...  
I can't remember... Oh, yes. "Tea for Two"

**JOOP**

What did you say?

**MOTHER**

I can tell from your face: that wasn't it.  
What was it called?

**JOOP**

"Look Homeward, Angel"

**MOTHER**

Oh, yes. "Look Homeward, Angel"  
That was such a beautiful play.  
It was so beautiful then.

**JOOP**

But the *Werkteater* is doing very well too.

We've made a movie, and it won a prize:  
the Prix Italia...

**MOTHER**

And all those people there... they asked:  
"Are you Joop Admiraal's father and mother?"  
...because you were new... you understand?

**JOOP**

The Prix Italia is an international prize,  
which means it's the best in the world!

**MOTHER**

In the whole world? Your father always won  
prizes too, at his shooting club...  
a goose... or a barrel of apples...

**XXX**

Good afternoon!

**MOTHER**

Good afternoon! Do we know that man?

**JOOP**

Yes, of course. He's here every Sunday.

**MOTHER**

Another walking wreck! I'm still one of the  
better ones don't you think so?

**MOTHER**

I think it's so nice you're here with me.  
Do you think it is nice too?

**JOOP**

Yes.

**MOTHER**

Just as nice as I do?

**JOOP**

I think so...

Do you want some more chipolata pudding?

**MOTHER**

No, thank you.

**JOOP**

Then I'll eat it.

*I eat the pudding as Joop*

Your father was a policeman.

**JOOP**

Yes.

**MOTHER**

You are an actor.

And Piet is a specialist...

**JOOP**

Yes.

**MOTHER**

And what do I do?

**JOOP**

Nothing.

**MOTHER**

Nothing? Do I do nothing?

**JOOP**

But Mother... you don't have to cry...

I don't mean anything by that.

You don't have to do anything...

You're old. You raised us, Piet and me.

We are what we are because of you and Father.

Don't cry!

**MOTHER**

Siena also took pills...

**JOOP**

Yes... but Aunt Siena was in so much pain.

**MOTHER**

She left a note: "I'm going to Wout".

He was such an ugly man, wasn't he?

**JOOP**

Yes... but they loved each other very much.

**MOTHER**

Yes... they loved each other very much.

**JOOP**

Would you like to be dead?

**MOTHER**

Me? No. I still have you.

**JOOP**

Yes.

**MOTHER**

If I didn't have you...

Anyway... I wouldn't mind if one morning I didn't wake up again.

You don't mind if I say that?

**JOOP**

No.

**MOTHER**

Because... Well, you don't believe in heaven or hell either.

**JOOP**

I don't know.

**MOTHER**

You don't know? You believe there is a God?

**JOOP**

I don't know, Mother...

**MOTHER**

Oh, I thought you had more common sense!  
Siena really believed in heaven. Bonstra did too.  
And your father also believed in a heaven.  
It's really lucky that the minute you die you  
don't know anything anymore...  
Otherwise it might be a big disappointment  
for a lot of people!

**JOOP**

But Mother...you don't believe in anything?

**MOTHER**

No. Of course not. You're just a leaf. It falls from  
a tree and disappears.  
Do you see that tree there... so beautiful...  
with that... because of the light... and so...  
I never... I never knew it was so beautiful!  
Everything is so beautiful!  
And you... you're shining...  
and you're so young!  
By the way, how old are you?

**JOOP**

How old do you think I am?

**MOTHER**

Twenty... thirty...

**JOOP**

No, Mother... I'm already forty-four.



**MOTHER**

Are you already forty-four?

**JOOP**

Yes. And how old do you think you are?

**MOTHER**

Well... also about forty...  
or maybe thirty?

**JOOP**

No, Mother... you're eighty...

**MOTHER**

Am I already eighty? You didn't think I was  
eighty either. did you?

**JOOP**

Yes. You can't be as old as I am.

**MOTHER**

Right... because I'm your Mother.

**JOOP**

Yes.

**MOTHER**

You are mine.

**JOOP**

Yes.

**MOTHER**

Oh, what would I do without you. You're  
different. They sometimes laugh.

**JOOP**

Huh... what did you say?

**MOTHER**

No... nothing...



**JOOP**

Who laughs, Mother?

**MOTHER**

No. Let it be.

It's better not to talk about it.

**JOOP**

Yes, Mother. Tell me.

**MOTHER**

I want to ask you something. Honest.

But then you must give me an honest answer.

**JOOP**

Alright.

**MOTHER**

Would you have preferred to be a girl?

**JOOP**

Yes.

**MOTHER**

And I gave birth to you.

**JOOP**

But, Mother, I'm happy. Really. Don't cry.

We are happy together. The others only laugh at us because they are jealous, don't you think so?

We're happy, aren't we Mother?

**MOTHER**

Are you sleeping here tonight?

**JOOP**

No, Mother. I have to go back to Amsterdam, and you stay here.

**MOTHER**

Amsterdam! Yes. And where is "here"?

**JOOP**

"Here" is Delft.

**MOTHER**

Delft?

**JOOP**

Yes. You've lived here for the past three years.  
Look: in this building.

**MOTHER**

It's all around us... like a horseshoe...  
That's a beautiful building...  
You have to be a very good architect to build  
something like that.  
And that tree over there. That weeping willow.  
The way it stands there... on that little...  
tiny hill... it slopes so gracefully...  
it looks like someone put it there on purpose...  
Can't I stay and live here?

**JOOP**

Yes, Mother. As long as you want.

**MOTHER**

My whole life?

**JOOP**

Yes, Mother... your whole life.

**MOTHER**

I feel a bit cold.

**JOOP**

Yes, it's getting cold. Let's go back.

**MOTHER**

It's so beautiful here...  
Hello! Hello! They don't hear me...

Children are always jumping up and down.  
That's why people want children.  
It's quite beautiful here. I'm glad that you've  
finally shown me this.

**JOOP**

Mother, we come here every Sunday, at least  
when it's not raining.

**MOTHER**

Oh, yes. Yes of course. Well, I like it you know.

*Grace Jones sings: Strange, I've seen this  
face before...*

What's that?

**JOOP**

The sisters and the brothers live there, you know,  
those boys and girls who take care of you.

**MOTHER**

Oh, they are so sweet.

**JOOP**

Yes, fortunate, isn't it Mother.

**MOTHER**

Oh. Look what beautiful berries, what beautiful  
berries.

**JOOP**

That's a firethorn, mother. We had one in  
Buren as well, at the hindmost barn, do you  
remember?

**MOTHER**

In Buren? Yes. It's cold here.

**JOOP**

Yes, it's a cold corner, mother, but we're already

there. You see, here we are in the corridor.  
We're passing by the living room again.

**MOTHER**

Hello, this is my son. This is Joop, that's my son.

**JOOP**

Well Mother, they do know that I'm Joop.

**MOTHER**

We have everything in the house we need to eat?

**JOOP**

No, Mother. You stay here. I have to go back.

**MOTHER**

You're going away again?

**JOOP**

Yes, Mother. I do that every Sunday.  
I come and I go again.

**MOTHER**

Do you find that difficult?

**JOOP**

And you?

**MOTHER**

Yes. But it has to be that way.

**JOOP**

Yes, Mother. It has to be that way.  
Mother, I have to leave you now.  
Otherwise I'll miss my bus.  
Could you take off your coat.  
Right, I'll hang it up. Mother I'm leaving now.

**MOTHER**

I will not cry.

**JOOP**

I'll see you next Sunday.

**MOTHER**

Bye! Bye my love!

*Mother stands alone before bed, lets waving hand drop, shuffles to chair at bed, takes from behind chair invisible zimmer-frame, shuffles in circle with zimmer-frame*

**NURSE**

Are you going to bed already, Mrs. Admiraal?

**MOTHER**

Yes Sister.

**NURSE**

I'll come later to say goodnight to you.

**MOTHER**

That's nice Sister.

*Mother puts zimmer-frame back behind chair, sits down on bed, looks around her, does and don't recognize environment, scratches pyjama jacket out from between pillows, takes off blouse, gets up a little, lowers skirt, puts on pyjama jacket, doesn't know by God where she is, tights must be taken off, tights sticks half way knees, stands up and falls. The nuns' choir from Casanova sounds very loud. Mother lies on the floor, tries to get up, but keeps falling.*

*During the following text I take off Mother's*

*shoes and tights. Take cream spread off the bed, hospital spread appears. Turn bed a quarter of a turn, foot to the audience. Pull head up. Put chair next to bed and get into bed*

**JOOP**

My mother fell out of bed. That happens to very old people. Or they fall when they're walking. Of course you can tie them up, but that's terrible. Nobody knows how long she lay there. She doesn't know herself, fortunately. Maybe she called for me... but I don't want to think about that, or I'll go crazy!

It was on a Sunday morning that my brother called me: "Come right away to the hospital. Mother is being brought here by ambulance". All the way there in the train and in the taxi, I kept thinking I'm on my way to my dying mother... I kept thinking: maybe now, or in a week... But when I got there, I learned that only some small bone in her hip was broken, which is like your collar-bone. Not important... That was a disappointment...

**MOTHER**

This is a surprise. How did you know I was here?

**JOOP**

Piet told me.

**MOTHER**

Piet?

**JOOP**

He was just here in the room, Mother.

**MOTHER**

Mmmm... I guess I just didn't notice.

By the way, how is Siena?

**JOOP**

But Aunt Siena is dead, Mother.

**MOTHER**

Is Siena dead? And why didn't anyone tell me that? I have to leave here. Joop, I must leave here! I must! I must!

**JOOP**

No. Mother. You can't. You have to lie down.

**MOTHER**

I can't lie down. I must get away!

**JOOP**

You have to lie down. You broke your hip.  
Aren't you in pain?

**MOTHER**

Pain? I'm never in pain.  
I've always been tough!

**JOOP**

Yes.

**MOTHER**

Oh, what white teeth you have...  
Can you take them out?

**JOOP**

No, Mother, these are still my own.

**MOTHER**

What should I do with this?

**JOOP**

It's a sheet, Mother.

Wait, I'll fix it.

**MOTHER**

No, it's much too hot!

Oh, what beautiful legs...

There were women standing in the dark...  
where the ferryboat arrives in Rotterdam...

**JOOP**

Oh, yes. And what were they doing?

**MOTHER**

Oh, they were flirting, or something...

Let's drop the subject... So floppy...

*She takes her breasts*

Mmmm, mmmm, mmmm.

**JOOP**

Do you still know what that means?

**MOTHER**

What?

**JOOP**

What you just did.

**MOTHER**

What did I do?

**JOOP**

Mmmmmm, mmmmm, mmmmm.

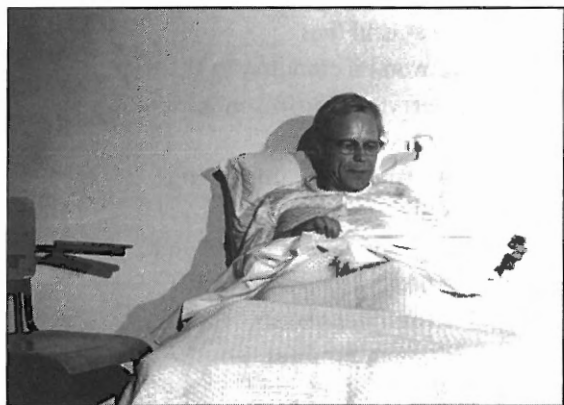
**MOTHER**

Willemiek, of course.

**JOOP**

When?





**MOTHER**

A fortnight ago.

**JOOP**

No, Mother... that was us... Piet and me...  
when we were babies... at your breast...

**MOTHER**

Don't be so childish! Pure cotton naturally...  
Does Mother know I'm here?

**JOOP**

Yes.

**MOTHER**

Then why doesn't she do anything about it?  
I can't stand it anymore...

**JOOP**

Mother, you're in the hospital... with Piet.

**MOTHER**

You don't know what goes on here!  
I had to fight with them!

**JOOP**

Mother! Mother! Calm down! You had a bad  
dream.

**MOTHER**

How dare you say that to me!  
Who are you? How do we know each other?

**JOOP**

You are my Mother.

**MOTHER**

Am I your mother? So you're mine...

**JOOP**

Yes, Mother.

**MOTHER**

Then take me with you. I want to leave here.  
Take me with you, Joop.

**JOOP**

Mother, that isn't possible. You can't walk now.  
You must stay here for a while.  
You'll do exercises and then you'll walk again,  
and we'll walk together in the garden.

**MOTHER**

Exercise? Exercise? I don't want to.  
I don't want to do any exercises.  
I don't want to anymore, Joop.  
I don't want to anymore!

**JOOP**

Mother... I've written a play about us.  
About you and me. And everything I say in it,  
because I play you, too, is exactly what you've  
really said to me. So in a way, you wrote this  
play for me... and most of the people like it.  
I'm very happy about it, and I owe it all to you...

But at the end of the play, right at the end,  
there's a scene where you say that you don't  
want to live anymore. And then, sometimes,  
there are people in the audience who think  
you really died...  
But it's not that easy...  
You're still alive...





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The series Theatre in Translation wishes to stimulate the reading and performing of plays by European writers, by publishing the works in different languages and in different countries.

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