

TRUCKSTOP

by Lot Vekemans

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English translation
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CHARACTERS

Katalijne (18)

Mother (62)

Remco (28)

The abbreviations K, M and R also stand for Katalijne, Mother and Remco, but are in a different time frame.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

Truckstop was originally written in Dutch and set in Brabant, in the south of the Netherlands near the borders with Belgium and Germany. In the Dutch version, this is sometimes reflected in the sentence construction of the characters. A similar choice could be made for a regional setting in an English language production of the play, i.e. it could be set in a specific English agricultural region, (for instance, Norfolk), if so desired, names and places could be changed accordingly and dialogues could be similarly adapted to reflect regional variations. This would need to be done in consultation with the author and translator. Of course, it's also perfectly feasible to perform *Truckstop* in English in its original Dutch setting.

1. The reconstruction of the lamp

Katalijne

Over a hundred pieces
Can't glue that
Over a hundred pieces
You'd lose the overall picture
Our mum says
Over a hundred pieces!
It's a hopeless task!
It's only fit for the dustbin
I don't believe that
I don't want that
Not the dustbin
Not that lamp
Not this lamp
Not this particular lamp
It was a beautiful lamp
One with lots and lots of pieces of coloured glass
green and blue
and yellow and red
And colours in between,
Not yellow but almost yellow
Not blue but almost blue
I'll sort them by colour
Those pieces
The red with the red
The green with the green
Right side up
The right side that's the ripple side
The outside
The ripples belong on the outside
The smooth glass inside
That's easy
Then I'll try and fit them together
If I find a piece with a sharp edge on the inside
I'll look for all the pieces with a sharp edge on the outside
I'll fit them together
One by one
On all sides
Don't know where to start
You can't know beforehand
You never do
So you just start somewhere
That's the best way
Just start somewhere and see where you end up
See if you can do it
I'll stick to the colours
They're a guide
They'll show you the way

Sort of
Not really of course
They don't tell you beforehand where they're going to fit
You've got to find that out for yourself
Just keep trying
I'm a trooper I am
According to our mum
I keep trying
When someone else would have given up
I keep going
That's typical of me
Tiresome
Sometimes
For others
But it doesn't bother me

2. Katalijne and mother talk about the truckstop

Mother

It used to be all farmers and turf cutters round here
They stuck a spade in the ground and got on with it
Day in day out
Rain or shine
You stayed where you were

Katalijne

I love this place
Especially in the mornings
Very early before the first customers arrive
Because it's still dark
In the summer it's not dark for long
And never completely
Dark with a crack of sky peeping through

Mother

Not nowadays though
Nowadays we all fly round the world
Everyone's on the move
On the road
From one side to the other and back again
I sometimes think
With all that rushing back and forth
And that flying as if it's nothing
That no-one knows where their plant flourishes best any more
You shouldn't move a plant too often, it weakens the roots

Katalijne

Sometimes in the mornings I sit on a chair by the window just staring out
There are hardly any trucks on the road and the canal is still quiet too
It makes me feel calm

Till our mum starts shouting that I'm behind schedule
Then I start swearing at myself
Lost track of time again

Mother

It's all the same to me
I can make a good living from it
From the truckers coming and going with their goods
Chickens to Belgium
Pigs to Poland
Men who come and go and in between stop by for a meatball and a coffee
Sometimes they're outside again in fifteen minutes
Sometimes it takes longer
They never really stay long
Not that you'd ask them to
I wouldn't
Not that I didn't want to
At times
With the odd one
But yeah, what are you going to say then
Love me?
They'd see me coming a mile off

Katalijne

I like working with our mum
The feel of my hands in the rinsing water when my fingertips go all wrinkly.
Like after you've been swimming or in the bath.
I like stock-taking, counting the crates of fizzy drinks and the packs of
coffee.
And the smell of stale beer in the cellar.

Mother

We can sleep six up there
All with their own room with washbasin
Shower and toilet in the hallway
Everything spotless
Spotless room
Spotless sheets
And for a couple of bob, spotless towels too.

Katalijne

I like it when my mother takes out her hairpins at the end of a day's work
and pulls down her long hair onto her shoulders with her fingers.
And the cuppa soup with a toasted sandwich before bedtime and counting
the money in the till
After that we usually watch a bit of telly together
I often fall asleep

Mother

Most of them only want a shower and a pee
They'd rather sleep in their own cabin

When we've got really good beds with mattresses from Slumberland
They weren't cheap either

Katalijne

I like the customers here too
Not all of them, but most of them
Some you only see once, especially the men from abroad
Germany or Belgium and lots from France as well
I've seen a few from Spain and Italy too.

Mother

Tourists don't come here
Only drivers
It's because of the name of course
It was always packed in here in the old days
Every evening
The good old days
I've even put an extra mattress down here in the café
For a German with a broken-down truck
Just bedded down here on the floor
I can still see it as clear as day
Mind you, he had to get up at half past four, same time as us

Katalijne

In the mornings I Hoover the rug and take all the chairs down from the
tables
I put the ashtrays out.
I put the coffee on and take the toasted sandwiches out of the freezer
That's my job

Mother

It was a rush to get breakfast ready in time
Coffee with bread and hot food
Eggs and bacon or toasted sandwiches
Fried potatoes too now and then
Luckily Katalijne made herself useful from an early age

Katalijne

On Wednesdays I clean the windows and once every four weeks I do the
outsides as well.
And when Mario van Erp comes with the cartons of milk, the eggs, the
blocks of cheese and ham and the jars of gerkins and pickled onions, I
help carry it all and put it away properly in the cupboards. Everything in its
place.
Just like the glasses that I rinse in the evenings at closing time.
The beer glasses go to the left of the pump and the soft drink glasses to
the right
because mother is left-handed and I'm right-handed:
she pumps the beer, I do the fizzy.

Mother

Nowadays they even have their own little fridges and coffee machines in those trucks

I even saw one once with a microwave

It's up to them isn't it

But if they want to park here then they've got to have breakfast

Well I'm not a car-park am I

3. Katalijne and Remco meet

Katalijne

It was like I was seeing him for the first time

or hearing him actually

I heard him for the first time

Remco

It was like she was looking straight through me

It spooked me a bit

Those eyes

That staring

Katalijne

Like I'd never seen him before in my life

Mother

That's not true

You've known him for years

That's Remco

The son of Van Schijndel

The one who's gone into those creatures

You know

Those ostriches

Remco

Our mum wanted to ask if I could leave a few of these here

For publicity

Katalijne

They were leaflets

Remco

Because we've had so much bad press and because none of it's true.

According to her

And she'd like to know if you'd consider putting ostrich steaks on the menu

You'd get a discount, of course

Katalijne

Our mum picked up a leaflet and looked inside

I did too

Then I saw those strange creatures for the first time

Katalijne Have you gone into those creatures too then?

Remco No, I'm a driver at Van Dijk's.

Katalijne
And his eyes began to shine

Remco Been doing it five years or so.

Katalijne
It was something in his voice
As if I already knew him from somewhere

Remco
It was like she was seeing me for the first time and like that was something special.

Mother He's no oil painting

Remco
I couldn't believe it because I'm no oil painting
With those ears of mine and that sticking-up hair
I used to try and do something to it
At school
To make it go wavy or make it look thicker or something
But our mum always used to take the clippers to it and
Zzzzzt, all off, nice and easy
She didn't have to touch it again for two or three months
They try and make out that boys don't care about their appearance, but
that's not true
Perhaps not when they're older, over forty or so, but before that, oh man...

Katalijne
I giggled at what our mum had said
But I had this strange...
Fidgety feeling
It started around here
And then moved up a bit
As if it wanted to get out
Never had it before
It was his voice actually
The kind of voice you like to hear
I asked him if he was coming by again

Remco I come here every Friday don't I

Katalijne
Was that true?
Was that really true?

Katalijne Tell me something
Remco What?
Katalijne Doesn't matter, everything, tell me everything
Remco Don't look at me like that
Katalijne How
Remco Like that
Like you are
Katalijne I'm not looking at all

Remco
She had a way of looking at you that made you think, she can read my thoughts and everything.

Katalijne
When he talked then I'd watch him secretly
So it wouldn't be so obvious

Remco
It made me feel shy so I'd look down and sometimes I could feel myself going red when I thought that she really could read my thoughts

Katalijne
He liked telling me things

Remco
I sometimes thought that she had a special gift
something different to other people anyway
Maybe that's why I used to tell her all sorts of things
Even things that I
Well
Sort of
Things that you
You know

4. The first facts: what?

M: I was found in the Truckstop with a meat knife in my stomach
Vital organ punctured
Liver
Sliced in two
Bled to death

R: I died instantly
In one go

Head-on collision
Skull sliced in two
Not a pretty sight
Not that you know anything about it

K: I was lying on the seat next to Remco
With my head on his shoulder
As if I was a bit tired and had fallen asleep

M: I was alone

K: My neck was broken like a matchstick
And I had a lot of lacerations

R: Me too
From the glass and the metal

K: My legs were crushed because the seat had been thrown
forward

R: That seat had been broken for ages
I didn't have airbags either

M: Not that that would have made any difference

R: My father had to identify me
He told my mother not to look

K: He identified me too

M: I was found by Van Dijk

R: My boss
My ex-boss I mean

M: He came by on Saturday morning
With a bunch of flowers

K: Like he did every Saturday morning

M: Like he did every Saturday morning yes

R: He had his eye on you

M: Don't be daft

R: That was an open secret

M: I was lying in a pool of blood, literally
Later the doctor established the time of death:
between 2.00 and 2.30 on the night of the 15th of June

Friday night

R: It was quarter past three exactly with us

K: The clock stopped on the dot

R: Quarter past three at night
Dead

M: Stone dead

K: All three of us

5. Katalijne gets a present

Katalijne What is it

Remco Open it
...
It's for your birthday

Katalijne How did you know that

Remco From your mum
She didn't want to tell me at first
But I nagged her till it drove her mad

Katalijne 18

Remco Adult

Katalijne A lamp with lots of colours

Remco It works too
Look

Katalijne It's like a rainbow

Remco It comes from Japan
An original from Japan

Katalijne Japan?

Remco Bought it off a trucker who's been there himself

Katalijne For me

Remco For your birthday

Katalijne Really from Japan?

Remco Absolutely

Katalijne Didn't you want to keep it for yourself then?

Remco It's for you

Katalijne Goh

Remco Do you like it

Katalijne Oh yes

Remco If you don't like it, you can just say

Katalijne It's beautiful

Remco Look (*he gives the lamp a twist so that the lights revolve*)

Katalijne Just like a disco light

Katalijne goes to give Remco a kiss on the cheek, but Remco turns so that the kiss lands on his mouth

Remco I'd better be off

Katalijne That was an accident

Remco Van Dijk's waiting

Katalijne Where are you going?

Remco To pick up some pigs in Berghem

Katalijne Are you coming back this evening

Remco Maybe

Katalijne Our mum's doing drinks on the house, for me

Remco I'll do my best
Promise

6. Remco talks about the Samurai

Remco
The first farmer that went from Holland to Canada
He didn't know
And his wife didn't know

And his children certainly didn't know
The first time Columbus sailed to the west from Portugal
Heaven or hell
He didn't know
It's a funny thing, discovering something
It's been there long before you find it, but you don't know that
You don't, your neighbour doesn't, nobody does, except the people who
are already there
Who've already discovered it
Or were already there the whole time
In Japan truckers are called 'the samurai of the tarmac'
I didn't know that
I didn't used to know that
Now I do
I read it somewhere
'Samurai of the tarmac'
Nice eh
Samurai
Men with true grit
Who didn't give a damn for the law, for rules, for anything
The sky's the limit but then in Japanese
That's what they'd say
The sky's the limit
And not even that
Because where the sky stops, the universe starts and where the universe
starts there's no end to it
Neverending
In Japan they've got trucks that are covered from top to bottom in little
lights that flash on and off – computer driven
They've got trucks that put Times Square in the shade
They've got trucks with more lights on them than the villages they drive
through
Yesterday I showed Katalijne a picture of one of those Japanese trucks
She was gobsmacked
All those lights, she kept saying
Do you know what that costs?
Lights like neon boards
I couldn't believe it
A couple of million yen
That's about 75,000 guilders
75,000 guilders just to decorate your truck
And some of them reinforce their whole truck with steel
Steel that juts out on all sides
Steel as sharp as a razor blade
Death machines they are
Tin openers
You can get heavily fined for them too
Very heavily
For the extra lamps as well
Cost you the earth
But the really big guys, it doesn't bother them

They just bribe their way out of it
Connections
Tit for tat
It's the same everywhere
Here there
Everywhere
But if you're small
insignificant
Then no-one's gonna give you a break
And certainly not the police
If you're small and down on your luck you're screwed
Where are you going to find the money?
And then one day you've had enough, you're up to your ears in debt,
you're an ant in comparison to the mountain of money you've got to pay
The Japanese have a sense of honour
That's a fine thing
They don't want to shame their family
They save the family honour by going and never coming back
You sacrifice yourself
You're a hero
"The disappeared" that's what they call them
Drivers who go away and never come back
Gone
At the annual gathering of the clan your name gets a mention, you're
remembered, honoured, kind of
Just like in church when they read out the names of the people who've
died

7. Remco tells about the loan

Remco You should have seen their faces when I started telling them
 about that new relay system
 It sounded so simple they could hardly believe it
 Gentlemen, I said, it's the beez-neeze
 I take the freight to just outside Hamburg where there's a
 Danish colleague waiting to take it off me
 In 24 hours it's all sorted on both sides
 No expensive overtime
 Customer happy, I'm happy

Mother It's time you were off Remco, I'm going to lock up

Katalijne Oh mum, not yet

Remco Then I knew it, that loan's virtually in my pocket, I saw them
 thinking, this kid knows a thing or two about business, we've
 got ourselves a good investment here

Mother I'll be out the back
 Remco?

Remco I'm on my way

(mother leaves)

Katalijne Stay a bit longer, just a bit longer

Remco I'm telling you Katalijne, it's going to happen, tomorrow it's actually going to happen

Katalijne Your own truck

Remco It's secondhand of course, but it's a good one

Katalijne What colours are you going to do it?

Remco Here, I've already made a sketch

(he shows Katalijne)

Katalijne Wow, it's like a rainbow

Remco I've asked Berend if he'll spray it for me
For a knock-down price
He owes me a few

Katalijne Does your father know yet

Remco I want to surprise him

Katalijne And Van Dijk

Remco He can get stuffed
Prat

Katalijne You're a hero

Remco Hngh, hero..

Katalijne My hero
A samurai

(Remco laughs)

Katalijne A samurai of the tarmac

Remco *(sings exaggeratedly)* Yeah, I'm... King of the Road!

Katalijne Come on, let's dance

Remco I've got to go, your mum..

Katalijne Just for a second

Remco There's no music

(Katalijne turns the radio on and searches till she finds some suitable music)

Remco Not so loud

(Katalijne starts to dance, daring him to join in)

Katalijne Come on

(Remco joins in, hesitantly)

Remco This time next week I might be on the road in my own truck

Katalijne And I can come with you

Remco You can come with me, sure, you can come with me
Maybe not straight away, but later, if it all goes well

Katalijne No, straight away, I want to straight away

Remco We'll see

Mother Katalijne!

(Remco freezes on the spot)

Katalijne You've got to promise me

Remco Your mother's calling

Katalijne You've got to promise

Mother Katalijne!

Katalijne Say it, say it, say it

Mother Katalijne, what are you doing? Turn that music off!
Is Remco still there?

Remco *(turns radio down low)*
We'll talk about it another time
I'd better go before she blows her top

Katalijne You've got to promise me

Remco Right, right, I promise, okay?

Katalijne Will you come back in the morning

Remco Soon as everything's sorted
We'll have champagne

Katalijne And cake

(enter Mother)

Mother You still here?

Remco I'm just going

Mother It's not a nightclub you know

Remco Sorry, I wasn't, I mean...

Mother Yeah yeah, excuses
Always excuses

Remco Sorry
(he starts to leave, has second thoughts)
By the way, have you seen what Goossens is up to?

Mother What about Goossens?

Remco Those bill boards
They start at Helmond

Mother What about it

Remco He's even put one up near here
"Second drink..."

Mother *(interrupts)* I'm not blind

Remco No, no, of course not

Mother Anything else?

Remco No, no, I'm going, sorry for the inconvenience
Or the nuisance I mean

(he leaves)

Mother Why's that boy still hanging round here at this time of night

Katalijne He's going to buy his own truck, tomorrow and then he's
going to spray it in lovely colours and then we're going to go
to Russia together or somewhere

Mother Yeahyeah, Russia in his own truck
Katalijne Honest
Mother That boy lives in cloud cuckooland
Katalijne He said so himself
Mother Yeah yeah
Katalijne He said so
Mother You shouldn't take that boy so literally
Katalijne Why not?
Mother Because I said so

(Mother walks to the radio to turn it off, hears a newsflash)

Radio

There now follows a special traffic announcement. A vehicle has been reported driving on the wrong side of the A50 Hertogenbosch–Nijmegen road in the vicinity of Oss East. Do not attempt to overtake it, keep to the right-hand lane and try to warn the driver by flashing your lights. I repeat: watch out for a vehicle on the wrong side of the A50 Hertogenbosch–Nijmegen road at Oss East.

Mother *(turns off radio)* It's always the A50.

Katalijne What?

Mother Some maniac driving the wrong way along the A50.

Katalijne Again?

Mother Again yes.

Note 1

K. *(reads out loud)*

At closing time Rinse glasses Soft drink glasses on left Beer glasses on right Chairs upside down on table Shut curtains Turn off neon sign

This note hung on the door leading from the bar to the back room
I had to pass it on my way to bed
Not forgotten anything?
Not forgotten anything

8. Mother on Remco

Mother

It's not that I dislike him
I'm not saying he's bad inside or rotten
But I wouldn't say I get a warm feeling when he's here
I wouldn't say "Hey Remco, nice to see you"
No I wouldn't
I'd rather see him go than come
To be quite honest, not for me, but for Katalijne
That boy's got a certain influence over Katalijne
Unintentionally he's got a certain influence over Katalijne that I...
I'd rather he hadn't
She's under his influence without knowing it herself
Yeah yeah, it's probably love
You can think that
But what of it
Girls like Katalijne always pull the short straw
That's the way they're made
She can't help it
It's difficult for a mother to stand by and watch
You feel responsible after all
To the bitter end
That's my job
I've got to look after her
No-one else is going to
I gave birth to her.
A boy like that
You don't even want to think about the two of them...
You know
I mean
There's no knowing what she might produce
They do say it's not hereditary, but do they give any guarantees?
No.

“No madam, we don’t give any guarantees. Medical science doesn’t come with a kite-mark”
That Remco, he’s so...
I don’t know how to put it
I don’t want to paint him black
There’s something about him
Something
How shall I put it
Remco is one of those boys who bashes his nose when he goes into a shop, because the electric doors always close just as he walks in
Might sound hard, I don’t mean it like that, but all the same
Why is it that one person always has bad luck and another doesn’t?
You command success, you’ve got to radiate that
He hasn’t got it
Remco’s a boy with just one extraordinary talent
A talent for failure
I can see that
And I’m not the only one
Van Dijk sees it too, but he keeps giving him one more chance
It’s nice when a boss always gives you one more chance
Decent too
But whether it gets you anywhere
I don’t know
I’m not about to try it
My daughter’s not a guinea-pig
Imagine if I was to say: go ahead, have a go, if it all goes wrong never mind, better luck next time, you can just be good friends
No mother’s going to do that
A mother’s got to protect her child
That’s her job

9. Clarification When?

M: It was on a Friday
K: In June
R: It was hot
K: Muggy
R: Sweltering
M: With thunder in the air
K: You could smell the ozone

M: It was a strange day

R: You can say that with hindsight, because you know what happened

M: Hindsight my foot, it was a strange day from the outset

K: Half past nine in the morning and we still hadn't had a customer

M: Not by eleven o'clock either
Yeah, Van Dijk came by
(to Remco) Looking for you

R: Yeah, I'd handed in my notice
(corrects himself) Okay I was fired
What difference does it make, I wanted to leave anyway

K: I was looking out the window all morning watching one truck after another drive past

R: To Goossens, 3 kilometers up the road

M: Goossens who cooked his chips in the same old fat year in year out
And his meatballs
Who didn't actually sell meatballs but faggots
Round faggots
Straight from the factory
Pre-cooked instead of fried, chucked 'em straight into the fat he did
The old fat

K: Goossens had been closed for two months for refurbishment

M: Not fit to eat those faggots
But nice and fast

R: And cheap

M: Fifty cents cheaper, what's that

R: A lot

K: That Friday

M: That fateful Friday

K: That momentous Friday in June
Goossens was having a re-opening party

M: I made my meatballs myself, by hand
From 50% steak mince and 50% beef mince
The best meatballs for miles around
Big and hot and not too salty
I was famous for my meatballs

R: Now, famous...

M: Famous yes
Really famous

R: You were in the *Truckstar* one time

M: In the top ten of best meatballs

R: Boyoboy

K: GOOSSENS RE-OPENING PARTY

R: There were billboards all along this road

K: Second drink free!

R: It was packed down at Goossens
I wanted to go myself, but yeah, something came up

M: It was like a McDonalds
A McDonalds with hamburgers, milkshakes and big beakers
of coke
All made of paper
Plates, cartons, beakers

K: All disposable

R: Nice and easy

M: That's what people want
No crocheted curtains up at the windows
No linen tablecloths

Or plastic flowers on the tables
No waiting for your food
No, just sit down and get stuck in

R: That's what Goossens said to mother
When she went to have a look

M: I left cursing and swearing

K: According to eye-witnesses

M: You can't halt progress!

R: Goossens called after her

K: Mother went straight back to the Truckstop

M: I was fuming

K: Van Dijk was there

M: You can't halt progress!

K: He drank gin and spoke to me as if I was a potted plant

M: We'll see who's got a future round here
That's what I was thinking

R: Not you in any case

K: As if I didn't have a pair of ears on my head

M: I know damn well what people want
People want a nice place
They want to feel at home
To pull up a chair
To come back
I can do all that
With a bit of good will

K: He was talking about you
Saying how well you both got on
And that a good woman needs a good man
And that he was a bit lonely sometimes too

Since his wife died
He thought I wasn't listening
The prat

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to be continued (63 pages totally)

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