

Naslov originala:
PRILIČNO MRTVI
Vladan Matijević

Copyright © 2000 Vladan Matijević
Copyright © 2020 ovog izdanja KONTRAST izdavaštvo

Za izdavača:
Vladimir Manigoda

Urednica:
Jelena Nidžović

Prevod:
Dunja Radonić

Lektura i korektura:
Randall A. Major

Dizajn korica:
Jelena Jaćimović

Štampa:
F.U.K. d.o.o.

Tiraž:
1200



Co-funded by the
Creative Europe Programme
of the European Union

VLADAN MATIJEVIĆ

THE QUITE DEAD

Translated from the Serbian by
Dunja Radonić



KONTRAST

Beograd, 2020.

CONTENTS

BLOTCH	
BLOTCH.....	9
THE DARKNESS.....	11
POOUF.....	13
THE OFFICER'S UGLY FACE	
THE NEWCOMER.....	27
THE OFFICER'S UGLY FACE.....	33
THE DARK SIDE OF THE MOON.....	47
THE TRAJECTORY OF THE SPECKLED BALL or THE CHANGE.....	59
I'M LEAVING SAID I, LOUDLY AND CLEARLY.....	69
FLOWERS FOR THE DOCTOR	
THE SPRING OF PHILIP CUCKOO.....	79
FLOWERS FOR THE DOCTOR.....	87
THE MOMENT DOBRIVOJE ČURGUZ DIED.....	101
THE PEBBLES ON THE ROAD THAT BRNA ZRNČ TOOK.....	105
SHORT CUTS.....	111
NOTHING, SILENCE	
THE DOWNFALL.....	125
THE FOGGY CIRCLE.....	133
NOTHING, SILENCE.....	139
ABOUT THE TRANSLATOR.....	147

BLOTCH

BLOTCH

What was that thing we were talking about? We weren't silent. Well, we were silent, but we weren't just silent, before we fell silent we were talking. I can't remember what it was about, but I do clearly remember that we took turns talking, my turns maybe took a little longer, however, you weren't too far behind either. I did not mistake us for anyone, that really was us. I know there's no point in talking, I do, but the two of us were talking. I'm almost a hundred percent sure of it. I'm not sure, but I almost am. And you are? So you don't know about me, but you are a hundred percent sure about you not talking. I don't just talk all by myself like a crazy person, and how can you be so sure about anything. Well then you and I are different.

I'd like to ask you something, I don't know how though, I'm a bit uncomfortable. You won't get upset. Good. When you talk, do you have issues with the pronunciation of the letter L? Well check, say a word that begins with, or contains the letter L. Any word you like, find a short one, think of something. Now why would I have to rack my brains and look for such a word, you put some effort in yourself. What, you can't think of a single word. Fine, I'll think of one, there's one on the tip of my tongue anyway. Hold on, I can't do it right away, if you can, you say it. It's hard for me to think when you're looking at me like that. Just averting your gaze will do, no need to blindfold yourself with the scarf. Blotch! I got it! Blotch. Go on, say: blotch. Say it. What do you mean there's no such word. Never heard of it? Ever heard of stain, well, that's what a blotch is, too. Okay, never mind, maybe I'm making things up, but let's hear you say it. What, what's that?! Bwotch?! Bwotch?! Is that how you say it? I'm sorry. I wasn't laughing at you out of malice, no, no way, I even find your speech defect kind of cute.

A bit of persistence and a session or two with a speech therapist and you'll get the impairment repaired. It's good that we have these words such as blotch, it's thanks to this word you're finally convinced that we'd talked. So you still have doubts? How weird of you. How would I know about that, oh so intimate, detail had we not talked sometime. Huh... No wonder you forgot. After all the silence we are lucky that we still know how to speak. Well, I don't know, it's nice to know how to speak. What do you mean you don't care. Fine, let's not argue.

Lll. Lll. I'm trying to remember that word of yours that you'd uttered, thanks to which I noticed your speech impediment. If only I remembered that word, maybe I could get your other words to form into crystals around it. It's certain that this word of yours is not the word blotch, because you didn't even know about it, it's some other word instead. It appears to me it could be some old, forgotten, at one point certainly important and sorely needed word. Help me out here. I think this word was most commonly used by bards, if you know what bards are. You're wrong, those are bars. There were rarely any fistfights concerning bards. How is it you don't even remember bards. They enjoyed expressing their feelings. You don't remember anything, even though you look wiser than me. You have fallen into silence again. Once you start speaking again, you'll claim that we didn't talk this time either. And maybe you won't be mistaken.

THE DARKNESS

Ooooh! God blind me, what've you done? Why did you smile? You, that's who! Tsk-tsk-tsk-tsk-tsk. You miserable devil. You think you can do whatever you want because the darkness has fallen. Is that what you think. Or you don't think at all. Just awful. I expected nothing but the worst from you, but this... Your action has put me in an unpleasant situation as well. Don't you fear for your soul, oohh you villain, let me call you that until I find a worse name. Like the cold wasn't enough, now there's also dread in my bones. And such dread indeed. I feel like jumping into the river, like drowning myself. Do you see how far you've pushed me, drop dead damn you. You should've warned me to get away from you, and then done whatever you pleased, I couldn't care less. Oh sure, you didn't mean to. Or are you now going to say that I made you smile. Mm-hmm. I just can't believe you, I'm stunned. I rue the morning when I woke up amid those ruins just to find you there, all curled up in a ball, mumbling in your sleep about a dead goat. Oh, if only instead of you I had found that goat, or even better, a cow! But I had no luck. I'm not surprised. As far as my memory goes, I've had neither luck, nor anything to milk. I kept on wandering around with you, what on earth was I thinking, seeing that one can expect nothing but inconvenience from the likes of you. Who knows what you did to that goat of yours, to make the poor thing croak.

Such a beautiful darkness has fallen, and you just had to ruin the pleasure for me. And please, tell me, what could've possibly been there to smile about? Tell me, so I can die in peace. What was it? I can't remember the last time I felt the need or saw a reason that would give me the right to smile. Or even lighten up my face. And you stretch out that mouth of yours like a frog. I've

never seen anything like it. I have to abandon you even though I'm used to us holding hands whenever the mud is too sloppy so that we're helping each other stand. I have to abandon you, I don't have a choice. Some things you, simply, can't get over. Oh, what an exhibitionist you are! However much I think about what you just did, I still can't believe it. At the very least, where's this audacity coming from. I would never let myself do anything like it. Not in my wildest dreams. If due to the exhaustion of my tear ducts I am unable to cry incessantly, then at least my face is always gloomy. I'll rip out your tongue! I'll rip out your tongue! Come on, open that mouth one more time! Come on, I dare you! You big fat liar. That wasn't a smile, that was a cramp. Who in their right mind smiles when they step on a nail. You're off your rocker. And when I stick your tongue on a little stick and roast it slowly over a nice low flame, you'll think I hate you. Yes, that time when I was plucking a nail out of my foot, my expression was similar to a smile, but it wasn't a smile. A smile is when you tauten your lips, lift one lip from the other and bare your clenched teeth, but you don't suck air through your teeth when you do that. And don't play dumb, a smile is exactly what you pulled a minute ago. Really?

You're not lying to me? Are you seriously telling me you did it unconsciously, or is this one of your childish tricks again. Now look me in the eye and repeat that previous statement. No use, I can't tell. I mean, it looks like you're not lying, but I don't know anymore. Right now I could really use one of those tiny portable lie detectors to establish whether your statement is true. And then I would know if I should leave you without a word, or bid you farewell. But as it is, I'll have to leave without a word and head back, so I can start wiping off all the traces that prove we used to walk together once. Just so you know, I'd be really glad to know that that wasn't a genuine smile and that, instead, your smile was just a little mistake.

POOUF

Pouuf. Pouuf. Here's another pouuf for you. Pouuf. Pouuf, pouuf. I've just told you pouuf, and you do as you wish. I'm not afraid of you. I've survived so much hardship that nothing you do can harm me. Not one thing. You cannot hurt me. Not even you. So: pouuf. Pouuf, pouuf. Pouuf, pouuf. A hundred times pouuf, pouuf, pouuf... I am warning you that you shouldn't try to ignore me. You aren't capable of ignoring me, so stop faking then. I don't like that. Pouuf, pouuf... Look me in the eye while I'm talking. Look at me. Pouuf.

Pouuf. One long and soft *f*. Never two *f*'s. It's not pouuff, it's pouuf. The *f* is long. An ignoramus might think it's two *f*s, but no, definitely not, it's just that one long *f*. You can feel the difference between two short *f*s and one long *f*. It's not even close. When I say pouuf, I always imagine the almost inaudible sound of the top of a pusule popping. The word pusule fits it better than the word pustule, which is, I think, the right word. Pouuf.

Do you know how hard it was for me to learn how to pronounce pouuf. One decent and correct pouuf requires arduous work, but, if you care to admit, it also requires talent. There is only one right way to say pouuf, but there are thousands of ways to say an incorrect pouuf. You can immediately notice an incorrect pouuf. You can't even imagine how much time and effort it took me to perfect the pronunciation of pouuf. It took days and nights of practice. Pouuf, pouuf... I spent a long, long time in silence speaking and listening to myself.

And as I practiced, I took pleasure in the softness of the pouuf. That pleasure enabled my perseverance to last. You are familiar, I hope, with just how much perseverance there is in me. You see, I'd used up almost all my perseverance until I became

the perfect pronounceress of pouuf. You have to admit that now I am the perfect pronounceress of pouuf. And while, at first, that decent and correct pouuf required a spur of inspiration, a moment of insight, I now say pouuf like a professional, like a time-worn craftswoman. Now if you asked me to do that in my sleep, I'd be able to say pouuf correctly and faultlessly. How happy I'd be if you stirred me in the middle of the night and asked me to say pouuf. But I know that this will never happen. Unjustly, above all else, you my dear, hate pouuf. I have to admit, I'm unable to keep any secrets from you, for a long time I couldn't decide whether I should tell you pouuf or pouf.

Which one's more refined. Which one's better suited for this setting, our outfits, your tears, my features. What do you think, was I wrong to choose pouuf. I chose pouuf because that's the one I like better. Maybe I should have said pouf after all, or pff so you can't hear the ou. But pouuf must be the right word. It seems to me that pouuf upsets you most. Or it just seems that it does. In any case, I cannot know for sure if you like pouuf or pouf less. You get upset just the same, you cry just the same. Same intensity. It bothers me a bit that I don't know which word it is you like less, pouuf or pouf. I'm used to knowing everything about you and this is new for me. Even after the experiment, I don't know if you remember, that one day I was taking turns saying pouuf and pouf, I still haven't determined which word it is you like less pouuf or pouf. Maybe I should have been more persevering. Well. Maybe. That's a failure of mine I don't feel guilty for. But maybe you should feel guilty that you haven't even given me the slightest sign that would indicate which word it is you like less, pouuf or pouf. You didn't, I watched you very closely. All you did was wring your shirt, try to pull it over your face and press your ears with your palms. If you don't feel guilty either, I will respect that and I won't hold it against you, nor will I appeal to your feeling of guilt. But you probably know what you're supposed to feel. Don't you. Pouuf. It would be delightful, to me at least, if one word

didn't upset you at all, and if the other upset you just as much both of them are upsetting you now. That would have preserved the balance in the air, and spared me the dilemma. But, let's be real. No one asks me what I find delightful. Isn't that so. Pouuf.

But you couldn't bear it with joy even if I told you pppouf. Ugh, disgusting. But I don't say that word to you, except for moments like this when I slip, because that's a word that I can't bear either. When I slip and say that word, I feel bad. Then I observe that you feel bad as well. I haven't determined if this feels worse and more unbearable for you than it does for me. If I were sure that this word was more unbearable to you, I would occasionally say it, even at the cost of feeling bad myself. I'm used to bad things. You're not. You're made of cotton. It's been a while since I last said pouuf. I can't just go on like this and forget about pouuf. Pouuf, pouuf. Pouuf, pouuf. Pouuf. All my pouufs are the same, no imagination there, no improvisation. They are bare tenderness, and also pathos, and even kitsch. I hate to admit it, but that's how it is. However, when I add a pouuf to my pouuf, and to them another pouuf and so forth, those countless completely identical pouufs become art. Pouuf. Pouuf. Like two peas in a pod, like two little yellow Chinese babies. Pouuf. Pouuf. The same. Pouuf the individual is style-less, but a multitude of pouufs become a style, and the style that's the multitude of pouufs is absorbed by each pouuf the individual. And so every pouuf has a style. Do you get what I'm saying.

Right, you're covering your ears. You're funny, you are. You're covering those little ears with twirls on top. Your ears quiet me and remind me of the past. They gave me the courage to approach you. I knew that people who have such ears are curious and restless in nature. And those were the people I liked most. I spotted you on the stairs in front of your faculty building. Skinny, with a slightly rachitic back. You wore a youth work brigade blouse with Che Guevara's face on it. You sat with your legs spread-eagle. I love it when beautiful girls sit spread-eagle. A delight to the eye.

And if the girl also happens to smell good, a delight for all the senses. And you smelled like a violet. You make a woman want to squeeze you out, and make perfume out of you. We met and I started to seduce you. I touched your shoulder, just for the fun of it I unfastened the button on your epaulette, then fastened it back. Your laughter. Your tiny teeth, like you were a member of the rodent family. Those were the most exciting days of my life. And the most beautiful. But pouuf.

Pouuf sounds and feels far more natural in the hours of the evening. In the morn, at noon, and by night alike, it sounds and fulfills its role just the same, but since the very beginning, I've noticed that pouuf most beautifully suits the evening. Maybe evenings were in fact formed from many pouufs, or perhaps the pouuf was formed from a tiny shred of an evening. The evening and the pouuf are made of one and the same matter. Perhaps they are not, but it feels like they are. Pouuf. Sometimes I mistake the radiance of the pouuf for the Moon. How else would I explain the gentleness of the Moon than to say that it was bestowed on it by a pouuf. And the season that matches the pouuf is winter. But as the pouuf is being pronounced, at that moment there should be no snowfall, but only frost. In a way, pouuf suits the cold best, it suits fields covered in snow. The pouuf and the white night are like brother and sister. I'm ashamed to admit it, but for a while it seemed to me that pouuf corresponded to summer. Blazing summer. And I have to admit, even now it often appears to me, though only briefly and in times of headache, that pouuf corresponds to summer. But, that's ridiculous. I'm convinced that pouuf corresponds to winter. It never crossed my mind that pouuf would correspond best to spring or fall. Not in the least. Naturally, I do say pouuf, and just as perfectly, in every season; however, in fall and spring it somehow feels inappropriate to say it, although you wouldn't notice that in my voice. Oh don't you mind that, that's just me, you know, making a bit of a confession to you.

To me, a pouuf is visible. It is mildly pinkish and I cannot understand or believe that others don't see it. If you really don't see

it, it's probably because the life of a pouuf is short. But regardless of the brevity of a pouuf's life, I just don't understand how you can't see it.

A pouuf sprouts, or rather say explodes out of nothing and then it returns into nothing again. The word explode is not the right word, and neither is the word sprout. Actually, it might be the worse choice. Yes, it's worse. Pouuf agrees with implosion better than with explosion. So, that's the kind of word pouuf is. You can especially say that about the letter *f*. It's the letter *f* that gives the whole pouuf its characteristic of agreeing better with implosion. Almost all other words agree better with explosion. Maybe that's the characteristic that provides the pouuf with its uniqueness. And you have to admit, there's a uniqueness to pouuf, a great, slightly reddish uniqueness.

You're crying. But when we were young, you were able to take my pouuf. Back then, you loved me. That's why I never said pouuf to you then. But, even though I wasn't saying pouuf to you, I knew, as I know now, that back then you would have taken it well. Now the bags under my eyes have turned dark, so there. But I want to. I don't feel sorry for you. I don't even feel sorry for myself, so why would I feel sorry for you. I might be lying a bit about not feeling sorry for you, but I want to. I want to say pouuf.

Why are you pulling away. Pouuf won't bite you. Pouuf doesn't have teeth. Or a mouth. Or a shape. Pouuf carries tenderness and warmth. The warmth of your little honey lips. Your little lips are still pretty. How juicy your kisses were. How intoxicating that madness. Pouuf. You used to love making out in risky places. Remember when those appalled retirees found us in the elevator in the middle of a passionate embrace. Your naked, pale body hidden from view with just your unfettered hair as black as tar and your soft, light brown pubic hair. We didn't even notice when the elevator stopped and the door opened. And now you are old and grumpy pouuf. Pouuf. I enjoy those memories. We used to play doctor, mom and dad, the postman, fire and water.

You were almost always the fire, and I would be putting you out. Now I would love to ignite you, but you are icy and white. If you weren't so irritated by pouuf, I wouldn't be able to tell if you're alive. So pouuf.

A pouuf's life is short. So short it makes me want to cry. It hardly appears, and it's already gone. So sad. You don't feel that sadness. Pouuf. You only ever think about yourself. Poor little pouuf. But she doesn't know any better, expect any better and she braves her short life like a stoic. Yet other, equally short words, live longer. Let's take the example of the word serpent. That is a long-lived word. Although it is pronounced incredibly quickly, this is a long word because it owns the silence after it, so the word serpent also lives on in the ensuing silence. Pouuf doesn't own that silence. Pouuf dies as soon as the *f* is gone. Instantly. Why would serpent deserve to live longer than pouuf. There's no justice in the world. You know that. Not to mention these also seemingly short words, which compared both to pouuf and serpent are nothing short of deoxyribonucleic acid. Words like: cloud, flower, pain, blood, water, white, rain. Pouuf, pouuf, pouuf. Let's go back to pouuf.

Pouuf. It's music. Slender little fingers pressing the keys of a piano. Every key is pouuf. A white curtain covering an open window is pouuf. And a tan curtain, and a beige curtain covering an open window are also pouuf. They are all so pouuf.

Under no circumstances should a pouuf ever be trapped in a triangle. The pouuf loves freedom, above all else. The triangle it cannot stand. Of all the geometric solids and shapes, the pouuf's favorite is the sphere. And then comes the circle. For any pouuf, the rhombus, the triangle and the deltoid are a real nightmare. Inside those, a pouuf would swell, bloat and maybe burst in pain. One of its *u*'s would have to be cut off in order to deflate it and save its short life. And that would be painful. No pouuf can withstand pain. That's basic knowledge. No, it can't. Stop making a triangle with your eyes, or else! Pouuf! Pouuf!

Pouuf! Pouuf! Pouuf! I'll bite you, dear. Keep your gentle little hand away from my mouth. Let the whole world hear me say it. Pouuf! Pouuf! Like when you pop a soccer ball. A balloon. A virgin. Pouuf! Is that what a popped virgin says? Huh? Pouuf! You should know. You remember. And I was standing under your window then, in the rain, in tears, and I heard pouuf. Your pouuf. The pouuf of your body. The pouuf of your soul, your boundless soul. You wanted to be theirs. To be ordinary, like all other women. You wanted children. But pouuf. Pouuf, pouuf, pouuf. You didn't believe that men are filthy and rough. Now you believe, with distress in your eyes you confirm it to me. Ugh, you'll make me cry, slut. He looked directly at your crotch and kept looking and that made you think you were a queen. But pouuf. Dear. Perhaps you even thought for a bit that he loved you. Be honest, did you think that he loved you. Pouuf. Just imagine what you'd have thought if he'd gone so far as to pinch your butt. Cry. Fine by me. I don't care about that, dear. Pouuf, pouuf.

Sing me an aria by Verdi, while I take a moment to accept your hatred towards me. But for that one moment only. Oh spare me, you don't hate me. Huh. Pffft. Pouuf. You love me. Pouuf. Anyway, sing an aria by Verdi to me. If you're not going to sing, I'm not going to stop pouuf-ing. Oh, so you will. Oh... Don't be surprised by my tears. I can't believe you thought of that aria first. That's my favorite. Do you remember our summer vacation in Makarska? Our young bodies, sun-kissed and salty, drunk on strength and beauty. It's like I'm breathing in that same night air again, the bewildered waves keep charging and slamming into the rocks, and with an olive wood comb in my hand, I'm trying to contain the blaze of your hair. Go on, dear. By the way the muscles around your lips twitch, I can tell that you're singing to me. I'll conduct this piece. Look, I'm pulling my pants down and conducting with my hard clitoris. Sing, dear! I will put my clothes on, just sing! Sing, don't be a pouuf. Sing, please. Pouuf. I have to give you yet another resigned pouuf.

Pouuf, pouuf. The word pouuf doesn't like to be alone. Pouuf is a friendly word and it makes contact with surrounding words easily, but what it loves most is standing right next to another pouuf. So: pouuf, pouuf. Then, it's as if one pouuf was looking at itself in that other word. I say if, because it's not true that this occurs; if the mirror phenomenon did occur, that would look like this: pouuf, fuuop, and we can see, which you'd see too even if you were totally crazy, that it doesn't look like that. Pouuf, pouuf. The two words stand next to each other thoughtfully and with so much love even though they do not touch; between them you can always find a space, sometimes even a comma. Still, that doesn't bother them. They don't take the comma seriously anyway. Or, it turns out, the period, or the colon, or the ellipsis. But the exclamation point is a whole different story. When a pouuf's beside an exclamation point, that's an alarm call or at least, that's grounds for concern. In that case, a pouuf doesn't sound like the top of a pustule popping, but imagine if somewhere in the distance you heard a blue balloon which falls on a burning candle and says pou- uf! That's the sound. Only way fainter. Quieter. That's why I said it takes a certain distance to soak up a huge amount of that pouuf's clarity and force. After a pouuf, you actually can put the mark ! . I'm not saying that the mark ! is welcome or that it belongs there, but for some reason, you simply can put it there. But if we join a second pouuf to our pouuf, then the mark ! doesn't work at all, and not only is it undesirable, but it's also unacceptable and this is when either the mark . is necessary, or ... are necessary. Pouuf, pouuf. Or: pouuf, pouuf... By no chance would I dare to follow pouuf, pouuf with a certain mark consisting of one vertical line with a dot underneath.

When there's one pouuf, sorry for repeating myself, you can have the mark ! . Pouuf! But, like I have also said, that pouuf! means rebellion. They beat us then. June 1968. We joined the students' movement. You were all hot and quivering. You wanted to make the world a better place with protest signs. Standing on