

QUIET QUITTING

Written by

Larisa Vödisch-Nikitina

Schützenmattstrasse 43  
4051 Basel  
Switzerland  
Tel. +41 61 3024722  
Email: larisavoedisch@gmail.com

QUIET QUITTING

FADE IN:

EXT. LADDER LEANING ON THE WALL - NIGHT - (LAURENCE'S DREAM)

A head of a MAN appears at the very bottom of the stairs. He SIGHS heavily. Then, he climbs slowly and with incredible difficulty. Finally exhausted, he stops, BREATHING intermittently.

THE ALARM CLOCK rings.

BACK TO PRESENT DAY

INT. LAURENCE'S APARTMENT, BEDROOM - DAY

LAURENCE wakes up, turns in bed, and stops the RINGING with his hand. His longish face, now becoming visible, betrays a middle-aged man, marked early with wrinkles of worry on his forehead. He is unshaven and with long unkempt grayish hair.

LAURENCE

To hell!

He slowly sits down on the bed and massages his eyes SIGHING heavily. After a minute, he lies down, ready to sleep again, and pulls the blanket with his hand to cover himself, but then gets his act together and stands up.

LAURENCE (cont'd)

Goddamn!

Laurence bends over, takes dumbbells out from under the bed, and, standing in his pajamas, starts pushing them up.

INT. LAURENCE'S APARTMENT, WORKROOM - DAY

Laurence sits at his desk and writes:

INSERT - COMPUTER SCREEN

The title page of the script:

"QUIET QUITTING"

WRITTEN BY

LAURENCE EMMANUEL

## BACK TO SCENE

He stretches and, throwing his head back, puts his hands behind it. Then, he closes his eyes.

## LAURENCE'S FANTASY SCENES

## EXT. LADDER LEANING ON THE TALL HOUSE - DAY

Laurence climbs the ladder and sees an open window. He looks inside.

## INT. ROOM - DAY

Three young GUYS and a good-looking teenage GIRL sit on a sofa. One Guy starts playing the guitar, and the Girl SINGS to his music. Then, they all LAUGH, cheerful and exuberant, and the other Guy kisses the Girl.

DISSOLVE TO:

## INT. SAME ROOM - DAY

Laurence, two other young Guys, and a good-looking Girl sit on a sofa; one Guy plays the guitar, and the Girl SINGS. Then, they all LAUGH, and Laurence kisses the Girl.

DISSOLVE TO:

## EXT. LADDER LEANING ON THE TALL HOUSE - DAY

Laurence continues climbing the ladder and comes again to an open window.

## INT. ROOM - DAY

A BOSS sits at his desk and smiles at a tall MAN standing in front of him.

BOSS

My congratulations! Your project was the best of all! You get the job!

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SAME ROOM - DAY

The Boss sits at his desk and smiles at Laurence standing in front of him.

BOSS

My congratulations, Laurence! Your project was the best of all! You deserve to get this job!

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. LADDER LEANING ON THE TALL HOUSE - DAY

With difficulty, Laurence climbs the ladder and again is in front of a window, but it is closed. He bends down and puts his face against the window pane.

INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

A family of five people is having dinner. The MOTHER pours the soup into the plates, and the FATHER serves the three CHILDREN bread, smiling happily at them. All are very friendly to each other.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SAME DINING ROOM - DAY

The same family is having dinner. The Mother pours the soup into the plates, and Laurence serves the children's bread, helping the Mother and smiling happily at her.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. LADDER LEANING ON THE TALL HOUSE - DAY

Laurence looks up. The ladder seems so high that you can't see the end. He SIGHS loudly.

LAURENCE

That's enough! There will always be someone above me! Someone to be envied! Even millionaires envy billionaires and want to be in their place!

(pause)

All this makes me feel unhappy!

He sits on the stairs and looks down.

LAURENCE (cont'd)  
And there will always be someone  
beneath who has it worse than me!  
And I'll always be afraid of rolling  
down there!

He wants to keep climbing but changes his mind.

LAURENCE (cont'd)  
No matter what you choose, you will  
feel miserable! This social ladder  
makes one unfortunate!

And he jumps off the ladder into the hollowness.

BACK TO PRESENT DAY

INT. LAURENCE'S APARTMENT, WORKROOM - DAY

LAURENCE  
And now what?

He starts to write but is dissatisfied with the result and  
shuts down the laptop.

LAURENCE (cont'd)  
The whole thing is a game. Or a  
theater. What did Shakespeare say?  
"All the world's a stage, and all the  
men and women merely players." So,  
what is a man without his roles?

He gets up and looks through the window. Large snowflakes  
are falling outside.

LAURENCE (cont'd)  
All that makes me are just the  
labels. Did I choose my name and  
first name? Did I choose my family,  
homeland, or religious community?  
No!

He starts walking back and forth across the room.

LAURENCE (cont'd)  
But I own what was given to me by  
nature! My character, temperament,  
and my talents!

(pause)  
I don't have to compare myself to  
anyone!

(MORE)

LAURENCE (cont'd)  
So, I shouldn't make an apple out of  
myself if I'm a pear! A pear is just  
as good as an apple!

He sits at the table again, opens the notebook, and starts writing as a man possessed.

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Laurence PLAYS the piano; these are his improvisations. VISITORS converse in low voices while listening to his music. As the last note fades, there comes an APPLAUSE. Laurence lifts his head and sees a young woman - CLARISSA - clapping her hands.

CLARISSA  
Clarissa.

She reaches out her hand to him. He stands up and gives her his.

LAURENCE  
Laurence.

Clarissa smiles. She has snow-white teeth, big green eyes, and is wearing a strict pink women's suit.

LAURENCE (cont'd)  
(to himself)  
She has eyes like those of a cat. Or  
like those of a sorceress.  
(to her)  
Sorry, but I should continue playing.

CLARISSA  
My friend and I will stay here until  
the restaurant closes. So, you can't  
escape me!

And she smiles again.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT (LATER)

Laurence and Clarissa sit at a table drinking wine.

LAURENCE  
Where is your friend?

CLARISSA  
He's gone.

Clarissa looks at him attentively.

You've very distinctive facial features.

LAURENCE  
Was it a compliment?

CLARISSA  
Sure!

LAURENCE  
You now expect a compliment in your direction, don't you?

CLARISSA  
Please, try it.

Laurence looks at her thoughtfully.

LAURENCE  
You have such unusual eyes that I'm even a little scared.

CLARISSA  
Is that a compliment? Ha ha!

She laughs infectiously.

CLARISSA (cont'd)  
I'm at this restaurant often, but this is the first time I've seen you.

LAURENCE  
I'm on probation period while the other pianist is on vacation.

CLARISSA  
What have you done so far?

LAURENCE  
(confused and  
reluctant)  
To be honest, I'm not a pianist, but a writer managed as an editor in a newspaper. I also write screenplays, but they are rarely filmed.  
(pause)  
What are your talents?

CLARISSA  
My only talent is to recognize and appreciate other people's talents.

She looks serious now.

CLARISSA (cont'd)  
Have you been terminated?

LAURENCE  
No. I've decided to start a new life. Quiet quitting - have you heard about it? "Work is not your life; your value as a human being is not defined by your productivity."

She nods.

LAURENCE (cont'd)  
I'm going to take inspiration from this.

They drink wine in silence.

CLARISSA  
Will you come to my party on Saturday? I would be glad to introduce you to some people.

Laurence nods reluctantly.

INT. CLARISSA'S APARTMENT, LARGE LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

PEOPLE are around talking and holding glasses of wine. Laurence plays an EVERGREEN on a grand piano. As he finishes, Clarissa comes to him smiling and hands him a drink. She looks fantastic in her long golden evening gown.

CLARISSA  
Will you teach me to play like that?

Laurence gets up and looks at her questioningly. Clarissa laughs.

CLARISSA (cont'd)  
Okay, not as good as you, but I can work hard.

Laurence sighs.

LAURENCE  
I'm a lousy teacher. I play it by ear.

He finishes his glass in one gulp.

RUDOLPH (O.S.)  
It's clear. The new pianist stole my  
fiancée.

RUDOLPH is a tall, broad-shouldered man, in his mid-sixties, with a soft white beard. Clarissa embraces him tenderly.

CLARISSA  
He's been saying that to everyone for  
ten years.

Rudolph shakes hands with Laurence.

RUDOLPH  
Rudolph.

LAURENCE  
Laurence.

RUDOLPH  
I need to know more about you as a  
rival before I give Clarissa to  
someone else.

LAURENCE  
I'm not a rival because I cannot  
create and nurture a family. That's  
for sure.

RUDOLPH  
That's good to know. So you're not  
an average person with normal needs.

Laurence's gaze wanders through the room.

LAURENCE  
What is normal? Who can determine  
what is normal for me? It's my plank  
that I can set for myself and no one  
else.

RUDOLPH  
Oh! We've got a philosopher there!

LAURENCE  
(agitatedly)  
What is a normal, happy family? I'll  
tell you how I would describe it in  
an article: "Married. Children are  
raised. Then, the couple sits in the  
garden with flowers watching the  
sunset. And, they die gray-haired  
together in one bed." Isn't it? But  
this is a common fantasy.

(MORE)

LAURENCE (cont'd)

In truth, it looks like this:  
"Married. Children give them worries  
and will do so lifelong. The couple  
sits in the kitchen, eating what each  
of them finds on his shelf in the  
shared refrigerator. And, they die  
not in their bed, but in a retirement  
home."

RUDOLPH

Ha ha ha! Ha ha ha!

Rudolph can't stop laughing.

RUDOLPH (cont'd)

That's good!  
(to Clarissa)  
I like him! At least he's honest.

CLARISSA

I understand what he is trying to  
say. Society suggests to us how we  
must think and act.

LAURENCE

Not only that. Society turns us into  
products, which are also evaluated as  
goods. For example, I'm a product of  
C or even U grade of quality  
because...

He goes silent.

CLARISSA

Not for me.

LAURENCE

(as if thinking  
further)

And we want to adapt, showing  
ourselves like... a round apple  
although we feel like being... a  
crooked pear.

CLARISSA

That's true. We don't want to be the  
black sheep.

(to Rudolph)

Laurence writes scripts. Could you  
please support him?

RUDOLPH  
(to Laurence)  
Look! A film critic is standing  
there.

He points to MIKE - a small man with a cigarette and tousled  
hair standing in a corner.

RUDOLPH (cont'd)  
If he says, you can write as he would  
appreciate it, then... maybe...

CLARISSA  
(to Laurence)  
Well, let's see him then, my ugly  
duckling.

She grabs his arm.

LAURENCE  
Why are you doing this? What do you  
get out of it?

She looks at him seriously.

CLARISSA  
Do you believe in your talents?

LAURENCE  
Yep.

CLARISSA  
And I believe in mine.

INT. CLARISSA'S APARTMENT, LARGE LIVING ROOM - NIGHT (LATER)

Laurence, Clarissa, and Mike stand in the corner and talk  
animatedly.

CLARISSA  
Okay, guys. I have to take care of  
my guests.

And she leaves.

LAURENCE  
(to Mike)  
When they say that Mozart heard his  
music, he's a genius.  
(MORE)

LAURENCE (cont'd)

But try telling someone that in literature, you also have to listen to your characters, what they say, and how they act - it will sound like the author has schizophrenia.

(pause)

Screenplays should be written like poems - freely, without mental constructs, not making up characters or putting them together like a jigsaw puzzle.

MIKE

In scriptwriting textbooks, they write--

LAURENCE

I know what they're writing! They invent a character with such contradictory traits that make him implausible. A serial killer is cruel and immoral and lacks empathy for nobody; why should he pity the animals?

Mike extinguishes his cigarette in the ashtray on the table nearby.

MIKE

(thoughtfully)

We all are looking for something extraordinaire, like a positive black swan. Do you know the metaphor of the black swan? For a long time, people believed there were no black swans, only white ones. Then they learned that there were black swans in Australia. That was the impossible thing that occurred. Since then, the black swan has been a metaphor for entirely unpredictable events.

LAURENCE

I call it a miracle.

MIKE

Please let me read some of your scripts. Maybe--

LAURENCE

Mind you; I'm not going to pretend and write to please you.

(MORE)

LAURENCE (cont'd)

(pause)

And I also won't worry if you don't like my work. I'm used to it by now.

He leaves. Mike looks at him as he walks away.

INT. LAURENCE'S APARTMENT, WORKROOM - NIGHT

Laurence sits at his desk and writes with his laptop. Then, he pauses and closes his eyes.

LAURENCE'S FANTASY

He sits alone in a green meadow. The ladder with People climbing on is on his right side.

LAURENCE

Now what? I'm not a Buddhist monk, after all! So what should I do here wholly alone?

He stands up and looks at people. Soon, they appear with fruits in place of heads. Some have pumpkins as their heads; others have melons, and still others have pineapple-shaped heads.

LAURENCE (cont'd)

Oh! How unusual! But they don't see themselves; how can they know who they are and what is their vocation?

BACK TO SCENE

Phone RINGS. Laurence picks it up.

CLARISSA (V.O.)

Hi! How are you doing?

LAURENCE

(into phone)

Fine.

CLARISSA (V.O.)

What did you talk to Mike about yesterday?

LAURENCE

About the positive black swan.

CLARISSA (V.O.)

Oh! That's great! Do you want to talk about it with me today?

LAURENCE

Clarissa, you're wasting time with me.

CLARISSA (V.O.)

It's not so. I just believe in you.

Laurence is silent.

CLARISSA (V.O.) (cont'd)

I'll wait for you at our restaurant in an hour. Is that okay?

LAURENCE

(reluctantly)

Okay. See you soon.

Laurence switches off his phone and sits, thinking.

INT. RESTAURANT - DAY

Clarissa sits next to the window and looks at the light snowflakes hitting the glass and sticking to it.

Laurence appears.

LAURENCE

Sorry for the delay. I couldn't find a cab. Have you been waiting long?

CLARISSA

Not so long.

Laurence takes off his coat and sits down in front of her.

LAURENCE

Clarissa, tell me, who is this Rudolph? What is your relationship?

CLARISSA

He's my good friend. In love with me a little bit. But he knows that I'm not in love with him.

She sips her coffee.

LAURENCE

I guess you're a rich child from a good family.

CLARISSA

I don't have to go to work, and I can pay all my bills. But otherwise, my life is just as complicated as any other person's.

The WAITER approaches them.

LAURENCE

A coffee, please.

The Waiter nods and goes.

LAURENCE (cont'd)

Explain it to me, please. How complicated is it?

CLARISSA

People think that money alone makes a person happy. That's not so. When I'm sick, I suffer, like the others, and when I feel lonely, I also feel sad, like the others.

(pause)

Money is only the means, but not the end of life.

LAURENCE

Agreed. But having funds is already a lot. You can do whatever you want. Many people can only dream about such things.

CLARISSA

Sure! But there are many things you can't buy. For example, peace of mind, affection, and love.

Suddenly she looks sad.

LAURENCE

I guess you have a lot of admirers.

CLARISSA

But that doesn't make me happy.

They are silent.

CLARISSA (cont'd)

Do you really think there are no happy families? People who love and respect each other?

The Waiter comes with a coffee cup for Laurence.

LAURENCE  
They do exist, but rarely.

CLARISSA  
What makes them happy? Children?  
Common interests?

LAURENCE  
No.

CLARISSA  
What then?

LAURENCE  
Kinship of souls. When they're both  
"apples."  
(pause)  
Or "pears."

CLARISSA  
And how does one determine that?

LAURENCE  
I'm looking for the answer to this.

They are silent again.

CLARISSA  
Rudolph said he would film your  
script if Mike approved it. He  
recently received a considerable  
inheritance. But he's a frugal man  
who's used to not spending on  
himself, so--

LAURENCE  
I'm not going to be pushed.  
(pause)  
Art is not born this way. When  
writing is commissioned or somehow to  
please the reader, clichés are almost  
always the result. That's because  
the writer must initially think about  
what the customer likes.

CLARISSA  
I see. And what about the black  
swan?

LAURENCE  
When you have freed yourself from  
society and are no longer active,  
there's nothing left but to be  
passive and wait for... happiness.

Clarissa pauses for thought. Both look at the snowflakes circling the window. That takes time.

LAURENCE (cont'd)  
(as if thinking  
loudly)

Maurice Maeterlinck believed that the kinship of souls is revealed through silence as if they were silently asking and answering each other.

They keep silent.

INT. LAURENCE'S APARTMENT, BEDROOM - NIGHT - (LAURENCE'S DREAM)

Laurence wakes up and sees that he is lying in bed with Clarissa. At first, he is frightened, but then he looks at her: she is sleeping profoundly, breathing calmly.

LAURENCE  
(to himself)  
Oh, God! How is that possible? What have I done?

He lies still for a while, so he doesn't wake her up.

LAURENCE (cont'd)  
What happened yesterday? I can't remember anything.

Cautiously, he turns to her and looks at her. The sparse light illuminates her high forehead and her long blond hair.

LAURENCE (cont'd)  
She is beautiful. But her eyes...  
So green... So... witchy...  
(pause)  
I should look her in the eyes again.  
She should wake up. Yea, wake up.

He strokes her hand, then her cheek. But Clarissa lies there motionless as if feeling nothing at all.

LAURENCE (cont'd)  
I have to wake her up! Why is she sleeping so deeply? Is she alive?

He pulls the blanket off her exposing her breasts, but she still does not wake up. So, he diligently covers her up again.

LAURENCE (cont'd)  
That's a task! How can I wake her up?

BACK TO PRESENT DAY

INT. LAURENCE'S APARTMENT, BEDROOM - DAY

Laurence opens his eyes and lies still as if remembering something. Then, he looks at the alarm clock: it shows noon.

LAURENCE  
Wow! I slept for ten hours!

He jumps out of bed.

EXT. STREET - SUNNY WINTER DAY

Laurence comes out of his house and gets into a silver Lexus. The car immediately drives off.

INT. LEXUS - DAY

Clarissa drives the vehicle, and Laurence sits next to her.

LAURENCE  
And where is fate directing me today?

CLARISSA  
Be surprised.

LAURENCE  
Please, just no arranged contacts.  
I'm tired of it.

CLARISSA  
I know.

The path leads them down a narrow country lane.

CLARISSA (cont'd)  
There is something I want to show you.

Laurence looks out the window at the snow-covered fields. Sun bunnies bounce around on icy hills, making him squint his eyes.

LAURENCE  
It's been a long time since I've been  
out of town.

His stern face suddenly becomes relaxed and romantic. They drive up to a small one-story country house.

CLARISSA  
Here we are!

EXT. LEXUS - DAY

They get out of the car and walk to the snowy house. Clarissa looks under a window sill; there is a key there. They go inside.

INT. HOUSE - DAY

The house is divided into four square parts; three are open and sparsely furnished. The last one is closed with two sliding walls.

CLARISSA  
The house is designed for one or two people but is equipped with all the necessary rooms: kitchen, restroom, bedroom, and living or workroom.  
(pushing the walls)

These sliding walls, which divide the house into four even squares, always close one of the rooms. So when you, for example, shut off the kitchen, smells can't spread throughout the house.

LAURENCE  
Oh! Nice!

CLARISSA  
Such a house costs much less than an ordinary one since all the walls are prefabricated.

LAURENCE  
Cool!

CLARISSA  
Like it?

LAURENCE  
Excellent idea!

CLARISSA

The Japanese Shoji inspired me. But  
the walls are not made of paper.

LAURENCE

Does that mean - you designed this  
house?

She smiles shyly.

CLARISSA

I've studied architecture.

LAURENCE

What a surprise!

CLARISSA

Do you really like it?

LAURENCE

It's stunning! I would move into a  
house like this immediately!

CLARISSA

You can move right in if you want!

LAURENCE

You're kidding!

Clarissa pushes the walls, and Laurence sees a room with a  
grand piano.

LAURENCE (cont'd)

Oh!

He rushes to the piano, lifts the lid, and looks at the  
maker's mark.

LAURENCE (cont'd)

Even a Steinway!

CLARISSA

It hasn't been used for long and may  
need to be in tune.

Laurence sits down at the piano and begins to play the  
melody of the duet "Say yes, my love, say yes" from Emmerich  
Kálmán's operetta "Countess Maritza." Clarissa comes to him  
and sits down next to him.

Suddenly, Laurence interrupts his play, turns to her, and  
looks into her eyes.

LAURENCE

I can't understand until now, are you  
a positive black swan for me, or...?

She looks at him, a little embarrassed, with a childish  
smile on her lips. Laurence kisses her on the lips like she  
is a baby.

CLARISSA

Was this a happenstance?

He moves closer to her.

LAURENCE

(to himself)

She has gone from being an assertive  
woman to a shy girl. Is she in love?  
With me?

He doesn't answer, only puts his arm around her waist and  
kisses her long and passionately.

INT. THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART (NEW YORK) - DAY

Laurence and Clarissa walk from painting to painting,  
quietly discussing them.

Then, they stop in front of "The Lovers II" by René  
Magritte; Laurence bends down to her and whispers something  
in her ear. She LAUGHS softly. He presses her to him and  
gently kisses her.

INT. CASINO, ROULETTE TABLE - DAY

Clarissa makes bets, and Laurence comments on them, shaking  
his hands as if he wanted to say, "well, here we go again!"  
She GIGGLES.

INT. LAURENCE'S APARTMENT, WORKROOM - DAY

He writes quickly and enthusiastically, occasionally  
scratching the top of his head.

INSERT - COMPUTER SCREEN

"AND HE REALIZED WE GET TO KNOW WHO WE ARE BY REFLECTING IN  
OTHERS."

BACK TO SCENE

His face beams with joy.

SERIES OF SHOTS - LAURENCE IN LOVE WITH CLARISSA

- A) Sitting on a bench and feeding the squirrels on a sunny spring day.
- B) Talking and kissing lustfully on a couch.
- C) PLAYING the piano together and LAUGHING.
- D) Swimming racing in a swimming pool.
- E) Playing badminton.
- F) Sitting at a bar on the beach with cocktails.
- G) Walking along the sunny seashore.

INT. LAURENCE'S APARTMENT, WORKROOM - DAY

Laurence writes the last sentence of his script:

INSERT - COMPUTER SCREEN

"SHE WAS HIS SOULMATE BECAUSE SHE BELIEVED IN HIM.

FADE OUT.

THE END."

BACK TO SCENE

He closes his computer in satisfaction and calls.

LAURENCE  
(into phone)  
I finished my script.  
Yes, I'm ready to show it to Mike.  
Are we going to the movies?

FADE OUT.

THE END