

"

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 extraordinary, 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