

"SWEAT"

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Written by

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INT. GLAMPING POD - MORNING

A woman, BRIGIT (30's), with voluminous long hair, enters. She sets down her luggage. The luxurious tent interior is decorated with the wellness retreat's merchandise and mock-Navajo artefacts.

An interview plays on the TV. HANK, a self-styled wellness guru who's company runs the retreat, is speaking, his voice flooding the room, but we can barely see him in the tiny screen.

HANK

(OS)

It's very simple really. We are responsible for our own healing. No one else can do it for us, we can't do it for anyone else.

Brigit unpacks: clothes in the wardrobe, many tubs of expensive face creams and promising little pill bottles go on a dresser.

HANK (CONT'D)

(OS)

That is what I teach in my book, The Soul Conquest...and my exclusive retreats. I teach success! Lets overcome the hurdles we have put in our own paths!

Brigit places healing crystals from a velvet pouch on the bedside table. She lights a palo santo and walks the room leaving a trail of smoke behind her.

HANK (CONT'D)

(OS)

As a society we have forgotten how to take care of ourselves first! When did it become a sin to put MY needs, MY dreams ahead of the dreams and needs of others?

Brigit sits on the bed, looking tired.

HANK (CONT'D)

(OS)

I'm here to tell you that you have to do what is right for you! Before you do what is right for anyone else...stop thinking of others...

Brigit opens a travel picture frame case. On one side is a picture of her with her Mother. On the other a picture of her now completely bald sick Mother, some years later.

She places the picture frame on the bedside table, along with a little crystal vial filled with ashes.

HANK (CONT'D)

(OS)

... And start thinking about
YOURSELF!

Brigit unpacks a swag bag left on her bed: Hank's book, and a t-shirt and cap with his slogan on it. She puts on the cap.

EXT. A BONFIRE - EVENING

Soul Conquest attendees are gathered around a bonfire. Some greet each other from previous events - there are branded banners, flags with Hank's face on it, and Conquest Guides around. It is a slick operation, like a McDonald's franchise or a Star Trek convention.

Brigit, a first timer, stands alone in the shadows away from the bonfire.

Someone rings a gong. Participants get into an orderly queue and start, one-by-one, throwing things into the fire.

Brigit hangs back, trying to figure out what is going on.

It's a MAN's (40's) turn. He approaches the bonfire.

MAN

...and I lost 50lbs since last
year's Soul Conquest. Here's my
last XXXL t-shirt, Hank. Thank you.

He throws the t-shirt into the bonfire and walks away to the sound of clapping and cheering.

Brigit is confused. Is Hank here?

Next in line is an OLDER WOMAN (70's).

OLDER WOMAN

My liver is sick and nothing's
working. But I know you will teach
me how to heal myself, Hank. Here
are the wretched pills - this
poison - heal me, Hank.

She throws the pills in the bonfire, which briefly lights up with blue flames.

Brigit gasps as she glimpses her MOTHER's face in the flames. But she blinks and it's gone. Brigit is left distressed.

The old woman is hugged and comforted as she moves away from the bonfire. Next up is a striking AMAZON with wild red hair and a phoenix tattoo sleeve.

AMAZON

You are the only one who really
knows me Hank.

She has defiant tears streaming down her face.

AMAZON (CONT'D)

The only one who loves me for who I
am inside.

She pulls scissors from her pocket and dramatically chops off chunks of her flaming hair. She throws the strands in the fire.

The crowd goes wild. They chant "My past mistakes are the key to my successful future. I will unlock that door."

Brigit is mesmerised.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. A BONFIRE - MOMENTS LATER

Another person has just made their offering. The crowd is cheering.

It's Brigit's turn. She has nothing to say.

Someone in the queue behind her encourages her.

Brigit looks like she's going to speak, but loses her nerve.

She sees The Amazon's abandoned scissors on the ground and picks them up. For a moment she considers it, but then just sighs, and moves away from the bonfire.

There are no cheers for Brigit.

Disappointed, she chews her hair - a tick she's had since childhood.

Brigit watches from the sidelines as others approach The Amazon to congratulate her. They hug and kiss her. They run their fingers through her miraculously stylish short hair.

Brigit tries to catch The Amazon's eye, but the other woman looks away.

INT. GLAMPING POD - NIGHT

Brigit can't sleep. She tosses and turns. She lights her travel scented candle. She spritzes some lavender oil on her pillow. She chews on her hair. She chants Hank's mantra to herself.

Nothing works.

In her insomnia, she sees Mother lying next to her. Mother is bald, bleeding from her nose, and smiling at Brigit.

Suddenly awake with fright, Brigit sits up. Mother is gone.

Brigit succumbs and takes two sleeping pills. She hides her head under the pillow.

I/E. OUTSIDE GLAMPING POD - MORNING

Brigit leaves her pod for the day. She's wearing the Soul Conquest t-shirt she got in the swag bag. Someone has left an envelope for her outside the door.

It contains today's activities.

Brigit is to join the BEGINNERS GRIEF GROUP for a sound therapy morning, then a hike.

EXT. PICNIC AREA - MORNING

Brigit is carrying a tray with breakfast. Tables have been allocated according to groups: GRIEF, HEALING, SELF-WORTH, GROWTH. She walks towards the Grief table and spots The Amazon surrounded by admiring friends.

Brigit approaches the table, but as she is about to sit, The Amazon and her friends leave.

Brigit sits alone under the Grief banner, her food untouched.

EXT. FIELD - LATER

Brigit lays on the grass with large headphones. Others are lying around her. Some are crying, some are humming along to the music in their own headphones.

The Amazon, seemingly overcome with emotion, stands up and starts dancing and openly weeping.

Brigit turns the volume of her own headphones up. Red Headed Stranger by Willie Nelson blares into her ears.

INT. HOSPICE ROOM - MORNING

FLASHBACK - Brigit and her sick Mother share earphones. They both sing the Red Headed Stranger and laugh at the outlandish words.

The singing leaves Mother struggling to breathe and eventually coughing some blood.

EXT. FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Brigit pulls off her headphones and gasps for air.

EXT. HIKING TRAIL - LATER

Brigit is setting off on the hike with a small group and a Conquest Guide. From a distance Brigit sees The Amazon. She is wrapping a linen bathrobe over her bathing suit.

The Amazon heads into an elaborate tarpaulin tent covered in Hank branding. Smoke billows from a crack on the roof.

Brigit slips away from the hiking group.

EXT. OUTSIDE SWEAT LODGE - MOMENTS LATER

Brigit looks around. No one is watching her. She leaves her hiking boots next to the flip-flops and Birkenstocks piled by the entrance and gets in the tent.

INT. SWEAT LODGE - CONTINUOUS

Brigit pushes her way to the center and takes a seat next to The Amazon. She is directly below the tent's guide-pole.

The Amazon's eyes are closed in concentration. She's seated cross-legged like a yogi.

Brigit looks around. Is Hank in here, perhaps?

A fire pit full of hot rocks and embers sings in the center. The tent is decorated with mock Navajo blankets, dream catchers and framed pictures of Hank. There are speakers attached to the poles. A pan-flute track is playing.

Someone closes the flap door and suddenly it's much darker.

The fire pit blazes alight.

The speakers buzz to life. Hank's voice is muffled audible over the crackling of the fire. It's a well worn tape.

Participants start humming in unison.

HANK

(OS)

Soul Conquistadors, are you ready?
The next few hours are going to be
hard, they are going to be the
hardest of your life. You must put
your trust in me.

Brigit looks around. She catches The Amazon's eye.

BRIGIT

Here we go.

The Amazon rolls her eyes at her and continues humming.

Brigit joins the humming. She is starting to sweat.

HANK

(OS)

Why are we put on this earth if not
to suffer and then conquer our
suffering?

The fire blazes. Vapour rises. A fly buzzes around Brigit's face. The temperature soars quickly.

Brigit is hot.

MOTHER

(OS)

Please, Brigit. Please.

Brigit shakes her head, disoriented. The Amazon, slightly concerned squeezes her hand.

Brigit is somewhat revived. She squeezes back.

HANK

(OS)

I'm here in this tent so that we can suffer together. Your pain can be my pain too. When we leave this tent, it will all have burned, and we'll emerge healed.

Brigit takes off her shirt. The fire blazes. It's hotter now. Sweat drips into Brigit's eyes.

HANK (CONT'D)

(OS)

Nothing exists outside this lodge. In the fire and smoke you will be reborn from the flames.

The flames roar. Brigit's watch stops.

Brigit digs her hand into the earth where the soil is cooler.

Someone coughs in the back.

Brigit reaches out and squeezes The Amazon's hand again.

Brigit is struggling.

BEGIN FLASHBACK

Mother is dying. Brigit holds her hand. The room is cool and bright.

MOTHER

Please, please Brigit.

END FLASHBACK

The hot stones hiss and vapour rises from the pit.

HANK

(OS)

Your addictions, your depression, your disease, those are excuses you made for yourself. But you don't make excuses anymore. Let the heat deliver a truer version of yourself.

Participants chant "My past mistakes are the key to my successful future. I will unlock that door."

A participant in the back retches.

A fly crawls around Brigit's shoulder. She rubs her neck. Her dirty hands leave marks on her skin.

HANK (CONT'D)

(OS)

Forget the other people in this lodge. Forget your friends outside. Forget your family. There is just you and me and the fire.

INT. HOSPICE ROOM - MORNING

FLASHBACK - The hospice room's walls are now darker and made of tarpaulin.

MOTHER

Just do it Brigit, do it for me.
(viciously)
You coward.

Brigit is crying.

INT. SWEAT LODGE - CONTINUOUS

Brigit is crying.

HANK

(OS)

There is no heat. There is no smoke. There is only healing.

Brigit rocks back and forth, her lips trembling.

Someone in the back claps at Hank's words. The Amazon sways from side to side, arms lifted above her head. Brigit squeezes her eyes closed and then opens them again.

Brigit's contact lenses shrivel and peel from her eyes.

The fire hisses. Vapour is risings in plumes from the pit.

Mother appears through the smoke swaying where The Amazon was. She is smiling. Blood drips from her nose and mouth.

MOTHER

Help me, Brigit, help me.

The Amazon grips Brigit's hand, concerned, and a little annoyed. Mother is gone again.

HANK
 (OS muffled)
 I know it's hot, but hold on
 Conquistadors. We're halfway there.

The participants clap, and make mutterings of agreement.

The flames blaze. Vapour rises like a geyser. Brigit gulps it down hungrily. She is struggling to breathe.

HANK (CONT'D)
 (OS his voice is melting)
 Your bodily form will accept the
 heat if you are destined to
 succeed, but you can only do that
 by focusing on yourself, and
 letting go of everybody else. They
 are weak, where you are strong,
 they succumbed where you survived.
 You cannot help the weak and dying.

Brigit coughs.

She cannot stop coughing. She coughs up some blood.

Brigit wipes her bloody hands on one of the Navajo blankets that are lying around.

She tries to brush off the fly crawling on her skin but she crushes and it's smashed form sticks to her.

Brigit closes her eyes.

INT. HOSPICE ROOM BUT CHANGED - MORNING

FLASHBACK - The hospice room looks like the tent. There is a picture of Hank on the wall.

HANK
 (OS fully distorted now)
 We are almost there, Conquistadors.
 Stay strong.

MOTHER
 (In Hank's voice)
 Only when you confront death will
 you be able to conquer life.

Brigit approaches her Mother. She shakes her head.

MOTHER (CONT'D)
 (In her own voice)
 Let me go. Do it, do it.
 (MORE)

MOTHER (CONT'D)

You coward. Do it!

(In Hank's voice again)

Commune with death, embrace your own mortality so that you can live free from fear.

Brigit picks up a pillow.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

Brave girl, good girl.

Brigit holds the pillow over Mother's face. Mother laughs for a moment then she coughs. Then everything goes quiet.

INT. SWEAT LODGE - CONTINUOUS

Brigit opens her eyes. She tries to get up to leave, but The Amazon pulls her back.

THE AMAZON

Where are you going? He's not done.

HANK

(OS distorted again)

Let go of the tethers tying you to your old life so that you can emerge anew, better, evolved.

Mother, now in the back of the tent, laughs.

Brigit struggles. Why is no one helping her?

She lays back. Mother lays next to Brigit and strokes her daughter's face.

Brigit coughs. She tries again to get up.

Mother dances around the fire.

MOTHER

(singing)

The red headed stranger had eyes
like the thunder/ And his lips,
they were sad and tight/ His little
lost love lay asleep on the
hillside/ And his heart was heavy
as night/

Brigit clamps her dirty hands over her ears.

HANK

(OS)

Don't let your guilt stop your
healing, your growing.

The Amazon tries to squeeze Brigit's hand and pull her back down, but Brigit is agitated.

INT. HOSPICE ROOM- LATER

Brigit replaces the pillow behind her dead Mother's head. She sits down on the edge of the bed, wipes the blood from her Mother's nose.

She sits for a moment in silence. Then she presses the buzzer for assistance.

INT. SWEAT LODGE - CONTINUOUS

Brigit tries to call for help, but no voice comes.

The Amazon tries to soothe Brigit. It doesn't work. She gives up and sits back down, trying to focus on her chanting.

Other participants chant. They are actively ignoring Brigit.

Brigit looks at The Amazon's determinedly serene face. She sees blood drip from The Amazon's nose.

HANK

(OS barely comprehensible
now)

Your past mistakes are the key to
your future. You will unlock that
door.

Brigit reaches over and wipes her dirty hand on The Amazon's face.

The Amazon, shocked, slaps her hand away.

THE AMAZON

What is wrong with you? You are
ruining this for everyone.

Brigit is swaying. She is melting.

She struggles to her knees. She holds on to the guide pole, pulling herself up. She leaves a bloody hand print on the picture of Hank hanging there.

Mother is laughing at Brigit. The Amazon is trying to get Brigit to sit back down. Other participants are rattled.

HANK

(OS barely comprehensible)

Your past mistakes are the key to your future. You will unlock that door.

The flame blazes once more. The steam rises thick and fast.

Brigit, looking Mother straight in the eye, pulls the guide pole down.

HANK (CONT'D)

(OS barely comprehensible)

Your past mistakes are the key to your future. You will unlock that door.

Thunk.

The pole hits The Amazon in the head. She falls back.

The tent crashes down around Brigit. It catches fire.

Mother laughs. The speakers buzz with static.

MOTHER

(dreamy OS)

Good girl, brave girl.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE SWEAT LODGE - LATER

Brigit wakes up disoriented. It's pandemonium.

Conquest Guides are pulling people from the smouldering tent.

Someone is putting out the flames with a hose.

Brigit looks around.

Next to her is a body covered by a tarp, arm hanging out. The Amazon's now singed phoenix tattoo is blistered and mangled. She's dead.

Brigit lowers the tarp. The Amazon's head is caved in.

Brigit wipes blood from The Amazon's face.

Brigit smiles at The Amazon. She flees the scene.

INT. GLAMPING POD - MOMENTS LATER

Brigit throws away her talismans. She tosses the crystals into the toilet, and crushes the pills under her heels. She empties the vial of ashes on to her hands and rubs it on her already soiled face, like war paint.

She stands in front of the mirror with the scissors she picked up at the bonfire.

She smiles at her own reflection, her teeth bloody.

BRIGIT

Good woman, brave woman.

She hacks away at her singed hair smiling at Mother's reflection in the mirror. Mother sings.

MOTHER

The yellow haired lady was buried
at sunset, the stranger went free,
of course. For you can't hang a man
for killin' a woman .../