

POULTICE

Written by

Anthony Cawood

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anthony@anthonycawood.co.uk

EXT. PRAIRIE TRAIL - DAY

ANNIE KNOX, 30s, red-cheeked but pale skinned otherwise, rides a dappled mare up the dusty trail. One hand rests lightly on the bulge of her pregnant stomach the other on the pommel of her saddle.

She hums a melancholy dirge as she pats the baby growing inside her.

ANNIE
I'm gonna make it right this time.

She pats again.

ANNIE
You'll see.

She rides on up the trail.

EXT. ORNATE TEPEE - DAY

Annie slows the horse as she approaches.

PAUWAU (O.C.)
Who be out there?

Annie, stops, bites her lip.

ANNIE
Annie Knox.

The flap of the tepee opens and PAUWAU, 50s, long braided hair, tanned skin and wide hips, steps out.

PAUWAU
Your name is a curse to my ears.

Annie holds her hands up in supplication.

ANNIE
I come to make things right.

Pauwau hawks phlegm up and spits it at Annie's feet.

PAUWAU
Many years too late.

ANNIE
I know, but at least hear me out.

PAUWAU

Why?

Annie points at her bump.

ANNIE

I want this one to live.

Pauwau shrugs but beckons her into her dwelling.

INT. ORNATE TEPEE - CONTINUOUS

Annie sits cross-legged, Pauwau opposite in the same fashion.

ANNIE

This is my sixth.

She pats her stomach.

Pauwau shrugs again.

ANNIE

The other five were all stillborn.

PAUWAU

A shame.

Annie nods.

PAUWAU

Why?

ANNIE

No one knows.

Silence for a moment.

PAUWAU

Sad. But, does not change what your father did.

ANNIE

I know, but he's dead, and the ranch is mine now.

PAUWAU

So?

ANNIE

I can return what was stolen.

PAUWAU
My husband died because of your Pa,
can you return him?

Annie casts her gaze to the floor.

ANNIE
No.

PAUWAU
Give my daughters their father back?

ANNIE
No.

PAUWAU
An heir to carry on our family name?

ANNIE
No.

PAUWAU
So what?

ANNIE
I can give you the land back.

Pauwau laughs.

PAUWAU
The land is as poisoned as you.

ANNIE
I am sorry truly, but --

PAUWAU
But?

ANNIE
It was my father, I didn't...

PAUWAU
And that makes it right?

Annie shakes her head.

ANNIE
No, but --

PAUWAU
You need something.

ANNIE

Yes.

PAUWAU

No.

ANNIE

You don't know what it is.

PAUWAU

I do. Poultice.

ANNIE

How did --

PAUWAU

Your kind always want the savage's
medicine that they don't believe in.

Tears streak down Annie's face.

ANNIE

The women in town say --

PAUWAU

I said you can't have it.

Annie sobs.

ANNIE

I can't see another dead.

Compassion flickers over Pauwau's eyes.

PAUWAU

I don't forgive your family.

ANNIE

I know, but we can trade.

PAUWAU

My own land back for the poultice,
when we have lost so much, is not
fair trade.

Annie shakes her head.

ANNIE

I will do anything to save my child.
What do you want?

Pauwau considers for a moment.

PAUWAW

I will give you a unique poultice.
But, in addition to the land, I
want...

Pauwau leans in to tell her, whispers it.

EXT. LARGE WOOD CABIN - DUSK

Annie rides up to the solitary house and dismounts, pulls a cloth bundle from the saddle.

She runs through the dirt yard, sending chickens squawking in all directions, and up the porch stairs into the cabin.

INT. CABIN - CONTINUOUS

She runs through the hallway into...

THE KITCHEN

Annie puts the hessian sack onto the table and takes a knife from the drainer, puts it on the table too.

She opens the sack and smooths the contents out: herbs, berries, twigs and other dark and desiccated things. She glances between the dry poultice, the knife, and then her stomach.

Annie grabs the knife, draws it quickly across her palm.

The blood drips rapidly onto the poultice, covering the contents. She moves her palm around to make sure the blood is distributed evenly.

ANNIE

(under her breath)

Mix it together...

She stirs the contents with her fingers, working the blood into the dry goods.

ANNIE

Urgh.

She turns to the sink and pumps water with her elbow, runs her bloody hands under the flow.

ANNIE
(quietly)
Put it on the baby.

She exposes her stomach, retrieves the cloth and places it centrally onto the bump.

She shudders as she presses the poultice into place, then collapses to the floor in agony.

She SCREAMS into the empty room.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Annie writhes on the bed in the throes of labor. The MIDWIFE fusses around as Annie pants, then groans, screams, repeats.

BEN KNOX, 40s, paces at the bottom of the bed.

MIDWIFE
Right you, out of here.

She shoos Ben out of the room.

MIDWIFE
Don't need no men under my feet.

She rolls up her sleeves.

MIDWIFE
Remember, push on the out breath.

ANNIE
I'm dying.

The midwife laughs.

MIDWIFE
No you ain't.

Annie groans again.

MIDWIFE
Push!

EXT. ORNATE TEPEE - DAY

Pauwau jigs around the tent, a decorated branch in each hand.

She chants a sing-song incantation.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Annie strains, pushing out short GASPS, drawing in shallow breaths.

Outside the room, FOOTSTEPS pace over wooden floor.

MIDWIFE
Shall I let him in for the end?

ANNIE
No!

She GROANS.

MIDWIFE
Push!

EXT. ORNATE TEPEE - DUSK

Pauwau whirls like a dervish, her dance hypnotic.

Faster and faster she turns as the day fades to night.

With one last spin, accompanied by an ear-splitting SCREAM, she collapses onto the ground.

INT. BEDROOM - DUSK

Annie SCREAMS one last push, and collapses back onto the straw mattress.

The Midwife darts in, snips the umbilical, wraps the baby up in a shawl and hands him over to Annie.

Her face is ashen as she hands over the new-born.

MIDWIFE
I, well...

Annie looks down at her Native American baby boy.

The midwife flusters, shocked.

MIDWIFE
He's probably just --

Annie shakes her head.

ANNIE
He's a fair trade.

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For the first time, she cradles her son in a loving embrace.

FADE OUT:

THE END