

# The Wilting Flower

By Taelon Pinto

What is life? That is a question that most seem to be concerned about these days. What makes us alive? Is it our thoughts, or our feelings? Or is it the simple beating of our hearts? Well, I have never cared much for that question. I have my own question: *why* is life?

Why can life exist? Some answer with science, some answer with God, and as far as I am concerned, both are just fine. But neither of those answers seem to explain a rather...curious case that I found. Her name was Anemone, and I had never seen anyone exist quite like her.

I came across the case about twelve years ago. I was a doctor at the time, and I ran a small practice that served the citizens of Tofino. For those unfamiliar with Tofino, it is a somewhat...remote part of Vancouver Island. The way of life there was free and open; I thought it a lovely place to retire.

Anyways, one night while I was in the back checking over the prescriptions of the day, someone came in. It was quite past closing time, but I had yet to lock up and therefore I felt I could not turn them away. I went to the front and saw a young aboriginal woman, rounded with child, struggling to walk up to me. I rushed over to help her, and she gasped out with pain.

“Please...it’s coming... My baby...is coming...”

It was all too clear that getting her to a proper hospital was not an option, and so I took her into one of the back examination rooms. Birthing was not my specialty, and I had no pain-reducing drugs that would be safe to administer to a woman in her condition, but I did the best I could.

Her labor lasted six hours into the night, and I could tell something was wrong. When the first inkling of the child came into view, I could see why. Her baby had twisted itself into the umbilical cord, and was now in the process of strangling itself. I cut the cord as quickly as I could and did my best to stimulate breathing. When the child finally emerged, it's heartbeat had

stopped.

“I-Is it a boy o-or a girl, Doctor?”

“I...I’m afraid it’s...”

My heart sunk. How could I tell this poor woman that her child, the child she had carried all the way to me in utter desperation, had not made it past birth? I held the child close to my chest, trying to feel if there was any warmth; and *life*, left in it.

That is when it happened.

The child's mother struggled to sit up and, in doing so, knocked a vase of flowers from the desk by the sink. I turned to try and stop her from getting up in such a weak state, and the flowers showered the lifeless child.

“Please miss, you must sit down! You’ll exhaust yourself!”

“My baby I...I want to see my baby...”

“Miss I...your child didn’t-”

I was cut off by the sound of crying. At first I thought it was the mother, knowing what I was to say. But when I looked at her, she was silent. I turned to look at the child in my arm; it was grasping at the flowers that had fallen upon it, and crying for it's mother.

“It’s...”

“Yes?” The mother looked up at me, seemingly unaware that her child had been lifeless a mere moment ago. I sighed with relief and handed her child to her.

“It’s a girl.”

The woman smiled gently and held the child in her arms, moving her close so she could nurse.

“What is the flower she’s holding?”

“An anemone.”

“Anemone... I quite like that.”

In the months that followed the woman and her daughter came to see me often; with the young Anemone getting stronger each time.

“She’ll only nurse when she’s with her flower. In fact, she won’t go anywhere without it. If she leaves the house and her flower is not with her, she wails like death itself.”

“She must like the scent. I mean, surely any flower will calm her.”

“No, it must be *her* flower.”

“*Her* flower?”

“Yes. The one she held onto when you first gave her to me. The one she is named after; her anemone.”

“But that is simply not possible. That flower would have dried up a long time ago.”

“But it hasn’t! It’s the same flower! Look, it hasn’t even wilted yet!”

She held up Anemone who was, like every other time I had seen her, grasping a flower. I was sure that it could not be the same one, for it was far too fresh, but her mother insisted. I should have payed more attention to it at the time, but botany was not my science. I shrugged it off as a miracle of nature, and concluded that it must simply be calming to the girl.

I was wrong.

After Anemone's first year of life, her and her mother came to see me less and less. It seemed that the girl was strong and healthy, and simply didn't need a check-up. This was rather odd, as most toddlers got into things and places they shouldn't, causing quite the fuss around my office. But, I was glad that she was doing well, and only asked that she come in every now and then for vaccinations and the like.

It was on her third year of life that things started to go wrong. Anemone had apparently gotten sick, and I prescribed some simple, over-the-counter medicines for children of Anemone's age. A week later, she was in again; her symptoms had only worsened.

“I don't understand it; she should have recovered by now. She was only mildly under the weather.”

“Well she's *not* better. Not at all. Can't you do something?”

Anemone's eyes seemed pale and tired, and she was more than a little lethargic. As always she had her precious flower in her pocket, but seemed to be guarding it a bit.

“Can you tell me how you're feeling, Anemone? Has the medicine helped at all?”

The child simply shook her head.

At the end of the check-up I prescribed an antibiotic and suggested that she refrained from letting Anemone have much sugar.

“Bacteria feeds on sugar, so make sure she stays away from it for a little while.”

“She'll start to feel better soon, right?”

“Of course. This happens to children all the time. I’m sure it’ll pass.”

Another week had passed and I had heard nothing from Anemone's mother. That was usually a good sign, and I took relief in that fact. My relief was short-lived however, when Anemone's mother walked in one night, carrying her child.

“Doctor! Doctor you have to help me!”

I rushed over and took the burden of Anemone's weight. The girl's skin had grown paler, and appeared to be wrinkled ever so slightly.

“You must be careful; her skin is very frail. It might tear.”

“After only a week? How is this possible?”

I rushed into an examination room and sat the child down. Her mother held onto her hand as I tried to take some blood. Her veins were exceptionally visible, but her blood was not. It seemed light, and almost milky.

“I’ll have to send this away for tests... I’ve never seen this before.”

“This isn’t right! She’s only three years old! These things aren’t supposed to happen to children!”

“Please, you must calm down. I’m sure that...whatever is happening can be resolved. I just need to send this away to a hospital in a larger area that has seen more...things. I’m sure this isn’t as unusual as it appears to be.”

I tried my best to comfort her, but I was finding it hard to believe my own words. I looked down at Anemone, who was hunched over slightly, cradling something in her hands. I knelt down to her.

“Anemone? What’s that you’ve got there?”

She looked up at me weakly.

“My flower...” She said, opening her hands “It’s wilting.”

The next few check-ups Anemone had were house calls, as she no longer had the strength to walk or stand. Her skin was getting whiter, and she was getting weaker by the hour.

“Her blood-work came back.” I said softly, trying to sound calm.

“And? Does she have some sort of virus?”

“I’m afraid they haven’t checked...”

“What!?”

I put my hands out, trying to calm her down.

“Well it seems there was some confusion at the lab. They tested what appeared to be phloem sap.”

She stood there, speechless, looking at me for a moment before falling to her knees and crying.

“This isn’t fair! My little girl is dying and they’re...they’re mislabeling *sap!*”

I knelt down beside her. “I’m sorry. I don’t understand what happened, but I’m sure...”

“You’re sure of what?”

I sighed. “I don’t know. I’m so sorry. I just don’t know.”

The last visit I made to Anemone's home was a day before her birthday. Her skin was practically transparent now in it's whiteness, and her skin was too frail to touch. I spent the day with her, just trying to make her as

comfortable as possible. She smiled at me, unable to say a single word.

“Doctor...will you stay?” Her mother asked, looking up at me as she lay beside her daughter on the bed “You were here to bring her into this world it...it’s only right that you...”

I nodded, and sat down beside her bed.

“I brought you a present, Anemone. For your birthday. Would you like me to open it for you?”

She nodded softly.

I smiled as best I could and opened her present; it was an anemone seed, young and new. Her eyes lit up and she moved her hand out slowly to reach for it. I put the seed in her hand, on top of her old flower, which was dying now as well. She smiled a thank you and closed her eyes.

As the night went on I checked her pulse, every hour on the hour, until midnight, when her heart stopped. I woke her mother, who cried softly into Anemone's hand, kissing it gently.

“It’s her birthday, you know.” She whispered.

“I know.”

She opened Anemone's hand to see her flower on last time, but there was no flower anymore. Just a seed, with a small green sprout.

This is why I ask, *why* is life? Why does it come and stay and leave? Science failed to answer my questions, and God could not tell me such things. So I may never know why she came into this world upon a flower, or why she left it the same way. All I know is that it was a curious case, and that her name...was Anemone.