

The Point Of It All

by John Olson

He understood that people no longer read or thought deeply about things but continued to write anyway. He understood that Einstein's theory of relativity was proved correct during the world's longest eclipse of May 29, 1919 when photos of the Hyades star cluster revealed that their light was being curved around the sun. He understood that the water coming out of his faucets came from a public water supply, for which he was grateful, and that a chief cause of darkness is an absence of light. He understood rainbows, traffic lights, seasons, thunderstorms, quotients, quorums, quarantines and the beauty of opposable thumbs. What he didn't understand was the point. The point of life. The point of death. The point of it all. Being. Not-being. He moved around the house with the aid of a walker. He was 97. He once taught philosophy. And now he had become philosophy, a form of disembodiment, the crackle of branches as he followed the terrain, of roving abstractly through the infinite space of the mind, sifting reminiscences, hints of an afterlife, intimations of a before life, those billions of years before coming into existence, all the way back in time to that primary particle, that infinite density preceding time itself. Was there anything in consciousness that might connect with that initial condition? A faint memory of not existing? How could there be a memory of nonexistence? You'd think there'd be something. A something encapsulating nothing. I wish I knew, he thought. There must be something I'm missing in this argument. He had become — as it happens to nearly everyone, sooner or later — a puzzle to himself. Loneliness and absence had become absolutes. He missed his wife. They'd been married 70 years. It was another dimension that preoccupied him. It felt as if a part of him had gone. It had been a happy life. But half of him was gone. The absence itself had become a presence. That something that was missing had become a flavor, a tone, a character that gave an aura to things, that spread itself throughout his immediate space. Death. It's a frightening thought.

Shouldn't it be a comfort? He sat on the patio and looked at the trees blowing in the wind. He's seen them numerous times, but seeing them now had become a transcendent experience. He hadn't fully appreciated them until now, which made the fact of death more difficult. It was central to existence. Something he had not yet come to terms with. One day. One day soon he would shut his eyes. And that great mystery would unfold as he unfolded, everything once tightly gripped let go as his fingers uncurled and his hands outstretched, empty.

