

# Letter to a Distant Friend

*by* Gary Hardaway

It's hard to find the time to write.  
Small duties proliferate.  
A sloth breeds among this crowd  
of phones requiring answers, meetings  
needing attendants, knots demanding  
to be tied or loosened — Now.  
I wonder often if the life  
I live is worth the life I lead  
supporting both. The two seem not  
my own but messes left  
by someone else for me to tidy up.

My life is life in shape alone.  
The substance leaks away like blood  
removed by the embalmer's art.  
My wife is wife in name alone.  
The moist affection dries. A residue  
alone still clings like glitter to her skin.  
The loneliness amid a hum  
of voices kills a little more  
each cluttered day and kissless night.

A small despair suffuses me.  
I wish for vast and sudden grief,  
huge and quick enough to justify  
the sharp voracity of sorrow  
eating me away. A shell  
confronts the news from Bosnia,  
Belfast, and the Mississippi Valley.  
Implacable water rises to the mouth.  
My own is amplified by grief  
impersonal and endless. How

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can we survive so much indifference?

Complaints are crowding out the small  
and daily wonders I once used  
to justify my breathing. Pattern,  
habit, inertia, and obedience  
are all that keep me vertical.  
Without them, I would sleep. I wash  
another glass. I do it well  
and this allows another step.

I know that beauty flourishes,  
that misery like mine is private,  
individual and small.  
Such knowledge, though, remains inert,  
pinned by all the tiny darts that  
paralyze. Enough belief remains at least  
to push the pen, to let it say

I hope this finds you well and happy,  
busy in the work you love.  
I hope it's such abundance  
widening the gaps between your letters  
into chasms. Worry comes of quiet.  
Reading what you write is reassurance  
always welcome. Just a note  
however brief would comfort as a smile.

I send a few new pieces, knowing  
you will read them; knowing, too,  
you seldom seem to like them much  
and that it's hard to find the time to write.

