

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.

