

Dead Letter Day

He sent the letter to the guy's wife
The same day,
Leaving out the following:
"About 2 in the morning the automatic went off
And nobody moved, we just waited for the morning
Light and the order to recon.
There were two of them. One was dead.
The other hung on all night,
Waiting to blow away some round-eyes
Before he bought it too.
He shot the second man, missing the point.
The point opened up and somebody threw a frag
And it was all over. Except that your husband
Took a bullet through his helmet that tore a
Gash in his head, and going down shot the man
In front of him. The blood was deep, dark red;
He was lying flat on his back, in shock;
His eyes were wide open and lifeless,
As if he could see everything.
They say he lived a few days in the rear,
Even got up and spoke. Then died.
Head wounds are like that."
She wrote back. First thanking him and the platoon
For writing her, then going on for pages asking
About his last moments. You could tell she was crying;
And he cried too, and did not reply to the desperate
Letter, and has desperately not replied ever since.

Marc Levy, first published in Peregrine, Winter 1998