

The Weight of What Remains



combat reflections.

The Weight of Remains

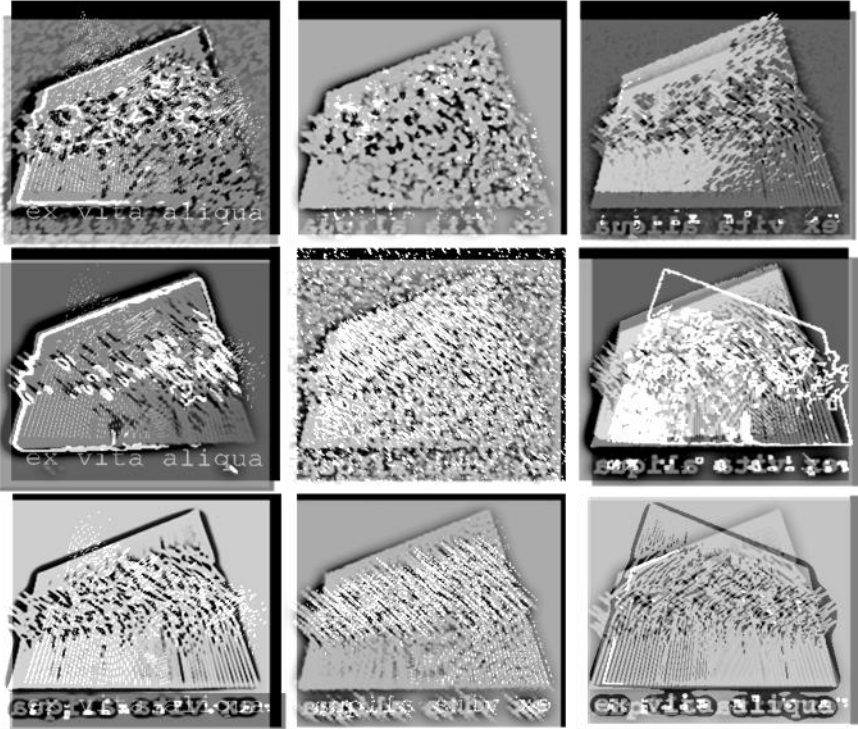
The Weight of What Remains
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ex vita aliqua
(mail@exvitaaliqua.com)

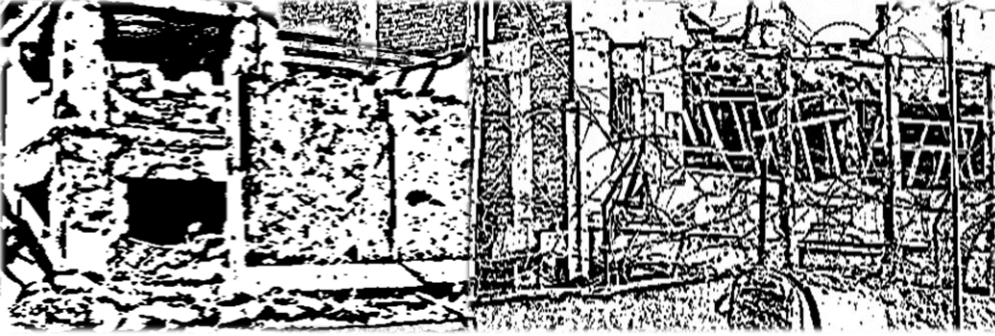
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digital pdf edition, 2026

combat reflections.



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ex vita aliqua



Soldier's Day

Weapons of war wrecked the buildings that day
Blood flowed freely—lives lost, lives saved
Bravery was born among battle that day
The courage of soldiers—ours and theirs
The mettle of many was measured that day
And found not wanting—not on that day

We ran to the wounded, broken and bleeding
Silently screaming
For no sound can be heard through blast-deafened ears
We ran to the dying, picked up their pieces
Silently screaming
For no sound can be uttered through sorrow-choked throats

Weapons of war wrecked the world that day
That awful, bloody, damned deadly day

A Soldier's Night in Three Acts

Act I: Night

These bodies of soldiers
Broken
Bleeding
Feeding thick red pools
Too red
Too thick
Too real
These vessels moments ago held life
Now meat
Stiff
Heavy
Unwieldy
Dead
Where have they gone
Their hopes
Their loves
I knew them once
I cannot remember them
Their names
Their humanity
I stand soaked in their essence
But it is not them
This viscous fluid
These lifeless husks
They are dead weight in my arms

Is this all we are,
and all we can hope to be?

Act II: Nightmare

Broken bodies bleeding

Feeding fetid ferrous furrows

Vessels vicious in vivid verisimilitude

Moldering mounds of meat

Heavy hulking hunks of meat

Unsweet sweaty meat

Gone are the ghosts

Gone is the good

Gone are their gods

Gone the giddy girl

the bungling boy

the bundle of joy

Sinew bone and suet

the sum of their lives

the sum of their lives
the sum of their lives
the sum of their lives
the sum of their lives
the sum of their lives

This is all we are: this is all we can hope to be.

Act III: The Following Mourning

bodies

fetid

vicious

meat

meat

meat

Gone

Gone

Gone

Gone

girl

boy

bundle of joy

Sinew

suet

sum of

life

sum of life
sum of life
sum of life
sum of life
sum of life
sum of life
sum of life
sum of life
sum of life
sum of life

all we can hope to be.

Soldier's Weight

It was about fifteen-hundred local time on a warm February afternoon in Kandahar City. We were near three hours into close combat. I was short of breath, sweating in my armor, hands soaked in blood, and there was no effing way the stretcher was going to fit in the bed of the effing truck.

Hanging the stretcher out over the tailgate wasn't an option; it would fall out during the ride to the aid station. The soldier lying on the stretcher was unresponsive, his skin sallow with massive loss of blood. But he was breathing. I thought he might live if he got to the medics in time. He was the second or third casualty we carried out of the ruined masonry and twisted metal, which moments ago had been the foyer and front parking area of a hotel.

We unceremoniously slid him off the stretcher

onto the truck's cold, hard surface. It seemed callous and I instantly regretted it, but there wasn't time for niceties—there were still wounded who needed to be carried out of the kill zone. At that moment the only thing that mattered was figuring out how to get this one securely into the tiny repurposed delivery truck.

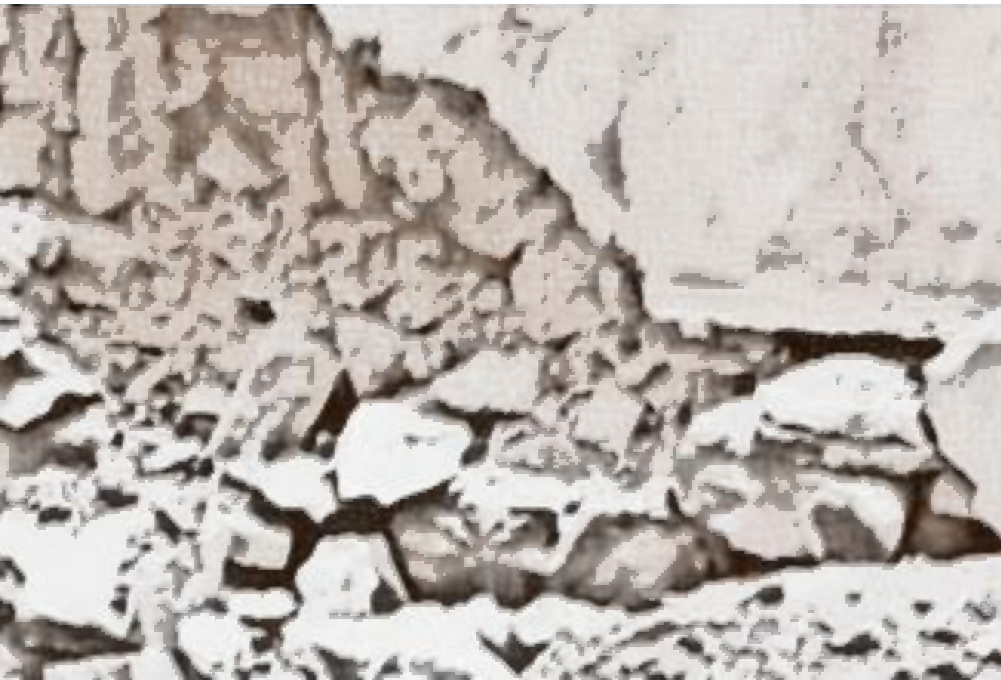
It took a deliberate effort to focus on the puzzle before me. All my mental resources were being used by my senses. Every smell and flash of light became an immediate source of intense focus. The turn signal on one of the destroyed cars kept drawing my attention with its incessant flashing, and the sharp smell of burning explosives and centuries old dust, freshly disturbed, assaulted my sinuses and left an acrid taste at the back of the throat. And there was an odd, uneven silence—shouting and gunfire were muffled, but the crunching of my boots on the gravel was close and loud, as if it were right in my ears.



Even without the stretcher, he was too tall to lie straight in the truck. The other soldiers had started back to the blast site, so I was on my own to figure out the mess. I climbed up onto the truck's tailgate, and—arms trembling with exhaustion—lifted him by his shredded uniform, shifted him diagonally in the truck's bed, bent his legs some, and shifted him again. The tourniquet we had put on his leg was wholly ineffective due to the location of his wound, and soon my hands were soaked and slipping through his warm, sticky blood. I climbed back out of the truck and, as gingerly as I could manage, pushed on his shoulders until his head

was clear of the tailgate.

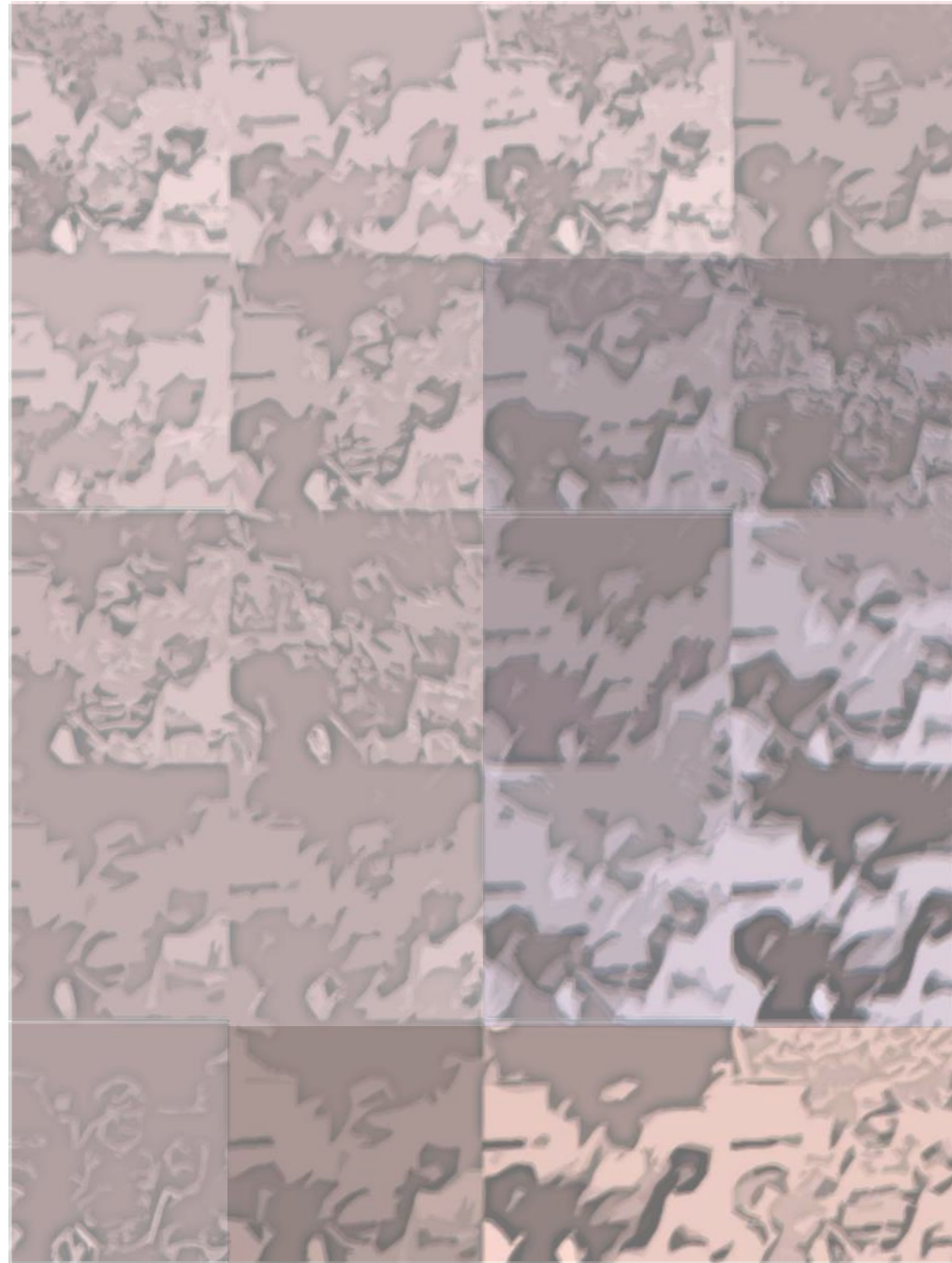
Just when he was reasonably situated, he suddenly became animated. I leaned forward and hooked my arms under his, held him to my chest and tried to keep him from twisting himself and worsening his injuries. I felt his muscles tense in a terrible spasm, saw his body begin to arch and his fingers curl into claws. I lowered his torso until his shoulders were at my lap, trying to steady him. In that position I was looking directly down at his face. His expression was strained and plaintive; his lips, thin and pale, parted and paused on the cusp of enunciation.



He then became very relaxed. His expression calm, he turned his head slightly to one side and looked around aimlessly through slowly blinking eyelids. He leaned his head back and his brown eyes came to focus on my own. They looked huge and intense in that moment. He reached back with his right hand and grasped my arm, possessing strength his appearance belied. His final intake of breath was labored and wet. He exhaled a long, staccato sigh as the life left his eyes and his grip on my sleeve slackened. His body went limp in my arms and somehow felt heavier.



“Poor guy,” I thought, then slammed the tailgate and ran back for the next one.



They said his name was Enemy

and when I came to meet him
he would be no Friend to me
for what friend's name is Enemy

But would he be a Friend of none
though unspoken the question was
in one name answered Enemy

A name that held the power to
annihilate humanity
leaving only Enemy

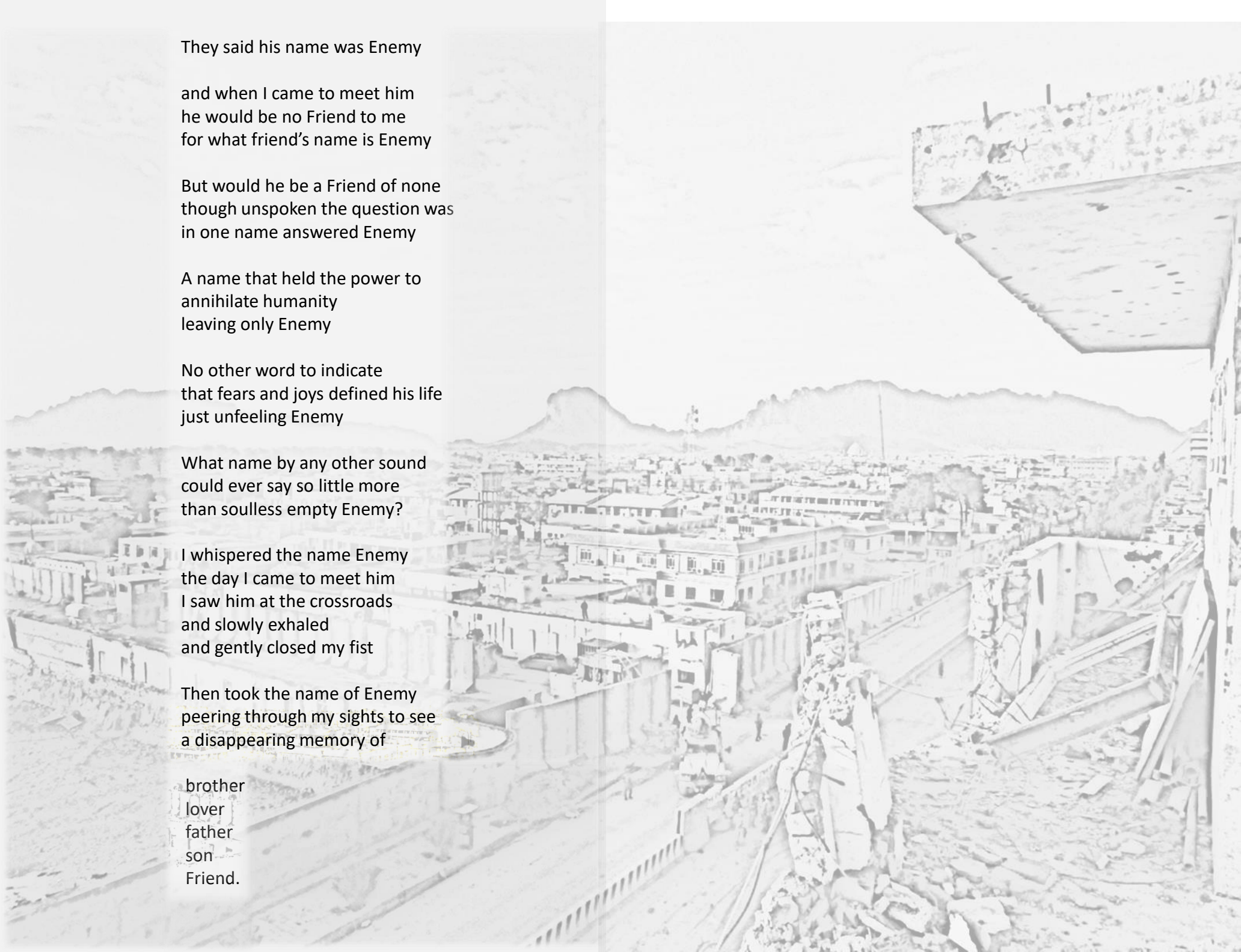
No other word to indicate
that fears and joys defined his life
just unfeeling Enemy

What name by any other sound
could ever say so little more
than soulless empty Enemy?

I whispered the name Enemy
the day I came to meet him
I saw him at the crossroads
and slowly exhaled
and gently closed my fist

Then took the name of Enemy
peering through my sights to see
a disappearing memory of

brother
lover
father
son
Friend.





ex vita aliqua

witness to the making of a life.

spelling and grammar may be intentional.

The Weight

Remains

