

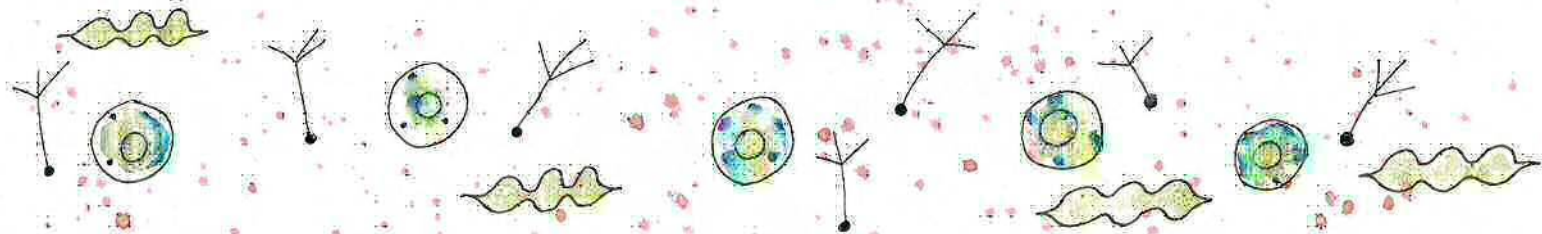
war as a work of fiction

inside the leather-bound tome are pages
of history watermarked by the victor
dive into blue trickles of salvation
walk along narrow roads to freedom
climb and look down on the conquered

names and places
a playground for silverfish
statements and similes
smeared with the shrapnel
of a moth's thorax

inside the story are roses and thorns
waiting to be selected and arranged
chapters underlined by ruddy fingerprints
references decorated with medals
postscripts to be chiselled into stone

and in the final chapter
float down to earth
on a parachute
of dandelion
debris



The Breakdown Plan (withdrawal)

“Another Operation?”

“Yes.”

“Got a name for it?”

A waiter appears - his footsteps swallowed by the deep tread of silk rugs underfoot. In the corner of the ornate dining room an insignificant individual strums. Sheffield forged steel on Coalport China clatters out of time with the rhythm. Waterford crystal decanters wait in line on the gold-lacquered dresser. Collecting their plates the waiter leaves.

“Will anybody be joining us this evening?”

“Aha, I’m glad you asked. How about Kipling? What a treat that would be.”

“Yes, what conversation that would be. Alas.”

“What do you think he would make of the situation?”

The music stops. Scraping and cutting continues. Most of the diners perspire silently; buttoned, cummerbund-ed, tightly laced. A new *veena* player replaces the first one and the music continues.

“Desperate, I think. It’s all mixed messages from London. Perhaps change is unavoidable but one thing is for sure, nobody likes the unknown. It’ll be a madhouse.”

“Exactly.”

“Do you recognise this tune?”

“Can’t say I do. I mean, I must have heard it before but they all sound the same to me. I’ve been thinking, If I were to invite anybody it would be Coleridge.”

“But would he accept your offer? I mean, at least Kipling had some idea of this wretched heat.”

“Good point.”

Both diners have their own means of escaping reality, although one is more interested in poetry and the other travel.

“How about Operation Stilton? I do miss the simple pleasures.”

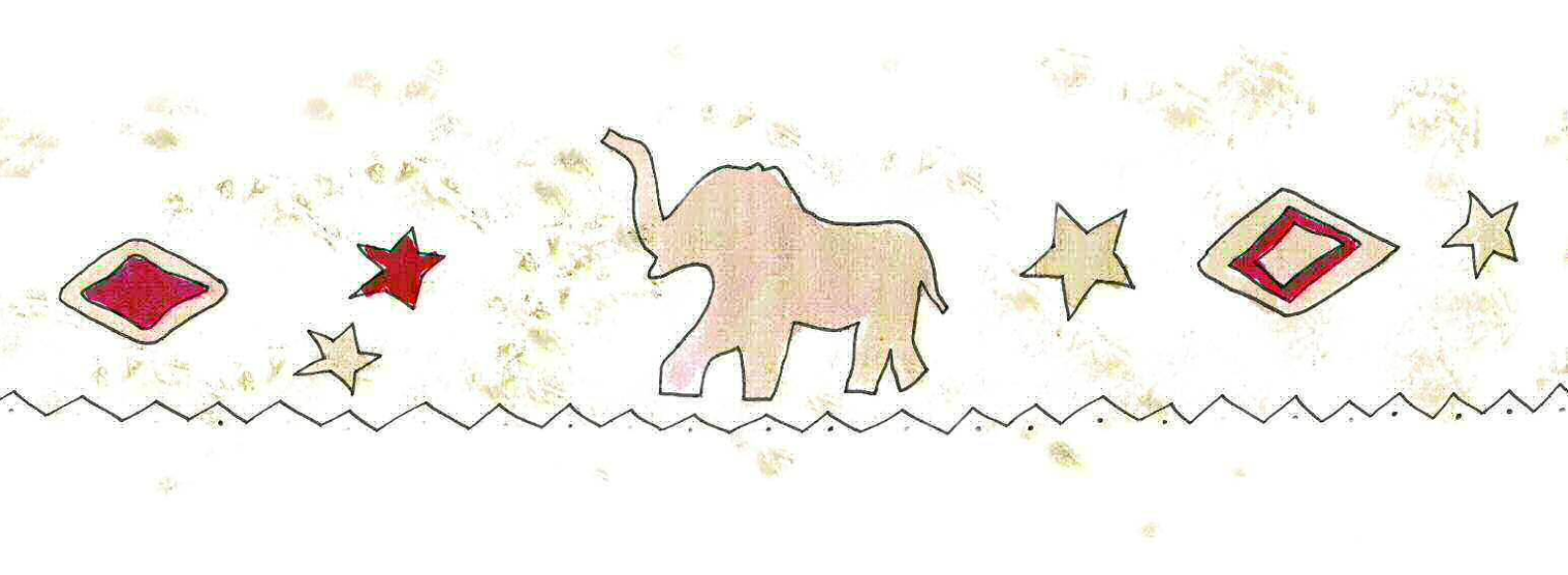
“Stilton, plum pudding, mince pies, sherry trifle - I’ll get someone to check if they’ve been used before.”

The waiter arrives with the main course.

“Yes, it all sounds the same because it is all the same. Like these curries all taste the same especially towards the end of the week. It is as if all the left-overs have been put back into a large pot and reheated. All the loose ends, all the unanswered questions, all these damned operations (whether they fail or succeed) appear to boil away into an unpalatable stew. We are charged to simply stir the pot and blur the original ingredients when we are the ones who can see what is really happening and what could really be done. We need a clear strategy. We need leadership.”

“I think we all need another drink. Damned mosquitoes are making a pin cushion out of me. Gets me worried I’ll swallow one of these and it will all come out like a fountain. Let’s keep our spirits high and not succumb. Mark my words - the situation is going to get worse before it gets better.”

“Politicians, mosquitoes, what’s to differentiate between these blood thirsty individuals except they don’t care whose blood they steal.”



cleaning out the last hurrah

slap of cloth on wet stone

under hungry eyes in a cloud of
mosquitoes
women toil under an incandescent
midday sun

backs bent like a cackle of hyenas
stripping a carcass

short-nailed fingers wrinkled and cracked
by a lifetime of hard labour

this has been their story

a sliver of nose pin catches the light
like a mirror

bare feet anchored to dimples in the rock
where parents and grandparents
once stood ankle deep in scum

stone pounds cloth
suds swirl dive and slip
downstream

listen to the rattle tattle
of cheap brass bangles
the nitter natter of friendship

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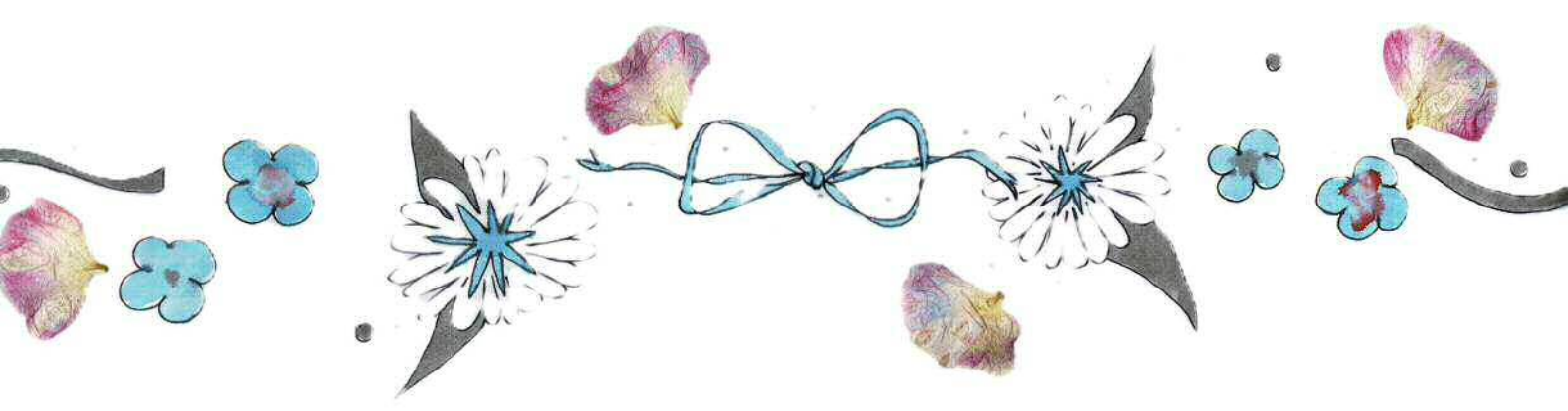
there
is no end
to the task
piles of sweat-soaked
shirts bloody collars nicked
in shaving juicy jocks muddy jodhpurs
a malodour of vests the river swallows it all
gurgles regurgitates belches out bile separates whites
spits out handkerchiefs steals a sediment of

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~ ~ ~ ~ ~

in a baking heat
strewn over bushes
a regiment of khaki cottons
would drip-dry
until stiff and inflexible
each item resembled the wearer

once pressed and polished
buttoned and belted
booted and fed
armed and ready
the world was theirs
to add to the map



Gift of memory

Condition. Fair.

*a fragile thread binds one
to another from the first
through the penultimate*

From Music, Mystery and Magic
to the Last Post.

*on occasions I repeat myself
repeating oneself is
seldom popular*

Add to basket.

*some days I fear the stream
is running dry
and muddy*

Mild joint tears.

Pages and binding are presentable
with common faults.

*memory stumbles over
a word or a line*

Paper cover has moderate edge wear
with noticeable creasing and chipping.
Moderate tanning and markings.

growing old

Some issues present such as
cracking, inscriptions, inserts,
moderate foxing, tanning and
thumb marking.

*I have gathered a posy
nothing but the thread
that binds is mine*

Binding remains firm.

*a blessing to all beautiful
things that help us forget
the dreariness of war*

381 pages.

Patterned paperback.

to my son

Text is legible throughout.

A P Wavell

Quantity: 1 available

