Belgium

Ann Reddig
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BELGIUM

Mama and Papa watched us from the house while we played in limited space. Papa, his beret pushed back on his balding wrinkled head, smoked with his thumb and forefinger quickly inhaling forcing his arm downward. Mama, all floured white from daily bread, played ahead of each of our moves with jerking movements and worried looks. Kept silent by window barriers.

Wartime evenings passed on in bed. Saving wax and candles. Canceling wartime talk.

We in a bed upstairs next to Grandmama, played silent army. Helped by sound from near-by Ghent. Army sounds belting us to sleep

Glass ate us awake as the floor caved in and the roof flew and we saw but couldn’t hear. I knew I cried. I knew I screamed till mama found me underneath a rafter and a wall. And Brother sat in the middle of the floor staring and Papa lay on top of what should have been Grandmama, and we should have been inside but we could see Ghent burning.

Our farmlands grew army tents, green trucks and men. We learned to speak English begging for rides and for chewing gum. Our wine given freely, all the food we could spare,
and they gave us cigarettes.
Protection.
And
orphans.