

Ping Pong with the Nazis

for Leo Jesurum

Bored couriers have kicked off boots and set
their pipes aside, a Dutch interior.
The slapped ball clacks over the table
like a telegraphic code, or trickles
like faint hope across the marble floor.
How quickly he bends to retrieve it
and puts it back in play, the Jewish boy
living with false papers in a villa
owned by his mother's Gentile friends, and now
commandeered by retreating Germans
as divisional headquarters. The young
blond soldiers, deferential to a social
better, muss his blond locks like the kid
brothers back in the fatherland, like big
brothers steeped in genial menace.
He begs another game, so they relent.
As the ball resumes its chatter across
the no-man's land strung with a net,
he calculates the risk that each shot brings.
And so do they. He holds his pee and serves.

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