GELLA Time wipes out what beauty lies within, Ernst. Days cut across us like the teeth of a saw.

ERNST This win-or-lose game is giving us a second chance, Gella.

GELLA Not in my book.

ERNST It is. Take it from me.

GELLA Joking apart, Ernst. Laughs. In all earnest, Ernst.

ERNST Puns involving my name are like water off a duck’s back.

GELLA I’ve turned the page on you, Ernst.

ERNST That page is about to be reopened and made into a full-blown novel.

GELLA It was more of a footnote actually.

ERNST I’ve come to make you happy, Gella.

GELLA What you call a win-or-lose game is just a bitter pill to me.

ERNST I’m here to gild that pill, Gella Dear.

GELLA Darling Ernst has come to sprinkle sugar on the sour apple.

ERNST Something tells me you’re not exactly rolling in it.

GELLA She shows him a cardboard mini-coffin. I found this on my doorstep the other day. It has my name on it. Strange, no? I wonder what it means.

ERNST I’ll tell you how I see our future happiness.
Extract from I’m not wearing that star

GELLA One of my neighbours has it in for me.

ERNST They’re just trying to intimidate you.

GELLA I get scolded. My head is shorn, I’m chased naked through the streets, caged, strung up on a lantern post. That’s what goes through my head when I hear that song, Underneath the Lantern. *Hums.*

ERNST Do you suspect anyone in particular in this house?

GELLA It could be anyone.

ERNST I can have all the residents taken into custody. Just say the word.

GELLA That’s very kind of you, Ernst.

ERNST It’s just the beginning. I’ll shower you with benefactions.

GELLA Thanks but no thanks, I get benefacted plenty.

ERNST Has anyone in this house taken a particular dislike to you?

GELLA On the contrary. That’s just it. Everybody’s very kind to me. Mind you, one of them has, come to think of it. My downstairs neighbour. The man blithely ignores me, while I always say hello. He’s got those creepy pale blue eyes. Every time I bump into him, his pupils contract into tiny specks. He stares at me, stony-faced. I’m not sure whether it’s hatred or lust. Probably both.

ERNST Write his name on a piece of paper.

_They sit down. She writes down the name on a piece of paper, folds it, slides it in front of her on the table. Ernst takes Gella’s hand. Proppy mumbles. Ernst puts Gella’s hand back on the table._

GELLA How’s your mother?

ERNST I’ve got dreadful news, Gella. Our house in Hamburg, the house you know so intimately; the house, I daresay, where we had our happiest moments together, got bombed in an air raid. Mutti intends to spend the winter in her country house in Segeberg.

GELLA She never did like me.

ERNST She adored you. Dad died last year. The day he died, at the exact time of his death, the clock in my room in Montmartre, I was in Paris at the time, fell off the wall. Weird, no? This man, the rationalist and positivist par excellence, the Leibniz and Comte man, the exact...
second he croaks it, a clock drops down a thousand kilometres away in his son’s room. Try and rationalize that.

GELLA The world is full of dark forces.

ERNST You know what our house in Hamburg looks like. The day after the calamity a few friends who were supposed to have lunch with Mum arrive and find the place in ruins. They ring the bell anyway. They peer through a broken window and see a trapdoor open. Mum crawls out of the hole wearing a long smart dress and that hat with the hideous pheasant feathers. She kicks the dust off her clothes. Gentlemen, she says, I’m afraid today’s lunch has been cancelled. *Laughs, then immediately serious again.* Germany’s groaning, Gella. On my way here the train went through North Rhine-Westphalia. Dortmund, Bochum, Essen, Duisburg, it was as if each of those places had been hit by a meteor. Long rows of charred corpses lay strewn along the tracks like sleepers. The mind boggles. Death and horror on such a scale it becomes unreal, like walking through a Hieronymus Bosch painting. The burnt smell spread through the train. *Leaves through the album with nude photos with growing dismay.*

PROPPY The prints you ordered will be ready in an hour.
ERNST to Gella Is this what you’re doing at the moment?

GELLA That and Tarot reading. I also magnetise through faith healing. I consult the Ouija bord. I read tea-leaves. I perform shamanic rituals for money. I’m a heartless fraud. You have no idea how many Huns come to me wanting to know if they’ll win the war in the end. I invariably say they will.

ERNST These are young Jewesses.

GELLA Not all of them.

ERNST Naked.

GELLA Not all of them.

ERNST What sad underlying message are you trying to convey?

GELLA I’m not conveying anything of the sort. These are cunts, Ernst. Cunts exist for man’s amusement.

ERNST This couldn’t be further away from your earlier work. I can’t believe I’m seeing this.

GELLA laughs It’s a logical next step.

ERNST It’s well done, I’ll grant you that. You’re still an excellent photographer.

GELLA Artistic license as a form of excuse? Been there, done that.
ERNST These are kids, Gella.

GELLA They’re precocious. It’s not like I’m forcing them. This is how I make a living, Ernst.

ERNST Sooner or later it’ll blow up in your face.

GELLA What do you suggest? That I wash dishes in a restaurant instead? Work as a telephone operator? Nightclub hostess?

ERNST Who buys this stuff?


ERNST We shove them into cattle-trucks, Gella, deport them East. Apparently murder is committed on a large scale out there. Rumour has it, if it’s anything to go by, that something so horrible is going on in the wings of this war, that it has no precedent in all of history.

GELLA Then I suggest you put a stop to it.