PUBLIC READING SAMPLE

Die Schattendorfer Echos

Literary Prelude

Liana Marie Sive

English translation of the German cycle

Prelude

Reading edition: 12 October 2026

14 excerpt pages | Original PDF pages 7-20

Original typography and printed page numbers retained.

Complete manuscripts: approved private reader access.

© 2026 Liana Marie Sive. All rights reserved.

Three Hands at the Paper: Before the First Paste

A Prelude in Twelve Pressure Points

FIRST PRESSURE POINT
THE PLAIN FACT

The room had been chosen because it contained a table. No one had measured the table beforehand.

It stood on three firm legs and one folded residency slip. A medicine glass held paste left from some earlier repair; a skin had dried across it. Beside the glass were an inkwell, a sand shaker, three cups, and two handles. The cup without one had been turned so its break faced the wall. Cold air entered around the window frame and moved the blank sheet at the center by the width of a fingernail.

Zeitblom sat nearest the stove. The Unreliable Editor—UE in the margins—took the end chair and announced that there would be no head of the table. A Fellow Wayfarer, entered as AFW, remained standing because the only unoccupied chair rocked.

"We need a beginning," the Editor said.

Zeitblom warmed both hands around an empty cup. "Tell me first which death you mean to begin with. If I begin before it, I shall write as though I might still prevent it."

"We already have one."

"Yes, in the papers. Hermann von Kunstdorf, a German painter, living in Austria. I can put that at the top of the page; it is all quite accurate. But I have to get her into a sentence before I lose the sound of her," Zeitblom said.

The Editor dipped the pen and wrote:

The plain fact is this: Hermann was already dead when this account began.

AFW leaned over his shoulder. The cuff of his coat brushed the sand shaker. It tipped, scattered three pale fans across the table, and sent one grain into the wet downstroke of "plain."

"I used to keep the sand on my left," Zeitblom said. "I have forgotten why."

AFW rubbed at the grain with a finger and spread the ink.

"Leave it," said the Editor.

AFW looked at him. "You wanted plain."

"I wanted it to be plain when I wrote it. Leave the first version where I can see it."

Zeitblom read the sentence aloud. The borrowed cadence pleased him; he disliked being pleased so quickly.

"Marley was dead," he said. "To begin with. Dickens states the death before he permits the ghost."

"Hermann is not Marley."

"I know. I was thinking of Marc entering the house, and I have put the death in the wrong place for him. Let me hear your sentence again."

The Editor read it, then stopped at the name. "It puts Hermann beyond any chance of answering us."

The window lifted the lower corner of the page. AFW put the handleless cup on it. The crack in the cup faced outward now.

From beneath the table came a faint scrape. The short leg had shifted on its folded paper. Zeitblom bent down, drew the paper free, and nearly upset the inkwell a second time. The table dropped to one side. All three cups moved.

The paper was a *Meldezettel*. Its fold had gone white. An old sex designation remained legible. A first name appeared twice: once in ink, once later in pencil, fainter but not erased. The official hand had supplied honorifics, relation, and legal category. Another hand had returned to the name.

"The register says 'he,'" the Editor said.

"Julia says 'Papa,'" Zeitblom answered.

"Rita does not always follow either."

AFW took a piece of card from a drawer and pushed it under the table leg. It was too thick. He peeled one layer away, tried again, then another. The table steadied.

The Editor wrote four words at the top of a second sheet:

Register. Daughter. Rita. Editor.

Zeitblom added, "Witness, when there is one."

"And the dead?"

"We have her letters," AFW said. "I would begin with those before I chose a voice for her."

The Editor glanced at the blank page. "Some were not addressed to any of us."

He copied the sentence again without "plain": "Hermann was dead when this account began."

Zeitblom wanted the Dickensian turn restored. AFW wanted the sentence left bare. The Editor wrote both versions, one beneath the other, and placed a small question mark beside each. When he reached for the sand shaker, AFW moved it beyond his sleeve.

"Do not make my mistake invisible," AFW said.

"I was going to sand it. I thought—leave it a moment."

The Meldezettel remained on the table. No one returned it beneath the leg.

A soft knock came from the wooden box under the window.

Once.

After a pause, once again.

Zeitblom looked toward it. AFW looked at the page. The Editor capped the ink.

They left the box closed until morning.

SECOND PRESSURE POINT
WHAT LIES IN THE BOX

The paste had cracked overnight. Three fissures crossed its skin, and the mass beneath had hardened near the glass.

Zeitblom reached for the water pitcher.

"How much?" AFW asked.

"A little to begin with. I have done this before, though not with paste so old."

"Not onto the inventory," AFW said.

Zeitblom poured anyway, carefully at first. The water sat on the skin and refused to enter.

The Editor had already put the key into the box. The lock resisted. He lifted the lid while the rear hinge still held, and a splinter tore loose and fell among the contents.

"The splinter just broke from the wood beside the hinge," he said. "Put that beside the description. I do not want to find myself calling it something she kept."

AFW reached inside.

"Splinter first," said a woman from the adjoining room.

Frau Klemper did not appear. Her voice came through the wall with the smell of coffee and stove soot.

AFW found the splinter and set it beside the blank sheet. "I was doing that."

The lid bore the name KUNSTDORF beneath a scratched crest. Dust lay thickest in the U. Zeitblom traced the groove with one finger.

"Kunst. Dorf." Zeitblom separated the syllables. "When I first heard the name I thought I knew what sort of household I should find."
"I knew it as a name," AFW said. "I cannot remember thinking of the village in it until you said that."
"And now you cannot stop hearing it?"
"I can if you let me."

The Editor wrote "family name" and, beneath it, "perhaps an assignment." He did not ask AFW for permission. AFW added a question mark after the second phrase and smudged the first with the side of his hand.

A gray cloth covered the contents. AFW lifted it and said, "Hermann's."

Frau Klemper entered at last, carrying the coffee pot. "Mine."

The cloth had silver polish at one corner, paste along one edge, and stove black in the center. AFW folded it again without comment.

Beneath it lay a blue ribbon; a small bag of white beans; a bread knife; a buttonhook; a bent nail; a cracked slate; a child's drum bound with loose blue thread; a paper crown; two keys; a bundle of newspapers; and a strip of paper sewn into a loop.

The Editor began an inventory. Zeitblom moved each object toward him as it was named. Frau Klemper moved the knife back because its flour-paste edge touched the ribbon. AFW placed the nail beside the splinter and then, after a moment, separated them.
"Twelve," Zeitblom said when the list was complete.

The Editor counted again.

Frau Klemper poured coffee into the two cups with handles. She looked at the third, fetched an enamel mug from the next room, and set it before AFW.

She filled it last.

The crested key was heavy and polished at the teeth. The smaller key carried no ornament. The letters stamped into it were uneven:

Gemeindesaal.

Zeitblom held up the first. "The house."

AFW held up the second. "The room."

Frau Klemper took the smaller key from AFW.

One bean rolled from the bag and stopped against the inkwell. The Editor wrote "one bean outside the bag."

Zeitblom laughed.

The bean rolled again when Frau Klemper set down the coffee pot.

They worked until noon. Rust remained on the nail. Flour remained on the knife. The crown had been folded and unfolded so often that one point leaned. The slate was marked CHARES on one side and tally strokes on the other. No one touched the drum.

Zeitblom returned to the paste. He broke the skin with the knife tip and poured water into the opening. Too much entered at once. Thin paste ran over the rim, crossed the inventory, and blurred *key*, *drum*, and *paper strip*.

The Editor stood so quickly his chair struck the wall.

"Lift that end. The ink is still coming off."

Frau Klemper laid the gray cloth over the spill. AFW reached for it, then stopped because it was hers.

"Hold the corner," she told him.

They lifted the wet sheet together. The cloth took up water and ink. The object names remained, but their edges had feathered into one another.

"We need another inventory," Zeitblom said.

The Editor spread a clean sheet beside the first.

"And this one?"

Frau Klemper rinsed paste from the knife. "Dry it by the window. I need the cloth back."

AFW copied the first line. His handwriting was less certain than the Editor's. Zeitblom watched him misspell "buttonhook" and did not correct it until the line was finished.

The first inventory dried under the window. The second began beside it. The bean remained outside the bag.

THIRD PRESSURE POINT

THE SECOND KEY

The small key appeared the next morning on the lid of an empty coal scuttle.

No one admitted placing it there. Frau Klemper said she had left it beside the medicine glass. The Editor said the room had moved it. AFW asked whether he meant to enter that in the inventory. The Editor left the place blank.

The letters were struck crookedly. The second e sat low; a burr rose behind the m. The word looked less engraved than forced into iron.

Zeitblom placed the key in the scuttle. It struck the bottom with a sound that made all four of them turn.

"We have to distinguish the house from the hall," he said. "She owns both. That does not tell me what Rausch may promise people about using the room."

Frau Klemper took the coffee cups from yesterday and inspected their rims. “He can promise them a cold room at present. Does anyone want this coffee warmed?”

“I am trying to find the point at which the use becomes public. There must have been an arrangement.”

“Ask who paid for the coal. Someone will remember the winter.”

AFW sat for the first time. The rocking chair had been wedged with a folded scrap from the spoiled inventory.

Zeitblom began with 1918. He spoke of crown, emperor, army, territories, and the name Deutschösterreich, forbidden almost as soon as it was attempted. He spoke of Vienna occupying buildings meant for a larger state and of offices that retained the habits of empire after their map had shrunk around them.

The Editor drew two columns. AFW watched him write HERMANN above the first.

“Wait.”

The nib remained over the other column.

Zeitblom reached into the scuttle and came away with soot on his fingertips, though the scuttle had been emptied. Frau Klemper took it from him.

“Carry this to the stove.”

“It is empty.”

“I can see that. Take it by the handle, please; I have just washed the cups.”

He carried it badly. At the stove he set it too close to the door. Frau Klemper moved it aside so a person could pass with a bucket.

Zeitblom came back rubbing the red mark the handle had made in his palm.

“Who holds the second key?” the Editor asked. “Can we at least establish that before we invent an arrangement?”

“I should have said the municipality,” Zeitblom began, “but someone would have had to collect it. Rausch, perhaps. Then anyone who wanted the hall would have had to ask him.”

“Or the priest,” AFW said.

“Would Rausch have accepted that?”

The Editor wrote both names and added Zeller. AFW remembered Zeller searching for a key in three coat pockets, then finding it between the pages of a book he had already put away. He could remember the book more clearly than the key.

Frau Klemper held out her hand.

The key lay in AFW’s palm. He hesitated.

He gave her the key.

She tested its weight, wiped the soot from it with the corner of her apron, and put it in the pocket where she kept string, a pencil stub, and the cupboard key.

"That does not make the hall public," said the Editor.

"I know," she answered. "Tell them to ask for me until you have settled it. I am here in the mornings."

At noon Frau Klemper put on her coat. The Editor asked her to leave the small key on the table. She felt for it through the lining, then asked who would still be there when the room was needed.

"I shall be here," Zeitblom said. He did not look up from the two columns.

She placed it beside his elbow. The Editor moved it to the space beneath HERMANN so it would not lie on the wet ink. Frau Klemper took it back and set it on Zeitblom's closed notebook.

"I am going now. You need to have seen where I put it."

He put down his pen. "Yes. I have it."

After she left, the other room asked for a cup. The Editor called her name before remembering that she had gone. AFW went to the cupboard. He brought the enamel mug, but the voice wanted the one without the handle. He returned with it, holding the broken place between finger and thumb.

Zeitblom had opened his notebook. The key fell between two boards beneath the table. He could see the bow, but his fingers could not enter the gap. AFW knelt beside him and tried the blunt knife. He pushed the key farther in.

"Stop," Zeitblom said. "Leave the lamp where it is. I can see it from here."

The Editor found a length of thread in the box. Zeitblom refused it at first; then he lay on his side, passed one end through the bow, and asked AFW to hold the light low. Soot from the floor entered the cuff he had kept clean while handling the papers. They lifted the key together.

When Frau Klemper returned, it lay on a dry saucer beside Zeitblom's chair. The Editor had made a mark against her name for the cup and crossed it out. Zeitblom did not tell her about the floor. He took the key from the saucer and put it into her hand before offering her his place by the stove.

The scuttle stood one foot left of the stove. Wind lifted the sheet on the table.

FOURTH PRESSURE POINT

FIVE PAPERS

Zeitblom wanted eighty-three newspapers.

The list filled six sheets: Vienna and the provinces, party organs and official papers, Catholic, Social Democratic, German-nationalist, *völkisch*, local, regional, papers that reported the shootings for columns and papers that gave them three lines between grain prices and a railway delay.

"There is no room," AFW said.

"We can bring another table."

Frau Klemper, polishing the coffee pot with the gray cloth, said, "You can carry it."

The Editor chose five papers for the table and left the list of the others on the chair by the wall.

The *Arbeiter-Zeitung* came first. Its headline used the word "*ermordet*" without official gloves. Beneath the accusation were names.

The *Wiener Zeitung* brought station, route, weapons, investigation, funeral, and procedure. Its sentences placed the bodies later.

The *Salzburger Wacht* carried the stoppage and burial beyond Vienna and Burgenland into rail, post, factory, siren, and provincial solidarity.

The *Welser Zeitung* entered more quietly, with tragedy, family, order, Christian responsibility, restraint, and the hope that authority might contain what violence had opened.

Last came the *Deutsche Arbeiter-Presse*. Zeitblom left it in the bundle.

AFW drew it out.

"I did not want that column beside the names," Zeitblom said. "I can read it at the other table."

"Read it here," AFW said. "We need to hear what you leave out when you copy it."

Frau Klemper set a saucer over the worst column.

The five papers covered the table. There was nowhere to set the coffee pot.

The Editor returned to the *Arbeiter-Zeitung*. He lifted the headline by one corner and reached for a pin.

"Names," Frau Klemper said.

He lowered it.

They read:

Matthias Csmarits.

Josef Grössing.

Josef Haring.

Alois Schmiedel.

Josef Wagner.

Jakob Stromer.

Martin Grössing.

Zeitblom misplaced a vowel in Csmarits. The Editor corrected him. Zeitblom began again from the first name, though no one had required it.

“Five in the house,” the Editor said.

“And the others?”

“They are still to be checked,” the Editor said. “Some give different dates. I have not read enough to decide which disagreement matters.”

“Who will read the others?” AFW asked.

“Put your name beside the list,” the Editor said.

AFW put down his pencil. “Beside the work I have agreed to do. You have not asked me how much I can read.”

The Editor brought the list nearer. AFW marked the first two titles. After a pause the Editor wrote his own name beside the next.

AFW left room beneath it for another name.

They stacked the five papers slightly askew, leaving a strip of each visible. The saucer remained over the poisoned column. The names stayed on the table while the headline waited for paste.

FIFTH PRESSURE POINT
THE BOY COUNTS CHAIRS

The slate read CHARES.

On the reverse were twenty-seven tally marks and a wolf with four legs and five teeth. Zeitblom called its expression tragic. Frau Klemper thought Alex had drawn the mouth that way to fit the teeth in.

“He needs the spelling,” Zeitblom said.

AFW began to write CHAIRS on a scrap, then turned the slate over again to check the count.

The Editor wrote ALEX on a card. AFW put it beside the slate.

A child’s voice came through the wall.

“If the chair is broken, does it still count?”

No one went to the door.

The Editor answered, “Yes. Write down that it is broken.”

“Then I have twenty-seven.”

“Counting the broken one?” Zeitblom asked.

“Yes.”

Afterward came the scrape of something being dragged, then a smaller thump. Frau Klemper closed her eyes as if counting damage in the next room.

AFW placed beans along the tally marks. At the third, the first bean rolled to the floor. He bent to retrieve it and struck his shoulder on the table.

The inkwell trembled but did not spill.

Zeitblom picked up the looped paper strip. “The child makes this.”

“Later,” said the Editor.

“I remember him making it. Or I remember someone telling me. There was a red thread.”

“Put that on a separate sheet. We are still counting the chairs.”

The child spoke again.

“If nobody is sitting on the little one, can I take it?”

The Editor looked toward the door. He had counted the chair in the room without thinking where Alex wanted to put it.

Frau Klemper called through the wall, “Where are you taking it? Alex, leave the other chairs where they are.”

Frau Klemper went to the door. Alex called that he could carry the little chair himself. On the table one bean had rolled across the wolf’s mouth; AFW moved it back to the tally before the Editor lost his count.

SIXTH PRESSURE POINT

THE KNIFE BEFORE THE CONCEPT

The bread knife was blunt. AFW established this by cutting the loaf.

The first slice was too thick, the second tore, the third came out properly, and the fourth carried away a piece of crust that should have belonged to the fifth. He gave the thick slice to Zeitblom and the torn one to himself.

Zeitblom exchanged his slice for AFW’s.

The Editor thanked him and received a look he could not interpret. Zeitblom broke his slice into two pieces.

They ate over the working papers until Frau Klemper entered and moved the paste glass beyond the crumbs.

The Editor began speaking with bread in his mouth.

“Who has the cup without a handle?” Frau Klemper asked.

The Editor looked down. The broken cup stood before him. He moved it aside and uncovered the last letters of security on the page beneath.

Zeitblom read the word. “I have used that for the owner and the policeman. And then for a mother afraid to let her child go out. I shall have to go back through it.”

Frau Klemper cut herself a slice. “Security from what?”

“I can write ‘protection for the owner,’” the Editor said, “but the mother may want protection from him. I have put them into one sentence. Read it. I cannot tell which of them I have promised to help.” He tried two sentences, folded the sheet, and pushed it beneath the closed door to the adjoining room.

It returned after several minutes. Someone had changed “claim” to “request,” “render” to “say,” and added a question mark after “yes.”

“They have changed the question,” Zeitblom said.

“I want to know why,” said the Editor.

“Who is in there?” AFW asked, looking at the returned sheet.

Frau Klemper pointed with the knife. “Julia is in there. She heard you making the list and thought you meant to ask her something. I told her you would be finished by eleven.”

The Editor took another card and wrote JULIA. When he saw Zeitblom reading, he turned it over.

AFW set a heel of bread on the blank side. Grease spread slowly into the paper. They listed tomorrow’s work without giving it a title: Rausch, Zeller, the curate, perhaps Josef; coal; lamp oil; a repaired window; minutes; someone to wash the cups.

Zeitblom took up the list. “Who holds the key?”

“Frau Klemper,” the Editor answered.

“Who pays for the coal?”

“Hermann.”

“Who writes?”

“Adornfeld.”

“Who cleans this?” Frau Klemper asked.

Crumbs, paste, grease, and sand occupied the table. Zeitblom reached for the gray cloth, then stopped.

“May I?”

She gave it to him.

He wiped. The grease mark remained on the blank card; the crumbs caught in the cloth’s paste-stiff corner. AFW moved his papers out of reach. Zeitblom shook the crumbs into the stove and tried the card again.

SEVENTH PRESSURE POINT

THE FAULTY SEAM

The paper strip had been cut from an election handbill. A candidate's promise remained on one side; flour, salt, and lamp oil on the other. Red thread joined the ends, but one end had been twisted before the seam was made.

Zeitblom ran a finger along the surface and returned to where he had begun without crossing an edge.

"Möbius."

"Paper," AFW said.

"Both."

The Editor drew a pencil line. It traveled around the strip and returned on what should have been the reverse.

Zeitblom lifted the loop toward the window. The red thread broke.

One fiber held. The strip opened and hung from his hand.

"I scarcely touched it."

"You lifted it by the seam," Frau Klemper said.

"It was badly made."

"There is more thread in the drawer, if you want to try it again."

They searched for thread. The blue cord around the drum was long enough; no one used it. The blue ribbon was too wide. The Editor found gray sewing thread in the drawer and a needle with an eye too small for him.

AFW offered to sew. His first stitch went too near the edge and tore the paper farther. He swore.

Frau Klemper took the needle from him. "Hold the lamp."

She began farther in. The repair was broad and uneven. The old red thread remained on the table beside the new gray seam.

When the Editor drew the line again, graphite gathered where the repair thickened.

Zeitblom touched the rough place but said nothing.

The Editor placed two cards nearby.

KUNSTDORF.

SCHATTENDORF.

"One is a family name," he said. "One is a village on the map."

"I have been letting the names answer one another," Zeitblom said. "Every time I write Kunstdorf I hear Schattendorf. I cannot tell whether that was how she heard them."

Frau Klemper knotted the gray thread.

AFW wrote beneath the cards:

ONE SURFACE. ONE EDGE.

Zeitblom said "*Anschluss*." AFW told him the novel had not reached it.

"I shall leave the date beside it. But I cannot now write about 1927 without hearing what came after. I was there, and even that does not help me separate them."

From the adjoining room came a woman's voice. Zeitblom stopped with his hand above the two cards.

"You have sewn the ends with a twist. Hold it the way I gave it to you."

A younger voice said, "I tried. The line comes back on this side." Paper scraped along the other side of the wall.

The Editor wrote down the words, leaving the names blank. Before he had finished the younger voice's answer, something scraped against the adjoining wall. He asked AFW whether there had been another sentence.

AFW had gone to the door. He stood with his hand on the latch, listening. Frau Klemper held out the repaired strip, and he took it without turning toward her.

"Hold it flat," she said. "The stitches are pulling."

He brought his other hand beneath the seam. From the next room the younger voice called for someone to move a chair. AFW tried the latch with his elbow and dropped one end of the strip.

Zeitblom drew the axe aside. B, F, A came from the room, the retrograde countervoice from his shoulder. He kept the blade away from his leg.

"Who put this here?"

The Editor had written "The chair moved." He could still hear its feet scraping. He put a line through "moved" and reached the doorway as AFW was trying to take the repaired loop through sideways.

"Come this side," the younger voice said. "You are pushing it against me."

EIGHTH PRESSURE POINT

THE BEAT THAT DOES NOT FALL

The drum was smaller than Zeitblom had imagined. His notes had given it warning, heartbeat, procession, march, command. The object itself could have hung from a child's shoulder. Its skin was dull; two scratches crossed the rim. Blue thread had been tied around it where a striking hand would have to feel the knot.

The paper crown lay beside it. PRINZ RITA had been written across the band in a child's hand, the Z too large.

The Editor wrote PRINCE RITA TABOIRE on a card.

Zeitblom rearranged the letters quickly. He had practiced before the others arrived.

BEATRICE PORTINARI.

He smiled.

Frau Klemper set down a basin. “Rita was asking what time you wanted her. I could go and fetch her now.”

Zeitblom’s smile weakened. “Beatrice is a guide. That was why I tried the letters in the first place.”

“You have not asked Rita whether she wants to lead anyone,” AFW said. “Last time she asked me where we were going.”

The Editor wrote “guide,” crossed it out, tried “companion,” then “companionship under conditions.” The last phrase ran over the edge of the card.

He turned over the card.

The drum remained.

“Strike it?” he asked.

“The drum? Why are you asking us?” said AFW.

The Editor looked at Zeitblom, who raised both hands.

“Rita?”

No answer came through the wall.

“Julia?”

A chair scraped in the next room. No one spoke.

The Editor raised his palm above the drum and lowered it without touching.

Frau Klemper took the instrument and hung its strap over her wrist. “Then carry it.”

Zeitblom touched the blue knot. It loosened a little under his finger.

“I keep hearing a march when I see it,” Zeitblom said. “I know children had them. My brother had one. Yet I cannot write down its sound without bringing soldiers into the room.”

AFW had begun tapping his pencil against the table while Zeitblom spoke. Tap. Tap. Tap. Frau Klemper put one finger on the pencil before the fourth.

In the quiet afterward they heard the coffee pot click as it cooled.

“Shall I put it back, then?” the Editor asked. “I have written down a next beat and nobody has agreed to play it.”

Frau Klemper gave him the drum.

He did not strike it. He carried it to the chair by the door and set it down badly, strap twisted under the rim. AFW freed the strap from beneath the rim.

The blue thread lay across the drumhead. The beat did not fall.