

Southwestern France
September 1942

It was a rare act of disobedience, lying in the tall grass less than a hundred meters from the farmhouse. Despite her orders to be far away, Sophia was determined to witness her mother's murder. Her favorite rifle, the Enfield, a present from her biological father, lay ready at her side. She would honor her mother's wishes and hold fire until it was over, but none of the executioners would live to see the setting of the sun.

The Vichy police were coming to arrest her mother, a thing Maria Beauchamp would not permit. She knew her body, weakened as it was by the hard treatment meted out by the Germans in the last war, could not withstand the brutal interrogation in store for her. Instead, she chose to sacrifice her life rather than risk those who worked the escape route.

Sophia studied the scene through Swiss binoculars, panning to the second story window in the rear of the house, her bedroom window. Slate shingles rose to a high ridge. She swung the binoculars to the wraparound porch. Square wood columns supported the sloped roof above. Her mother occupied a rocking chair facing the driveway, a blanket covering her lower body. A police car crunched to a halt at the wooden fence that was the demarcation between road and garden. Dust trailed behind, settling like a ghost snake. The car disgorged four traitors in uniform, their distinctive flat-billed round caps bobbing. Sophia watched the chief approach the porch. She knew he would feign courtesy if given the chance. Her mother threw off the blanket, raised a pistol, and denied him the opportunity. Another fell to the wrath of the Modele 1935 before her mother fled inside, dodging the fusillade of bullets burping from machine guns.

Sophia dropped the binoculars and took up her rifle, sighted on the remaining traitors and tracked them as they mounted the porch. She bit her lip, relaxed her trigger finger, and waited.