



Freefalling into northern France on an unbelievably dangerous sabotage mission wasn't exactly what Kat had expected to be doing on a Saturday night, but there was the dark French countryside rushing towards her, illuminated by the narrow arc of light from the half moon. A few stars were spread out among the blackness. They seemed to be watching her suspiciously as if they were part of the enemy force too. Suppressing the urge to scream in terror she counted to ten and pulled the parachute's cord.

With a loud whoosh and the sound of flapping, the parachute's nylon surface flew upwards above her and gave her a thudding jolt. Her speed was reduced and she breathed a sigh of relief; at least the parachute hadn't let her down.

What would her parents and her younger brother, David, say if they saw her now? He would love it – the opportunity to sock it to the Nazis. Her parents wouldn't be anywhere near as keen.

With thirty yards to go, Kat placed her hands behind her neck, tucked her elbows in close and bent her knees. As she hit the ground, she immediately threw herself to her left side, distributing the landing shock to the balls of her feet, the side of her left calf, the side of her left thigh, the side of her left hip, and the side of her back. She rolled over three times and came to a stop on the moist grass. She'd landed without injury!

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Picking herself up she quickly started folding the parachute, fully expecting a unit of German soldiers to pick her out with a glaring searchlight and gun her down.

But all around her was silent.

She switched the blue rucksack to her back, grasped the folded parachute to her chest and made a beeline for the thick forest of trees in front of her. Once inside the thick foliage she checked her watch: 11.10 p.m. In under twenty-four hours she would be attempting to blow up the bridge. What if things went wrong? What if the timer malfunctioned and she was blown to smithereens along with the bridge? Maybe the explosives wouldn't work?

Reassuring herself to not over worry about these possible disaster scenarios, she used the hunting knife to dig a small pit and carefully buried the parachute. Next she found some dry leaves and placed them on the forest floor. Sitting down on top of this makeshift carpet she pulled the torch and the map out of the rucksack. Oater or one of his orderlies had marked out the immediate area, with the bridge circled in black. Kat had loved maps and orienteering since a young age so she had no problem working out that the road was about a quarter of a mile away and that a small French village called Chantibe was half a mile down the road in a southerly direction.

She had a quick check that all of the explosives components were in the rucksack and then pulled out some table crackers and a small cube of cheese. Munching on this snack she studied the map more closely. From her current hiding place, she'd need to run through the rest of this small forest, over another field and enter a further thicket of trees. This would take her to the side of the road. It was then about fifty feet to the bridge. She closed her eyes and pictured herself following this route and then following each step of Oater's instructions to set the charge.

Having memorized her route, she folded the map away and got out the blanket. Using the rucksack as a pillow she lay down and pulled the blanket on top of her. It was a mild night. She'd camped out in far worse conditions. Sleep shouldn't be a problem.

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And it wasn't. After the day's excitements and twists, her eyelids grew heavy and it wasn't long before she nodded off.

She was woken by the snapping of a twig nearby.

Opening her eyes she forgot for a moment where she was but it quickly came back to her and she leaped to her feet, her heart hammering wildly.

She reached for the torch, switched it on and shone its beam in wide arcs, waiting to pick out the German soldiers who were surrounding her. But there was no sign of anyone, just the thick trees stretching around her.

It must have been an animal, she reassured herself, lowering the torch and looking for signs of a rabbit or a field mouse. But the forest floor was undisturbed. She thought of the floorboards in her house that creaked in the night for no apparent reason. Houses, forests – they were bound to produce various noises without anyone making them.

Feeling a sense of relief she was about to lie down again when she heard the crunching of leaves to her right. Spinning round she aimed the torch in the direction of the sound and was horrified to see a rapid blur of movement.

Now she was really scared. There was someone else incredibly close to her and her life could well be in danger. Moving the beam left and right she desperately tried to pick out the figure but as she spun round again to try and cover all angles, an arm gripped her neck and a rough hand clamped over her mouth.