

Munich University, 18th February 1943 – The Story of Sophie Scholl

It is February 1943. The winter air bites through the grand arched windows of **Munich University**. A young woman, a student, walks through the crowded halls. Her dark hair is cut into a sharp bob haircut in defiance of Nazi ideals. In her arms is a suitcase stuffed with leaflets. She is **Sophie Scholl** and she is just 21. Along with her brother Hans, they are the leading members of the **White Rose**.



Despite the relentless propaganda, most of Munich knows the war is going badly. Whispers fill Munich University with tales of how the German army has been defeated at Stalingrad. The White Rose are getting bolder. They are leaving anti-Nazi leaflets everywhere from train carriages to city centres. They post them too. Sophie risks suspicion and arrest by buying hundreds of stamps. Their leaflets openly criticise Hitler. They say he is a terrible general who is deceiving the people and killing German soldiers in a needless war.

As a young girl, Sophie was drawn to the camaraderie of the **League of German Girls**. However, her father served time in prison having called Hitler a 'scoundrel' in front of his secretary, who reported him to the Gestapo. Her father once told her - 'All I want is for you to walk straight and free through life, even when it's hard'. She remembers his words. It is her brother, Hans, who forms the White Rose whilst studying medicine at Munich University. Sophie joins Munich University two years later – one of the few girls these days who get this opportunity.

At first, Sophie does not know that Hans is the White Rose. When she finds out she joins and quickly gets involved. The White Rose is a small group and by February 1943 they have produced 10,000 copies of their fifth leaflet. They use clever tactics to distribute leaflets. The Nazis know about the White Rose but they don't know who they are.

It is 18th February 1943 and with the war intensifying, Sophie knows she must act. She stands in the upper gallery of the university's grand atrium along with her brother Hans. Below the caretaker, **Jacob Schmid**, polishes the marble floor unaware of the drama about to unfold. In the distance, a crackle of a speech can be heard on a People's Receiver. It is Joseph Goebbels who is making a speech in Berlin with the strapline – 'Total War – Shorter War'. Goebbels asks the question with fervour 'Do you want total war? If necessary, do you want a war more total and radical than anything we can even imagine today?' For people like Schmid, this is a promise of greatness – proof his beloved Germany is destined to win the war. Sophie has the leaflets, and she is poised to act.

Each word is a defiant call to action: 'The German name will remain forever tarnished unless finally the German youth stands up, pursues both revenge and atonement...Students! The German people look to us! The responsibility is ours: just as the power of the spirit broke the Napoleonic terror in 1813, so too will it break the terror of the National Socialists in 1943.'

Sophie takes one last look at the leaflets. Her pulse quickens. She steps forward. She releases them into the air. Thousands of leaflets flutter down like snow, their crisp edges catching the light. For a moment, the hall is eerily silent, save for the rustle of paper as it settles onto the cold stone floor. The bell goes and the atrium is suddenly full of students. Then come the gasps.

Below, Jacob Schmid's head jerks up. He watches in disbelief as leaflets rain down. His anger flares. Treason, here in the university he loves. He drops his mop and sprints toward the staircase, "Stop! Halt!"

Hans tugs Sophie's arm, and they bolt down the opposite hall. The adrenaline surges as they weave through the growing crowd of students. Sophie's breath comes in short bursts, her heart pounding. As they near the doors to the street, a hand clamps down on Hans's shoulder.

"Got you!" Jacob's voice is triumphant, his grip unrelenting.

Sophie spins around, her wide eyes locking with the caretaker's. For a fleeting moment, fear flickers across her face, but it is quickly replaced by calm determination. She is marched to the Rector's office. Eventually, the Gestapo are called.

The Gestapo interrogation room is a dark, airless box. The weight of silence presses down. Sophie says nothing. Hans says nothing. The investigator slams a battered suitcase on the table. "Why do these leaflets fit perfectly inside?" Hans doesn't blink. "Our mother washes our clothes. We were picking them up." The lie is simple, believable. The man hesitates – just ordinary students, clean-cut, middle class. They look like perfect Germans. He almost dismisses them. But then comes the search. A flat overflowing with stamps. A gun. Even drugs – morphine.

The investigator returns, fury in his eyes. Stamps hit the table. A gun next. Hans breaks first. "It was me. I am the White Rose." His voice trembles. Sophie holds her ground. Still nothing.

The man leans close. "Your brother confessed. It's over."

Sophie's expression hardens. "It was me," she says, calm, deliberate, unshaken. The confession he's been waiting for. She leans forward, her voice unwavering: "Somebody had to make a stand. What we wrote – what we said – it's what everyone thinks. They're just too afraid to say it."

4 days later and the cold courtroom is packed with Nazi supporters. The walls are lined with swastikas. Sophie and Hans Scholl stand before the People's Court, their faces pale but defiant. There is no jury, no defence – just **Roland Freisler**, Hitler's hanging judge, presiding from a raised podium. His voice fills the chamber. Freisler is infamous and feared - the man responsible for over 5,000 executions. The guilty verdict is a formality. Freisler spits his words, each syllable laced with venom. He delights in berating Sophie, calling her 'naïve' and 'foolish'. She doesn't flinch. As he thunders down their sentence – death by guillotine – she stands straighter, her voice cutting through the tense silence. "Another court will pass a sentence on you."

For a moment, the room is still, Freisler's smirk falters ever so slightly. Then, with a dismissive wave, he condemns them. Murmurs fill the courtroom. They are led away. Sophie's words linger on like a prophecy.

At 5pm the bells of **Stadelheim Prison** toll faintly. Sophie Scholl is calmly awaiting her fate. She accepts a cigarette and smokes it steadily. Her quiet bravery leaves the hardened guards uneasy. When the time comes, she walks into the execution chamber with purpose. Sophie doesn't falter. She speaks her final words, clear and resolute:

"How can we expect righteousness to prevail when there is hardly anyone willing to give themselves up individually for a righteous cause? Such a fine, sunny day, and I have to go... But what does my death matter, if through us, thousands are awakened and stirred to action?"

With that, she dies a hero, another victim of Nazi brutality. Moments later, her brother Hans is led into the same room. Outside, life in Munich carries on, the sound of trams clattering faintly in the distance, unaware of the resistance being silenced within these walls. Just before he dies, he shouts with all his strength:

"Long live freedom!"

His words echo through the chamber and beyond, a cry for justice that carries far past the prison walls. Their deaths are just the beginning.

