

# DIANA

AND

# DAEDALUS

by WILLIAM T. ROYCE

A mass of air induced by the Bermuda High had been following its anticipated northwesterly path across the Gulf of Mexico toward the great plains of the United States. A second air mass seething over the Pacific Ocean west of Baja, California, taunted the "Bermuda High" into a rough-and-tumble. Like so many affairs of life, which start with playful innocence, this meteorological mixing got out of hand. Before the titanic wrestling match was halted, the tuna boats in the Baja Gulf were forced to weather a hurricane off Manzanillo and the Bermuda High traveled much further west than normal. This unusual westerly movement spread a blanket of warm, moist air over Arizona and Southern California.

It was July 28, 1954. The early morning sun had already begun heating the floor of Elsinore Valley. By mid-day, cumulus clouds would be covering great areas of the sky stretching many miles in southeasterly to northeasterly directions from the Elsinore Gliderport. At the nine o'clock weather briefing for the contestants in the National Soaring Contest this report caused happy excitement. Getaway thermals would pop early and soaring conditions would be excellent.

Although the patio of the Waverley Hotel was in the shade of the building proper, a sultry warmth eased among the palm trees and enveloped the glider pilots and crew members who were listening to the briefing information. Beads of perspiration flecked the pilots' brows partly from the heat but principally from tension developing over anticipated competition with the weather and one another.

In the hotel lobby Anne Howard sat in a corner of a soft, deep sofa. Her head rested against the back and her arms lay limply on the cushion. The palms of her hands opened to the room. It had taken from 6:30 this morning until a few moments ago to get her two children dressed, fed, organized, and in the care of her baby sitter. She thought to herself,

"How good a cigarette would taste, but I'm too tired to get one and light it." Anne let a feeling of rebellion and resentment lie heavily on her mind and body, waiting for the bitterness to boil to the point where it would be stronger than her fatigue. Discontent finally welled up inside her and she jerked upright, snatched her purse and fumbled inside for a package of cigarettes. When her groping hand found none, a sound of exasperation exploded from her lips.

"Wish I could offer you one, but I don't smoke!"

Humiliation burned through Anne as she realized that this lovely looking lady who had just spoken to her had been sitting close by watching her frustration and sensing her need. Anne felt piqued at having been thus caught.

Without waiting for encouragement from Anne, the other woman continued, "You look like I feel. These damn pilots' meetings and these damn pilots. My life seems to be nothing more than playing second fiddle to a miserable tin bird."

Anne felt pleased that she had apparently found a companion in misery. A slight smile began to catch one corner of Anne's mouth and the other woman continued, "You are Bob Howard's wife, aren't you?" As Anne nodded her head, the other introduced herself, "My name is June Elder, Frank Elder's wife. He pointed you out to me at the field yesterday. He thinks your husband, Bob, is a terrific pilot. Is he?"

Anne felt a momentary recurrence of the old pride she used to have about Bob's piloting skill, but the feeling was immediately drowned by her present bitterness. She answered, "Oh, I guess so! I'd hate to have him killed, and have to bring up two children without their father."

"Well," continued June, "You know it's not really that dangerous. It took me a long time to believe it, but gliding, I know now, is safer than riding a bus, a train, or an airplane. I know how you feel though.

As for me, I'm glad Frank is a steady, conservative pilot."

Slowly the two girls became conscious of an intrusion. They looked up to see a tall blonde standing politely awaiting acknowledgment of her presence.

"I beg your pardon, but do you have any idea when the pilot's meeting will be ended?"

Swallowing a nasty impulse to say, "Who knows! Who cares!" Anne answered, "Any minute now." Glancing at her watch, she continued, "It's almost 9:50 and they all like to get to the field around 10:30 or a little after, so they will have to break up very soon."

Before the girl could comment, June said, "If you are waiting for one of the pilots, you're welcome to sit with us."

The blonde girl gracefully sat on the sofa beside Anne, and though she remained admirably erect from the waist up, her slender body appeared to be quite relaxed. She folded her hands and crossed her legs with the ease of a professional model. She softly said, "Thanks."

June introduced herself and Anne, and they learned that the newcomer was Betty Coverley. Following the introductions, an hiatus in conversation set in. Betty immediately produced a box of cigarettes and offered them around. Gratefully Anne accepted one. Taking a long inhalation, she began to talk as the smoke left her lungs. She had noticed the wedding ring on Betty's finger so she said, "Mrs. Coverley, we have been complaining to one another about being glider widows. How do you feel about it?"

"Oh," Betty started, "this is my first national contest and I'm so confused and the heat during the day is so unbearable and I'm afraid to move almost, for fear of making a faux pas and really I'm so unhappy." These words had rushed from her pretty mouth so fast that both her listeners were somewhat surprised,

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