

Cruising along at three-thousand feet under a high overcast making for smooth air, Sandy relaxed between maneuvers. The Biennial Refresher Ride with examiner Ben Asher would be over soon.

The handsome man she met before the flight was still on her mind. When their gazes met, something magnetic happened. Like the view of the distant horizon, her life would change in unseen ways in a mere twelve days.

Speaking into the headset mic, "The best part of my days is the time in the air." She turned toward Ben, who sat in the plane's right-hand seat filling out a form on his knee-pad.

"I know what you mean." The older, white-haired man checked off the last item on the flight exam form on his knee. "Okay, almost finished. Except for a forced landing practice."

Enjoying the gentle air, Sandy smiled in satisfaction. Ben pulled the throttle to the idle position. "You've just had an engine failure," he said.

But the engine didn't just go to idle. After a couple of coughs, it quit running entirely. Silence fell on the cabin, the rushing wind outside the only sound.

Sandy felt her heart racing. "Oh crap, this isn't good."

The worst sound that a small aircraft pilot can hear is quiet. She lowered the nose to keep flying speed.

Ben had a stunned look on his face.

"There's a good field over to the left. I believe I can glide to it," speaking over the headset, trying not to let panic show in her voice.

Ben nodded his approval.

She tried to relax but this was not practice anymore. Making a gentle turn and setting up her best glide speed of eighty, she headed toward a grass area where landing would be best without causing damage to her plane. Her blond ponytail swished from side to side as she leaned forward and scanned the instruments.

Sandy began the engine restart procedures. "Carb heat on, check. Mixture and throttle full, check. Now restart," as she turned the starter key. It rotated the prop, but the engine didn't even pretend to want to crank.

"Okay, throttle back to one-third, in starting position." Tried again, and although the prop rotated, the engine would not even burp like it might start. Nothing.

"Anything I haven't tried, Ben?" she said. He shook his head.

"Okay, landing in the field," she mumbled.