

## Freedom Alone

“Only you and the pilot,” the man told the stewardess while on the ground in Seattle.

“We’re going to Mexico.”

The woman’s hands shook as she handed him the bag with one thousand twenty-dollar bills. Four parachutes sat on the rear seat of the Boeing 727 airplane.

“Now, go into the cockpit and stay there. Don’t come out here. When we get to Mexico, we’ll all go get some tequila. On me,” Cooper patted the bag of cash the long-legged blonde had just handed him. Her body trembled beneath her red jacket. This made him smile.

The man with a face anyone would recognize but no one knew watched as the woman sashayed down the aisle to the cockpit. She’d left him with three tiny bottles of tequila. He raised one in a toast to their upcoming adventure together as she turned around looking at him one last time.

“Cheers,” he said.

After three tequila shots, Mexico was no closer. Cooper leaned over the seats in the thirty-third row watching the treetops through the oval window. The plane was slower in speed and closer to the ground than the last flight Cooper was on from Portland to Seattle.

“Time to go, Coop,” he said.

Cooper took off his tie gazing at the gold clip. A smirk spread across his face. He wouldn’t need that piece of ore where he was going. After stepping into one parachute the FBI

left him, Cooper left the three extra chutes on the floor between aisle thirty-two and aisle thirty-three.

“This is what I came here for. Adventure. And freedom,” Cooper said as he opened the back staircase door. The creaking steps startled him over the sound of the wind. His hair whipped to one side as his suit jacket clung to his skin.

“Take me with you.”

Cooper turned. The blonde with the beautiful legs stood just feet from him with a parachute in her hands.

“Not today, babe.”

“Roger?” she asked.

“You’re on your own. I only needed you for the plane. Tell them whatever you want. I’m going to freedom.” Spit clung to Cooper’s cheeks as he yelled loud enough for the blonde to hear him over the wind. “And my name is not Roger.”

She stepped forward reaching out to him. The man she’d met last night in the bar stood in front of her sweating despite the cold air filling the cabin.

“It’s not Mexico, but my heart is in the water down there. Alone with freedom.” Cooper spoke in a whisper. His flesh tingled with goosebumps. Resigning himself with a cross over his chest and face, Cooper took a step, clung to the cash he’d strapped to his chest, and plummeted to the ground. The cold air thousands of feet above Portland was nothing compared to the air forcing his cheeks outward as gravity stopped its hold on the man known as DB Cooper. The blonde stood at the open doorway of the plane Cooper had hijacked.

The ground was close but not close enough. He still had ten thousand feet between him and safety. The sun's light glistened off the water. He tried to scream. To exclaim his freedom. His attempts to touch the money strapped to his chest failed. He fell with his arms whipping behind him and watched as twenties by bundles pulled away from the harness. A breeze picked up and pushed Cooper's body toward the coast. Freedom waited for him.

Cooper pulled a cord opening the parachute. *Freedom* was below. She was there, on the beach rocking as each wave drove her closer to shore. Money scattered in the wind landing on the beach below.

"Freedom," Cooper called from his position hundreds of feet in the air.

A branch caught his parachute, leaving Cooper twenty feet off the ground. Five hundred yards from *Freedom*. But she was there. Right on the beach where he'd left her. *Freedom*.

Cooper wriggled out of the chute and fell to the ground. His broken ankle swelled on impact. On hands and knees, Cooper found his way to *Freedom*. He climbed aboard.

"Fuck," he whispered. *Freedom*, a twenty-seven-foot Coronado sailboat, lost her hold of the sand below her pushing her out to sea as Cooper drifted off to sleep.

Clouds from the west rolled in stirring up the sand on the deserted beach. Waves broke before pulling out again. Sand swirled on the beach as Cooper's breathing slowed. A funnel of wind pushed sand into ripples across the shore.

Birds scattered to prepare for the brewing northern Pacific storm. One seabird landed on top of the water leaving just as quickly with a small fish in his mouth. Another landed on shore leaving with a marked twenty-dollar bill in his mouth. Winds scattered sand covering DB Cooper's freedom. *Freedom* crossed over the horizon as the man known as Cooper slept.