

An excerpt from *A WILD RIDE ON A SEESAW*, a novel by Blas Padrino

A WILD RIDE ON A SEESAW

CHAPTER ONE

Early August, 1992.

He had the granddaddy of all headaches. Lindy moaned and rubbed his temples. To no avail. It had to be the tension, he thought. Or breathing the diesel fumes from the boat's engine. Well, he'd also snorted some coke in the afternoon, but it'd been just a couple of hits; a couple of lines to keep Tanya from going bonkers. They'd only been two days out of Key West and she was already jumpy. Still, he didn't like doing dope when he was in the middle of business. If he'd find out that Tronko or Carlos or any of his people were doing it they'd be history.

But Tanya was different. She was part of his cover, so he had to humor her. And, he had to admit, you give that woman a sniff of nose candy and she takes you to heaven. Lindy couldn't suppress a smile. It made his brow wrinkle. A bolt of pain smacked him between the eyes. *Damn headache*. Anyway, she'd crashed now and would stay asleep – and out of the way – for at least the next twelve hours.

The boat slowed down. The engine's noise hushed and the hammer that banged inside his head eased up a bit. They must be closing in on the rendezvous point, he figured. He looked up at the sky. The night was full of stars. But when he fixed his eyes on the horizon all he saw was blackness. He turned towards the pilot house. "Is this the spot? I can't see shit!"

A diminutive man came out on deck.

"José, are you sure we're in the right place?" Lindy asked.

"Si, Señor Lindy. I'll show you."

José picked up a spotlight, pointed it ahead and clicked it on and off three times. Moments later, out of the darkness, a light blinked back at them.

"There's the mother ship," José said. "The supermarket." He laughed long and loud. Louder than one would expect from such a small man. Lindy stayed stone-faced.

José gave Lindy a disappointed look. "You don't think it's funny."

Lindy rubbed his temples. "Very funny. But I have a mother fucker of a headache. It hurts when I laugh."

José pulled a plastic bag out of his shirt pocket. He opened it, removed a few brown leaves and offered them to Lindy. "Chew on some coca. It's good for the headache."

Lindy turned his face and pushed José's hand away. "Not this headache," he said. "Let's get this deal over with."

José handed the spotlight to Lindy. "Give 'em three blinks every minute or so, okay?" He hastened back to the pilot house.

Lindy watched as his boat closed in on the intermittent flashing lights. All of a sudden, the hulking shape of a freighter appeared before him, its towering silhouette etched in shining black against the opaque blackness of the night. While José maneuvered the boat alongside it, the lights on the big ship's deck turned on and a Jacob's ladder dropped from it. Lindy rushed down to his cabin. Inside, he looked at Tanya for a moment, sprawled naked on the bed, her hard body tangled with the satin sheets, a trickle of snot frozen on her upper lip. Sexy. Even like that, with flaky toenail paint and hair all mussed up.

Lindy moved quietly, so as not to wake her. He knelt by a footlocker, opened it, took out a backpack and strapped it on. He went back on deck and climbed up the ladder to the freighter.

As Lindy reached the railing, a tall, muscular man offered him a hand up. Lindy took it and hopped onto the deck. Next to the man who helped him aboard, stood a stocky, curly-haired, man who, for a moment, scrutinized Lindy's face.

"Lindy, right?" he said.

"That's me."

"They'd faxed me your picture." The man patted his chest. "I'm Julio." He pointed at the backpack. "You have my money."

"It's all in there. A million in hundreds."

"May I?" Julio reached for the backpack.

Lindy hesitated a moment, looked around him. A half-dozen men armed with automatic rifles watched from various points of the deck. One side of his mouth twitched. He handed Julio the money.

Julio nodded to his muscle-bound associate and looked back at Lindy. "With your permission," he said.

The large man moved behind Lindy. A pair of beefy hands patted him down the sides of his body, from armpits to ankles.

"He's clean," Burly-man rasped.

"Bueno," Julio said. He turned to Lindy and shrugged. "I am sorry for the inconvenience, but rules are rules. No?" He smiled. "Let's go inside and have a drink while we count the money."

"That's going to take some time," Lindy said.

"We have a couple of scanners. It'll take 15 minutes. You'll be packed and ready to go by the time you finish your *pisco*. I got your 500 keys on a pallet."

The men walked across the deck in the direction of the bridge. Lindy glanced over the other side of the freighter. There was a smaller boat anchored nearby. A 50 millimeter double-barreled naval gun protruded from the deck. Lindy froze. His headache came back with a vengeance. He glared at Julio. "Who the fuck is that? You got the fucking Coast Guard out here!"

"Relax, amigo," Julio grinned. "No need to get worked up."

"Are you shitting me? You with the DEA?" Lindy began to hop in place. Part of him wanted to punch Julio out. Part of him wanted to make a run for the railing and jump off the ship. He wasn't sure which would get him killed faster. *I'm toast. I'm fucking toast.*

Julio inspected his fingernails. "Everything's fine. We're in Cuban waters. That out there's security."

Lindy pointed at the gunboat. “That’s not the Coast Guard?”

“It’s not the *gringo* Coast Guard.”

The tremor on Lindy’s lower lip subsided. He let out a sigh of relief. “You had me going there for a minute, Julio.” He massaged his temples. “Let’s go have that drink. I need it.”

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An hour later, Lindy lay on the bed, too wired to sleep. Still knocked out, Tanya had one leg clamped around his, her breasts pressed tight against his shoulder. But the headache had given way to the exhilaration of the moment. The numbers kept dancing inside his head: He’d borrowed one million and had to pay back two. When he sold the cocaine in New Orleans it would fetch 15 times what he’d paid. He’d settle with the loan shark and still score thirteen million. After taking care of the help and covering expenses there’d be a cool ten left over. By next week, he’d be swimming in dough; enough to last him a lifetime.

If everything went as planned.

And why not? He already had Tronko and Carlos, hidden in the bayou, stirring things up with the shrimpers. That was his idea. His stroke of genius. The Cajuns and the Vietnamese fishermen hated each other’s guts and were itching for a fight. All they needed was a little encouragement. Lindy figured that if he messed with their boats and busted up their gear the Cajuns would blame the Viets, and the Viets would blame the Cajuns. Once the war got started, the cops would have their hands full keeping the sides apart. No time for roadblocks and traffic checks. Even the feds would be too busy to pay any attention to his smuggling venture. He’d land the coke and drive it away without any trouble. It’d be he and Tanya, looking like a tourist couple, headed for New Orleans in an RV.

He turned toward Tanya and ran his hand down her body until it rested on the curve of her hip. His lips stretched into a self-satisfied grin. He cupped his hand and squeezed. Soon, all his mornings will be just like this one. No headaches and a sweet piece of ass in hand.

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