

## Hell's Bounty

Aida threw her top off and the nightclub erupted in cheers.

Every occupied chair bar swiveled towards the stage, and every chair fortunate enough to be near the front row went vacant. The men who had inhabited them rose to their feet, in reverence for Aida.

The music kicked on and she got to work.

Aida glided across the stage with grace and poise. The type of grace that makes men drool and their wives jealous. Aida's poise isn't the kind that is bestowed arbitrarily at birth, or the sort to be coached, no. This poise could only be acquired by puttin' in the hours. The hard hours. Painstaking experience gained through the relentless passage of time. That's what made her special. Aida. That's what she allowed them to call her.

Aida demanded attention. And she got it. From everyone in the room except for two people... Me, and my target, Roy Candy.

Candy was surrounded by his goons high up on a balcony above the stage. He stared daggers into the back of some guy in the front row trying to get handsy with Aida. Front row Joe keeps reaching up, grabbing at Aida's thigh with a damp dollar bill and she's not having it. Neither is Candy. If looks could kill, this'd be a funeral. I didn't know who the hell that bastard was that caught his eye, but I did know one thing: he was going to die tonight. Horribly, too.

I'd been hunting Roy Candy for three years and this was the first time I'd ever seen him in person. Hell, I doubt I'd ever been in the same room as him. But I knew it was him. His face is scarred to hell, and nobody else is wearing cowboy hats in this part of town. Three long years of chasing after Candy, always one step behind him. Missing him by a couple of days here, a couple of hours there. But finally, I'd caught up with the bastard.

Candy was notorious as he was elusive. A stone cold killer with a supernatural reputation. Rumor had it he had access to black magic's. Hoodoo shit. People've said he could walk through shadows. Teleport. Show up at places he couldn't possibly be. Escape places without being seen. I wasn't buyin' it. But I'd be lying if I said I wasn't taking it into account. Might explain why I hadn't been able to catch up to him 'til now. I'd been in my line of work for twenty years and I was pretty damn good at what I did.

Every disreputable riff raff knew who Candy was. What he'd done. Few had interacted with him. Fewer had lived to talk about it. That's how I got the gig. A revenge hit. Candy killed my

employer's son. The heir to an oil empire as corrupt as the government that took it's money. I wasn't judging'em. I was gonna take their money too.

But after three years of tracking this ghost, I'd caught up to him. I had to play it patient so I didn't scare him off. I figured if he's pre-occupied with bloke in the front row, he wouldn't see me coming. I didn't know if I'd ever get another chance like this. All thanks to that jerk off who insulted his dancer.

"Another round," the barmaid shouted over the music. I swiveled around to a dime-of-a-dame. A knockout with a pretty smile.

"Old fashioned," I replied, "Say, who's that up there on the banister? Rough lookin' ain't he?"

"Oh, Candy? He's the owner," She said as she made the drink, "Better not let him hear you say that. He's pretty self conscious about his look."

"You know him pretty well then?"

"He pays my bills," she said as she slid me the glass, "but he doesn't come around here too often. Must be something important going on tonight."

I swiveled around and Candy was gone. Just my luck. As soon as I get a trail, he gives me the slip. Aida was winding down on the stage, collecting her clothes and the last couple of loose dollars. But the guy who Candy was staring down was still there. Drunkenly waving those one's at Aida. She ignored him. Good girl.

After the cold shoulder she gave him, I could tell the guy was pissed. In more ways than one. He didn't look like the type that was used to rejection. A tall, dark and handsome fella. If I'm going to get close to Candy, I'm gonna need to keep an eye on him too. Luckily for me, he kept those dollar bills, strode up to the bar, and slammed'em on the counter. I said he was a good lookin' guy, but up close I could see why Aida ignored him. He looked like shit and smelled like piss.

Aida's song faded out while the DJ was prepping to introduce the next dancer, still, this shithead yells, "Give me another." He waved an empty bottle at the bartender. He turned back to the stage before she could reply, but she was a good sport and got him what he wanted.

Now was my chance to get to know him better. I'd stick close to him. Surely Candy'll come looking for this disrespectful schmuck sooner or later. Then, I can take Candy out. After all this time, I'll finally be able to cash in on that bounty.

"You usin' that," I pointed at the ashtray behind the guy and packed my smokes. He turned and slid it across to me.

"Want one," I asked.

His thick, moist, meaty fingers pinched towards my pack. I gave him one. He jams the butt between his lips and I light it for him and then mine. The DJ spins a bass heavy rap song as Tiyana gets to work.

I say, "That Aida, huh? She's somethin' ain't she?"

He mumbles something under his breath. I couldn't make it out so I say, "what?"

"I said don't talk about my girlfriend." This time he tuned up the volume of his voice a bit higher than necessary and puffed up his chest. There's no way this drunk asshole is dating her with the way she was acting. I call bullshit.

"Bullshit. Ain't no way a dame like that could go for a tramp like you."

I was doing whatever I could to keep this guy here talking to me. And even though I hadn't seen Candy in a while, I knew he was eye'in him. I figured if I had any shot at catchin' the big fish then I'd need some good bait. And sure enough, I had the minnow on the line with that one.

"Who the fuck do you think you are," he said, red-faced. He stood up and shoved me out of my seat. I didn't have any intentions of fighting the guy and definitely not after he lifted his shirt; flashing his piece at me, "You better watch your mouth old man. You don't know shit. I'm the one who's going home with'er tonight. While your sad sack sits here diddling yourself, and smoking these nasty fuckin' stoges."

He flicks what's left of the cig at my jacket and stares me down, waiting for my move. Now I see why Candy was eyein' him. He's a sunova bitch. An armed and dangerous one. The worst kind.

As I wiped the ash of my jacket, two of Candy's goons come up from behind the guy and grab him, one on each arm.

"Eyy, what the fuck is this?" He slurred, "Let me go."

The two brutes weren't much for words. He kicked and flailed as they drug him through the bar to a steel door, guarded by a third goon. The man in front of the door opened it and stepped to the side, while the others disappeared behind it. Once they were through, he closed it and resumed his post in front of it, arms folded.

The pretty barmaid hands me the drink and gives me a look that says, 'sorry about that drunk asshole,' and I shrug. I down the glass and slid her a big bill.

"Keep the change."

Chapter 2(Optional to use)-Charle's addition.

If I wanted to make a dent against this Candy, I needed the right type of instrument. I phoned up HQ to see what they had in stock. My contact, Virgil, mentioned that I might go with an acid tipped Kukri from my past job in Brazil. That was a dicey contract, but I did pick up an unexpected souvenir.

Because Candy was a pro at disappearing, I needed to make sure I could track his location for a while. The plan was to keep tabs on his daily routine and extrapolate the variables to set up a decent trap. It wasn't going to be complicated, but timing was everything.

From chatting with Virgil, I headed out of the club and back to my car. I fired up the engines and followed the path south. Virgil mentioned earlier that the next spot Candy was going to hit up was a smoke shop. My knowledge was limited as to how long he would stay there, but in my past experience being around these types of places, he was always hunting for a favorite piece or probably knew the staff. Or owned the staff. I weighed these probabilities as a vantage point and decided to start preparing the big dance.

Because I had to get in close to contain Candy and he could bounce out at a moment's notice, I had to prepare for exit points. In the store, there were 2 entrances. One was in the far north east corner and the other was directly south, in the middle. A couple of windows scattered on each opposing side, but there wasn't anything else. My best guess was Candy either owned this shop or he knew a contact here.

For the northernmost entrance, I had to think of something that would throw him off. He'd be expecting a direct trap, but since his mystical powers were more tangible with the intel I had on him, I'd use this as a diversion to catch him on his left flank. Good. I finally had something pieced together.

For the door, I prepared two aerosol cans in my pack with zip ties. These makeshift firebombs would complement the door laced with ether perfectly. Okay, so entrance 2 was set. What about the direct entrance? And what if doors didn't affect him with his abilities?

Entrance one was going to be more traditional. Because I could confirm he dabbled in voodoo, I decided to find the antithesis to that. I didn't have anything precise on me, but this flask of holy water I got a while back on my last trip to the church would have to do.

With the holy water, I just set this to the right side of the entrance of the lobby underneath a chair. It was good to have weapons on standby. I couldn't hold everything in my belt like I wanted.

The tricky part was getting Candy's attention without raising an alarm to the rest of the patrons. Even if I couldn't capture Candy immediately, tagging him with a tracker charm would prove useful to keeping tabs on him. I'd eventually get him, but I have to wait, not directly chase. If he catches on, he alerts his entourage and the mission is toast. I would be stepping into a firefight vs. a victory lap.

As I was setting up this trap, Candy trotted through the door with two guards. I quickly moved to the side, making sure he didn't make eye contact with me. If I was going to contain this guy, I had to do the unexpected to him.

Everything was in place, so I decided it was showtime. I rushed his two guards, ducking under the swinging fist of one and tripping the other with my right leg. As I dealt with the initial impact of my knee, Candy scrambled for the north entrance. Just as I planned.

Slightly limping, I used everything I had left in me to go after Candy. He was chanting some words and he started glowing. To interrupt this process, I threw the water bottle fused with holy water I prepared from earlier.

Screeching, Candy panicked from the splash of water. I quickly zip tied his hands together and drug him along with me to the car. The effect would be temporary, so I slipped the tracking charm into the coat of his right pocket. He tried to continue the chanting, but I muzzled him with some bark I picked up earlier in the parking lot of the forest area.

The job appeared to be done. Or at least halfway done at this point.