REDEMPTION OF A BROKEN MAN

Nervous Anticipation – August 24, 1989

Rory Walsh sat nervously in a rented pickup truck on that dark and haunting three a.m. evening in Virginia Beach. Sighing deeply, he considered the dangerous endeavor he was about to undertake. He was parked across the street from the Pappas Brothers Bar & Grill. Once a month, the owners hosted a high-stakes underground poker game in the basement, which attracted a diverse clientele ranging from lower-income to several well-to-do players. They also offered a variety of enticing side plays, supposedly lucrative to the players, but in fact mostly money-grabbing scams.

After each game, the Pappas brothers, armed with handguns, transported the house-money in a locked metal briefcase to their small office building across the street, where they secured it in a safe. The amount varied anywhere from $100,000 to $300,000, depending on how fortune (or perhaps luck) tilted on any particular evening.

Rory was laser-focused on the rear exit door, through which the Pappas brothers would soon exit to deliver that evening's revenue. Briefly, he glanced across the parking lot at his two accomplices, his younger twin brothers, Aidan and Braden. They were lying on the ground up against the building in the fetal position, disguised as hobos. They each held a bottle of MD 20-20 in one hand and a spray can of military-grade mace in the other. Rory's sweaty hands firmly gripped the steering wheel. Momentarily, he considered calling it off but stayed put as he reminded himself of why he and his two younger brothers were willing to face such intense danger.

As he waited, Rory reflected on his broken life. He was first charged with assault when a drunken asshole groped his widowed mother in the family bar in '68. He got lucky, as the judge offered him the opportunity to join the military in lieu of jail time. The countless life-threatening situations he faced in Vietnam periodically haunted him.

There were three important ladies in his life: his beautiful but mentally impaired younger sister, Erin; her seventeen-year-old daughter, Fiona; and his girlfriend for the past fifteen years, Angie. Guilt struck him for stringing that beautiful young lady along and not yet putting a ring on her finger. Most important now was his recently deceased mother, scammed by the Pappas brothers.

He worried about the fact he was putting his two younger brothers in peril. Over the past few weeks, Rory desperately scrambled to find alternative solutions to solve his grave financial problems, but he always came up empty. He also reminded himself he was an ex-con who'd done time for a second assault and getting busted was not an option. They absolutely had to pull this thing off without a glitch.

Finally, he thought about the most profound life lesson he learned from his Uncle Oscar, his chess mentor. *Always be thinking two or three moves ahead of where you are at any given moment.*

Who Is Rory Walsh?

Rory Walsh was born on October 25, 1950 into a middle-class family. They resided in Cape Charles, Virginia, located at the southern portion of the Delmarva Peninsula. Both of his parents were Irish immigrants, and they opened up a bar and restaurant called Luck of the Irish Lounge. The oldest of four children, his siblings idolized Rory in spite of the challenges he encountered over the years. His younger sister's mental impairment placed enormous stress on their parents. Their father was a raging alcoholic and ultimately died of cirrhosis on Thanksgiving Day in 1965. Rory was only fifteen, but he immediately assumed the male leadership role in the family.

In their late teens, Rory and his brothers earned a bit of a rough reputation, as they were known to get into altercations, rumored to occasionally be involved in petty crimes.

A neighbor once commented, "The Walsh brothers never met a barroom brawl they didn't like."

They all topped six feet and were physically gifted with strength and good looks to go along with the height. Rory was a great athlete in high school, and swimming was his favorite sport. In fact, he absolutely loved being in and around water.

As an alternative to jail following his first assault charge, he enlisted in the Air Force shortly after graduating high school in 1968. He served as a Combat Controller, a challenging field, and he frequently operated in remote, often hostile areas. Rory would act as a one-man attachment to other special forces teams, trained in a wide range of skills, including firearms, scuba, and parachuting. He served in Vietnam, earned the Air Force Cross for heroism, and

was honorably discharged in the summer of 1972. His younger brothers soon followed his lead and served in the same capacity.

Unfortunately, Rory again faced adversity shortly after his discharge. Lenny Watkins, a drug-addicted piece of human defecation from his neighborhood, forced himself on his then-seventeen-year-old sister, leaving her pregnant. Enraged, Rory confronted Lenny, beat him into submission, and broke his jaw. This time, Rory was convicted of assault and sentenced to two years in confinement. Due to his honorable service and heroism in Vietnam, his sentence was reduced to six months followed by two years of probation, but Rory was a felon.

He responsibly did his time and worked hard to recover from that unfortunate incident. One month after his release from prison, his niece was born, and Rory made a commitment to protect and support her like a father. Lenny Watkins died of a heroin overdose shortly after Fiona's birth.

Meanwhile, Rory was having a difficult time finding stable employment in the Cape Charles area. After his probation period, he considered moving, but he stayed put to honor his commitment to take care of his mother, his sister, and her daughter. Plus, he was completely enamored with Angie, then an eighteen-year-old waitress at the family bar, and they began a passionate relationship. The beautiful young woman, six years younger than Rory, could absolutely go toe-to-toe with him in any aspect of life. She came from a broken home and was street smart and tough as nails.

In the mid-eighties, Rory bought a humble beachfront home so that his mom, sister, niece, and girlfriend had a proper place to live. Rory was persistent and worked hard to earn money any way he could. Due to his criminal record, most companies and government institutions ruled him out. He preferred not to work at the family's bar but did so periodically out of necessity. He also tried various other endeavors, such as landscaping, auto repair, and home improvement.

Recently, he found steady, fascinating work in the local fishing industry. Rory was establishing himself as a dependable and competent employee, and his future finally seemed bright, but two severe financial challenges struck.

First, Rory's mom died after a devastating stroke. Shortly after paying their final respects at her burial, they discovered her major gambling problem. She had run up a

significant debt. She and Uncle Oscar were involved in the underground gambling world in Virginia Beach and got scammed by the Pappas brothers. Uncle Oscar was a disabled World War II vet in his late sixties, who walked with a severe limp. About a month after Rory's mom's death, two goons demanded Uncle Oscar repay their significant gambling debt within two months.

As if that wasn't enough stress, Fiona talked with him at a Saturday family barbeque about her desire to attend college. She was sad and frustrated because she had the grades to get accepted but didn't think it was financially possible. Although Rory's sister was mentally challenged, Fiona was academically brilliant, had ambitions to become a lawyer, and wanted to attend the prestigious University of Virginia. Hardly a cheap date.

The Plan

Later that evening, Rory walked over to the family's Luck of the Irish Lounge, now run by his twin brothers. Rory sat on a stool at the corner of the bar and was greeted by Braden, who happened to be working the bar that night. Without asking, Braden poured Rory a glass of Chianti—his favorite.

He took a long, slow sip. "Braden, you are the man. I really need this tonight."

Braden responded, "Hey, man, do you know what's going on with Uncle Oscar? He was recently in here, and two intense-looking dudes sat at a table with him for a little while. They left in a hurry, and Uncle Oscar has been looking nervous ever since."

Rory was cautious. "Hang tight. We'll talk about it in a bit."

A short while later, Aidan and Uncle Oscar arrived and sat next to Rory. "Pour us two glasses of Chianti, kind sir. We need to have a serious talk about a serious matter."

Braden asked, "What's going on? What do we need to talk about?"

"Uncle Oscar is in a bind and needs our help," said Aidan.

Uncle Oscar informed his three nephews about the Pappas brothers. The Greek immigrants were a dominant force in the Virginia Beach underground gambling world, not to mention master scammers. He and his sister (their mother) got caught up in the Pappas brothers' vile world and were scammed. He used to have a standing seat at those monthly games, and their mom would periodically join him. He went on to explain how much he'd love to get revenge on those "Greek bastards."

Sternly, Braden asked, “So, how much do you owe them?”

A sheepish Uncle Oscar closed his eyes and rubbed his forehead. “$42,000 between me and your mom—but hear me out.”

All three brothers sat glaring at their uncle for a few agonizing minutes. Rory broke the silence. “You mentioned that you want to get revenge on these Pappas brothers. What exactly do you have in mind?”

Uncle Oscar told the boys about the Pappas brothers’ ritual of moving the house-money after card games, then slowly leaned forward. “They could be an easy mark.”

“Are you suggesting we rob them right outside their place?”

“I’m just saying it might be a great opportunity for me to pay back the debt they scammed me and your mother into, and we can get revenge on those pricks. I hear the pot is usually at least six figures.”

Crossing his arms, Rory smiled. “Okay, humor me, Uncle Oscar. How might we pull this off without going to jail or getting our brains blown out by pissed off Greek gangsters?”

Uncle Oscar told them the games typically wrapped up around two a.m. After everyone left, the Pappas brothers counted and organized the evening’s house-money. He provided specific intel on how they placed the money in a metal briefcase, then transported it to the location across the street. The Pappas brothers were control freaks getting on in years, now in their early sixties. Especially with the element of surprise, they could be physically taken down.

Rory interrupted his uncle. “Why would these guys be so risky with that much money? It doesn’t make sense.”

“As I said earlier, they’re control freaks. Plus, they have a delusional sense of invincibility. They really don’t believe anyone would dare mess with them.”

Captivated, the Walsh brothers spontaneously brainstormed a hypothetical plan to step in and grab the earnings from an upcoming poker game. The brothers maintained a high level of strength and fitness, and they could use mace to temporarily disable them. They’d need bolt cutters, as one of the Pappas brothers always attached the briefcase to his wrist with handcuffs. At that point, they could grab the briefcase, hogtie the Pappas brothers, and head home.

When Rory asked his brothers what they thought, both seemed interested. Rory told Uncle Oscar he was free tomorrow, and he'd like to take a Sunday drive over the bridge to get a firsthand look at the location. The twins agreed. They were going on a road trip.

Practice Run

The Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel is an approximately eighteen-mile long, visually breathtaking sequence of structures. It crosses the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay between the Cape Charles area, where the Walsh family resided, and Virginia Beach, where they hoped to pull off their seemingly far-fetched plan. Three sections of bridge held two one-mile-long tunnels in between, enabling passing ships to cross over. So, you drove onto the first section of bridge for several miles, then dropped down into the first tunnel, then drove back up onto the second section of bridge, then dropped down again into the second tunnel, and then completed the trip on the final section of bridge. For those who suffered from gephyrophobia, fear of bridges, the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel was a freaking nightmare.

The next day, the three brothers and their uncle drove over to check out the Pappas Brothers Bar & Grill and get a sense of what they might be up against. They parked inconspicuously across the street. Uncle Oscar pointed out the rear exit door at the bar and the building across the street where they stored the money. He also indicated spots on each of the two front corners the streetlights didn't touch, so they were pitch black at night. The brothers talked about how they could safely position themselves to get the element of surprise. Uncle Oscar suggested they could lie there posing as homeless guys.

Once they felt comfortable with the location, they focused on their exit plan. They figured out the fastest route from the Pappas Brothers Bar & Grill to the bridge, then tried it out. Once onto the first section of bridge, they drove a short way, and Rory stopped at the first of many pull-off locations used for emergencies.

They all got out of the vehicle and leaned over the railing, awed by the magnificent view and the vast magnitude of the bridge. Rory asked his uncle and his brothers if they thought a person could survive jumping off from this point. The guys went back and forth about the dangers and the possibilities. Rory mentioned the water depth ranged from twenty-five to a hundred feet and that the current could at times be strong.

A seasoned and competent swimmer, he concluded, "I can do it with the right gear."

After the discussion, Uncle Oscar, Aidan, and Braden silently reveled in the beauty of the Chesapeake Bay. Rory, however, thoroughly scanned the area below and imagined what it would take to survive a jump and get to shore.

A police car pulled up, and a cop approached them. “Is everything okay here, gentlemen?”

Rory respectfully replied, “Yes, sir, we just stopped for a few to take in the view.”

“I get that, but these pull-off points are for emergency vehicles only. Please move on.”

“So sorry about that. Let’s head home, guys.” Rory found it interesting that the police were so quickly aware of them stopping.

They drove to Rory’s place in Cape Charles, barbequed some steaks, and enjoyed a nice meal. After they ate, they hung out, sipping on Chianti and smoking cigars while Rory and Uncle Oscar played their weekly game of chess. Oscar, a masterful player, taught all three boys, but Rory took a keener interest in the game and was competitive in his own right.

After completing the game, they had a follow-up discussion about their plan. Uncle Oscar told them the specifics about the next high-stakes game.

Rory chimed in. “Look guys, I’m fully committed to do this. Those fucking Pappas brothers need a good beating, at the least. My concern is getting you two involved. My life’s a mess, and I’m dealing with that, but I don’t want you two to cross the law. You both have your lives in order with great families, and you’re doing a great job running the bar. This feels too risky for you to get involved.”

Braden drained his glass and slammed it down on the table, “Rory, you’re my big brother. You know how much I love and admire you, bro, but those motherfuckers messed with Mom and Uncle Oscar, and we need to avenge that shit. I’m in!”

Aidan followed up. “Yeah, Rory. You’re my hero, but we’re doing this with or without you. And let’s not forget about Fiona and the University of Virginia.”

Nodding slowly, Rory stared into each of his brothers’ eyes. “Okay then, it’s settled. Let’s do it.”

Uncle Oscar took a hit of his cigar. They set the date and time and reviewed their plan in detail. Once the date arrived, the Walsh brothers drove over the bridge in a rented pickup truck. They quietly parked and assumed their positions, waiting for the Pappas brothers to exit the bar.

“Go Time”

After a nervous waiting period, the Pappas Brothers Bar & Grill’s rear exit door slowly opened. A complete sense of calm came over Rory. He glanced at Aidan and Braden, who lay inconspicuously, ready to strike.

Preparing to walk to the building across the street, the Pappas brothers scanned their surroundings. They didn’t appear to notice Aidan and Braden. As they crossed, Rory started the truck, flashed his bright lights, and drove directly at them. They both quickly turned and reached for their handguns, but Aidan and Braden sprang up and tackled them, then sprayed the mace into their eyes and held them down.

Rory pulled up and jumped out of the truck holding bolt cutters, two washcloths, and rope. He firmly placed his foot on the face of the Pappas brother with the briefcase and cut the cuffs. Aiden and Braden then stuffed the washcloths into their mouths and hogtied them. Rolling in pain, the temporarily blinded Pappas brothers grunted.

The guys all jumped into the truck and took off. They traveled quickly enough to expeditiously get away, but not so fast as to draw unnecessary attention. After about ten minutes of driving, they made the final right turn putting them on Route 13 North, leading through the toll booth toward the first leg of the bridge.

As they hit the ramp, Aidan shouted, “Oh shit, there’s a car coming behind us.”

Rory maintained the speed limit, recalling how quickly the cop approached during their trial run. He also kept an eye on the approaching vehicle; they were being chased. He pulled into the same emergency stop from their practice run. Rory tossed the truck key to Aiden, then grabbed a duffle bag with a few of his old government-issue military diving gear items: a flotation vest, swim fins, and a sealed, waterproof backpack.

He hurriedly put on the gear, stuck the briefcase in the backpack, and shouted, “Get home safely. Don’t worry. I got a plan.”

To the amazement of his brothers, Rory jumped off the bridge. Minutes later, their pursuers, immediately followed by a police car with a screaming siren, reached them. Aiden and Braden stood in awe as the two vehicles raced past. Gazing down into the water, they saw no sign of Rory.

Aiden said, “Hey, man, we have to trust Rory. He told us to get home safely and that he has a plan. Let’s get the fuck out of here.”

A short distance after the final leg of the bridge, the twins drove past their pursuers who were surrounded by police cars. Their tail had tried to outrun the cops—big mistake for them and a huge break for the Walsh brothers. They headed home without further incident.

Four Years Later

Rory, looking sharp in his tuxedo, stood at the front of the St. James Catholic Church overwhelmed by the sight of the beautiful lady walking down the aisle in her amazing wedding gown. Glancing to his left, he smiled at his two best men, Aiden and Braden, and his usher, Uncle Oscar. On his right stood Angie’s sister, serving as maid of honor, and two bridesmaids, Erin and Fiona. Rory was finally putting a ring on Angie’s finger. They exchanged vows in a beautiful ceremony followed by an amazing reception.

About halfway through the event, Fiona sat next to Rory. “Congratulations, Uncle Rory. I’m so happy for you and Aunt Angie.”

“Thank you, Fiona. So, how does it feel to be a college graduate?”

Fiona teared up. “It’s amazing. I’m not sure how you and my twin uncles managed it, but I appreciate everything you’ve done for me.”

Smiling, Rory hugged his niece. “Now you need to get your law degree and achieve your dream. Who knows? Maybe I’ll need your services one day.” At her gasp, he chuckled. “I’m kidding. Just stay focused on your studies, and your uncles will take care of the rest. Okay?”

“You’re incredible. I love you, Uncle Rory. I’m so happy Mom and I have you in our lives. Thank you.”

Rory gently kissed his niece on her forehead. “I’ll always have your back, kiddo. Now get out there on the dance floor and have fun.”

Uncle Oscar walked up and proclaimed, “Sorry to interrupt, Fiona, but I want to smoke a cigar with this guy.”

Grabbing his glass of Chianti, Rory headed to the deck outside with Uncle Oscar. Aiden and Braden, already seated, sipping on Chianti and smoking cigars, greeted them. Oscar and Rory lit up their cigars, and the four men sat together and relished that very special moment.

Uncle Oscar quietly proposed a toast. “To my amazing nephews, the Walsh brothers. You guys saved my life, salvaged your mother’s honor, and set Fiona up for life. I’m still blown away that you pulled off that deal with the Pappas brothers four years ago.”

“*We* pulled it off, Uncle Oscar,” Rory corrected. “You played a big role. When I swam up onshore scared shitless, you were right there to pick me up and get me safely to that hotel room. I vividly remember how nervous we were that there would be a knock on the door and two henchmen would be there to fuck us up.”

Uncle Oscar responded, “Yes, and I remember counting the money. It was over $220,000. Amazing. And thanks to those dumbass Greek bastards trying to outrun the cops that night, their place wound up getting investigated and shut down. They never did figure out that we did the heist.”

Rory stated, “Well, my ski mask-wearing twin brothers hit those two old bastards so fast and hard, they had no idea what hit them.”

Aiden chimed in, “Yeah, I was worried they’d figure out that we did it. I will never forget that moment when you jumped off the bridge, Rory. I was astounded, but I realized you were thinking a few steps ahead, just like Uncle Oscar taught you. You figured it was inevitable that someone would chase us. You have a pair of brass balls, brother.”

“Failure was not an option," Rory quietly stated. "But we swore to take that situation to our graves, right?”

Uncle Oscar and the twins solemnly nodded in agreement. Then Rory proposed a toast.

“We did what we had to do. Cheers!”

Braden added, “Rory, you seem to be doing great working with the Baldwin Fish & Oyster Company. Looks like you found your niche, big brother.”

Rory took a long drag of his cigar followed by a slow sip of his Chianti.

At that moment, his bride walked up and scolded the Walsh brothers and Uncle Oscar. “So, you’re having a private party, and you didn’t invite me.” She settled herself sideways on Rory’s lap. “Can I take a hit of your cigar, Mr. Walsh?”

“Yes, you can, Mrs. Walsh. My God, you look and smell amazing. What did I do to deserve you?”

On that note, the twins and Uncle Oscar headed inside, and the DJ serendipitously played Santana's slow and sensual "Samba Pa Ti." Rory asked Angie to dance, and they privately enjoyed a passionate slow dance.

As they swayed, Angie asked Rory, "How are you feeling, baby?"

"Well, for the longest time I felt broken, but recently I feel…" Tears welling up, Rory paused as he looked into Angie's beautiful eyes. He took a deep breath as he searched for the right word. "Redeemed. I feel redeemed."

Angie kissed Rory on his cheek, held him tight, and rested her head on his shoulder as they thoroughly enjoyed a dance of absolute joy together.

The End