

Final Cut

When hairdresser Scott Ruffalo—brother of actor Mark Ruffalo—was shot in December, news of his death rippled through L.A.'s celeb and society worlds. Seven months later, the case remains unsolved, but is the fast lane to blame? | By Mark Ebner |

On the night of December 18, 2008, more than 200 people gathered at Caffè Roma in Beverly Hills to pay tribute to Scott Ruffalo—actor Mark Ruffalo's younger brother—who had died 10 days earlier from a single gunshot wound to the head. In the last five years, only two—or perhaps three—murders have taken place in the city of 33,000. “The biggest f***ing crime here is a jaywalking ricket,” says larger-than-life hairstylist Giuseppe Franco, the wiry, tattooed co-owner (with actor Mickey Rourke) of an eponymous Golden Triangle salon located at 350 N. Cañon Dr.

Ruffalo, 39, cut hair at the big-name salon (known for its rock 'n' roll edge and such celeb clientele as Governor Schwarzenegger, Ashton Kutcher and Sylvester Stallone) for the past 17 years, working his way up the ranks to become one of its most successful and popular stylists, earning at least \$200,000 a year and sometimes up to \$6,000 in a single week.

That evening, what his friends recalled at the café was Ruffalo's warm and easy manner. His million-dollar smile. The family man who had been raising two daughters and a step-daughter with his wife, Luzelena (“Lulu”). And his clients, like the one who canceled her therapy appointments because she loved how Ruffalo made her feel every time she came in. “Scott was well-liked. Even the governor, who's a friend of mine, knew who Scott was,” says Franco in his Joe Pesci honk. “He had a very sensitive, delicate heart.”

But there was little denial that Ruffalo—who shared his famous brother's dark good looks—had for years battled a drug problem that brought out another side of his personality. Even given the hairdresser's self-destructive ways, however, Franco and others were still in disbelief at a shocking claim that had been advanced over the last few days: that Ruffalo hadn't been murdered, but that he had pulled the trigger himself.

Attorney **Ronald Richards**—who represents the initial suspect in the case, Shaha Adham, 26, a dark-haired Saudi-American heiress turned Beverly Hills bad girl—alleged in press interviews not only that Ruffalo had been playing Russian roulette on the night in question, but that unnamed associates of his had seen him engage in such deadly games before. “This guy likes to stay in his apartment after he's done cutting hair and smoke cocaine,” said **Richards**, a lawyer well-known to scandal watchers, whose client list has included both ecstasy traffickers and so-called “Limousine Rapist” John Gordon Jones. “Normally, he'd pull the trigger and they would hear a click and independent witnesses have corroborated he's done this.”

(When pressed by *Angeleno*, **Richards** refused to name or give any details about these “independent witnesses.”)

On the night of the memorial, however, the coroner's findings had yet to be released. That evening, according to Franco, Scott's brother Mark, 41, received a text message from a friend who was watching the evening news. The latest? As the actor told Franco: “The coroner said it was not a suicide.” Now—with the autopsy complete—the Beverly Hills Police Department was officially investigating a homicide. “That made Mark and I hug, Mark smiled and I was jumping up and down,” says Franco. “Never ever *ever* will I accept that it was a suicide.”

To this day, the dispute is still churning over whether Ruffalo's death was murder, or whether he was the reckless agent of his own demise. But what is clear, according to friends, is that Ruffalo lived right at the complicated crossroads of money and fame. And his tumultuous life and mysterious death



“We have a saying in the business. Today's peacock is tomorrow's feather duster.”

—Vidal Sassoon
veteran Michael White

add up to an object lesson regarding the lopsided relationships, secret addictions and overwhelming personal challenges that come with servicing the wealthy and famous. Exhibit A? The Giuseppe Franco Salon itself, which had weathered its own scandalous period early on. In the hothouse atmosphere of the L.A. beauty world—where names like José Eber, Sally Hershberger and Christophe can vault to star status as easily as their clients—image is everything but looks can be deceiving. “We have a saying in the business,” says Vidal Sassoon vet Michael White. “Today's peacock is tomorrow's feather duster.”

More than seven months after the shooting, no suspect, as of press time, has been charged in what is still an active BHPD investigation. And what exactly happened in the very early hours of December 1 is still unclear—though at least two witnesses, including Adham, acknowledge they were present at the time of the shooting.

Ruffalo—who had recently separated from his wife—lived alone in a rented condo on Beverly Hills' North Palm Drive just above **CONTINUED...**

...CONTINUED Beverly Boulevard, a jacaranda-lined block of 12 apartment buildings, four blocks from the Four Seasons Hotel, where units sell for around \$800,000 to \$1 million. In the year before Ruffalo's death—according to Rocco Serra, a colleague at the salon—friends had become concerned about his increasingly heavy drug use, which had led to mood swings and even his involvement in a number of street fights.

On the night of the shooting, Adham—who had been a client of Ruffalo's for about a year—was spotted on surveillance cameras entering the hairstylist's building. A child of privilege who attended such prestigious schools as Marlborough and Harvard-Westlake, she is widely acknowledged to be the black sheep of her wealthy family, which has close ties both to the Saudi royal family and to the social swirl of Beverly Hills. Richards, in an initial e-mail to *Angeleno*, confirmed that Adham has used illicit drugs (though he later said he doesn't know about that fact.) "The Adhams were a staple in the society scene. They'd throw these grand dinners but you'd never see that daughter at them. She really was kind of the wild child," says a jet-setting Angeleno who knows the family well.

That same night, a second person, Kristian Muradaz, 30, was also caught on camera entering the building. Richards tells *Angeleno* that Adham and Muradaz (until recently a client of Richards' as well) knew Ruffalo separately and that the two had not met before that night. So why were they there? Adham, says Richards, was simply trying to track down her Range Rover, which she had loaned to Ruffalo. The hairstylist had in turn let Muradaz borrow the car to have it detailed, but it had been impounded and Muradaz was returning the keys.

Police refuse to release basic details about the

According to Richards, Adham—in shock after the gun went off—called her boyfriend, Brian Scofield, 30, who then made a 911 call from a Ralphs on Beverly Boulevard, to report that someone needed medical assistance. Soon after, Adham fled the scene, which her lawyer says was simply a dumb move, not a sign of having anything to hide. "It's stupidity like I've never seen in the history of my legal career," Richards has said.

By the time the Beverly Hills Fire Department responded to the 911 call—showing up at the scene at 1:10AM—Ruffalo was alone and unresponsive. Thirteen minutes later, the police arrived. Allegedly, according to TMZ, the cops recovered two loaded handguns at the



"It's stupidity like I've never seen in the history of my legal career." —Attorney Ronald Richards, on his client—Saudi-American heiress Shaha Adham—fleeing the scene of the shooting



BROTHER'S KEEPER From left: Mark Ruffalo and his brother Scott at a store opening in April 2004. Above: Giuseppe Franco at his Beverly Hills salon.



SHAHA ADHAM A mug shot of the initial suspect in the case. Adham was later released after five hours of questioning.



BRIAN SCOFIELD The police photo of Adham's boyfriend, who called 911 from a local Ralphs.

ongoing investigation, but at some point after Adham and Muradaz arrived at the apartment that night, something went drastically wrong. Claiming that his client was merely a bystander to a rash, out-of-the-blue act on Ruffalo's part, Richards told E! News on December 13: "She [Adham] turned around and was looking at something and then all of a sudden heard him say something about Russian roulette and heard a shot and saw him then slumped over in his chair breathing heavy with some blood coming out of his temple."

(Richards also confirms that Muradaz, about whom he refuses to release any information, was present at the time of the shooting. Recent court documents—a child support case regarding Muradaz's three-year-old daughter—note that he worked last year at the Tower Beverly Hills Hotel on S. Beverwil Dr. at Pico.)

apartment. And Richards, in an interview with the *Daily News*, has acknowledged that Adham's fingerprints were on the gun, but only, he says, because "she had moved some of [Ruffalo's] guns off the table while she was hanging with him so they would not be near her."

Seven days after the shooting, Adham and Scofield turned themselves in for questioning. Muradaz was also questioned by the BHPD. All three were released without charges. And while toxicology reports found traces of cocaine, morphine and alcohol in Ruffalo's bloodstream, the amounts suggested that he was not high at the time of his death. (Adham refused to talk to *Angeleno*; Muradaz and Scofield could not be reached for comment.)

Ruffalo lived for another week. After being rushed to Cedars-Sinai that night, he was kept on life support but never regained consciousness. On December 8, he was taken off the machines and pronounced dead shortly after 10PM. Mark, who had been a constant presence at the hospital that week, was reportedly devastated by Scott's death. (Through a spokeswoman, Mark Ruffalo declined comment.)

Scott Ruffalo was born in the auto factory town of Kenosha, Wisconsin, two years behind his brother. Their father, Frank, worked as a painting contractor.

In various celeb profiles, Mark has described him as more of an "inventor, schemer, dreamer" who moved the family to Virginia Beach to sell his invention, the "Soda Butler," with which consumers could carbonate their own soda. After relocating the family to San Diego when Scott was still in high school (the brothers also have two sisters, Tania and Nicole), their parents separated.

Scott and Mark grew up good friends, and each, after years pursuing their chosen professions, broke into the limelight. Struggling actor Mark (star of such films as *Collateral* and this spring's *The Brothers Bloom*) was a bartender and sometime doorman at such L.A. hotspots as Small's and Chateau Marmont. In 2000, he hit it big onscreen with *You Can Count on Me*, only to be stricken with a benign brain tumor two years later that briefly left his face partially paralyzed. Through CONTINUED...



...CONTINUED it all, the siblings remained close: Scott would often visit his brother on movie sets or do his hair for events, and Mark organized Scott's last birthday party at the salon.

Scott, like his sisters, followed his mother into hairdressing, landing at Giuseppe Franco in 1991. Ruffalo's former co-worker Serra remembers him arriving just out of beauty school, skinny and all smiles. As the price of entry, Franco told Ruffalo to bring some models with him. He returned with three knockouts, all of them African-American, whose hair he specialized in. "He made the kinkiest hair straight as an arrow, shiny like glass," says Serra. Eventually, he inherited the salon's upscale Middle Eastern clients—among them Shaha Adham. "He did princes. He did princesses. His technique was flawless," says Serra.

According to his salon co-workers, Ruffalo was a workaholic—in at 6:45AM every day—and a family man. He married his Mexican-American girlfriend Luzelena ("She's a great Catholic mother, a hairdresser and the nicest f***ing girl in the world," says Franco) and bought a house in Huntington Park with her to raise their daughters. Though he had plenty of celeb clients—Benicio del Toro, members of *En Vogue*, Sean Penn ("If I was busy and he needed touch-ups," says Franco)—Ruffalo would sometimes work pro bono if a client had an audition and couldn't afford him, or when a cancer survivor needed her wigs styled. If he had expensive tastes, he didn't flaunt them. Ruffalo's regular-guy ways set him apart in the fancy Bev Hills salon world. "He drove a pickup and dressed in Levi's and a flannel shirt," says Serra. To which Franco retorts: "It was a f***ing \$400 flannel shirt."

Franco describes seeing him in action—circling the chair to the latest house mix, arms flying, scissors clicking, simply having fun in the moment—

LIKE A PRAYER

Giuseppe Franco—tattooed with the words "They Will Be Done"—holds a shot of himself (right) and Ruffalo, taken a few months before Ruffalo's death.

as akin to watching Tom Jones in concert. "Everybody is coming in for an experience. You aren't getting a haircut, you're getting a show," says the salon owner. Like Warren Beatty's *Shampoo* character, Ruffalo's gift was listening. "You've got miserable clients—the richer they are, the more miserable they are. He had a way with people. He made them laugh," says Franco.

How Ruffalo originally met his client Shaha Adham—who remains "a person of interest" in the case—is not clear. But if Ruffalo had been working his way up the ladder of success, Adham was to the mansion born. Her paternal grandfather, Sheikh Kamal Ibrahim Adham, was the brother-in-law of King Faisal Ibn Abdul Aziz. The sheikh played a role in the notorious Bank of Credit and Commerce International (B.C.C.I.) debacle of the '80s and early '90s; Kamal Adham, a major shareholder, pled guilty to fraud charges, paying a fine of \$105 million.

When Adham's grandfather died in 1999 in Cairo, he left the family's business interests in real estate, telecommunications and hotels (once valued at \$3 billion riyals or around \$800 million) to his son Mishaal, Shaha's father. While Mishaal and his now-divorced wife Hussa, a well-known couture client, owned residences all over the world (Marbella, Morocco, Majorca) as well as a yacht, the Baksheesh, the couple decided to raise Shaha and her two siblings, Sharifa and brother Kamal, in Beverly Hills. Growing up, Shaha Adham reportedly had a bodyguard posted outside her classroom, and she numbered among her childhood cohorts Paris Hilton—another example of great wealth gone gamey—and Nicole Richie. "They were all the same age and they all ran

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...THE RADAR SCOOP CONTINUED FROM PAGE 50 around together,” says a confidante of Kathy Hilton. “When Kathy was telling me about the whole thing, she said, ‘I can’t believe this. She’s just such a sweet girl.’”

Before their divorce in 2007, Adham’s parents had been building a 50,000-square-foot dream house (since sold in 2007 for \$35 million) on a 24-acre parcel off Coldwater Canyon. Famed Parisian designer Alberto Pinto had been commissioned to do interiors for the spread, which included an underground pool, gym and its own vineyard. But Adham’s life appears to have taken a turn around the time her parents’ marriage fell apart. (According to court papers, Mishaal confessed he had entered into a temporary “muta,” or “pleasure marriage,” in Morocco.) Adham, confirms **Richards**, has two children under five years of age fathered by a Jordanian national. But she no longer has custody of either child. As to her current whereabouts, her lawyer states that Adham still lives in Los Angeles.

For those in Ruffalo’s business, working in close proximity to such wealth, fame or power can have its pitfalls. An hour of incidental intimacy with a celebrity can provide a window into a parallel world—and sometimes that window feels like a door. “You’re like an untrained psychotherapist,” says Eli Thomas of Santa Monica’s Thomas Chance Hairdressing. “You become part of the celebrity’s tribal council. It’s an incredibly intimate experience. People will come in and drop insanely heavy emotional things on you.” Though not all stylists agree that the biz is different than any other creative field, Thomas says he has witnessed his fair share of flameouts. “Stylists always have a pocketful of rip money. It’s easy to pick up too many drinks and go after the other stuff. I can think of tons of car-cash stories, stylists who went from having it all to sleeping on couches, ones that have overdosed and ended up in rehab.”

In the mid-’80s, Franco himself got caught up running after an even darker glamour. “I don’t know if it’s generally known,” says Serra, “but [the mob] was extorting the businesses on the street. And it [the salon] got taken over for a brief period of time before Giuseppe got it all back.” Franco confirms the story—albeit circumspectly: “My sweet good friend I grew up with is Mickey,” says Franco, who takes a call from Rourke during the interview. “Mickey’s making a movie [1984’s *The Pope of Greenwich Village*] and he has to do some research. I start becoming a mob groupie. That’s how that s*** started. I was in heaven. If they came out here and bought a hot dog, I put the f***ing mustard on it. Somehow, I don’t know how, I slept with the devil.”

Ruffalo appears to have succumbed to that same seductive pull of the fast lane. According to Serra, about 10 years ago, Ruffalo started collecting guns. “This guy wanted to be tough. He had something to prove, I noticed... He actually started getting dark—dark energy,” says Serra, who saw a troubling addictive streak in Ruffalo: too many Vicodins or a boxing phase where he would hit the gym three times a day. Ruffalo’s arrest in February 2002 for methamphetamine possession with intent to sell should have been his wake-up call. The court sentenced him to a six-month outpatient drug program and three years’ probation. Ruffalo made a concerted effort to clean up, attending church and going to 12-step meetings. It worked until it didn’t.

By around 2006, Ruffalo had bulked up significantly and was flying into unprovoked rages—Serra believes as a result of steroid use (though Franco notes that Ruffalo went to the gym at 5AM every morning before work: “We called him the f***ing Adonis.”) Astonishingly, Serra claims that, over the years, Ruffalo was stabbed in several street fights. “Yeah, quite a few times he came in all banged up,” Franco remembers. “He was a brawler.” Ruffalo claimed he acquired the injuries in the boxing ring.

In the last year of his life, according to Serra, Ruffalo’s demeanor took on a much more disturbing cast. “That’s where he really started to go f***ing ballistic,” he says. Friends tried to intercede with his substance abuse problem. “I knew I couldn’t do the tough-love talk to him, because a million other people were doing it. Other people were more straight up: ‘God, what in the f*** are you doing? You need to get off drugs.’ He would be like, ‘I know, but I like it,’” recalls Serra, who offered to let Ruffalo move into his place to keep an eye on him. “In the last year, his clientele dwindled to nothing—he only had a few regulars that he had from the early ’90s. But Franco disputes that: “Not one of them [his clients] has left—they’re all here.” (Serra, however, in a follow-up interview, has since denied that Ruffalo lost clients, and insists he does not have direct knowledge of the hairstylist’s use of either steroids or Vicodin.)

Unsubstantiated rumors have swirled since the shooting: It was a retaliation for a drug deal gone bad, or Ruffalo refused to pay off his debt to a group of dealers. Adham herself—approached by TMZ on Robertson Blvd in Beverly Hills in December—had this to say about the episode: “There’s a lot of little pieces to the whole story—not the crime, but to the story—that are going to come out.” (Intriguingly, she called the incident a crime.)

But **Richards** is not hacking down on his claim that Ruffalo’s wound was self-inflicted. “The coroner has not issued any written report,” he told *Angeleno* in January. “Their oral statement is reckless and uncorroborated.” Later, he added: “The fact is there was no evidence that anybody else pulled the trigger. The trajectory was consistent with someone who had a gun at close range and shot himself.”

According to Ed Winter, an assistant chief of investigation at the Los Angeles County Department of Coroner, the bullet entered Ruffalo’s head on the right frontal and parietal scalp and moved downward at a 45-degree angle: “The reason why we ruled it

as a homicide—well, part of the reason—is because most people playing Russian roulette don’t hold the gun at that angle and shoot themselves. The angle just doesn’t make sense.”

Renowned forensic pathologist Dr. Michael Baden, a regular on the HBO true crime series *Autopsy* (who is not involved in the case), agrees with **Richards**—to a point. “Angles can be very peculiar. People can hold guns in different ways,” Baden said, after *Angeleno* provided him with basic details about the trajectory of the gunshot wound. “If the angle is the only reason they ruled it a homicide, then I’d be very concerned, but I’m sure the medical examiner is taking more into consideration than just the angle.”

Franco has his own ideas about what may have happened to Ruffalo. “He got hooked up with people that were doing drugs with him,” says Franco, “because I don’t think [the shooting] was over a bad haircut. You get my point? There’s drugs everywhere. Doesn’t even have to be him that was on them. It could have been the people that bought—if that’s the story—and didn’t pay. Common sense to me, old school, is [that] somebody’s finger was on the f***ing trigger. I just need to get that finger.”

Serra too believes a crime was committed, but, in his last dealings with Ruffalo, he says he had a sinking feeling that the stylist’s life had reached a critical turning point. In one encounter, he remembers Ruffalo being scared, upset and almost crying. Another time, he saw Ruffalo in the salon’s courtyard and made one last attempt to talk to his friend. Ruffalo just laughed it off. “I was really just trying to extend a hand, but he just made a big joke out of it... And you know, unfortunately, something had to end. I actually thought he was going to get busted, and hopefully get put in jail or something, or O.D., and get put in the hospital. But not this. Not f***ing murder.” ▀



STAR-CROSSED Scott Ruffalo and his wife Luzelena at a benefit party in 2002.