

Wealth. High finance. Fraud. New friends and new lovers. An unhinged former CIA operative still looking for thrills. What could go wrong? Murder. Investigators blocked at every turn. Suspects come and go. Old cops point the way.

AFTER THE GULFSTREAM

By P.C. Puccio

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P. C. PUCCIO



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MONDAY
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Total darkness now. Almost midnight.

Warm air apparitions rose over manicured fairways. Cool moisture settled on dewy grasses.

The lamp in the first floor home office shone the only visible glow in the big colonial in bucolic Brookville, Long Island. The house stood left, just off the seventh green of the country club behind too low a fence. Daily bombings of bright white golf balls, finding their way to the deep end of the pool.

He stood next to his desk, cellphone to his left ear. Right arm drawing air circles in anger, maybe distress. Couldn't tell by just looking.

He was visible from a long distance.

The first bullet hit his bicep shattering the humerus, and into his liver, turning his right shoulder six inches backward and clockwise, opening his full torso to the shooter.

The second bullet splintered a rib, then exploded the aorta. Both rounds passing through the victim, now somewhere imbedded in the office walls.

Neighboring house lights came on. Then off.

Forty-two year old G. Roderick Von Ness was dead before he hit the floor.

Two shots. Professional.

Young bucks trying to make a name, shoot once. Usually head shots. Flashy. Messy. Sloppy.

Old pros are two shots to the torso. Always two. Clean. Neat. Done.

Where's my money?

On Tuesday morning, August 13th, the comely Cherry Von Ness, wife of the deceased, rose out of bed at seven-ten a.m., just moments after her usual rising time. She came down the stairs, called for Roddy. She always called him Roddy. Roddy. Sheesh. It seemed to stick.

Overnight, G. Roderick had never come to their bed.

She found her husband of six years, called the Brookville Village Police Department, expressing shock and fear over her tears.

Almost five feet seven, one hundred twenty-five pounds, cream white complexion contrasting silky-straight, raven hair with never-ending legs, she'll have no problem replacing the very dead Mr. Von Ness.

Not to mention the value of the deceased's estate; about fifty-eight million, including the house, brokerage accounts, savings and checking accounts, jewelry, and a vacation home in Naples, Florida. The Jaguar that Cherry liked, titled in Roddy's name, and a couple of leased cars; a Mercedes Benz and Range Rover, of course. Cherry always forgot about Roddy's restored 1963 Split Window Corvette in the six-car garage. He loved it. She couldn't care less.

No, the widow Von Ness will have no problem at all.

Brookville PD immediately sent a unit to the Von Ness address. It was the biggest thing they'd had since the mayor was caught taking kickbacks in exchange for property variances four years ago when he was handcuffed and driven to the county seat in Mineola to await arraignment.

The Brookville PD arrived at seven-thirty. This was no cat stuck in a tree, no suspicion of a nighttime prowler. It was clearly murder and that called for the county cops.

At eight-thirty, in G. Roderick's home office, Nassau County Major Crimes Detective Captain John Alhora stood motionless. Stomach unsettled. His brown eyes flicked around the room, scanning details, absorbing facts. A cellphone on the floor, almost as dead as Roddy.

Then he met the widow.

His only notes were mental, for now. While asking her questions he wanted to focus on her. Her facial expressions, her body language.

She was the widow and good looking or not, she warranted his full attention.

Detective Albora was eighteen years seasoned and too good to be working county crimes. Should at least be with NYPD and put away some real bad guys. Move on up. Nonetheless, Albora was content in his job. But at forty-one years old he was too jaded, and now, even the occasional smell of death, still wore heavily upon him.

The office in the big house had old world furnishings with modern bits of technology. The room had high ceilings corner-to-corner, lots of wood, plenty of books. The laptop computer switched off, as was the wireless printer. On the walls, plaques for community service and family vacation photos. A couple of golf tournament trophies on a shelf. The usual stuff in homes like these.

In the room, everything in its usual, exact, proper place. Which means that maybe it wasn't. What wasn't usual was the shattered window, chest high, next to the wooden acacia desk. Given the entry wounds on the body, G. Roderick was standing, not sitting, when the bullets burst through.

A uniformed, Nassau PD cop stood nearby. Detective Albora told him to take a photo of the position of the cellphone. With that done, the detective, using the tips of his thumb and index fingers, lifted the cellphone lying on the floor. It had been partially underneath the body near the small of the dead man's back. The greying corpse rapidly approaching room temperature now, about nine hours after the shooting. The jaw tight, rigor setting in. Albora checked the recent calls log on the cellphone. An outgoing call. Eleven-forty. He made a mental note of the name of the person called. It was in Roddy's contact list. See what the widow says. Follow up tomorrow. This will be a start.

The well-hardened detective peered out through the now, shard-paned window. Morning lilac air fought the ripening indoor atmosphere in a losing battle. He motioned over another uniformed cop.

Pointing through the open gap in the window glass, along the seventh fairway.

“See that? Go about a hundred fifty maybe two hundred yards back along the fairway. On the right side you’ll see a sand trap. If there’s anything in the trap other than deer shit, bring it to me. Anything. Wear latex gloves. Then take two other uniforms and canvas the neighborhood.”

He knew the uniformed cop would return empty-handed but with grass stained, muddy shoes. This was a professional hit. There wouldn’t even be a footprint in the sand trap. And the neighbors would know nothing.

The county forensics people were already out on a break, their work not yet complete.

“Let’s get going on this. I want those two rounds found and the ballistics on them ASAP,” Alborna yelled to the forensics team.

He still had a critical eye and by the looks of the entry wounds he believed the slugs imbedded in G. Roderick Von Ness to be from a small caliber but high velocity firearm. Professional for sure. The lab will figure it out.

Where’s the weapon? Long gone.

Without leaving the crime scene in the home office, Detective Alborna continued his interview of Mrs. Von Ness, who was standing, motionless in the big home office. He wrote down his findings this time. She, inching to the door, he moving to interrupt her exit from the room of her husband’s death. He wanted to keep her in the same room with the uncovered body, wounds still mildly oozing. He wasn’t being unnecessarily cruel. He’d read about this technique somewhere, long ago. It worked well with immediate family members and other obvious suspects.

After an hour or so, the detective’s notebook was marked with scribbles and abbreviations. They seemed disjointed to the uninformed but included several valuable facts.

Cherry Von Ness was twelve years younger than her deceased husband. Cherry, short for Cheryl. Roddy was a senior executive at a bank in Manhattan, J. P. Morgan Chase, she told Detective Alborna. Frequently away on business. Business trip just last month.

He had no real hobbies except maybe single malt scotch, weekly card games at the club, and reading the occasional biography of a past

president. In that order. His father, G. Rudolph, introduced him to the taste of scotch. Haig & Haig in the identifiable pinch bottle was the old man's poison. G. Roderick's palate favored Glenlivet.

All in all though, G. Roderick was smart, well-educated, well-liked and a good guy. Generous, too.

Cherry did the usual charity rounds, occasional lunch with a casual acquaintance and a couple of eyebrow raising tennis lessons with the club pro, though she protested there was nothing going on. Almost daily visits to Equinox to work out, then over to Starbucks. Whole Foods twice a week and evening bouts with a moderately priced chardonnay. She didn't describe it that way.

That was their life in a few sentences.

Then Detective Albora asked if there was someone she wanted him to call. After she shook her head, indicating "No", he politely left.

A murdered banker. As good as he was, this time Albora might need the feds.

"Nothing is as deceptive as an obvious fact." Sherlock Holmes.

Cherry Von Ness was alone now in the home office. Standing on the other side of her husband's desk, having sidestepped the bloodstained floor, she silently eyed her surroundings. Her gaze landed on a bottle of Grey Goose vodka across the room, sitting on a small liquor cart. Seal torn, but lots of it left.

Too early to mourn. Too early to celebrate.

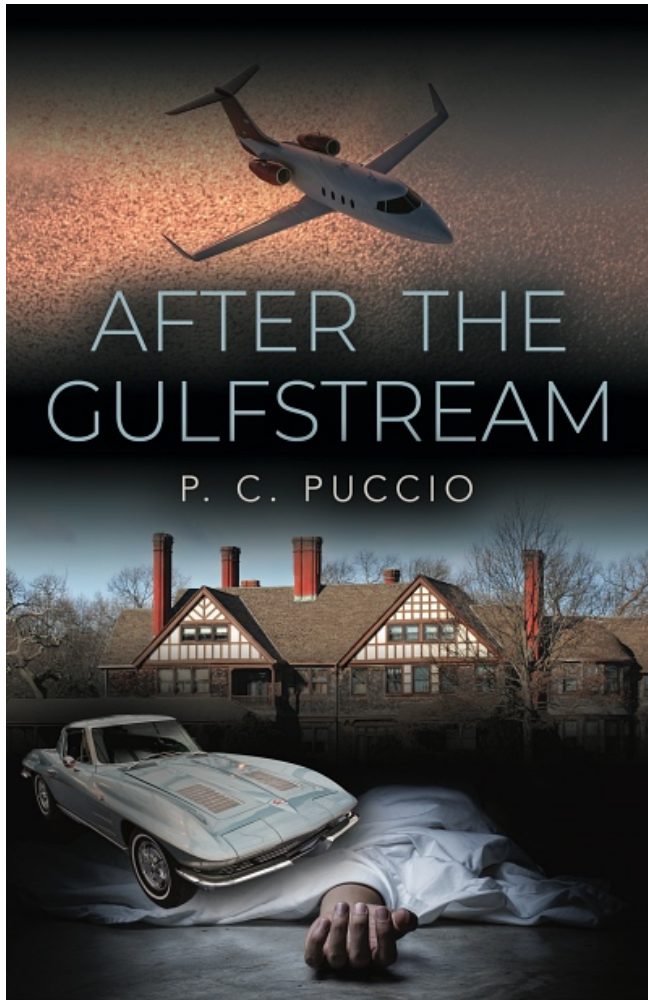
About the Author

P. C. (Pete) Puccio, a Certified Public Accountant, is retired from a forty-five year finance and banking career. Mr. Puccio holds B.A., M.B.A., and M.S. degrees and is currently President of L2 Associates, a consulting firm with a banking and real estate financing focus.

He currently serves on the Audit Committee for the New York City Housing Partnership Development Corporation and the Advisory Board of Lynx Mortgage Bank, Ltd.

Mr. Puccio was on the Board of Directors of the Madison National Foundation, and the Board of Directors of the Real Estate Practitioners Institute of Long Island University as well as serving on the Advisory Committee of the Nassau Educators Federal Credit Union. He was an Adjunct Assistant Professor, at New York Institute of Technology, an Instructor at Long Island University and an Instructor at Molloy College, teaching courses in finance, banking, and real estate investments.

A veteran of the United States Air Force, he is the author of two crime drama novels, *White Burgundy* and *Righteous Endeavors*. He is married, has two married daughters and four grandchildren. He is an avid reader and car enthusiast.



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