

Grand Theft Death

A Salty Sister Mystery
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Grand Theft Death

Chapter One

THE CADILLAC AT the curb mocked me. I wanted to go over and kick the stupid thing, but I'd probably break a toe.

I paid the taxi driver and stepped out of the cab. My front door swung open, and Mrs. Betty Butterfield's small pudgy frame jogged across the lawn, her arms open wide. Two steps from me she stopped abruptly and folded up like a bat taking a siesta.

"Dear Patricia, what a traumatic experience," she said. "How are you?"

I reeked of *eau de jail cell*, my mouth tasted of vending machine coffee, and something icky was stuck to the bottom of my flip-flop. I appreciated her concern, but how did she get into my house?

"I need a shower," I said, running my fingers through my mop of curly blond hair.

She nodded in obvious agreement. "Of course you do. Come in dear, we have breakfast waiting for you."

We?

I followed her into the Spanish bungalow I'd inherited from my recently deceased grandmother. Then I heard the other ladies laughing. "The Ladies," as I'd always called them, had been good friends of Nana's. But why were they here? Was this an intervention to stop my supposed thieving ways?

Three smiling expectant faces greeted me. Mrs. Rita Miller and Mrs. Audrey Taylor sat at my sun-drenched kitchen table. Mrs. Sunny Russo stood at my stove.

“Good morning, Patricia,” they sang in unison.

I slid into a chair and Mrs. Russo plunked a full plate of food in front of me—scrambled eggs, bacon, fried potatoes, plus a huge cup of coffee, and that was just the beginning. On the table were pancakes, fresh-squeezed orange juice, toast, and ham. I smiled meekly and took a huge bite.

“I remember my first time in.” Mrs. Taylor’s wide-brimmed, flowered hat flapped in rhythm with her speech. “I got picked up for shoplifting at Tiffany’s.”

“Shoplifting,” Mrs. Russo scoffed. “Don’t be so modest. A \$100,000 diamond tiara and matching necklace is a major jewelry heist, and you know it.”

“Mine was for check fraud,” Mrs. Miller said, smothering her eggs with Tabasco.

“Mine was just like yours, dear,” Mrs. Butterfield said, her bright yellow dress casting a warm glow onto her softly wrinkled face. “Grand theft auto.” She smiled proudly at me.

In fact, they were all smiling proudly at me. I put down my fork mid-chew and looked from one sweet face to another, trying to grasp what was happening. Apparently I’d gone through a hazing ritual and joined their secret club.

“We’d given up on you, dear,” Mrs. Miller said. A bright red hibiscus rested behind her ear, accenting her shoulder-length, salt-and-pepper hair. “Your grandmother was so pleased when you went into the art world. But this, oh, I wish she’d lived long enough to see you now.”

I attempted to swallow but choked instead.

“Hands up, dear,” Mrs. Taylor said, pounding on my back. “Open pathways are breathable pathways.”

“Nana?” my voice was a whisper.

“Why yes, didn’t you know?” Mrs. Butterfield asked.

I shook my head.

“She got sent up for counterfeiting. She was one of the best.”

I instantly thought of the five dollar bills my grandmother had faithfully given me every birthday, always tucked inside a syrupy greeting card decorated with playful kittens or puppies.

“This is a joke, right? You’re just saying this to make me feel better.”

They glanced at each other, looking insulted.

Mrs. Russo had yet to disclose her transgressions and I looked at her serene face, haloed by a perfectly coiffed silver page boy. “I never got caught,” she said, and The Ladies burst out laughing.

“I can’t believe your grandmother never told you,” Mrs. Miller continued. “She often mentioned that you were her favorite.”

I gave Mrs. Miller a don’t-patronize-me look. I was an only child of an only child.

“Look how similar Patricia’s hands are to her grandmother’s.” She grabbed my arm and held it up like a trophy.

“And you’re so tall and graceful,” Mrs. Butterfield added. “I always thought you’d make a good cat burglar, like Cary Grant in *To Catch a Thief*.”

“She never taught you how to pick a lock?” Mrs. Russo asked. Her diamond tennis bracelet caught the morning light and shot starlight around the room as she gestured to my back door. “Or lift a wallet?”

These were such outrageous questions I didn't know how to respond. I started eating again, hoping the conversation was a hallucination produced by low blood sugar and a lack of sleep.

Mrs. Butterfield stabbed a pancake, plopped it on her plate and smothered it with syrup. "Well, thank goodness Sunny bailed you out," she said. "The jails are pretty rough these days."

Well, thank goodness I'd just swallowed, or Mrs. Taylor would have been slapping me on the back for a second time.

"Mrs. Russo, you bailed me out?" I asked.

She nodded, giving me a sly smile.

I'd called my parents twice during the night, but no one answered. "How did you manage that, Mrs. R?" I asked, falling back on my childhood habit of referring to The Ladies by the first initial of her last name. "It's only eight o'clock in the morning."

"I have some pull with the judge."

I picked up my coffee cup, held it with both hands, and peered over the rim at Mrs. Russo. Of all The Ladies, I knew the most about Mrs. Russo. She was a tall thin woman who radiated elegance. She lived life by her own rules and her past was littered with husbands. At least four from what I'd been told. Her most recent partner, the late Nico Russo, had been involved in organized crime. Arrested for tax evasion, he died in jail before the trial. I didn't know how Mrs. Sunny Russo could influence a judge, but she had connections to the mob, and now I was indebted to her. I wanted to ask her why she had done this, but a question like that smacked of ingratitude.

"Thank you, I'll pay you back," I said. "But I didn't steal that car." Their faces looked skeptical, like Officer Romano's had at the police station. "Really, I just went out for ice cream."

I took a deep breath. "I walked to the convenience store down on the corner, and ran into Julie Gordon, a friend from high school. She was drunk. So I drove her to her apartment in what I thought was her car. Then I had to get home, so I drove the car here." I looked around frantically for reassurance. "How was I supposed to know that it wasn't hers?" My voice rose to a shriek. "I mean, come on, why would I steal a car and park it in front of my own house?"

"Rookie mistake," Mrs. Miller said, shrugging her shoulders. "It could happen to anyone."

"So you really had no idea about your grandmother?" Mrs. Butterfield asked, tactfully changing the subject.

I shook my head.

"Well, there's a lot more to tell you," Mrs. Butterfield continued, "but this probably isn't a good time." She reached over and gave my hand a squeeze. "All I can say is that we are so, so proud of you."

The beeping of a truck backing up interrupted the conversation. Mrs. Russo shot out of her chair and headed out front. We followed her onto the lawn with Mrs. Taylor relying heavily on a wooden cane. A yellow tow truck with the words 'Marino's Towing' on the door positioned itself behind the Cadillac.

Mrs. Russo stood on the sidewalk, hands on hips. The driver jumped out of the cab. Oil stains marked his dark blue slacks and shirt. An embroidered patch above the chest pocket said 'Mel.'

“On a Sunday?” Mrs. Miller said with alarm. “Why is he working on a Sunday? But we haven’t had enough time to—”

Mrs. Taylor elbowed Mrs. M in the ribs and gave her a stern look.

Mel hit a lever and the towing equipment lowered to the ground. The Caddy was one of the longest automobiles I’d ever seen. No wonder it felt like a bus when I turned a corner. Outside of needing a bath, it looked to be in pristine condition.

“It’s breathtaking, isn’t it?” Mrs. B whispered.

“What is?” I asked. “The car?”

“Oh, Patricia, it’s not just a car.” She raised her arms, palms up as if giving a benediction. “The 1959 Cadillac Eldorado Biarritz Convertible,” she said, her eyes filling with tears. “Looks like a rocket, drives like a dream.”

I imagined the massive automobile tipped up on end with the headlights pointing skyward. An arc of chrome running from tail to headlight mimicked the curve of an early spacecraft and oversized fins flared out like supports. I could almost see flames shooting out of the tail lights, propelling it into the ether.

“Mel, what are you doing?” Mrs. Russo asked the truck driver, bringing my attention back to earth.

“Police orders, Mrs. Russo. I’m taking the Caddy to impound.”

Mrs. Russo stepped forward and grabbed his arm. “Oh, no you’re not.”

He hesitated. A look of compassion came over his face.

“I’m sorry, Mrs. Russo.”

I leaned over to Mrs. Miller and whispered, “How does Mrs. Russo know the tow truck guy? And why is she so upset?”

“Sunny and Nico used to own the towing company,” she whispered back. She ignored my second question.

Mrs. Russo let go of Mel’s arm and clenched her fists.

“How long until the owner can claim it?” Mrs. R asked Mel.

“I don’t know. The police have to check for fingerprints.”

I cringed. Mine were all over the steering wheel as well as the door. My cell phone rang from inside the house and I went back in to answer it.

“Hello?” I said.

“Patty?” A breathy voice replied.

I watched out the window as the Cadillac pulled away from the curb and eased down the street like a lumbering elephant. The Ladies flowed back into my house, talking nonstop. I put a finger over my free ear, blocking out the chatter.

“Yes.”

“It’s Julie.”

I’d left her asleep on her bed. She obviously found my note telling her I’d slipped the Cadillac key off her troll doll key ring and used the car to get home.

“Sorry about last night,” she continued. “I was pretty wasted. Could you bring my car over?”

“Your car?” I snapped. “After I drove it home I got arrested for stealing it. I spent last night in jail.”

The Ladies quieted down, listening in on my conversation.

“Arrested!” she replied. “Oh, damn that Jimmy! I could shoot the guy.”

“Who?”

“Jimmy Chang.”

Ish. I shuddered. The name brought back bad childhood memories. Jimmy Chang liked to steal things from me. He stole my marking pens, my colored pencils, my drawing pads; he even pulled a scrunchie right out of my hair one time. And then there was ‘the incident.’ Double ish, I didn’t want to think about that.

“What does Jimmy have to do with this?”

“The car kinda belongs to him.”

“What do you mean, kinda?” A combination of irritation and fear tighten my neck.

“It used to belong to my dad, and after he died I started driving it. Jimmy came by my work the other day and repossessed it. He said my dad owed him money.”

“So, why were you driving it last night?”

“Jimmy was going to sell the car, so I swiped it from the Finley Hotel’s parking lot. Patty, I’m really sorry about all this. I’ll make it right. I promise.”

I felt cold cell walls closing in on me and I broke out in a sweat.

She continued: “I’ll ask my mom if she can drive me over to pick it up; just leave the key in your mailbox.”

“The car’s not here. It’s been impounded.”

The line was silent for a moment. “Jimmy’s a dead man,” she said, and hung up.

I turned to The Ladies. “Julie says her dad owed this guy some money, so he repossessed the car.”

“Who repossessed it?” Mrs. R asked.

“Jimmy Chang.”

“Jimmy Chang,” Mrs. Miller muttered, shaking her head. “*Díos mío.*”

“How do you know Jimmy?” I asked.

Before she had a chance to reply, Mrs. R interrupted: “Patricia, what about the car?”

“Jimmy wanted to sell it, so—”

“Oh no!” Mrs. B exclaimed, her hand covering her mouth. “He’s not going to sell the Cadillac!”

The Ladies turned in unison to Mrs. R.

Her jaw tightened and her eyes narrowed to slits. “We’d better go,” she said.

The Ladies quickly gathered up their purses and headed out the door.

My phone rang again and I answered, only half listening to my mom as I peered out my living room window and watched The Ladies walk across the street. Mrs. Butterfield unlocked the passenger door to a bright yellow older model VW Beetle. Mrs. M hopped in the back, while Mrs. T leaned heavily on her cane, and slowly lowered herself into the front seat. Mrs. Russo lived in the apartment complex next door to me. She stood on the sidewalk until Mrs. B pulled away from the curb.

“So noon’s okay?” My mother asked for the second time.

“Hmm?” I replied.

“Noon’s okay for lunch?” she asked. “Patricia, what’s wrong? You seem distracted.”

“Yeah, that’s fine.”

“I’ll meet you downtown then.”

“Okay.” I hung up.

I suddenly missed my grandmother. Her absence gripped my heart, and I let out a long sigh. If only she would walk in from the kitchen and tell me what to do, or more importantly, who to trust.

I plodded off to take my much needed shower, and pondered the irony, that after all the things Jimmy had swiped from me, I had been arrested for swiping something of his.
Ish.

Chapter Two

AT NOON I met my mother at Lombardi's, a family owned Italian restaurant that had been downtown as long as I could remember. We sat by the window watching shoppers stroll by in the warm June sun.

"Two coffees please," I told the waiter, ordering for both of us.

At first glance, my mother, Genevieve Schuster and I did not appear related. Her deep brown, shoulder-length hair contrasted with my light-colored, uncontrollable mane. I stood at five foot ten, a good three inches taller than her. But what we did share was fair skin that freckled easily and green eyes that took on a turquoise hue when we wore blue.

Ripping off a piece of sourdough bread from the loaf, I dug into the butter, working up the courage to tell her of my arrest. I delayed long enough for her to speak first.

"So are you going to sell Nana's store as a business? Or liquidate?" she asked.

Along with inheriting my grandmother's house, I'd also inherited her business, Elsie's Antiques.

"Neither, I thought I'd give it a go."

It had been three years since I received a degree in Graphic Design. Since then, I'd been laid off from two jobs and fired from another. I was a fine artist at heart, same as my mother and my grandmother. But I'd studied graphic arts, hoping to earn a living.

My mother raised her eyebrows.

"But, what about your graphic art's career?" She made it sound holy. Of course, for the price she and my father had paid for my education, it practically was.

I shrugged my shoulders. "Maybe this will carry me until I get my own design business going."

I was lying. Truth was I'd been bored with the work and bored with my life. What I thought would be an outlet for my creativity had turned into a game of trying to please executives who had no taste and took joy in tearing apart my work. I'd started my own business, but a few jobs here and there barely covered the rent. I was at the end of my financial rope. So when my grandmother left me her business, I moved from San Francisco back to my home town of Lakeville, forty-five minutes north.

The waiter came to take our order. Then we returned to safer topics of weather and food until I noticed my mother staring out the window; I followed her gaze. A meter maid driving what looked like a souped-up golf cart stopped outside the restaurant. A camera sat on the top of the tiny vehicle.

"What's that camera for?" I asked.

"It records license plate numbers and the time. If you're parked for more than two hours on the same street, you'll get a ticket."

"That's not very shopper-friendly."

"Welcome to downtown Lakeville," she said smiling. "You know, I've always believed that meter maids have a sadistic streak."

"Wouldn't you, if you went through police training, but your job description still had the word 'maid' in it?"

"They're called Parking Enforcement Officers these days."

I glanced outside again. The meter maid looked our direction. Her long, straight black hair partially covered her sunglasses. She tucked one side of her wayward locks behind an ear. "Well, that Parking Enforcement Officer is staring at us."

The woman turned her head and pattered off.

"That reminds me," my mom said. "I had an odd thing happen last night."

"You and me both."

"What's that?" she asked.

"You go first," I stalled.

"The police department called me," she said.

"Why didn't you answer?"

She paused and looked at me. "How did you know I didn't answer?"

"Because, I was the one calling."

"Oh no!" She put her hand to her throat. "What happened?"

"I was picked up for supposedly stealing a car." I hoped the statement sounded as if I'd just bought a new sweater.

Her mouth dropped open and her face paled. "What do you mean 'supposedly stole a car'?"

I paused, took a deep breath and explained. I waved my fork in the air, as if it would help to explain the complicated events.

My mother looked pained, and I had an odd feeling that she didn't believe me. Her stare floated upwards and she mumbled something that sounded like, "I've always feared—"

"What?" I asked, leaning forward.

"Nothing," she said, looking back at me. "So they dropped the charges?"

"Mrs. Russo bailed me out."

My mother swallowed hard, took her napkin and blotted her upper lip. "Not Sunny Russo?"

“Of course, Sunny Russo. How many Mrs. Russos do we know?” I asked teasingly, hoping to lighten the mood.

She leaned over and whispered, “You know her husband died in jail a few months ago.”

“I know. You told me when it happened,” I whispered back.

“But she’s still involved with them.” She meant the mob. “For all we know, she could have taken his place. She could be their head-honcho.”

“Mom, I don’t think the mob hires women. They don’t strike me as an equal opportunity employer.”

Our lunch arrived and I cut open a cheese ravioli. My mother stared down at her soup.

“Look, it was all a mistake,” I continued. “It will easily get cleared up. So why didn’t you pick up the phone last night and what happened to your answering machine?” I popped a bite of pasta into my mouth.

“It’s broken.” Her voice returned to normal. “But I saw the name on caller ID.” She turned away from me and stared out the window again. “Okay, okay, we can deal with this.” She seemed to be trying to reassure herself, not me.

“I know we can Mom. I’m sure Dad has some lawyer friend that will get the charges dropped. Julie just wanted the car back, so she took it. See? So, it’s probably nothing, just a misunderstanding.”

“Maybe there’s a twelve-step program,” she mumbled, picking up her spoon and gingerly placing it in the minestrone.

“Mom, I wasn’t the one drinking. Julie was.” I searched her face, hoping for an ally. “I couldn’t let her drive like that. She could have killed someone.”

She nodded and sighed. “Well, call your father tomorrow at the office. He’s been out of town all weekend.” Then she leaned forward and looked around the room before she whispered, “You didn’t enjoy, it did you?”

“Enjoy it? What do you mean? You know how claustrophobic I am.”

‘The incident,’ that I so hated to think about, happened at the age of six, when Jimmy Chang locked me in his family’s linen closet and ever since I’ve hated small spaces. Fluffy towels gave me the willies too.

I continued: “Enjoy sitting in a cell with some hookers? Enjoy being questioned by an officer who didn’t believe a word I said? No, I wouldn’t say I enjoyed it.” I paused. “But it was interesting.”

As I walked back to Elsie’s Antiques, a voice called out: “Hey, Salty Sister!”

I turned and smiled, immediately recognizing my surfing buddies, Chris and Adam.

“Hey!” I called back, happy to see them.

The old beat-up van they drove had two surfboards strapped to the roof. Chris’ tanned muscular arm rested on the open passenger window. He pushed his straight, shoulder-length, sun-bleached hair out of his face and grinned. Adam’s locks were the same color but shorter with loose curls. Both wore T-shirts with ripped-out sleeves. I’d always considered them like brothers, despite their attractiveness, and they treated me like a little sister: protective, yet encouraging.

“What are you doing here?” Chris asked.

“I moved back.”

“Really?”

“I’m taking over Nana’s store.”

“I was real sorry to hear about you losing your Nana,” Chris said.

Adam nodded.

“Thanks, I miss her.” My eyes started to tear up and I took a deep breath. “Where have you guys been? Every time I go by your store, the ‘Gone on Surfari’ sign’s in the window.” Chris and Adam’s Surf Shop sat two doors down from Elsie’s Antiques.

“Oh man, we were down in Texas, chasing supertankers,” said Chris.

“Supertankers?” I asked.

“Yeah, the oil freighters that run in the gulf between Galveston and Houston send out great waves. A guy took us out in his boat, and we surfed the wake for miles. Totally juicy!”

“Killer on the quads though,” Adam interjected.

“Did you see any tar balls?” I asked.

“Nope, not one,” Chris replied. “Next time, you’ve got to come with.”

I nodded. They’d been trying to get me to go on surfari with them for years. To Tahiti or Hawaii, even down to Half Moon Bay. But I’d always been working or in school.

“I’m also living in Nana’s house,” I continued.

“Wow, that’s major,” Chris said, his whole body nodding.

I glanced up at the meter maid who stared at us as she cruised by at a slow clip. The guys turned and looked.

“Oh man, that chick’s crazy,” Chris said, after she’d passed by.

“The meter maid?” I asked.

“She tried to run me down.”

“Seriously?”

“Seriously. Right in front of our surf shop.”

“I saw it,” Adam said, holding up his hand, as if giving a sworn oath.

“Watch out for her,” Chris warned, shaking his head. “She’s a freakdudette.”

Feeling a chill, I rubbed my arms. Chris wasn’t a person who threw labels around lightly. I made a mental note not to leave my car parked on the street for too long.

I unlocked the front door of Elsie’s Antiques and flipped over the sign in the window from closed to open. A woman walked across the street and headed my direction with a rather determined look on her face. She wore a blue and purple paisley dress that adhered to her large curvy figure. I judged her to be in her 60s, and her gray hair was pulled up into a beehive. As she got closer tiny bolts of light shot out from the sides of her head, like miniature sun flares. I had the distinct impression of a super-hero gone bad. She stopped in front of my door and I felt compelled to open it for her. Her arms went immediately to her hips and that determined look turned to anger.

“Elsie never closed up for lunch,” she snapped.

I felt like a child being chastised.

“You know the merchants have an unspoken agreement,” she said, pointing down the street, as if all the shop owners had suddenly lined up in front of my store. “We open by nine o’clock, we stay open until six, and we don’t close for lunch.”

I mulled over the irony of her speaking this unspoken agreement while I stared at what I could now see were two pink knitting needles sticking out of her hair. The beehive hid the X shape they made while the pointy ends hovered right above her ears. The round ends, with their shiny silver finish must have reflected the sunlight. My musings left a long silence and she started talking again.

“I’ve owned the Yarn Barn for twenty-four years. Plus I’m on the board of the Merchants’ Association. And I will not have you,” she said, thrusting her finger in my face, “ruining our downtown with your lackadaisicalness. You’re as bad as those surf boys.”

I wondered whether I should argue with someone who accessorized their hairdo with lethal weapons. Plus she’d used the word *lackadaisicalness* correctly in a sentence. I positioned myself behind the door so just my head was vulnerable.

“Do you understand?” she barked.

I nodded, which seemed to satisfy her. She turned and stomped away, muttering about how irresponsible youth shouldn’t be self-employed, and that I’d probably be out of business in a week.

She’d made it to the center of the street when I noticed the meter maid traveling our direction. The little vehicle sped up, and the driver leaned forward over the steering wheel. For a terrible moment I thought the Yarn Barn lady might get mowed down, but she broke into a trot and made it safely to the sidewalk. As the wild driver zipped past, she turned my direction, tucked her hair behind her ear and gave me a satisfied smirk.

I shut the door quickly and had an overwhelming urge to lock it behind me. Maybe my mom was right. Maybe I should sell the store.

After a tiring day of sorting through accounting books and unpaid bills, I pulled into my driveway a little after six. My inherited house had a white stucco exterior, with classic terracotta colored roof tiles. A small palm grew out of a front lawn consisting mostly of crabgrass, and a bougainvillea climbed a trellis next to the front door. My grandmother had been the last hold-out against the land developers in the neighborhood. Condos and apartment buildings surrounded the house on all three sides. An elementary school sat across the street, which led to a lot of confusion around eight in the morning and two in the afternoon. Somewhere in the apartments to my right lived Mrs. Sunny Russo. I had come to the conclusion that she must be able to look directly into my backyard and with binoculars, probably into my house. It would have been the only way she could have known I’d been arrested the night before.

I let myself into the house, still trying to get used to the idea that it belonged to me. My grandmother passed away a month ago, and I’d been living here for a week. Practically everything in the house belonged to my Nana. I hadn’t collected much furniture in my life, and what little I had, I left with my roommate in San Francisco. All I brought with me were clothes, a few plants, my computer, art supplies, and numerous finished and partially finished paintings on canvas.

For years I’d wanted to be independent, but it hadn’t worked out that way until now. Because of my unstable work life I’d relied on handouts from my parents over and over again. I knew I could move back in with them, as so many of my friends had. But that wasn’t the direction I wanted to head. Now I had a house and a business. On one hand I felt grateful and relieved, having a security that I’d never felt before. But on the other

hand I was scared I'd blow it, lose it all to a bad decision or some unforeseen event. And last night I had run right into that fear. Now I was back in the position of needing help again. My independence waned and with it my self confidence.

I took some solace just being in my grandmother's house; it made me feel close to her. Her collection of tea pots decorated the counters in the kitchen and lined the tops of the cabinets. A large picture she'd painted of rolling golden hills broken by clumps of purple green trees hung over the fireplace. Every wall reflected her love of art with prints and reproductions of many wonderful artists: O'Keefe, Monet, Picasso, plus others I wasn't familiar with that could have been locals or friends of hers. She'd turned her extra bedroom into a studio. A blank canvas sat on her painting easel in front of still life of a vase and a stack of hardcover books. I hadn't touched a thing, hoping one day I'd finish the painting she'd never had a chance to start.

I went out back to the old garage that sat at the corner of the property. Two doors opened out to reveal a dirt floor that held parallel ruts from long-ago wheels and oil stains from long-ago leaks. On a homemade plywood workbench, alongside rusty trowels and weed pullers, lay gardening gloves that I'd given my grandmother as a birthday present when I was eight years old. I picked them up and slipped them on, remembering how my mother had taught me how to use fabric paint and I'd decorated the practical gift with yellow flowers and purple crescent moons, now faded from years of use.

Above the work bench, screw drivers and pliers hung from a peg board, while an assortment of rakes and shovels leaned in the corner. The opposite wall held something as dear to me as the gardening gloves, but in a different way. My surfboard. I'd stored it here since high school, after my father complained that it took up too much room in his shelf-lined immaculate garage.

I placed my surfboard fin down on two saw horses, opened an old tin of board wax and gave the surface a light coat. I craved surfing like a physical addiction. Especially during times like these, when the world seemed to be spinning away from me, out of my control.