A surreal illustration of a surfer riding a glowing wave under a full moon. The scene is set at night, with a large, bright yellow full moon in the dark blue sky. The ocean is depicted with swirling, glowing green and blue waves. A surfer, silhouetted against the light of the wave, is crouching on a surfboard, riding the crest of a barrel wave. The overall mood is mysterious and ethereal.

# *The Mist, The Moon and the Glow*

*El Aliento, The Breath of Time*

*By Zinn Tidewell*



ZINN TIDEWELL

# The Mist, The Moon and The Glow

*El Aliento, The Breath of Time*



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*To Annabelle, Paige, Alexander, Julian, Griffin, Graham and Nolan*



“Time is not a river, but a tide — it  
pulls you under, lifts you up, and  
leaves you changed.”

— Anonymous Pacific proverb



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## Foreword

There's a moment in every surfer's life when time seems to stop — when the wave folds just right, when the light hits the water a certain way, when everything else fades. That moment — suspended between ocean and sky, past and future — is where this story lives.

*The Mist, The Moon, and The Glow* is not simply a surf tale. It's a meditation on aging, memory, and the elusive nature of second chances. It's a story about a man, Pete Wellstoke, who once stood on the cliffs of Central California staring into the impossible — and dove headlong into it.

What unfolds is a journey as spiritual as it is physical. Through Pete's time-bending odyssey, we glimpse the bittersweet thrill of reliving youth, the danger of knowing too much, and the quiet power of surrendering to mystery. Surfing here is more than sport — it's a ritual, a vehicle for transformation, a thread connecting lifetimes.

This book doesn't claim to have all the answers. But like the wave it's named after — *El Aliento*, The Breath — it leaves you wondering: what would you risk to feel truly alive again?

Whether you're a surfer, a dreamer, or simply someone drawn

to the strange currents of time, may this story carry you, even briefly, into the barrel of something bigger than yourself.

— ***Clyde Moorhaven***

## Preface

I didn't set out to write a story about time travel.

At first, it was just a feeling — something buried in sea fog and moonlight. A whisper on the wind that there might be more to a wave than motion. That maybe, under the right conditions, the ocean could breathe... and if you were in the right place at the right moment, you might be pulled into that breath.

This story began with Pete Wellstoke — a name that came to me as quietly and suddenly as a rising swell. An aging surfer haunted not by what he'd done, but by what might have been. Pete lives on the edge of time in more ways than one. His journey is as much about confronting the past as it is about shaping the future.

The world of *El Aliento* — The Breath — is grounded in real places: Big Sur, Morro Bay, the North Shore of O'ahu. But the currents beneath the surface are stranger, older, and more sacred. I've woven in the voices of surf legends, coastal myths, and the inexplicable beauty of a wave that appears only when nature and fate align.

This isn't a tale of scientific time travel. It's a meditation. A drift. A story about how we carry our lives with us, even when

the world around us changes completely.

If you've ever stared into the sea and felt it staring back — this story is for you.

— ***Zinn Tidewell***

## Prologue

There are places on Earth where the line between reality and something else—something older, quieter, stranger—grows thin. Big Sur is one of those places.

On moonlit nights, when the tides align and the water shimmers with unseen life, a wave is said to form. Not just any wave, but one of perfect shape and impossible duration. It barrels like a tunnel of breath, mist curling within it, and those who've heard the whisper of its legend call it *El Aliento*—The Breath.

No one truly knows where the wave begins, or where it ends. Those who've sought it rarely speak of it again. Some say it's a myth. Others say it's a portal. All agree it's beautiful. And dangerous.

Pete Wellstoke didn't go looking for the wave. He didn't chase legends or write poetry about the sea. He was an aging surfer in a quiet town, fading gently with the years. But one night, under a full moon, the water lit up and the wind whispered *El Aliento*—just like it had long ago when he was a much younger man with a map drawn by a mad old expat and too many unanswered questions.

That night, Pete paddled out...

And when the wave came, it was not just a wave. It was time itself breaking.

This is the story of what came next...

# Introduction

Time travel stories often rush to the science—the machine, the glitch, the wormhole in space. But this story is different.

This is the story of a surfer. A man named Pete Wellstoke, who didn't invent anything, didn't fall through a crack in spacetime, didn't stumble into a lab. Instead, he rode a wave.

And not just any wave—a perfect, rare wave called *El Aliento*. It breaks under impossible conditions, forming only when the tide, the moon, the wind, and bioluminescence all align. Locals whispered about it, old maps hinted at it, and some even claimed to have seen it. But Pete rode it. And when he came out the other side, he was somewhere—*somewhen*—else.

What follows isn't just a tale of surf and sea. It's a meditation on memory, solitude, the burden of knowing too much, and the beauty of moments that shimmer briefly and vanish like mist.

Pete's story spans decades and dimensions, but at its core, it remains rooted in something simple: the feeling of gliding across a wave, alone with the ocean, chasing a fleeting breath of magic.

This book is for those who've ever wondered what they would

do with a second chance—or a second timeline. It's for those who believe that the ocean holds secrets, and that sometimes, those secrets whisper back.

# 1

## When the Mist Glows

Pete Wellstoke lived in a small house above Morro Bay, perched like a stubborn barnacle on the hillside where the fog came first and the wind never quite stopped. The place wasn't much—just cedar shake siding worn gray by salt air, a sloped roof patched with mismatched shingles, and windows that moaned in the wind. But it was his. At 74, Pete liked things quiet, liked the way the gulls wheeled in lazy spirals and the ocean spoke in long, low breaths.

He wasn't famous. Not anymore, if he ever was. A few surf shops in San Luis Obispo still had a poster or two of him from the '80s, hair sun-bleached and curling at the corners, hanging near the register. He shaped boards when his hands didn't ache, surfed the point breaks when his knees let him. He didn't talk much about the old days. Not about the wave. Not about the map. Not about El Aliento.

But that changed one night.

It started with a breeze.

Pete was standing at the edge of the bluff, hands tucked into his jacket pockets, staring down at the sea. The sky was bruised with evening and the moon, nearly full, hovered low and heavy. Below him, the tide crept in, curling gently along the rocky crescent of sand far below.

Then it came—a sound more felt than heard, something carried in the damp wind.

“El Aliento.”

He stiffened.

The words struck deep. Spanish, but more than that. The Breath. A whisper he hadn't heard in over forty years.



*Old man gives Pete the map*

Back in the early 1980s, he'd been in Mexico, sleeping in his van and surfing remote breaks along the coast. One night, in a dusty cantina, he met a sunburned expat—some kind of ex-Navy wanderer, drunk on mescal and riddled with stories. The man had given Pete a hand-drawn map in exchange for a bottle of rum. Said it pointed to a wave that only broke under specific, nearly impossible conditions.

The map was odd—too precise in some places, scrawled and cryptic in others. It marked a hidden cove somewhere in Big Sur. In the margins were notes: **full moon**, **bioluminescence**, **offshore wind**, **midnight tide**, and most importantly: “**barrel must last 10 seconds or more.**”

Pete kept that map all these years, sealed in plastic, tucked into

a drawer. He used to pull it out once a year, maybe less. Mostly, he didn't think about it. He'd convinced himself it was a myth. A drunken man's story.

Until now.

He returned to the house with the wind still brushing the back of his neck like a memory. Inside, he flicked on a lamp and opened the drawer.

There it was. The paper was soft with age, but the ink held firm.

The cove. The tide marks. The phases of the moon.



*The Map*

Pete spread it across the table and ran his fingers along the coastline, his eyes narrowing. The conditions—he'd memorized them long ago. Now they were aligning.

Just yesterday, there had been talk of a red tide bloom offshore. And tonight, the moon was full. Tomorrow, the swell was forecast to rise, west by northwest. The wind was predicted to shift offshore by dusk.

All of it—every piece on the map—was happening now.

Pete leaned back in the old wooden chair, its legs creaking beneath him. He stared at the paper as though it were a riddle he'd just remembered how to solve.

Was it even possible? After all this time?

He rose slowly and walked to the corner of the room where his board stood, waxed and ready. He hadn't ridden anything serious in years—not since the arthritis began whispering in his joints. But he could feel it now—a weight in the air, a pull behind his ribs.

This wasn't nostalgia.

It was something else.

Something real.

Pete turned on the porch light and stepped outside. The mist was rising now, thin tendrils curling over the earth like breath.

He had two days. Maybe less.

If the wave—El Aliento—was coming, he had to get to Big Sur.

Tonight.

## 2

### The Shoulder

The night was velvet black, stretched over the cove like a shroud. Pete knelt on the sand where he'd launched dozens of sessions over the years, but never like this. Not under this moon. Not with this mist. And certainly not with the electric charge in the air that made every hair on his neck stand like sea oats in a stiff offshore breeze.

He pulled the zipper on his full wetsuit up to the base of his neck and paused, his breath catching. It wasn't the cold. It was that whisper again — the same one he'd heard decades ago, the one that had led him to the map, and ultimately to this night. It seemed to ride the wind, curling between the trees and cliffs, calling him softly: *El Aliento*.

Pete stepped into the water, board tucked under his arm. It was cold — not the bite of frost, but the deep, living cold of the Pacific — dense and ancient. As he waded out past the shore break, the moon broke through a gap in the clouds, casting a silver path across the surface.

He dipped his hand into the water, cool and heavy with fog. The bioluminescence danced faintly along his fingertips. That's when he saw it — deep below, a long silver ribbon undulating in the blackness.

A creature — **an oarfish**. Forty feet at least. Moving slowly, like it had been there forever. It shimmered with a strange internal glow, not of this world. Pete blinked hard, unsure if he was dreaming or seeing a sign. But it was gone, slipping into the depths before he could make sense of it.



*Oarfish*

A ripple passed through him, not of cold, but of recognition. Something ancient was stirring.

He straddled his board and paddled past the outer rocks into the lineup. The night was still, the wind nonexistent. He watched the horizon, waiting.

And then it rose — El Aliento. Not a towering giant, but a beautifully shaped four-to-six-foot wave, glassy and perfect. It bent across the reef like a glowing muscle. The mist thickened as it approached, luminescent and curling off the face in tendrils.

Pete turned and paddled. One stroke. Two. Three.

He felt the wave take him.

The drop was smooth, almost gentle — but there was weight behind it. Time flexed. He crouched low, adjusted his feet, and set his line.

The lip pitched over him like a folding gate. And then: silence.

He was inside.

Inside the barrel.

Light bent around him. The walls of the wave shimmered with tiny stars, the mist within glowing faintly blue, like the inside of some marine cathedral. Every tiny bump of wax beneath his feet mattered now — every shift of balance, every muscle memory. The sound was gone, replaced by the hush of time holding its breath.



*El Aliento - The Breath of Time*

Seconds stretched. Ten. Maybe more. The wave kept throwing, perfectly cylindrical.

Then — it exhaled.

The barrel collapsed behind him with a force like a lung clearing its last breath. The mist burst outward, sending him arcing onto the shoulder.

He rode it out in stunned silence, gliding until the wave sighed into the deep. Then he sat up.

The cliffs were gone. The water was no longer cold and green. It sparkled now — a translucent turquoise, kissed with sun. He turned his head. To his right, a long crescent of golden sand curved into the jungle. Palms rustled onshore. The air was warm on his skin.

Pete blinked and looked around. The sun was high. The mist was gone.

And so was Big Sur.

He sat astride his board, heart thundering. Nearby, other surfers were watching him, murmuring to each other. Hawaiian, by the look of them. One of them squinted, called something he couldn't quite hear.

They hadn't seen him enter the wave. He was just there, suddenly, materialized from the heart of a perfect tube.

Pete Wellstoke — 74 years old in 2025 — now sat in warm, tropical water, 23 again, with the mind of an old man and no idea where—or when—he had landed.

But the whisper had brought him here.

El Aliento.

And it had only just begun.

### 3

## The Beach

Pete stepped onto the sand, his feet sinking slightly with each step, the hot grains biting at his soles. He walked a few yards before peeling down the top of his wetsuit. The heat was thick and humid. Sweat prickled along his neck and arms. He felt the sun on his skin in a way he hadn't in years—not filtered through cloud or fog, but warm and immediate. Alive.

He stood still for a moment, just breathing it in.



*Hawaii 1970's*

All he owned in this moment was what was tucked into the sealed dry pocket inside his wetsuit:

- **The hand-drawn map**
- **A single, damp twenty-dollar bill**
- **No ID**
- **No shirt**
- **No plan**

**And yet he felt... light.**

His joints didn't ache. His back wasn't tight. His breathing was full and clean. He bent over and touched his toes with ease, then laughed quietly. No reef rash. No soreness. His muscles felt younger. Looser. The tightness that had lived in his spine for

years was gone.

It didn't feel like a dream. It felt better than one.

His reflection in a window confirmed it. He looked maybe twenty-three—long hair sun-lightened, face unlined, shoulders broad with youth. His eyes, though, told the truth. The weight in them. The knowledge.

His body had warped with time, but his mind had not. He was still Pete Wellstoke from 2025, still holding decades of memories. And somehow... the barrel had taken him back.

He crossed the sandy path toward a dirt road and paused.

There was a small fruit stand at the edge of the beach, built from driftwood and corrugated tin. A woman stood behind the counter in a sleeveless dress, chopping mango and papaya into wax-paper cones. Her radio hummed something slow and dreamy from a Hawaiian quartet.

Pete approached, hesitant.

“You look like you saw a ghost, uncle,” the woman said with a grin.

“Maybe I did,” Pete muttered, blinking. “Or maybe I am one.”

“First one's on the house,” she said, handing him a cone of sliced pineapple. “You look like you need something sweet.”

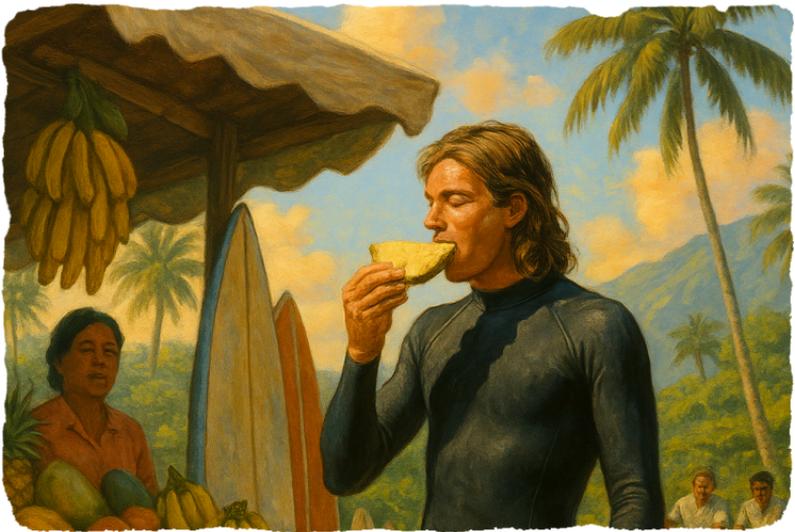
Pete smiled. “Thank you, that’s very kind, but I’ve got a twenty.”

He dug into the dry pouch and handed her the bill, careful not to let the map slip out. She took it, smooth as ever, and handed him back some change—coins and a few crumpled paper bills.

The weight of the coins in his palm felt strange, like artifacts from a museum. Like time made solid.

“You just get here?” she asked.

Pete nodded, chewing slowly. The pineapple was perfect—warm, bright, sugary. “Yeah. Just now.”



*Fruit Stand*

“You staying nearby?”

He looked up the road. “I guess I’ll find out.”

He walked for a while. The road was lined with ironwood and palms, the air fragrant with salt and sweet decay. Chickens scattered into the brush as he passed. He could hear waves breaking rhythmically in the distance—long sets rolling through.

He didn’t know exactly where or when he was.

But everything told him one thing:

This was the North Shore.

This was **1974**.

He had studied surf history. He recognized the single-fin boards, the cars, the surf trunks. The music. Even the faint smell of older resin.

It all aligned.

He crossed a rise and came upon a low wooden shack near the beach. Boards were stacked under the eaves, old canvas awnings flapped lazily, and a rusted toolbox sat beside a shaping bay.

Pete stepped closer. No one was around.

There was a hammock strung between two posts, and a faded red cooler in the shade.

He dropped his board carefully to the side and sat down on the porch, finishing the fruit. The sun was lowering, casting long golden shadows across the road.

Maybe someone would come by soon. Maybe not.

For now, he was here.

Breathing. Watching. Listening.

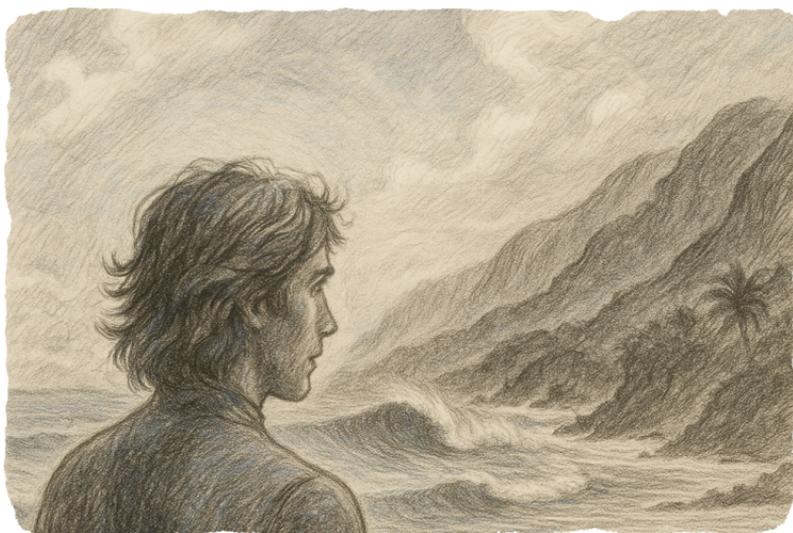
And somewhere in the distance, over the breaking surf, he thought he heard it again—

**El Aliento.**

## 4

### The Surf Shack

Pete walked barefoot down the narrow path from the beach, the soft rustle of palm leaves overhead blending with the distant hiss of shore break. His wetsuit, still damp and clinging to his frame, felt out of place in the sultry Hawaiian heat. The warmth was shocking — not just in temperature, but in its embrace. It wasn't just the weather. It was the air, the colors, the rhythm. He had arrived in a different time, and the land knew it.



1974

He passed a row of pandanus trees and came upon a cluster of surf shacks just inland from the dunes. Rustic wood and corrugated tin, the buildings looked like they'd been cobbled together with equal parts love and desperation. Boards leaned against every available surface — single-fins, mostly, narrow and sharp, some with bold pinstriped sprays. The smell of coconut oil, wax, grilled meat, and ganja hung in the air.

He approached cautiously, knowing how surf territories worked — especially here, in the '70s, on the North Shore. You didn't just wander in.

A group of locals sat beneath a tattered canvas awning, laughing and sharing beers. They were lean and sun-darkened, their bodies sculpted by years in the water. Their expressions sharpened

when they saw him.

“Eh, brah, you lost or what?” one of them called out, not unkindly, but guarded.

Pete stopped, hands open at his sides.

“Not lost. Just... kind of new. Name’s Pete,” he said. He tried to keep his voice casual.

“You da haole we seen out at Rockies?” another said, squinting. “In a wetsuit?”

A few of them chuckled. Pete couldn’t help but grin a little.

“Yeah, that was me. Water’s a hell of a lot warmer than Big Sur.”

They exchanged glances, not sure what to make of him yet. Pete didn’t push it. He let the silence breathe. Then one of them stood, wiping his hands on his trunks.

“Come,” the man said. “You look like you need somethin’ cold.”

Pete followed, stepping into the shade of the shack.

Inside was a mix of surf gear, posters of Duke and Lopez, stacks of yellowing Surfer magazines, and a refrigerator that hummed like it was on its last legs. The man handed him a bottle — Primo Beer.

“Name’s Benny,” he said. “You ain’t from around here, that’s

for sure.”

“Nope. California. Morro Bay,” Pete said.

“Morro Bay? That where da rock is?”

Pete nodded. “Right in the harbor.”

Benny sized him up. “So what, you just show up in the middle of the lineup and blow minds?”

“I just caught a wave,” Pete said, shrugging.

Benny chuckled. “You got timing, that’s for sure. Conditions been flat for days. Then this one pulse comes through and boom — you in the barrel like some kind of ghost.”

Pete took a sip of the beer. It was warm, but tasted like a gift.

He felt eyes on him — curious but still testing. He was used to it. The North Shore was a proving ground. The fact he’d come out of nowhere didn’t help.

But the hostility softened as Benny kept talking. They asked about his board — a standard pintail, but shaped just slightly different from anything they’d seen.

“Where’d you get that stick?” someone asked.

Pete hesitated. “Shaped it myself. Just messing around.”

They nodded, impressed. One of them gave a slight whistle.

“Nice rails. You ride clean.”

He let the compliment pass, grateful but cautious.

The surf shack became a kind of refuge over the next few days. Pete crashed in the back — a plywood bunk with a thin mattress, no complaints. He helped sweep up, wax boards, and patch dings. He paid in small bills and kindness, never asking for too much.



*Working in the Surf Shack*

As the week went on, the others warmed to him. He shared waves, gave space when it was needed, and didn't show off. And

slowly, Benny and the rest started treating him like he belonged — or at least like he didn't not belong.

And Pete? He marveled quietly at it all.

This was the heart of it — the golden era of Hawaiian surfing, real and immediate. And here he was, living inside it.

But beneath the surface, he never stopped watching. Listening. He studied the swells. Checked the stars. And kept the old map hidden in his gear, dry and waiting.

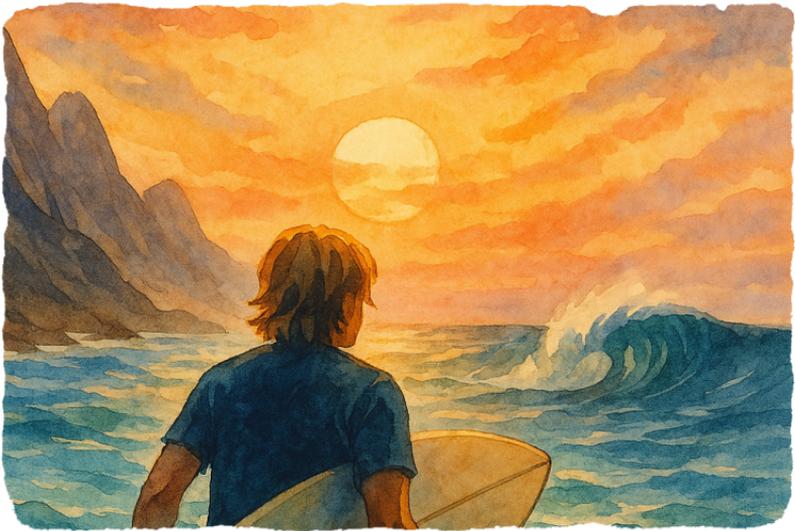
Because El Aliento wasn't finished with him.

*Not yet.*

5

## New Skin

Pete woke before sunrise. The trade winds whispered through the palms, and outside the surf shack, roosters cried in the distance. The North Shore was quiet, holding its breath.



*Youthful*

He sat up slowly on the thin mattress, listening to the creak of the old wooden frame beneath him. His body felt... right. Youthful. Limber. Stronger than it had in years. He reached down and flexed his toes. No stiffness. No ache in the knees. His back didn't complain.

It was still a mystery — this body he wore. Twenty-three again, at least on the outside. A gift from the wave. A curse, maybe, too. Because his mind was unchanged — still seventy-four, still filled with decades of memory, loss, and knowledge. That split ran through him like a fault line. Sometimes, it was dizzying.

He stepped out into the pink early light and wandered barefoot down the dirt path toward the beach. The ocean glowed faintly, soft and silver in the pre-dawn.

There were no others out yet.

He sat in the sand with his board across his lap, staring into the horizon. In a way, this place was more dream than reality. And yet, he was here. Really here. Breathing. Alive.

After a long while, he paddled out alone and took a few slow waves at Chun's Reef, just carving soft arcs, feeling out the curves. He kept his surfing clean — stylish but muted. Nothing flashy. Nothing that would raise questions.

Back at the shack, Benny offered him a job helping out with ding repair. They needed someone reliable, someone who could shape and sand. Pete didn't hesitate.

In the following weeks, Pete found himself folding into the rhythm of this old new world. The warm salt air. The thrum of reggae and steel guitar. Plates of kalua pork and loco moco. He learned names, earned nods in the lineup. He bought papayas and pineapple from a truck that parked under the ironwood tree every Wednesday. The woman who ran it handed him change and a smile, and never once asked where he was from.

He shaped a board — just one — something different. A hybrid of what he remembered from the future and what fit the time. It had a modern rocker, slightly wider tail, double concave under the fins. He glassed it by hand in the shack after hours, but once it was finished, he hid it away deep in the jungle behind a lava wall. It was too far ahead. It might turn heads. Might change something.

And Pete knew he wasn't supposed to change anything.

One evening, while they sat on the porch sipping beers, one of the locals — a quiet, sharp-eyed guy named Kai — asked, “Where’s back home, anyway?”

Pete smiled softly, eyes drifting toward the horizon. “Morro Bay.”

Kai nodded. “Never heard of it.”

Pete shrugged. “Not many have.”

There were moments when Pete forgot where — and when — he really was. Then something would remind him. A billboard not

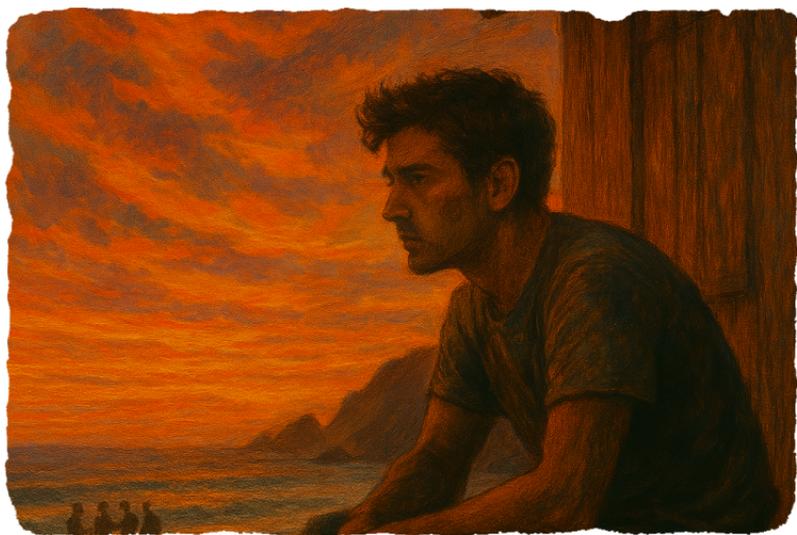
yet built. A song on the radio that hadn't been written. A surfer not yet famous, just a lanky kid carrying a board up the beach. And Pete would retreat into himself again, silent, observant.

Because knowing the future was a heavy burden. It isolated him. He couldn't explain why he tensed every time a plane flew overhead, or why his eyes lingered a little too long when he saw children playing barefoot in the street.

One day, while waxing a board behind the shack, he overheard someone mention a name. Carver Tomson. Another voice chimed in: "He's supposed to be showing up next season. Heard he's got that magic style."

Pete smiled to himself. He remembered Carver. And Rabbit. And all the others. He had studied them for decades in books and films. Now he might see them here, unformed and raw, before they became legends.

But he'd be careful. He'd observe, not interfere.



*Contemplation*

And in the evenings, alone with his journal, he wrote it all down — not as a diary, but as a chronicle. The events. The people. The swells. He wanted to remember it all. In case he ever made it back.

Still, even as he settled into this borrowed life, he kept watching the ocean. Checking tide charts. Whispering to the stars.

Because the wave — **El Aliento** — was not finished with him.

And somewhere deep in his chest, he already knew...

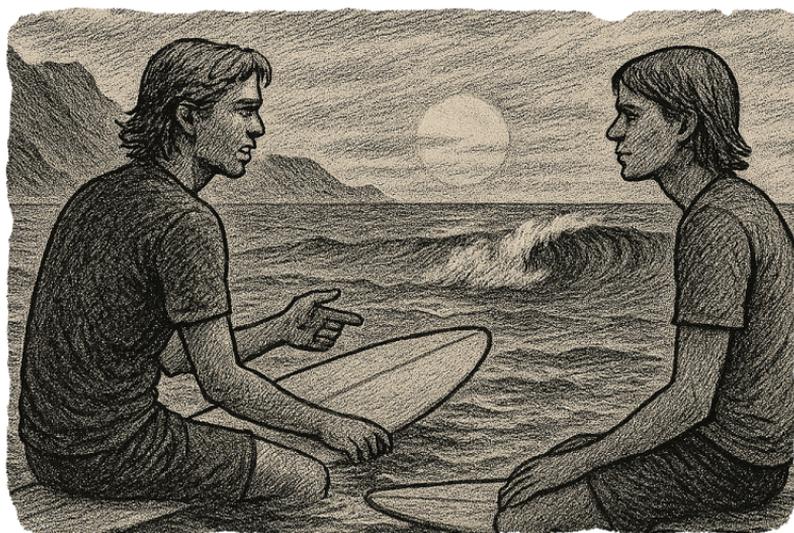
***It would call again.***

## 6

### Shadows of the Future

The months passed in a blur of swell lines and sunsets.

Pete's tan deepened. His movements became more fluid, his style in the water refined into something pure and efficient — like a man who knew every consequence and chose each turn with intention. Locals began to greet him by name. He wasn't just the haole in the wetsuit anymore — he was Pete from the shack, the guy who could fix a snapped fin box with nothing but resin and patience.



*Carver and Pete*

But even as he warmed into this life, Pete never truly let his guard down.

One afternoon, as he sat shaping a classic single-fin for a Hawaiian kid named Nalu, he overheard Benny arguing with someone about fin placement. The voice of the other man struck Pete like a dropped weight — not the sound, but the tone.

Measured. Curious. And young.

Pete stepped into the main room of the shack, dust still clinging to his arms. There, standing beside Benny and examining a raw blank, was a lanky teenager with sun-bright hair and a longboard under his arm. His posture was precise, but relaxed. His voice held the edge of Cape Town, though it was softened

now by time in Hawaii.

**Carver Tomson.**

Pete had watched Carver in footage from the '70s. He'd read interviews, seen him deliver keynote speeches, even owned a signed copy of *Shredder's Code*. But now — in this dusty shack, with sweat dripping down his back — he was just a kid with a dream and a board, asking questions about foam and glass ratios.

Pete stayed quiet.

He didn't want to spook him. Didn't want to steer the timeline even a fraction of a degree.

But later, out in the water, fate did what fate always does.

They ended up sitting next to each other in the lineup at Off The Wall. The waves were glassy, the crowd light. Carver turned and gave him a nod.

"You're the guy who shaped that little swallowtail Benny's been talking about," he said.

Pete nodded. "Just a hobby."

Carver looked at the horizon. "Feels like the waves are trying to teach us something lately. You ever feel that?"

Pete studied him. "What do you mean?"

Carver leaned back on his board. “Like... inside the barrel, everything slows down. Time stretches. You’re not just riding — you’re somewhere else entirely.”

Pete felt a chill despite the warm water.

He hesitated. “You think time can change in there?”

Carver shrugged. “I don’t know. But I’ve been in some barrels where it felt like I could live a whole life inside. Then it spits you out, and it’s only been two seconds.”

Pete swallowed hard. “Maybe the wave remembers us.”

Carver grinned. “Or maybe we remember the wave.”

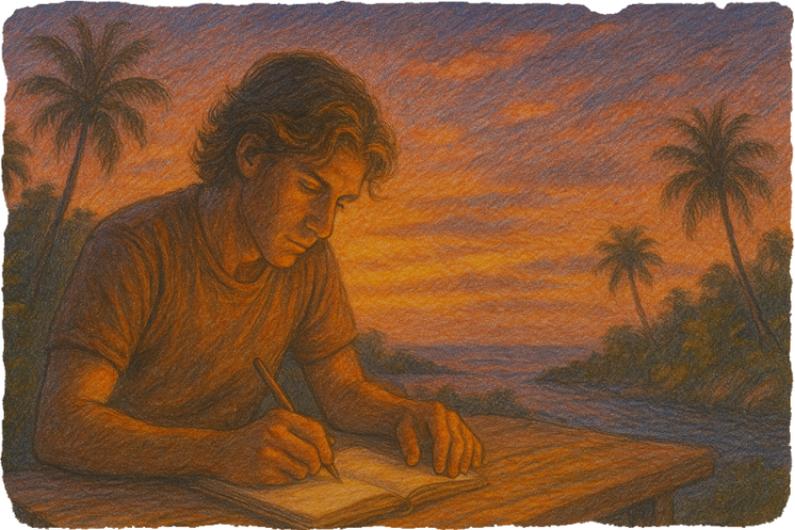
They shared a wave a few minutes later. Not a huge one — shoulder-high and playful — but it was clean, and the two surfers danced along its face in quiet harmony. It wasn’t competition. It was communion.

That night, Pete returned to the shack and sat for a long time by the kerosene lamp, journaling by hand. He wrote everything Carver had said, word for word, as best he could remember. It felt important.

He didn’t know if Carver knew anything about **El Aliento** — but he *felt* something. That was enough to stir something in Pete’s chest.

Over the following weeks, Pete saw more familiar names. Rabbit,

all spark and fire. Mark, quiet and focused. A young Larry paddled by once, powerful, all limbs and wild hair.



*Writing in Journal*

Pete kept to himself, mostly. He didn't seek anyone out. But sometimes, they sought him — intrigued by his quiet style, his precise surfing, his boards that were somehow familiar and strange all at once.

And when he felt like he was being pulled too far into this time, he'd take a walk along the beach, far past the point, and pull out the map.

It had grown soft with age but remained legible. He studied the hand-drawn lines — the crescent cove, the tide notations, the

strange symbols near the full moon sketch. He kept track of charts. Watched the stars. He still wasn't sure *when* the next chance would come... but he knew it *would* come.

Until then, he'd stay in the shadows. Watch. Witness.

Because Pete Wellstoke was no longer just a surfer lost in time.

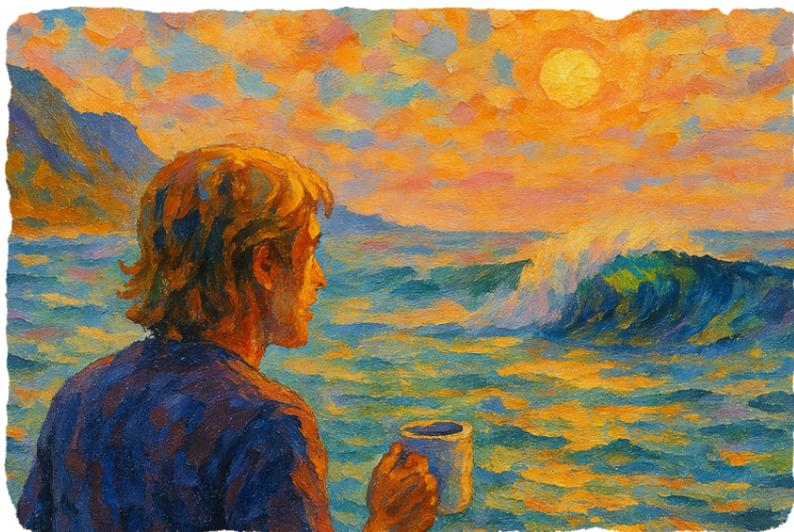
He was a man guarding the thin edge between past and future — between what was, and what could be.

And somewhere out there, El Aliento was building again.

# 7

## Legends in Real Time

It was one of those North Shore mornings where the light came sideways — soft and golden, filtering through a sky marbled with tradewind clouds. The reef was alive. A solid swell had filled in overnight, and by dawn, Pipeline was already awake, throwing perfect A-frame barrels over the jagged coral.



*Morning Coffee*

Pete stood in the shade of an ironwood tree, sipping instant coffee from a chipped mug. Around him, the beach was buzzing with anticipation. A few dozen surfers huddled along the shoreline, boards under arms, eyes fixed on the horizon. No jerseys. No jerseys yet. Just pride, instinct, and the need to be seen in this crucible of water and consequence.

He spotted them almost immediately — the men he had only read about, studied in flickering 8mm reels, memorized through magazine spreads and grainy VHS tapes.

**Reno**, sitting cross-legged in the sand, waxing a sleek blue board with a narrow nose and pulled-in tail. Calm. Stylish even on land.

**Jeff**, arms folded, watching the sets. That clean, powerful frame of his — like a man built by salt.

**Barry**, all intensity and nervous energy, pacing near the water's edge. His eyes tracked the peaks like a hawk looking for prey.

**Eddie**, tall and broad, laughing with a couple of groms. He gave Pete a small nod as he walked by — a gesture of aloha, of recognition, even though they'd never spoken.

And then, cutting down the path with that unmistakable grace, Mr. Pipeline himself. Board under one arm, black trunks, and a serenity that seemed to silence everything around him.

Pete's throat tightened. This wasn't a documentary or a story passed around at a surf expo. This was it. Real life. Unfolding now.

He stayed out of the way, just another haole on the beach with salt in his beard and too much in his eyes. But his hands trembled slightly as he reached into his satchel and pulled out his notebook. He wrote quickly:

*January 1974. Pipeline. Sets overhead and rising. Reno's on a blue pin. Jeff watching swell lines. Lopez quiet. Eddie glowing like a lighthouse. I shouldn't be here — but I am. History is happening, and I can't stop it. I can only watch.*

A commotion broke out near the dunes. Someone had spotted Rabbit jogging down with a board slung across his back. The Aussies had arrived. And not far behind him, a blond South

African with calm eyes and a slight smile — **Carver Tomson** again.

Pete closed the journal and slid it back into his pack.

He couldn't surf today. Not here. Not with them.

Instead, he wandered down the beach, stopping just shy of where the reef jutted closest to shore. He stood there, arms crossed, watching one of the greats paddle out. It was like watching a monk approach a sacred altar.

And then it happened.

A wave. Not the biggest of the set, but flawless. A clean, hollow funnel curling perfectly over second reef.

Lopez turned, paddled once, twice, and dropped in with impossible smoothness.

The board kissed the face. He tucked low, vanished inside the tube. The spit blew out a full second later — but he was already gone, a ghost slipping through the hollow.

When he emerged fifty yards down the line, the beach erupted.

Pete didn't cheer. He couldn't. He was too busy holding his breath.



*Sketch of Lopez*

Because inside that barrel — in the shimmer and shape of it — he had seen something. A signature. A glint of *El Aliento*. Not the wave itself, not yet, but something... adjacent. A cousin in spirit.

And he began to wonder.

*Was this time influencing the wave? Or was the wave influencing this time?*

Later that afternoon, Pete sat on a bench near the surf shack. Kai plopped down beside him with a coconut and two spoons.

“You see Lopez’s wave?” Kai said.

Pete nodded.

“Man’s got timing. Like he’s reading the ocean’s heartbeat.”

Pete didn’t respond. Not right away.

Then, after a pause: “What if the ocean’s reading *his*?”

Kai laughed. “Ha! Deep thought, Uncle Pete.”

But Pete wasn’t joking. His gaze was fixed on the horizon.

Because for the first time since he arrived in 1974, he wasn’t just watching the past unfold.

He was starting to feel the edges of it — the fabric of time.

*And it was beginning to thin.*

## Ghost in the Lineup

Pete lay on his board at Sunset Beach, floating just outside the impact zone. The sun hovered low in the western sky, throwing golden bands across the sea. The water was glassy, almost too still, as if it too were waiting for something to break.

It had been two years since his arrival in Hawaii. Two years of warm barrels, full moons, shaping boards under moonlight, and witnessing history without interfering. He had kept his head down. Kept his surf clean. He wrote his notes. Tended to his journal. Waited.

But lately... the signs had started to return.

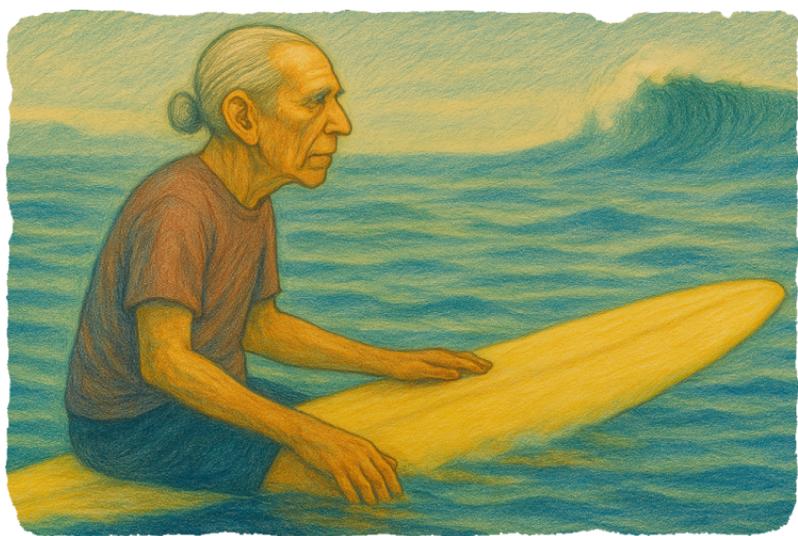
Bioluminescence. A strange pressure in the air before dawn. A groom talking about a dream where the ocean glowed like it was breathing.

Pete's hands tightened on the rails of his board. He knew these signs. He'd chased them once already.

He paddled for a small insider, just to keep moving. The wave lifted him gently, and he rode it in a lazy arc along the shoulder before pulling out and gliding to a rest in the channel.

As he sat up, he caught sight of something in the water just outside the main pack.

A figure.



*Mysterious Surfer*

An older man, alone on a faded yellow longboard. Thin frame, wiry arms. His paddle stroke was steady but slow, deliberate. His board had no logo. No leash. Pete squinted. The man's face looked vaguely familiar — weathered but calm, with long white hair pulled back in a knot.

The man caught a wave — not a standout, just a slow-moving shoulder — and rode it with ease, a classic stance that didn't waste a single movement.

Pete watched him all the way in. The ride lasted twenty seconds. When the man kicked out and began paddling in toward the beach, he glanced over his shoulder — directly at Pete.

And Pete felt a shiver.

He'd seen that face before.

*Mexico. Early '80s. A bar in Sayulita.* The man had been a wino then, or so Pete had thought — a sunburned drifter with wild stories and a crude hand-drawn map folded in a sandwich bag.

The map of **El Aliento**.

Pete dropped into a prone position and paddled hard for shore. By the time he reached the beach, the man was gone.

Pete scoured the shoreline for him, even jogged through the palms up the road toward the surf shack, but there was no sign. No footprints in the sand.

That night, he couldn't sleep.

He lit a candle in the corner of the shack and unfolded the map again. His hands trembled as he traced the same lines he had studied a hundred times: the cove, the notations about tides, the cryptic swirl that marked the moment of convergence.

*What if that man was never just a wino?*

*What if he'd ridden the wave too?*

The idea lodged in Pete's chest like a splinter.

The next morning, he returned to Sunset Beach at first light and waited. No sign of the man. Not that day. Not the next. Not the next week.

But Pete knew what he'd seen. It wasn't just déjà vu. It was *recognition*. Not of the man's name — Pete never knew that. But of the role he played.

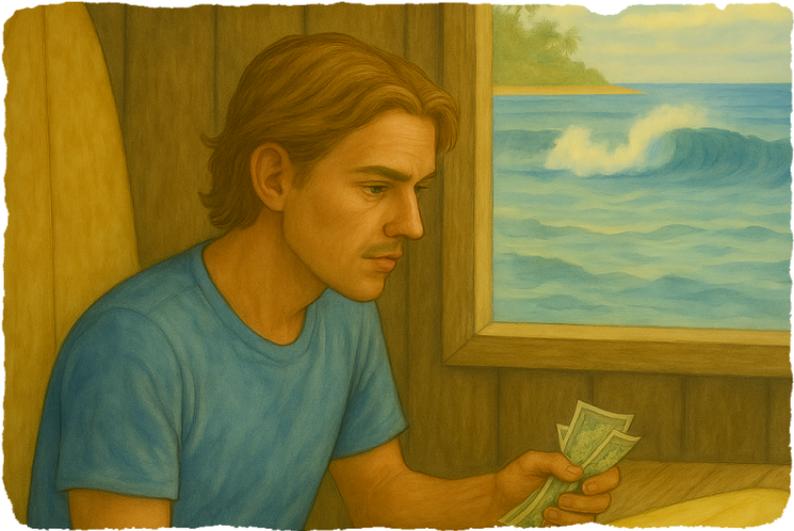
*He was a rider of El Aliento.*

*And maybe, just maybe, he'd come through again.*

The weeks that followed were full of tension. Pete kept his routines — surfed quietly, helped fix dings, shaped the occasional board — but he felt watched. Or maybe he was the one watching, scanning faces in the crowd, waiting for that moment of certainty again.

He checked the tide charts obsessively. Moon phases. Swell windows. The conditions were beginning to line up.

He counted his money. He'd saved almost all of what he earned. Enough for a flight back to California and then to Big Sur.



*Going Back to the Source*

He didn't tell Benny. Didn't tell Kai. Some part of him wanted to. But he couldn't risk it. Not now.

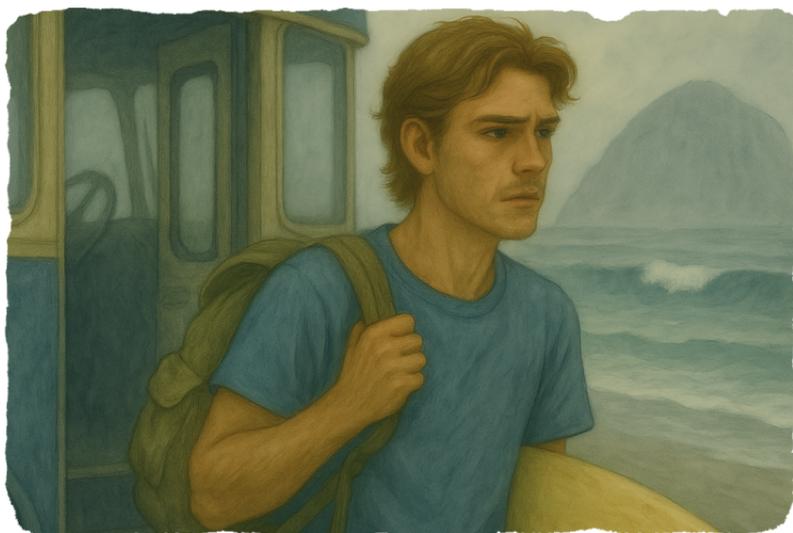
Because if the signs were true, if **El Aliento** was coming again, he needed to be in the right place when it arrived.

And that place was not Hawaii. It was Big Sur. And it was calling.

## Back to the Source

Morro Bay had changed — or maybe it hadn't changed enough.

Pete stepped off the bus with a rucksack slung over his shoulder, a weathered surfboard under his arm, and eyes that had seen too many versions of the same coastline. The air was cooler than he remembered — briny and damp with fog. A seagull wheeled overhead, crying like it was mourning something.



*Arrival in Morro Bay*

He walked the short distance into town.

The streets were quieter in 1976 than they had been in 2025. Fewer cars. No electric charging stations. Just an old gas station on Main, a corner café, and the scent of fried fish drifting in from the wharf.

He passed the lot where his old house *would be*. Right now, it was just a wild patch of dune grass and weeds, sloping up toward the low hills. No porch swing. No broken fence. No future yet written.

Pete stood there a long time, surfboard resting against his hip, as a memory passed through him like mist.

He could see the kitchen window. Hear the creak of the back steps. Smell the salt rising from the estuary just beyond the back fence. But it wasn't here. Not yet.

He turned away and kept walking. The past had teeth when you looked at it too long.

The coast road south wound along the cliffs, sometimes close to the edge, sometimes hidden behind walls of cypress and oak. Pete walked much of it. He hitchhiked a few stretches. A retired couple in a VW van gave him a lift just past Cayucos, playing Joan Baez on the 8-track and asking no questions.

When he reached Big Sur, the sky had begun to clear.

It had been raining. The trees smelled rich with earth and salt, and the cliffs shimmered with the runoff. The Pacific lay below, glinting like old silver. And nestled in a bend in the road, partly obscured by brush, was the trail head — the one from the map.

He found the old footpath just where he remembered it.

The trail wound down through eucalyptus and pine, steep in places, slick with moss. It hadn't yet been paved or "preserved" by the state parks system. It was still wild. Raw. Dangerous. The way the wave wanted it.

When Pete stepped through the final curtain of trees, the cove opened up before him — a crescent bowl of rock and sea, cliffs on either side like ancient guards, and in the center, the water gently breathing. It looked just like the map.

He dropped his pack and sat.

Time moved strangely here, always had. The wind spoke in slow syllables. The waves broke in quiet pulses. Everything felt suspended — as if waiting.

He would have to wait, too.

The signs weren't fully there yet. The moon was just a sliver. The water had no glow. But soon. Weeks, maybe. Months. Or longer.

Pete dug out his small notebook and began to sketch. Not just the cove, but the trees. The birds. The way the light struck the far cliff around 3 p.m. He had done this before, but now it felt urgent — like the land might forget him if he didn't pay attention.

That night, he camped just above the cove, tucked in among the manzanita and twisted oak.



*Watching and Waiting*

He lay in his sleeping bag, staring at the stars, listening to the far-off crash of waves. Somewhere, deep in his bones, he could feel it coming.

Soon, **El Aliento** would return. And this time, he would be ready.

## Holding Pattern

Pete became part of the land.

Days blended together in the cove — cool mornings thick with fog, warm afternoons kissed by golden light, and long, firelit evenings where he scratched notes and sketches into his journal by flickering flame. He tracked the tides. Watched the stars. Kept an eye on the full moons. But **El Aliento** did not return.

Not yet.

Three months turned into six. Then a year. By the second spring, Pete had built a small shelter half-buried in the brush. Nothing visible from the road. Just driftwood, stone, and an old tarp he'd bartered for in town.



*Shelter*

He rarely went into Morro Bay. When he did, it was only to pick up supplies — canned beans, oats, coffee, matches. He avoided contact, kept his head down. Even in 1977, he feared someone might recognize something in him they shouldn't.

Because though his body was now twenty six his mind was still that of the seventy-four-year-old man from 2025. The one who had surfed with his joints wrapped in heat pads and kept handwritten logs of every swell from 1982 on. He missed those notebooks sometimes — their careful charts and yellowed edges. But he had traded them for this chance.

Occasionally, the pull of the ocean was too strong to resist.

He paddled out when the swells were clean, kept to himself, and

surfed like a ghost. Locals saw him now and then, the quiet guy with the faraway eyes. He earned a nickname: *The Watcher*. Some thought he was a Vietnam vet. Others said he was a lighthouse keeper who'd gone half-feral.

No one knew the truth.

One late summer evening, the mist rolled in strange. It wasn't fog, not exactly. It was finer, more silver than gray, and it seemed to carry light with it — like moon dust floating above the cliffs.

Pete stood barefoot in the sand, watching it move through the trees.

His breath caught.

He'd seen this before.

The night before his first ride.

Back in 2025.

He ran to the bluff and scanned the cove. The moon was nearly full. The tide was in. A light offshore wind had begun to whisper. He held out his hands — felt the cool beads of mist condense on his knuckles like dew.

But nothing came.

Not that night. Not the next.

Then the mist was gone again, retreating into whatever crack it had slipped from.

By the time 1978 arrived, Pete had nearly stopped surfing altogether. Not from age — he still moved strong and fluid — but from the weight of waiting. His leashless board remained stashed in the rocks above the cove, protected in a makeshift canvas wrap. The board he had shaped by hand in Hawaii in 1974 — the one with the lines ahead of its time. He still remembered the exact feel of the rail tucked under his arm.

On the rare occasion he saw other surfers in the area, he kept his distance.

And then one foggy morning, he saw *him*.

The man from before — older now. Same silver hair. Same calm gaze. Walking the bluff trail just as Pete had years ago.

Pete dropped into the path behind him, called out.

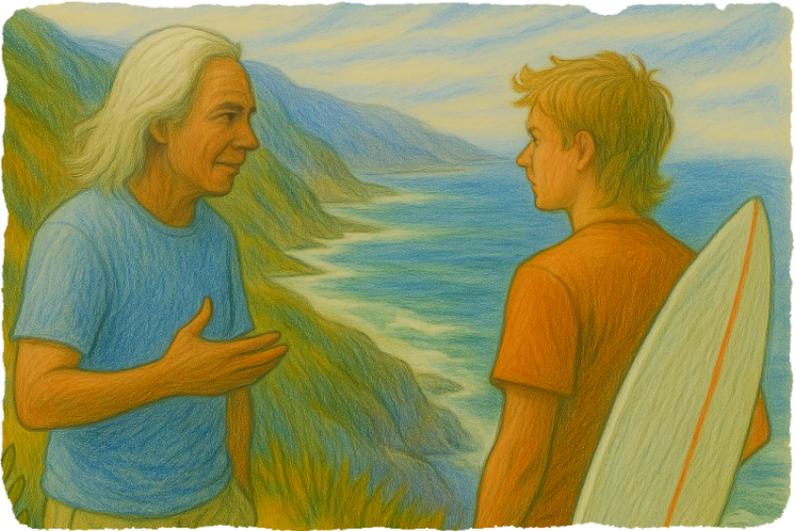
“Hey!”

The man stopped. Turned.

His face was kind, weather-worn, eyes dark but not surprised.

“You made it back,” he said.

Pete blinked. “It was you, wasn’t it? In Hawaii. Sunset Beach.”



*Another Rider*

The man nodded slowly. “I was younger then. Well... relatively.”

Pete stepped closer. “Who are you?”

The man smiled. “Just another rider, same as you. Someone who found a door in the sea.”

They sat on a flat rock at the bluff’s edge. For a while, neither spoke. They just watched the wind carve ripples into the water.

Finally Pete said, “Can you tell when the wave will come?”

The man nodded. “I think so. I can’t ride it anymore — not in this time. Not with this body. But I can feel it.” He tapped a

finger to his temple. “The pattern’s starting again.”

Pete’s heart stirred.

“I thought I was the only one.”

“There are more,” the man said. “Not many. Most don’t last. They get lost, or they chase it too hard and vanish.”

Pete looked toward the cove. “I waited two and a half years.”

The man nodded again. “You’ll wait one more. Then it’ll come.”

He stood slowly, joints creaking. “It seems to always comes in threes. The third ride could be the final one. You should prepare.”

Pete stood too. “Where will I go?”

The man shook his head. “No one knows. You go where the wave takes you. That’s the rule.”

Then he walked away, vanishing into the trees like a whisper.

Pete was left alone again — but not alone in the same way.

The weight of purpose had returned.

He had one more year to wait.

Then the wave would come.

HOLDING PATTERN

And with it, the end of one journey...

Or the beginning of something entirely new.

# 11

## The Return

The air held a charge. Not electricity exactly — something older, deeper, like the memory of lightning.

Pete had been sleeping lightly, fully clothed, his pack ready by the firepit. The stars above the cove were unusually sharp, as though the veil between worlds had thinned just enough to let their light pierce through without distortion.

He rose before midnight. No alarm. No dream. Just that internal pull, the same one he'd felt in 2025 — back when it all began.

The mist had already begun to gather.

Not fog. This was different. Finer. With movement. It hovered just above the ground and sparkled faintly when the moonlight caught it. The moon itself hung low and bloated on the horizon, half-shrouded by drifting clouds, just like on the map. Just like before.

Pete moved down the trail with practiced steps, careful on the damp stone.

At the edge of the cove, he paused. The sea glowed faintly blue, touched with bioluminescence that pulsed and swirled as if stirred by something deep beneath the surface. No wind. No noise but the slow roll of distant sets.



*The sea glowed faintly blue, touched with bioluminescence*

He crouched by the rocks where he'd hidden the board.

Unwrapping the old canvas, he ran a hand over the curves. The board was still perfect. Yellowed slightly, but intact. The rails, the rocker, the fine contours he had shaped by instinct back in 1974. This was the only board he trusted for what lay ahead.

He waxed it slowly, methodically. Every tiny bump felt like a prayer.

And then — he heard it.

The breath.

That deep exhale from the sea itself. The same rushing sound he'd heard the first time. Not a breaking wave... a *breathing one*.

He stood, tucked the board under his arm, and stepped into the water.

It was warmer than he expected. Soft, silky. Welcoming.

He paddled out alone.

No one else could have known. Not this time. The cove was too hidden, the signs too subtle. And this was a one-way ride. Always had been.

He waited just outside the takeoff zone.

The water calmed. The sky deepened.

Then... the horizon moved.

A single wave approached — not the biggest, not the fastest — but shaped like glass and glowing faintly at the lip. The mist thickened over the face of it, and Pete felt something shift in the core of his being. Time, maybe. Or memory.



*El Aliento*

He paddled hard.

Dropped in at the last moment, rail biting the face, and tucked immediately into the barrel.

It wasn't a ride. It was a surrender.

The lip threw over him, and the mist thickened. The sound dulled — not into silence, but into some hum beyond hearing. Every droplet inside the wave seemed suspended. The glow intensified until it was impossible to tell where the wave ended and the light began.

Pete was completely covered up.

Then the wave... collapsed.

The tunnel blew out like a massive lung exhaling. Mist erupted into the air.

And Pete was gone.

Darkness.

Then silence.

Then—

Light.

Pete gasped and coughed, spat seawater, and blinked at the sky above. Blue. Different. Warmer?

He floated, stunned, on the surface of the ocean.

The cliffs were gone.

The cove was gone.

Even the shape of the coastline had changed.

The air smelled like salt and something sweet, almost unfamiliar.

He spun slowly on his board, scanning the horizon.

THE RETURN

Wherever he was now... it wasn't the cove. It wasn't California.

It wasn't *anywhere* he recognized.

He had crossed again.

And the next chapter of his journey — had already begun.

## The Far Shore

Pete sat on his board, drifting.

The water was glassy, motionless, but carried a faint pulse — a hum just beneath the surface, as if the ocean itself was breathing. His board rocked gently as he scanned the horizon. No boats. No buildings. No landmarks he recognized. The air had a different density to it, subtly sweet, like the world had been scrubbed clean.

He turned toward shore.

A steep coastline rose from the sea, rugged and forested, like Big Sur — but not. The cliffs were smoother, the trees taller and thinner, their leaves almost translucent, catching the strange sunlight like stained glass. A beach stretched into a half-moon cove of golden sand, untouched, primal.



*The Far Shore*

It was... close. But *off*.

Pete paddled in, moving carefully. Every stroke echoed strangely in his ears. He half expected to see someone — a hiker, a ranger, a surfer. But the place was empty. Perfectly still.

He walked up the sand, board under arm, barefoot, wetsuit clinging to his skin. The sun here was higher and slightly redder than he remembered. The air had no bite. No breeze. Only the distant crash of waves and the whisper of the strange trees rustling.

Time felt... thick.

Pete dropped the board on the sand and sat down, arms draped over his knees. For a long while, he just breathed. In and out. Steady.

“This isn’t home,” he said aloud.

Not even 1974. Not Hawaii. Not California. Somewhere adjacent, maybe. Somewhere parallel.

His mind, still rooted in 2025, began assessing the situation. If this was Earth, it wasn’t *his* Earth. There were no contrails, no distant hum of cars or planes. No footprints. No wrappers in the sand.

The place was beautiful. But eerie. Like a memory that didn’t belong to him.

He explored the beach that day. Found nothing. No people. No signs of habitation. He drank from a freshwater spring and gathered fruit from strange but edible-looking trees that reminded him of fig and guava. His body, now still young and strong, responded well — no fatigue, no dehydration.

As the sun began to set, it didn’t fade behind clouds or drop toward the horizon.

It just... blinked out.

Instantly.

Twilight fell like a curtain.

Then came the glow.

From the ocean.

Pete walked to the shore and saw it again — the bioluminescence — except this time it was more intense. A river of light moving beneath the surface, like fireflies in the current. It flowed, circled, then pooled into a single spot offshore.

And that hum again — low, steady, almost mechanical. But deeper. Elemental.

“El Aliento...” he whispered.

He knew it.

The wave was coming again.

From nowhere, without wind or swell, a perfect 5-foot wave began to stand in the glowing water. A single, curling barrel. Mist formed over the top, swirling like smoke.

Pete stood frozen. The wave passed. Then another formed. And another. Like a machine. Regular. Unnatural.

He didn't ride them that night.

He just watched.

The sea here *breathed* El Aliento — every night.

Was this where it was born?

Or was this place some kind of **waiting room** between times?

He slept fitfully that night beneath the stars — which twinkled unfamiliar patterns above. His dreams were fractured: glimpses of Morro Bay, the old man on the bluff, Benny at the surf shack, Rabbit dropping into a wave at Sunset. Time... scrambled.

The next day, he walked inland. The forest was vast. Every leaf seemed to track his movements. No birds. No insects. Just the windless rustle of light-through-leaves.

He began to feel the pull of the ocean again.

That night, he paddled out.

Waited.

The waves came like clockwork. Each glowing, each silent, each shaped with impossible precision.



*Perfection*

He caught one.

Just to test it.

Dropped in late, crouched deep, felt the mist enclose him. The same hum. The same glow. It built and built—

Then spat him out into the same place.

Same beach.

Same water.

Same empty world.

No time travel. No change.

He stayed one more day.

On the third night, as the red sun dropped like a guillotine behind the cliffs, he made his decision.

He would try again.

One more time.

But this time, *with intent*.

This time, he would ride the breath with everything he had — not hoping to return, but surrendering completely.

The glow began to rise.

And Pete paddled toward it.

## The Leap

The water pulsed beneath him, glowing like veins of moonlight had been buried in the ocean floor and were now bleeding toward the surface. Pete sat on his board just beyond the break, breath calm, body still. The evening air was thick, and there was no wind, only that quiet, consistent hum — the sound he now associated with **El Aliento** itself.

He had been here long enough to understand: this place wasn't meant for people. It had no time, no change, no decay. The waves broke nightly in mechanical perfection, as though the world exhaled the same breath again and again without variation. Paradise at first glance. But sterile underneath. Unsettling. A looping dream.

And now, Pete was done dreaming.

The mist began to rise.

Out on the horizon, the wave began to form. Not massive, not

towering — just clean. A five-foot cylinder of water, illuminated from within. The lip curled delicately, the barrel hollow and smooth, like a tunnel through glass.



*A five-foot cylinder of water, illuminated from within*

This time, Pete didn't hesitate.

He paddled with purpose, each stroke an affirmation. He didn't know where the wave would take him. But he knew he couldn't stay.

He caught it just before it pitched, dropping in with the grace of a man who had lived more years than his body now showed. He crouched low, hands brushing the face of the wave, feeling the cold silk of the water hum against his palms.

Then the mist closed around him.

The hum crescendoed. He was inside again. Covered up. Bathed in glow.

His mind flickered.

**Morro Bay. 2025. His small home on the hill. The fruit stand. Benny. Rabbit. Carver. The old expat. The map.**

The timeline spun around him like driftwood in a whirlpool. But Pete stayed centered.

He whispered into the roar, “Let me go forward. Or take me home.”

The tunnel narrowed.

The glow grew.

Then — silence.

The wave collapsed.

Not violently, not in chaos — but like a long-held breath finally released.

And Pete was gone.

When he awoke, he was in a bed.

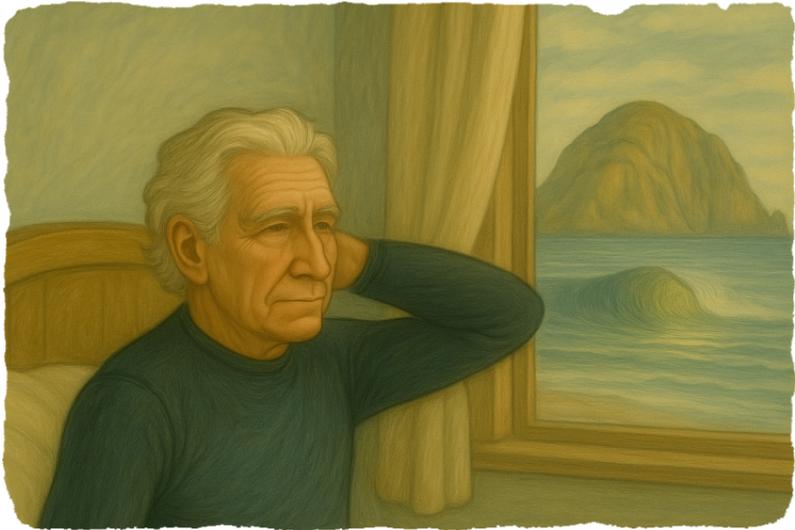
Not sand. Not forest. A bed.

Soft linen. A cotton blanket pulled over him. He blinked at a ceiling fan spinning slowly above. A fly buzzed somewhere nearby.

Then — the smell. Coffee. Distant traffic. Salt air.

He sat up slowly, muscles aching.

The room was modest — old hardwood floor, surf posters on the wall, a window with faded curtains looking out onto a familiar street.



*Back Home*

He staggered to it, pulled it open.

**Morro Bay.**

He could see the bay itself in the distance. His old neighborhood, but changed. Subtle changes. Slightly newer cars. New paint on old shops. It was 2025.

He was home.

Or a version of it.

His board — the one he had shaped in 1974 and ridden through time — leaned quietly in the corner of the room.

The sound of a seagull cracked through the silence, and Pete smiled.

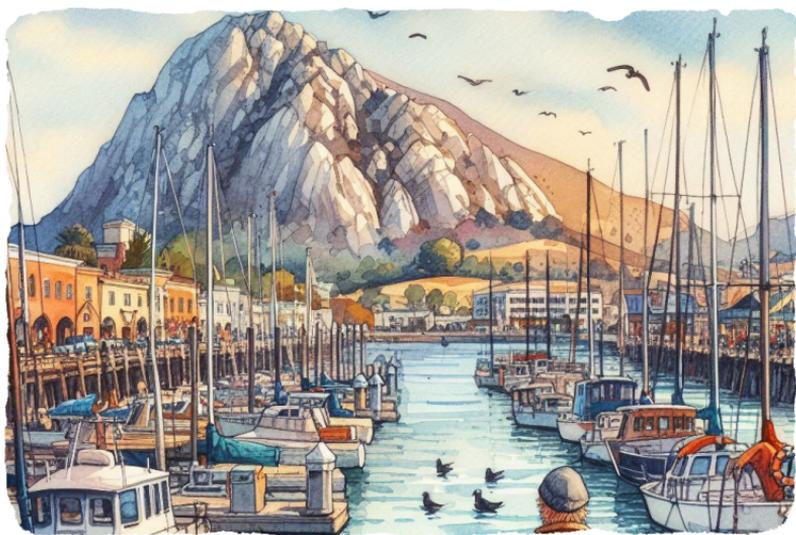
He had made it back.

THE MIST, THE MOON AND THE GLOW

## The Echo of Return

Pete moved through Morro Bay like a ghost in his own past.

The streets were as he remembered them — but sharper, louder, paved differently. The town had changed, of course. It always had, just slowly enough that most people never noticed. But Pete noticed everything. He'd seen Morro Bay in 1974. He'd seen it in other versions of time and place. Now, in 2025, it all looked... unfamiliar and familiar in equal measure.



*Morro Bay*

He walked up Harbor Street past Dorn's, where the smell of grilled halibut and fries drifted out like memory. Across the street, kayakers were loading up by the Embarcadero, laughing in the breeze. He paused, taking it in.

It was the world he'd left behind.

But not exactly.

He found a quiet room above a surf rental shop — the same building where his old friend used to keep a workshop before it was turned into a wine bar. The landlord didn't ask many questions. Pete paid cash and nodded like a man used to hiding in plain sight.

Each morning he walked the bluff trail alone, watching the swell patterns, looking north toward the stretch of Big Sur coast where **El Aliento** had first carried him. His board — the 1974 shape — was stashed beneath the floorboards. He hadn't ridden it since. It was sacred now.

At night, he read the charts.

He compared moon phases. Studied tide tables. Checked wind directions and bioluminescent bloom reports like a scientist studying an ancient ritual. The map was back in his hands. Worn now, faded, creased in strange new ways. But legible. Still guiding.

The pull of **El Aliento** hadn't left him.

It whispered still.

One afternoon, Pete walked into a used bookstore off Main. In the back, tucked between two fishing memoirs, he found a journal almost identical to the one he had carried in Hawaii. Blank. Waiting. He bought it, paid in cash, and spent that evening filling the first page:

*"I am back. The year is 2025. I have returned, changed.*

*El Aliento breathes still.*

*And I am listening."*

He spent weeks re-learning how to move in this new-old world.

Technology had crept in like vines over a crumbling fence. Kids rode electric bikes where they used to skate. Drones hovered where seagulls once ruled. The surf lineup was crowded with foam boards, GoPros, and conversations about crypto.

Pete rarely paddled out.

He watched instead.

On a foggy evening near the end of September, he stood at a lookout point and felt it — that *change in the air*. A static, subtle shift. A mist began to form, though no wave broke below.



*El Aliento is Whispering*

Something stirred in the cove.

It was faint. A whisper. A memory.

And Pete knew:

**It wasn't over.**

Not yet.

El Aliento would come again.

Maybe not soon.

But eventually.

And when it did... he would be ready.

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## Others

Pete's dreams had become strange again.

Not surreal, like dreams usually are. These were precise. Fragmented flashes of faces, voices, oceans that looked almost right, but never quite. He woke often with the name of a town on his lips, or a time, or a tide pattern he hadn't seen since the '70s.

He told himself they were just memories.

But he knew better.

Something was calling.

Not just **El Aliento**.

**Someone.**

It started with a glimpse.

On a dull gray morning, Pete stood by the sea wall near Morro Rock, sipping black coffee from a paper cup. The fog hung low and damp, curling around the edges of town. As he turned to head back up the trail, he spotted a figure down by the jetty — a man, older, standing barefoot on the rocks, staring out at the sea.



*Mysterious Figure*

There was something familiar in the way the man stood.

Something in his posture, his stillness.

Pete froze.

Could it be—

He moved toward the rocks, heart climbing into his throat. But by the time he reached the spot, the man was gone.

Only a trail of faint, wet footprints led up the sand... and vanished where the mist met the beach.

Later that week, Pete pulled the old map from its leather sheath.

He hadn't looked at it closely since his return. But now, something was different. A small red dot near the edge — a pinprick of ink that hadn't been there before.

A new exit point?

Or a rendezvous?

He couldn't say.

But the mark pulsed in his mind.

Not literally. But every time he closed his eyes, it floated there — flashing like a warning buoy.

Pete stared at it for hours.

Then packed his bag.

The next morning, he left Morro Bay in his old truck. Same one he'd found rusting behind the surf shop. He'd restored it with patient hands and just enough money.



*Leaving Morro Bay*

The route was etched in his soul — the curves and cliffs of Highway 1.

He drove north through fog and pine.

Back toward **Big Sur**.

Back toward the **cove**.

He arrived just before dusk. The air had that strange stillness he now recognized — the prelude to *something*.

Pete hiked the familiar trail, tracing old steps, each one stirring a memory. When he reached the overlook above the cove, he sat

on a stone outcropping and waited.

Hours passed.

The moon crept higher.

Then... he saw it.

Another surfer — paddling out.

Young. Smooth strokes. No flashlight. No gear. Just instinct.

Pete stood slowly, breath caught in his chest.

**Someone else had come.**

Someone who knew the signs.

And just as Pete was about to call out — the wave began to rise.

Soft mist. Subtle glow.

Pete watched from the cliff as the surfer dropped into the glowing barrel... and vanished.

No crash.

No spit.

Just... gone.

OTHERS

Pete stood in silence for a long time, wind tugging at his jacket.

*He wasn't alone...*

*He never had been.*

## The Riders

Pete remained still on the cliff's edge, the salt air curling around him like a question he couldn't yet answer.

He had just watched someone disappear into **El Aliento**.

The wave had formed exactly as it had for him — glowing, misted, sacred. And the rider, someone young and unknown, had paddled for it with perfect timing, dropped into the barrel, and vanished.



*Arriving in Big Sur*

Not in the way a surfer might get lost in the foam, or taken under.

**Gone**, like Pete had been. Like the expat in Mexico had hinted at. Like others, maybe, over centuries.

Pete was not the only one.

That idea sat heavy on his shoulders, not as a burden, but as revelation.

There were others.

**Riders.**

By morning, Pete was hiking inland. There was a trail off the

highway — not marked, but worn by feet. He followed it with a kind of subconscious certainty, as though he had done this before. And in a way, he had.

It led to a bluff above a small cove, the one where he first rode El Aliento. At the edge stood a man waiting.

Tall, older. Wind-chiseled. Sunburned in a way only lifelong surfers get. His long gray hair pulled back under a woven cap. Eyes sharp and calm.

“You saw him, didn’t you?” the man said.

Pete didn’t answer right away. He took a few more steps.

“Who was he?”

“One of us,” the man replied. “From another time. Maybe your future. Maybe your past.”

Pete’s jaw worked slightly. “How many?”

“Hard to say. But we all find this place eventually. The wave finds us.”

Pete looked out at the sea, the early morning light tracing silver along the water’s edge.

“You’re not surprised,” he said finally.

The man smiled. “I was once. Now? I’ve seen enough. I’ve even

tried to follow one, once or twice. Never quite caught the right one.”

“So you’ve never gone?”

The man shook his head. “I’m too old now. My knees don’t paddle right. My breath’s too short.”

There was silence between them for a long moment.

Then Pete said, “You gave me the map.”

The man looked at him. “In Mexico, yes.”

“You were drunk.”

The man laughed. “Usually was.”

Pete folded his arms. “Why me?”

“You already had the timing. You were always listening. Some people hear El Aliento and pretend it’s just the wind. You leaned in.”

Pete lowered his gaze. “So what now?”



*Wise Old Man*

The man shrugged. “You’ve come full circle. You know it’s not just about going back or forward. It’s about knowing **when**. And **why**.”

Pete nodded slowly. “I saw the wave again last night.”

“I know. I was on the bluff.”

Pete turned to him. “Then you saw it too. You saw him vanish.”

“I did,” the man said, voice quieter now. “And you saw what I once saw. That this isn’t just about time. It’s about *connection*. Between eras. Between people.”

Pete didn’t respond right away. The tide was shifting below.

Gulls cried overhead. Somewhere, a wave cracked and foamed.

“I think I have one more ride in me,” Pete said.

“I know you do,” the man said. “But what are you looking for now?”

Pete looked up, eyes distant. “Not a when. Not a place. Just... understanding.”

The man nodded.

“Then you’re ready.”

## Holding Pattern (Return)

Pete stayed near Big Sur.

Not in the cove itself, of course — too exposed, too raw with memory. But nearby, tucked along the inland slope of the Santa Lucia Range, where redwoods filtered light and the ocean murmured distantly below.

The wave would not come again quickly.

He knew that now.

El Aliento was not some scheduled train, some lunar event he could clock like a tide chart. It breathed on its own terms. It needed the right mix of tide, moonlight, mist, bioluminescence, wind, swell, and — more than anything — **intention**.

For now, it slept.

And so, Pete waited.



*Redwood Forest Shack*

He passed the time hiking the ridges, revisiting the secret trails and fire roads he had wandered as a boy. This land had changed less than Morro Bay. The developers hadn't fully invaded here yet. There was still space, still wilderness. Still quiet.

He found an abandoned A-frame cabin half-hidden in the trees, long forgotten, but dry and sound. Over the next few weeks, he cleaned it out, patched the roof, and made it livable. It reminded him of his old house back in 2025 — not in shape, but in **spirit**. Solitary. Patient.

He surfed local spots when the swell was right — Garrapata, Andrew Molera, sometimes down near Lucia. Nothing special, nothing mystical. Just waves. Cold and green. Honest.

And each time he duck-dived beneath the surface, he listened.

But the breath was silent.

The map remained tucked in its sheath, though he unrolled it from time to time. Not to look for anything new, but just to feel its weight. Its promise. The ink was fading. The edges more frayed. But the magic, whatever magic it held, was still there.

He had begun to wonder if that last ride had closed the loop. Maybe it was done now. Maybe El Aliento had offered its gift twice — once to bring him to his past, once to bring him home.

But he didn't quite believe that.

There were too many signs.

The oarfish he'd seen. The young surfer who disappeared. The red dot that had appeared on the map, then vanished. And something else — a **tension** in the wind, like the world holding its breath.

Sometimes, he'd drive the winding coast road just for the view. He'd pull off and sit on a bluff, watching the mist roll over the cliffs, feeling the air on his skin.

He saw familiar faces in town now and then — younger versions of people he would know in the future. He kept to himself, kept his knowledge buried. But the temptation to interfere was always there.

One night, at a roadside diner, a young woman sat next to him at the counter and asked if he believed in destiny.

Pete smiled into his coffee.

“Not destiny,” he said. “But maybe... rhythm.”

“Like music?” she asked.

He nodded. “Or the sea.”

She said nothing for a moment, then: “You seem like someone who’s waiting for something.”

Pete didn’t answer. Just left a few bills on the counter and slipped out into the night.

The seasons turned. One year passed. Then another.

Pete aged slowly now — not visibly, but internally. He felt each moment differently. Not like someone growing older, but like someone **growing through time**.

And though he sometimes doubted, he always found himself back at the overlook near the cove.

Just in case.

He never saw the mist.

Not yet.

But on the last night of the third year, as the moon rose fat and orange above the hills, a strange glow shimmered faintly over the water — not bright, but real.



*Mist, Moon, Glow*

He didn't move.

Not yet.

He only watched... and listened...

...for the breath.

## The Third Breath

The mist arrived without warning.

It did not creep in like fog or swirl with the chill of marine layer. It simply appeared — suspended in the air above the cove like a shimmering veil, curling low along the face of the sea.



*The Mist Appears*

Pete stood barefoot on the cliff above, staring.

Three years.

Three years of watching, waiting, reading the sky, listening to the ocean. Three years of wondering if it would ever return. If **he** would still be the kind of man who could ride it when it did.

But now, as the wind shifted and the water pulsed with light, all his doubts burned away.

It was here.

El Aliento.

Again.

He moved with silent purpose. Down the worn goat trail carved into the bluff. Across the pebble-strewn shore. His wetsuit, faded but still whole, clung to his frame as he paddled out slowly into the glow.

The ocean was warm — not tropical, but warmer than it should have been. Bioluminescent threads danced beneath his board, sparking to life with every stroke. The air tingled against his skin. Even the stars overhead seemed to lean closer.

There was no lineup. No other surfers. Only Pete.

The wave began to rise in the distance.

It wasn't monstrous — no towering slab or freak swell. It was just as it had been: a perfectly shaped 5- to 6-foot right, forming out of nowhere, gathering light and mist and **meaning**.

He turned to face the horizon.

He paddled hard.

Caught it.

The drop was smooth. Almost too smooth.

He slid down the face with the ease of memory, feeling every tiny bump of wax under his feet. The barrel began to pitch. The lip curled forward with graceful intent. The tunnel formed.

And then he was inside.

This time, it was different.

The mist wasn't just glowing — it was **alive**. It pulsed around him, wrapping his arms, his chest, his board. He couldn't see the lip behind him anymore. Couldn't see the opening ahead.

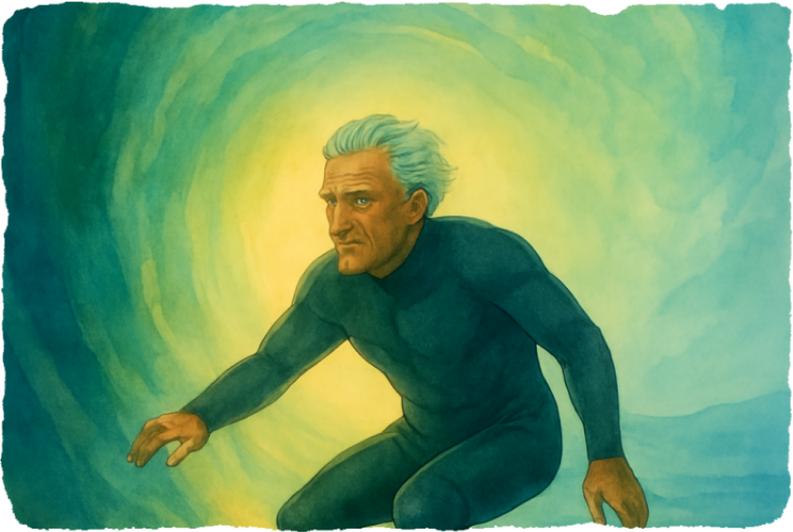
But he could feel the **time** in it.

It pushed and pulled like a tide. Like breathing. One moment he felt young again — lean, light, sixteen. The next he felt old — brittle, weary, eighty-four. Then something stranger: a sense of **agelessness**, of being outside time altogether.

The wave inhaled.

Pete held his breath.

The barrel collapsed — not with violence, but with the rush of a **giant lung exhaling**. The mist blasted out in a halo of light and water droplets, and Pete vanished inside the glow.



*The mist wasn't just glowing — it was **alive***

Silence.

Darkness.

Then...

Light.

A new shoreline appeared in the distance. Golden. Unfamiliar. The wave spat him out gently, and he skidded onto the shoulder, blinking into the dawn.

The air smelled different. The light was different.

Wherever — **whenever** — he had landed, the journey had

changed him.

He sat up slowly, straddling his board.

Ahead, a coastline he didn't recognize stretched out — wild, lush, maybe tropical. But not Hawaii. Not California.

And certainly not 2025.

He was somewhere new.

Somewhere beyond time.

*Somewhere El Aliento had chosen for him.*

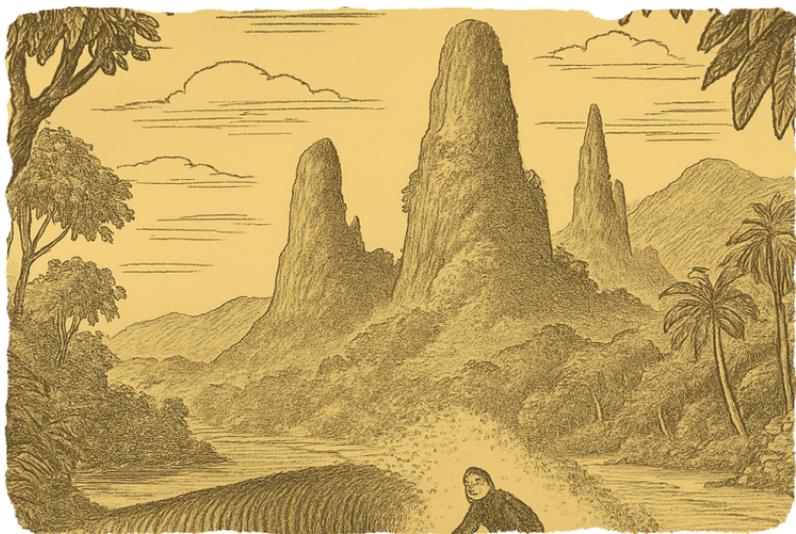
## The Place Between

Pete sat on his board for a long time.

The sun had just crested the horizon, bathing the unfamiliar shore in a golden haze. The wave that brought him here was already dissolving into the background swell, its mystic glow gone as if it had never existed.

He looked around.

The coastline was beautiful — too beautiful. Cliffs that resembled Big Sur, yes, but softer somehow. The rock formations were more rounded, and vines hung from ledges in a way he'd never seen in California. There was jungle-like growth along the ridgelines, but no buildings, no signs of roads. No footprints.



*Strange New Land*

It was quiet.

**Too** quiet.

No birds. No insects. No wind in the trees.

Pete paddled slowly toward the shore, each stroke rippling bioluminescence behind him like a comet tail. When his feet touched sand, it was fine as sifted flour — dry, despite the tide. The air felt neither warm nor cool, but neutral. Almost like a dream.

He carried his board up the beach and stopped just short of the tree line.

The jungle — or forest — was dense and unfamiliar. The leaves had an iridescent sheen, and the trunks of the trees shimmered faintly in the shifting light. Pete turned to look at the ocean again.

Nothing.

Just endless blue and that feeling of **stillness**.

He spoke aloud: “Where the hell am I?”

His voice didn’t echo.

In fact, it felt **swallowed**.

He walked for hours, exploring the coastline. He found no trails, no debris, no animals — only surreal beauty and a persistent sense of watching eyes that never revealed themselves.

Eventually, exhausted and aching in his bones — even in his younger form — Pete slumped beneath a slanted palm and opened the small pouch in his wetsuit.

The **map** was still there. Still dry. But something had changed.

A **new marking** had appeared.

It was faint, drawn in the same style as the original — a swirling pattern near the edge of the paper, where before there had only been blank parchment. It looked like a **spiral**, drawn in what resembled silver ink.

He traced it with his finger. The lines shimmered, pulsed once — and then returned to stillness.

This wasn't just another place.

This was a **waiting room**. A holding space. A world built not for living, but **passing through**.

Pete stood and looked to the sea.

And there it was again.

Just offshore, forming silently beneath the surface — a perfect, glowing wave. Another El Aliento.



*Another Perfect Glowing Wave*

Not tomorrow. Not next year.

**Tonight.**

He began to understand: This place existed at the edge of time. A kind of **junction**. A sacred dimension where El Aliento was born, or maybe where it ended. Time behaved strangely here. Space was warped. Logic bent. Colors accentuated.

No one lived here because **no one was meant to stay**.

Pete knew what he had to do.

He had until nightfall to rest, reflect, and ready himself. This wasn't home, and it wasn't where he belonged.

One last ride.

And wherever it took him — he'd go.

## The Final Ride

Twilight descended quickly in the Place Between.

There was no long golden hour, no gradual fading of the light — only an abrupt shift, like someone dimming the world by hand. The shadows deepened, the sea turned to glass, and the air shimmered faintly with anticipation.



*Twilight*

Pete stood alone at the water's edge.

His board — the same one that had carried him through time again and again — rested under his arm. The wax was pitted, the deck sun-faded, but it felt alive. Ready.

This would be his last attempt.

He wasn't sure what "last" meant anymore — not in the way others might mean it. But something in his bones told him: this ride would take him **somewhere final**.

Behind him, the jungle rustled — not with animals, but with unseen presence. The trees didn't speak, but he felt them **listening**.

Far out to sea, the mist began to rise.

At first, it was barely visible — just a low, swirling haze hugging the surface. Then it grew, thickening and glowing as it moved inward. A wave began to form beneath it, the telltale roll of a swell gathering speed, gathering light, gathering **purpose**.

Pete paddled out, arms steady, breath slow.

His body, though young, trembled with the weight of everything he'd seen, everything he'd lived. The years in Hawaii, the return to Big Sur, the time spent waiting — and the realization that the wave had never really belonged to any one time at all.

El Aliento **was time**.

Or the breath between times.

He turned to face the wave.

It rose behind him, not monstrous but perfect — again that 5-foot wall of glowing energy, crowned with mist, glittering with blue-white flecks of bioluminescence. The sound it made was no longer a roar but a **drawn-in breath**. As if the ocean itself were preparing to exhale once more.

Pete paddled.

Dropped in.

And stood.

The barrel wrapped around him like a tunnel of stars.

Time flickered. He saw flashes — memories, futures, moments he hadn't lived but somehow knew. A child's laughter. A long-lost friend waving from a distant shore. The face of the old expat, younger again, smiling from the water.

The mist thickened.

The breath built.

Pete felt his heart sync to the rhythm of it — the pull and push of time, the uncoiling of something ancient and beautiful.

The wave curled tighter.

The world disappeared.

With a great sigh, the barrel collapsed — not in chaos but in *release*. Mist and light exploded outward like the detonation of a dream.

Pete was gone.

**And then...**

He hit the water, hard but clean.

The sound of gulls overhead.

The scent of brine and diesel and eucalyptus.

When he surfaced, he blinked rapidly. The water was cold. The cliffs — familiar. Fog drifted lazily over the bluffs. A red kayak bobbed in the distance.

He turned to look inland, up and down the coast.

**Morro Bay.**

**Home.**

He waded to shore slowly. His legs trembled, not from exhaustion but awe.

Up the road, past the old pine grove, he saw it — the house. **His house.** Not the future one. The old version, newly built, fresh paint and raw wood. Still decades from becoming the quiet place he'd once left behind.

He laughed.

Then cried.

He was back in his time — or close to it.

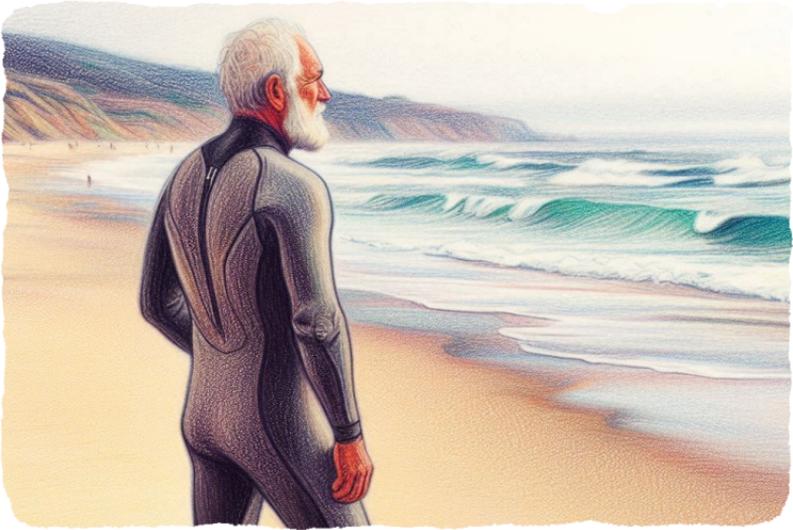
A thought struck him, clear and sharp:

The **board.**

The one he had shaped in secret in Hawaii in 1974. The one he had hidden away beneath the floorboards of the shack near Waimea. Would it still be there?

Would it exist here?

He didn't know.



*Back Home*

But something told him: some part of that board — like a ghost — had traveled through time with him. Not physically, but *imprinted* somehow.

He looked down at the board beneath his feet.

Different wax. Different dings.

But the rails were his. The rocker curve — unmistakably his hand.

He smiled.

Pete Wellstoke, seventy-four years old once more, stood at the edge of the Pacific with a time-traveling board beneath him and the breath of the ocean in his lungs.

El Aliento might come again.

And if it did... he'd be ready.

## Epilogue

### *Big Sur – Present Day*

The cove was still there.

Same jagged cliffs, same restless kelp tugging at the tide. But the world around it had changed. Trails were posted now, lined with signs warning of erosion. Drones sometimes buzzed overhead. Still, if you timed it right — if you waited for the fog to lift and the moon to rise — the cove would whisper, just as it always had.

Pete Wellstoke stood at the overlook, his surfboard planted upright in the sand beside him. Not the old board from Morro Bay. Not the 2025 carbon stringerless tech. The board he'd shaped in 1974 — the one he'd stashed behind the old koa wood rafters of the Hale'iwa shack, years before anyone would understand what it was. He had retrieved it. Kept it hidden. And now, after all this time, it waited beside him again.



*Pete's Board from 1974*

The years had caught back up to him, mostly. He was older now, back in the body he had before that first ride. The years he lived in Hawaii — they still shimmered inside him like salt crystals you could never fully rinse off.

No one knew the full truth, not even the ones who had seen him vanish. The ones who knew him as a quiet man who came and went with the tides. Who shaped boards under moonlight. Who

## EPILOGUE

watched the ocean like it was a clock only he could read.

The map was gone — disintegrated in the mist on his final return. But he didn't need it anymore. The signs were etched in his memory. The tide, the moon, the shimmer in the spray.

He walked down the path slowly, barefoot now, just like before. The ocean below breathed in and out. Somewhere, a wave began to form.

Maybe it would come again.

Maybe not.

And if *El Aliento* returned — the breath, the glow, the mist — then maybe the wave still had more to show him.

Or maybe, this time... it would be for someone else.

## Afterword



*Some waves exist only in memory, or in myth. “El Aliento” began as an idea on a scrap of paper, scribbled while watching the fog roll in. What followed was a journey through time, surfing history, and the longing to rewrite the past.*

*I wanted this story to feel like a whispered tale told around a driftwood campfire — full of sea spray, mystery, and the pull of what might have been.*

**— Zinn Tidewell**