

— A NAVRITTO STORY —



One More
Breath.



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One More Breath

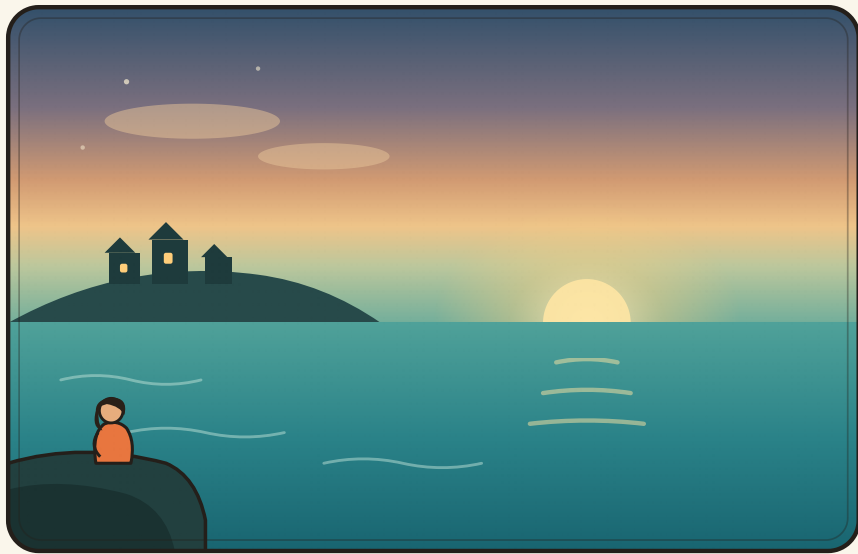
Written & illustrated by Navritto.

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Nila lived where the land ended and the sea began, in a village of small houses built on the rocks. Every fisherman there knew the water. Nila loved it more than any of them.

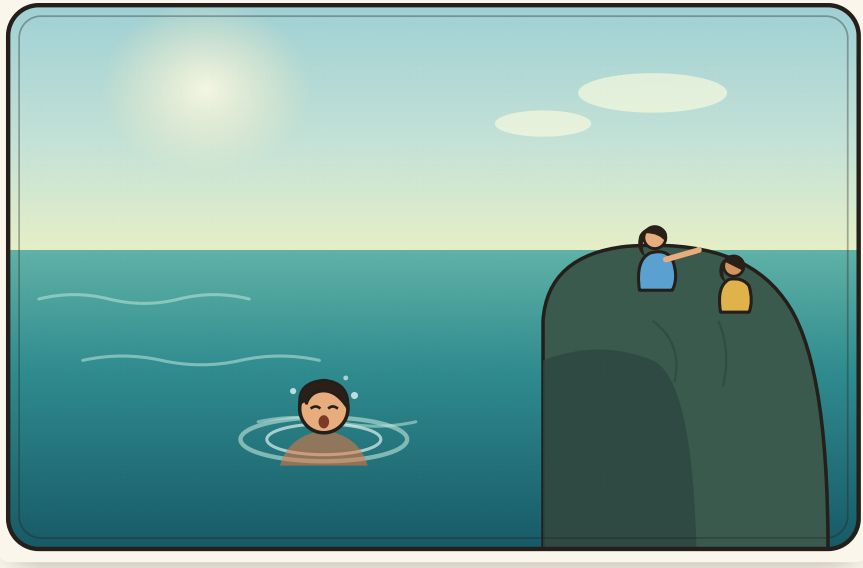
Each morning she sat on the cold stone and watched the sea breathe — in, and out, and in again. She wanted to know what it was like far down, where the light could not reach.



Long ago, the village had a storm-bell. When dark weather was coming, someone would ring it, and its deep bronze voice would call every boat safely home.

But one winter the old bell slipped from its post and sank. It came to rest on the seabed, far below, in the cold and the dark. Year after year it lay there, silent. No one could hold their breath long enough to reach it.

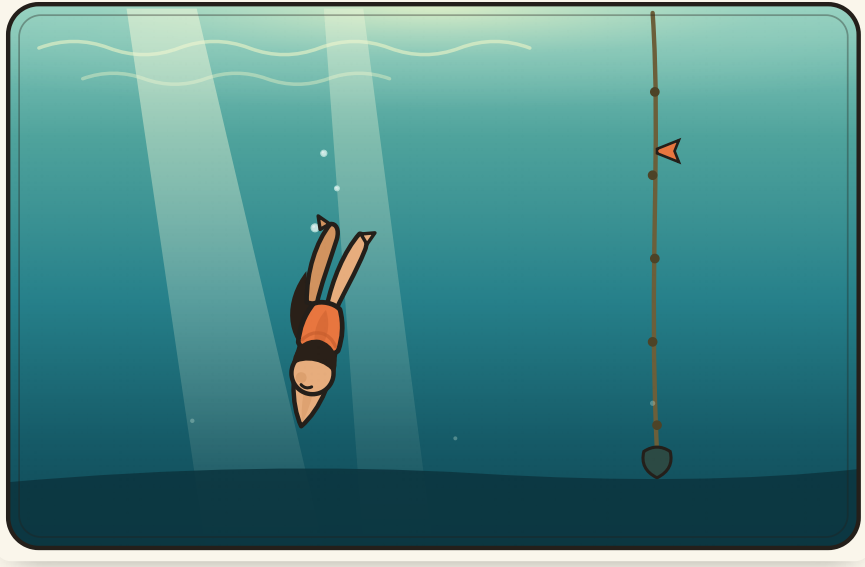
Nila looked at the grey water and thought, quietly: one day, I will go down and ring it.



But Nila could hold her breath for only a few seconds. When she ducked under and swam down, the sea soon pushed her back up, gasping.

The other children laughed from the rocks. “You? You can barely reach the crabs,” they said. “The bell is deeper than the deepest boat. You will never touch it.”

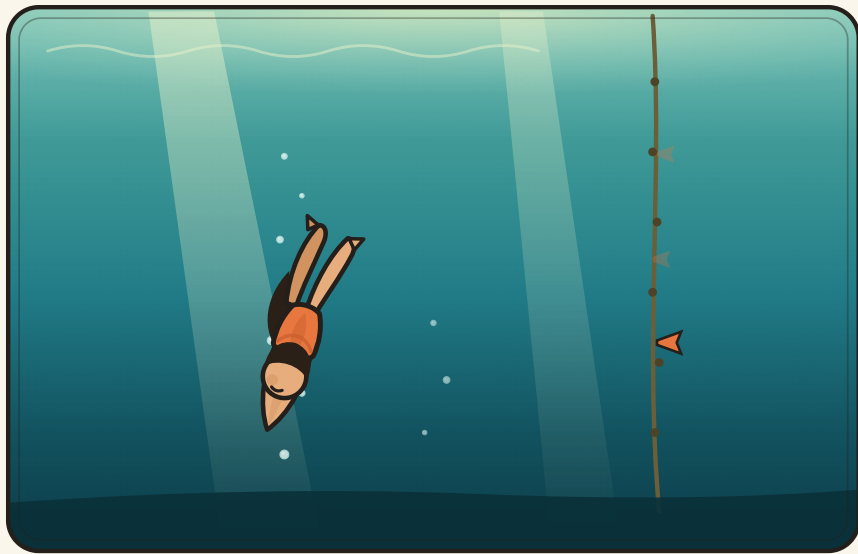
Nila climbed out, dripping and cold. She did not argue. But she did not stop wanting it, either.



So she began to train, alone, before anyone else woke.

She hung a knotted rope from an old buoy, with a stone to hold it straight down. On the first morning she took one big breath, swam down along the rope, and touched the second knot before her chest began to burn. She tied a little red cloth there, to mark how deep she had gone.

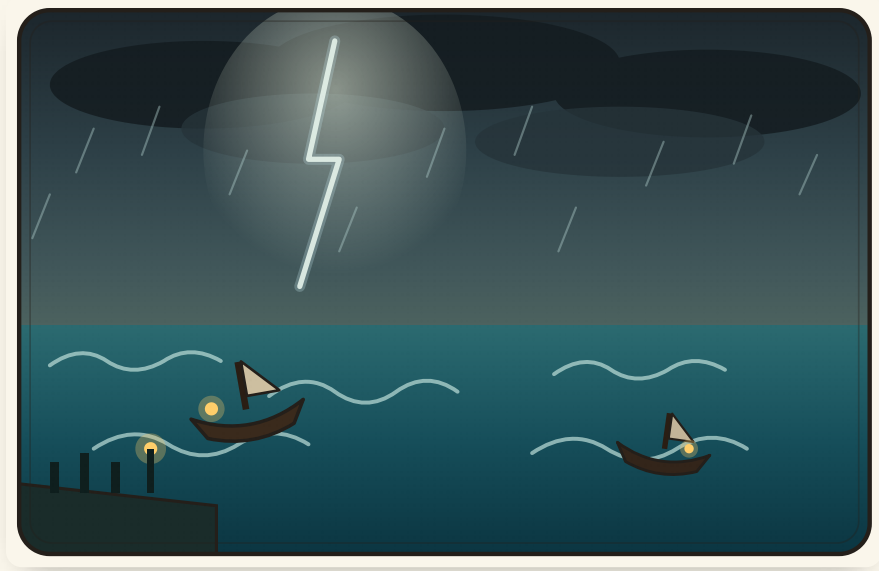
Two knots. That was all. She swam up, breathed, and went home.



The next morning she went a little deeper. And the next. And the one after that.

Most days, nothing seemed to change. The rope looked the same. Her count sounded the same. The red cloth crept down by less than a hand. On the cold mornings, when the water bit her skin, a small voice told her to stay in bed — and she got up anyway, and took one more breath, and went down one more time.

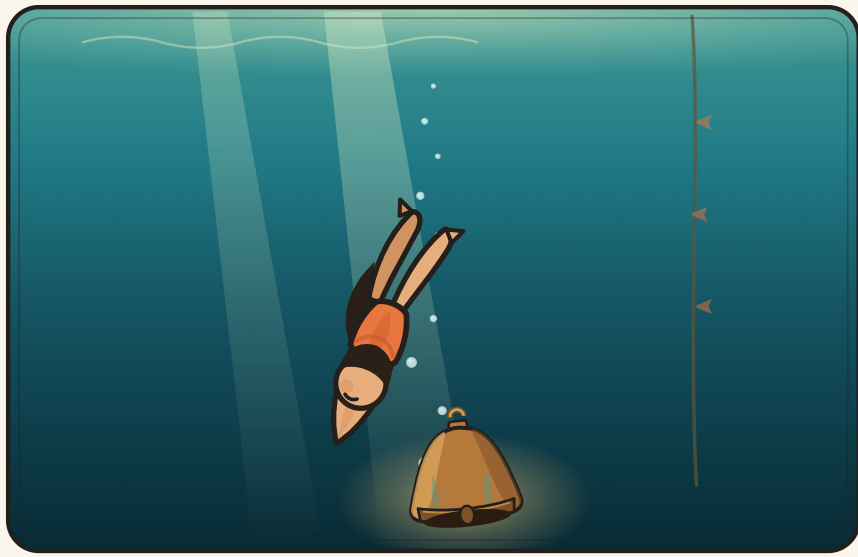
Winter passed. Then spring. The village did not notice. The sea did not notice. Nila kept count, and kept going.



Then one black night, a storm came fast off the sea.

The wind screamed. The waves stood up like walls. And the fishing boats were still out on the water, too far to see the shore. In the old days the bell would have called them in — but the bell was on the seabed, silent, where it had lain for years.

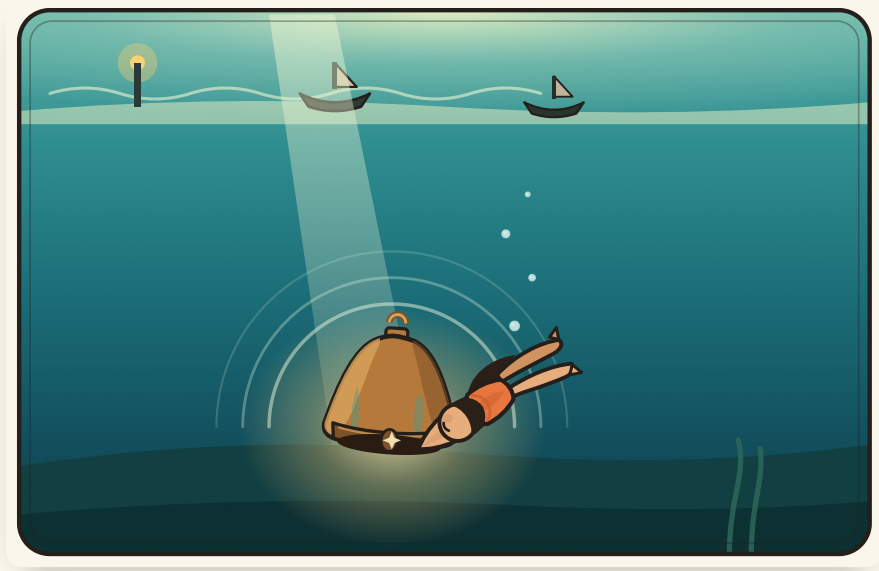
The whole village ran to the rocks with lanterns. “Someone must ring it!” they cried. But no one could dive so deep. They stared at the wild, dark sea, and no one moved.



Nila stepped to the edge. She took one breath — the same slow breath she had taken a hundred mornings — and dropped into the black water.

Down she went. Past the first knot. Past the red cloth. Past every mark she had ever made. The cold closed around her, and the light disappeared. But her body knew this darkness. It had come here a little at a time, every single day, for a year.

Deeper than she had ever been, the old bronze bell rose out of the dark to meet her.



Nila wrapped both hands around the cold metal and pulled.

The bell swung. Its deep bronze voice rang out and rolled up through the water, up into the storm — one long note the whole bay could feel. Out on the waves, the fishermen heard it, turned their boats, and followed the sound home.

When Nila rose into the rain, the whole village reached down and pulled her from the sea. No one laughed now. They thought they had watched one brave, impossible breath. Only Nila knew the truth: she had been swimming down toward this bell every quiet morning for a year — a little deeper each time — and today, at last, she had reached it.

✦ THE END

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