

BREATHING UNDERWATER

by KM Churchill

Savannah heard the first shot reverberate through the parking lot in front of her apartment complex. She heard the echo of the shot before she felt it hit her chest and the wonder of it hadn't worn off before a second and third bullet cut through her shoulder and stomach. The crack of the first was still ringing in her ears but now she could see the sound of the shots moving through the air of her bedroom like ripples from a stone thrown into the lake. They were moving through studio apartment, rolling out in all directions: over her queen size bed, over the loveseat that she'd gotten for free on the side of the road, over the coffee table, where her letters were lying, past the book shelves stacked with stories about God and the supernatural, through the paper thin apartment walls and out the into the dark parking lot where her rusting pale blue Toyota Camry was parked - and had been parked for several days now because it wouldn't start, nor would it pass inspection.

No one but Savannah seemed to notice when the last ripple became a wave. It rose silently behind her, raising her up and carrying her across the room to where it crested just over the head of Ned Wilkes and crashed down engulfing him. But before it did, Savannah slid down the back of the wave and was smoothly lifted up and carried on by another over the threshold and out into the night. A cool spray of salt water splashed on her face like rain. Savannah smiled—it was almost like flying. The swells moved fast, the next one picking her up before the last crested and fell. She traveled like this for miles, slipping serenely from one wave to the next. It was breathtaking. Soon she discovered that she could ride the surf any way she chose. She could lie back and float while gazing at the starlit sky—more stars than she'd ever seen and brighter too—or she could sit up and straddle it like a horse, letting the fresh sea wind whip across her face. Riding like this she could see and hear everything they passed over: a red fox cub barking as it dashed across a highway and dove safely into the thicket on the far side, two boys talking quietly and poking sticks at a crackling campfire, organ music flowing out of a brightly lit white church—she could actually see the notes drifting up into the air then fading like smoke—and, way off in the distance, the red flashing lights and sirens of an ambulance.