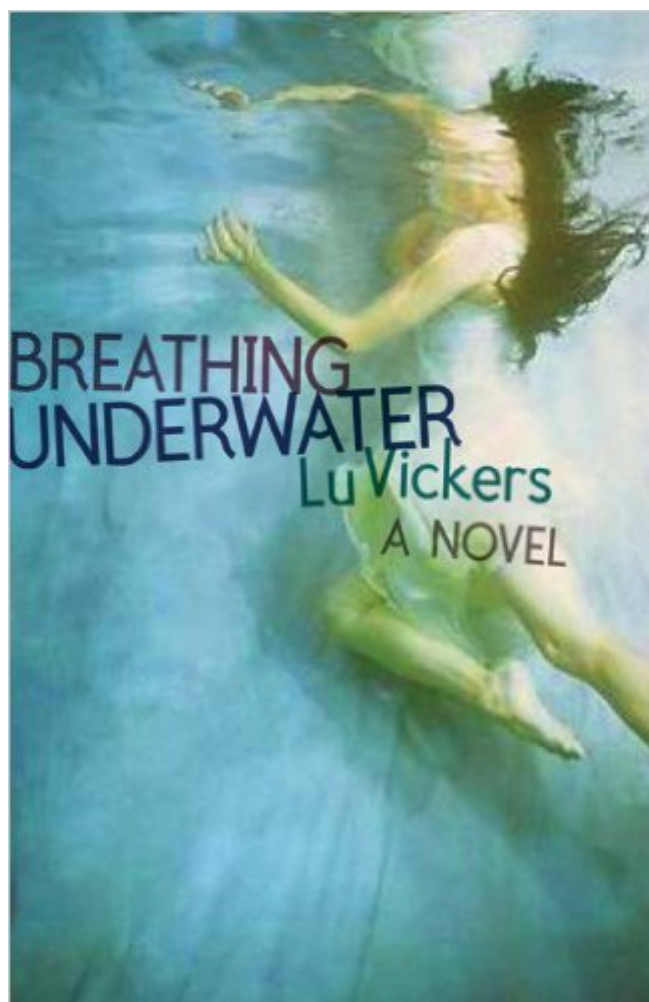


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# Breathing Underwater



## Synopsis

A hilarious and daring portrait of growing up gay in the American South. One roots for Lily as one does for Huck Finn. This beautifully written debut novel explores the fragile links between a girl's growing awareness of her sexuality and the far-reaching effects this has upon her family.

"Pamela Ball, author of *Lava* and *The Floating City*" Lu Vickers is an exquisite writer. Her work can be, at once, poetic, sharp, hilarious, and relentlessly moving. In *Breathing Underwater*, she investigates, with keen insight, the legacies of guilt, the intricacies of the mother-daughter relationship, and the complexities of budding sexuality. A stunning, rich, and haunting debut."

--Julianna Baggott, best-selling author of *Girl Talk*, *The Madam*, and *Lizzie Borden in Love*

In 1970s Chattahoochee, Florida, where the main employer is a mental institution, it's sink or swim for Lily. When her mama, a former beauty queen who once dreamt of being Miss Florida, takes Lily and her siblings fishing one morning, Lily nearly drowns while her mother looks on, weighing her gains against her losses.

Lily proves to be a survivor, which she will need to prove again and again, as she struggles to stay afloat amidst her mother's slow mental deterioration, her first love, and her quest to come to terms with who she is and what she wants from this crazy world. With lyrical prose, Lu Vickers gives voice to Lily's inner soul, and in turn reveals how universal our needs and desires are.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Coming out young is tough enough, but poor Lily has the misfortune of doing it in a setting as gothic and claustrophobic as anything Faulkner could have dreamed up: Chattahoochee, Fla., where the

largest employer is a mental institution. Her family is classically dysfunctional: an emotionally distant father and a failed beauty queen mother who believes her children ruined her life. Lily's mother is especially toxic "she watches while Lily nearly drowns early in the book" and grows more demented as the narrative progresses. Lily's preteen undercurrent of awareness that she is not like the other girls prompts her to determine that she's in love with her friend Rae; the two practice kissing one another with Rae's caveat that one has to pretend to be a boy. Lily keeps her lesbian yearnings mostly under wraps, but an encounter with another young woman gets her in trouble with her off-the-rocker mother, and her father's attempts to keep the family together can only do so much. The plotting in this debut novel is by-the-numbers, but Vickers's prose is polished and the characters are sharply drawn. (Jan.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

We all have our dreams. Lily's crazy mother wanted to be Miss Florida and ride around in a Cadillac, but all she got was kids, three of them, including Lily, the oldest, who drives her even crazier than she already is. As for Lily, her dream is to be a boy so she can marry bad-girl Rae, and together they can fly out of "this made-up town." The town is Chattahoochee, Florida, where, thanks to the presence of a mental institution, Lily grouches, "there are more crazy people than sane ones." Will Lily's dreams come true or will they, too, go a-glimmering? Vickers' coming-of-age story set in the sixties and seventies is full of intriguingly off-center characters and a wryly humorous treatment of life's grimmer realities. Though the story feels rushed at the end and sometimes nearly sinks under the weight of too much overripe symbolism, Lily's struggle to find her sexual identity and a life she can call her own has emotional integrity and the authenticity of real life. Michael Cart Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

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