Beneath

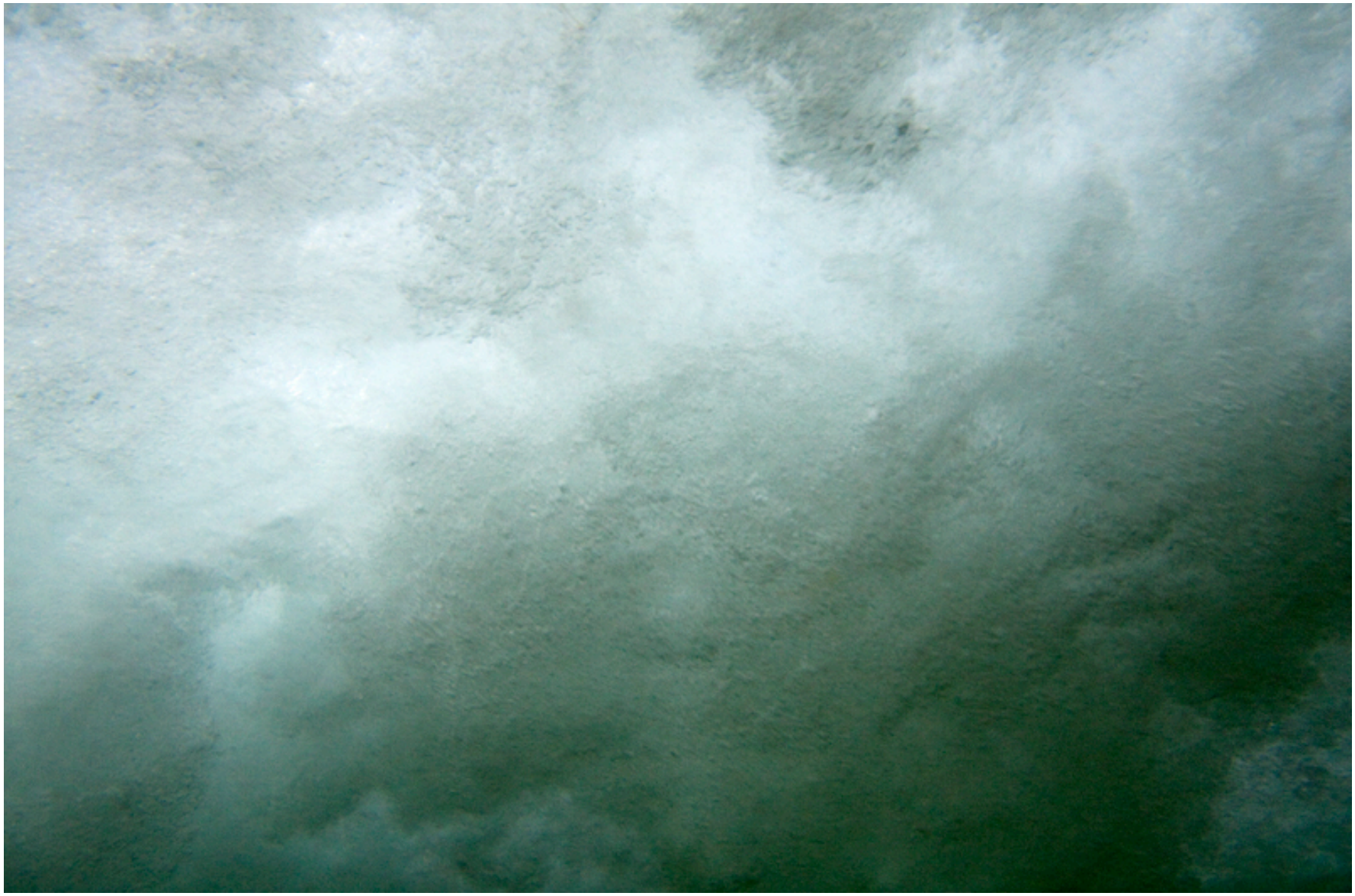
Photo-Essay: Chris Short

Rush as the wave shapes up and surges. Un-thought but hard learnt, in one move.
A big drop as I carve across and it charges beneath me.
Nothing. No bottom turn, just falling, too fast to recall the impact.

The fear and excitement as I look down the face of the wave are extraordinary. Too often I fell, and exhilaration gives way to shock, sometimes terror, pain, then anger. But the sensation of speed borne of a pure, natural force is second to none. It's so simple: body, board, wave. But always, there's the knowledge that that force is way greater than me, and that at any moment, what is beautiful can become brutal.

Nothing, but enclosed in dark water, and momentary calm.
A violent surge carries me up again, slamming my body deep into the water.
No breath. Always breathe in as you fall.
Then deep under gasping for breath. Muscles from throat to stomach grip eyes wide open in pain.

It’s where I am right now no idea how deep where up is. Spinning, can’t see anything for the oxygen I need, tiny bubbles, and silt borne by currents. Ripping currents all in slow motion. Lungs burning screaming shit limbs torn here and there.

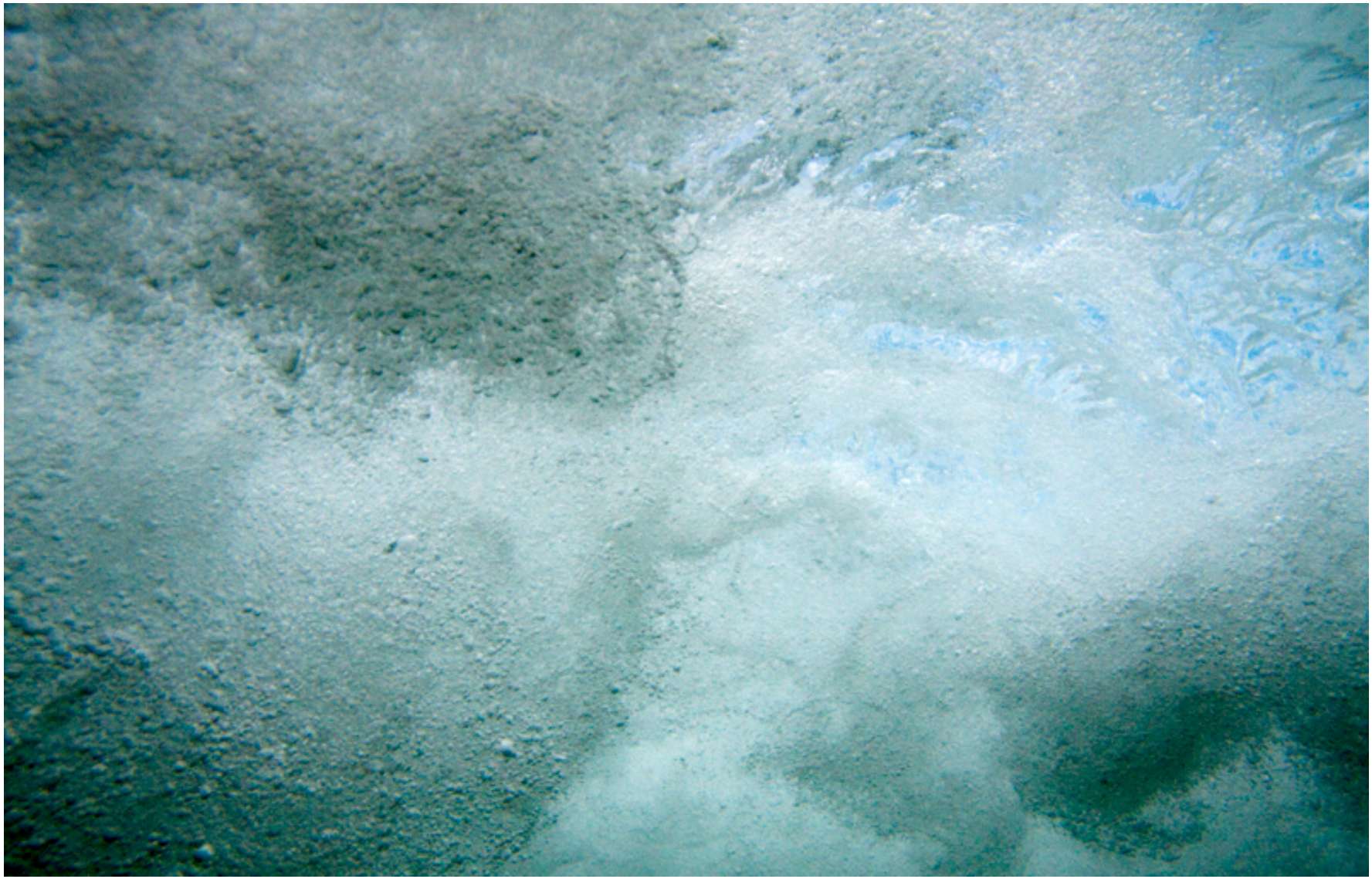


Nothing turning tearing gasping, panicking. My lungs draw breath but there is none.
Quiet.

It’s a really curious thing. On one hand, I feel complete panic. My body starts to breath though my mind knows this is a terrible mistake. But my mind can’t stop my body, only my body closes off the breath that could well bring it all to a close. On the other, there’s an extraordinary calm. It goes with the feeling that time is standing almost still while I examine my predicament. I don’t know where I am, but I know I’m there and for the moment, there’s no escape, so I’ll just have to sit it out. I’ve always got out of this in the past, and I don’t know anyone who hasn’t. But, of course, that doesn’t mean that I’ll be OK this time. Panic and calm are curious fellows.

I’ve been here for way too long.

Calm. Nothing. Still.
Water passing as I float. Toward the surface. I reach up
takes too long
breathe again water choking. Clawing to the light



The water cracks open air gasping choking. Lungs fill, brain to feed before the next wave hits.

Air and breath. Calm returns to my body as it heads toward the next wave, dives beneath, glides and emerges the other side. Order. Water is water and air is air again.

Calm outside.

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