



BAYOU-
GRAPHY

Up From the Depths

A grieving daughter
faces the ocean alone.

Sabrina Galloway *Shrimper*

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abrina Galloway inadvertently glances at the cabin floor of the *Mr. Anthony*, and then its splintered wooden walls and broken windows. “I promise it used to look much prettier than this,” she says of her family’s shrimp boat. The 20-year-old gently grips the steering wheel, lightly scraping the wood with her fingernails.

It is a bizarrely hot, sunny day in late October and Galloway is in her usual spot, the spot she first stood in when she was 8, back when she had to climb atop a milk crate to steer, the spot she was in on that day this August when the *Mr. Anthony* flipped over twice, taking her father’s life and trapping her for four hours in a small compartment under the deck. She was somewhere near the engine, covered in diesel fuel. Now the slightest whiff of the stuff—from the exhaust pipes of golf carts patrolling the UH campus, say, where she is a sophomore majoring in education—brings it all back.

“Hey, turkey birds. Time to get up.”

It’s the voice of her dad, Ronnie. He is trying to wake up two of his children, Sabrina and Cody, who are asleep at the front of the boat. “Time to go shrimping.” The sun is rising but Sabrina is still recovering from her first wake-up call, at 2:30 a.m., when the trio left their Old River home for the north end of Galveston Bay.

“It made me happy, making my dad proud doing something he loved,” says Galloway, back in the present, but only for a moment. Soon she is remembering their first real shrimping excursion together.

She is 15 and not one of the deckhands has shown up. It will only be her and her dad that day, but together they will pull in 2,200 pounds of shrimp.

“From that day on, I loved being out on the water. I was the only girl—pretty much ever—out here.” After that, Galloway spent most of her summers working with her father; not that it ever felt like work. “My dad was my best friend....Being on the water was something that he loved, so I loved it.”

They see some rain coming, so the shrimpers buckle down and prepare for it. The day could not be hotter, but there’s a strong wind too. Sabrina begs her 13-year-old brother Cody to come over and do the Titanic pose.

When the rain started, Galloway was unfazed. “Dad always said, ‘That’s not something to worry about,’ in an I’ll-take-care-of-you sort of way. So, that’s how I always felt.”

Lightning streaks across the sky, and Sabrina picks up her phone, intending to take photos, when she notices that the boat is tipping into the water. A second later, it capsizes. Sabrina obeys when her dad shouts for her to grab onto a window. She feels her feet dangle as Ronnie makes his way to the back of the cabin. He finds the door, but before he can open it the boat flips again. Cody

manages to break a window and Sabrina shoves him through the opening, but before she can pull herself through, she gets hit in the face by something and falls.

“My hand touched an opening. I thought it was the door, so I pulled myself in, and it was total darkness.” It was somewhere she’d never been before, somewhere near the cabin, which was now entirely full of water. “I went to swim down, to see if there was an opening down below, and when I went to come back up, a rope had gotten caught around my neck....I started breathing in the water. And, I was like, I guess this is it.”

She freed herself from the rope and shouted for her panicked brother—she could hear but not see him—and discovered that her dad had yet to resurface. “I knew that he was still somewhere in the boat. There was no way in the world Dad would’ve left me.”

Galloway dived down toward the cabin to try again to swim out, and when she did, “I thought someone grabbed me. And I screamed. And I turned towards it, and I could feel him. And it just kind of floated away. And I was like, there’s no way that was Dad.”

She swims back to the darkened room, momentarily considers slitting her wrists on something so Cody won’t have to hear his sister screaming for oxygen and drowning. I don’t want my brother to hear me die, she thinks. But discovering her dead would be worse. No, she thinks, I won’t give up.

Eventually, Cody flagged down Steve Auld Jr., a commercial fisherman and off-duty fireman, who called 911 and his own firehouse. Auld got as near as he could and tried to calm Galloway. Then she heard “a whoosh, and the water started rising. And I lost my mind.” But she felt a peace come over her as she listened to the soothing voice of the fireman, a stranger who’s now one of her closest friends; she introduces him to everyone as her rescuer, like that’s his title. It wouldn’t be long before the Port of Houston Fire Department would cut her out of the *Mr. Anthony*.

She and Cody are being transported to a hospital by ambulance. He gets 35 stitches. Sabrina’s blood is found to have a high concentration of carbon monoxide and she spends 12 hours on oxygen. The following afternoon, just as she is being discharged from the hospital, a call comes from the search team made up of her grandfather, cousins, and friends: her father has been found in his cabin.

Eight days later, the boat was turned right-side-up and drained. The engine had somehow emerged unscathed, so once the soot and debris were cleared away and the hole Galloway had been pulled through patched, the *Mr. Anthony* was seaworthy again.

Which was important for Sabrina Galloway, because while she has vivid memories of the treachery of water—she hasn’t yet been able to take a bath, and even showering was difficult at first—she also knows that it is the thing that will always bind her to her dad, always remind her of their time together.

“I feel at home on the water. It’s how I grew up.”