



IN PIECES

MOLLY CHASE
BOOK ONE

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Award-Winning Author

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Rhonda Ortiz

HISTORICAL FICTION AUTHOR

MEDIA KIT

ABOUT RHONDA ORTIZ

RHONDA FRANKLIN ORTIZ IS AN AWARD-WINNING NOVELIST, NONFICTION WRITER, AND founding editor emerita of Chrism Press. *In Pieces*, the first novel of her *Molly Chase* series, was the recipient of the ACFW-VA Crown Award, the ACFW Genesis Award, the Catholic Writers Guild Seal of Approval, and was a finalist in the Oregon Christian Writer's Cascade Award and Catholic Media Association Book Awards.

Rhonda's articles on spirituality, family life, and arts and culture have been published by a variety of popular media outlets, including *Integrated Catholic Life*, *CatholicMom.com*, *Aleteia*, and *Catholic World Report*. She was a contributor to *The Catholic Mom's Prayer Companion: A Book of Daily Reflections* and has served as both Art Director and Webmaster for the literary magazine *Dappled Things*.

Rhonda is a member of the Catholic Writers Guild and American Christian Fiction Writers. She is also a fully professed lay member of the Order of Preachers (the Dominicans). A native Oregonian, Rhonda attended St. John's College in historic Annapolis, Maryland and now lives in Michigan with her husband and children. Find her online at rhondaortiz.com.



ABBREVIATED BIO

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ABBREVIATED BIO FOR CATHOLIC PUBLICATIONS

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SAMPLE OF PAST MEDIA APPEARANCES

Morning Air with John Harper, Relevant Radio
Catholicism and Culture (University of St. Thomas - Houston) with Dr. Stuart Squires
A Seeking Heart with Allison Gingras
Cross + Word with Michele McAloon

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IN PIECES

MOLLY CHASE, BOOK ONE

Certain things ruin a girl's reputation, and madness is one.

BEAUTIFUL AND ARTISTIC, THE ONLY DAUGHTER OF A PROMINENT MERCHANT, Molly Chase cannot help but attract the notice of Federalist Boston. But she carries a painful secret: her father committed suicide and she found his body. Now nightmares plague her day and night, addling her mind and rendering her senseless. Molly needs a home, a nurse, and time to grieve and to find new purpose. But when she moves in with her friends, the Robbs, spiteful society gossips assume the worst. And when an imprudent decision leads to public scandal, Molly is tempted to take the easy way out: a marriage of convenience.

Merchant sailor Josiah Robb is as familiar to Molly as a brother—as dear and as exasperating. Yet she is no sister to him. He hopes to marry her before anyone else does, but sailing the high seas leaves no time for convincing Molly that he is more than her teasing childhood friend. Josiah wants a new job and a fresh start, and when he agrees to carry a confidential letter to President Washington, his life is forever changed.

In the wake of tragedy, these longtime friends discover a new intimacy. But slander, confusion, absence, and a wealthy, conniving bully stand between them. And with French spies on the loose, they not only have to rescue their reputations—they have to protect their lives.

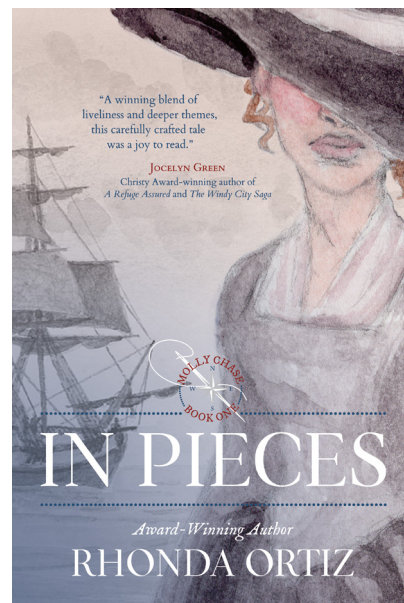
AWARDS

ACFW Genesis Award in Historical Romance, 2020
ACFW-VA Crown Award in Historical/Historical Romance, 2019
Finalist, Oregon Christian Writers Cascade Award, 2022
Finalist, Catholic Media Association Book Awards, 2022
Recipient, Catholic Writers Guild Seal of Approval

ADVANCED PRAISE

“This delightful historical romance is so refreshingly alive. It is not deadened by the supercilious contempt for the past that characterizes so much contemporary historical fiction, nor is it killed with the cynicism of pride or with hallmarked schmaltzy sweetness, the two extremes which are the death of true romance. It is as fresh and alive as Miss Austen in its treatment of really believable people in a believably real world. It breathes the life of realism, philosophically understood, into the reality it depicts.”

— JOSEPH PEARCE, author of *Catholic Literary Giants*



GENRE

Historical romance with elements of family drama, society drama, espionage, and political suspense

AUDIENCE

Adult

PUBLISHER

Chrim Press, a division of
WhiteFire Publishing
www.chrimpress.com

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978-1-941720-44-8 (digital)

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Ingram

ADRIFT

MOLLY CHASE, BOOK TWO

“Everything about your life is my concern, Mr. Robb, including your betrothed.”

NOW ENGAGED, MOLLY CHASE AND NEW FEDERAL INTELLIGENCER JOSIAH ROBB want nothing more than to settle into quiet married life—or as quiet as life can be when one is hunting down a ring of traitors among Boston’s elite. But the plan has one glaring flaw: Molly herself, and the madness that has plagued her since her father’s death. Until Molly proves herself an asset rather than a liability, Josiah’s investigation cannot move forward.

Intelligencer Eliza Hall thought she had left her troubles behind in Philadelphia long ago. When she is sent back to follow a suspect, she’s ready to acknowledge the truth and make her peace—except that the man she loves, who doesn’t know about her past, is assigned to come with her. Now she must outwit her fellow spy and closest friend, lest he hate her for what she had been, while they maneuver to prevent Revolutionary France from dragging the fledgling United States into a war it cannot afford.

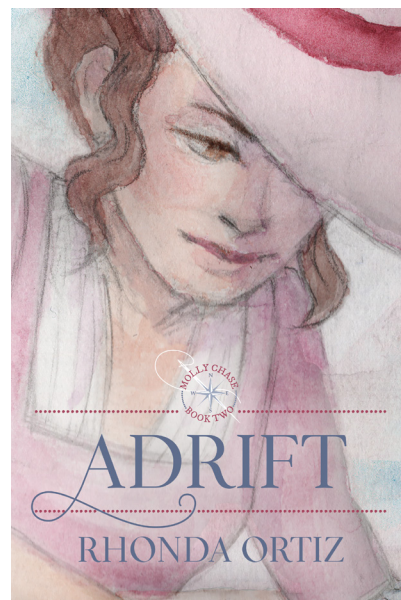
Both women are in search of a safe harbor. Little do they expect the winds to blow them into the most tumultuous waters of all—back home.

ADVANCED PRAISE

“Weaving a captivating tapestry of history and storytelling, Rhonda Ortiz deftly builds the tension in her second Molly Chase novel, *Adrift*. Brimming with insight, action, and intrigue, the story fully immerses the reader in the uncertain early years of our nation and the lives of a compelling cast of characters. The satisfying ending hints of even more excitement on the horizon—a brilliant and edifying historical read!” —STEPHANIE LANDSEM, author of *Code Name Edelweiss*

“First comes love, then comes...’ a scintillating spy plot, perduring mental and emotional trauma, deep spiritual questioning, and, of course, romance. With *Adrift*, Ortiz provides a stirring sequel that weaves together historical detail and psychological complexity in a cloth as intricate as any from Penelope’s mythological loom.” —ELEANOR BOURG NICHOLSON, author of *Brother Wolf*

“Full of espionage, political and social intrigue, with historically accurate details, *Adrift* is the exciting sequel in a series sure to have you looking at American history with fresh eyes and interest. Ortiz delves into the racial, social, religious, and mental health struggles of the time with a deft hand that leaves you aching for better for the characters but in awe of their struggle to rise above, all while serving their country. It is a must read for fans of historical novels.” —CRYSTAL CAUDILL, author of *Counterfeit Faith*



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SAMPLE INTERVIEW

TELL US ABOUT YOUR BOOK.

The Molly Chase series is an award-winning historical continuity series featuring romance, family drama, society drama, political suspense, and plenty of humor. The story is set in Boston during the tumultuous early days of the American republic, not long after the ratification of the Constitution. It could be described as *Anne of Green Gables* meets Gaskell's *North and South* meets *Kristin Lavransdatter* meets *Hamilton: An American Musical*—with all its contemporary jocularly, but minus Maria Reynolds in her lingerie. This is a clean read.

WHERE DID YOU GET THE IDEA FOR THE STORY?

I initially wrote a story set in 1770s England with Molly as the central character and an entirely different supporting cast. I spent two years working on that story, all the while knowing that something wasn't quite right. Boston was at the back of my mind, but I wasn't willing to admit it, lest I be forced to start over.

WHAT HAPPENED?

Two things. First, I learned that the British navy impressed upwards of 10,000 American merchant sailors during the French revolutionary and Napoleonic wars. That gave rise to a nascent idea of a sailor character, and with him the story's setting shifted from the 1770s to the 1790s. Second, I decided to open the story on this side of the Atlantic. Once that happened, I was forced to let Josiah Robb into the story, and the rest is history.

YOU REALLY LOST TWO YEARS OF WORK?

Josiah was worth it. I adore that man. And we see and understand Molly so much better through his eyes.

MOLLY'S FATHER, JOHN CHASE, COMMITS SUICIDE AND SHE FINDS HIS BODY, AND AS A CONSEQUENCE SHE SUFFERS FROM PTSD. HOW DID YOU APPROACH THESE THEMES?

Carefully! I researched the topics, of course, but I also was able to draw on the experience and expertise of friends, a psychiatrist, and a professional counselor. My editor also asked a number of pointed questions that helped me clarify John Chase's backstory, which added complexity

to the whole. Molly's father had long been a "shadow character" for me, and without my editor's help, his story would have been woefully underdeveloped.

SEVERAL HISTORICAL PERSONS APPEAR IN THE NOVEL: GEORGE WASHINGTON AND HIS CABINET, CITIZEN GENÊT, AND THOMAS MELVILL, A MINOR PLAYER IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION. HOW DID THEY COME TO BE A PART OF YOUR STORY?

We forget how small the United States once was! The 1790 census put the population of Boston at roughly 18,000. In a town that size, you may not know everyone, but you come across the same people, time and again.

Major Thomas Melvill is a key character in my story and the most likely real-life person Josiah would have known. The major was a beloved figure in Boston. He was a friend of Sam Adams and was one of those rowdies at the Boston Tea Party. After the war, as surveyor of Custom House, he would have been acquainted with nearly everyone on the wharves. Josiah would have been no exception.

Josiah also meets the infamous Citizen Genêt, revolutionary France's ambassador to the United States who tried to override President Washington's Declaration of Neutrality and draw the country into the French revolutionary wars. Genêt's ship veered off-course on its way here and landed in Charleston in April 1793, around the same time the news that England had entered the war was reaching our shores. As soon as he landed, Genêt began recruiting American privateers to fight alongside the French navy. In *In Pieces*, he encounters Josiah while Josiah's ship is in Charleston and, thinking that he's the captain, tries to recruit him—one of my favorite scenes to write.

THE SERIES FEATURES A PROTESTANT-TO-CATHOLIC CONVERSION SUBPLOT. HOW DID YOU HANDLE THAT?

I was initially miffed by Josiah's interest in Catholicism—not because I'm embarrassed by my faith, but because I didn't want the story to veer toward didacticism. People often complain that religious fiction is "preachy," and here I had a character who wanted to convert. Curses!

Now I know that from a storytelling perspective, Josiah's conversion needed to happen for Molly's sake. In order

for Molly to make peace with her dead father, she needs a broader eschatology than her Anglican upbringing would have allowed—specifically, she needs the concept of purgatory. Such was the inevitable conclusion of my Catholic imagination. And if inevitable, I figured I had better do it well, depicting both sides fairly while also steering clear of merely irritating polemics.

So I made the primary conflict personal rather than theological. Josiah is all but convinced at the beginning of *In Pieces*, but he doesn't want to upset his mother, Sarah Robb, a devout Congregationalist and the daughter of a minister. One need not be Catholic or even religious to understand the difficulty of a child going against his parent's will, or of a parent accepting the decisions of her grown child.

I also utilized *Catechism* §817-822, which, while grieving the fracture in the Body of Christ, acknowledges that Catholics and Protestants alike share in God's grace by means of our common baptism. In fact, Josiah's interest in Catholicism is the direct result of his Protestant father purportedly being in heaven. Think about that!

CAN ONE WRITE A "CATHOLIC NOVEL" ABOUT PROTESTANTS?

I certainly hope so! Catholic-Protestant differences came to the fore in writing this book, and I would be lying if I said I didn't struggle to reconcile the two. When writing about faith, most Catholic novelists prefer to employ "signs and symbols," while many (not all) Protestant writers lean toward direct discourse. Hence the charge of "preachiness" from those who are unaccustomed to it.

Yet I have to engage the dialectical at some level if I'm going to depict my eighteenth-century Congregationalist characters well. Josiah's interest in Catholicism is owing to a mystical experience that his own tradition cannot explain—the premise is Catholic—yet mysticism is not reason enough for him to convert. He wants to read and talk and argue and meet issues head on. Same with his mother. This is their religious mode, deeply ingrained in them—and even myself. (I'm a convert.) I like to think of some Protestants' preference for the dialectical as one of many cultural differences that came as a result of the Reformation.

On the flip side, I can see Protestants thinking that Catholics are sometimes too understated. That's a fair critique.

THIS STORY IS FIRST AND FOREMOST A ROMANCE. DID JOHN PAUL II'S THEOLOGY OF THE BODY HAVE AN INFLUENCE ON YOUR WRITING?

Absolutely. I would say Molly Chase is my exploration into the Theology of the Body, especially as the story extends into marriage itself, rather than ending at the proposal. The book follows Molly and Josiah along the path of sanctification through the joys and trials of marriage. They grapple with the meaning of suffering and taste the sweetness of the Cross.

In fact, the story contains not one love story, but two: one human, one divine. Not only does Josiah court Molly, but so does God. God's love and Josiah's love are of a piece, bringing Molly healing, then sanctification, and finally *theosis*.

NOT ONLY ARE YOU ONLY A CHRISM PRESS AUTHOR, BUT YOU ARE ALSO ONE OF ITS FOUNDING EDITORS. HOW DID THAT COME ABOUT?

I was in the middle of the acquisition process with WhiteFire Publishing, Chrism Press's parent company, when owners David and Roseanna White had the idea to start an imprint for those of us whose fiction doesn't quite fit in either the general or Christian markets. The Whites believe that Catholic and Orthodox fiction will enrich not only their company's offerings, but the Christian market at large.

Not only did they accept my book, they asked both me to come on board as an editor. Chrism Press is truly unique, both in its founding and in its robustly ecumenical mission.

INTRODUCTORY ARTICLE

MEMENTO MORI, THE ROMANCE GENRE, AND THE CATHOLIC IMAGINATION

MOLLY CHASE SURPRISED ME. WHEN I SET OUT TO TELL Molly's story, about a girl reeling from trauma and the childhood friend who loves her, I assumed I was writing a classic courtship love story—*Anne of Green Gables*, but with more pathos and politics. I fully intended to write a compelling story; nevertheless, I had accepted the inevitability of its abiding by the usual genre conventions and tropes.

Most readers recognize romance genre conventions. Boy meets girl; rivals and obstacles keep them apart. There are rituals and secrets, helpers and hinderers, a first confession, a moment of physical intimacy, a break-up, and the “proof of love,” in which one of the lovers sacrifices him or herself for the other without hope of return. Proposal, acceptance, happily ever after. *Finis*.

Two things happened to derail my plan.

First, while drafting *Molly Chase*, I had resolved the courtship plot between Molly and Josiah Robb, bringing them to the expected proposal. But Molly had yet to recover from her father's suicide, nor had she forgiven him for it. In a typical, genre-abiding romance, she would have resolved these conflicts within the course of the courtship. The fact that she hadn't meant the story wasn't over. I was writing not one novel, but several.

Second, I had a vision of Molly's death—a vision so powerful that I cried for several days afterward, causing my husband to wonder if I had lost my marbles. I told him I was grieving.

He reminded me that Molly is a fictional character.

Not to me, she isn't, I said.

I realized then that my Catholic *memento mori* sensibilities were pushing the romance genre beyond its usual bounds. The first book, *In Pieces*, ends with a proposal, but the series continues into

marriage, until death do them part. That, too, would be a courtship story, but not a typical one.

Realizing this made me giddy. Not every story presents an opportunity to play with genre conventions. Molly Chase might seem like an archetypal courtship story at first glance, but it isn't.

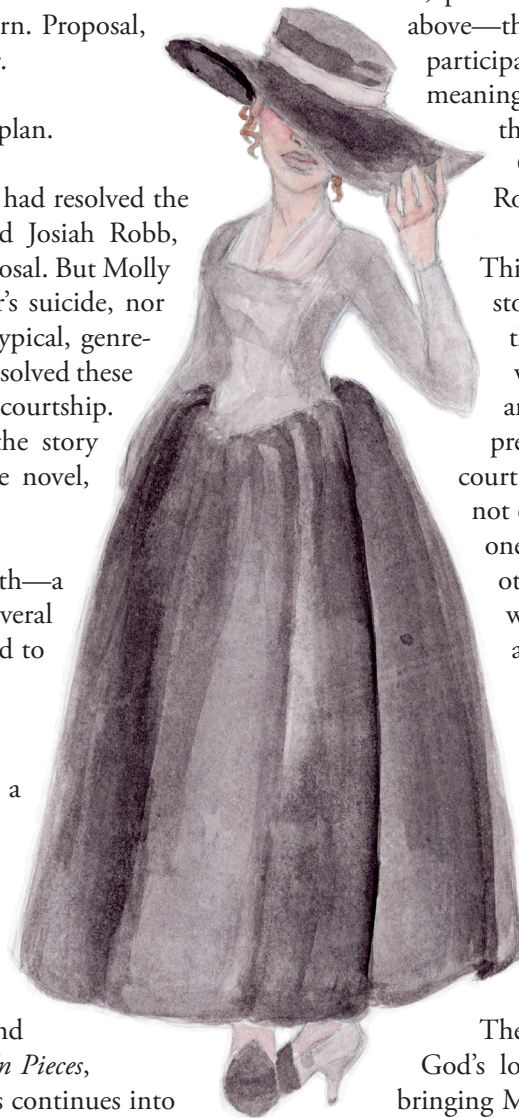
Why? Because death changes everything.

Sacramental marriage points to the divine union between God and man. Courtship, therefore, is analogous to the divine wooing, to grace. Romance conventions mirror this, particularly the “proof of love” mentioned above—the lovers' self-sacrifice is a direct participation in Christ's Passion. Without meaningful, altruistic self-gift on the part of the lovers, a love story falls flat. The Cross shows us what love looks like. Romance genre conventions follow suit.

This applies to any well-drawn courtship story. Yet *Molly Chase* extends beyond the allegorical to the literal. Josiah woos Molly, but so does Christ. Molly and Josiah's courtship and marriage are precisely the vehicles by which God will court Molly for Himself. The novel features not one, but two love stories: one human, one divine. They run parallel to each other, earthly marriage intertwining with the heavenly one until it gives way at death.

Here, the romance genre conventions apply to both stories. Both Josiah and God are cast in the archetypal role of Lover, opposite Molly's Beloved. They also are both cast in the archetypal role of Helper—first, God helps Josiah win Molly, and then God enlists Josiah as His own helper vis-à-vis their marriage.

The grace of the sacrament has its effect: God's love and Josiah's love are of a piece, bringing Molly healing, then sanctification, and



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finally *theosis*. In *Molly Chase*, the divine romance looks eerily similar to the earthly one.

This has been an ambitious understanding, both thematically and in terms of plot structure. I took Sigrid Undset's masterpiece *Kristin Lavransdatter* as my model for both. My humble story differs from Undset's in several key respects—Josiah is a good man whereas Erlend Nikulaussøn is not, and the blame for the fracas between Molly and her father lies mostly on his side, rather than the other way around. Kristin is the instigator; Molly is the wounded party. (Plus, my narrative tone is far lighter, and unlike Undset, I am no literary genius!)

Yet both stories both follow a woman along her path of sanctification through the joys and trials of marriage:

courtship, vows, lovemaking, children, family, church and society, sin and brokenness, misunderstanding and estrangement, slander and political intrigue. Both Kristin and Molly grapple with the meaning of suffering. Both taste the sweetness of the Cross.

My first duty as a storyteller is to be faithful to the story I've been given and tell it as well as I can. I didn't plan on following Molly and Josiah into the intimacy of marriage. But obedience to the Muse has its fruits. Beyond its first *raison d'être*—to be an entertaining tale—*Molly Chase* has become my exploration of the deeper meaning of marriage and of the Theology of the Body. In pushing the romance archetypes to their fullest extent, *Molly Chase* acknowledges that wedding vows are not a conclusion but an opening toward an even greater love affair.