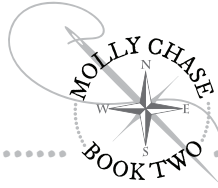


ADRIFT

RHONDA ORTIZ



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CHRISM
PRESS

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Grandfather Robb's *Penelope*
Excerpt from Chapter Fourteen

promise.” He added at normal volume, “But don’t get me started again on you giving up the *Alethea*.”

“That Hamilton taxes both the molasses I need *and* the spirits I sell is bad enough,” Mark added. “Now my friend will be doing the taxing.”

Josiah fished a flat stone from the gravel. He hop-stepped toward the edge of the seawall and flung the stone. One, two, three, four skips across the water before it sank.

“I have a guess,” Filippo said. “You hate import duties as much as we do. You would not take the position unless the position was something other than what it seemed.”

Filippo *would* guess correctly. How did one dissemble with one’s own friends?

“Is he right?” Lewis asked.

Josiah turned around. They were looking at him with undisguised curiosity. And, dare he say it, even respect?

“At least Melvill knows he’s dealing with a sailor.” He could say that much. “He suggested I buy myself a boat, for the sake of my sanity. Know of any for sale?”

They talked of nautical matters, business, and politics until the sun dipped below the horizon and the sounds of nature and ships’ bells alike echoed across the surface of the Charles River. Lewis said he needed to go home and help put his children to bed. They parted ways, Filippo with Lewis and Josiah with Mark. Tomorrow the *Alethea* weighed anchor for England.

He and Mark strolled along the seawall past the quiet wharves, fallen into shadow, and the handful of sailors making their way back to their ships. The only activity he saw was at the Lawrences’ wharf, where two men were mooring a skiff carrying several hogshead barrels.

What an odd thing to be doing after sunset.

“You know,” Mark said before Josiah could pursue that line of thought, “my father has a jolly boat.”

“Oh?”

“A twelve-footer, or thereabouts.”

Sounded about the right size. “And?”

Mark hesitated. “I think the boat has a mast. Don’t press me for details. I’m a lubber.”

“Want to learn?”

“To sail?”

“Taking her out would be more fun with company. Don’t let me push you into it.”

“No, no.” Mark’s expression relaxed. “I have always wanted to learn, but no one has ever offered to teach me.”

“Well, I’m offering now. Where is she moored?”

“In the back of our stable. She hasn’t been on the water since before I was born.”

The jolly boat had been in a barn for thirty years? Her timbers would be as dry as powder. He would have to sink her for a week—or a year—before she took up water, and even then she would be a sieve. What were the chances he would end up rebuilding the entire thing? “Never mind. She will require too much work.”

“Don’t be so hasty,” Mark said. “I could be wrong, but she may have been your grandfather’s before he died.”

Then again, a good project would keep him out of trouble. “Sold.”



“TWELVE-FOOT CLINKER-BUILT FISHING DORY,” MR. FINDLEY PRONOUNCED AS JOSIAH and Mark pulled back the coarse canvas tarpaulin covering Grandfather Robb’s boat, sending years of dust into the pungent stable air. Mark had mentioned the boat to his father as soon as they arrived home, and Mr. Findley had insisted on showing her to them immediately, despite the late hour. “But not the typical dory. She’s double-ended with a shallow keel, and she’s built with some heft to her, as you see.”

Josiah looked her over. “She’s well-proportioned.”

“Then she’s perfect for you,” Mark deadpanned.

“Tis your grandfather’s design,” Mr. Findley said before Josiah could pummel his son. He hung the lantern on a nearby nail and reached across the boat’s stern, pushing the tarpaulin to the floor. All signs of infirmity had disappeared; he moved like a man half his age. “A project ahead of his retirement, he said. The frame is mahogany. He had brought the wood back from Cuba himself, not long before he turned over the *Beatrice* to your father. The planking is cedar. He and I used to take her out fishing in the bay. Here, let’s turn her up.”

Josiah and Mark laid hands to the weathered gunwale. Mr. Findley called the commands, and without hitting the ceiling beams, they lifted her from the blocks. Paint flakes and debris fell, tickling the back of Josiah’s neck and making him sneeze. They rolled her down to the dirt floor and set her leaning to starboard on her keel. Straw rustled in the neighboring stall, and Alcibiades, Mark’s always-preening, forever-misbehaving Friesian horse, stuck his head over the wooden wall and squealed at them for disrupting his rest.

Mr. Findley rested his crabbed hands upon his hips. “She can hold a catch of cod, and she’s trustworthy in rough water. But she’s also nimble and easy to row. Under sail she’s happiest running. Ideal for an afternoon jaunt about the harbor with one’s wife. The mast, sprit, rudder, and oars are in the loft.” He gestured upward. “Your father suggested a gaff rig, but your grandfather thought he was being ridiculous. A spritsail means less hardware and less fuss. Practicality over speed, always—old Josiah Robb was a plodder. Used to drive your father mad. Still, she’s an enjoyable little boat.”

Josiah crouched down and examined the timbers. Even in this poor light, he could see gaping between the strakes, as predicted. But the frame looked to have held its shape.

“I didn’t know you could speak sailor,” Mark said to his father. “The things one learns. When was the last time you took her out?”

“Robb fell and hurt his hip not long before your birth. He passed a few months later. Nathan Robb said the dory was half mine and let me have her. But I hadn’t the heart to take her out, and I let her go dry.”

“Let’s sink her. See if she holds once her timbers take up water.” Josiah stood. “Though we should revisit the idea of rigging. What about a gunter rig? It would make for more sail and eliminate the bad tack. And if I add a daggerboard, I could sail close-hauled.”

“You mean that new rig the whalers are using? A little much for a fishing boat.”

“I don’t plan to fish, sir. This is purely for fun. Speed, not practicality.”

Mr. Findley cackled. “That’s your father talking.”

“There you are.” Mrs. Findley peered around the doorframe, then entered the stable. She carried a second lantern. “I was wondering where you disappeared to. Tea and gruel are waiting in the parlor.” Her round cheeks dimpled at the sight of the dory. “So, you finally told Josiah about the *Penelope*. ’Tis about time you pulled her out of storage.”

“The *Penelope*?” Mark turned to Josiah. “Aww. You couldn’t have planned it any better, Ulysses.”

Mr. Findley smiled at his wife before directing Josiah and Mark to turn the dory onto her blocks and cover her again. Together they left the stable and made for the house across the back garden. Spring peepers chirped in the distance, and wispy clouds floated in front of the waning gibbous moon. Mrs. Findley handed her lantern to Josiah and took his arm, and the Findley men followed.

“The men’s happiest days were those spent on the water,” she said. “Your grandmother and I called the *Penelope* the other woman in our lives. We ought to have been more jealous than we were.”

“Nonsense,” Mr. Findley objected. “My happiest days are the ones spent with you.”

“With me *in* the boat, he means.”

“Aye, that’s true. Every so often I would shirk work and she would send the children to her mother’s. We would pack a hamper, borrow the dory, and go explore the harbor islands. Time stood still those days, only to be rudely interrupted by the setting sun.”

“I wonder if Molly would enjoy that,” Josiah said. What might a wedding trip do for Molly’s frame of mind? Because leaving town for a spell sounded ideal. No haunted house, no vindictive gossip, no jesting colleagues, no scrupulous pastors...and no mother and sister hovering nearby, which was what *he* wanted.

His jaw set. Come Sunday morning, he would take Molly to Old North. Try his luck with the Episcopalians.

“You were lotus-eaters.” Mark groaned. “I’m not sure I want to hear this story. I’m your son, after all.”

“Where do you think you came from?” Mr. Findley quipped.

“Please don’t tell me I was conceived in that boat.”

“And risk tipping her?”

Mark groaned again.

Mrs. Findley’s eyes twinkled in the lantern light. She patted Josiah’s arm. “A friend

of ours is a farmer on Peddock's. He has an empty house on the island's western head. I'm sure something could be arranged."

Sailing Lesson



Chapter Thirty-Two

"IN TWO... ONE... TWO... WEIGH ENOUGH."

Castle William glowed rose in the morning light as Josiah and Mark rowed the *Penelope* under bare poles from Boston Harbor to Castle Island, letting her run a hundred yards off its eastern head. They had risen early and, with tools, cleaning supplies, a food wallet, bedrolls, and a change of clothes, took the dory on her post-restoration maiden voyage. As long as the *Penelope* remained watertight, they would sail to Peddock's Island and ready the empty farmhouse for Josiah and Molly's wedding trip. Mr. Loring, the Findleys' friend, was being more than accommodating, though he warned in his letter that the house needed a few repairs and a thorough cleaning. Nothing he and Mark couldn't handle together in a few days' work.

Josiah unshipped his oars. "Time to make sail. You stay seated and watch."

"Teach me, O Wise One." Mark saluted, his other hand holding his oars, blades flat on the water.

"First things first." Josiah slid his oars onto the hull, then looked over the stern to make sure the rudder's pintles hadn't pulled free of their gudgeons. The metalwork was new, and though he was no Isaac Lewis, he thought himself a decent carpenter. But the old girl *was* several decades old, and he was of a mind to check everything twice over before getting underway. Thus far, the *Penelope* was holding together. "Good." He pivoted halfway and gestured. "This is a tiller. It turns the rudder."

Mark glared. "I'm a lubber, not an imbecile."

"One never can tell. Best to name everything."

"Son of a mongrel."

"My grandsire's ark is what's keeping you afloat. You can pull in your oars now. We'll switch places."

They did. Mark got settled with the tiller while Josiah pushed down the daggerboard before turning to the yard, boom, sails, tackle, and sheets. "The main-sail is attached to this vertical yard-arm, which slides up and down the mast through gunter irons—those iron rings running up and down the mast, see? The higher the yard, the more sail we have."

Mark pointed toward the halyard. "And you raise it with that rope?"

"There are no ropes on this boat."

"Then what do you call that?"

"A halyard."

"Sure looks like a rope. And that one? Coiled at your feet?"

"That's the sheet. The mainsheet, to be specific."

“I thought the sail was the sheet.”

“The sail is the sail. The sheet is the rope that controls the sail.”

“You said there were no ropes on this boat.”

“I used the word for your benefit.”

Mark muttered something suspiciously foul.

“Enough of the yard. This is the boom, but you’ll notice it’s not fixed to the mast. I decided on a loose-fitted main so I can brail up when I’m by myself or with Molly. With a gunter rig, lowering sail is a two-step process, as you see, and—”

“I surrender.” Mark raised his free hand. “Please explain everything—and enunciate for this imbecile lubber. I’m old, so I don’t hear so well.”

The groan of oars in their locks and blades hitting the water echoed faintly off their stern. Josiah glanced out. Two points off the island’s eastern head, he saw the shadow of a laden skiff sitting low in the water.

He showed Mark how to ready the main and small headsail, keeping an eye on the skiff. The oarsmen rowed hard on port, turning south, so that the morning light illuminated the rowers’ faces: the men he had seen at Naaman Lawrence’s wharf late at night. If they were fisherman, he would think nothing of their odd hours. But these men were hauling cargo.

Anything touching on Mr. Lawrence deserved his attention. But not until they had set sail—which, given Mark’s lesson, took three times as long as usual.

“There we are. We’re already facing the wind. Ready?”

“Ready.”

He handed Mark the sheet. “Hold the tiller steady.”

Hand over hand, Josiah raised the mainsail. It didn’t take long—a dory wasn’t the *Alethea*. The sail luffed softly as he secured the halyard. He turned back around. “Congratulations. You’re the skipper now.”

The wind shifted eastward. His friend’s eyes widened as the sail began to fill and the *Penelope* eased to life in the direction of Castle Island. “What do I do?”

“Not run aground, to start. We need to be on the opposite tack.”

“You enjoy dropping a man headfirst into the drink, don’t you? Very well. Talk me through it.”

Once on a starboard tack, Josiah launched into a lecture on the points of sail and the relationship between wind and boat. They beat to windward and cleared the island’s eastern head, then made for the channel between Thompson and Spectacle Islands, the wind across their beam.

“She’s picking up speed.” Mark’s growing smile lacked its usual irony. “I see why you like this.”

Another convert to the sea. Josiah adjusted the daggerboard’s height and watched the sail and the water, giving direction on trimming and steering. Mark, true to form, was a quick study; the fresh breeze held steady, and the dory herself was as nimble as Mr. Findley had promised. They cleared the channel, and Long and Moon Islands came into view—and so did the shadow of the skiff, a mile off. It was rounding Moon Island in the direction of Quincy Bay.

Mark saw it too. “Isn’t that the boat we saw earlier, the one carrying hogsheads?”

Josiah motioned toward the waiting headsail. “Want to try and catch her?”

“You think I’m ready?”

“All right, Grandmama. We can stick with the mainsail alone.”

“Fighting words.” Mark glared. “Fine. But you’re managing the sheets. That requires more coordination than I have at this early hour of the morning.”

“What do you mean, ‘early?’ We’re nigh on the forenoon watch. Go into the wind a moment.”

Watching the block and tackle, Josiah shifted forward, crouched as low as possible, and raised the small headsail. Mark came off the wind and both sails filled, the *Penelope* heeling as she picked up speed. If Grandfather Robb had thought a gunter rig ridiculous, the addition of a headsail was more so.

“This is fun,” Mark called.

“My grandfather would shake his head if he could see us now.” They were pushing the old girl to her limits.

“And your father would be cheering you on.”

Josiah smiled and patted his waistcoat pocket, where Father’s coral lay.

The skiff disappeared into Quincy Bay, but the *Penelope* soon closed the gap. They too cleared Moon Island just in time to see the skiff approaching land, not far beyond the wetlands.

“She beat us.” Josiah turned aft as Mark let out the sheet. “Your sister’s husband owns a farm in Quincy, right? Do you happen to know whose dock that is?”

Mark squinted at it for a moment. He looked sideways at Josiah, and his slackened mouth snapped shut. He turned forward again and shrugged.

“No idea,” he said. “Peddock’s is directly east. Perhaps you’ll think me less of a man, but can we lower the headsail before we beat to windward?”



Landlubber for a Wife
Excerpt from Chapter Thirty-Seven

“What about packing? It will take me at least a couple of hours—”

“Hannah took care of it.”

A moment passed. Molly’s throat bobbed. “I have never been on the water before.”

Josiah rested his other arm on the table and turned fully to his bride. “Molly, you are a lifelong resident of a major seaport. You’ve lived within walking distance of water your entire life. This town is overrun with sailors, shipbuilders, ship chandlers, ropewalks—and you have never been in a *boat*?”

“One would have to have a reason to leave town. I rarely travel. I’m not good at it.” Molly’s cheeks flushed. “And I never learned to swim,” she muttered. “Women usually don’t, you know.”

Was she afraid of the water? How had he not realized this before? He lowered his own voice. “There’s no need to worry. The *Penelope* is newly rebuilt, freshly caulked and painted.”

Her shoulders softened.

“I won’t let you drown.”

“I know you wouldn’t, but...”

“Trust me. Please?”

“Are you pleading?”

Pleading, their old inside joke. “You can never resist me when I plead, right?”

Molly’s cheeks pinched. She was hiding a smile. “Aiming for the heart, not the head. Will our entire marriage be like this?”

Her humor had returned. They had survived the second altercation of the morning. Only one task remained. Josiah turned to the others, watching them over the remains of their wedding feast. “Pardon me, everyone. I owe Molly a kiss of peace.”

And to the sounds of cheers and laughter, a kiss was exactly what he gave her.



WET WAS ONE WORD FOR THEIR JAUNT ACROSS BOSTON HARBOR THAT AFTERNOON. *Windy* was another. *Nauseating* was most accurate.

Molly pulled her cloak tight to ward off the spray and kept her eyes on the horizon, just as Josiah had instructed. Her nerves were jangling, and her stomach was not cooperating. Seasick in the harbor. She would never live this down. To his credit, Josiah had not laughed when she complained. Which was how she knew it was their wedding day.

“Dory...double-ended...sprit sail...bad tack...” His voice carried from behind her, where he held the sheet and tiller. “Rigging...keel...loose-footed...”

She turned about. “I recognize those words as English, but you may as well be speaking one of your other languages.”

“Point taken.” Josiah grinned. “I have been planning this trip for weeks. You and me, on an island by ourselves—or effectively by ourselves, as our host has promised to leave us alone. Eventful morning of investigative work aside, I am happy for the

sabbatical.” He looked over his shoulder and out over the water, then adjusted the tiller. “Restoring the boat was only the first step. You should have seen the house. Took five days before Mark and I had it shipshape... Take that back. Ignorance is bliss. Let’s just say some furry friends needed to find a new home.”

He was right. She didn’t want to know. “So long as it’s livable.”

“More than livable. All’s clear, love. Ready to tack?”

She pushed the daggerboard all the way down—her one job, which was meant to distract her from her nausea. Josiah had told her the board kept the boat from being blown sideways. Then she gripped her seat, braced her feet against the hull, ducked her body down as low as it would go, and squeezed her eyes shut. “Ready.”

“You’re adorable.”

“Save the compliments for Peddock’s.”

Her stomach gurgled as the boat turned and tilted. The boom swung over her head and the sail flapped noisily, and Josiah’s leg brushed her petticoat as he shifted in his seat. She had yet to find this enjoyable.

“You can look now.”

She cracked open one eye. He was switching hands on the tiller and sheet. Then he adjusted the sail until it quieted and the boat righted to a comfortable angle. “One gets used to it, I promise,” he said.

Another wave of nausea swept over her. “I would curse you with every unladylike word at my disposal—”

“I love you too.”

“—but cursing doesn’t seem very bridal.”

“Just wait until I take you out into the bay.”

“My stomach is rolling enough, thank you.”

“Leave the daggerboard down. Eyes back on the horizon. Won’t be long.”

They sailed around Spectacle and Long Islands. The golden water opened before them, and Peddock’s came into view on the horizon. He sailed to the island’s southern side, at which point he let out the sail. “I’m going to row. Switch places with me.”

She did. He tied up the sail—he had a sailor word for it—then sat, pulled up the daggerboard, and ran out his oars. His attention was behind him, intent on clearing Prince’s Head on their way to the dock. Molly’s gaze was on Josiah himself. His legs braced, his body leaned, and his arms pulled to his chest at an even tempo as he rowed. He had assigned her the daggerboard as a distraction, but his own person served the purpose far better. Between her admiration and the *Penelope’s* easier pace, her nausea eased. She looked over the sunlit water and, to her surprise, found herself enjoying this.

“I like rowing,” she said.

Josiah glanced her way and smiled. “Good. We can start there.”

“Sorry I’m not much of a sailor.”

“Fortunately, I never wanted to marry a sailor. Too stinky. No manners.”

She giggled.

“I can suffer a landlubber for a wife, if that wife is you. You’re the only woman

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

BOSTON, 1793—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.

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“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!”

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