



# Let the Tornado Come: A Memoir

*Rita Zoey Chin*

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**Let the Tornado Come: A Memoir** Rita Zoey Chin

**From an award-winning poet comes this riveting, gorgeous memoir about a young runaway, the trauma that haunted her as an adult, and the friendship with a horse that finally set her free.**

When she was eleven years old, Rita began to run away. Her father's violence and her mother's hostility drove her out of the house and into the streets in search of a better life. This soon led her into a dangerous world of drugs, predatory older men, and the occasional kindness of strangers, but despite the dangers, Rita kept running. One day she came upon a field of horses galloping along a roadside fence, and the sight of them gave her hope. The memory of their hoofbeats stayed with her.

Rita survives her harrowing childhood to become a prize-winning writer and the wife of a promising surgeon. But when she is suddenly besieged by terrifying panic attacks, her past trauma threatens her hard-won happiness and the stable, comfortable life she's built with her husband. Within weeks, she is incapacitated with fear—literally afraid of her own shadow. Realizing that she is facing a life of psychological imprisonment, Rita undertakes a journey to find help through a variety of treatments. It is ultimately through chasing her childhood passion for horses that she meets a spirited, endearing horse named Claret—with his own troubled history—and together they surmount daunting odds as they move toward fear and learn to trust, and ultimately save, each other.

## Let the Tornado Come: A Memoir Details

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# From Reader Review Let the Tornado Come: A Memoir for online ebook

## C. E. says

Confronted by seemingly unrelenting challenges, an extraordinarily courageous woman remains loving and hopeful in the face of dark forces that would incarcerate those with less spirit. With her astonishing voice, Rita Zoey Chin weaves an exquisite tapestry from the narrative threads of her life in this redemptive memoir as she heals herself, her horse, and her reader all at once.

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## Suzan Bond says

I really meant to savor this book over the long weekend. Instead I tore through it, staying up late to finish it the first day. It was *\*that\** good.

Though the story itself isn't an easy read, the writing is beautiful, almost lyrical. For instance:

On the day of my birth, I'm sure they were there--thunderous, rhythmic coming and and coming: hoofbeats.

In short, this is an incredible memoir. While there are plenty of hard moments, the author's resilient spirit comes shining through, encouraging the reader that it will be ok, even in the hardest moments.

The structure of the story is told in an unconventional way with a non-linear structure and short chapters. The short chapters keep the pace of the book brisk, which really works especially when the author is going through horrific neglectful and disempowering situations, giving the reader relief just when it was needed. The non-linear structure also encourages the reader on breathlessly eager for more.

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If you love memoirs, this is one of the best of this genre, read this book.

If you love stories about the resiliency of the human spirit, read this book.

If you are a writer looking for inspiration on non-linear formats, read this book.

If you love a good story wrapped up in poetic language, read this book.

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OK. Everyone. Read this book.

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## Canadian Reader says

When Rita Zoey Chin moved with physician husband, Larry, to a spacious, light-filled colonial-style home in rural Massachusetts, she felt she was finally putting a very difficult childhood and youth behind her. Her husband soon started a new, high-pressure job as director of neurosurgery at a Boston hospital, and Rita's plan was to write at home. Alone in the house during the day, Rita felt her heart begin to race at such a clip that she made a 911 call. The paramedics appeared, confirmed that her pulse was indeed racing, smiled when she told them she'd run out the door when she'd felt the alarming symptoms, and hinted that she might be having a panic attack like another lady who called them fairly regularly. Rita's husband reassured (or dismissed) her, telling her she'd be fine.

The fact was: Rita's heart had been racing for a long time, and there were reasons. In the first six chapters alone, the reader learns that during Rita's childhood, her mother spent a lot of time weeping; believed she saw Jesus; made a point of driving off on Rita—leaving her stranded in shopping mall parking lots, apparently to scare the child, but usually returning for her after 20 minutes or so; and argued loudly with Rita's father. If her mother was seemingly an intermittently psychotic depressive, Rita's father wasn't a great deal more stable: in fact, he was violent, hurling objects at Rita for the most minor of childhood offences.

The author makes clear early on that her chaotic childhood propelled her into a life on the streets with all its attendant dangers. Somehow, though, she'd eventually managed to get it together: attend university, find fulfilling work, and now move with a beautiful husband to a beautiful place.

I liked the evocative title of Chin's memoir. I liked the cover photograph of a young woman clinging to the earth—very Andrew Wyeth, but with the added feature of a horse (a hint that an animal would play a therapeutic role). I also liked the epigraph from a Stanley Kunitz poem. So what was the problem? The writing. It's functional, yes. There are no glaring grammar or usage errors to grate on one's nerves . . . but, boy, is it bland. I pushed myself to the end of the sixth chapter (p. 42), and I had no motivation to go any further. If the tornado did come, I wasn't there to read about it.

The problem these days, of course, is that there are so many misery memoirs, an author needs to be possessed of extraordinary talent and sensibility to pull one off. Chin's writing is serviceable, but wholly unremarkable as far as I got. (At this point in my life, having wasted hundreds of hours seeing dozens of books I didn't like to their sometimes bitter—but mostly just mediocre—end, I feel 5 chapters or 50 pages is a fair chance for a book to hook the reader—or not. No more clean-plate club for me.) I know many other readers loved Mira Bartok's *The Memory Palace*, but I did not. To see Bartok's warm back-cover blurb about Chin's book, then, seemed even further reason to abandon it. I really enjoyed returning it to the library.

I want to make clear that I do not dismiss Chin or her experience. I just wish her writing had been of enough quality to make me want to continue (or that the author had condensed the narrative into a brief, cleanly written personal essay). As far as I got, not a single person approached living and breathing on the page.

Some people object to people rating books they didn't complete. However, I feel my rating of 2 acknowledges that yes, I believe there was a story to tell here; there was promise—but, for me, that's just not enough anymore.

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## **Catherine says**

How a book about fear, about running away from a home filled with anger and hopelessness and despair becomes a story of courage, of truth and beauty and will, and of always reaching toward love--speaks to the prodigious talent and heart of the author, Rita Zoey Chin. Gorgeous and unflinching, this memoir tells the story of a harrowing journey through childhood into wisdom, into strength, and into joy. This is an incredible, compassionate, and absolutely thrilling book, filled with humor, warmth, and depth, and it will stay with me forever. (lucky me.)

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## **Karen & Gerard says**

In *Let the Tornado Come* by Rita Zoey Chin, we are told about Rita's childhood which was rough to say the least. Now a married woman, she suffers panic attacks at every turn. This read like a novel only it's true! I loved this book and highly recommend it. I was drawn into her stories and found myself rooting for her to get help. Turns out an animal was a big help. What kind? You will have to read the book to find out! (Gerard's review)

*Let The Tornado Come* by Rita Zoey Chin is a memoir about her dark childhood, her panic attacks and her journey to having a normal life she dreamed of with the help of horses. I almost quit on this book because her childhood was so awful! The abusive parents were bad, but the child prostitution and her life on the streets was horrible and disgusting. I felt bad for her and admired her courage to keep searching for a better life. The best part of the book was how she bonded with a horse named Claret. The thing that was most distracting to me was how the book kept jumping back and forth between the past and the present. Overall, it was pretty shocking to me and gave me some insight into a lifestyle that is very different from mine. (Karen's review)

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## **Justina says**

"*Let the Tornado Come*" is Chin's memoir of a childhood filled with abuse, her struggle on the streets as a runaway trying to survive, and how a horse named Claret helped her overcome her panic as an adult. I really enjoyed this book. I won it as a first reads giveaway. It is beautifully written. Chin's story is a sad one but one filled with hope. Chin endured a horrific childhood and came out the other side even stronger. Her story is inspiring. The book has a poetic feel to it. My favorite line from the book is on page 149. "If only we could always say our truths-- if we could name the things that haunt us-- maybe they would float up from us like a kind of helium that the birds would sip in the treetops. Then they would make us laugh and laugh." I highly recommend this book.

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## **Deb J says**

"*Let the Tornado Come*" by Rita Zoey Chin

I just finished reading this wonderful book.

Rita has a way of bringing the reader "in". I am pretty good friends with her sister (Joanne) which is how I initially learned of the book. A notoriously slow reader, a week into reading, I jokingly -- but not so jokingly

-- told Joanne that the book feels so intimate that I felt like I was having sex with her! She laughed. But my point was, Rita has a prose that feels very intimate; she connects with her reader on a basal familiar way. I loved it. Didn't expect to. Picked it up as a way to fill the gap until one of my favorite authors released a new book. But Rita sucked me in. Her horse Claret and their relationship reminds me of the horse I've been riding since I took up learning to ride, two years ago. Her intimacy of "why" she was a runaway touches me in a very personal way. Her prose would touch anyone who makes the decision to read her book. That said...I very highly recommend this book!

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### **Kate says**

I used to walk to and from work in Boston, and on my way, I noticed this tiny garden plot in the space between the sidewalk and the road. A small tree was starting to bud and some early spring flowers were blooming. The next day, for some reason, a crew of city workers were cutting down the tree and by the time I walked home again, the plot had been covered with blacktop. But around a week later, a tulip shot straight through it and bloomed. I had the image of that tulip in mind as I finished reading this book. The author displays such resilience, strength, beauty and courage and this book was an honor to read.

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### **Shannon says**

What a beautiful and heart wrenching story! As a fellow panic sufferer, I felt the author's pain as I read through this book, but I also felt myself grow stronger in the process. I think panic sufferers are actually braver than most people, because in order to get better, we are forced to confront our own fears--whether those fears are tangible, such as the fear of crowds or elevators, or intangible, such as our own thoughts (as in my case). Panic is paradoxical--to overcome it, we must first accept it and move through it.

After reading Rita's story, I think she is one of the bravest people in the world. I cannot imagine surviving the childhood she did, let alone overcoming it and thriving as she has. I had to put the book down a few times during those sections, because I found them too hard to read. Yet she had to LIVE THROUGH IT. Hope. Hope really is the only thing stronger than fear.

Loved this book, everything about it. And I'm going to go read some poetry now.

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### **Morgan Lee says**

**Read this review and many others on my blog [For Such Love We Feel](#).**

*I received this book free from NetGalley and Simon and Schuster as an advanced reader copy.*

Let The Tornado Come is a beautifully written, thought provoking novel that anyone can relate to. Rita Zoey Chin delivers a raw look back at her own life that is simultaneously sad and triumphant and left me wanting more of her insight and wisdom. Her narrative voice spoke to me in a way that few authors have been able to, and I felt a kinship with her as she journeyed through her childhood on into adulthood, a solemn creature who knew the fragility and weight of joy. You feel the sweetness of her highs and the weight of her lows as

Chin navigates between a sudden anxiety disorder and learning to ride the horse that soothes her fears. She recreates the soaring feeling of cantering with her words alone, and describes the one of a kind relationship you can only have with an animal. As a horse lover myself, it made my heart swell to read that someone else could feel so strongly and so similarly about them and it is amazing to hear the healing qualities of even the smallest things they do. And, as a sufferer of an anxiety disorder, Chin's writing filled me with a sense of hope that if someone else can suffer so badly and overcome it, then I can continue to push through my own struggles. This intriguing, intricately written novel wraps itself around you and cradles you in its arms; it made me cry, laugh and sigh all in the same breath and it reminded me of the redemptive qualities of love in all of its many forms.

I would honestly recommend this book to anyone – if you've ever felt alone in a room full of people, if you've had a parent abandon you, if you've ever loved something so much it hurts, or even if you haven't experienced any of these things, you need to read [Let The Tornado Come](#). I cannot wait to see what other things Rita Zoey Chin releases out into the world; her narrative voice is strong and lyrical and I hope she continues to publish not only fiction, but poetry. I love when a book can remind you that there are other people out there in the world like you, when a book can make you feel something you haven't felt before, or reaffirm your hope that things happen for a reason. If you take nothing else away from this book, take this: "Yet despite the fear and sadness and shame I carried, hope kept sprouting up like weeds in the cracks, taking root inside me." Let that hope grow my friends, nurture it, surround yourself with people who will also nurture it and never forget that you are beautiful no matter where your life has led you. No one can take away your hope, it is a part of you and this book is a beautiful example of that truth.

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### **Bob Walenski says**

Just started the book, recommended by Jennifer, and I love it so far! It's completely captivating and engrossing.....

Rather than try to follow her life in chronological order, Rita switched back and forth, which saved her very sad story from getting too overwhelming. I couldn't help but feel empathy for her, her pain and betrayal by her parents was horrible. I couldn't feel anything but anger at our systems, that don't listen to the abused, but simply shuffle kids around like paper cut outs and don't help any of them.

I found her story with Claret ( horse) fascinating. The horse was a perfect reflection of herself, and as she saw his panic and helped him, she was able to deal more with her own. The love, and the difficulty along the way was my favorite parts to this story...it was tremendously uplifting and joyous in the end.

The family pain was the worst. A S Neill once said: "There is no such thing as problem children, there are only problem parents" . I want to shake her mother and scream in her face at what she did to her child. I want to really inflict some pain on her father, despite the laws of karma. He deserves a special place in hades. And yet look at the beautiful person that emerges out of that nightmare! Finally able to live without panic and express her art and talents to the world. What a wonderful example to us all and to other abused and abandoned children.

There's so much more to potentially talk about, but this was an unforgettable book.

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### **Jess says**

In equal measures gut-wrenching, heartbreaking, humorous and inspirational, this memoir moved me in ways I could not have expected. I was drawn into Chin's story when I heard her interviewed on NPR.

Though it took me about 6 months to actually pick up the book, I was amazed at how her courage, gusto, and fierce love and determination for something better came across just as clearly in writing as it had through her spoken word. Reading a poet's memoir, even with the difficult subject matter of nearly every possible kind of abuse, was a literary gift. Read this book. With Kleenex handy. I will carry her story with me and hope to have half the strength and courage in my darkest moments as she displays in her mildest of discomforts.

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### **Michelle says**

A brave and courageous memoir: "Let the Tornado Come" authored by Rita Zoey Chin recalls her abusive childhood, her life on the streets as a teen runaway, later to find services in residential facilities. As a happily married wife, she faced an unrelenting panic disorder, as she was forced to confront her troubled past. An estimated 40 million Americans are affected by an anxiety disorder during their lifetime.

Convinced she was having a heart attack, she dialed 911, only to discover she was having a panic attack. Her husband Larry, a neurosurgeon at Boston Medical Center offered unconditional love and support, she received the best therapies available. Still, her anxiety was particularly challenging to deal with, she found tremendous solace, comfort, and healing caring for and riding her horse.

Chin recalled her childhood, living near a loud, busy congested airport. Their lives improved slightly when her parents moved the family to a Maryland country side. There was no happiness, with her parents constant fighting, neglect and abuse. After a bitter divorce, custody was awarded to her father, after guided manipulation of truth and fact. Both parents were utterly selfish and cruel, likely from mental illness. Chin's mother refused to allow her to live in her home, even after finding out she had been a runaway living in the streets. Chin's account of her childhood and as a runaway were totally heartbreaking.

"Grub Street" is a memoir class/workshop Chin teaches, as she advocates and mentors troubled teen girls. She holds a MFA from the University of Maryland, and lives in Boston, MA.

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### **Linda Marie Marsh says**

People hear the word 'abuse' and more often than not, think physical. But wait...there's more...add in mental and emotional, wrap it up in one package and you have a ticking time bomb. Wrap it all up in a beautiful female package and it becomes Rita. One can run from childhood trauma but there is no hiding, no escape, it's a part of who you are. Shove it away and it WILL burst out in one way or another...

But there is more to this story, a story of struggle, strength, loss, confusion, choices, despair and...love. The craving of love from a parent, the search for replacement love from whoever might give it, if one is lucky-the love of a soul mate, and in this case....the love of and for a horse. A soul mate of sorts with four legs! The moral? Never give up on yourself. Accept the hurt and work around it.



FAVORITE QUOTE: " how sweetly the lotus grows in the litter of the wayside"

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## Rebecca says

(3.5) An affecting memoir of the author's unstable childhood and adult anxiety disorder, this book reminded me of *Once in a House on Fire* by Andrea Ashworth or *Take This Man* by Brando Skyhorse. After a home life filled with physical and verbal abuse, Chin became a teenage runaway, trading sex for money, drugs or a place to stay. She bounced between detention centers and mental hospitals in suburban Maryland before finally kicking her cocaine habit and entering college to get an English degree.

That is only half of the story, however. The other, almost more troubling part of the memoir concerns her new life with her neurosurgeon husband, Larry, on the outskirts of Boston. This was supposed to be a haven, a place of peace and industry where she could devote herself to her poetry and continue to heal. But out of nowhere she started suffering from anxiety; soon she couldn't drive on the highway, climb a staircase or take a shower without having a full-blown panic attack. It seemed her past was back to haunt her, after all; "Who knows the ways brutality wedges itself into the body, into the synapses of a brain?" Chin describes these attacks so vividly that, even if you have never had a similar experience, you will feel as if you know exactly what she is talking about.

The best sections of the book, to me, were about how she attempted to deal with the anxiety: everything from CBT and Freudian psychotherapy to cooking and ceramics lessons. "I spent so much energy hoping for some magical mother or therapist or guru to appear and unfurl a scroll of answers into my hand—ones that would tell me which steps to take and how to feel better, less afraid." Yet the most helpful thing of all may have been her relationship with her new horse, Claret. He, too, was a nervous and possibly traumatized creature, and his recovery process in some way mirrors Chin's.

At times I thought this metaphorical connection was a bit strained, with cringe-worthy lines like "It wasn't until I followed the hoofbeats of my earliest memories that I would fully find my way free." The structure of the memoir, alternating between past, present and horse, also feels needlessly overcomplicated. (I'm not too keen on the title, either.) Still, I found this a moving and lyrical piece of life writing. "Mostly, life to me feels like a lot of stumbling, punctuated by rare moments of grace" – moments she illuminates beautifully here.

Recommended for fans of Jeannette Walls and Anne Lamott.

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