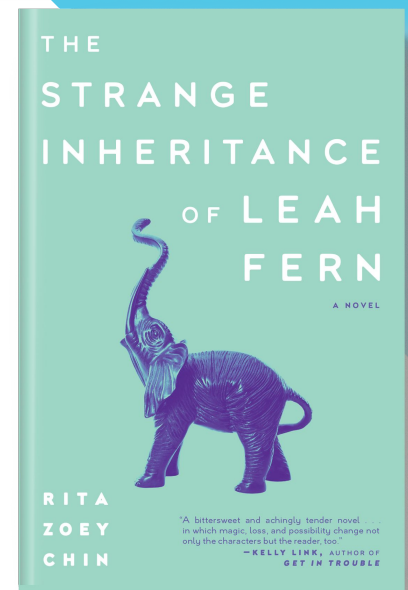


THE STRANGE INHERITANCE OF LEAH FERN

Rita Zoey Chin

Trade Paperback Original 978-1-61219-986-3

eBook 978-1-61219-987-0



“*The Strange Inheritance of Leah Fern* is a bittersweet and achingly tender coming of age novel. Like V. E. Schwab and Audrey Niffenegger, Rita Zoey Chin is an expert guide to that territory in which magic, loss, and possibility change not only the characters but the reader, too.”
—**Kelly Link**, author of *Get in Trouble*

“An imaginative debut...” —*The New York Times*

INTRODUCTION

The luminous story of a fiercely lonely young woman's quest to uncover the truth behind her mother's disappearance . . .

When 6-year-old empath Leah Fern—once “The Youngest and Very Best Fortune Teller in the World”—is abandoned by her beautiful magician mother, she is consumed with longing for her mother's return, until something bizarre happens: On her 21st birthday, Leah receives an inheritance from someone she doesn't even know, and finds herself launched on a journey of magical discovery. It's a voyage that will spiral across the United States, Canada, into the Arctic Circle, and beyond—and help her make her own life whole by piecing together the mystery surrounding her mother's disappearance.

The Strange Inheritance of Leah Fern is an enchanting novel about the transcendent power of the imagination, the magic at the threshold of past and present, and the will it takes to love.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

1. Leah's adventure is driven by both curiosity about her mother and the feeling of obligation she has to honor Essie's final request. What does this say about what it means to be part of a community?
2. Many of the characters in the novel are outcasts in one way or another. Discuss a time when you felt like an outsider, and how that may have affected your sense of identity.
3. What is the significance of the various places Leah visits throughout the narrative? What does it mean to cross borders, physically and figuratively? What role does the environment play?
4. Essie East takes photographs of nature—like moss and ice—to “uncover hidden worlds, to see the islands within the islands” (179). Do you think there are “islands within the islands” of human beings?



THE STRANGE INHERITANCE OF LEAH FERN

5. Leah's story is punctuated by several important interactions with animals, as well as key changes to the landscape and environment. What do the different creatures that she meets along her journey signify? How do these changes in her surroundings reflect the different stages of her internal journey?
6. The Moss Witches were all artists who supported each other's creative endeavors. "Where does the desire to create art come from," Leah wonders (page 177). How would you answer that question?
7. We see many different models of family in *Leah Fern*, except perhaps that of a "traditional" nuclear family unit. What defines family for you?
8. What are some of the ways Leah copes with her mother's abandonment? How does Leah find freedom in learning about who her mother truly was?
9. Although none of it is explicitly depicted, there are several kinds of abuse in Jeannie Star's life mentioned or implied by Essie's letters. What does Leah's story have to say about the effects of generational trauma? Is this also one of her "strange inheritances"?
10. Essie East withholds from Leah Fern that Claire Silver is her mother. How does this affect the narrative? How would Leah's experience have been different if she had known earlier that she was scattering not only Essie's, but her mother's ashes?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rita Zoey Chin is the author of the widely praised memoir, *Let the Tornado Come*. She holds an MFA from the University of Maryland and is the recipient of a Katherine Anne Porter Prize, an Academy of American Poets Award, and a Bread Loaf scholarship. She has taught at Towson University and at Grub Street in Boston. Her work has appeared in *Guernica*, *Tin House*, and *Marie Claire*. This is her first novel.

MORE TO DISCOVER

Find more resources for your book club at www.mhpbooks.com.

