

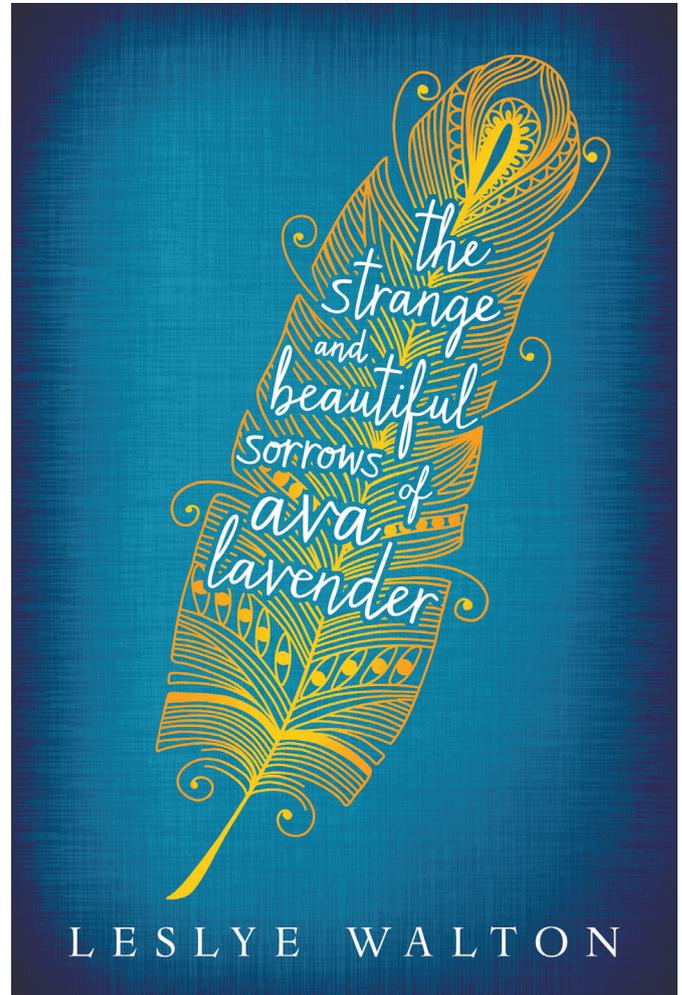
the strange and beautiful sorrows of ava lavender

BY

LESLYE WALTON

Magical realism, lyrical prose and the pain and passion of human love haunt this hypnotic generational saga.

Foolish love appears to be the Roux family birthright, an ominous forecast for its most recent progeny, Ava Lavender. Ava—in all other ways a normal girl—is born with the wings of a bird. In a quest to understand her peculiar disposition and a growing desire to fit in with her peers, adolescent Ava ventures into the wider world, ill-prepared for what she might discover and naïve to the twisted motives of others. Others like the pious Nathaniel Sorrows, who mistakes Ava for an angel and whose obsession with her grows until the night of the summer solstice celebration. That night, the skies open up, rain and feathers fill the air and Ava's quest and her family's saga build to a devastating crescendo. First-time author Leslye Walton has constructed a layered and unforgettable mythology of what it means to be born with hearts that are tragically, exquisitely human.



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About the Author

Leslye Walton says that *The Strange and Beautiful Sorrows of Ava Lavender* began as a short story that came to her while listening to a song. She has an MA in writing and this is her first novel. Leslye Walton is a native of Tacoma, Washington, where she currently teaches at a high school.

Discussion Questions from Leslye Walton

1. The three Lavender women, Emilienne, Viviane and Ava, all face tragedy in their lives. Discuss how each woman responds to these events. What does this say about them? Do you think the responses are fitting for the characters?
2. This novel provides a cast of many memorable characters, most of whom have strong personalities, as well as unusual names. What do the supporting characters – Cardigan Cooper, Wilhelmina Dovewolf, Marigold Pie, René Roux, Gabe – bring to the story? What role do they play, both for the main characters and in the plot?
3. Would the people of Pinnacle Lane have accepted Ava had she not been attacked, or was the horror of what happened to her necessary for them to accept her? In other words, is empathy necessary for acceptance?
4. Wilhelmina says, “Just because love don’t look the way you think it should, don’t mean you don’t have it” (page 241). How does Emilienne interpret this? Do you agree with Wilhelmina?
5. Do you think what happened to Nathaniel at the end was justified? Would you have preferred a more traditional, or perhaps less obtuse, form of punishment?
6. The ending has caused much debate among readers. What do you think happened? Did Ava finally allow herself to fly, or did she succumb to those dark thoughts in the end?
7. Discuss two of the themes in the novel. How do they interact and build upon each other throughout the novel?
8. The novel begins with Emilienne’s story and continues to Viviane’s before leading into Ava’s. What do you think about this format? How does this structure contribute to the reader’s experience, as well as impact the overall plot?
9. The novel is set in a fictitious neighborhood in Seattle, Washington. How does the main setting contribute to the mood of the story? What role does the setting play in the plot?
10. Discuss the use of language throughout the story. What does the French vocabulary add to the story?