



# The Strange and Beautiful Sorrows of Ava Lavender

By Leslye Walton

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**The Strange and Beautiful Sorrows of Ava Lavender** By Leslye Walton

**A 2015 William C. Morris YA Debut Award Finalist**

**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, sixteen-year old Ava ventures into the wider world, ill-prepared for what she might discover and naive 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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## **Editorial Review**

### **From School Library Journal**

Gr 9 Up—A girl born with brown speckled wings, as Ava Lavender was, is surely bound to be a curiosity. In the Roux family, however, Ava is not really so strange. This multigenerational saga moves from France to New York before Emilienne, Ava's grandmother, becomes the family's sole survivor. She is accompanied by the ghosts of her deceased siblings when she moves to Seattle, where she becomes a baker. Her loveless marriage produces one child, Vivianne, who lives an ordinary childhood, despite the fact that Emilienne is believed to be a witch. Emilienne's hope that teenage Vivianne will avoid the heartbreak that plagued her own youth is dashed when Vivianne becomes pregnant and the father of her twins returns to college and his college sweetheart. Vivianne is not just brokenhearted when she gives birth to Ava and Ava's mute twin, Henry, she is also a heartbreaker. Gabe, who rents a room from Emilienne, is in love with Vivianne, but receives no reciprocation. This story of unrequited love, betrayal, brutality, and healing is beautifully narrated by Cassandra Campbell. Her pronunciation of French proper names and pastries is authentic, as is her characterization of various personalities. This fantasy tale of ghosts, humans with feathers and wings, and cherries that ripen in Seattle in February will appeal to older teens.—Ann Weber, Bellarmine College Preparatory, San Jose, CA

### **From Booklist**

Ava Lavender, a typical girl in every respect except for the fact that she was born with wings, sits upon a family tree of doomed lovers. Her great-grandfather, her grandmother, her aunts and uncles, and her mother were either unlucky or foolish in matters of the heart. Family stories have become local legend, and Ava must explore them all to discover the two questions that haunt her: Where did I come from? . . . What would the world do with a girl such as I? What the world eventually does is to foist itself rather viciously on her. Ava is alternately shaped and trapped by her family's saga, and her voice at times gets lost in the telling. But it is a beautiful voice—poetic, witty, and as honest as family mythology will allow. There are many sorrows in Walton's debut, and most of them are Ava's through inheritance. Readers should prepare themselves for a tale where myth and reality, lust and love, the corporal and the ghostly, are interchangeable and surprising.

Grades 9-12. --Kara Dean

### **Review**

[A]n entrancing and sumptuously written multigenerational novel wrapped in the language of fable, magical realism, and local legend. . . . Walton's novel builds to a brutal but triumphant conclusion. It's a story that adults and teenagers can appreciate equally.

—Publishers Weekly (starred review)

Walton's novel is both strange and beautiful in the best of ways. . . . This multigenerational tale examines love and considers the conflicting facets of loving and being loved -- desire, despair, depression, obsession, self-love, and courage. . . . It is beautifully crafted and paced, mystical yet grounded by universal themes and sympathetic characters. A unique book, highly recommended for readers looking for something a step away from ordinary.

—School Library Journal (starred review)

This love story by debut YA author Leslye Walton is as rare and perfect as Mona Lisa's smile.

—Ellen Klein, Hooray for Books! (Alexandria, VA)

It is just as the title suggests, both strange and beautiful, and should be read by every lover of books, regardless of their age.

—Becky Quiroga Curtis, Books & Books (Coral Gables, FL)

This remarkable, magic-laced family history continues and spreads to other members of Ava's Seattle neighborhood to produce a gauzy narrative of love and loss... [An] intentionally artful tale.

—Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books

This magical lyrical story is a beautifully written novel with much to offer readers. ... Exquisite.

—Library Media Connection

[Ava's voice] is a beautiful voice—poetic, witty, and as honest as family mythology will allow. There are many sorrows in Walton's debut, and most of them are Ava's through inheritance. Readers should prepare themselves for a tale where myth and reality, lust and love, the corporal and the ghostly, are interchangeable and surprising.

—Booklist

The story's language is gorgeous.

—Kirkus Reviews

In a sweeping intergenerational story infused with magical realism, debut author Leslye Walton tethers grand themes of love and loss to the earthbound sensibility of Ava Lavender as she recollects one life-altering summer as a teenager. ... Walton presents challenges that most teens will hopefully never face. She writes of love, betrayal, birth, murder, affection and rape--and wraps them in prose so radiant that readers feel carried by Ava's narrative. The heroine's humor and wisdom as she looks back at her life let us know that she is a survivor.

—Shelf Awareness (starred review)

This. Book. Stole. Our. Hearts. It unfolds like a hauntingly beautiful dream (or is it a gorgeous nightmare?)... Strange and beautiful... violent and gorgeous. You gotta read it. A must-read for fans of beautiful monsters like Miss Peregrine's.

—Justine Magazine

Using detailed imagery and an almost mythical storytelling style, teenage Ava tells the history of four generations of her family. ... [Teens] willing to enter Ava's world on its own terms will find themselves richly rewarded.

—BookPage

[Ava] navigates through her family's history—along with her own—with a lyrical prose that maintains a whimsical and traditional fairy tale feel despite the sorrowful themes. ... Overall, I'm both impressed and dazzled by Leslye Walton's debut. "The Strange and Beautiful Sorrows of Ava Lavender" is a novel that has so many layers that it demands your attention. Written with the finesse of a seasoned writer, it's stunning, magical, strange and, of course, very beautiful.

—Tor.com

First-time novelist Leslye Walton has crafted a beautiful, haunting family history that spans generations and continents. The story's narrator, Ava, is achingly believable. ... "The Strange and Beautiful Sorrows of Ava Lavender" is not a typical love story. Walton's tale, by turns tragic and comic, expects readers to explore the big questions love raises — why do we love the people we love, and why do we hold on to love that hurts?

—The Times-News

[This novel] should be remembered for the devastatingly beautiful character of Ava Lavender and how she depicts just what it is to be different.

—The Guardian

Foolish love and flight are Ava's family inheritance. Magical realism colors this tale of a girl normal but for the wings with which she was born.

—San Francisco Chronicle

The characters are rich and familiar, and Walton does whimsy with a healthy dose of melancholy and tragedy. The storytelling is completely beautiful... A particularly toothsome and pleasurable read.

—Toronto Globe and Mail

## Users Review

**From reader reviews:**

**Christopher Hannah:**

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**Marilyn Vance:**

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**Stephen Hawkins:**

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**Susan Gaier:**

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