

The Strange and Beautiful Sorrows of Ava Lavender Study Guide

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

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Plot Summary

“The Strange and Beautiful Sorrows of Ava Lavender” is a young adult fantasy novel by Leslye Walton, which recounts the family history, and early life of Ava Lavender, a girl born with wings. Ava’s maternal family originates from France to settle in New York, including her grandmother, Emilienne. Emilienne struggles with love in her youth, and the deaths of her three siblings and both parents leave her shaken and wanting to leave New York. As a result, at the age of 20, she marries 31-year-old baker, Connor Lavender, who had previously believed he was not marriageable material due to his deformed leg as a result of childhood polio. Emilienne promises him one child if he will get her as far away from New York as possible. She and Connor then move to Seattle, where several months later, Emilienne gives birth to their only child, a daughter named Viviane. Connor dies of a heart-attack not long after, leaving Emilienne to run the bakery.

Viviane, as a child, befriends Jack Griffith, a neighborhood kid, and as teenagers, they fall in love with one another. Jack’s father, however, has high expectation of his son, which Jack can never meet. He breaks up with Viviane in order to marry a wealthy girl for her money and for the status it will afford him. Nevertheless, Jack still sleeps with Viviane once, who later gives birth to twins –the winged Ava Lavender, and her brother, the very-quiet Henry Lavender.

Ava and Henry are kept at home by Viviane, who worries that they will not do well out in the world. Nevertheless, Ava befriends a new girl on the block named Cardigan, who is happy to visit with Ava regularly. When they are both 15, they notice a young man arriving at the Widow Marigold Pie’s house in the neighborhood. They learn the man is an aspiring priest named Nathaniel Sorrows, who has been sent to take care of his aunt and help her get her health in order. Ava is immediately smitten with Nathaniel. On the first night Ava ever sneaks out with Cardigan, along with Cardigan’s older brother, Rowe, to head to the reservoir, while heading home alone, she encounters Nathaniel. Nathaniel has been struck by her wings, believing her to be an angel. She allows Nathaniel to touch her wings, and over the next few weeks, does everything she can to get Nathaniel to notice her. She preens her feathers in her open window so he can see her, and she leaves piles of feathers for him on his aunt’s doorstep. She begins to imagine what a married life with Nathaniel would be like, only to discover, in the end, that her crush is no more than a crush. Ava ends up falling in love with Rowe, instead.

Nathaniel, however, has become obsessed with Ava. While she is on her way home one night in the rain after a neighborhood celebration, Nathaniel invites her into his aunt’s house, where he proceeds to attack and rape her, stunned to discover that she is not an angel after all. Enraged, he hacks off her wings, and flees the house. Viviane, who has noticed her daughter is missing, is driving to find Ava when she sees Nathaniel running down the street. Two of Viviane’s dead ancestors appear with Nathaniel, and cause him to burst into flames and disappear. Ava is rushed to the hospital, while the entire neighborhood turns out in a vigil of prayer for her. At home, she recovers slowly, her wings regrowing, and she endeavors to survive in order to return the love Rowe has



given her. While Ava recovers, Emilienne herself begins to weaken, and ultimately passes away. At the end of the novel, now recovered, for the first time in her life, Ava takes to the night sky in flight.



Prologue – Chapter 5

Summary

Prologue – Ava Lavender is born on March 1, 1944, in Seattle, Washington. By many, she is considered everything from an angel to a monster. Ava considers herself just a girl, one who happens to have been born with wings. All the birds on Pinnacle Street, where Ava lives, gather around outside when she is born. Ava's wings are declared a "slight physical abnormality" which, it is later learned, cannot be surgically removed, for her body and her wings are dependent upon one another. The novel about to be read is a history of Ava's family and her young life, begun at the Seattle Public Library over a weekend in 1974, and completed in March, 2014.

Chapter 1 – Ava's maternal grandmother is a woman named Emilienne Adou Solange Roux, born on March 1, 1904. Emilienne has four siblings, all born on March 1 in successive years. Rene is born in 1905; Margaux is born in 1906; and Pierette is born in 1907. Their father, Beauregard Roux, is a well-known phrenologist, who, in 1912, decides to move his family from the small French village of Trouville-sur-Mer to Manhattan, New York aboard the SS France, one week after the Titanic sinks. By 1914, the family has finally settled into a squalid, two-room apartment. While the phrenology craze has gone out of style among most Americans, Beauregard manages to find good customers among German descendants in Yorkville and Carnegie Hill. While Beauregard's wife, Maman, is not thrilled with the dirtiness and poverty of New York, Beauregard can only see the good and promise in it. Beauregard sees America as a place for dreams to be born, while Maman sees it as a place where children come to die, for death among children is high. In 1915, Beauregard, visually similar to an adulterous man, is mistaken for that man, and killed. Maman then becomes a bookkeeper at a local dry cleaner's.

In 1917, at the age of 13, Emilienne meets the first love of her life, Levi Blythe, a boy who is pelted with rocks by a gang of boys. Emilienne tends to Levi's wounds. She then lets Levi touch her bare bottom, explaining later to her sister, Margaux, that love can make people such fools. It is the last time she sees Levi, never knowing what happened to him. At 16, Emilienne falls in love with a boy known only as Dublin, who teaches her to smoke cigarettes, gives Emilienne her first kiss, and then runs off with a girl named Carmelita Hermosa. Pierette, at 15, falls in love with an older man who studies birds, though Pierette can never get his attention. She covers her body in yellow feathers in an attempt to get the man's attention, but it does not work.

Emilienne herself possesses a certain sensitivity to things other people might not notice, which gives people the impression she is clairvoyant or telepathic. For example, a dropped spoon for a normal person indicates the need for a clean one. For Emilienne, a dropped spoon means tea should be put on, for company is coming. At the age of 18, Emilienne meets a visitor to the area named Satin Lush, who appears to be from Quebec or Montreal. They become engaged quickly. At the same time, 16-year-old



Margaux gets pregnant, though she will not name the father. While heading home one day, Emilienne's hat is blown away by the wind and retrieved by a boy with one blue eye and one green eye. Emilienne subsequently discovers 17 similar children in 12 blocks. Emilienne then breaks things off with Satin Lush, who has one blue eye and one green eye. With Satin gone, Margaux commits suicide by carving out her own heart. Rene, the only boy in the Roux family, turns out to be gay. He is killed by his lover, William Peyton, after Peyton's wife discovers the affair. Rene is shot in the face, the wound is covered with a handkerchief, and the body is left on the Roux family's front steps.

Chapter 2 – In the 1920s, a small, residential neighborhood of Seattle on the hilled Pinnacle Lane is host to a beautiful house with a widow's walk directed toward Salmon Bay. The house was built in the 1800s by a Portuguese captain for his younger sister, Fatima Ines de Dores, after their parents died. It is believed the two had an incestuous relationship, for Fatima watched for her brother's return like a lover or a wife each time he set out to sea. He returned each time with numerous gifts for her, including lilacs, which come to grow all around the house. Wealthy from his travels, Captain Dores has the growing neighborhood built to his specifications, and financially backs everything from the post office to the school. According to legend, Captain de Dores arranged for his sister to take First Communion at their house in a beautiful white dress, during which time the Holy Wafer burst into flames upon touching Fatima's tongue. The Catholic priest refused to ever return, and the Lutheran Church was then constructed. In exchange for his patronage to the neighborhood, Captain Dores asked only that each year, Fatima's birthday be publicly celebrated on summer solstice. The celebrations were elaborate and luxurious affairs. But one day, Captain Dores did not return from sea, and no one saw Fatima for months until the authorities removed her from the house. She was wearing her white dress, wrecked and covered with feathers and bird droppings from the pet doves she kept. Nevertheless, the celebrations on her birthday continued.

With her siblings and mother all gone by 1924, Emilienne looks for her next step in life. She meets a baker named Connor Lavender, who at the age of 31, lives with one crippled leg after having contracted polio as a child. His leg exempts him from the draft in World War I, but also means that no girl wants to marry him. Emilienne proposes marriage to Connor in exchange for giving him one child, and getting Emilienne as far away from New York as possible. They marry three months later. Though it is a loveless wedding, Emilienne vows to be good to her husband.

Four months after marrying, Connor and Emilienne move to Seattle, and take the old Dores House on the hill at the end of Pinnacle Lane. Emilienne is already pregnant, and her unusual sensitivities to things are soon well-known. When Emilienne's neighbor, the Widow Marigold Pie, suffers insomnia, Emilienne brings her a garland of peonies, which helps the Widow to sleep. As a result of these sensitivities, Emilienne is referred to as a witch and is avoided completely. Her husband, Connor, however, is well-loved, as is his bakery. It is located near the Lutheran Church. Pastor Trace Graves and the other congregants love to stop by the bakery after services. Emilienne, often alone at home, is never truly alone. The memories and spirits of her dead family members all hover around her. While the house is considered to be haunted by Fatima's ghost, Emilienne



never sees it. Instead, she finds numerous possessions that once belong to Fatima. When Ava's mother is born, Emilienne and Connor name her Viviane. Connor is thrilled to have a daughter, and Emilienne considers that she may just be coming to love him. In the early morning of December 23, 1925, Connor dies of heart failure. Emilienne immediately goes to work at the bakery, bringing the infant Viviane with her. Emilienne soon learns that no one will come into the bakery to buy anything from her.

Chapter 3 – With Connor gone, no one wants to buy anything from Emilienne in the bakery. In early February, 21-year-old Wilhelmina Dovewolf, member of the Suquamish Indian tribe, goes into the bakery. She does not quite fit in among her own people, for she has been educated by whites, and does not quite fit in among whites, because she is Indian. Wilhelmina knows that death has been following Emilienne, and that a cleansing ritual on the bakery must be performed. Emilienne does as instructed, and the next morning, a line of customers forms at the bakery door. Emilienne hires Wilhelmina on to handle the surge of business. Among the customers is Beatrix Griffith, who shops at the bakery in secrecy, for her husband, John, vows that Emilienne is a witch, and no business should be given to her.

Chapter 4 – Viviane's infancy and childhood are spent in the bakery with Emilienne and Wilhelmina. At home, Viviane likes to explore, and one day finds an old, white gown that has a burn mark down the front. Viviane often wears this dress, and is wearing it when she meets her best friend, Jack. They become inseparable. Jack is the son of John and Beatrix Griffith. Reflecting on the past, Ava considers that fate controls the lives of people.

Chapter 5 – John Griffith is an angry and demanding man who secretly lusts for Emilienne. As World War II breaks out, Jack is 17, and John considers him a disappointment for not going off to war or being captain of the football team. In January, 1942, the Admiral Theater opens in Seattle to great acclaim, and is well-attended, including by Jack and Viviane. Sitting nearby are Constance Quackenbush and Delilah Zimmer. Constance is determined to break Jack and Viviane apart. Jack dismisses Constance's attempts to flirt with him, and after the movie, Jack and Viviane drive to the reservoir, their favorite spot. Located near Pinnacle Lane, it is overseen by a caretaker and his wife who live in a small white house near the water's edge. At the reservoir, Jack teaches Viviane to dance. They end up kissing on the ground, and as Viviane begins to undress, she tells Jack to stop, for she has an appendicitis scar on her stomach she is self-conscious about. Jack shows her a scar on his hand from a can opener. This leads to them showing one another their scars, going all the way back to their childhood. They even discuss emotional scars, such as Jack's horrible relationship with his father.

Analysis

"The Strange and Beautiful Sorrows of Ava Lavender" is a young adult fantasy novel by Leslye Walton, which recounts the family history, and early life of Ava Lavender, a girl born with wings. When the novel begins, the theme of flight and freedom is readily at



hand in Ava's birth in the prologue. A gathering of birds portends her birth, and Ava's wings are a surprise to everyone. Her birth makes headlines, and over the years, people will come to consider her everything from one of God's angels to a monster. Birds, wings, and feathers traditionally allude to flight and freedom in terms of symbolism, but oftentimes, their use can be ironic. In the novel, the use of wings, of flight, is largely ironic. From the very moment of her birth with wings, Ava is not free. Immediately, she is objected to the opinions and ideas of others about her, trapping her in preconceived assumptions about herself. While the birds outside are free to fly away, Ava is not.

The theme of family will also prove to be important through the course of the novel, for Ava's own history is dependent on her family, and Ava explains that what the audience is now reading is indeed also an account of her family's history. Seeking a better life for his family, Beauregard Roux moves his wife and three children from their home in France to New York. While things do not turn out exactly as planned, Beauregard is still thrilled to be in America. He works hard to support his family. Yet, the family seems beset by tragedy, and by fate (which here also emerges as a theme in its own right). Beauregard, Rene, Margaux, Pierette, and Maman all die within a few years of one another, leaving Emilienne alone and looking for a way out of New York. Heartbroken from three failed romances, and seeking flight and freedom, Emilienne willingly arranges herself in marriage with Connor Lavender, offering him herself, and a child in exchange for relocation. Emilienne has come to accept that she may never have love, but she will have a family once more, and will be able to get out of New York. Tragedy and fate seem to follow Emilienne even to Seattle, however, as she begins seeing the ghosts of her siblings, and as Connor comes to have a heart attack a short time after the birth of their daughter, Viviane.

Tragedy and fate do not only seem to touch the Lavender family, but the Dores family as well. A bizarre, strange sort of relationship develops between Fatima and her older brother, perhaps even incestuous, as is hinted at in the novel. The neighborhood is built up around Pinnacle Lane, based on the funding and benefaction of Captain de Dores. This includes the Lutheran church that will come to factor into events heavily in Ava's own life, as well as the birthday celebrations for Fatima on summer solstice, a neighborhood festival which will continue long after Fatima dies. The reader should take note of the scene where the Communion wafer bursts into flames when being given to Fatima, for this symbolizes the probable sexual abuse she suffers at the hands of her brother. The event singes and ruins her Communion dress, a pure and beautiful white, leaving it irrevocably stained and ruined, just as Fatima's own innocence has been forever stolen and corrupted by her brother. Indeed, the reader should also pay attention to the fact that Fatima kept pet birds – winged creatures who had the ability to fly away from whatever situation they were faced with – while Fatima herself was trapped by forces beyond her control, primarily, her older brother.

There is, however, one seeming bright spot amidst so much tragedy in the novel so far. This, as the reader discovers, is the unfolding love between Viviane and Jack. Having grown up together from childhood into teenagers, they naturally fall in love with one another. Here, the theme of love comes to the fore. Viviane is pretty, but is by no means



beautiful like her mother, or like Constance Quackenbush. Nevertheless, Jack only has eyes for Viviane, and Viviane for Jack. The reader should here take note of the near-sex scene at the reservoir in Chapter 5. Sex is an incredibly intimate and personal act, and as Jack and Viviane appear as if they will have sex, she stops due to her self-consciousness about her appendicitis scars. While they do not have sex, they become just as intimate and personal with one another – perhaps even more so – as they talk about their scars with one another, both physical and emotional.

Discussion Question 1

Emilienne falls in love three times before she marries Connor. Why does Emilienne force herself not to fall in love with Connor? Do you believe she succeeds? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Beaugard move his family from France to New York? What happens as a result of the move?

Discussion Question 3

Explain and discuss the symbolism of Fatima's white dress, and the Communion incident.

Vocabulary

incarnate, embodiment, superb, auspiciously, holistic, phrenologist, grandiose, effeminate, insalubrity, harbinger, complaisant, desiccated, impeccable, betrothed, effervescent, exuberant, inconsequential, monotonous, bewildering, hymnody, grimaced, aberration, sycophant



Chapter 6 – Chapter 12

Summary

Chapter 6 – In September, Viviane turns 17. She is one year and two months younger than Jack. Jack is depressed, for he has tried to enlist in the military, but is rejected for poor eyesight and flat feet, which enrages his father. He tells Jack that no girl would ever be caught with an Army reject. Viviane, however, loves Jack, and takes comfort in the fact that he will not be across an ocean fighting, but only a few hundred miles upstate at college in Walla Walla. Before Jack leaves for college, he tells her that he loves her. Viviane is thrilled, and shouts about it all the way home.

Chapter 7 – It is the morning of the summer solstice. Viviane is brokenhearted, for Jack has stopped writing letters to her, and is unreachable by phone – for more than five months. It is also at this time that Emilienne opens her home to house guests. Among them is a young man named Gabe, who has fallen in love with Viviane. Rather than summoning the courage to ask her for a date after seeing her at the bakery, he is instead given a room by Emilienne. He fast becomes a handyman of sorts, tending to and fixing things around the house. Gabe is descended from Russian aristocrats, though his mother, a would-be Hollywood star, becomes a prostitute instead and is later murdered. Gabe serves a year in the army as a cook, but is discharged with fatigue due to his incredibly sensitive nature causing him physical illness after so many people he knew were killed. Gabe, however, goes largely unnoticed by Viviane. Viviane dresses beautifully for the neighborhood's Fatima celebrations, and Emilienne encourages Viviane to ask Gabe to be her date, and Viviane reluctantly agrees. Emilienne gives Viviane a sprig of lavender for luck. Gabe agrees to go with Viviane when she asks him. Gabe calls her "Vivi". Viviane then parts with him, saying she'll catch him later, and goes to meet Jack at the reservoir. Instead of romance, Viviane is heartbroken to learn that Jack is now engaged to a girl he met at college, named Laura Lovelorn. This causes Viviane to say that Jack was supposed to come back to her, not come back with someone else. She and Jack then have sex. In the end, it means nothing, for Jack still leaves her for Laura. Gabe sees Jack and Viviane walking with each other from a distance. It hurts him deeply.

Chapter 8 – Viviane's heartbreak negatively affects her baking skills, so she is forced to take a job behind the soda fountain at the local drugstore. Without Jack, Viviane dreams of becoming a stewardess, and taking flight in the skies. But by the end of the summer, Viviane and Emilienne both know that Viviane is pregnant. Jack reflects on meeting Laura at a Whitman football game. Her family is from Spokane, is wealthy, well-connected, and normal – all things of which Jack's father would approve. At the end of the summer, Jack visits Viviane at work and tells her that he will never forget her. Viviane then throws up.

Chapter 9 – By February, Viviane still hopes that Jack will come back to her, even as her belly swells. Despondent, she eats cherries, wears the white dress, and stops



bathing. Wilhelmina and Emilienne tend to Viviane, doing their best to keep her clean and together. Meanwhile, the bakery continues to thrive under Emilienne and Viviane, who diversify their products, among which are now wedding cakes; and arrange a bike-delivery service utilizing local high school kids. Gabe, at home, works on converting one of the spare rooms into a nursery, which Viviane requests be painted a spring-apple-green. Among the crib is a tiny sculpture of feathers, which Gabe has created after feeling Viviane's stomach, and feeling fluttering within. A short time later, on March 1, Ava Lavender is born with wings, and along with a twin brother, who appears to be quiet and small. It is Gabe who suggests the name "Ava", which Viviane accepts. Viviane decides then to name the baby boy, Henry.

Chapter 10 – It is easy to see that Ava and Henry are the children of Jack Griffith, but John refuses to recognize them as his own. Beatrix comes to visit Ava and Henry when they are two, bringing along gifts for them. Beatrix has not always been a quiet and subdued woman. As a teenager, she was happy and bubbly, but John's overbearing nature has worn her away. Beatrix's visit to her grandchildren coincides with her decision to leave John for previously demanding that Jack stop seeing Viviane. John, after Beatrix leaves, dreams the same things she does – of flight and birds and feathers. Viviane, meanwhile, comes to love motherhood. By the age of three, Henry has yet to utter a sound. Emilienne is convinced that Henry has simply been born fluent in another language. As the children get older, Henry doesn't take to learning, and Viviane decides the best place for her unusual children is to remain at home. Ava, unlike most twins, shares no special connection with Henry, which makes Ava feel more isolated. However, there is a strong connection that will be discovered in the years to come. Ava consoles herself that her position in life is fate, and that there is nothing she can do about it. Gabe, however, is convinced that Ava is special, and she should learn to fly. Gabe is building a set of wings, determined that when Ava is ready to fly, he will find a way to help her learn. Gabe wonders why Ava would have wings if she wasn't meant to fly. He is determined to be a father to Ava and Henry.

By 1952, Pinnacle Lane has undergone many changes. The Cooper family builds a house next door to the Lavenders. They are headed up by family patriarch, Zeb, his wife, Penelope, who is hired by Emilienne at the bakery, and two children, the older Rowe and the younger Cardigan. Cardigan and Ava become fast friends. While Cardigan is fascinated by Ava's wings, she is more interested in being friends with Ava. John Griffith continues to share the dreams of his wife, including dreams now of exotic locations from the tropics to the Arctic. John becomes fat, slow, and old, and one day heads to the bakery to tell Emilienne that all he's ever wanted in his whole wasted life was Emilienne. A few weeks later, Jack Griffith returns home with Laura, remodels and expands his father's house, pays for medical care for John, and becomes financially involved in the local community. Ava and Cardigan do not know the identity of Ava's father, and they always guess at it. Ava always hopes that Gabe will be her father.

Chapter 11 – When Ava and Henry turn 13, Henry is allowed to leave the hill at Gabe's insistence. Gabe drives Henry all over town. Henry draws a map of the neighborhood, which stuns Gabe and Viviane. Outside the next day, Gabe finds a stray puppy, which is given to Henry, and which Henry names "Trouver", French for "to find". Trouver awakens



Henry's speech, though he communicates in limited ways and with different meanings. For example, the use of the word "caramel" means good, while "fumigate" means bad. Gabe comes to be called "cedar" by Henry, while Ava becomes "pinna", Latin for feather. Viviane is called "etoile de mer," French for starfish, which no one can find the meaning behind.

Chapter 12 – In March 1959, not a single drop of rain falls in Seattle, though it pours the day before the month changes to March. Penelope Cooper's presence at the bakery has caused it to thrive even more. Marigold Pie comes into the bakery for a regular visit. She is a devout member of the Lutheran church, and has grown in size the more and more she shops for sweets at the bakery. Her heaviness and subsequent difficulties getting around cause concern among the neighbors, and Iris Sorrows, Marigold's sister, comes to visit. Iris knows Marigold must turn her life around, and instructs her son, Nathaniel Sorrows, who has been raised and groomed for Church ministry, to go to Marigold's. At 29, he has been rejected by three seminaries, but still seeks to do the work his mother believes he has been intended for. When he arrives at his Aunt Marigold's house, he notices a pair of wings near a lilac bush in the next yard over. A strange feeling stirs inside him.

Analysis

As the novel continues, the themes of love and fate appear with respect to the love between Viviane and Jack. The two of them have indeed fallen in love – and that a real and honest relationship between a member of the Lavender family and another should be possible seems too good to be true. It ultimately is. Owing to what Ava describes as fate, Jack leaves Viviane for another girl – one who is wealthy, well-connected, and whose family has an excellent reputation. Viviane is heartbroken. Despite his engagement, Jack sleeps with Viviane, and leaves her in the end, anyways. It is a callous and cruel thing to do, which greatly affects and hurts Viviane – and leaves her pregnant with Ava and Henry. While pregnant, and after Jack's departure, Viviane takes to wearing Fatima's old communion dress, which she finds in the house. The dress here becomes representative of Viviane's own youth, innocence, and happiness, all taken away by someone who has changed her life for the worse.

Ava's own birth, along with Henry, finally brings a measure of joy to Viviane's life. She comes to love motherhood, and loves being able to protect and care for her children. The Lavender family now consists of Emilienne, Viviane, Ava, and Henry, as well as Gabe, Wilhelmina, and Trouver. They are an unconventional sort of family given their history and backgrounds, but they all behave and live their lives as if they are a family. For example, while Viviane is pregnant, Emilienne and Wilhelmina both tend to her during times of need. Gabe, who clearly loves Viviane, though that love is not returned, endeavors to stay around to provide not only income for the house, but to maintain the house, and to be a father figure to Ava and Henry. Gabe's desire to teach Ava to fly demonstrates the knowledge of a parent passed down to the child. In this case, it is Gabe and Ava.



Between Chapter 11 and Chapter 12, a series of unusual incidents and new situations occur, which will ultimately serve as catalysts for the rest of the novel. Henry, for the first time in his life, is allowed off the hill with Gabe – and the result is that Henry begins drawing maps of the neighborhood and surrounding area. No one can understand why, but it is enough of an unusual occurrence to warrant the reader’s attention. The reader should also pay attention to the fact that no rain falls at all in March. Rain, symbolically, has numerous meanings, including to serve as a bad omen and to serve as a physical manifestation of spiritual and emotional cleansing. Here, it is the lack of rain that serves as a bad omen – the sunny, dry weather is ironic. This is especially true when, in the midst of beautiful weather, Nathaniel Sorrows arrives in the neighborhood. His last name – Sorrows – is a giveaway to the reader that there will be something striking about his character, at the very least sad, and at the most, evil. The reader should note that Nathaniel has been rejected from the seminary three times, and his first observation in the neighborhood happens to be Ava’s wings. (The reader should also note the presence of the word “sorrows” in the title of the novel itself. It is easy to see that Nathaniel Sorrows will become one of the strange and beautiful sorrows of Ava’s life.)

Discussion Question 1

Why does Jack break things off with Vivian, and get engaged to Laura instead? How does Viviane react to this news? Why?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Ava comfort herself with the idea that everything that happens to her is fate?

Discussion Question 3

Describe and explain the ad-hoc family that develops around Ava. Who does this family consist of? What are their roles in this family? How do they affect and influence Ava?

Vocabulary

lollid, putrid, ambling, gait, bewilderdment, quizzical, sprightly, reveries, formidable, impeccable, penitential



Chapter 13 – Chapter 19

Summary

Chapter 13 – Ava relates that her mother forces her to stay on the hill for various reasons, not least which among them is the fact that Ava has wings, and that she won't be able to protect Ava from the very thing which has hurt Viviane so badly – love. As such, 15-year-old Ava listens with great interest to 15-year-old Cardigan's relationship stories lying sprawled out in the yard. Henry begins shouting "Pinna hurt!" causing Viviane to check on Ava. It is then that Ava and Cardigan see a taxi pull up to Marigold Pie's house, out of which steps a man with an old suitcase, in which he carries a black journal. Both girls think he is incredibly attractive, and they hide when he glances in their direction. Ava wonders if the man liked what he saw.

Emilienne's mother made quilts for all her children, intended as part of a dowry for each of them. With their deaths, Emlienne passes the quilts onto her children and grandchildren. Each quilt has a different name, and are given to the individual who most becomes that name. For example, Ava receives the quilt called "Dove in the Window". After straightening the quilts on their beds, Emilienne heads downstairs to find Henry at the table, and the spirits of her dead siblings nearby. Henry is speaking with them, and says "Bee in the bush and cat on the wall". Emlienne also notices that Fatima's ghost is present. Henry then tells his grandmother that the Sad Man needs her to know that there's red on the floor and feathers everywhere. He begins repeating these things in the following weeks, about the bee, the bush, the cat, the wall, the red, and the feathers, over and over again, ultimately ending by screaming "Pinna hurt!"

In an excerpt from Nathaniel Sorrows's diary, Nathaniel recounts his arrival to his Aunt Marigold's house on April 29, 29159. The house is in disarray, and Nathaniel wonders how he can help his aunt. He also notes that he has seen an angel, a clear sign from God, and marvels at the angel's wings and beauty.

Chapter 14 – Gabe continues to attempt to build wings to learn how to fly so that he can teach Ava. All of his attempts so far at flight himself have ended in disaster. Unable to replicate the wings of a bird, he decides to catch a bat and replicate its wings.

Chapter 15 – Cardigan sneaks into Ava's room one night where she reveals her older brother, 17-year-old Rowe, will be joining them momentarily. Rowe drives the delivery truck for Emilienne's bakery. He is thin, handsome, and has a slight stutter. Cardigan invites Ava to the reservoir with her, Rowe, and some other teens. Ava decides to go. She finds it ironic that she should be blessed with wings but feel so trapped because of them, but not tonight. She and Cardigan concoct a harness to hold down her wings, and Ava wears an old green cloak to conceal them. They then head out to meet Rowe, and head to the reservoir.



Ava is nervous. She and Rowe look at the constellations overhead, and Rowe points out which constellations make up larger constellations. Ava says she has never noticed this before, and Rowe explains that sometimes it just takes someone else to point out the things that aren't so obvious. At the reservoir, Cardigan immediately gives away Ava, and everyone is very interested to meet her. Ava is shy and embarrassed. The kids tell her not to be worried about her wings, and encourage her to fly. Ava says she can't, but Cardigan insists she try. Rowe intervenes and refuses to let Ava attempt to fly off a cliff over the reservoir. Ava wants to fly, but she knows she can't. The other kids leave. Ava is furious with Cardigan for not only outing her, but telling everyone Ava could fly when she can't. Near home, Cardigan apologizes. Ava explains she just wants to be normal. After Cardigan goes home, Ava decides to run through town with her wings in plain view – something she has never done before. She feels like a normal teenager for the first time.

In a journal entry dated May 11, 1959, Nathaniel Sorrows records that he has since become a fixture in the Lutheran community, helping out with the church and with services, even though he himself is Catholic. Unable to sleep at night, Nathaniel discovers Ava making nightly trips out with Cardigan and Rowe. He goes out to meet her one night when she is alone, expecting a message from God through Ava. When such a message does not come, he asks to touch Ava's wings. Ava hesitantly agrees. It is a stunning experience to Nathaniel.

Chapter 16 – Ava learns from Cardigan that the man staying with Marigold Pie is her nephew, Nathaniel Sorrows. Ava has developed a crush on Nathaniel, and treasures the night he touched her wings. It is a secret she keeps from Cardigan. Viviane, meanwhile, deals with bouts of depression brought on by memories and dreams of Jack. She focuses on other things to overcome the depression, especially taking delight in removing stains from laundry. Gabe, meanwhile, continues to study his bat, who grows quite tame and becomes a pet to Henry and Gabe, for a design to build wings. Gabe tests out his bat wings, and manages to glide through the air before crashing, unharmed, into a lilac bush. Henry then sets the pet bat free. Viviane snaps at Gabe, telling him he is stupid for trying to fly, and telling him it is mean for him to tell a young girl she can fly when she can't. Gabe insists he should have a say. Viviane says they are not his children, and his still being around is pathetic. She wants to know why he has stayed. Instead, he leaves through the back door. Ava is horrified to see Gabe go, and stunned that Viviane will not go after him.

In a diary entry for May 15, 1959, Nathaniel Sorrows reveals his unfolding obsession with Ava. This includes envisioning having winged children with her. He begins watching her as she sits in her window and preens feathers from her wings.

Chapter 17 – Ava's crush on Nathaniel continues to grow. She enjoys the thought that he is watching her. She leaves feathers for him on Marigold's stoop. She imagines marrying Nathaniel and having children with him. She always leaves her wings out in these dreams, wanting to be a normal girl. The more she wants to be normal, and to be with Nathaniel, the more she realizes her wings make normality impossible. It ends up making her ill. On the night of Pentecost, she follows the ghost of Fatima down into the



yard, and into the Lutheran church. The parishioners, hanging around talking after the service, are stunned to see Ava enter. She heads to Nathaniel, and for unknown reasons to herself, kneels to receive communion. Upon touching Ava's tongue, the communion wafer bursts into flames. She flees the church, and runs into Cardigan. Cardigan asks what is going on, but Ava doesn't say. She sees Fatima's ghost, holding a finger to her lips. Ava begins to realize that her crush on Nathaniel is only an infatuation, and she begins to develop real feelings for Rowe. She realizes that Rowe is interested in her for more than her wings, whereas Nathaniel is like everybody else. That night, Ava dreams she can fly.

Nathaniel Sorrows reveals in his diary entry for May 26, 1959, that the incident at church has left him with a fire inside him, and gives him heat rashes. He considers it is punishment for the impure thoughts he has about Ava's wings.

Chapter 18 – By the third week of June, it still hasn't rained. Gabe rarely spends time around the house, taking carpentry jobs farther and farther away. Gabe struggles to fall out of love with Viviane. He begins dating a waitress who lives alone. Henry continues to make maps. On midsummer's eve morning, Henry worries about what the Sad Man says is coming after it rains. Henry knows only one bad man, and knows the bad man will be involved in what happens.

In his June 19, 1959 diary entry, Nathaniel has had a crisis of faith, and no longer believes in organized religion. He is dismissed from his services at the church, but doesn't care, for he knows that truth – an angel of God – lives at the end of Pinnacle Street.

Chapter 19 - Ava and Cardigan both decide to attend the summer solstice celebration by going in angel costumes. Cardigan will be wearing a pair of Gabe's constructed wings to make it look like Ava's wings are merely part of the costume. They blend in perfectly to the crowds. Ava is thrilled to be attending the celebration. She and Rowe share their first kiss. Meanwhile, Viviane can tell the rain is coming. She knows something is wrong. She has caught Henry trying to sneak off the hill three times that day. The rain begins to fall later. She discovers that Ava, Cardigan, Henry, and Trouver are all gone.

In his June 21, 1959 diary entry, Nathaniel explains his desire to make Ava come inside.

Analysis

The theme of flight and freedom, in irony, is readily made apparent after the birth of Ava, and well into her teenage years. Her wings, obviously meant for flying, do not allow her to do so – she doesn't know how. Gabe, gently, and like a father figure, determines that he will find a way to help her fly. Ava's wings also do not prevent her from being cooped up in the house and on the hill, for Viviane will not let Ava leave the property. Viviane worries for Ava's safety, and worries that Ava will not fit in out in the world. Ava herself recognizes the irony of having wings and being unable to fly, and having wings, which



symbolize freedom, and being trapped on the hill. Even at the age of 15, Ava is still not allowed off the hill. This, in effect, does two things. First, it provides a place from which Ava will grow and come of age, thus truly beginning the theme of coming of age in the novel; and second, it will make Ava more naïve about the world and what goes on in it. She is an incredibly sweet, kind, and thoughtful girl, but with little realization about the kinds of people that can inhabit the world.

It is this naïveté which ultimately causes her to flirt with Nathaniel in various ways, from making sure he can watch her in her window, to leaving gifts of feathers for him. She even imagines what a married life with children by Nathaniel would be like, but then realizes that she can may never have a normal life, thanks to her wings. Again, the theme of flight and freedom through Ava's wings appears in an ironic sense. She believes her wings are holding her back from living a normal life, or being able to one day have a normal life. Nathaniel, at first, believes that Ava is an angel, and he believes he should be awaiting a sign from God through her. In an act that is, for Ava, sexual, she allows Nathaniel to touch her wings the way a girl might allow a boy to touch her breasts. However, Nathaniel's reverence for Ava turns to dangerous obsession. This is borne out through his journal entries, which Ava includes in her account of her life as a way to add context to what is going on with Nathaniel, though Ava herself (at the time) did not know.

The reader should also note a number of strange events and occurrences in this section of the novel as well. Henry becomes more talkative, referring cryptically to events which have yet to come – from a bee being in a bush to the Sad Man saying that something terrible will happen after the rain. The ghosts of the dead also come out in full force – from Emilienne's dead siblings to Fatima, who, as it turns out, has died rather than merely been taken away as previously imagined by neighbors decades before. The dead, out in such numbers, come to symbolize that there is death still to come. At long last, the rain also arrives – and here, again, as in its absence earlier in the novel, the rain serves as a bad omen in conjunction with Henry's prophesying. It is the rain, in the end, that compels Ava to seek shelter with Nathaniel in the Widow Marigold Pie's house.

Discussion Question 1

For what reasons does Viviane refuse Ava the ability to leave the family home and property? Do you believe she is right in doing so? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

What affects does Ava's inability to leave her home and property have on her, especially as it relates to Nathaniel Sorrows?

Discussion Question 3

Why does the falling of the rain portend evil and serve as an ill-omen?

Vocabulary

beguiled, haphazard, bemused, disarray, righteous, iridescent, cantankerous, acclimate, fervent, miraculously, melancholy, coquettish, vehemently, narthex, prefabricated, idiosyncrasy, dilapidated, staccato, redolence



Chapter 20 – Chapter 24

Summary

Chapter 20 – The first time as a mother, Viviane feels as if she is not in control. She receives a call from Jack Griffith, saying Henry and Trouver are at his house. At the solstice, Rowe leaves to pick his mom up from work after kissing Ava once more, while Ava and Cardigan begin the long run home. At Cardigan's driveway, she yells that she and Ava are going to be sisters-in-law, and then runs into her house. Ava watches as her mother drives down the road, and Nathaniel approaches Ava. Nathaniel believes that Viviane has gone out looking for Ava. She agrees to wait inside with Nathaniel and wait for her mother to come back. She also notices that Nathaniel seems more normal, and less pious and attractive. She is ashamed at her secret infatuation with him.

Chapter 21 – Emilienne, Penelope, and Wilhelmina work hard to meet the day's demands at the bakery. All day, visions of the past haunt Emilienne, and she sees the specters of the dead all around her, from Dublin to Satin Lush. Wilhelmina notices that Emilienne looks sad, and reminds Emilienne that just because love doesn't look the way she thinks it should, doesn't mean she doesn't have it. Emilienne sees Rene's ghost float through the shop. She decides to close up early for the day, and gives Wilhelmina the privilege of opening up shop the following morning. Wilhelmina and Penelope decide to head back on their own, and Rowe decides he will drive Emilienne. Emilienne tells him that she hopes Ava falls in love with him.

Chapter 22 – Viviane arrives at Jack's house. It is huge and speaks of wealth. Jack explains he picked up Henry and Trouver on Phinney Ridge. Jack tells Viviane he is amazed to have a son. Jack tells Viviane he could secretly see her, that he is still in love with her. He won't leave his wife and forfeit his wealth or good reputation in the town, however. Viviane realizes, then, that Gabe loves her. She also realizes that Jack is still living under his father's shadow. Driving home with Henry and Trouver, Viviane laughs happily, knowing she no longer loves Jack Griffith. It is then that Viviane sees that Henry has drawn a new map, but one of the houses on the map has blood smeared on the door. She then realizes that Henry knew it was going to rain. She realizes Henry knows something else is going to happen, and Henry once more says "Pinna is hurt."

Chapter 23 – Nathaniel brings Ava to the fireplace, where she settles into a chair. She is nervous, for she realizes Nathaniel has alcohol on his breath and is unclean. She decides to leave. He tells her he has one more thing he wants to show her. As soon as he leaves the room, Ava jumps up and makes a wrong turn, ending up in the room Nathaniel has used to watch Ava from. The carpet is threadbare from pacing, and all throughout the room are the carcasses of dead birds, some piled in stacks, and some pinned to the wall. Nathaniel then shows up, saying birds are filthy creatures and do not deserve wings like angels. He tells Ava that he loves her, and then grabs hold of her. He then gags her, and pins her to the ground, stomach down. He proceeds to rape her, and is enraged because she is only a girl rather than an angel. He calls her a stupid bitch,



then uses the axe by the fireplace to hack off her wings. He then flees the house. At home, Emilienne finds the house empty, except for ghosts. Rene tells Emilienne what has happened, and Emilienne then calls the police. She then tells Rene not to take Ava with him. Rene says he doesn't want to.

Chapter 24 – At Marigold Pie's house, Emilienne discovers a letter b – a backwards, upside-down p – fallen from their mailbox still bearing the letters "ie" from "Pie". She now realizes what Henry meant by "bee in the bush". Inside the house, Emilienne discovers the room where Ava lay bloodied, clinging to life, her wings hacked off and blood and feathers everywhere. Driving home, Viviane, Henry, and Trouver nearly run over Nathaniel, his face streaked with blood. They stop to see two ghostly figures appear behind him – one with her heart carved out and holding a baby where the heart should be, and another that changed back and forth from a canary to a girl. The two figures attack Nathaniel, who disappears in a fiery blast. An ambulance arrives at Marigold Pie's house, and Ava is taken to the hospital. The entire neighborhood turns out to witness what has happened. As Henry goes to get Trouver, who has run across the street, Laura Lovelace places a hand on his shoulder to stop him from blindly crossing the street, causing Henry to scream and Wilhelmina and Penelope to rush to his defense. It is then that Laura realizes how much Henry resembles Jack, and why Jack always said he never wanted any children. At home, after Jack confesses to Laura his rejected love for Viviane, she decides to leave Jack. She then returns to the crowd to ask Wilhelmina how she may help out.

Wilhelmina, Laura, Rowe, and Cardigan go to the bakery and spend the night making bread. The bread is for the people of the town who have turned out in a mass vigil to pray for the life of Ava Lavender. At the hospital, Gabe quickly arrives. There, Viviane takes his hand, realizing how blind she has been all along. Gabe reveals that Marigold Pie was found asleep, drugged, upstairs in her house, enabling Nathaniel to carry out his crime. Gabe tells Vivian she can depend and lean on him, for he can keep them both upright for a while. Vivian admits she now realizes that Ava can live like a normal girl. Viviane stays the night at the hospital with her daughter, and Emilienne arrives to do the same for her daughter. The rains continue for months, well into September.

Analysis

The irony of the theme of flight and freedom resurfaces in Ava's presence at Nathaniel's house. Her wings, which should allow her to escape to freedom, ultimately end up dooming her in Nathaniel's presence. When Ava was born, birds gathered for the event. Now, Ava finds dead birds all over Nathaniel's room, in addition to being pinned to the walls by their wings, in Christ-like fashion – dead and unable to escape Nathaniel. Ava, who also has wings, becomes Nathaniel's last victim. He savagely rapes her, only to discover that she is just a girl. It is tragic and cruel that Nathaniel should recognize this against the evil crime he has just committed – and his evil grows exponentially as he brutally hacks off Ava's wings – the very things that made her different than everybody else. Nathaniel has stolen her innocence, and nearly claims her life. His own punishment, fitting and proper, is to die in a fiery blast summoned by two of Ava's dead



relatives. The reader will remember that Ava's own attempt to receive Communion from Nathaniel ended in disaster, as the Communion wafer burned upon touching Ava's tongue. But here, the evil is not of Ava's doing, but of Nathaniel's doing. Nathaniel's impure thoughts and unholy nature have made the act of Communion a sin for him to deliver to a girl who is pure and whole. If Nathaniel was seeking a sign from God, that would be it – to turn his life around and get back on the straight and narrow path. Nathaniel does not recognize the warning by fire, portending eternal fire for him, if he is to harm Ava in any way.

Through this section of the novel, it is not only Ava who experiences more of the world, and grows in character and in maturity, but Viviane and Emilienne as well. Both women have been held back by the past, and have been afraid to live in the present.

Wilhelmina wisely reminds Emilienne that, just because love doesn't appear the way Emilienne thinks it should, doesn't mean she doesn't have it. It is clear to the reader, then, that Emilienne did indeed share love with Connor, short-lived by his death though that love was. Her attempts to stop herself from falling in love with Connor were only indicative of the fact that she had already fallen. Love, now, for Emilienne, exists in the love shared between her and her family. She is finally free of her past. Viviane, also, comes of age in the novel when she finally confronts Jack after years of avoiding him, and remaining cooped up in her house. Returning with Henry and Trouve, Viviane finally feels free of Jack, and realizes that she is no longer in love with him. As such, she can now turn her attention to, and continue to grow with, someone who truly does love her – Gabe.

It is here that the reader is again reminded of fate. Everything in the novel seems to have led up to Nathaniel's savage attack on Ava. Ava's ancestors left France for New York, during which time, one of her sisters fell in love with a bird watcher, and tried to pretend to be a bird, herself. All but Emilienne ultimately died. Emilienne then married Connor and moved to Seattle. There, in Seattle, the Dores house, home to tragedy for Fatima, becomes the home for tragedy for the Lavenders. Viviane is born, and Connor dies. Viviane, in turn, gives birth to two children – one with wings, and the other with special sensitivities. Henry serves warnings about what is to come for Ava. Meanwhile, a rejected aspiring priest, Nathaniel, comes to serve at the Lutheran church – funded by Captain de Dores. This is, in part, what keeps Nathaniel in the neighborhood, until his obsession for Ava overpowers his own common sense, morality, and religious nature, leading to the attack on Ava. And it is fate that Ava uses to comfort herself with the fact that her wings are more like prison bars than instruments of flight and freedom.

Discussion Question 1

What does Viviane come to realize following her meeting with Jack to pick up Henry and Trouve? How does she come to this realization? What does it mean for her?



Discussion Question 2

Why does Ava willingly go into Nathaniel's house the night he attacks her? What ultimately makes her want to leave?

Discussion Question 3

How do Viviane and Emilienne come to grow in this section of the novel? How does this happen? How does it affect their future actions?

Vocabulary

infrequently, deluge, nostalgically, translucent, absentmindedly, virile, feral



Chapter 25 – Chapter 27

Summary

Chapter 25 – Three months after her attack, Ava is allowed to return home. She will be bedridden, and her body is full of stitches. Emilienne, who grows weaker as time passes, is replaced by Viviane at the bakery. Cardigan decides to take over her brother's delivery job in October, for Rowe has gone away to college. Rowe writes letter after letter for Ava, but Ava is unable to read them, so they are piled on Ava's nightstand. Cardigan also visits Ava to read class assignments to her, so Ava doesn't fall behind. Viviane also commits to making sure Ava keeps up with her class. Viviane and Gabe finally get together. On the day Viviane brings Ava home from the hospital, she finds an unmarked package at the door, with two sizable checks from Laura, one to Henry, and one to Ava. Laura has returned to eastern Washington, her separation from Jack final. Emilienne begins to sleep more and more. Ava wonders about death, and whether or not she will end up dying anyways. She contemplates suicide, but does not follow through due to so many visitors wishing her well. Slowly, Ava's body begins to repair itself. Ava is visited by her uncle, Rene, who tells her that she has a choice to live or die. For the first time in six months, Ava is able to sit up and walk across the room. She has finally been able to read Rowe's letters, in which he has declared his love for her, and asks her to let him love her.

Chapter 26 – Emilienne dreams of her old Manhattan apartment, and her three siblings, all of whom no longer bear the scars of life. Ava, whose wings have regrown, slips into her grandmother's bedroom, and discovers that Emilienne has passed on to the next world. Ava then goes upstairs to the third floor of the house, where numerous birds have nested. Ava looks down at the neighborhood, including Marigold's house. Marigold, who refused to lose weight, left her house to become the Fat Lady with a traveling circus. When Marigold dies, she wills Nathaniel's diary to Ava, who takes years to read the book. Ava then sees his father and Rowe returning from college. Ava then sees the ghost of Fatima, who asks if everything is alright. Nodding yes, that it is, Ava watches as Fatima fades up into the night toward Heaven.

Chapter 27 – Jack Griffith has come to inhabit the caretaker's house at the edge of the reservoir. There, he lives among memories, and is able to see the hill on Pinnacle Lane. Ava likes to think that her father was able to see her take wing and fly for the first time that night.

Analysis

At the end of the novel, each of the themes found in the plot – coming of age, family, flight and freedom, love, and fate – all come to a close with Ava. While recovering from the attack, Ava learns that it is up to her whether she dies or continues to live. She decides to live, for she has experienced both good and bad in the world, and as a result,



she is better equipped to live out in the world. Among those experiences that are good is that of love – real and genuine love, given to her freely and willingly by Rowe. It is a love that Ava returns in kind. As Ava recovers, her entire family – Emilienne, Viviane, Henry, Gabe, and Wilhelmina, all tend to her. Even Cardigan, who has become like a sister to Ava, helps to care for her as she recovers.

Flight and freedom, as well as fate, also conclude the novel in dramatic form. Ava, past the horrors of the attack against her, and fully recovered physically, finally takes flight. She has never before flown anywhere. Her freedom now comes not only literally, but figuratively and symbolically as well. She is free from being trapped on the hill. She has grown more as a person. She has come to accept who she is – as a girl who just happens to have wings, which can be considered a blessing rather than a chain. She is loved, and loves in turn – a truly freeing feeling. She knows her grandmother is in a better place, and she knows her family has grown closer – which is also a freeing feeling. Fatima's spirit, aware that everything has finally been made right, and that the tragedy of her own life has been avoided, moves on to the next world. It is also at the end of the novel that the reader may question whether fate truly had a hand in how things turned out. For example, it is not fated that Ava is to die – but, as Rene reveals, it is Ava's choice whether to live.

Discussion Question 1

Do you believe that Ava is truly fated in the novel? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Jack Griffith ultimately move into the caretaker's cottage at the reservoir? What does he hope this will accomplish?

Discussion Question 3

Why do you believe that Ava hopes her father watches her take flight for the very first time?

Vocabulary

stitchery, menial, stammered, somber, solemn, surliest, billowing



Characters

Ava Lavender

Ava Lavender is the main character, principal protagonist, and narrator of the novel “The Strange and Beautiful Sorrows of Ava Lavender” by Leslye Walton. Ava is the daughter of Viviane Lavender and Jack Griffith, is the twin sister of Henry Lavender, and is the granddaughter of Emilienne Lavender. Ava is born on March 1, 1944, with a pair of wings that nobody can explain. They are not surgically removed, for her wings and body are dependent upon one another. Word of Ava’s birth spreads, and different people consider her everything from an angel to a monster. Ava, however, knows she is merely a girl – just one who happens to have been born with wings. Though she longs for a normal life, Viviane keeps Ava locked up at home, refusing to allow her off the hill on which their house is located. By the time she is 15, Ava is a sweet, lovely girl, but has little experience in the world. She has become friends with Cardigan and her old brother, Rowe, who are neighbors, and what little she does know of the world, she knows through them.

It is largely through Ava’s inexperience, and desperation for normalcy, that she develops a crush on Nathaniel Sorrows, and does her best to get him to notice her, doing everything from leaving feathers for him to preening herself in her window so he can watch her. She even imagines what married life would be like with him. Eventually, this crush fades away, and is replaced by true love between Ava and Rowe. On the night of the summer solstice celebration, Ava seeks shelter with Nathaniel in his aunt’s house during the rain, only to be savagely attacked, brutally raped, and have her wings hacked off with an axe by Nathaniel. Ava is rushed to the hospital where she survives the attack, is brought home to recover, and decides to live. She has much to look forward to in life, including the love of her family, and the love of Rowe. Her wings eventually regrow, and at the end of the novel, Ava takes flight for the first time in her life.

Viviane Lavender

Viviane Lavender is the mother of Ava Lavender and Henry Lavender, and the daughter of Emilienne and Connor Lavender. Viviane grows up alongside Jack Griffith, and ultimately, the two fall in love. When Viviane is 18, Jack leaves her for another woman, but not before sleeping with, and impregnating Viviane. Heartbroken, Viviane confines herself to home, and later gives birth to Ava and Henry. She confines them, too, to the house and surrounding property, worried about how they – especially Ava – will get along in the world because they are different. She is determined to protect them from the horrors of the world, believing they are unfit for it, but later comes to realize that both of them, especially Ava, will be alright in the world. She also comes to realize that she no longer loves Jack, and is thus able to give her heart to Gabe instead by the end of the novel.



Emilienne Lavender

Emilienne Lavender is the mother of Viviane, and the grandmother of Ava and Henry. Emilienne runs the neighborhood bakery, having taken over operation of the establishment on the death of her husband, Connor, years before after moving to Seattle from New York. Emilienne lives in almost constant sadness and in dwelling on the past, for both her parents, and all three siblings, have all tragically died. Having special sensitivities, Emilienne often sees the ghosts of her siblings, as well as other people from her past. Emilienne comes to learn that, although love may not look like what she thinks it should, it doesn't mean she doesn't have love. She comes to realize that she truly did love her husband, and truly does love her family, and that they love her in turn. At the end of the novel, Emilienne passes away, and goes on to Heaven.

Gabe

Gabe is the son of a Hollywood prostitute and an unknown father, and is told he is descended from Russian aristocracy. He takes a room at Emilienne's house, and immediately falls in love with Viviane. He works as a carpenter, and becomes the de-facto man-of-the-house, aspiring to be a fatherly figure to Ava and Henry. He is especially interested in learning how to fly, himself, so that he in turn may teach Ava. Viviane, however, is blind to Gabe's affection for her until the end of the novel, when she realizes she is no longer in love with Jack. At the end of the novel, Viviane and Gabe finally get together.

Henry Lavender

Henry Lavender is the twin brother of Ava Lavender, is the son of Viviane Lavender and Jack Griffith, and is the grandson of Emilienne. Henry is incredibly quiet and largely non-communicative, perhaps even slightly autistic, speaking only when necessary, and keeping to himself the rest of the time. Like Emilienne, Henry can see and commune with the dead, and they warn him about the impending attack on Ava, which Henry in turn relates to his family.

Rowe Cooper

Rowe Cooper is the older brother of Cardigan Cooper, and the neighbor and ultimate boyfriend of Ava Lavender. Rowe is tall, thin, and relatively handsome. He is unpopular with girls, for he suffers from a slight stutter, though this does not matter. He only has eyes for Ava. He is one of the few people to see Ava as Ava, and not for her wings. As such, Ava quickly falls in love with him, and Rowe quickly falls in love with her.



Cardigan Cooper

Cardigan Cooper is the 15-year-old younger sister of Rowe Cooper, and the best friend of Ava Lavender. Boy-crazy and very much a regular teenager, Cardigan is Ava's only real source of knowledge about, and exposure to, the world. Following the near-death of Ava, Cardigan slows down, takes on work at the bakery, and reads class assignments to Ava while Ava is recovering. She very much hopes that Rowe and Ava will get married, making her and Ava sisters-in-law.

Connor Lavender

Connor Lavender is the deceased husband of Emilienne Roux, and the father of Viviane Lavender. Connor, suffering from polio as a child, has a deformed leg, and as such, believes that no one will ever love him. When the much-younger Emilienne proposes marriage to him, in exchange for a child and a ticket out of New York, Connor willingly accepts. He and Emilienne move to Seattle, and have Viviane. Connor is delighted and thrilled to be a father, though a short time after Viviane is born, Connor dies of heart failure.

Jack Griffith

Jack Griffith is the father of Ava Lavender and Henry Lavender, and the former love interest of Viviane. When younger, Jack leaves Viviane for another woman, desperate to live up to his father's expectations. As such, Jack gains power, prestige, and wealth, but loses out on love. Viviane rejects his advances years later, after which Jack breaks down, and confesses his love for Viviane to his wife, Laura, who leaves him. Divorced and alone, Jack moves into the old caretakers house at the edge of the neighborhood reservoir.

Nathaniel Sorrows

Nathaniel Sorrows is the 29-year-old nephew of the Widow Marigold Pie. Nathaniel comes to Pinnacle Lane to care for his obese aunt, and is seeking eventually to become a priest. Nathaniel notices Ava right away, and comes to believe she is an angel. Her flirtations with Nathaniel continue to capture his attention, but his reverence for Ava ultimately descends into a dangerous obsession. Nathaniel ultimately brutally attacks and viciously rapes Ava, and is horrified to discover she is not an angel at all, but merely a girl. Incensed, he hacks off her wings, and flees the house. Confronted by vengeful spirits of Ava's ancestors, Nathaniel spontaneously combusts in fire, and is killed.



Symbols and Symbolism

Feathers

Feathers appear throughout the novel in various ways and for various reasons. For example, in New York, Margaux, naked, uses feathers to cover only certain parts of her body in order to attract the attention of an older man, who happens to be an ornithologist. In an extreme attempt to gain his attention, she covers her entire body in canary feathers, only to learn that her love is not returned. As such, the feathers become a prison for Margaux, for she does not have feathers of her own, and she cannot ever grow feathers of her own, and she is unable to gain the love of the ornithologist. When Ava is born with wings, she must learn to preen her wings of loose and old feathers. In an effort to gain Nathaniel's attention and to flirt with him, Ava leaves piles of her feathers for Nathaniel on his aunt's front stoop. Feathers also form a part of Henry's vision and warnings for Emilienne and Viviane, later brought to fruition when Nathaniel hacks Ava's wings from her body with an axe.

Wings

Ava Lavender is born with wings. The exact cause is unknown, but Ava ultimately comes to view them as a blessing. They cannot be surgically removed, for Ava's body and wings are dependent upon one another. Until the end of the novel, Ava does not know how to use the wings to fly. Throughout most of the novel, they are more of a curse than a blessing, for rather than giving her freedom and flight, they are a reason for Viviane to believe that Ava will never get along in the world, and as such, Viviane keeps Ava locked up at home and on the hill. This, in turn, becomes a cage for Ava, preventing her from leaving. Ava's wings are later hacked off by Nathaniel with an axe and, ultimately, grow back.

Artificial Wings

Artificial wings modeled after bird and bat wings are constructed by Gabe so that he may use them to learn how to fly. He intends to then use his ability to fly to teach Ava how to fly, but this never comes to fruition. The day of the summer solstice, Cardigan wears a pair of fake wings so that she and Ava may attend the celebration without Ava having to hide her wings.

Nathaniel's journal

Nathaniel's journal is an account kept by Nathaniel of his time spent at his aunt's house. The journal is willed to Ava, who takes years to read it afterwards. The journal recounts Nathaniel's experiences, from the first time he sees Ava to the night he decides to lure



her inside. The journal documents his spiraling and dangerous obsession with Ava, and excerpts from the journal are provided in the novel.

White dress

A white dress is worn by Fatima de Dores on the day of her First Communion. The dress symbolizes her innocence and purity. The dress is ruined when the Communion wafer Fatima takes bursts into flames, representing the incestuous crimes committed against her by her brother. The ruined dress becomes representative of Fatima's stolen innocence. The ruined dress is later worn by the pregnant Viviane, becoming representative of her stolen innocence and broken heart, courtesy of Jack Griffith.

Maps

Maps of the neighborhood and surrounding area are regularly drawn by Henry after he starts leaving the hill at the age of 13. Nobody quite knows what to make of these maps until the night of Ava's attack, when the map Henry draws shows the Widow Pie's house with blood streaked on the door, indicating the attack.

Bat

A live bat is caught and kept by Gabe and Henry as Gabe constructs a new set of wings. He studies the bat to replicate the bat's wings, and the bat becomes more like a pet to Henry than a wild bat. After the wings are constructed, the bat is set free.

Letter B

A lowercase letter b, the upside-down version of the letter p, is found by Emilienne in the bushes beneath the Widow Pie's mailbox the night of Ava's attack. This is confirmation of one of Henry's cryptic clues indicating the location of the attack, that there is a "bee in the bush".

Birds

Birds appear in great number at the beginning and toward the end of the novel. They are symbolic of different things depending on the events of the novel. Early on, when Ava is born, live birds congregate outside the window, as if in reverence and in heralding of her birth. Later, when she is entrapped by Nathaniel, Ava discovers hundreds of bird corpses all over his room, including dead birds pinned to the wall by their wings in Christ-like fashion. Here, the birds are a loud and clear omen of death and danger for Ava.

Axe

An axe is used by Nathaniel to hack off Ava's wings after he rapes her and discovers that she is not a real angel, but only a girl.



Settings

Pinnacle Lane

Pinnacle Lane is both a road and a neighborhood in a largely residential area of Seattle, Washington. Pinnacle Lane ascends a hill, at the top of which is the large home and property formerly belonging to Captain de Does, and now belonging to the Lavender family. It is where Ava, Henry, Viviane, Emilienne, Gabe, and Trouver live. Pinnacle Lane is also home to the Cooper family, including Cardigan and Rowe, and the Widow Marigold Pie, whose house also serves as a temporary home for her nephew, Nathaniel. The neighborhood is located near a reservoir, popular among the kids, and is a quiet, welcoming neighborhood. The night of Ava's attack, everyone from Pinnacle Lane and beyond turns out for a massive vigil to pray for her life. The name of "Pinnacle Lane" should also be noted. A pinnacle is a great height, or upmost elevation, and heights are often associated with flying. It is only fitting that Ava Lavender, a girl with wings, should live at the highest point of Pinnacle Lane.

The Reservoir

The Reservoir is a manmade lake formed by a dam, and is located behind the neighborhood at Pinnacle Lane. It is a spot popular with kids for hanging out, and is overseen by a caretaker and his wife. The Reservoir is where Jack confesses to Viviane that he is engaged to someone else, and is where the other kids first see Ava's wings. The reservoir is where Jack ultimately comes to live, while everything else in his life has fallen apart.

Seattle

Seattle is a city in northwestern Washington, and is notorious for its overcast skies and rainy weather. It is to Seattle that Emilienne, recently married to Connor Lavender, and carrying his baby, moves to escape from the bad memories of New York. Emilienne comes to fit in well in Seattle in the long run, though at first many in her Pinnacle Lane neighborhood suspect her of being a witch due to her sensitivities.

The Widow Pie

The Widow Pie house is located near the Lavender residence on Pinnacle Lane. The Widow Pie house is where Marigold Pie's nephew, Nathaniel Sorrows, comes to stay to help take care of her and return her to a healthy state. The Widow Pie house is where Nathaniel drugs his aunt to make her sleep, and then brutally rapes and viciously hacks off the wings of Ava Lavender. It is in the Widow Pie house that Emilienne discovers her wounded granddaughter, and calls for help.

New York

New York is the city to which Beaugard Roux moves his family from France, including Emilienne. In New York, Beaugard is killed and his wife dies. All of his children, except Emilienne, and including Rene, Pierette, and Margaux, are either killed, commit suicide, or die. The loss of Emilienne's entire family propels her into marriage with Connor, and with Connor, she leaves New York behind for Seattle.



Themes and Motifs

Coming of Age

Coming of age is an important theme in the novel “The Strange and Beautiful Sorrows of Ava Lavender” by Leslye Walton. Coming of age involves the personal, spiritual, moral, or emotional growth and maturation of an individual often based on real world experiences. While coming of age generally occurs among the young, teenagers, and young adults, coming of age can also occur among individuals at any age. In the novel, three characters – Ava, Viviane, and Emilienne – all come of age in some way, shape, or form.

Throughout most of the novel, Ava Lavender is at the age of 15, and is a sweet, kind, and patient girl, though she is also largely inexperienced as to the realities of the world. Her mother keeps her at home, and never allows Ava to go beyond the hill on which their house sits, for Viviane worries that Ava will never be able to fit in, be accepted, or have a normal life in the world due to Ava’s wings. In many ways, this ends up handicapping Ava, making her naïve to many things. For example, her only real experience with romance is through the stories of Cardigan. This leads Ava to quickly develop her first real crush on Nathaniel, and her excess flirtation with Nathaniel becomes dangerous, as it ends up feeding his unfolding obsession with her. Likewise, Ava is not entirely sure how to defend herself when the other kids encourage her to try to fly from the reservoir. It is Rowe who ends up saving the day. Ava, who is also entirely too trusting, willingly goes into Nathaniel’s house with him the night he attacks her, rapes her, and hacks off her wings. Ava, while recovering, considers death and suicide, wondering if she will ever truly fit in or get along in life. Her uncle’s ghost reminds her that it is her choice, in the end. As such, Ava decides to live. She recovers, continues a loving relationship with Rowe, finally leaves the hill freely and on her own without needing to sneak off, and ultimately comes to fly, deciding her regrown wings are blessings after all. After everything she has been through, she is now more mature, and more experienced, and thus equipped to handle whatever life throws at her.

Viviane herself also comes of age in the novel, but during her thirties. Having grown up with Jack, it is only natural that Viviane and Jack end up in a relationship together. Indeed, they fall in love. But when Jack leaves Viviane for another woman, stopping only to have sex with her and leaving her pregnant, Viviane is heartbroken. So shattered is Viviane that she stops leaving her house and her property, and remains depressed and downtrodden for decades as if she was still 18. This blinds her to the love that Gabe freely, and frequently gives her. Only when Viviane at last confronts the past, and personally confronts Jack, does she realize she is no longer in love with him. As a result, she feels as if a burden has been lifted from her shoulders, and indeed feels free. Now having grown as a result, she is able to return Gabe’s love to Gabe in kind, and to begin a real relationship with him.



Emilienne, like Viviane, is also held back by the past. Emilienne's heart is broken three times by the age of 19 in terms of romantic love. Her heart is further broken by the deaths of every member of her family. As such, Emilienne is determined never to love again. She marries Connor Lavender as an arrangement to give him one child, and so that she can get out of New York. She has to fight herself to stop from falling in love with Connor, and Connor, who has lived his whole life without love, doesn't understand that he is in love with Emilienne. When Connor dies after Viviane is born, Emilienne goes to work at the bakery, not only to support herself, but to keep her mind off of the past, including her deceased husband. It is from Wilhelmina that Emilienne learns that just because love doesn't look the way Emilienne thinks it should look, doesn't mean she doesn't have it. As a result, Emilienne comes to understand that she does indeed have that kind of love from her family, and did indeed have that kind of love from Connor.

Flight and Freedom

Flight and freedom form an important theme in the novel "The Strange and Beautiful Sorrows of Ava Lavender" by Leslye Walton. Flight and freedom are most often associated with, and symbolized by, birds, wings, and feathers. In the novel, flight and freedom appear in numerous ways, including literally, figuratively, and ironically.

Ava Lavender is born with wings. Wings are intended for flight, and flight is often symbolic of freedom, but in Ava's case for most of the novel, wings serve precisely the opposite end. Ava's wings lead her to feel isolated, alone, and trapped, for her mother will not let her leave the house and grounds due to the fear that Ava will not be able to get along in the world. Ava's own identity as a girl is not free from speculation or consideration, as others label her everything from an angel to a monster because of her wings. Likewise, her wings, meant for flying, are useless to her for much of the novel, because she cannot fly at all. This also makes her feel unfree, and even cursed with wings unable to do what they are meant to do – something quite obvious (make her fly). It is only after Ava's wings are chopped off, regrow, and only after Ava decides that she truly wants to live life, does Ava finally take to the sky in flight. She feels free knowing that she can get along in the world, knows she has her family behind her, and knows that she has Rowe's love. This emotional freedom ultimately leads to her figurative and literal flight.

Whereas Ava is born with wings, Pierrette wishes she had wings. At the age of 15, Pierrette falls in love with a much older man, who happens to be an ornithologist by trade. Pierrette tries unsuccessfully numerous times to win his attention and his heart, but always ends up failing since she cannot apparently compete with the grace and flight of birds. Without wings and feathers, she thus feels trapped. She ends up going to great lengths to win the ornithologist's heart, including appearing at his home completely nude except for a small patch of feathers in a certain place. When this fails, she goes above and beyond by gluing canary feathers all over her body – a tremendous and desperate act of love that in the end, proves fruitless. Pierrette is not loved freely in return.



Flight and freedom also appear in the novel symbolically by representation of birds. When Ava is born, flocks of live birds gather outside the window in homage to Ava, and denote that something about Ava will indeed be different. She is born with wings, something no other human has. The birds, here, not only symbolize Ava's being marked with a distinct physical trait, but also come to symbolize her birth, and life. When Ava is 15 and in Nathaniel's room, she discovers hundreds of dead birds all over, including dead birds pinned to the walls by their wings in Christ-like poses. Here, the dead birds symbolize danger and death, and speak to the entrapment that is about to occur at the hands of Nathaniel – a negating of Ava's freedom and ability for flight (escape).

Family

Family is an important theme in the novel "The Strange and Beautiful Sorrows of Ava Lavender" by Leslye Walton. Family involves mutual love, compassion, loyalty, and emotional, spiritual, and physical support of individuals who may or may not be blood-related, but who still behave in the fashion of the traditional family unit. Family can be found consistently throughout the novel, and family affects the plot of the novel in various ways.

Beauregard Roux, early in the novel, decides to move his entire family – wife, Maman, and children, Emilienne, Rene, Pierette, and Margaux – from their small, rural village in France, to New York City. Beauregard does this primarily in order to be able to provide a better life, and better opportunities for his family. He thinks first and foremost of his family, wanting to provide for their every need, and giving his children abilities and chances that he himself never had. When Beauregard is tragically killed in New York, his wife, Maman, takes over as sole provider for the family. Over the next few years, Maman, Rene, Pierette, and Margaux all die – though Emilienne lives. Now without a family, she looks for a reason to escape New York and leave the bad memories of the city behind.

She finds her chance with Connor Lavender. Though he is a cripple, Emilienne realizes he is her one true chance to get out of New York through marriage. She promises him a child and that she will be a good wife if he is willing to head west, which he agrees to do. Without realizing it, Connor falls in love with Emilienne, and Emilienne much later realizes that she did indeed love Connor. While Connor is alive, he works hard and cares deeply for his wife and infant daughter, doing everything he can provide for their material and emotional needs. When he dies, Emilienne takes over his business as a baker, to provide for her daughter's upbringing.

It is Emilienne who ends up patching together an unconventional, through traditional-styled family. Emilienne thus becomes the matriarch of this group. Emilienne ultimately comes to have two grandchildren, Ava and Henry, through Viviane, and essentially adopts Wilhelmina as a member of the family. While Viviane is pregnant with Ava and Henry, it is Emilienne and Wilhelmina who care for and tend to Viviane. Emilienne later invites Gabe to come and live at the house, where he rents a room. He becomes the de-facto man-of-the-house, working as a carpenter and performing usual maintenance



to the house itself. He also endeavors to become a father figure to Ava and Henry. He especially wants to learn how to fly so he can in turn teach Ava how to fly – as any father would do for his daughter. Ava and Henry come to love and accept Gabe as a father in place of their real father, Jack, who abandoned their mother years before.

Fate

Fate is an important theme in the novel “The Strange and Beautiful Sorrows of Ava Lavender” by Leslye Walton. Fate is the idea that everything that happens in life is meant to happen, and will happen one way or another. Fate contends that free will is not real, and that whatever an individual does, and whatever choices an individual makes, it will prove useless in the end if it is not consistent with fate itself.

In the novel, Ava Lavender attempts to convince herself in order to console herself that things are the way they are, and that there is nothing she can do about it. She feels incredibly isolated, lonely, and trapped for having wings, and comforts herself with the idea that her situation in life is simply fate. It is fate that she will never fit into the world. It is fate that she will probably never leave the house and yard on Pinnacle Lane. It is fate that she will probably never get married and have children. And it is fate that she will never fly. By convincing herself of these things, she is able to put her mind to ease. But this does not always work. For example, when she develops a crush on Nathaniel, and imagines marrying him and bearing children for him, the realization that her wings will probably prevent this from ever happening causes her to become physically ill.

Indeed, to Ava, it appears as if everything in her life eventually leads up to her attack. Beauregard Roux moves his family from France to New York, during which time, everyone but Emiliennes dies. Emilienne marries with the condition of leaving New York, and so ends up on Pinnacle Lane in Seattle. There is a Lutheran church there, as well as the house of the Widow Pie. Marigold Pie’s nephew, Nathaniel Sorrows, comes to care for her and to serve at the church – a church founded and neighborhood built up by Captain de Dores in the first place. It is in the Dores home that the Lavenders now live, and it is on Pinnacle Lane that Nathaniel first sees Ava. Ava’s brokenhearted mother wants to protect her daughter from the world and from heartbreak, so she keeps Ava at home. This, in turn, causes Ava to be inexperienced in the ways of the world, and entirely too trusting – leading her to being drawn inside by Nathaniel prior to the attack.

After the attack, Ava considers death and suicide, and imagines them to be fated. But her the ghost of her uncle, Rene, reminds her that it is her choice whether or not she lives. As a result, Ava decides to live. She comes to learn that, in the end, she is not fated beyond her control. Indeed, everything that has led up to that point could have been avoided or changed. Beauregard didn’t have to move his family to New York. The family members themselves could have conducted their lives in different ways. Rene, for example, didn’t have to go to bed with a married man. Emilienne, for example, didn’t have to marry Connor, and even when she did, didn’t have to insist on living in Seattle. Captain de Dores didn’t have to live in Seattle, either, and didn’t have to patronize the neighborhood. Likewise, Jack didn’t have to abandon Viviane, and Viviane didn’t have



to force Ava to remain cooped up on the hill. Even Ava herself could have changed the events of that night by never even having stopped to talk to Nathaniel. Nathaniel himself could have changed the events of that night by getting a grip on himself, or never having even come to Pinnacle Lane. While Ava was born with wings, she wasn't fated to be controlled by them – something she learns only after they are cut off and then regrow.

Love

Love is an important theme in the novel “The Strange and Beautiful Sorrows of Ava Lavender” by Leslye Walton. Love takes many forms thematically, most notably in the novel, romantic love. Romantic love – both in tragic failure and in empowering success – comes to affect the novel in numerous ways.

In New York, the Roux family is ultimately undone by romantic love. Emilienne falls in love three times by the time she is 19, and each time, she has her heart broken. The third time is the most tragic, for the man she has fallen in love with and intends to marry, impregnates her 16-year-old sister, Margaux. When Emilienne kicks the man out of her life, Margaux, who has fallen hopelessly in love with him, commits suicide by carving out her own heart. Fifteen-year-old Pierette falls helplessly in love with an older man, who is an ornithologist by trade. She attempts numerous times to win his love and gain his attention, but he seems to be more focused on birds than anything else. In desperation, Pierette shows up at his home completely naked except for a patch of feathers in one certain place, and then later glues canary feathers all over her body. This ultimately fails, and Pierette ultimately dies of heartbreak. Rene, the only male sibling, turns out to be gay. He carries on a love affair with a married man, and is caught by the man's wife. The man later shoots Rene in the face and kills him. Emilienne, seeing what romantic love has done to herself and to her family, vows never to love again. She forces herself not to fall in love with the man she marries in her union of convenience, Connor, but much later comes to realize that she does love him.

A generation later, Viviane and Jack grow up as friends and neighbors, and as teenagers, fall in love. Though Jack loves Viviane, he lives under the shadow of his father, John, for whom nothing Jack does is ever good enough. Jack grows to live for the day that he will meet his father's approval, and exceed it. As a result, he breaks things off with Viviane, in order to marry Laura Lovelorn – a purely calculated move. Nevertheless, he sleeps with Viviane once before leaving her. It is enough to cause Viviane to become pregnant, and give birth to Ava and Henry. As Ava grows, Viviane is particularly worried about protecting Ava from heartbreak. Viviane herself only belatedly comes to realize that Gabe has loved her for years, and in turn, gives her heart to Gabe by the end of the novel.

Ava herself ultimately comes to experience love. This begins with her first real crush, which is directed toward Nathaniel. She makes sure to preen her feathers in full view in her window so that Nathaniel can see her, and she leaves him gifts of feathers at his aunt's house. She also allows him to touch her wings, which for Ava, is akin to a sexual

act. She even imagines marrying Nathaniel and having children with him. This crush on Nathaniel, however, ultimately fades in favor of a real form of love with Rowe. Ava admires how mature and caring Rowe is. She also comes to love him for his courage and his compassion. Rowe, in turn, comes to love Ava deeply. While away at college, he saves himself for Ava, and Ava is thrilled to see him return for winter break at the end of the novel. The love that she and Rowe share also becomes a motivating reason for her to choose to live and not to die.



Styles

Point of View

Leslye Walton tells the majority of her novel “The Strange and Beautiful Sorrows of Ava Lavender” in the first-person limited-omniscient reflective perspective, from the point of view of main character and principal protagonist, Ava Lavender. The novel, as described in the prologue, is an autobiographical account of Ava’s family and Ava’s early years, as explained by Ava herself. Because Ava is telling her own story, it is only natural that she write it in first-person, for the experiences are her own. The narrative is reflective, for as the prologue states, she is completed the work in March, 2014, and is thus looking back on her life at the age of 70. There are also a handful of sections of the novel told from the first-person perspective of Nathaniel Sorrows, in the form of extracted entries from the journal he keeps the spring and summer of the events of the novel. These add contextual information for the reader, and includes information that Ava herself was not aware of at the time as events unfolded.

Language and Meaning

Leslye Walton tells her novel “The Strange and Beautiful Sorrows of Ava Lavender” in prose and in language that is gentle and poetic. This is done for at least two reasons. First, the prose takes on a gentle and poetic tone because it is being written by Ava Lavender at the age of 70. As such, the gentle and poetic language is evocative of a reflective mood, and lends credence to the idea the reader is perusing a memoir. Secondly, Ava herself is a lovely, beautiful, and deeply sensitive person, so it is only natural that someone who recognizes the importance of love and beauty should transmit that recognition in her writing. The same is true of Ava at the age of 15 as it is at the age of 70.

Structure

Leslye Walton divides her novel “The Strange and Beautiful Sorrows of Ava Lavender” into 27 numbered, linear, and chronological chapters preceded by a prologue. The prologue serves as an introduction to the novel, where Ava, writing at the age of 70, explains that what the audience is about to read is an account of her family’s history, and her early years of life through the age of 15 in the summer and winter of 1959. Each succeeding chapter is devoted to a particular incident, or series of incidents relating to the plot. For example, Chapter 11 deals with the beginning of Henry’s mapmaking phase, and his first visit away from the hill and the house. Beginning with Chapter 13, excerpts from Nathaniel’s diary are included at the end of each chapter, through Chapter 19.



Quotes

I was just a girl.

-- Ava Lavender (Prologue paragraph 2)

Importance: While many people hypothesize and consider what Ava might be – and those ideas range from an angel to a monster – Ava knows the truth. She is only a girl, despite having wings.

Love can make us such fools.

-- Emilienne Roux (Chapter 1 paragraph 39)

Importance: After Emilienne helps an injured boy at the age of 13, she allows the boy to touch her bare bottom. It is an impulsive act borne of Emilienne's love for the boy, but also holds to a deeper truth. Love can make people do dumb things. This will certainly be the case later in the novel, especially when it comes to Viviane, who allows her own broken heart to dictate her life, and the life of Ava.

Fate. Both my anguish and my solace. My escort and my cage.

-- Ava Lavender (Chapter 10 paragraph 31)

Importance: Ava attempts to console herself with her lot in life – wings that she sees as both a blessing and a curse. She attempts to make herself feel better by reasoning that her situation in life – being locked up on a hill because of wings – is something she has no control against. As she accepts she has no control over her life and her body, she does feel better, knowing there is nothing she herself can do to change it.

Those born under the Pacific Northwest skies are like daffodils: they can achieve beauty only after a long, cold sulk in the rain.

-- Ava Lavender (Chapter 12 paragraph 1)

Importance: Here, Ava explains much more than botanical facts. The statement has a deeper meaning, in which an individual can only shine in the light, in beauty, after going through the darkness, through trial, and through a figurative storm. Ava is one such person, who will come to achieve true beauty by the end of the novel, after the most traumatic experience of her life.

She worried she couldn't protect me from all of the things that had hurt her: loss and fear, pain and love. Most especially from love.

-- Ava Lavender (Chapter 13 paragraph 1)

Importance: Here, Ava explains Viviane's reasoning for keeping her cooped up on the hill. Viviane's biggest fears are not just whether or not Ava can survive in the world as she is with wings, but also worries that Ava will experience the same sort of heartbreak.



I found it ironic that I should be blessed with wings and yet feel so constrained, so trapped.

-- Ava Lavender (Chapter 15 paragraph 16)

Importance: Ava is well-aware of the irony of having wings, and not being able to use them, and being trapped by them. Wings, symbolically, traditionally mean flight and freedom. Yet, Ava is unable to fly or freely go about the world. She is constrained by Viviane, who compels Ava to remain on the hill and at home.

Maybe you just needed someone to help you see the parts that aren't so obvious.

-- Rowe Cooper (Chapter 15 paragraph 32)

Importance: When most people look at Ava, all they see are her wings. As a result, so too does Ava. Yet, it is Rowe who reminds her that she needs someone who sees her for more than just her wings. That Ava is, above all a girl, shouldn't be less obvious than her wings. And Rowe sees Ava for Ava, rather than for her wings.

Just because love don't look the way you think it should don't mean you don't have it.

-- Wilhelmina Dovewolf (Chapter 21 paragraph 13)

Importance: Wilhelmina hands Emilienne some sound wisdom regarding love. Emilienne, who has been feeling the pull of the past, and who has been wondering about her own life and lack of love in it, is surprised to realize that she did indeed have love in her life with Connor, and still has love in her life with family. Just because love doesn't appear in her life the way she thinks it should, doesn't mean that that love isn't there.

They were, quite simply, prayers said for a girl. For me.

-- Ava Lavender (Chapter 24 paragraph 52)

Importance: After Ava is attacked, she is rushed to the hospital. Crowds gather in the neighborhood for a vigil to pray for the life of Ava. Those prayers are not, as Ava explains, for monsters or angels or mutants or divine beings, but simply for a girl who has come to mean much to the community.

I thought I was protecting her. It never dawned on me that she could live like everyone else. Now that I know she can, it feels like it's too late.

-- Viviane Lavender (Chapter 24 paragraph 64)

Importance: After the attack, in a moment of intimate reflection with Gabe, Viviane admits that she has been overprotective of her daughter. All along, she believed she was protecting Ava, but now she knows that Ava is strong enough to survive in the world, and could live a normal life.

We all have a choice.

-- Rene Roux (Chapter 25 paragraph 57)



Importance: Ava, in the worst part of her recovery, contemplates suicide, death, and fate. Her uncle reminds her, however, that she is not fated to die, and not fated to anything in life. It is all her choice whether she lives or not, and how she lives in the end. This, in addition to the love she shares with Rowe, motivates Ava to live.

But mostly, I like to think that Jack Griffith, my father, smiled as I let go of the railing behind me and, stretching my wings to that star-studded sky, soared into the night.
-- Ava Lavender (Chapter 27 paragraph 4)

Importance: At the end of the novel, Ava takes flight for the first time, and hopes her father sees her as he lives far below Pinnacle Lane. She hopes she can be seen so her father knows that she has risen above the horrible experiences of the summer, and the tragedy of the family's past.