



## A Note from Author Leslye Walton



Photo by Erin Grace Photography

The novel started out as a short story that came to me while listening to the song “I Just Don’t Think I’ll Ever Get Over You.” I remember listening to the lyrics, “If I lived till I could no longer climb my stairs/ I just don’t think I’ll ever get over you,” and pondering the logic, or lack thereof,



in love—the ways we coax ourselves to love, to continue loving, to leave love behind. And through this thinking arose Viviane Lavender, a girl who loved a boy her whole life. I imagined the burden of this love, the many ways she’d try to free herself from it. I imagined the immense weight of loving someone who didn’t, or perhaps couldn’t, love you back, and how it would define every step you took from that point on.

Over the course of a few months, more characters began showing themselves to me, revealing their intricate place in this now-evolving story. Henry was based on an autistic boy I taught who had a preoccupation with and remarkable aptitude for mapmaking. Trouver was a neighbor’s dog I walked to earn money while in grad school. But it was Ava who changed everything. At the time, I was playing with the idea of introducing



characters through detailed descriptions of photographs. I was looking at a picture of my younger sister, taken when she was perhaps eleven. To be honest, I'm not even sure if the actual photograph exists, or if it is merely an image that I recall when thinking of my sister as a young child—all long limbs and big teeth, wearing oversize white T-shirts, and running, always running, her shirt billowing out behind her as if she had wings. And it was in that description that I came to a stop, my fingers poised over the keyboard, and I thought, *No. Not as if she had wings. She has wings.* And in that, I also realized I had no idea what I was writing. I didn't write again for weeks.

I immersed myself in magical realism. Gabriel García Márquez, Isabel Allende, and Louise Erdrich were my guides, as were Alice Hoffman, Joanne Harris, and Neil Gaiman. Then I woke one morning and found Emilienne and the entire Roux family waiting for me to tell their story. I wrote their chapters in one afternoon. I discovered that in this strange and beautiful world I was creating, metaphors were literal, the imaginative conceptual, the impossible possible. Emilienne's "gift" is my favorite—I find it comforting to consider that coincidences could have meaning, that there's truth behind old wives' tales.

The idea that I, the writer, had any control over these bizarre characters, or the story they had to share, is humorous to me. They surprised me all the time. Like reckless teenagers, they rarely listened to what I said, the warnings I called out when I knew the pain they were diligently running toward. When I realized I was writing a story about a girl who would be mistaken for an angel—a symbol of purity—I knew it would also be a story that included a rape. It was never a story I wanted to tell, but it's Ava's story, and she insisted I share it with you.