
Autumn Magi



Beautiful day. Surprising visit.
By Cathy Tallady



I raked leaves last week on a perfect day. No wind. Both mild and crisp. Hazy sky that muted the brilliant colors to something ethereal.

Twin maples dominate my front yard. They had saved enough leaves for a canopy of beauty above me and dropped just the right amount for a matching carpet beneath.

My task was to remove the carpet, though I'd rather have left it there, like some exquisite oriental creation. Still, I loved the pungent air, the swish of the rake, the feel of seldom used muscles, still functioning.

In such a mood I wanted to compose a poem, about fall, about colors blended together in splendor.

Nothing came but clichés and words others have written before me.

I turned to philosophy. Isn't it some kind of paradox that God chooses to create such beauty from *dying* leaves? But I couldn't wrestle with that now. It didn't fit the simple rhythm of the rake and the canopy and the carpet.

As I piled my harvest beside the road, I became more aware of the miracle of these *particular* leaves. A cursory glance upward at the maples showed mostly gold. But when I knelt down and looked closer, I saw myriads of combinations of hues—from bright yellow to deep gold, to green and red together, to deep red. I began to gather them in my hands, as if making an arrangement or painter's palette.

*I began to gather
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Just then, three teenage boys sauntered by—backward caps, baggy pants, untied sneakers.

I didn't know them. I'd never seen them before. But I said, "Hello," and they stopped.

"Hi," one of them said. "You collecting leaves?"

"Well," I replied, "I just raked these here, and I can't believe the colors produced by two identical maples. See?"

I fanned out the leaves in my hands, suddenly feeling foolish mentioning such a thing to three cavalier boys.

But they smiled, and the one with curly hair said, "That's really neat." The other two nodded. "Neat," they added.

Then they walked on.

I stood very still for a minute, looking at the miracle of the leaves in my hands—then at the receding boys.

I didn't have my poem. I didn't have the answer to my deep philosophical question.

What I had was a simple benediction—from three unlikely Magi with untied sneakers, baggy pants, and backward caps.

Neat.

Neat, indeed. ❖