



When Autumn Leaves: A Novel

Amy S. Foster

Overlook TP

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When Autumn Leaves, the title of Amy Foster's debut novel, refers not to Johnny Mercer's song of lost love, but to the gentle and wise witch Autumn Avening, who has been notified of a promotion and has to select her successor from a list of thirteen names. It's no easy task, for each person on that list holds a special power, which may or may not benefit the town. Autumn decides to hold a contest for an apprentice and choose her disciple.

This is the first book in a series about the town of Avening and its magical inhabitants. Foster introduces the main characters that readers can assume will be making their appearances in subsequent books with an expanded storyline. Each one has a whimsical quality that might be seen as personality quirks or traits in mere mortals; these qualities bring a unique twist to Foster's story about the splendor and wonder of everyday life.

Foster captures Avening in delightful prose, putting the reader right in the center of the quaint Northwestern town. Her lyrical imagery brings to life the town and its people; readers can imagine enjoying tea with Autumn in her homey kitchen at Demeter's Grove, and can laugh along with the mischievous Justy, whose shoe-making wizardry can turn a seemingly shy and invisible person into a songbird.

Foster's eccentric characters make readers giggle with their foibles, but there are bittersweet moments, too. Love and betrayal, illness and death all make their appearances. In the second half of the book, for example, readers are introduced to Piper Shigeru, who is dying from a brain tumor. Piper is like many of the town's inhabitants and has mysterious talents. Her special gift is the ability to travel to another dimension. There, she'll spend the rest of her life without physical pain and in peace, but the trade-off is that she'll never see her husband and daughters again.

Primarily known as a songwriter, Foster writes beautiful, narrative prose. While the dialogue can seem a bit forced, the characters and the richness of Foster's material carry the story along. *When Autumn Leaves* is a sweet fable of life's twists and turns which reminds us of the wonders of life and death, friendship and love, disappointment, and failure.