

I have always collected books.

Not expensive books like first editions, antiquarian books, special modern rare printings.

No...

1) I keep the books I read.

And

2) I buy books I plan to read.

The books mount up.

A few summers ago, in what seemed like a time of endless medical appointments in London, I stopped on the way home from one in a little used book store housed in a former church.

I bought a book I have always wanted by Sacheverill Sitwell, *The Gothic North* (1929). It is a long, very long essay on medieval objects (furniture, clothing, dishes, etc.) that appealed to the writer.

It sounds incredibly boring, but it is in fact like sitting next to an intelligent man or woman who tells you about their special interest in a way that you can understand.

But this is not my point in writing about this book.

The book in question belonged to Lenore Pratt. She had signed the front page.

Now...I always look up on the Internet the signatures of former owners in the old books I buy.

Lenore Pratt popped up immediately.

She was a Canadian poet (1901-2001) ..., and she published several collections of poetry.

She is best known, I found out, for one poem.

It is a poem about a house surrounded by sixteen birch trees.

And it tells of that autumn day when all sixteen of the trees turn yellow...a windless day, not a leaf dropped.

The poet walks in her house looking at the reflection on the walls of the rooms and hallways of the yellow leaves through the windows of the house, upstairs and down.

She looks out to see the trunks, like columns of a temple, holding up a golden translucent roof, almost over her house.

And then she remembers as she is bathed in this golden light, as she is looking out at this stillness, those stories of myth and legend from her childhood reading.

And finally...a unicorn approaches.

A unicorn in a Canadian woods.

Birch Light

This is the single day of all the year
When sixteen birches stand together
In golden somnolence around our house,
In such full perfection of clear gold
That one may look in vain for a slight flaw,
For a glint of summer green, or branch
From which the silent leaves have fallen.

I walk upstairs to halls that brim with gold,
To rooms suffused in apricot and amber;
I look from windows into sixteen trees
Reflecting the long stored-up suns of summer,
To columns pale as parchment that ascend
Up and up beneath translucent eaves
Where the empty nest is dark in the forked bough,
And the sky beyond is brilliant blue enamel.

Oh, if today would only last, the stillness last,
And the birches hold this pure illumination
That one more night of frost will quench! In such a light
Remembered is the myth and fable, and revealed
The legend's wonder. A fleet sails for Troy,
Iseult embroiders cornflowers on a glove,
In Merlin's hand the ruby philtre trembles,
Rapunzel from a tower unbinds her hair,
And a unicorn approaches through the windless wood.

Lorne Ellaschuk