

When Great Trees Fall *by* Maya Angelou

When great trees fall,
rocks on distant hills shudder,
lions hunker down in tall grasses,
and even elephants lumber after safety.

When great trees fall in forests,
small things recoil into silence,
their senses eroded beyond fear.

When great souls die,
the air around us becomes
light, rare, sterile.

We breathe, briefly.

Our eyes, briefly,
see with a hurtful clarity.

Our memory, suddenly sharpened,
examines,
gnaws on kind words
unsaid,
promised walks never taken.

Great souls die and
our reality, bound to
them, takes leave of us.

Our souls,
dependent upon their nurture,
now shrink, wizened.

Our minds, formed
and informed by their
radiance, fall away.

We are not so much maddened
as reduced to the unutterable
ignorance of dark, cold caves.

And when great souls die,
after a period, peace blooms,
slowly and always
irregularly.

Spaces fill with a kind of
soothing electric vibration.

Our senses, restored, never
to be the same, whisper to us.

They existed. They existed.

We can be. Be and be better.

For they existed.

