

When Great Trees Fall

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 on 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.