

The Leaf and the Tree

**When will you learn, myself, to be
a dying leaf on a living tree?**

**Budding, swelling, growing strong,
Wearing green, but not for long,
Drawing sustenance from air,
That other leaves, and you not there,
May bud, and at the autumn's call
Wearing russet, ready to fall?**

**Has not this trunk a deed to do
Ungessed by small and tremulous
you?**

**Shall not these branches in the end
To wisdom and the truth ascend?
And the great lightning plunging by
Look sidewise with a golden eye
To glimpse a tree so tall and proud
It sheds its leaves upon a cloud?**

**Here, I think, is the heart's grief:
The tree, no mightier than the leaf,
Makes firm its root and spreads its
crown**

**And stands; but in the end comes
down.**

**That airy top no boy could climb
Is trodden in a little time**

By cattle on their way to drink.

**The fluttering thoughts a leaf can
think,**

**That hears the wind and waits its turn,
Have taught it all a tree can learn.**

Time can make soft that iron wood.

**The tallest trunk that ever stood,
In time, without a dream to keep,
Crawls in beside the root to sleep.**

Edna St Vincent Millay