

**Tuesday, March 2**

**The Way of All the Earth**

Joshua 23:14

In various ways we'll be taken. Fine, except  
that we know it, and just when we've tricked it away  
someone nearby— a sister, say, or a child— proves it again

as fact. More pleasant to be one of those turtles  
who each September takes a last breath  
and goes gliding down to the profound

mud to wag in for a fine six months  
of anti-meditation. How brown it would be,  
and more than milky, an opaque shell

around the shell of the body, any minnow who passed  
taking the body for rocks that had sat on the bottom  
for centuries, mossier. We would not attend

the last rites of our families. We would be happy  
as stone until spring when we swam upwards  
to catch ducks in our snappers—

oh, unavoidable affront, especially  
for the old, for whom death's quick mouth  
darts daily through reed and shallow pool.

It snatches from the surface the children  
and sleek teens of the past, each month a volley  
of funerals, leading up to the snap over a webbed foot

when the self, which quakes and rages, is dragged under  
until it is drowned. Better, perhaps, not to go  
alone, but to pile, instead, like other turtles

on top of one another in a river's trench—  
to stay alive by being nearly dead. When the winter of dust  
blustered and whirled sixty-four million years back,

and the great beasts who stalked the land suffered  
and fell, their bulk heaving the hills—  
all of that was only a loud game of billiards

to the turtles, who sank down away from the light  
and let the arms and legs float in the waters,  
each belly atop another shell, the skin assuming

the work of the lungs, so the lungs—  
as the earth above wasted and sore—  
might, through that din, be still.

K. A. Hayes