

After the Turtle Years

Len Harrison

Before the turtle years—
the chrysalis years, the metamorphic years, the churning
years—

I stood in my garden of good and evil,
pulling weeds that didn't belong in the sweet
tomatoes

and dumping them under the
crabapple tree
where they should have grown.

Before the turtle years—the flooding years,
the storming years—I trained my gaze on the sky
for why wouldn't I look up?
Why shouldn't I look up?

When arrived the turtle years—
the folding years, the burning years, the learning
years—

the forest devoured me whole.

The tissue in my lungs could photosynthesize and my veins
became roots.

When arrived the turtle years—the
never-ceasing fool's spring years—I spoke to the sea
and it spoke back to me.

The waves taught me
everything I needed to know;

When Fish Walk

everything I couldn't grasp on my own.
How to change my focus.

After the turtle years—
the odd years, the lawless years, the godless years—
I sit in the chalk dust of stars and write like a river.
After the turtle years—the changing years,
the rearranging years—I keep my ribs in place,
 remembering the soil.
I call to the sea, and it laughs at me,
rising and crashing, and I know
my place is wherever I make it to be.
I brave the walk in the dark, tracing the outline of the land
and my mind.

I love the way this poem uses metaphor to talk about periods in a person's life.

Len Harrison is student at the Waynflete School in Portland, and has been a writer for as long as he can remember. When not writing, they can be found reading science fiction novels at the beach, working backstage at Franklin Theatre, or hiking in Midcoast Maine with friends and family. "After the Turtle Years" is also the 2025 Telling Room Statewide Writing Contest Winner for Cumberland County.