**Growing -- By Philomena Lloyd**

I.

She looked about her and thought:
something is missing.

And there it was, blooming in a crack in the sidewalk,
pushing up the earth around it and
spreading tentacles of green across the dusty
cracked gravel,
a shoot of red or pink struggling,
blossoming.

And there it was.

So she bent down and looked at it
and whispered, hello.
And perhaps it whispered back
playing its voice through the winds
and the creak of the earth
and the crack of the gravel
and the rustle of the leaves,
through her ears and around her mind
twisting through her memories
until she was sure
she had found what she was searching for.

II.

In the crepuscular light, by a bird
chirping quietly to itself,
it came.

It snuck through the city,
shrouded and hunched and
licking its lips as if
they were dry.

They were not.

In its sneaking and rustling
through the landscape,
mothers clutched their children tightly
and old women sitting in their rocking chairs
by fireplaces,
shrunk with fear.

And it came upon the bloom,
staring through the crack in the sidewalk.

As it passed, the green tentacles retreated,
and the red or pink blossom shriveled.

III.

He sat gazing into her eyes.
Clearing his throat, he said,
I love you.

And in that moment, her heart
was a ticking clock,
the pendulum of time swinging back and forth
as she said
something generic and clichéd.

If she sometimes scrubs her children's
faces too hard,
or spits in the food before she sets it,
ever so carefully,
on the table,

is she to blame?

IV.

This time she wrote a different song,
and played it through the years
until her five began to dance,
and, whispering to a crack
on the sidewalk,
allowed a bloom to grow.

She didn't feel so heartbroken,
and allowed her mind to release itself,
ramping through disappointments
until she felt herself kissing the rain,
and laughing as snow
clung to her eyelashes.

Perhaps an aching heart was only
herself looking, through the bars
of a gray cage, into the sky.

V.

She is older still,
her soul trekking through
mountains
and whistling to the sky.

If sometimes she laughs too loudly
or cries too often
or clutches her wrist
to assure herself of an allusive pulse,

is she to blame?

Or is she just another woman
with hungry eyes,
helpless in stopping

time?