**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?