

## TREMORS

### I

Hippie farm near  
Thunder Bay  
sauna made of barn  
board harvested from  
neighboring abandoned fields  
inside two kerosene lamps a  
bottle of red wine some home  
grown Mary Jane six  
steam cleaned friends and lovers  
starlight visible through knot  
holes  
deep winter  
snow ready to seal their  
pores

Twenty years later  
state of the art Finnish  
sauna in town  
Christmas snow falling on  
reunited friends as  
they enter  
disrobe  
ladle water onto hot  
river rocks  
sit on rich redwood benches that  
feel like silk on slick  
skin

The air between them steams  
open like oyster  
shells hands reach for each  
other wrap thick warm white  
towels around torsos  
bring ceramic sake  
bowls to moist  
lips  
contented unraveling  
tongues

II.

A loud bang, not like a backfire or car crash or battery of rifles at a military funeral. Black and white checkered linoleum floor under old clawfoot bath tub begins to vibrate. Surface of water in the tub pops gently as if peppered by many tiny pebbles. Bather brings her knees to her chin, hugs her legs, holds her breath. It's 8:30 on the morning of May 18, 1980, her 30<sup>th</sup> birthday which she will celebrate that evening. She doesn't know Mount St. Helen's has just exploded. When the shaking stops she takes her turquoise terry cloth robe from the peg on the wall and slips into it, amused for a moment by the iffy introduction to her third decade.

Water swirls down the drain faster and faster, as magma and melted ice will soon cascade down the mountain pulverizing trees and cabins, disappearing animals and humans. The birthday girl goes to the south window of her kitchen, sees what might be mistaken for a mushroom cloud by someone less upbeat. She tunes into local radio, hears the news. Friends who haven't called for months make contact, talk in tones that imply the world is about to end. She begins to wonder if the ash will reach Vancouver, if the sky will darken.

After dinner at her favorite curry house she lets burning candles on the cake drip wax onto the cheerful lemon icing as though crying for all the life taken unawares that day. When she finally blows them out, everyone at the table feels a little older. They raise glasses to more subdued toasts, close ranks around fragility, go home at a reasonable hour.

### III

Teenage girl genuflects before  
her mother's early morning anger  
needs bus fare to get  
to school

Middle age mother takes  
change from nightstand throws  
it at the uniformed girl leans  
back on her pillows

Girl collects coins from  
deep pile of the carpet runs  
out to the bus  
stop late for her first period class again

Mother back in bed by  
three when girl comes  
home with a note from the  
principal

From behind her back  
girl takes a clear glass  
vase of burnt orange  
gladiolas picked from the neighbor's yard

Mother watches girl place  
flowers on the cherrywood dresser  
careful not to spill any water  
I thought they might cheer you up

the girl says slipping the  
note under the vase

Mother doesn't ask where she got  
them doesn't speak at all  
won't see the note until the gladiolas  
wilt

#### IV

Professor Arlene's head shakes  
yes then no then yes as she  
does the double helix dance with  
her nursing students to  
teach them about DNA

Her voice is unsteady too  
when she conducts the class  
in a rhythmic  
recitation of human  
bones and their  
connections

Sparks from nerve  
endings jolt food from  
her hands make lunch a solitary  
task in a space  
cleared on her office  
desk

It's called essential  
tremor Arlene tells a  
new friend and colleague  
one weekend  
I'm not supposed to smoke or  
drink but

They take a chance  
split a beer

feel fine split another  
Arlene lights a cigarette they  
move to the front  
porch

Show me the dance  
the new friend  
says keeping time by  
tapping her Hopi pinky  
ring on her  
glass

It takes two  
Arlene says  
coaxing her friend to  
her feet with  
words temporarily less  
tremulous

Head and hands on  
leave from jumpy muscle and  
bone

## V

Anxiety Reaches Epidemic Proportions, says the headline of a local newspaper. People in doorways, coffee shops, offices, cars. On street corners, TV reality shows, smartphones. Kids at school, parks, friends' homes. Pets under tables, chairs, beds. One teenage girl sums it up while her mom buys two six packs of Heineken at a convenience store on a Friday night. I'm dying here, she says. No you're not, mom says. Yeah I am, mom. The world is going to hell. Mom. The cashier gives them a complementary lottery ticket with the receipt for the beer. He wishes them luck, trying hard to delete the skepticism from his face, voice, hesitant hand.