Upstream

Gail Folkins
Upstream

Coho salmon return—
silver scales on stones
in streams that whisper,
home grows near.

Tumors, budding quiet,
spread inside you,
your feet swollen
from their reach.

No remedy exists
for upstream journeys,
each foot soaking in a bath
of tepid rivers.

I look at your toes, a
mother’s nails grown long,
 thick white scars of the
rock-bruised salmon

thrashing under
Douglas firs that beckon
toward the place
of birth and death.

Your smile reaches
down your feet,
warmed from bathwater
and wrapped in towels;

under Mt Rainier’s pink light
I trim your toenails,
silver coho scales,
all of us returning.