

Ann E. Michael

My Life as a Japanese Woodcut

This is not one of those prints
with a mountain in it.
And the ocean—only seasonal.
A small river
with its humble footbridge
is more apt,
the kind of murmurous rill
you can cross by stepping
stones, early in fall,
when the cut-leaf maples
are a feathery magenta
and tall grasses slip
a bit of beige and gold
into their green sway.

The dogwood is fruiting—
in its branches,
a small grey monkey
etches mischief—
hunger and humor balanced
in elegantly-skewed perspective.
Near the stream bank,
a small pine.
You could count its needles:
the world is that precise.

There is no monk crossing the water
with his robes gathered
under his arm,
no maiden stands on the bridge,
her sleeves aflutter.
But a heron stalks half-hidden
in sedge; and, making his way down the slope
(there is a mountain, after all),
one indistinct traveler
leads a red pony.