

# NOEL CROOK

## Smith Canyon

That summer when loss took me by the throat  
I came home to the parched Texas hills, in late  
August a bleached bone-color, the grasses sallowed,  
white caliche roads shrouded in thin dust.

I drove to the canyon—a great scar, beautiful  
in the way of a scar, in the story it tells—  
where a child can trace the stone swirl of a mollusk  
big as her father's foot, and the cliffs are whales

that swim endlessly, tattoos of humped and eyeless  
trilobites embellishing their flanks;  
where along the steeper sides the untouched ledges  
tease with their pale stippling.

The mind canvasses them, lies along them,  
crouches in crevices cool with the chalky smell  
of millennia. Comanches camped here,  
chipping arrowheads at the water's edge.

Under the persistent wheeling of the buzzards,  
I walked the rocky shore, sank deep in the dark water  
until green and fingering reeds brushed my hair, glad  
that once the cliffs had whispered

with the scuttling of a million blind crustaceans.  
I was their sister, the warm sun whitening  
my bones, the curve of my spine  
another decoration on the limestone floor.

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