


FOSSIL RECORD: SMILODON



As a child, I put my hand between its teeth,
dropped coins down its throat to make it roar.

Pillared in the museum lobby: open-jawed
bust of a saber-toothed cat, not a Sphinx
but a Cerberus guarding the fossilized
dead. Through rooms of wire-strung bones

and taxidermied beasts, I was drawn to
dioramas like a light-mired moth, pressing

the buttons to hear their worlds described
in tinny voices limned with prehistoric

lore as I held the bulky headphones
tighter to my human ears. This felid,

scalpel-mouthed and fierce, once stalked
giant sloths. Once was taken by the tar pits,

bubbling cuspid, thick with tusks and fangs.
Once snarling dire wolves watched the stuck

cat yowl. How I could hear the ghost-growls
echo through museum walls, each fossil-body

rigid with the sound. Small mammal that I was,
pennies in my pocket as the exit loomed.