

Archaeopteryx

Ken Raines

Quarry workmen slice open the past,
pry limestone chunks with picks,
shave each delicate layer
with a chisel and a sledge.
Sometimes they are rewarded
with the memory of a bird
leaping from the stone.
They do not lean or strain
forward as if expecting a squawk
from the meticulous slab.
They barely notice
the preserved minutiae of scales
and of fine veins
which lace the feathers.

Bones fallen
into random angles.
A gaping beak in a grimace,
baring teeth, anachronistic
in the silt, a rictus whispering
across millions of years.

With its head bent back,
wings and legs akimbo,
it is a dancer fallen
from a great height.
Fallen out of a dim past,
like some mythical fish
which circumvents turbulent water,
choosing instead to evaporate
and ride dark clouds back
to the spawning grounds.