"Stop! For God's sake, stop! There's a dog in the road."

It wasn't a dog, but they didn't know that until the car was locked into a skid and on top of the crumpled heap of sheeting lying in the outer lane. After that there was no time for accurate identifications. The car spun twice before hitting the structure of the bridge and bouncing off into the central lane. The Belgian vehicle behind was itself going nearer sixty than forty.

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The police sergeant blew out his cheeks. Sustained compassion is an emotion sometimes found in short supply among motorway police patrols.

"Blithering bloody idiots," he said objectively.

The young constable had been on motorway patrol long enough to share his superior's familiarity with such scenes. He ran his eye along the crushed concertina of jagged metal that had lately been a cherished motor car in Ford's upper range.

"What you reckon's the length of one of these, Sarge?"

The sergeant shrugged. "Fifteen feet? Fifteen and a half?"

"Can't be more'n eight or ten now. Wouldn't believe it, would you?"

"If you caught a fully-loaded container lorry up your backside, son, you'd believe anything except it was your birthday." He sniffed. "Especially if it was driven by some push-on wog."

The young constable poked gingerly into the small space that had been the passenger seat area. The ambulance men had had to take Angie out in handy pieces. He fished something from between the crushed seat and the twisted metal that might have been the door frame. It was a blood-soaked dog collar.

"Funny," he said. "No sign of a dog in there."

The sergeant made a face.

"Must have been someone's birthday, then," he acknowledged.

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TIME FLIES

this is the bird's hour
when fog merges land and sea
and the sun's audience is lost
to those who sleep

in the tranquil hours of dawn
I watch these winged creatures
from my perch upon the hill
they flirt with waves of air
and carry songs above
the thunder of the city
where sirens replace
the urgency of the wind
and bulldozers silence
roaring rivers

I hold the vision that these friends
will survive the wreckage
when humans have flown too high
and the birds' hour
will be the only hour
to witness the morning sky

Katherine Minott

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