

## *Terminal Velocity*

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*—the highest velocity attainable by an object as it falls through air*

The male Mandarin, world's most gorgeous  
    duck—scarlet bill; purple breast; white  
eye-crescent; crest of green, blue, violet,  
    orange; back-feathers tucked and folded  
like an Empress's dress—helps his drab mate

nest in a hole high in a tree to stymie  
    foxes and raccoons. The yellow-and-brown  
ducklings feast on formula from Momma's  
    beak until, one day, she clucks, "Off  
to the lake," and glides gently to the ground.

Her bravest baby leaps, flails its stumpy  
    wings, and drops straight down.  
But are the rest dismayed? Never!  
    Thinking, in some duckish way, "No! No!  
Like this," they hop, flap desperately,

and plunge. A week's more weight  
would kill them. Now, their tumble barely  
hurts at all. For humans, though, that long  
a fall—like getting whacked by an Earth-  
sized fastball—would do to our bones

what the car speeding ahead of me  
on Pass Lake Road did, this morning,  
to six waddling products of car-free evolution  
that won't grow, now, into the world's  
most gorgeous ducks.