

James Cihlar

Jumping Down

If we jump down the page together
into the kitchen of my childhood home in Council Bluffs

where Grandma Carroll spins an opener
around a can of Campbell's Tomato Soup,

we'll see me sitting on the counter. But outside,
looking up, my eldest sister Vikki is poised to jump

from the garage roof and fly like Superman,
like Art Linkletter's daughter,

as we stand on the ground, cheering her on.
She will survive the fall—don't worry,

we always do—but how many "Batman" episodes
and "Mighty Mouse" cartoons did it take

to get her up there? How many times
did my grandma politely ask me to jump down

from the kitchen counter? "What is a saint?"
we asked in CCD. Someone like Joseph, or Mary,

or Grandma, I thought: her high cheekbones,
her cat-eye glasses with the aluminum rosettes,

her blue veins. How many times did she ask me
until finally she ordered, "Get your butt off the counter"?

And so, in the words of my youngest, newly married sister
who turned toward the passenger seat and said to me

years later, as her Honda Civic spun off the icy interstate,
"Grab hold," take my hand,

because this is where
we jump off.