

Carter Richard

Root-Beer Girl

Look here, she says when she wraps
her fingers around the leaves
and – in one swift move – exhumes
the plant, roots and all, dirt sliding away.

I'm ten;

she lives down the street, goes to high school,
studies biology, smiles with all her teeth.

See this root? she asks, curled down
to a crouch, her boots arched, her jeans
somehow squeezing my attention,
a gray tank-top taut between
the buttons of her red flannel shirt.

She holds sarsaparilla veins up to her nose,
then breathes in and offers them to me.

This is the smell of my favorite
soda. It's the smell of what's
missing from any cold glass
filled with scoops of ice cream.
It's the smell of an aluminum
can pulled wet from a cooler then
popped fresh open while firework

smoke and cigarette smoke and
barbecue smoke thicken the air.

But more than this, it's the smell of
root-beer girl, sixteen or something,
whom I now hardly remember, offering me
this earthy root, a walk in the woods,
Springfield, Missouri.