

John C. Morrison

Every Fourth

At twelve, I'm too much misfit
to sit under the wisteria arbor
as the sky spits an
effervescence, droplets so tiny

to be invisible pop like bubbles
on my face and forearms.
The translucent macaroni salad
leaves a tang on the tongue
that could be pimento or
ptomaine. Every Fourth
at Aunt Rosie's, the family picnic

above the Tualatin River, I miss
Uncle Bandit, who would set
a lawn chair beside mine and talk
moss and rocks. Soon the sprinkle
will pause, the sun

crack through the bulky clouds
long enough for the adults drunk
on the cheap punch known only
as *Recipe* to flop in the water,
with the new sewage plant two miles
upstream, float on their backs
and spout streams of grey green

while we wary cousins scuff along
the steep dirt bank and under
cottonwoods to trap crawdads
and come back with a rash. Nettles.
A sting deep beneath the skin.

