

PAUL J. WILLIS

Things I Forgot

I did remember the dog. But not
the tent poles. My wind suit, I forgot
that—and on this ridge it is very windy.

Cooking dinner on the remembered camp stove,
I can't find the potato flakes,
the cheddar cheese. So very odd:

I bought them just this morning
with the bagels dangling from my fingers.
Could there be a trickle of sacks

in a parking lot, my breadcrumb trail?
Once, my dad took my brother on a camping
trip and forgot both sleeping bags.

They froze in the back seat of the car,
and my brother never forgave him.
What kind of person forgets

the sleeping bags? he used to say.
Tonight, I uproot the back seat
to make a little room on the floor.

The van rocks like a broken
hammock, and the Jeffrey pines
whistle as hard as a boy crossing a graveyard.

After moonrise, fog comes
shredding through the branches.
Cones and needles beat the roof

with gothic and invisible hands.
The dog trembles next to me;
he doesn't forget to lick my face.

—Los Padres National Forest

Paul J. Willis is a professor of English at Westmont College and a former poet laureate of Santa Barbara, California. His most recent collection of poetry is *Say This Prayer into the Past*. He is also the author of *Bright Shoots of Everlastingness: Essays on Faith and the American Wild* and an eco-fantasy omnibus, *The Alpine Tales*. He recently served as an artist-in-residence for autumn 2014 and spring 2015 in North Cascades National Park.

ALLEN FORREST

Petaluma Hills, 2011
Oil on canvas panel, 6 x 8 in



COURTESY: THE ARTIST