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## Suitcase

Gold-zippered, blue plaid, gilded with initials: suitcase  
we were told to *pack in case of a new attack*. Girl's suitcase,

my grandmother's gift for those first sleep-overs.  
I fill it with duct tape. *Cipro* hidden in the lining of the suitcase.

The pediatrician refused to give the drug but, yes, I begged, cried,  
I demanded. In the *Before*, this would be my daughter's suitcase.

While she slept inside me, I'd pack a silky nightie, toothbrush.  
In the third trimester, I'd lie in bed and arrange the suitcase.

Now: Swiss Army knife. Distilled water. *Potassium Iodide*  
to carry with us at all times when we leave our home. *In case of*—

tablets to *swallow immediately* as the subway fills with smoke.  
This city permanently on *Orange Alert*, the ready suitcase

waiting while I nurse my daughter, watch the news.  
In the *After*, another day of jewel-blue sky, I pack the suitcase,

seal the windows as we were told against *possible chemical attack*,  
but still we breathe in the burning, the ash, the soot.

*Plan an evacuation route*. With each warning, the city shuts tunnels,  
cuts us off. We're packed and ready, with our suitcase.

I watch the news. I already know I won't have another child,  
not in this city. Packed and ready for the next attack: our suitcase.

Now the baby no longer fits in the circle of my arms. Pregnant,  
I'd dreamed the girl I'd birth as safely miniature, kept in a suitcase.

*You must be ready*, the TV tells us. *To leave your life,*  
*for the safety of your family.* I lay my daughter in the suitcase

stamped with my initials, N.R.C., letters engraved long ago  
on a headstone, and now not mine, not hers, no one's suitcase.