

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.