

In Case of Fire

Ami kept an empty suitcase
ready in the closet by the apartment door,
its overlapping labels scuffed
off the brown leather, an Air India
maharaja bowing before the maple leaf,
a white cross on a scarlet field,
a Statue of Liberty, minus her torch.

Woken one night in a fire alarm din
she opened it and tossed in
her gutka, photos of my faraway grandparents,
our passports, Papa's degree, her vinyl of Talat Mahmood,
H.G. Wells' *History of the World* volumes one and two,
A French primer, a copy of *Paradise Found*.

Then she gripped my hand tight
and we ran down

down

down

stairs

stood, panting, shivering
on Sherbrooke St. to be counted
with all the rest.

Pulling the sleeves of my pyjamas
over knuckles, using one bare foot
warm the other in the drifting snow,
I thought: real Montrealers
would have reached first
for their boots, then their coats.

Shauna Singh Baldwin