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Luggage for one leaving

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Luggage for one leaving

You are required to keep the poundage low:
two large cases and a carry-on,
what you take for months overseas.
In a year of famine, you have volunteered
for hunger in a strange language
you begin to force onto your tongue,
words affirming ways of irrigation:
seeds salvaged, sprouts toward green
in the fields.

What you need most was there
before you packed, not fire in the eyes,
but deeper, not things you have
but what you enjoy.
You've planted vegetables and flowers
in old tires—a family's garden;
pruned massive lilac trees and honeysuckle
that crowded paths; painted fences
and repaired collapsing sheds
in that dying farm town.

When I walk back
toward my car and education, the acquiring
of whatever will allay my dread of poverty,
I carry nothing from the airport
but an ache and tremble in my hands.

From Dixie L. Partridge, *Watermark*
(Upper Montclair, N.J.: Saturday Press, 1991).