



GREEN CARD

From the office parking lot the GPS lady tells you to *exit south* even though today you are headed north, to the INS building in Lawrence, Massachusetts. You are going there to renew your green card because this is something you must do every ten years to stay in America.

Each decade is just long enough to forget that you are Alien Registration Number 0000-000-0000.

Now, on this rainy highway, you are also Application Number LIN2212703694, and the GPS lady tells you to stay on the current road.

This makes no sense, but you obey because this is something you have learned in America: Sometimes, you must head south to get north.

The wipers squeak. You turn the radio dial for a radio traffic report.

The rain turns heavier. It's 10:05 a.m. You have allotted twice the required time for this journey, but now, you fear that you might be late.

The U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service doesn't *like* or tolerate late. You know this from the letter that sits in your briefcase—letter I-797C—where it says in block capital letters: "If you fail to appear as scheduled, your application will be considered abandoned and denied."

Even worse than being late would be a fender bender that sends your passport and your Letter I-797C skittering across three lanes of highway. You would become illegal, though your arms, your legs, your speeding frantic thoughts, your sometimes broken heart—none of these feels illegal and they never can or will.

At work, the Finance Department would have to create a new budget line item: "Immigration Fines." At home, your husband would have to pay the mortgage while Harry the cat would mewl around the house for his deported Mommy.

You force yourself to shush those fears. You study your fellow highway