

## The Green Card Is Not Green

*Patriotism assumes that our globe is divided into little spots,  
each one surrounded by an iron gate.*

Emma Goldman

*An "alien" married to an American receives a conditional green card, which is a green card  
whose conditions must be removed after two years. The Department of Homeland Security allows  
what it calls a "window" in which to apply for the removal of these conditions, after which, if the  
couple miss the "window," it is closed.*

--May 15, 2005

1

The couple look through this window that is time,  
    blackened out, and space,  
    in no space.

The window is neither open nor closed. It is before them.

    They are before it.

    They poise on its sill

between inside and outside the legal.

    Balanced. Out of balance.

    Liminal. Marginal.

Time determines whether they trespass or freely stay.

\*

The couple are told that processing takes a year and a receipt  
will be issued that allows the Resident Alien to travel.

And so it was the couple traveled,  
not leaving the country

but the state, from one to another: as from "happiness" to "unhappiness,"  
or from "contentment" to "discontent." In May the couple stayed in the same country  
across the country, where lilacs bloomed—the deep purple

and pale-lavender honeying  
the air each morning.

\*

\*

One day the couple received a letter.  
The Resident Alien's application to have conditions  
removed from his green card was approved. In 14 days.  
His case was such an open book that it changed  
the couple's story.  
Now to leave the country  
the Alien Resident needed a stamp. To stamp  
a passport takes a minute. It is the same stamp  
everywhere because it is the same Department  
of Homeland Security, the same Homeland.

\*

But the stamp must be delivered not anywhere  
in the Homeland but only at Home. Why  
is never explained but "that" is repeated often:  
*That that that that that that that that that*  
*that that that*  
*that that that.*

\*

When one calls The Department of Homeland Security,  
one reaches a line called Customer Service giving many numbers to press  
for help. Each number pressed gives new numbers in new voices.  
Each voice speaks of the same laws of the same land in the same language  
in which the same questions have been asked,  
each giving different answers which  
if chosen lead to different fates.

One cannot complain of the Customer Service.  
There are no lines for complaints to  
The Department of Homeland Security's Customer Service Center.  
One is not really a customer  
(there are no customers),  
and cannot buy anything  
but trouble,  
which is priceless.

\*

U.S. borders are both policed and permeable.

2

*A border orders disorder.* Evidently.  
How secure to secure the border?  
I breathe the confident air of a liminal space:  
neither what came before nor what lies ahead  
but between these two.  
What is between between?

A nether-world.

\*

A border that divides also connects,  
the buffer imagined, arbitrary,  
opening where one can cross the line  
and become, quite suddenly, *other*.

I enter a strange country  
and myself become strange. *Étrangère*.  
At that moment, my Resident Alien husband becomes *Citizen*.  
We are, between us,  
two beings of determinate but shifting identities,  
always in transit, self-shifting,  
one of us word-less,  
one of us defined by prohibitions

expressed in abstractions  
all having specific consequences:

You are invited to submit  
an application for an extension

of the red tape in which to encase  
your green card.

You are not permitted to cross our borders  
without an endorsement that the conditions  
on your green card have been approved  
for removal.

\*

The permeable border is lethal without endorsement.

I wanted to endorse you but the Homeland must authorize your petition.

You will pay x and then go to z. You cannot go to y.

You can call us but the phone number we give you has been disconnected  
(you will have to call to find this out).

A receipt must be with all questions, and we will tell you that you can not ask questions  
in person without an appointment although you can  
(you will have to come here to find this out).

If you make an appointment, we guarantee the directions we give you  
will cause you to go to the wrong place,  
and then we will have to say:

You have to go back to where you came from.

If it is happiness you are free to pursue it but there not here.

If it is unhappiness you must dwell there.

If you cross our borders we will hold you without charge,  
for a time to be announced at some time

to be determined in the future.

\*

*A border disorders others  
My state but not my faith  
My country but not my cant*

This is a notice of action,

not feelings. We do not sway or bend

like reeds in wind. We do not feel for you. You must feel

for yourself.

*Please feel welcome.*

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