

## Love in New America

Annette was getting ready to leave the land in which she grew up. She knew that she might be able to get a new perspective of life if she were to travel outside and explore the way other people lived but was still afraid of the danger of not returning. However that was a risk she was willing to take because she was young and figured there was still so much to learn and so much of which could never be taught but instead had to be experienced. So she took off to the land outside her sovereign state. The year was 2065 and the land United States of America has changed drastically through changes of policy and thus the society changed along with it. The United States of America as it was known before, did not exist by that name, as it was now known as New America and the old ways were referred to as Old America. The country had been largely politically divided and thus parts of the nation broke off and formed its own sovereign nation after there was much polarization between bipartisan views. As a result the remaining nation of the United States of America fell apart and became acquired territory for other nations. The land now known as New America decided it they want to revert back to the Puritan roots of the United States of America from the time of the settlers because the divorce rates of Old America were high and as of 2019 they were the highest at a fifty percent divorce rate among all marriages. The laws of the New America were enacted to prevent such a high number of divorces because they saw it was a public health concern that was affecting society in a multitude of ways such as the mental health of children and recent divorcees who were at higher risk of

substance abuse and suicide. New America however still kept the market-focused spirit of the Old America and used the ideas of health along with the prosperity to create a system, which tracked individuals and gave them a score based on their behavior and health called the Citizen Score.

The whole society of New America thus became very focus on the morality of the nation itself and thus regulated all aspects of dating by using the Citizen Score. The Citizen Score was not public information but could be shared by the discretion of an individual, which ultimately became a way for individuals to find and evaluate a partner for dating. The Citizen Score however, needed to be presented when submitting an application for approval of dating and was to be reviewed by a committee dedicated to matching up scores and determining if the two would be likely to get married and be a health and contributing union into the society. If marriage was not seen as likely to happen or the potential couple was too in love thus displayed a crazy love then they were seen as a danger to society and were not deemed healthy enough to be a part of society together. If approved then the couple would then have a contract in which they would agree to the requirements and expectations of marriage that would advance the society such as having children and also adhering to not displaying any immoral actions or unhealthy displays of love in public. Once the agreement of the two resulted in marriage then the Citizen Score would be averaged between the two unless they were to separate by divorce, which would lower their score because they were not being good citizens and would make them less desirable for another marriage due to the lowered score. Annette had grown up in New America and was told of the horrors of the Old America where people did not have guidance to marriage and thus they did not love properly because to love properly was to be a good citizen. The Old America had too much pain and this was much better because the new laws protected them, that is what she was

told by elders. In New America it seemed that love could only be met by certain criteria.

Annette secretly dated a man despite that their submission for approval was denied. The reason behind the denial was that their love was seemed as unhealthy because they were too in love for their own good as they were told. However Annette knew that she behaved well and that she was a good citizen and in fact her score was probably much higher than his. She suspected it was because the people from the place she grew up in tended to have lower scores and it was expected that her score would be low too or would eventually become low. The committee had that information and thus did not want someone from a background with people of lower scores to be with someone from a community of people with generally higher scores. She knew that the committee had a reputation for being bias but thought that it wouldn't matter since her score was so high. She was wrong and now she worried that if anyone found out about her dating against the committee's approval then her score would actually become lower and that was the thing she feared the most, that their negative perceptions and expectations of her would actually become a reality.

Annette was not alone in her fear of having a lower score as she heard that others had to secretly date, too. Some people even said that they had sex before marriage, which the committee said was impossible. Sometimes it would even result in a secret marriage but that was especially secretive or else it would result in a very low score and even prosecution. There were people who would never even try to submit a review for approval because they knew it would never happen. The same sex couples met in secret, as did the people who had a large age gap, and also the people who knew that monogamy was not for them but they all feared condemnation from the committee. These were the ways in which love was present and existing in ways, which were not formally acknowledged and accepted. The committee even went as far to deny that love and

marriage could ever exist without their approval and taught the people from a young age that it was not love and instead a sickness or an immoral thing to do which would affect all of society and make an unhealthy one just as it was in old America. The committee created a lot of shame around what love was and how to express it and as a result most of the people internalized it and hardly even questioned why love felt so hard because it could only happen to certain people under strict circumstances. Everyone put that pressure on themselves and on others to keep up a good score and it had become a society filled with shame that carried out from generation to generation as they slowly forgot what it was to have a good life for themselves and not just for a score. A score to be judged by other people and used against them. For the people who went against the tradition, it was possible to keep up such a secret but it was not a liberating way to live because there was fear all around and it was all consuming to live a lie just to keep up a good score for the people around.

Annette had come to realize this as the stress had taken a toll on her from her relationship, which was unknown to most and at last her partner decided it was disrespectful to go against the rules of the dating tradition and most off all disrespectful to the committee. She was upset because she knew they were just rules put in place to protect other people from judging them and it was just a system it could be change over time because it clearly was excluding so many people. It was an unjust system, which went against its own rule to arbitrarily create a definition of love that ignored the true essence of love and love's nature. Systems were never love or meant to be love. Systems are to organize people and people are what create love not systems and if the systems were once created then they can be recreated or modified, she thought. However it seemed that she could never get her message about love out to the people around her because they saw the rule as the absolute way for love to exist despite that there was

already common knowledge indicating other ways of love, they were knowingly ignored and told it was not love.

Annette knew that it would not be anytime soon that the society she lived in would accept her love and it was clear that her own love could not accept that love either because they could never be a formal couple under the eyes of the committee as it had been tried before. To her love was willing to accept change and allow forgiveness to happen because then there would be so much shame around someone's past or value wouldn't be based on someone's number. Love at its core was acceptance from other but also of one's self and she lived in a place where people were not taught that and so they were constantly afraid of change. She decided that she would

leave New America and try to find a place where she could love the way she wanted and not have to fear any sanctions for her vision of love and find a society capable of accepting love.