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A GOVERNMENT-SANCTIONED MARRIAGE

by Cameron Van Sant

JUNE CERVANTES WAS MY NEW wife, as assigned by the NeoArc Government. Even though my parents wouldn't let me open my wife assignment email when it came in at midnight, I was sure of it because that day in my senior coding class, June said, "Hey, how are you?" in a super weird way.

"Arzner, stop complaining," my mom said later that evening, handing me a peace-offering beer. "We're opening it now."

"As soon as the lasagna cools," my dad said from the apartment kitchen.

I ignored the beer, and my mom put it on the table in front of me. I was halfway through an email to June apologizing for saying "Fine" and walking off instead of acknowledging the beginning of what no doubt would be the most significant relationship in our lives. She probably already had a job and was ready to move to our own place and would be upset with me when I told her I didn't have one yet.

"You really like this June, don't you?" Mom said.

I looked up from my phone and thought about it, which I hadn't done until now. "I guess," I said. Mainly, something felt wrong, and maybe it was my fault.

"You're gonna be okay if it's not her?" Mom asked.

"I'm not gonna send this until we know for sure," I said.

Queers Who Don't Quit

On my 18th birthday, I got a summons to show up at NeoArc Government Labs in order to have the most uncomfortable day of my life. Scientists swabbed my cheek and slapped a weird helmet on me that looked at my brainwaves and took pheromone samples or something. I even had to jerk off in a cup. They told me I could decline that part but they also said, "If we don't have all the information, we might not find your best match." And of course I wanted my best match.

All 18-year-olds go through the same process. Over the course of a year, scientists make a big database with all the 18-year-olds' chemical info, and the algorithm matches everybody up with someone on a chemical level. That match is sent to the administrative part of the government, who approves it, officially marries the couple, and sends them an email to let them know.

I heard all these stories about people meeting that person the algorithm chose and filling up with those big Hollywood feelings and knowing they're gonna be happy with this person forever. It's supposed to be worth that terrible day at the lab and all those years of not dating, which is illegal.

My dad hustled into the living room and put the steaming lasagna on the table. "You ready?" he asked me, cutting out pieces.

"I don't know." I tossed my phone aside and picked up the beer.

My mom took my phone, deleted my email to June, and plugged the TV's auxiliary cord into it for us to look at it together on the bigger screen. Then she passed the phone to me.

"How about now?" she said.

I took a deep breath and opened the email. It asked me to give my thumbprint and then sign, like a legal document. Then a video loaded.

I looked at my parents, and they were nodding at me to continue. I pressed play.

"Dear Mr. Arzner O'Shea," a voice played. "We have found your perfect spouse." I clenched my fists. "His name is Francis Tlalli." A

picture of a guy flashed up. He had big eyes, black hair, brown skin, and he was sulking.

“Is he even eighteen?” I asked.

“Why the hell did they send you a guy?” Mom turned to me. “Are you gay?”

“No!”

The computer voice chirped on. “The NeoArc Government congratulates—”

Mom yanked the cord from the phone and stalked to the doorway. “I’m going to call NeoArc Labs.”

Dad hopped up and trailed after her.

I sat alone with the beer in my hand, staring at the dark TV screen.



My mom and I waited in the lobby at NeoArc Labs, and I spent the time trying to convince myself I wasn’t gay.

Instead, I remembered that when I was eleven, I had this strangely intense friendship with this guy, Wick Wilson. We spent like every moment together at school and sometimes we wrestled and it got kind of weird, and I didn’t realize that maybe he was into me. And maybe I was into him.

One day, he started hanging out with a group of kids I didn’t know, and instead of talking to him about it like a rational person, I locked myself in the bathroom and cried. I didn’t know why I was crying.

“Arzner,” Mom said. Apparently, they’d called our number.

Behind bullet-proof glass, a clerk with a Betty Boop haircut said, “How can I help you?”

“My son here,” my mom said, putting on her business smile, “just got his wife assignment, except, you see, they assigned him a man.” Mom