The Risk of Us

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Selene always trusted the numbers. In a world where emotions had ceased to be gifts of destiny and were calculated probabilities, threading their way through the labyrinth of relationships had to be based on trust. It was her compass-the SoulStat system-an algorithm system which mapped every contact, every potential link, every possible connection with data, past history, and emotional compatibility scores.

In her life she could calculate everything in numbers. Every aspect of her life had been touched by this-system with regard to those career decisions, friendship and even her romantic relationships. Every person she met would yield another data point, every moment another computation and calculation. Nothing was with uncertainty, impossible to doubt or fear. It predicted what friends would bring her total happiness; which romantic relationships were worthy of her own emotional investment; and even which job in future would provide the most satisfaction for her career. The system did no mistakes.

One day, her phone buzzed replaced the silence, it was a notification from SoulStat. She clicked onto the notification tab. "Compatibility with Elias: 72%. Emotional Risk: Moderate. Potential Loss: 65%."

Reading it once more, Selene frowned. The numbers were right, but they didn't tell the whole story. Elias wasn't in her predicted circle anyway. His emotional rating wasn't what she would consider ideal. In fact, the connection was far from perfect with a 72% compatibility score again with a cautionary warning. It was always meant to be that the system drove her to higher probabilities for relationships that would provide the biggest chances for stability and emotional safety in the romantic relationship. However, in Elias's case, something was different.

Nothing was ever perfect about Elias. And that's what intrigued her.

They first greeted each other at a café on a rainy day, they both came seeking shelter as it was raining cats and dogs. With a glass of red wine in hand, he was almost finishing the last few pages of the book he was reading. She was captivated by him. She was not into the book, but she was into reading the man. His eyes were concentrated on the book, as if he was trying to get into the

book's reality and live there. When their gazes met, there was no awkwardness, just one compassionate smile, as if they had already met a thousand years ago.

Their creative game of pretending ended, and then for a while, it was simple talk. But after some time, the simple talk shifted into something deeper. Selene didn't think that there would be anyone in the world that didn't used SoulStat. But there he was, Elias who didn't use SoulStat. It was very interesting to understand his take on the system and how this thing turned human experience into a number and then into a prediction of what the person should be expecting to see and have according to the "normal" situation. These words are those that she didn't forget, "Love can't be reduced to a score."

Selene was intrigued and fascinated however she had also been skeptical. The problem is she grew up with the system. Her emotional life has been managed and frustrations had been controlled by that system all her life. So, she always believed in the data and numbers. Do you know how trustable, in this context, someone like Elias could be, who doesn't even use the system?

"I-don't-think-it-is-that-easy," she finally breathed nervously while looking down at the phone in her hand and absentmindedly playing with it. "The program was created to protect us from emotional harm. So, it's all about risk minimization."

Mino smiled softly "Maybe it's that fear inside us, the fear of wanting to avoid any kind of risk is stopping us from truly living. We are always computing and calculating data while forgetting to feel and live the life. "

Selene didn't really understand him, however, the seed had been planted. The next day arrived, and the SoulStat informed update did not match what she felt during that talk with him. As the compatibility score was only moderate, yet here she was again, seeking him out again. And again. Their connection wasn't perfect but it was imperfectly perfect and was real. And as far as she could sense it, the system did not calculate this.

The day moved on and they began interacting with each other more. With each interaction, her feelings started getting stronger but it was something that she couldn't measure. Selene would feel within each encounter that pull she could never quite describe and yet could never release. The

question lingered on. How reliable was this system? After all it had controlled of much of her life, right from friends to career and it has always been right.

One day, after they spoke for a long long time, Selene phone buzzed. A new notification appeared: "Compatibility with Elias: 72%. Emotional Stability: Low. Potential Loss: 65%."

Emotional stability.... What does this mean? Shouldn't it concern, mostly, how much they care about one another-or should negative feelings not fit into any data? Could she really ignore the system's warnings? That is there to protect her.

She did try. Still the seed of doubt had already been planted. Her encounters with Elias would only confuse her more, bringing into conflict with herself about what the system said with her vs what her heart told her. Yet here she was: Her life had been governed by data so much so that she could not compute the equation with Elias.

Then one fine evening after months of seeing each other and meeting each other, Elias dropped a bombshell.

"I'm afraid there is something I need to confess," he breathed out, sounding upset: "It's about me - everything you need to know about me."

Selene panicked looking upwards: "What do you mean?" she questioned.

There was a long pause before he continued, "I'm part of an experiment. The SoulStat isn't just an app but a study - an experiment and study on human behaviors through which it might be demonstrated that human feelings could be predicted." He continued, "I'm the guinea pig of the study. I'm a test subject."

Selene froze not knowing what to do. The confession made her head spin. An experiment? She looked him with hurt, anger and betrayal. How could he not tell her that? How could she have missed this? All connections she built with him, everything that happened between them, was actually just nothing more than a test?

"Why did you not say?" She spoke crying.

Elias sighed, "I didn't want you to feel as that you only see me as an object of numbers and hence, I didn't have the guts to disclose this matter to you for some time. However, I had to tell the truth now. I had to be honest with you. You deserve to know this. I do not know how the system manipulates but I am not here to appease your numbers. I'm here because I wanted to be here."

Selene felt a surge of emotions: she had no idea. The betrayal, the confusion, the irritation with him. Why her? How is it possible to belong to such a system which eliminates the uncertainty of love bondage?

"Do you feel like you're being manipulated?" she asked, her voice trembled.

He looked at her with regret in his face. "Maybe. But I also feel something real between us. I don't think it can be measured. Not in numbers. Not by anyone."

Selene's whole world shattered. Everything she had believed about emotional stability- the algorithm of love and predictability that made her safe-was a lie. She had spent all her life trying to mitigate risks, to avoid uncertainties, to never fully understanding the unpredictable nature of love. But the words of Elias had made her re-think her entire self.

The days followed weren't easy for her. Calm days turned into turmoil. Selene tried her best to understand her feelings, even tried to calculate the emotional return that she would be by investing emotions in Elias. The system told her that it was possibly a very high-risk relationship. But her heart felt otherwise.

She began spending time understanding how SoulStat functions. She found the system wasn't predicting emotional links, but it was perhaps nothing beyond the use of sophisticated actuarial models. The system was designed with loss prevention strategies; it used probabilistic models to forecast future emotional losses. Thousands of data derived from past romantic relationships were analyzed to develop a projected scenario about the compatibility of various factors.

However, it never accounted the human behavior. It never incorporated behavioral science. It never measured the beauty, unkindness, unpredictability of human emotions; what made them perfect and vulnerable. She was learning more and more about the fact the system was an attempt

to make love "a B" on the Excel sheet of a social scientist. But love could not be so simply measured; it was just chaos and beauty equally.

Her final decision came fewer than three days later, one cold, dark evening when she looked at what probably was the last updated notification from SoulStat in her device. "Compatibility with Elias: 90%, Emotional Stability: Guaranteed" it said. And for the first time, Selene ignored it.

"I'm so done," she murmured to herself. "I can't go on by these numbers. Love is too immense for the system to know."

It was days and now weeks, Selene quit checking the app. She did not rely on compatibility scores, emotional forecasts. She even faced the unknown where what was to be felt was meant to be; even heartbreaks were welcomed. She was now ready to risk it all.

While her career prospered, her relationships deepened, and Selene learned to live unpredictably. In the world of data, she managed to embrace her courage to embrace the love disorder.

The words of Elias lingering in her mind. She was processing. The revelation to her that their entire relationship had been a part of a state-run, involuntary, compulsory experiment by the system...that was too much for her to make sense, it was too much to absorb at all once. But another thought budged against her shock- what if the system and algorithm had been right all along?

Too many thoughts flew through her head as she remembered the years, she spent studying actuarial science in which she had studied methods for using probabilities to predict and manage risk. A perennially numerical language to her, numbers were her language. She knew the knowledge of risk management better than most people. The very idea of managing, mitigating or quantification of uncertainty by numbers was well known to her.

She then realized with Elias's confession, how deeply SoulStat had embedded itself in her life, in ways she had not even fully understood. That relationship which she had believed were made on the oil of chemistry and the emotional link was actually manipulated by a complex data-point system.

The emotions were staggering. SoulStat was not anymore just some tool to predict success chance in relationships. And it worked on predictive models that could optimize every human-to-human

interaction, not different from the way it would look like for an actuary allocating the risk portfolio for the entire corporation. By analyzing past data, current emotional state, external factors and countless variables, it could definitely forecast the probability of future loss or gains.

Her studies made Selene adept to the details of the models. They revolved around one thing – data, be it historical data, current data, or multiple sources which were combined to give a reliable forecast. She had devoted hours and days looking at actuarial models and risk exposures, and more importantly learning to update presumable, and predictable figures once something new comes to the dats or there appears extra information likely to prove the previously considered output more reliable, incorrect or inconclusive. It was a domain and probabilities of numbers that she had trusted all along. But how could she, seeing Elias in front of her, she felt the system she has trusted all her life has betrayed her.

"Elias," Selene said slowly, with a tense voice, "How much of this relationship was truly ours and how much was determined by the statistics that manipulated us?"

Elias seemed to struggle to answer this question of hers "It's more than normal. We…. We are real. What happened between us was real, Selene. However, the machine, the statistics; they are programmed to optimize how human beings relate to one another. To speculate on the risks and benefits of everything we want to accomplish. Yes I accept it was always around us, doing nothing, except altering us in the alien thinking. But it's not… not just cold calculations only. There are feelings in it. I… I know that myself."

She gazed at him, still thinking. She had been taught, over and over, that the purpose of actuarial science was to reduce uncertainty. It was to practice the ability to foresee the future with the greatest possible precision, as well as, to control risk and minimize its impact most effectively. But what has love got to do with that? Is it possible to use the same intricate models she used for her studies to predict something unpredictable and something intangible like human emotions and feelings?

She recalled all the models she read about in school that predicted outcomes based on certain conditions. In this case the target was to satisfy her desires for more on that subject. SoulStat

operated similarly, using the neural network, using the same math approach, only removing the User from the loop.

But the problem was that the algorithm was built on the idea that emotions could be predicted.The narrative value of love cannot be mapped as figures on a graph. It was such a human reaction, required against all expectation because people were meant to live risk free lives.

"Elias, you spoke of optimization in relation of our interactions?" She asked with a certainty in her tone "But does SoulStat appreciate the value of all human individuals. Are we just data and number of models for SoulStat ?"

Elias's eyes softened," We're not just a set of numbers, Selene. The system… It does not only stop at controlling us. It accesses us. However, we do have free will about how we behave and how we feel. It´s just that the system helps facilitate these choices in an attempt for them to be the right ones and not the wrong ones."

Their discussion shifted to the underlying principles of SoulStat as Elias began explaining the sophisticated actuarial models supporting the system. He spoke about the methodology used in a predictive model, which utilized the principles of actuarial risk management, emotional intelligence, and advanced machine learning techniques. The model capabilities were measured by cognitive performance in the increasingly growing 'emotional bond', which could also be broken down by subsystems. No matter what the positive factors, the risks were inevitable and should be taken into account.

"The whole philosophy of the system," Elias continued, "is that it predicts only; it creates everything." "It merely indicates where life will take us and where it is supposed to go," Elias even said, "and then despite ourselves, we drift back towards it. We begin to be swayed by our moods, by our decisions-we are acting on software and data, Selene. It's like any other action in life."

Selene listened as he spoke and she seemed a little worried about it. It's not that the system merely exists-to show him that it could predict future outcomes, but that it actually creates their future as well. The future is this system that is telling them that by using probability, outside of their conscious awarness, they have to feel bad and happy at set times or the system will do it for them.

Selene took a moment for this idea to sink in. SoulStat wasn't about love at all, but about control. It was an illusion of certainty in an uncertain world. This system claimed to be able to predict and optimize every moment of her life, but by doing so, took away all the messiness, unpredictability, and humanity that truly make life worth living.

"Is there such a world," she asked in a voice full of angriness mixed with disbelief. "Does all the choices we make and relationships we form, are supposed to be cultivated through algorithms?" "Where do we have to stand with it? Or where do I have to stand?"

Elias replied "Not everything needs to be like that. We shouldn't allow our lives to be governed by the system. We still can make choices."

Selene inhaled deeply, her mind was spiraling in different directions. She thought about all the numbers , computation, calculations and probabilities that protected her life. They promised security, stability and life without uncertainty. But those calculations were the ones that stopped her from experiencing human emotions like love. All of her life she has been focused to minimize risks that she failed to recognize feelings and emotions which can't be quantified.

The following days she spends hours rethinking her life. The way she approached her life and relationships. She felt like she has been living in a house of cards which were carefully constructed on an unstable foundation of assumptions and probabilities.

She also couldn't take the feeling that there was something very wrong trying to model emotions. The SoulStat had reduced the feelings and connection of humans to data and distributions. It reduced the real human connection. Due to the system, there was no room for messiness, unpredictability, uncertainty of life. No algorithm can predict the spark of attraction, a fling, the glances, or how a random encounter with someone can be beginning of something so beautiful.

She recalled a actuarial model which is used to calculate life expectancy. It used factors like age, gender, medical history and lifestyle to predict a person's future. The model had been producing results with minimal error. The model was a product of massive amount of data set. But even that model couldn't predict the unexpected events like accidents, sudden changes in lifestyle.

SoulStat was same, she realized trying to do the same thing. It used algorithms and data to predict the future with high accuracy. But no matter how good the system is, it couldn't account for one thing that is human behavior. Emotions and feelings couldn't be predicted with the same accuracy as mortality rates. Not everything is quantifiable.

One evening as Selene was with Elias she said in a quiet voice, "what if we lived in a world where not everything is calculated? Where everything isn't predicted?"

Elias looked at her with his hands on her cheeks, "But isn't that what we now want? Knowing future is comforting. It gives us stability and we can prepare for the worst."

Selene shook her head saying no, "But this world isn't real. It's an illusion, Elias. We aren't just data on the excel sheet. There are too many variables and things we can't account for. No model or anything can predict how love works. No any system or app can tell my feelings for you, only I can."

Elias got shocked "So you want to risk it all just to feel……. something?"

Selene eyes softened, " I want to risk it , I want to feel it. I want to be unpredictable and do things that aren't ordered by a system. I want to feel love without knowing the outcome."

Now she's seeing things differently than her whole life. She doesn't want to live in this bubble. While trying to eliminate uncertainty, she has lost something more valuable ; the freedom to choose without knowing the outcome.

She transformed gradually. She deleted the SoulStat app. It wasn't easy for her. But each day without that app telling you the predictions and probability felt like a breath of fresh year. The risk of unknown was no longer something to fear; it was something to embrace.

It wasn't long before both Elias and Selene navigated a new kind of relationship that didn't rely on data but on the unpredictable nature of human connection. They had disagreements, fights, moments of doubt they gradually overcome it without any algorithm telling them what to do. They learned to take risks.

One afternoon as they sat together at a café, Selene glanced with a smile at her lips, " I think I finally get it. Love isn't about minimizing risk, it's about embracing it together. Sometimes what you feel is more than enough."

Elias smiled back. "And sometimes, it's the uncertainty that makes life worth living."

As Selene reflected everything she had learned; about risk, about love, about limitations of data, it became clearer that love in its raw, uncalculated form was beyond prediction. The greatest risks were the ones worth taking.

In the world, where data is the bedrock of existence, the most valuable of all is time, which makes it possible to perceive uncertainty and awaken with it in the way just as the human heart does. Because, obviously even the most advanced actuarial model couldn't tell the future of a relationship, which existed in the interstices of probabilities – in the spheres of emotion and in the beauty of unknown.

The more Selene detached herself SoulStat's prediction, the more she started feeling present in her life. Every new day felt like a dream, a statement that her trust in others was far less than the one in herself. But, still sometimes she would want, the data-driven society's effects on her. She still sensed the urge of the voice of the algorithm wanting her to come back. But one thing was certain - her head was clearer, and she thought better.

She hung back and learnt how to admire the unpredictability that life had to offer. In a world without compatibility scores and risk assessments to worry about every day, Selene found that it was much easier to let her guard down and allow for the feelings without a layer of calculation. The feeling of not knowing the future was fascinating, and in weird way, liberating.

Elias was always there for her in the quiet moments of life, yet they shared no plans or ideas what the future held for them. They only felt they achieved something for themselves – freedom. Freedom from the numbers, from the forecasts, which had been forcing them to act in a certain way. In the end freedom was worth any risk.

And that, Selene realized, was the greatest leap of all.