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The Tale of Frankenstein's Average (trans. by Ari Kokko)

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The Tale of Frankenstein's Average

This story was originally published
in a book called Fairy-tales for
Children Over 18, written by
Tage Danielsson.

Translated by Ari Kokko

Dr. Frankenstein was a man of supernatural qualities. He was a statistician at the National Bureau of Standards and com-
jured effortlessly forth statistical symbols - small blue men with mystic meaning: sometimes the little man contained all the
teetotallers in the state of Georgia, other times the little man could depict all Americans voting for the Republicans, in which
case it was accompanied by another little man representing all Americans voting for the Democrats, though this little man didn't
have any head. So you see, Dr. Frankenstein really was some kind of sorcerer!

Dr. Frankenstein had for a long time kept hidden in his most secret and sheltered laboratory where he had been pattering
with mystical tables and magical formulas. He had for a long time been occupied with nothing less than the culmination of his
life's work: to scientifically create a statistical man in natural size. Meticulously he mixed all the statistical facts about the
American man in exact proportions, poured them into test-tubes and retorts, stirred, decocted the mixture, and procured
thereby a tough dough out of which he skillfully moulded a man who then lay lifeless on a table in the lab.

In another test-tube he had a mauve liquid, made up of all the statistically computed qualities and characteristics of the
American man.

"Now when I drop this liquid into the eye of the man, he should according to all calculations become alive, from a statistical
point of view," Dr. Frankenstein hissed in a voice muffled by ardor.

He dropped. The figure sat up with a drowsy look on his face.

"How are you doing?," the figure said.

"It all works!" Dr. Frankenstein exclaimed. "Phrases with high statistical frequency are consequently the first ones to be ut-
tered!"

"Well, bottoms up!," the figure said.

* * *

Dr. Frankenstein called his creature Paul-Ernest Average (PEA). Paul-Ernest was a man of medium height, with normal
physique, brown hair, and a slightly stooped walk. He was wearing a medium gray cheviot suit, a striped tie, and rather un-
polished shoes. He was fairly nice, quiet, secure, and 48% Democrat. He liked football and the Benny Hill Show, and every other
Sunday he went to Church.

Dr. Frankenstein now took Paul-Ernest Average to his normal house with three bedrooms and one and a half garage, which
had been prepared in advance in connection to Dr. Frankenstein's laboratory at the National Bureau of Standards. Paul-Ernest
Average immediately sat down in the armchair in front of the TV-set and smoked one and one third filter cigarettes.

"Now, let's get some things straight, Paul-Ernest" Dr. Frankenstein said. "I have created you out of all the means and
averages at the National Bureau of Standards, and you are constructed to always live according to what the statistics say, and
they never lie. You have a job here in a medium-sized factory nearby, you go to the movies three quarter times a week, and as
soon as I can I will make you a statistically exact wife and two and a quarter children. But remember: I am your Master and you
are to unconditionally obey my figures and formulas!"

"I'm fine. How are you, buddy?" Paul-Ernest Average answered in his statistically charming way.

For some time Paul-Ernest Average now lived according to his built-in statistics. He read 1.35 daily newspapers and was a
little bit bored, just as everyone else. But of course, it became a little bit more lively once Dr. Frankenstein had completed his
wife (who had six fingers on her left hand because of the surplus of women) and his two and a quarter children. Little Quartie
was not much of a problem, that is true, but the two others cried in accordance with the statistical averages and soiled 7.68
diapers per day.

Everything worked according to Dr. Frankenstein's calculations for some time, and statistical study groups occasionally
visited the Average's house to witness Dr. Frankenstein's miracle. Also at these occasions, Mr. and Mrs. Average behaved
quite normally, shaking everybody's hand twice, once when they came and once when they left.

"See you later, alligator" Paul-Ernest Average said.

* * *

After a few months, Dr. Frankenstein noticed a certain unrest in Paul-Ernest Average, which seemed to be more serious
than what was indicated in the tables. To begin with, he explained the irritation with the half cold Paul-Ernest suffered from
every third month, but eventually Paul-Ernest showed such signs of nervousness that Dr. Frankenstein became worried.

"Remember, Paul Ernest", Dr. Frankenstein said, "that you are under the command of my figures. If you deviate from the
pattern you also disturb the divine harmony which rules the world of statistics. Beware, Paul-Ernest!"

But Dr. Frankenstein had not taken into account the normal opposition to authority he had built in to Paul-Ernest Average.
Paul-Ernest bided his time. Finally, Dr. Frankenstein departed for a whole week, en route to the International Statistical Con-

gress for the Determination of Average Precipitation in Lombardia (ISTDAPL), which was held in Tokyo.

Now Paul-Ernest saw his chance. Over time, he had grown more and more frustrated with all the decimals and fractions he was constructed to live after. Dr. Frankenstein was caught in his own trap: he had not considered certain facts pertaining to normal human reactions versus statistical patterns of behavior. If one is intimate with one's wife 0.21 times a day, as Paul-Ernest for a long time had been, statistical proof indicates that one finally becomes rather frustrated.

That was why Paul-Ernest now rebelled against the decimals in his life. He began a Saturday night at 8 o'clock not by watching 2.6 hours of television but instead by drinking two whole beers (compared to the dictated 1.37). Thereafter he made love to his wife two whole times (an increase of 1.79 times!), took a whole bath (compared to the usual one third), smoked two pipes of Dunhill Mixture (instead of the three Marlboros) and finally went to bed without a pajama (not the prescribed 0.75 pajama). He felt rather good by the time he fell asleep.

The behavior of Paul-Ernest Average turned out to have unforeseeable consequences for the patterns of behavior for all other Americans, because Paul-Ernest was the national standard for all American life. TV polls showed all time lows, the consumption of beer increased so much that AAA had to call an emergency meeting in Boise, Idaho, sales of prophylactics boomed, and pipe smoking, bathing and sleeping naked experienced a renaissance. And when Paul-Ernest decided not to go to work the following Monday, the production of the country stopped as if by a stroke of magic. So much loafing around has never before been seen in the United States of America.

* * *

When Dr. Frankenstein came home from Tokyo he was, as statistical evidence shows most people would be, in dismay. What should he do? He could not well dispose of the Averages, because that would do it for the whole American population. He could hardly even quarrel with Paul-Ernest Average, because that would mean running the risk of provoking him, and thus all American men, to anger. And one knows what an angry American might do, not to talk about what 75 million could cause!

Dr. Frankenstein settled for the only possible solution: he talked gently with Paul-Ernest Average with compromise in mind. "Tell me, what do you want?" he said mildly.

"Just whole numbers" Paul-Ernest replied. "No decimals, just whole numbers. Rounded off to the nearest larger integer. Shoobidoo."

So if you feel like having another drink before bedtime, remember that it is thanks to Paul-Ernest Average.

Shaking Heads in Copley Square

Three,
Three piece and pin-striped vested
Minds left their lunch to
Frown.

Frown
Upon roller-footed youth skating and be-bopping to
Funk music spilling their fluid joy into the
Bricked square unaware they were being
Jiggled.

Jiggled
Back and forth by arrogant eyes which
Then
Snuggled back to the news
Content.

Uncontent
I
Frowned
And
Jiggled
The
Three.

Gregor Macdonald