

The Three Little Suits: A Fairy Tale

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Once upon a time there were three little suits: Respond, Meddle and Please. These three little suits had very strange, entangled relationships with one another. But mostly they lived together peacefully. Which was good because, without these strange, entangled relationships, they each would have starved.

Respond was a good-hearted soul, a bit simple perhaps, but he always meant well and did his best to help. An innocent easily led down any path, even the wrong one, unfortunately.

Meddle was somewhat, oh, how should I put this? Let's see. How about "vain"? Yes, that's a good word. Meddle was all about Meddle. And Please? Well, Please was all about Meddle, too.

This is how that tangled web was spun: Meddle would ask Please a riddle. It was always a riddle that Meddle didn't know the answer to. If he did know the answer, he wouldn't bother asking Please. He'd stand on a table and shout the answer so loud the King could hear him way far away in his castle. At least that's what Meddle hoped.

But for those riddles Meddle couldn't answer on his own, he would ask Please. And Please would think and think and think and eventually would come up with a clever way to solve the riddle. Please would tell Meddle of his clever plan and Meddle would always, always, always suggest ways to make the clever plan better. And Please would always, always, always agree that Meddle's suggestions were very, very clever indeed and Please would change his plan. This made Meddle very happy but usually made the plan very bad. Oftentimes, it also made the plan late and over budget. But that was OK with Meddle because, more than anything, Meddle wanted everyone, especially the King, to think he was clever. He wanted this even more than he wanted to solve the riddle. And besides, it was Please's fault whenever the plan was wrong or late or cost too much.

Please would then take the bad plan to Respond and ask him some questions. Often really stupid questions. Respond would always, always, always respond even if he didn't know the right answer to the question. Respond, after all, wanted to help. Even when he didn't understand what the question meant, he would give Please an answer. This made Please very happy but didn't really help solve the riddle. In fact, those wrong answers often made it impossible for Please to solve the riddle at all. But that was OK with Please because, more than anything, Please wanted Meddle to be happy. He wanted this even more than he wanted to solve the riddle, too.

See, when Meddle was angry, he didn't give Please any riddles, which made Please very sad. Please liked having riddles to solve. So Please never admitted he hadn't solved the riddle even when he hadn't. Please was very clever, remember? That's why Meddle asked him the riddle in the first place. So Please would take the wrong answers that Respond gave him and, being very clever indeed, he would make up a story that sounded like it was the solution to the riddle. This made Meddle very happy. For Meddle didn't really care if Please found the solution to the riddle. Meddle just wanted a good story he could tell the King.

So the three little suits lived happily, if not entirely consciously, year after year. Meddle would ask Please a riddle. Please would think of a solution to the riddle that Meddle would then ruin. And then Please would ask Respond silly questions that Respond would answer. Please would make up an interesting story to tell Meddle and Meddle would take that story to the King and pretend Meddle made it up all by himself. Everyone in the kingdom was content. Well, almost everyone.

One day something very odd happened. The King took a stroll. And on this stroll, the King happened to visit Meddle. The King, it turns out, had been listening to the Queen. The Queen told him it wasn't enough to get a good story. He needed to start finding solutions to all those riddles. So the King told Meddle he didn't care how it happened, he just needed real solutions, not just a good story with pretty charts and graphs.

Needless to say, Meddle was quite disoriented. He felt as if he'd caught an acute case of professional vertigo. But rather than call a doctor, he called Please. What were they to do? The King was destroying the delicate balance of tugs and pulls that comprised the Respond, Meddle and Please relationships. Meddle was in a pickle.

So Please being Please, that is to say, very clever, thought of a solution to this entirely different kind of riddle. Please told Meddle that there was a new way to ask Respond questions. Very scientific. Very sophisticated. It was called the Internet.

Meddle was thrilled. He could see how this might be used to assuage the Queen's, I mean King's, concerns.

The next time the King sent Meddle a riddle, Meddle called Please. Please came up with a plan. Meddle ruined it. Please executed the ruined plan on the Web, where Respond answered silly questions through his keyboard. Please made up a clever story using these Web-based data, added a few high-tech looking charts and gave it to Meddle. Meddle, stressing the state-of-the-art nature of this solution, pitched it to the King, complete with full color animated charts and graphs and professional voice-over.

The King was pleased. He had a new story for the Queen: best-of-breed data! Humongous sample sizes! Lightning-fast turnarounds! Drastically slashed costs! He didn't really care if they solved the riddle, either. After all, he planned to retire to his villa in the South of France very soon. And his son, the Prince, could always blame him in absentia if something went wrong.

And everyone lived happily ever after.



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