

Dear Fabio,

I know it's been a while since we spoke but I had to reach out. The absence of contact between us has been a necessary pain, pain which has helped with wounds of our own creation. All I ask is for your time and attention once more, you always allowed me that.

You were a boy playing on the streets of Brazil when I took my first steps into football management. Steps I never knew would lead me to you. Taking the QPR job in the summer of 2013 was my chance to mount my first steed of the managerial merry-go-round. A relative nobody on the circuit trusted with getting the hoops back into the Premier League. I could cite many reasons it didn't work out with QPR but I think we weren't compatible and met each other at the wrong time. And Anton Ferdinand's inability to clear set pieces.

I learned from my time with QPR. I grew, and I moved on. I was stronger because of the experience and after a quick 'go on holiday', I was ready to take the plunge again. Crystal Palace had achieved promotion via the playoffs and instantly parted ways with Ian Holloway. It was time to saddle up again and ride hard toward the rising sun.

As the sun rose, so did I. With the weight of 'avoid relegation' laying heavy on my inexperienced back, I battled on. I was a Premier League manager now. The minutes I took to get my coaching badges on the character creation screen had been building up to this. I wish you could have seen me back then. Young and naïve with a missing piece I was too ignorant to address. There were others. You don't sign Jay Rodriguez for £5m without feeling something. His goals were priceless in keeping us up but we both knew it wasn't a long-term relationship. I've always admired him for that.

Survival and consecutive mid-table finishes were the theme for the seasons that followed. I could not commit to anything. Yes, Barry Bannan and Adlene Guedioura marshalled the centre of the park with terrifying ease. Yes, Jay Rodriguez continued to hit 20 goals a season even into his early 30s. Yes, Jon Williams regularly ignored the advances of Arsenal to be with me but an expression of loyalty from the wrong man is never enough.

Then came Memphis Depay. He was in pain and looking for solace. He found that at Selhurst Park but also with me. I loved Memphis, as you well know because during his time with me, we both grew. We pushed each other. Fought for each other, respected each other, loved each other. From that love grew a fruit we seldom thought of in our wildest dreams, Europa League football. Little did I know, European football wouldn't be the highlight of that season. It was the summer of 2018 when I first heard your name. Even then, my heart skipped.

We met through a friend of a friend, a respected Crystal Palace scout. I knew I had to have you. A bright, dangerous Brazilian boy who curled cupid's arrow into the top corner of my heart. Nothing could keep me away from you, not even Gremio's outrageous £15mil price tag for a teenager.

Do you remember the first time we met? Surrounded by agents and representatives but there were only two of us. Two souls bound on a journey driven solely by love and the expectation of at least 6th place with a cup run. We spent that summer exchanging cute messages about contractual obligations and appearance fees; I don't think I've been happier.

The honeymoon period was in full swing and we were inseparable but I cared for you more than I had expected. When you had trouble adjusting to life in England, I was your confidant. When you weren't happy with your moderate training schedule, I was your helping hand. When you completely skied the deciding penalty against Sunderland in the League Cup quarter final, I was your support. I celebrated every one of your 44 debut season goals with you. Watching you do what you loved was a blessing, I never told you enough, but I was so proud of you.

I'm sure you remember our first real fight. It was the first time I saw your passion and how much you cared. You got mad because I signed an ageing Graziano Pelle. But like I told you then, it wasn't to make you jealous. I wanted you to shine amongst the brightest stars and also Cameron Jerome. I believe it was Friedrich Nietzsche that said, "there is always some madness in love, but there is also reason in madness". Everything I did, I did because I loved you Fabio. I hope you can see that now.

Perhaps we got caught up in the fairytale. The love triangle of my creation showed cracks. I upset Memphis; you were jealous. Through these distractions, we allowed our professional lives to become affected. I know we had no European football the following season, but you didn't have to blame yourself. Wanting to leave to punish yourself for our mistakes wasn't something I could let you do. I spent that summer convincing you and Memphis to stay. I promised you both Champions League football if you would just give me one more chance. Your infinite amount of compassion forced you to stay. I don't think I ever thanked you for that. But as one door closes, another opens. In this case it was windows, transfer windows.

January was never my favourite month. When you told me not to worry about Barcelona and that they meant nothing to you, I knew I shouldn't of listened. I knew someone else wanted you; I knew I couldn't make you stay. I was desperate, my impromptu 2-year contract extension offer proved that. You said you needed more space, but I assumed the 4-2-3-1 with a false nine

wasn't freeing you up enough; I didn't realise you meant space away from me. I tried to fight it but you were slipping through my grasp and I had to let you go.

You were gone. Everybody was talking about it and everywhere I looked I saw you with someone else. The only comfort I found in it all was that you looked happy. All I ever wanted was for you to be happy even if I was cursing the decision you were making. Alas, life goes on. I marched into my office the next day fuelled with emotion and hell-bent on replacing you only to open my door to see Memphis sitting there. He wanted to leave citing your departure as his reason. Numb and exhausted, I couldn't fight it. It defeated me. It was over.

They say when you break up with someone, disconnect from them entirely but I couldn't do that with you. I kept up with what you were doing as painful as it was. I heard you were warming the bench at Barcelona. That only added to the sorrow as I knew you weren't being appreciated like you were with me. I hated you for a while but as Martin Luther King said, "I have decided to stick with love, hate is too great a burden to bare". With you, Fabio, I'll always stick with love.

As you know, I left Crystal Palace soon after. The halls of Selhurst still echoed your name, and the emotion was too much to deal with. Do I regret going into football management? No. You showed me how to love and how it feels to commit to someone. I hope you find a home soon enough, it's the least you deserve. I want this letter to serve as a thank you. For all we went through, good and bad. For the highs of the Premier League golden boot to the lows of heartbreak. You changed my life forever. I have healed now and yet I still can't bring myself to watch Revista de La Liga.

I will love you, forever and always, Fabio.

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