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The Significance of Good and Dear Friends, Pasta, and the Number Six

by Anonymous

Summary

Garibaldi comes to several startling realizations. Six, in fact.

It only hits Michael that maybe Londo wants something else from him about a year after their first meeting. To be fair, Londo is *like that* with everyone and Michael doesn't know much about Centauri in general. And after about a year of lending him a few ducats at the gambling table, turning down alcoholic drinks, caving when Londo pesters him into at least accepting water or fruit juice, being stuck with the tab more than a few times, and listening to the guy complain and reminisce – Michael thinks he's got a pretty full picture of him.

He's lonely. He's probably an alcoholic, unless Centauri work differently than Humans. And Michael just happened to be there for Londo to latch onto. At least, that's what his initial idea of the situation is.

Really, Michael doesn't mind being Londo's 'good, dear friend,' doesn't mind the ranting, and doesn't even mind the occasional slight strain on his finances – not like he's blowing money on booze anymore (and he lives alone now, so he doesn't really need much anymore) and Londo sometimes pays him something back when he's got a streak going at the casino.

In reality, Michael thinks, he's not fooling anyone either. He's just as goddamn lonely as the Centauri ambassador – and that's as good a place to build a friendship (or, really, *acquaintanceship*) from as any.

Usually, Michael likes to finish his rounds for the day somewhere around the Zocalo. He's predictable like that. Likes his habits.

So he might occasionally bump into Londo, pretend to get harassed into sitting down with him for a bit, then go back to his quarters, cook himself some dinner, watch some cartoons, then go to bed. Sometimes he has dinner with Jeff, with or without the other command staff. Sometimes he and the guys from Security go to have a drink, which involves him laughing along and nodding and mostly eating cheap beer fries made by a Brakiri line cook who always packs the paper bucket with a little extra.

Londo is at the casino this evening – and he's losing, by the sound of his disappointed, "... *Great Maker!* No, it cannot be! *Again?!*"

Michael strolls over to the gaming table, and pretends he's not affected by the way Londo's face lights up upon seeing him.

"Garibaldi!" Londo crows exuberantly. "My good, dear friend, Mr. Garibaldi! Perhaps you can change my luck this fine evening, yes? This is my last chance!" He holds his hands out with the dice, sharp teeth on display in a wide grin. "It's a Human custom I learned today!"

"What is?"

"Blow on them! For luck!"

Michael suddenly feels a little awkward, because Londo's expectant look is mirrored by the half dozen other gambling aliens gathered around the table. It's not *super* weird, but it's a little weird. Michael is not a sleazy casino waiter in a sparkly outfit, or some high-roller's

arm-candy, for god's sake. But if he hesitates any more, or refuses, he'll make it even weirder, and, besides, Londo is definitely alien enough not to know how weird the vibe is. That's how he justifies leaning forward and giving a quick puff of air to the dice in Londo's cupped hands.

Just for a second, when he looks back up, Londo's gaze on him is hawklike.

And then he's laughing and grinning and throwing the dice – then cheering as they land in the exact configuration he needs. He throws an arm around Michael's shoulders. "You have won me and yourself a drink! I shall try my luck no further, I have decided."

"I don't drink, Londo," comes the well-repeated response. It's almost like a ritual at this point, the correct call-and-response that makes the basis of their 'good and dear' friendship.

"Of course, of course!" The smell of alcohol on Londo's breath isn't as strong as it is most nights, but it's still there. Michael momentarily considers the idea that even Londo's mouthwash is alcoholic, but then decides that's a bit mean, and continues to allow himself to be steered towards the bar.

"Kat! The usual for myself and my friend!" calls Londo. "And you may keep the change!"

"A good night, I see, Ambassador," the bartender smiles.

"Improving! In no small part due to the luck of Mr. Garibaldi." Londo turns to him. "Your arrival always changes my fortunes, it seems – for better or for worse."

"You're just easily distracted, Londo," Michael shrugs. "You don't keep your head in the game. Sometimes it helps, sometimes it hurts."

"Yes..." Londo agrees, then wags a finger at him in amused mock-reproval. "You can be *very* distracting."

Michael gives him a sideways look, but Londo has already turned away and is accepting the two virgin fruit drinks that Michael can never quite recall the name of.

"*Valtoo*," Londo clinks their glasses together and takes a generous sip.

"Cheers," Michael echoes. It suddenly hits him how far he's come from Mars, sharing froo-froo alien drinks with a Centauri ambassador who, he slowly realizes, looks like he wants to *eat* him or something. Michael blinks. That's what Londo usually looks like at him, though. Maybe he's just hungry. Maybe they're both hungry.

Maybe it's been about a year and a half since he's been properly laid and it's finally hitting him.

"Christ," he mutters, and sips the cocktail again.

"Hm?"

"Nothing. What's this stuff called again?"

"*Vrejal.*' It's made from the same fruit used in the making of *jala*, but instead of being fermented, it is..." he waves a hand, "Not particularly stimulating."

"Yeah?"

"We had a whole orchard of them on my family estate, when I was young. I would climb the trees to hide from my tutors and eat the fruit for hours until my stomach hurt and I was too full to climb down again."

Michael laughs. He can just *see* a tiny Londo ditching class. "I used to ditch class as a kid too," he confesses. "Drove the old man crazy. Me and a couple of the neighborhood kids would go and play baseball behind the old shuttlebay, right by where the general store was, so we could get a can of pop afterwards."

"You must demonstrate for me this 'baseball,' one day," Londo says. "It is a sport, yes? I have seen pictures – a uniform of very tight stripey pants."

Michael snorts. "Believe me, you don't want to see me in those."

"Oh, but I *do*! And you hit things with a stick, yes? A show of combat prowess!"

"It's called a bat. And it's mostly about hand-eye coordination..." Michael trails off, Londo's demand to see him in baseball pants suddenly registering. He squints at Londo. "*What?*"

"What?"

"Uh, nothing." Michael rubs his forehead. What the hell?

"I used to be a sportsman too, you know," Londo says, puffing up and preening like a peacock. "The second-best sword in the *Couro Prido*!"

"Sword? You did fencing?"

"Dueling!"

"*Dueling?*"

"A proud, old tradition of the Northern Continent noblemen," Londo says airily. "Hardly anyone kills each other anymore."

"Sounds reassuring."

He laughs. "Ah, in those shining old days, the things I could do with a sword..." His gaze sharpens slightly again, a perceptive, eagle-eyed stare, and his voice lowers. "Though, my skills in sparring with *many* swords have not dulled, I assure you."

It sounds like a threat. But completely out of place. And when his gaze drops suggestively down to Michael's mouth, Michael swallows. No fucking way. What the *hell*?

"Uh," he finds himself saying intelligently. "Right. Yeah?"

Londo takes this as encouragement, and lays a hand on Michael's arm that rests between them on the bar. It's a perfectly normal thing for him to do, but Michael is suddenly so intensely aware of it that the gentle touch nearly *hurts*. "You see, my dear friend," Londo continues, "I fear I have misled you. And tonight, I intend to amend this."

"Yeah?" Michael repeats, throat dry.

"Centauri Prime has several dialects, but one, standard language. Once, of course, as with many *early* civilizations, there used to be many – but by Imperial decree, more than five hundred years ago, the one language now called simply 'Centauri' was born, in order to further unify our people. However, it is a very complex language. Some words and concepts are very difficult to translate."

"Thanks for the history lesson, Londo," Michael snorts, gathering himself again during the time afforded to him by Londo's seemingly irrelevant explanation. "So, what's the point – us puny Humans can't fathom the epic depths of Centauri linguistics?"

Londo laughs. "It is rare, but possible! But that is not my point. On your world, what does the word 'friend' mean? It has but one meaning, yes?"

"Yeah. Like, 'buddy.' 'Pal.' ...'Chum.'" Michael winces at the words coming out of his own mouth.

"Yes, we have this too. Yet, among Centauri, there is another meaning, among others, to that word," Londo's voice lowers, and his hand slides a little further up Michael's arm. Michael can't help but watch the way pink, and blue, and orange lights glint off of Londo's fangs and in his twinkling eyes. "A more... Intimate meaning."

"Huh."

"Like that of soldiers, spending the last night before a battle. Or companions of youth discovering themselves and one another. Even that of old comrades who can find comfort in mutual warmth. You understand, yes?"

The hand on his arm is squeezing very gently, but Michael feels as though it's around his throat, or something. It's like his skin itches with anticipation. It has been *way* too long. He needs to get a grip, this is *Londo*, for fuck's sake. The Centauri Ambassador. The guy whose unconscious body Michael has had to drag out of the casino on more than one occasion.

He accidentally bites the inside of his own mouth. Fuckbuddies. The word is *fuckbuddies*. "Ow. Yeah. I, uh, get it." He calls the shaky feeling rising in his stomach 'panic,' but he's lying to himself. "... You wanna get something to eat?"

Londo sees right through him. "By all means, Mr. Garibaldi! Will you be cooking tonight, or shall I try my hand at reheating yesterday's dinner in my quarters?"

"You like pasta?"

"What's that?"

"Noodles in sauce."

"Oh! I *see*," Londo says with such a gleeful leer that Michael momentarily wonders whether he's just inadvertently made some insanely inappropriate Centauri cultural reference. "Please, lead on!"

Of course, just for the extra layer of mindfuck, going back to Michael's quarters feels almost normal. Londo is ranting about the 'good old days' of the *Couro Prido*, and obliquely making reference to some fellow duelist he may have had a *thing* with, and Michael can't help laughing at the jokes and feeling the normal, regular warmth of Londo's company.

Once inside, Londo turns to him, puts a hand on his waist and stares him down. "Now, you said, 'noodles in sauce'?" he repeats.

"Yeah," Michael says, pulling his jacket off and hanging it up, deliberately trying to pretend like the suddenly charged air isn't stretching his lungs to bursting. "Should take about six minutes."

"*Really?*" Londo says, the one, single word positively dripping with sleaze and anticipation.

Michael shuts his mouth. And in order to regain some desperate, slipping control, he shuts Londo's mouth too, backing him against the wall, hands planted firmly on Londo's shoulders.

Londo makes a strange, almost *chirping* noise in the back of his throat and grips Michael's sides, pulling him closer. His fangs scrape and catch on Michael's bottom lip as they pull apart for a few breaths.

Before Londo can say anything again, Michael kisses him once more. It has been way too long since anything like this. He presses forward, one leg between Londo's legs, and Londo pushes his own thigh up against him, making him nearly *ache*. Londo's hands slide down to his hips and untuck his shirt from his pants, reaching up under to touch skin. His hands are cool and their slight pressure over his stomach and waist feels somehow magnified by the temperature difference. Michael's breath catches in his throat and he pulls back.

"Why, Mr. Garibaldi! I am starting to suspect you did not invite me here to cook for me," Londo says with a mischievous grin. "Shall I go hungry?"

Michael realizes six things. One: he's completely out of his depth in the sexy banter department. Two: that's probably ok, since Londo can talk enough for two. Three: if he causes a diplomatic incident by fucking the Centauri ambassador, Jeff will never let him live it down. Four: he has no idea how to fuck a Centauri guy, because now that he's got his thigh pressed up against Londo's crotch, he realizes that there's literally nothing there. Just bone. And not in the sexy way. Five: something under Londo's shirt and waistcoat is *moving*. Six: he is out of his depth in *everything*, not just sexy banter, but despite it all, he's gonna go for it anyway. The old man didn't raise no quitter.

Of course, when Londo steps forward, unbuttons and throws off his waistcoat, pulls at the ties to his billowy white shirt to let it fall from his shoulders and pool around his waist – Michael realizes six *more* things about Centauri anatomy.

"Oh, fuck," he says. "What, uh- Are those your...?"

He tries not to question the fact that he gets so hard he's dizzy when he's this incredibly confused.

"Don't worry," Londo says reassuringly, laying a gentle hand over the tented front of Michael's regulation trousers, and popping the button open. "I know Humans have only one, but you mustn't feel badly about this."

"I *don't*," Michael says weakly, a little defensive.

"Come, let us leave the entryway, hm?" Londo kisses him again, taking him by the arms and guiding him towards the bed in the adjoining room, and nudging him down on it. "Close your eyes," comes his gentle voice, and Michael figures, fuck it, he may as well. He usually *hates* being told what to do, but he tries to think of any time someone tried that with him in bed and comes up blank. Shit, he's finding all *sorts* of things out about himself today.

He looks up at Londo, whose eyes are glinting at him in the half-light coming from the living room, and shuts his eyes.

A tentacle winding around his middle, slipping down past the waistband of his unbuttoned pants to lay against his inner thigh, under his clothes makes him gasp. His skin is on fire.

Michael sort of gets why Londo had him close his eyes – it's a lot easier to get used to being touched by something alien if you can't see it. He tries not to think about the fact that Londo can see right through him – how much he doesn't want to want.

The points of contact, sliding touches of all six tentacles making their way under his clothes make Michael feel like he's drowning, overwhelmed by feeling, and Londo hasn't even gotten to his dick yet. Hell, he hasn't even properly taken his clothes off yet. "I'm getting used to it," he grunts out, "Let's get on with it, Londo."

His eyes snap open when the bed creaks and Londo half-kneels between his spread legs, braced on one arm. "I very much doubt that," Londo tells him, and the bastard is obviously amused. "But, as you wish..."

Michael pulls his undershirt off over his head and reaches out for a tentacle resting against his chest.

He gives the triangular head a cautious stroke with a crooked knuckle. The response is a little gasp from Londo and a very slight wriggle from all appendages.

Londo's rings make slight indents in the skin of Michael's jaw as he grips it a little more forcefully to give him a rough, encouraging kiss.

Michael reaches up, under Londo's shirt, meaning to touch his skin and pull him down a little closer, but when his questing fingers reach a divot on the side of Londo's back, from which the long, thin shaft of a tentacle emerges, the sound Londo makes against Michael's chin, slipping out of the kiss, definitely means he did something right.

In retaliation, the tentacle down his pants is joined by two more, which begin to wind themselves around his dick, making Michael think of pythons strangling their prey. Probably not as tightly as that, though. "*Fuck*," he says.

Encouraged, Michael finds another divot on the other side and presses a finger against it. He is surprised to find it give way slightly and for his fingertip to slip in.

The sudden stifled groan Londo makes gives him a moment of pause.

"That's good, right?"

"That's rather indecent," Londo says raggedly, pulling away from another intense kiss. "You are *sure* you've not done this before, hm?"

"Positive," Michael pants. Whatever he's doing is probably kind of kinky by Centauri standards if he has to guess. Not that whatever Londo is doing to him is any different. The three tentacles winding around in his pants, pulling up and down, triangular heads pressed against his inner thighs are driving him to distraction. The remaining three tentacles writhing between them rub against his chest and stomach. "*You have*," he adds, mildly accusatory.

"It's a big station," Londo says. "You'd be surprised who wants to keep a lonely old diplomat some company."

In this case, it turns out that nobody is as surprised as Michael is, by this turn of events. Not like he'd *planned* to spend his Tuesday night fucking with tentacles. Tentacles attached to probably the last guy he'd expected in his bed.

Londo leans down to kiss him again, quietly laughing at whatever expression must be on Michael's face.

He's pretty sure it hasn't been all that long, but he's already close. His pants aren't even all the way off, just barely pushed down. *Fuck*.

"Whoa, whoa, hey, cool it-" he breathes. "I won't last much longer."

"You are close, yes?"

"Yeah..."

"Good."

The tentacles winding around his body suddenly tighten, bringing them closer. He can feel them, digging into the flesh of his middle and thighs, almost restraining him as they glide back and forth across his skin and around his dick. The heat and pressure in the pit of his stomach is building, and though he tries to hold out, he doesn't know how long he'll be, at this rate.

Michael runs his hands up and down Londo's back – muscle, flesh, the bases of tentacles and the slits they emerge from, all giving way under his questing fingers.

A gasp, a hot exhalation of air and the scrape of sharp teeth against the side of his neck and without realizing it, he tilts his head back, as though he *wants* to be bitten. Does he? He never finds out.

He comes so hard he sees white for a second, fingers digging into Londo's back reflexively – hard enough for Londo to make a strange noise in the back of his throat and all his tentacles to tighten around Michael to the point of near-pain, before retracting slowly.

They move apart gingerly, quietly, both catching their breath. Michael looks down and sees a small triangular bruise on his lower abdomen – almost like a hickey. He probably has five more elsewhere.

"Fuck," he breathes. What the hell. "I'm taking a shower," he mutters, and nearly stumbles to the bathroom, not looking at anything in particular.

The vibe shower takes away the heavy, sticky feeling – and a change of clothes has him almost feeling like himself. His head is still swimming with surprise – at himself, at Londo, at the whole situation – fears and regrets battling with the warm, pleased feeling of the post-orgasm haze.

When he comes out of the bathroom, he doesn't know what to expect, but the lights are on and Londo seems to have mostly re-dressed. His shirt is not fully laced up, and his waistcoat is back on, but unbuttoned – he's made himself decent. He lounges on the bed, looking critically up at the picture above the headboard.

Michael had suspected Londo would be a pillow-talker. Not that he'd thought much about Londo after sex (or before or during, for that matter) but it seemed right, and Londo does not disappoint.

"I am very glad you did not turn the lights on while we enjoyed each other's company," he says. "That thing above the bed would have given me unending nightmares."

Michael covers his face, sitting down on the edge of the bed. He has been single and living like a monk for way too long – nobody's been in his quarters but him, and it hadn't even registered until now what kind of decor he has. "Right. Yeah. Uh. It's a cartoon."

Londo hums, eyes closed, stretching like a cat. "By all the gods, we should've done this sooner... To think that only *now* you understand me. After a year."

Michael looks up. "So, let me get this straight. You've been hitting on me for a year, and I don't notice until *today*?"

"I didn't realize I had to *seduce* you to be understood..." Londo gives a little shrug and cocks his head to the side. "Cultural differences must be overcome, I suppose. That's why I am an ambassador."

"To fuck aliens?" Michael can't help laughing.

"Oh, no! That's just, what do you call it? A *bonus*!" Londo cackles.

He had been seduced. It's kind of disturbing how easy it must've been for Londo, how much Michael just... *Wanted*. He guesses it's just what loneliness does to a person.

"You need the shower?"

"The one in my own quarters will be more suitable, I think," Londo says, making a face. "Do you even have water?"

"I *can* if I want to," Michael says defensively. There is a time limit, unfortunately.

"No matter. Mine is far more comfortable." Londo's eyes sparkle. "Perhaps we can make use of it sometime. I have had a proper Centauri bath installed, you know. Large enough for at least three."

Michael tries to imagine himself, Londo, and one of those cute dancing girls Londo usually goes for, all sitting in some ancient, claw-footed tub he's seen in vids. He snorts. "Don't think so," he says. "Three's a crowd."

"Not for Centauri."

"...Right."

Londo's married, isn't he? Did he just sleep with a married man? Do Centauri wives get pissed off about that kind of thing? Michael rubs his forehead.

"Listen, I've got work in the morning," he says, once he looks up and catches a glimpse of the chronometer.

"Of course." Londo leans over and gives him a casual kiss on the cheek as he rises from the bed. "Now, where did I leave my coat..."

Something in the air is off. Michael can almost taste it – he's done something wrong, but he's not quite sure what, and isn't quite sure how to ask, without assuming too much. This is why he shouldn't've taken Londo up on his intentions. This awkwardness. The anxiety. Michael knows he fucks everything up eventually – Jeff being the only damn exception, and that's because of the distance between them: commander and subordinate.

Michael finds the coat on the floor. "Here you go," he says, then impulsively holds it up for Londo to dress into, like some weird parody of domestic bliss.

"You're afraid of something, Mr. Garibaldi," Londo notices mildly.

"Yeah, if someone sees you sneaking out of my room," he tries to joke. "I feel like I'm sixteen again and snuck a girl into my room while my dad was asleep downstairs."

Londo laughs, slipping into his coat. "Ah, another thing common to both our people, it seems."

Michael steps back.

"You are a secretive man, Mr. Garibaldi – perhaps not so strange for someone with a upright reputation. It is not my style, but I can appreciate a need for discretion. Nothing need change."

"Hey, I didn't mean it like *that*." Michael struggles to say *anything* that makes a damn shred of sense. "I'm-"

Is he sorry? Is he ready for this to become a thing, *really*? Is he just plain terrified of whatever the hell is going on here?

"No, I understand," Londo says, a little more softly. "You are a man of habit, are you not?" He winks. "Perhaps we can form new ones, but if it is not to be..." He shrugs. "Then there is still my good and dear friend Mr. Garibaldi who always has a kind word. There are worse things, no?"

Michael tries to say something, but Londo has already gone.

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