

## Sooner or Later

by Lynne C.

**Rating:** PG-13

**Disclaimer:** It's all Joss' – I worship at the altar of his genius, and acknowledge that he owns all these folks and everything that they do and say.

**Setting/Spoilers:** post-*Damage* (AtS 5.11)

**Summary:** Spike doesn't figure Andrew can keep his secret, but can't seem to do anything about it.

**Acknowledgements:** Thanks to my talented beta reader, [Xionin](http://www.beautiful-freak.com) (www.beautiful-freak.com), whose own work is MORE than worth your time. Go look at it when you're done here!! The dialogue from *Damage* was taken from [Buffyworld.com](http://www.buffyworld.com) ([http://www.buffyworld.com/angel/season5/transcripts/5x11\\_tran.php](http://www.buffyworld.com/angel/season5/transcripts/5x11_tran.php)).

“Wait a minute. She doesn't know you're alive, does she?”

“I don't think so. I mean... I don't know. Does she?”

“No. N-no. She can't. I mean... I—I would've heard about it. We would've had a conference call... Why haven't you told her?”

“ ‘Hello, Buffy. It's Spike. I didn't burn up like you thought. How are things?’ ”

“Uh...do you want me to tell her? 'Cause I—I'm really good with those...uh, delicate personal— “

“No. Don't tell her. I'll take care of it.”

“Got it. You're a loner... playin' it cucumber, as in ‘cool as a...’ ”

“Just keep your mouth shut.”

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Ever since he'd been re-corporealized, he'd been turning the question over in his mind, as to how and when and where to contact Buffy. He'd come pretty close to getting on that boat, and just going to her. But the more he thought about it... The trouble wasn't so much his fear that the real thing wouldn't live up to the scenarios he'd worked out in his imagination – but that he couldn't even conceive a picture of how it might go. And he had a pretty good imagination. After all, **he** could barely believe it and it was all happening to him!

So, he'd decided to just let things ride for a bit; not precipitate anything. Put her out of his mind, as best he could.

*Riiiiight, just put her right out of your mind – like giving a cat the boot before bedtime. Sure...* He knew he could just as easily reverse the earth's rotation. She'd never be out of his mind, not if he lived a millennium.

But now, one of the Scooby circle knew that he was back. Eventually, Andrew was bound to blurt it out. He probably wouldn't mean to, he'd just start going on about how gallantly he'd engineered Dana's retrieval, and before he knew it, he'd be recounting details of Spike's presence and involvement in the whole episode, and possibly the disgustingness of his de- ... handification (?). *Is there a word for that? Probably not.* Hell, the boy'd probably claim he'd been the one to put Spike back together!

*Bugger!* He'd have to decide something sooner or later...but not today.

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*Dear Buffy,*

He sat hunched over the table in the kitchen of the place he slept. He couldn't really think of it as **his** apartment. Too much odd about that Doyle bloke to trust the whole setup. He was still considering the roof as temporary.

And, he was having no luck coming up with what to write.

*How's Rome these days? Remember to throw your pence in Trevi Fountain? Oh, by the way, I'm available to have a gap at the Eurovamps, if you'll have me?*

He wadded the page up and sidearmed it into the far corner of what passed for a sitting room.

Sooner or later...but not today.

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It had seemed like a simple enough task. Wait for sundown, find a payphone, ask for help, talk to Buffy. Done.

After a bit of looking, he found a much grafitti-ed phone mounted outside of a run-down convenience store. He checked the coin return for spare change (there was none), draped his arm across the top, leaned against the side, crossed one leg in front of the other in a pretense of nonchalance, grabbed the handset, and dialed "0". After a long pause, an excessively cheerful voice chirped in his ear, "Dialcom operator, how may I help you?"

"Yeh, I'd like to make a long distance call."

"Thank you, sir. If you give me the area code and telephone number I can put the call through, and tell you how many coins to deposit."

"Well, thing is, I don't know the number. You'll need to find it for me."

"I'm sorry sir, I'm the operator for the pay telephone company that owns the unit you are using. I'm not able to provide directory assistance services. If you call 1+the area code you're trying to reach+555-1212, long distance information can look up your number."

"But I don't know the area code. Can you at least tell me that?"

"I can do that, sir. Please tell me the city and state?"

"Rome."

"Is that Rome, New York, sir?"

"No, Rome, like where the bloody Pope lives."

"Rome, Italy, sir?"

The perkiness of those "sirs" was beginning to get on Spike's nerves. He took a deep breath before replying, "Yesss...Rome, Italy."

“In that case, sir, you’ll need to dial ‘00’ for a long distance operator.”

“Right. Well then, thanks.”

He hung up and tried again.

“International operator. Can I help you?” This one sounded bored, with a hint of a New York accent. Union, no doubt, and just counting the minutes to her next smoke break.

“Yeh, I need to make a call to Rome, Italy.”

“Let me look up the country and city codes for you, please hol--.” The musak began before she’d even finished her sentence. Spike drummed his fingers. A smoke was sounding pretty good right now. He fumbled in his duster pocket and had just lit up and re-draped himself over the phone when the operator returned. “That’s country code 39, city code 6.”

“Right. So, I dial 1-3-9-6 and then—“

“No, you dial 011 for international access first, then 39, then 6, then the phone number in Rome that you want.”

“Okay, so 011-39-6...but I also need to get the number I want. I don’t know it.”

“Uh-huh...well, I can attempt to get that number. You’re calling from a pay phone?”

“Yeh.”

“Please deposit \$3.50, and I can try to find the number you want.”

“I have one of those calling card-amabobs.”

“Well, then you’ll need to call the customer service number on your calling card and they can put you through and charge it direct to the card.”

Spike leaned his head back against the plate glass storefront while one booted heel vented his growing frustration on the wall below the window. He gritted his teeth but managed to hold on to his temper. “Fine...I’ll try them.”

“Thanks and have a nice d--.”

He pulled the card out of the pocket of his jeans. He’d nicked it along with the wallet of a would-be vamp snack he’d saved a few days before. Using some of the cash inside, he’d mailed the rest of the wallet back to its owner, but kept the phone card for this purpose. *Scant payment for saving the git’s life. Idiots, walking about in dark alleys at all hours of the night....*

He punched in the toll-free number printed on the back of the phone card with a bit more force than was strictly necessary, the smouldering cigarette between his fingers tracing runes of smoke in the air as his hand moved over the keypad.

This time the operator was male. “MCT Call Pass Services, how can I help you.”

“Look here, Skippy, I’m trying to make a call to Rome, the one in Italy, and no one seems to be able to help me out. I’m banking on third try being the charm here. Otherwise, I just might not be responsible for what I do.”

“I see...,” the voice replied warily. “Well...okay then. If you can give me the number, I can connect you.”

“That’s part of the trouble, see...I just rang off with an ever so helpful long distance operator, who said she couldn’t get me the number until I put some money in this bloody call box. I told her I had your card, so she said to call you. Now, I’m getting’ impatient, and I’m feelin’ pretty capable of crawling through this phone line, if that’s what it takes, to make it happen.”

“Well...I see...” Skippy seemed to have an extensive vocabulary. The silence on the line lengthened until Spike began to wonder if he’d been disconnected. An eruption of fury was averted however, when the fellow cleared his throat nervously and finally continued, “I’m not supposed to do it this way, but since you’ve already gotten the run-around, I’ll put you on hold, call the long distance operator back myself, and get either the number of the party you’d like, or for information in Italy. Why don’t you give me the card number and PIN, so I can charge the cost to the card, and then patch you through?”

Spike felt his frustration begin to dissipate, now that he seemed to be making headway. *Funny how threats just always seem to make people more cooperative.*

He read the numbers off the bit of plastic, provided the name Summers-comma-Buffy, then settled back to wait, taking several deep soothing draws on his cigarette, and trying not to count the tink-tink-tinks of a moth battering itself against the yellowed glass dome of a light fixture mounted a foot or so above the payphone.

Finally the young man came back on the line, explaining that his database couldn’t locate a Buffy Summers in Italy, but that it wasn’t updated particularly often. “I’ll put you through to local information in Rome, and you can see if they can find the number for you.”

“Fine!” He dropped the butt of his cigarette and ground it out with his toe. He crossed his arms. He walked around to the other side of the phone, and gave the wall on that side a couple of new scuff marks. He uncrossed his arms. He was about to meander back to his original position, when the line finally picked up again.

“Pronto! Che numero?”

“Parliamo l’inglese?”

“Si, I speek a leetle...the numero you looking?”

“The last name is Summers, Buffy Summers, or maybe just B. Summers.” He was just a step below yelling into the phone, in the vain hope that an increase in volume would make the language more comprehensible to the Italian operator.

“You spella the name?”

“S – U – M – M – E – R – S, Buffy”

“S – U – N – N –”

“No, you nit, M – M ... M like in money, lira...!”

“S – U – M – L –”

“No, NO! No L...two M’s.

“S – U – M – M – E – R – S?”

“Yes!” The relief that poured through Spike at this minor triumph was rudely interrupted by the electronic announcement that he had “one minute remaining on your MCT Call Pass.”

“SHITE!!”

“Signore?! Che? Eh, what is...you are still here, eh?” Intending to holler at the electronic voice, he was, in fact, berating the very confused woman in Rome.

“Sorry...Scusi! My calling card’s about to run out of credit. Can we hurry this up a bit?”

“Eh, si, si.....Is Summers, Bunny?”

“No, not Bunny...Buffy! BUFFY!! B – U – F – F – Y.”

“Name is with two S, like the Summers?”

Spike was becoming convinced that Psycho Slayer’s work on him had been less painful than this project had become. “NO, IT’S A SODDIN’ F – LIKE FLORENCE, eh, Firenze!!”

“Si...un momento. I see no name like how you say. There is S – O – M – M – E – R – S, with just a B...this is maybe person you --”

“Yes, yes, just give me the number!!” But he was talking to himself. The line had clicked dead. Spike roared in frustration as he beat the receiver of the pay phone against the side of the box, prompting a young mother pushing a stroller to cross to the other side of the street.

He still didn’t know what he’d planned say to her, but he was hoping that perhaps hearing her voice would help him figure it out. Or, if not...hoping to just hear her voice.

He might as well have saved himself the trouble. Evidently, today was not the day either.

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“So y’see, Mate...’s like Fate ‘erself’s again’ me...prolly shouldn’t ev’n find the bird, sh’s got ‘er a life, don’t need me bollocksing ‘t up fer ‘er...‘er ‘n’ the lil’bit...’s all I ev’r do, ‘s bollocksup ev’r’tin’ I try....”

The bartender had clearly long since quit caring about Spike’s tale of woe, and understood very little of it, save that there was a girl, and she was overseas, and he couldn’t seem to contact her. For some reason. And that he seemed ambivalent about whether he should, except that being unable seemed make him want to. Or something. “Look buddy, you’ve had enough. I’m going to have to cut you off. Want me to call you a cab?”

“Wassat? Cab? Nahhh, don’ need a cab. Jus’ fin’ me a nice cozy alley t’fall down in...think how t’ tell’er t’morrow.” And he lurched to his feet, and staggered out the door, muttering how “t’morrow I’ll figger ‘t out. Not t’day....”

The bartender watched him go, absently wiping down the countertop, not entirely unmoved by the obvious pain he’d spent the last several hours witnessing. Maybe the girl’d left him because he drank too much, or ran around, or was some other sort of jerk. Then again, he’d heard enough sob stories to think this one might fall in the other category – of people who really cared about each other, but their timing was always wrong, or their families made trouble for them, or that in spite of their best efforts, they just couldn’t seem to make it work. He’d run into those every once in a while. Those were the sad ones.

He sighed, and began to rack clean glasses. He paused though, glancing at the clock. After a brief internal debate, he decided it wasn't too late for this phone call. He pulled out his cell, turned his back to the few patrons seated at tables, and hit a speed dial button.

A sleepy voice answered on the fourth ring.

"Heya, sweetie. Sorry to wake you up, but I wanted to tell you I love you."

"Love you too, baby...what's brought this on at..." he could almost see her squinting at the clock radio across from their bed, and he smiled, "one-thirteen in the morning?"

"Eh, just some guy in here all night, breaking his heart over his girl. Made me grateful to have you...to not be in his Doc Martins...you go back to sleep and I'll be home in a couple of hours."

"Mmmmm...", there was an obvious smile in her voice, "m'kay. Wake me up when you get here?"

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*Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow  
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day  
To the last syllable of recorded time  
~ Macbeth*

To be continued?

I don't know yet. It depends upon what the Big Man contrives over the rest of the season. Maybe there's a good opening for a follow up, and maybe there isn't. I'll decide sooner or later, but not today...

~ Lynne C. ~