

# Then and Now

By

Michael W. Kramer

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## Synopsis:

Dennis, a married, middle-aged, semi-professional theater manager, uses the internet to contact an old high school girl friend, Cathy, now a married doctor who runs a clinic. As they begin exchanging emails and then phone calls, memories of their unfulfilled love are revealed through a series of dreams and flashbacks. These memories and dissatisfaction with their current jobs and marriages lead them to secretly meet. When they meet, they instead rediscover their love and commitment for their spouses. However, when Dennis's wife, Bonnie, discovers his rendezvous, their marriage teeters on the verge of collapse.

## Characters:

- Dennis Larson: A 50ish year old manager of a semi-professional theater, married for over 25 years with grown children and discontent with his life, searches for the passions of his youth.
- Bonnie Larson: His wife, a 50ish year old elementary school teacher, committed to her career, finds little time to express the love she once felt for Dennis.
- Cathy Reisenbecker: A 50ish year old doctor desires more from her life than managing a clinic rather than treating patients, and the prospects of a commuter marriage.
- Bill Forester: Her husband, a 50ish year old owner of a failing business, hungers for success like his wife's, even if it means living a commuter marriage.
- Young Dennis: The 16-20 year old theater student Dennis once was.
- Young Cathy: The 16-20 year old science and medical student Cathy once was.

Setting: Various Midwest locations during the early 1970's and the present

## Stage Set:

*The set includes a large screen in the middle of the stage. Prior to the opening scene it shows a popup ad of Classmates.com or a similar "find your old high school friends" webpage. At appropriate times during the play various web pages appear and email messages are typed and displayed on the screen. These messages appear in bold italics in the script. These email messages should appear so that the audience can read along, but for the benefit of the visually impaired, recorded messages by the appropriate actors should be played with the messages. Ideally, the received messages should appear complete. The messages that are being written should appear one word at a time. During the rest of the time, the screen should be blank.*

*There are three main acting areas. Downstage right suggests an office—a desk with a computer on top, a couple chairs, and a bookcase. Downstage left is a doorway, a front door. These two areas should be on raised platforms to provide some definition of their space. Other suggestions*

*of settings are rolled or carried into center stage. These consist primarily of the suggestion of a dorm room/bachelor pad, two overlapping kitchens, and the suggestion of hotel rooms.*

Sample Dialogue from:

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From the Second Act:

*(The lights come up on the doorway down left. YDENNIS and YCATHY enter holding hands initially.)*

I had a good time. YCATHY:

Me, too. Sorry the movie wasn't any better. YDENNIS:

It was okay. I mean, I liked it okay. YCATHY

So. YDENNIS:

So. YCATHY:

Can I call you tomorrow? YDENNIS:

Sure. YCATHY:

Good. YDENNIS:

You called me everyday this week. YCATHY:

Yeah, I guess I did. So. YDENNIS:

So. YCATHY:

Well. Good night. YDENNIS:

*(They hug somewhat awkwardly.)*

YCATHY:

Good night.

*(Dennis considers a kiss, but starts to walk away. Stops and returns.)*

YDENNIS:

Did I tell you I get the car next Friday, too?

YCATHY:

Yeah. You mentioned it.

YDENNIS:

So. Would you, um, would you like to do something again? I don't know what, maybe another movie, a better movie.

YCATHY:

Like a second date.

YDENNIS:

We don't have to call it that.

YCATHY:

Okay.

YDENNIS:

But we can, we can call it our second date, if you want to.

YCATHY:

Whatever we call it, yeah, I'd like to do something. With you.

YDENNIS:

Next Friday.

YCATHY:

Yeah. Next Friday.

YDENNIS:

So.

YCATHY:

So.

YDENNIS:

See you in school on Monday.

YCATHY:

Unless you call tomorrow first.

YDENNIS

Yeah. I might do that.

I'd like that.

YCATHY:

Okay. Well, good night.

YDENNIS:

Good night.

YCATHY:

*(YDENNIS exits looking invigorated. YCATHY seems a bit disappointed or confused. Lights switch to center stage and the same hotel room as earlier appears center stage. Dennis is standing in the middle as Cathy enters.)*

I almost can't believe you came.

DENNIS:

I almost didn't.

CATHY:

I almost lost my nerve three times.

DENNIS:

Me, too. But I didn't.

CATHY:

I'm glad you came. I've . . . this is like . . . finally. . .after all these years.

DENNIS:

It's been a long time.

CATHY:

You look just like I remember, only better.

DENNIS:

Thank you. You do, too.

CATHY:

God, I feel like I'm sixteen again. I can't think of a thing to say.

DENNIS:

*(They embrace passionately. As they are about to kiss for the first time, Cathy's cell phone rings. She interrupts the passion and puts her finger to his lips as before.)*

Just a minute. I need to take care of something. I'll be back in a minute.

CATHY:

*(She exits with her cell phone. Dennis paces for a moment and then lies down on the bed as before. This time he gets back up and paces some, then sits, rearranges his clothes, and then paces. Finally Cathy returns.)*

DENNIS AND CATHY:

I've been thinking. . . . You go first.

DENNIS:

You go first.

CATHY:

We can't do this. It's not . . . it's not right. . . . I can't do this and I don't think you can either unless you've really changed.

DENNIS:

That's what I was going to say. I can't. We can't.

CATHY:

Well, that's a relief. . . that we agree.

DENNIS:

Yes, it's a relief. What were we thinking?

CATHY:

We weren't thinking, that's what I'm thinking.

DENNIS:

Yes. You're right. But it was exciting, for a while.

CATHY:

Yes. It brought back a lot. . .

DENNIS:

Yes, it did.

CATHY:

I think. . . I think I'm just going to leave. We'll just chalk this up as a big mistake and hope . . . we'll, maybe we'll just pretend it never happened. (*She starts to go.*)

DENNIS:

Don't go yet. Let's at least talk? Maybe just a few minutes. I mean we came all this way. We might as well at least talk.

CATHY:

Talk about what?

DENNIS:

I don't know. Tell me about your phone call.

CATHY:

Oh, it was just a quick consult. There was an emergency back at the clinic.

DENNIS:

Well, what was the emergency?

CATHY:

Do you really want to know?

DENNIS:

No, not really. It's just. . .Have you heard anything from your kids lately?

CATHY:

Nothing much. Samantha is looking for a different job. If she gets the one she's hoping for, she'll have to stay in Chicago for the holidays. Jerry doesn't think he'll make it home for the holidays this year, but it will depend on work. I understand working at a clinic. I don't expect to see him.

DENNIS:

I'm sure they'd like to come home.

CATHY:

I want to believe that. How about yours?

DENNIS:

Nothing new on Mark. He still seems happily married and likes his new job. So happy that he rarely calls. Cindy only has one more semester after this. We only hear from her if something really has her stressed out. We haven't heard anything so I guess she's doing fine.

CATHY:

It funny. You raise them to be independent, but then when they are. . .

DENNIS:

I know. And then it's just you and your spouse, trying to rekindle the flame that got lost in the busyness of kids and careers.

CATHY:

I know what you mean.

DENNIS:

So what's it like living a commuter marriage?

CATHY:

It's only been a few weeks. It's not as bad as I thought it would be. So far. It's lonely at times, but . . . We almost . . .In some ways it's . . . We actually pay more attention to each other now than when we saw each other everyday. We . . .Bill doesn't read magazines anymore when we're eating dinner. He actually tells me about his week. And he actually listens when I tell him about mine.

DENNIS:

That's good. . .for you. I think. . .I mean it is. It is.

CATHY:

There's actually a spark there that I thought we'd lost. I can remember, or almost remember why I first fell in love with him. Isn't that odd?

DENNIS:

Absence makes the heart grow fonder. (*ironically*)

I think we can make it work.

CATHY:

That's good; it is.

DENNIS:

Yes, it is. I still love him.

CATHY:

Why did you come here then?

DENNIS:

I don't know. Maybe the two aren't connected. Bill's such a part of my life, my routine. He's real to me. What brought me here today? I don't know.

CATHY:

A dream?

DENNIS:

Yes. A dream. A good one, but a fantasy really.

CATHY:

It was exciting. It was the thrill of the chase, the memory of unrequited love about to be fulfilled. I really did feel sixteen again for a while or maybe nineteen.

DENNIS:

But you're not sixteen or nineteen. And neither am I. There's Bill. And there's Bonnie. And the kids.

CATHY:

Bonnie. What have I done to Bonnie?

DENNIS:

You told me once in a letter that she was the love of your life. Well, is she? I mean, I know I'm not. Is she?

CATHY:

It's not the passionate, exciting love she and I had when we were 22 years old. You know, that "can't stand to be apart, longing for the next embrace every minute of every day" kind of love. It's not the "I'll die without you" kind of love. It's more like . . . it's like . . . do you remember "Fiddler on the Roof?"

DENNIS:

Of course. I remember everything you did in high school.

CATHY:

There's a great song between Tevye and Golde. I don't know if you remember it. They got married without even knowing each other, an arranged marriage, and so he asks her if she loves him because his daughters all want to marry for love and he wants to know if she loves him. At first she won't answer him. She says it doesn't matter, "why talk about love right now." But he keeps asking and finally she says she's cooked and cleaned and cared for him for 25 years and "if that's not love, what is." So they agree they love each other. It doesn't change their lives, but it's nice to know. It's kind of like that with Bonnie.

DENNIS:

It's commitment, stability, history. It's knowing what the other is thinking without having to say it. It's comfortable enough to not worry about being silent together. It's planning the future together. And it's a different love than 22, but it's truly love. So yes, Bonnie is that love of my life. I don't know what I was thinking. I've probably hurt her, more than I ever imagined. She's been everything to me. She is . . . she is my life, my love. And you're, you're. . . I don't know.

CATHY:

You sound like you're still in love with her.

DENNIS:

What about Bill? Do you still really love him?

CATHY:

I wonder if we even know what love is. In the movies and on TV, it seems like love is some momentary high, a fleeting thrill, infatuation rather than love. You never see the people live out a life together. What happens after the movie? We don't know. How do they live happily ever after? Is our marriage perfect? No. But every time we've suffered a bruise or a break, it's healed. One of the amazing things about broken bones is that they almost never break in the same place. They're stronger where they've healed than anywhere else. So maybe this commuter marriage will cause us to bend or even break a little, but in the end we'll be okay. He sacrificed for me when he gave up his job at the clinic and I can sacrifice a little here so that he can be successful in his business. Maybe healing from sacrifices is what love is really all about.

DENNIS:

I think you're still in love with him.

CATHY:

So why are we here today if we're still in love?

DENNIS:

You've never seen me build a set or do a home improvement project, have you?

CATHY:

Not really.

DENNIS:

My biggest problem is I keep misplacing my tools, the measuring tape, a pencil, whatever. It really slows me down. On every home improvement project, Bonnie is my official tool finder. She teases me about it, but she saves me a lot of time, not so much by helping me cut wood or hammer nails. She just keeps track of my tools so I don't have to find them. The tools are never really lost, just misplaced. Maybe we misplaced our love temporarily and now we're helping each other find it again.

CATHY:

So where does it leave us now that we've helped each other find our love again?

DENNIS:

I don't know. But we ought to go home, you to Bill and me to Bonnie.

CATHY:

You're right.

So. DENNIS:

So. CATHY:

We should say good bye, shouldn't we? DENNIS:

I have a question I need to ask first. CATHY:

What is it? DENNIS:

CATHY:  
Do you remember telling me that you weren't sure that there really was only one person out there for you? That maybe there was more than one person who could be the love of your life—that you were just hoping to find one of the ones?

DENNIS:  
I remember. I think I still believe it, that if I'd have made different choices, then I might have married someone else. Things would have turned out differently, but whoever she was, she would have been the love of my life.

CATHY:  
I probably shouldn't ask, but my question is this: could I have been one of the ones?

DENNIS:  
You always asked the hard questions. . . Things kept moving us farther apart. The choices people made for us, the choices we made. In the end, all we had was infrequent encounters.

CATHY:  
Passionate encounters.

DENNIS:  
Infrequent passionate encounters. Maybe if things had been different we could have been more than. . . than what we were. In fact, maybe that's why I'm here, to see if you were. . . are. . . could have been one of the ones. I sometimes have allowed myself to think about how it would have been different if we had been born later, if we were twenty now instead of back then.

CATHY:  
Why would that make a difference?

DENNIS:  
Technology. Instead of sending letters and waiting weeks for a reply, we could email every day. We could instant message. We could afford phone calls instead of waiting to see each other.

CATHY:  
I never thought about that.

DENNIS:

We would have stayed connected. And if we had stayed connected, maybe you would have been. . .one of the ones. Remember our pact? We only missed it by a couple years.

CATHY:

Thank you. I needed to know that.

DENNIS:

Of course, we never would have found each other again without the technology. A disastrous reunion, brought to you by Google.

CATHY:

Was it a disaster?

DENNIS:

No, not really. It just wasn't what I dreamed it would be. And it still might be a disaster.

CATHY:

How so?

DENNIS:

There's Bonnie. And Bill. What will you tell Bill?

CATHY:

Nothing. He'll never need to know.

DENNIS:

What do I tell Bonnie?

CATHY:

How about nothing?

DENNIS:

Somehow, I think she'll know. Or find out. I'll have guilty written all over my forehead when I see her. She'll know.

CATHY:

You used to be a good actor. Can you still act?

DENNIS:

You can't act a lie, at least, not for more than a couple hours.

CATHY:

Then how about the truth? You met an old friend and nothing happened.

DENNIS:

Would you believe that?

CATHY:

From you? Yes. I remember you. Our first date, and the next. .

DENNIS AND CATHY (*in unison*):

Five months.

*(They embrace for a moment. A polite kiss, a first kiss, and then they separate awkwardly.)*

DENNIS:

I think I'll change my plane reservations. There's no reason to stay. You can have the room. It's paid for.

CATHY:

What would I do?

DENNIS:

I don't know. Watch TV? Sign up for an exercise class?

CATHY:

I don't think so.

DENNIS:

So.

CATHY:

So.

DENNIS:

Before I go, there's something I want to give you. Here. *(He hands her a rather old ticket stub.)*

CATHY:

What? You still have this?

DENNIS:

I just couldn't ever bring myself to throw it away. But I don't think I want it any more.

CATHY:

You know, I remember why I liked you so much. And you turned out to be a pretty nice guy, for an old guy.

DENNIS:

And you turned out to be a pretty nice lady, too, for an old lady.

CATHY:

Hey, watch it.

DENNIS:

You watch it.

CATHY:

So.

DENNIS:

So.

Good bye.

CATHY:

Good bye.

DENNIS:

*(They share another polite hug and then separate as the lights dim. Dennis moves to the exact position he was in at the end of scene 1. Then he puts the cell phone away. Rises and turns to the door. He continues.)*

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