

Measuring Matthew

by  
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MEASURING MATTHEW

SCENE: A mostly bare stage that will represent several places (apartments and a store). If possible, a suggestion of two large windows with a ledge running between them.

AT RISE: MATTHEW, holding a tape measure, stands very close to JENNIFER.

JENNIFER

I love you.

MATTHEW

(to audience) Jennifer said this to me three times. April 27, May 4, and June 12.

JENNIFER

I'm leaving you.

MATTHEW

This was said twice. Within seconds of each other. Because of my response. (to Jennifer) What?

JENNIFER

Goodbye, Matthew.

MATTHEW

(to audience) Two words. Very effective, succinct. Combination of the five.

JENNIFER

I'm leaving you. Goodbye, Matthew.

MATTHEW

Extremely definitive. A real sense of finality. Five strong words. She made the strong choice. I hoped that she would hesitate, out of some conflicted sense of... well, heartbreak and anguish would have been nice. But her voice revealed no apparent equivocation, stammer, or justification.

JENNIFER

I love you.

MATTHEW

This was not said, but I wished that it was. She took eight steps to the door. From my door to the stairs is twenty-two feet eight and a half inches. There are forty-four steps down to the sidewalk. It took her three minutes forty-three seconds to exit the building.

JENNIFER

Matthew. Hi... How have you been?

MATTHEW

(to audience) Since she left me, I have come to the grocery store thirty-seven times with the intention of bumping into her. (to Jennifer) Fine. Fine. I...

JENNIFER

I'm glad. I'm sorry that things didn't... I'm glad you're doing okay.

MATTHEW

Okay? Sure. Never better. Hunky dory. Tip top. Okey dokey. Fantastique. Super. Swell. I'm just swell, Jennifer. Swell. Swollen. Fine. I'm fine.

JENNIFER

Okay. Great. Well...

MATTHEW

You look beautiful.

JENNIFER

Thanks. I should really--

MATTHEW

Maybe we could--

JENNIFER

No. Sorry. I don't think so.

MATTHEW

Okay.

JENNIFER

Bye.

MATTHEW

(to audience) In her cart, she had flowers, brownie mix, eggs, feta cheese, spinach, pie crusts, evaporated milk. She was making quiche. Quiche and brownies. For another person. You don't make quiche for yourself. For a man. Not me. How many times has she used this meal to test and impress? I'd estimate seven. She made the same thing for me on the first night she had me over. (to Jennifer) Thanks for a wonderful evening. The quiche was delicious.

JENNIFER

I'm glad you liked it. It's the one thing I can cook with confidence.

MATTHEW

So, I was wondering. In terms of first dates... How did I rate? Choose whatever scale works best for you.

JENNIFER

I'm not really good at quantifying things like that.

MATTHEW

It'll help me assess how I did.

JENNIFER

Okay. B minus. Eighty-one percent. You have nice table manners. Offered compliments. Very good eye contact. Appealing visage. A little mediocre in the conversation department. Seems like you can get a little fixated on things.

MATTHEW

Numbers. I know.

JENNIFER

I'm not sure that's a good quality in a man.

MATTHEW

I brought flowers.

JENNIFER

Which gives you a very good baseline.

MATTHEW

I tried hard at the conversation.

JENNIFER

I noticed.

MATTHEW

I showed you my watch with the built-in altimeter. Wasn't that cool?

JENNIFER

Sure.

MATTHEW

Your place is eighty-five feet above sea level. The sidewalk is at twenty-seven feet, so we're fifty-eight feet above the reference plane.

JENNIFER

Fascinating.

MATTHEW

That means it'd only take one and a half seconds to hit the ground if I jumped out your window. (to audience) I didn't actually say that. I didn't say it out loud.

JENNIFER

(answering the phone) Hello, Matthew.

MATTHEW

(to audience) I waited seventeen days after bumping into her at the store before I called on the phone.

JENNIFER

I'm fine.

MATTHEW

I considered calling her one hundred and seventy three times before I actually did. Waiting seemed like the better choice. I didn't want her to think me too obsessive.

JENNIFER

No. I'm busy that night.

MATTHEW

(to Jennifer) Maybe another night. I called and they said the movie will show for seventeen more days, so that gives us sixty-eight possible times, though some of those times are while we'll be at work, so it's really more like fifty-four. I'm pretty flexible.

JENNIFER

Matthew. You're a sweet man. And we had some good times. You are kind and thoughtful and honest. You mean a lot to me. For a while I thought that we... I know maybe I made it seem like it was easy for me to say goodbye. But it wasn't.

MATTHEW

Was it something I did? Something I said? Because if it was, whatever it was, I'm sorry. I miss you, Jennifer. More than you can know. I think about you, a lot.

JENNIFER

How many times a day?

MATTHEW

Sev--

JENNIFER

Sorry. That wasn't fair. I know you have an answer. It's not you, not completely. I have to go. I'm sorry, Matthew.

MATTHEW

(to audience) She didn't specifically ask me not to call her again. Not until the eighth time. (I tried to space them out.)

JENNIFER

Don't make me call the police.

MATTHEW

(to Jennifer) I won't. I'm sorry. Do Steve and José know about each other?

JENNIFER

Stay away from me.

(Jennifer exits. Matthew steps out his window onto the ledge. Inches his way between the windows.)

MATTHEW

(to audience) I'm guessing that they did not. They always seemed to arrive on different days, at different times. I wonder which one liked peanut butter. She never had peanut butter when we were together, but she purchased three jars since then. Steve moved away. He installed cable and received eighty-one complaints over the course of four months and thirteen days. So they fired him. (I can't take credit for more than sixty-two percent of those complaints.) He found a better job in Cincinnati. But Jennifer seemed very happy with José. She laughed more, at least twenty percent more than she did with me. Smiled more. Glowed. And I thought how sad it would be for José to become yet another statistic, one of the far too many traffic fatalities on our fair streets. I had this thought more than once...

And all of a sudden I could see a string of actions, leading to a future that, by all calculations, would be a disaster for Jennifer, José, and me. My desire to reduce the number of tragic victims by sixty-six percent lead me out the window, onto the ledge. (beat) Where I met, June, my neighbor.

JUNE enters and leans out her window.

JUNE

That's quite a story... How many times did you think about squashing José?

MATTHEW

Twelve.

JUNE

Were you ever behind the wheel?

MATTHEW

Twice.

JUNE

Wow. That's self control.

MATTHEW

I knew I was in trouble, when I actually got behind the wheel. I knew it would be wrong. Because it would hurt her (and him, too). And that's not what I wanted.

JUNE

Are you okay? Do you want me to call someone?

MATTHEW

No. I'm fine. I think I'll be fine.

JUNE

Well, I'll just stay a minute. (beat) Did you talk to someone? A therapist?

MATTHEW

No. Almost. But I felt... ashamed.

JUNE

I know. But everyone has times when they get fixated on another person, and maybe they're not quite... It's an awfully long way down.

MATTHEW

Seventy one feet.

JUNE

From the window sill.

MATTHEW

Sixty-eight feet three inches from the ledge.

JUNE

Not quite a full two seconds to the ground.

MATTHEW

Not quite.

JUNE

Not much time for second thoughts.

MATTHEW

Which is a plus, I think. But it's important to get that out of the way first, obviously.

JUNE

And have you?