

# MEASURING MATTHEW

TEN MINUTE PLAY

**By Patrick Gabridge**

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## **MEASURING MATTHEW**

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**SYNOPSIS:** Matthew is obsessed with two things: numbers and Jennifer. When Jennifer leaves him, he's driven to the edge of desperation. His salvation rests in the hands of his neighbor, June, who understands Matthew more than he expects. A quirky comedy of neuroses.

### **CAST OF CHARACTERS**

*(1 MAN, 1 WOMAN)*

MATTHEW

JENNIFER

### **SETTING**

Sparsely furnished apartment with an open window and a chair.

**AT RISE:**

**MATTHEW**, holding a tape measure, stands very close to **JENNIFER**.

**JENNIFER:** I love you.

**MATTHEW:** 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--What?

**JENNIFER:** Goodbye, Matthew.

**MATTHEW:** 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 makes the strong choice. I hoped that she would hesitate, out of some conflicted sense of... well, heartbreak and anguish would be 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 had been. 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 takes 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 great.

**JENNIFER:** Thanks. I should really--

**MATTHEW:** Maybe we can--

**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, napkins. Quiche. She was making quiche and brownies. For another person. You don't make quiche for yourself. For a man. Not me. She made the same thing for me on the first night she had me over. How many times has she used this meal to test and impress? I'd estimate seven. *(to JENNIFER)* How did I rate?

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

**MATTHEW:** It'll help me assess how I did. So I can move on a little more... effectively.

**JENNIFER:** Okay. B minus. 81 percent. You have very nice table manners. Offered good 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.

**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 was eighty-five feet above sea level. The sidewalk was at twenty-seven feet, so we were 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 I was 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 very sweet man. And we really 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 Jose know about each other?

**JENNIFER:** Stay away from me.

**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. He found a better job in Cincinnati. But she seemed very happy with Jose. 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 Jose 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

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see a string of actions, leading to a future that, by all calculations, would be a disaster for Jennifer, Jose, and me. My desire to reduce the number of tragic victims by sixty-six percent leads me out the window, onto the ledge. (*beat*) Where I meet, June, my neighbor. Who brings me back inside.

*JENNIFER adds a hat or scarf. She is now JUNE. SHE sits in a comfy chair.*

**JUNE:** How many times did you think about squashing Jose?

**MATTHEW:** Twelve.

**JUNE:** Were you ever behind the wheel?

**MATTHEW:** Twice.

**JUNE:** That's self-control.

**MATTHEW:** That's when I knew I was in trouble. And I knew it would be wrong. Because it would hurt her, and him, too. And that's not what I wanted.

**JUNE:** Did you talk to someone. A therapist?

**MATTHEW:** No. Almost. But I felt... ashamed.

**JUNE:** I know.

**MATTHEW:** Our floor is seventy-one feet off the pavement.

**JUNE:** From the window sill.

**MATTHEW:** Sixty-seven 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 had you? Have you?

**MATTHEW:** I had. This wasn't my first time out there.

**JUNE:** I know.

**MATTHEW:** You do?

**JUNE:** You went out twice before. Not really all the way out. Both hands the first time, one leg the second.

**MATTHEW:** I didn't know anyone could--

**JUNE:** You didn't look completely serious yet, so I didn't want to stick my nose in.

**MATTHEW:** But this time...

**JUNE:** Was a good time for me to weed my window boxes.

**MATTHEW:** I'm glad you did, June.

**JUNE:** Me, too.

**MATTHEW:** Lucky thing you were home.

**JUNE:** You seem to be most depressed around 6:30 p.m. I moved my hours around at work a little.

**MATTHEW:** To keep an eye on me?

**JUNE:** Just in case. People can be unpredictable.

**MATTHEW:** That doesn't stop us from trying.

**JUNE:** No, it doesn't. (*beat*) Matthew?

**MATTHEW:** Yes.

**JUNE:** I'm glad you didn't jump.

**MATTHEW:** Me, too.

**JUNE:** Would you go to the movies with me?

**MATTHEW:** Are you serious?

**JUNE:** Yes.

**MATTHEW:** Because, obviously, I'm not a very good prospect. I mean, you heard what I'm like. There's probably something wrong with me.

**JUNE:** Definitely.

**MATTHEW:** And I would think that would be a negative, in terms of appeal.

**JUNE:** You've lived next door to me for five hundred and seventy-three days, Matthew. Our doors are approximately fifteen feet seven inches apart, jamb to jamb. I'm glad to know what you told me, and I'm glad for all that I've observed about you. And I'm not sorry you're the way you are. You'll have to make your own observations about me. If you're willing.

**MATTHEW:** I am.

*HE takes her hand and gently uses his tape measure to measure her arm, her shoulders, her waist. SHE smiles with delight.*

LIGHTS OUT

**THE END**

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## NOTES