

Even After Everything
by Madison Farkas

A text string is projected onto a screen above the stage. The last visible message was sent by the phone's owner at 11:28pm on June 8th: "I just want you to be happy."

As the audience enters, a new message from MATT MCKINNON appears to the sound of a text tone.

MATT:

Hey, I'm sorry it's been so long. The last few months have been a lot for me, but long story short I'm divorced now. I'd really like to talk to you. I understand if you don't want to, but there are some things I need to explain. Could we meet?

Several minutes pass as the audience is seated. After a while, the message is seen. We wonder if he's going to be left on read. As the house lights dim, a reply appears, quickly followed by others.

ALLISON:

Wow, hi. I didn't think I'd hear from you again. What did you have in mind?

MATT:

1pm tomorrow at Williams by the harbour if you're free?

ALLISON:

I can't tomorrow. Same time on Sunday?

MATT:

Sure. Thank you.

The screen goes dark. Lights up on MATT, already sitting at a table with a coffee and an untouched scone on a paper bag. A winter coat is draped on the back of his chair. There are several other tables, all empty. Enter ALLISON, also in winter clothes. MATT stands awkwardly, unsure if he's allowed to hug her.

MATT:

I, um. I like your hair.

ALLISON brushes her fingers across her fresh haircut but says nothing.

[CON'T]MATT:

Thanks for agreeing to this, Allison. You didn't have to.

ALLISON:

I know.

MATT:

Did you want something to drink?

ALLISON holds up a Valentine's themed paper cup.

MATT:

Right. London Fog. Your favourite.

They sit. ALLISON removes her coat and takes a sip of her drink. There's a long, awkward pause.

ALLISON:

So...divorced.

MATT:

Since the middle of January, officially.

ALLISON:

Is that...good?

MATT:

It's been hard. I miss the boys. But I think it – will be, if that makes sense?

He rips absently at the paper bag.

[CON'T]MATT:

I'm so sorry, again. Not just for how long it's been.

ALLISON:

Eight months.

MATT:

It wasn't right.

ALLISON:

(Frostily) No, it wasn't. *(She softens a little.)* What happened? I figured something must have. One day everything was fine and then you just...disappeared.

MATT pauses to collect himself. He thought he was ready for this. It all comes out in a rush.

MATT:

Remember that night at the end of May we were supposed to go out?

ALLISON:

Board games.

MATT:

Cole and Henry both got chickenpox a few days before. We were all exhausted, sleeping in different rooms. I was really behind on work. I was gonna go into the office and then see you that night, but I guess me and Claire got our wires crossed. I thought she was still asleep but she'd already left. It was four hours before we realized neither of us was home.

ALLISON:

Were the kids okay?

MATT:

Cole slept through most of it but Henry was really scared. He still has nightmares about being left alone.

ALLISON:

I can see why you cancelled.

MATT:

I felt like the world's shittiest dad.

ALLISON:

You must have been scared too.

MATT:

I thought I was gonna throw up. Claire and I had a huge fight about it. She said I neglected them.

ALLISON:

It was just a mistake though, right? Nobody's fault.

MATT:

According to Claire, everything's my fault. But we both said some things that were...not nice. I ended up telling her I never wanted kids in the first place.

ALLISON:

I bet that went over well.

MATT:

(Bitterly.) Oh yeah. I think she always sort of knew, but I'd never come right out and told her. She was so mad. And she brought you into it. Said I was more interested in you than my own family.

ALLISON:

That's not fair. She knew about us. She was fine with it.

MATT:

She said she was. I think she more...tolerated it. You know she was never as poly as me.

ALLISON:

But she was seeing other people too, wasn't she?

MATT:

Mostly women. I guess she didn't think that counted, or not as much.

ALLISON:

Ah. Because that's how that works.

MATT:

She never had a problem with me dating men, but you were...well, different, obviously. You were the longest I'd been with anyone else since me and Claire got married.

ALLISON:

Sounds like she really had the whole poly thing figured out.

MATT:

I didn't tell her much about you, but she put it together that we were – were good.

It was one of those fights that wasn't really about what it was about, y'know? I said she was being jealous for no reason. She told me to get out.

ALLISON:

I'm so sorry.

MATT:

It wasn't your fault. None of this was. My marriage was failing before I even met you. It never should have happened in the first place, but she got pregnant so fast...

ALLISON:

I didn't wanna say anything.

MATT:

You had opinions.

ALLISON:

It's still none of my business.

MATT:

It was, though. I made it your business.

ALLISON:

Yeah, you did.

MATT:

You have to understand, after my mom died, my dad raised me to think divorce was...basically evil? It meant you didn't try hard enough. He lost the love of his life. To him, the worst thing someone could do was end a marriage on purpose. Especially when there's kids involved.

ALLISON:

People with kids get divorced every day. Isn't that better than if they grow up watching their parents make each other miserable?

MATT doesn't say anything.

[CON'T]ALLISON:

You can't tell me Jayden didn't know something was wrong.

MATT:

He knew before we did. As much as we tried to hide it. Teenagers are...annoyingly perceptive sometimes.

ALLISON:

What did he think?

MATT:

You know what he told me? "Fucking finally."

ALLISON:

Smart kid.

MATT:

Don't look at me. He was pretty much grown up by the time I got there.

ALLISON:

Two toddlers and a fifteen-year-old. Not gonna lie, that kind of sounds like my nightmare.

MATT:

If you'd asked me five years ago I would've said the same thing. But it's different when they're yours.

ALLISON:

I supposed it'd have to be. Otherwise why would anyone do it? Especially with someone you don't — well...

MATT:

Accidents happen.

ALLISON:

So do vasectomies.

Matt salutes her with his coffee.

MATT:

You just...figure it out. It wasn't like I had a clue what I was doing anyway. For the first few years I thought we'd make it work. But then all the fights we pretended we weren't having started getting louder.

ALLISON:

It can't have been much of a secret.

MATT:

Not at that point. Claire and I'd been on the rocks for months. Longer, probably. But we did our best. Date nights. We even renewed our vows, like that wasn't a fucking joke.

ALLISON:

You tried to fix it.

MATT:

And after what Claire said, and the marriage counselling, and the constant fucking arguments, I convinced myself the only thing getting in the way was —

ALLISON:

Me.

MATT:

(A little desperately.) It was a mistake. Everything I did back then was a mistake. My whole life was falling apart. I felt like I was losing my mind, losing...well, everything.

ALLISON:

You ignored me. You bailed on me twice. (*A beat. Then, quietly, her voice cracking.*) You told me you loved me and then two weeks later you made me think I'd done something wrong.

MATT:

You didn't.

ALLISON:

You couldn't even give me a real explanation. You didn't think after - after everything, I deserved more than "a lot going on at home"?

MATT:

I know. I'm sorry.

ALLISON:

(*Sarcastic.*) Oh, you're sorry. (*Beat.*) When I got your last text I told myself it had nothing to do with me. You have a real family and a real life and there's no room in it for me. That's — fine. That's different than if you ended things because you wanted to. But being a complication someone doesn't have time for isn't fun either.

MATT:

That's not what you were.

ALLISON:

Then what was I?

MATT:

(After a pause.) You were the best part of my life. Tuesday was my favourite day of the week because of you. You made me laugh, and you let me explore all these parts of myself that I just...couldn't with anyone else. *(He looks around and lowers his voice.)* I'd never subbed for anyone before you.

ALLISON:

(Half-joking but with an edge of bitterness.) Your wife didn't peg you enough, is that it? *(Silence.)* Sorry. That was mean.

MATT:

No, you're right. I felt...special, with you. Wanted. I didn't realize how much I needed that.

ALLISON hesitates. Once this would have been everything she wanted to hear. But it's been a long time. She takes a breath and plows on.

ALLISON:

Every day for months it was like there was this hole in my life where you were supposed to be. I worried about you, hoping you were okay, wondering what happened and hating that I'd probably never know. I blew kisses into the air for you, for fuck's sake! I laid against my pillow at night pretending it was you!

MATT:

That's so sweet.

ALLISON:

(Tightly, more restrained.) It's pathetic. I thought I was better than pining for some guy who didn't want me anymore.

MATT:

I did. You have to know I did.

ALLISON:

Then where were you when I needed to hear it?

MATT, *after a long pause*:

I'm too late, aren't I?

ALLISON:

For what, Matt? You said you wanted to explain and you did. I appreciate it. Really. I thought I was gonna spend the rest of my life not knowing what went wrong. But what else do you think can happen here?

MATT:

I don't know. I thought if I could just talk to you in person –

ALLISON:

That we'd go back to the way things were? After you made me miss you for longer than we were even together?

MATT:

I'm sorry. I'm – fucking everything up. I really did only come here to apologize. But seeing you again...it's just been such a long time. I missed you too.

He takes her hand across the table. She lets him.

ALLISON:

Except for you and Owen, most of the relationships I've been in just sort of...fizzled out after a month or two. And I didn't even care, because I didn't miss them. You were the first time it mattered to me that something had ended.

MATT:

It mattered to me too. So much. I hated that I hurt you.

ALLISON:

When you said you wanted a break, I knew that really meant I'd probably never see you again. But you left the door open and I just...couldn't close it. Like, you never unmatched me. I didn't know if that was you trying to say something or what.

MATT:

I don't think I've been on a dating app in like a year.

A long pause as ALLISON absorbs the implication that he hasn't been with anyone since her. She pulls her hand away.

[CON'T]MATT:

You? (*Beat.*) I mean, sorry, that's none of my business, you don't have to -

ALLISON:

A couple.

MATT:

Oh. (*Carefully.*) Are you and Owen still together?

ALLISON:

He's my person. But it was...rough, for a while. Your birthday was the worst.

MATT:

You remembered?

ALLISON:

No. I just knew it was sometime in June. I was feeling mooney on the thirtieth so did something stupid and re-read our text string. You know the thing everyone says you shouldn't do?

MATT:

They say that for a reason.

ALLISON:

I got to the part where you mentioned that was your birthday and it just...hit me. It was like I could feel you out there living your normal life, without me. You were half an hour away and you might as well have been on the moon.

MATT:

It wasn't normal. I filed for divorce like a week after that. I wanted to tell you as soon as it happened but there was so much going on. It got...really ugly.

ALLISON:

It must have, for it to take this long.

MATT:

Claire contested. Said I was cheating on her. I wasn't, but turns out divorce lawyers don't really understand what polyamory is. And she flipped the whole never wanted kids thing back around on me. *(After a pause.)* I don't get to see them much.

ALLISON:

I can't even imagine.

MATT:

But you know what's worse? That I don't even regret it. *(He points to himself.)*
World's shittiest dad, remember?

ALLISON:

You don't miss them?

MATT:

Of course I miss them. A lot. Bedtime stories, and Legos, and trips to the zoo. It was the best. But now I sit in my nice clean apartment and there's a part of me that feels like I can breathe, you know? There's no mess. No toys everywhere.

No one's made me watch Frozen in months and I'm fucking thrilled about it!

ALLISON laughs softly.

[CON'T]MATT:

I didn't like the person I became, those last few months with Claire. I was angry all the time. I like to think the boys are better off without me.

ALLISON:

Don't say that. You love them.

MATT:

I do. But I don't think I'm cut out to be a full-time parent. Too selfish, I guess.

ALLISON:

I don't think that's selfish.

MATT:

No?

ALLISON:

Okay, maybe a little. But at least you're aware of it. At least you're not lying to yourself.

MATT:

And you are?

ALLISON:

I knew looking at those texts was a bad idea. I knew it would just make it hurt more. But it felt so good to remind myself what it was like to talk to you every day. You made me feel...sane. Grounded. Present. Real. That...went away for a while after you left.

MATT:

There were so many times I wished I could text you. I'd see a cute dog or a funny meme and I'd think, "Allison would love this." But I couldn't do anything about it and it was nobody's fault but mine. (*He hesitates*)I, um. Saw that you watched the video again.

ALLISON:

Ugh, speaking of bad ideas. I wondered if you might be able to tell. God, that's embarrassing. I didn't use it for anything...like that, I promise. I just needed to hear your voice again.

MATT:

It's fine. I would've done the same thing. I looked at the pictures too, and the texts. And since it's apparently honesty hour, I should probably tell you I did use them like that.

ALLISON:

(Smirking fondly.) Deviant.

MATT:

Takes one to know one.

They exchange soft smiles.

ALLISON:

Anyway, Owen could tell something was wrong that night. So I told him...the truth. That you weren't just someone I was sleeping with. That I loved you.

Another long pause. Her voice catches.

[CON'T] ALLISON:

I'd never told him that. I knew like six weeks after we met. How come I could tell you and not him? That was our agreement, that we would see other people

casually but that was it. I was the one who set that boundary in the first place, but then as soon as it didn't suit me anymore...

MATT:

Why didn't you tell him?

ALLISON:

I - I was going to say I don't know, but that's not true. It's not like I meant for it to happen, but I needed it too much. The desire, the being wanted by someone who loved me. I never got that from him, not for years. I thought he'd ask me to give you up and I didn't want to. (*Beat.*) How's that for selfish?

MATT:

It's not -

ALLISON:

It is. And the best part is it wouldn't have mattered.

MATT:

What do you mean?

ALLISON:

He wasn't angry that I fell in love with someone else. It was that I didn't tell him. I lied, at least by omission. If I'd just been honest with him, it would have been fine.

MATT:

But you worked it out?

ALLISON:

Eventually. We talked – a lot – and decided there are things we can't give each other that aren't worth breaking up over. And after I thought about it, it honestly didn't bother me, the idea of him loving someone else too. (*Beat.*) I just wish I'd figured that out sooner.

MATT:

That's...wow. Noble.

ALLISON:

Hardly. I thought it would bother me, but it's actually really nice that someone can be good for him in a different way. Not...better, just different. He's got another partner now, Sam. I like them.

MATT:

That's great. Though I have to admit, kitchen table was never my thing. *(Beat.)*

Unless - ?

ALLISON:

Oh, Sam and I are just friends. *(She smirks a little wickedly.)* Mostly. I like that they make Owen happy.

MATT:

(Trying again, carefully.) What about you? Is there someone who makes you happy?

ALLISON:

I'm still seeing some other people. Nothing's lasted too long so far though.

(Quoting something from their past.) Fuck yeah or no, right?

MATT:

Fuck yeah or no.

ALLISON:

And I still have Owen. I'm being...careful, with him. I almost lost him because I was too chickenshit to be honest. *(She looks at him directly.)* I almost ruined the best relationship I've ever had for someone who was already gone.

MATT doesn't say anything.

[CON'T]ALLISON:

You were gone, Matt. Weeks before you made it official. You just...walked out of my life with no explanation and let me spend that whole time thinking I was – bothering you. That I was a burden.

MATT:

(Lashing out.) Is it really the best? Even though he never touches you? Even though he isn't attracted to you?

ALLISON:

(Standing abruptly.) Don't. Don't you dare put this on him. Owen has been nothing but patient and forgiving after my endless fuck-ups. He knows me.

MATT:

(Under his breath.) Does he give you what you need?

ALLISON:

Hey! I'm not like you, I'm not stuck in a marriage that never should have happened. We saw each other a dozen times in five months. I counted. Owen and I have been together for seven years. I love him. And sure, we have our problems, but they're ours.

MATT:

So has he had sex with you some time in the last year then?

Furious, ALLISON turns to leave.

[CON'T] MATT:

(Standing too.) Wait, Allison, please – I'm sorry. I know I have no right to – I just – I want you to be happy too. I want you to be with someone who loves you the way you want.

ALLISON:

And I suppose that's you?

MATT doesn't say anything.

[CON'T] ALLISON:

You've never seen me at my worst. Owen has. He saw the wreck you made of me and for some inexplicable reason he loves me anyway. *(A pause. Then, darkly.)* You didn't hear him cry that night. The - the sounds he made. I won't hurt him like that again.

MATT:

I've cried for you too.

ALLISON:

Yeah, well, there's been a lot of crying going around. (*A pause.*) You know Owen thinks you're an asshole? He thinks you broke my heart for no reason. He thinks I shouldn't even be here. I'm starting to wonder if he was right.

A very long pause.

MATT:

Do you regret loving me?

ALLISON:

You don't get to ask me that.

MATT:

Because I don't regret it. Even after everything. That night we spent at your place, I was driving home and I had to pull over. I sat by the side of the highway and just...sobbed, for like half an hour.

ALLISON:

You never said.

MATT:

How could I? How could I tell you I wanted that to be my life so badly?

He takes her hand. She doesn't pull away.

[CON'T]MATT:

You and me in a cozy little house. We talked about it once. If you read the texts then you remember. What it would be like to get some land in the middle of nowhere –

ALLISON:

Don't.

MATT:

– and I could build things and start a greenhouse and you could bake and paint and write and –

ALLISON:

(Pulling away.) Stop it!

MATT:

Then tell me you don't want it. Say you never thought about it and I'll walk away right now.

ALLISON:

You think I never daydreamed of what it would be like to have you all the time?

Of course I did. But that's all they were. Daydreams.

MATT:

They don't have to be.

ALLISON:

You were married.

MATT:

Not anymore.

ALLISON:

You have kids.

MATT:

That I'm allowed to see one weekend a month!

ALLISON:

And? I never wanted them either!

This hits close to home. A long pause.

MATT:

(Sighing and sitting back down.) You're right. And I can't ask you to uproot your entire life for me. I – I know what you'd be giving up. I just...I wish things were different.

ALLISON:

(Sitting as well.) Me too.

MATT:

I've spent a lot of time on myself in the last eight months. Trying to figure out why I let myself get pulled into a marriage I wasn't ready for. Ending up with three kids when I didn't want any.

ALLISON:

And did you?

MATT:

When you get told your whole life that other people's feelings matter more than yours, eventually you start to believe it. You helped me with that, actually. A lot.

ALLISON:

Really?

MATT:

(Half-joking.) What you said about finding whoever convinced me I didn't deserve to want things and beating them with a hammer.

ALLISON:

Oh yeah.

MATT:

You were always so colourful.

ALLISON:

I still think it's true, you know. You're allowed to want things.

MATT:

Am I allowed to want you?

ALLISON is silent.

[CON'T]MATT:

Because I do. I still think about kissing you in the pool at Oasis, how I just felt...lost in you. It's never been like that with anyone else.

ALLISON:

I wish I'd known that was going to be the last time. With all those other people?

MATT:

It was a hell of a night.

ALLISON:

I would have spent it with you. I would have said a proper goodbye.

MATT:

It doesn't need to be the last.

ALLISON:

(Voice tight.) Yeah. I think it does.

MATT:

(Almost pleading.) We could try again. I have more time now, and my own place.

It could be more than once a week.

ALLISON:

You really think that would be enough?

MATT:

(A pause.) No.

ALLISON:

And what about the rest of the time? I wouldn't make you live like a monk, of course you'd have to see other people.

MATT:

I honestly don't know. But isn't that why we got away from that monogamous hetero bullshit in the first place? So it doesn't have to be all or nothing?

ALLISON:

I can't watch you fall in love with someone else.

MATT:

You did it with Owen. And there was a time when I loved Claire.

ALLISON:

That's different.

MATT:

Is it?

ALLISON:

I already lost you once. I don't think I could do it again.

MATT:

So don't. Be with me, in whatever way you want. You're enough.

Allison hesitates.

ALLISON:

I know. *(She stands.)* That's why I can't.

MATT:

(Standing too.) Please.

ALLISON:

I have to go.

MATT:

What if we just tried? We were good. We could be again.

ALLISON:

We were. And I don't regret it. But I'm different now.

MATT:

(After a pause.) I know. I am too.

ALLISON reaches up to cup Matt's cheek. For a moment it looks like she's going to kiss him. But then she pulls her hand away.

ALLISON:

I waited for you for so long. For months I thought if you just asked, if I saw that text pop up with your name, I'd take you back in a second.

Matt looks suddenly hopeful.

[CON'T] ALLISON:

But now that you're here, I have to wonder if the version of you I was waiting for only ever existed in my head. He only showed up after you left.

MATT:

(Drawing back. A pause. Tears well in his eyes.) I still miss you. Every day.

ALLISON:

That'll pass.

She looks at him sadly.

[CON'T]ALLISON:

Be happy, okay? Fuck yeah or no.

This time, MATT can't say it back. ALLISON gathers up her things and turns to leave. Just before she exits, she turns back to look at him. He remains silent as he watches her go.

END OF PLAY