

When **M**en were **MEN**

By

Lawrence DuKore

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WHY I LIKE IT: *Drama Editor JANET EHRlich COLSON writes...* When Men Were Men by Lawrence DuKore is a pre-Stonewall sucker punch giving us a gritty and gorgeous glimpse into experiencing an identity beyond dictated societal roles. The play is sexy and subversive, a period piece that vibrates in the pandemic emergence with an urgency that demands a reckoning – or perhaps an awakening into a new era. There’s a post-postmodern poignancy about the desire for Dukore’s men to connect that transcends their conditioned attitudes towards gender, homosexuality, or mere lust. Not that you should prepare yourself for a psychology paper or a social justice treatise; this is pure theatre with some of the best dialogue you’re going to find (see below how just a couple of lines pull you in). The characters, Matt, a cop in drag on a sting operation, Gerry, a gruff NYC fireman out looking for a good time, and Dennis, another cop along for the ride, or at least part of it, are products of their time, defined, shaped, and oppressed by their idea of “masculinity.” DuKore’s wonderful play turns archetypes on their heads with characters that risk expressing truths to each other that they may not even recognize in themselves.

GERRY

I like’ em silent. That’s like ... mysterious, you know. Like you got a secret. So ... what’s your secret, little ... girl?

MATT

Get the fuck out of here.

GERRY

Who-a! Who-a, Nellie! Man, you got spunk. You got spirit. I like that in a girl.

Five Stars

(Spacing is playwright's own.) JEC

WHEN MEN WERE MEN

A one act play

by

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Characters

Matt a tough young New York City cop

Gerry a tough, young New York City fireman

Dennis a NYC cop; friend of Matt

The scene takes place in Washington Square Park, Greenwich Village. The time is 1968; preStonewall.

The lights come up on Washington Square Park, Greenwich Village. Matt, a New York City police officer, is in drag. This is part of an experimental sting operation. The young policeman is trying to get used to his six-inch pumps, hobbles over to a park bench in the long shadow of an oak tree. Nearby, at the waterless wading pool, we hear folk singers strumming their guitars. Presently, Gerry Doyle enters. He is a bachelor and this is his Friday night “on the town”. He looks at Matt for a long time. Both men are in the shadow of the oak tree.)

GERRY

How're you doing? (no response) Hey, if I'm disturbing you – no problem. (then) Waiting for a big date? (then) Hey ... I'm “going out tonight” – if you get my drift? (then) You working? (then) No insult intended – ‘cause, if you are, I fully respect the situation of a working girl. Now if you're not working, if you're just ... “taking in the air”, so to speak ... that's okay. And if I'm disturbing you, I can just move on. (no response) Mind if I sit down?

(Gerry sits down at the far end of the park bench.)

GERRY (contd)

I take your silence to mean that I'm not disturbing you – which is uppermost in my mind because I respect your privacy – especially your privacy in public. (silence) How about them folk singers? Music aint bad. But those guys, you know, they're creeps. Long hair. Long beards. You think they got long? Never mind. But Jesus they ought to get hair cuts. What do you call them? Beatnicks? Yeah, beatnicks. But the music aint bad. Although personally that kind of music belongs – I don't know – somewhere out west. You know, with mountains and prairies. Lonesome roads. Lonely travelers. Cowboys. But hey this is Greenwich Village and you got all kinds of weirdos. (silence) Can I buy you a drink? (then) You want to buy *me* a drink? (then) That's a joke. Hey what the hell I'm just trying to make conversation.

(Gerry moves to the halfway mark on the bench. Now that he is in the light from the lamp, Matt recognizes him. He slides to the far end of the bench, keeping his back to Gerry.)

MATT

Christ!

GERRY

I like' em silent. That's like ... mysterious, you know. Like you got a secret. So

... what's your secret, little ... girl?

MATT

Get the fuck out of here.

GERRY

Who-a! Who-a, Nellie! Man, you got spunk. You got spirit. I like that in a girl.

(Gerry puts his hand toward Matt's shoulder.)

MATT

If you don't get off this bench, I'm gonna drop you on your fuckin' ass.

(Matt clears his throat as it is an effort to keep his voice in a high, or higher, range than his normal baritone.)

GERRY

You okay? Can I get you a drink? Lady, I'd be honored to buy you a drink.

(Matt rises from the bench, keeping his face away from Gerry's prying eyes.)

MATT

If you're not out of here in two seconds, I'm gonna run you in.

GERRY

You gonna run me in? What? You some kind of a cop? (no answer) You are one funny ... lady.

MATT

Funny lady? FUNNY LADY?

GERRY

Just kidding, just kidding. (then) Hey, don't I know you?

MATT

Get out of my face – and take a hike! (then) I said, take a hike!

GERRY

Sure, I know you. But from where? (then) Couldn't be from work. Unless you worked with a Hook and Ladder ... you ever work with a hook ... and ladder?

MATT

You calling me a hooker? You calling me a hooker?

GERRY

No, no, that's me. I'm a fireman. Every unit is called Hook and Ladder number ... whatever. No, please. I would never cast aspersions. But man like I know you from somewhere. It's just something about you. Like I'm remembering from a long time ago. So it couldn't be from the job. Were you ever in the service?

MATT

Who are you? The "Inquiring Photographer"? Get the fuck out of my face and fuck off!

GERRY

Are you from Queens?

(Matt walks further away.)

MATT

Look, I'm trying to be nice. Do yourself a favor and get out of here.

GERRY

Yeah. Yeah. You're from Queens. Woodside! Right? My name's Gerry. What's yours? (then) I swear you look like someone I went to school with. You ever go to Holy Cross? I was on the football team. Yeah, the coach used to send me in when we were ahead by fifty points – or losing by fifty points. I don't know why, but I associate you with Queens ... Woodside ... Holy Cross. It's like all coming back to me. Am I right so far? (then) I'll take your silence for a "yes". How long ago was it? Fifteen years ago! Right? Right! (then) Yeah, you are one tough cookie. You should have played football for *us*. Then maybe we'd of had some winning teams. (quickly) That's a joke. Hey, I'll bet the nuns never beat up on *you*.

MATT

Do yourself a big favor: get out of here.

GERRY

Hey, I got a story for you? Want to hear it?

MATT

You got a million benches all over this park. Go find one and leave me alone.

GERRY

Get this: it's graduation day at St. Mary's and all the little girls are lined up in their cute little uniforms with the argyle skirts and the long blue stockings and the white blouses and anyway, one by one, they all gotta file past the Mother Superior. And the Mother says to each one of them, "What do you want to be when you grow up" and they all have their answers, blah blah blah blah blah. And then this one little girl, little Rosie, comes up to the Mother Superior and the old lady says, "Ah, little Rosie, what do you want to be here when you grow up"? And Rosie says in her cute little voice, "I want to be a prostitute". Whereupon the Mother Superior faints dead away. So all the nuns run over and get her up and revive her.

GERRY (contd)

And then the Mother Superior looks at little Rosie and says, "Did you say ... 'prostitute'?" And Rosie nods her head, "yes". Whereupon the Mother Superior lets out a big sigh of relief and says, "Thank God! I thought you said 'Protestant'".

MATT

Go home.

GERRY

What? You don't like my joke? That's okay. I like you. Look, you got great legs. You're not like those skinny little flat-chested hippy girls with long stringy hair. And they're wearing black. Like they're in mourning. Look at 'em. They're all hanging out with black guys. What's that all about it? You think those black guys have bigger ... I'm sorry. I'm out of line. You are clearly a lady.

MATT

My partner's coming over any minute now. Get lost.

GERRY

Your "partner"? Is that like your husband? No? Your boyfriend? (then) Do I take your silence to be another "no"? So who is he?

MATT

He's a big mother fucker and he's gonna lay you on your ass. And if he doesn't, I *will*.

GERRY

Man, you are one exciting lady. You are one special lady ... if you know what I mean. You're not just another lady. You are something ... special. Different. And I appreciate that ... in a ... woman.

(Gerry gets up from the bench and walks toward Matt.)

GERRY (contd) You are turning me on. You are getting me hard. Come on! I know you're working. And that's okay. I got my van parked right over there on West Fourth Street. I got a bottle of Sneaky Pete in the glove compartment. We can go over to the West Side – like under the West Side Highway. Down by the meat district. You know, just below Fourteenth Street.

MATT

That's fag city.

GERRY

I love it down there. All them great slabs of beef. All that meat hanging on hooks. And all those funny Italian guys in white suits and white hats, running around in them big refrigerators. So come on. We'll take a little ride. Have a little taste. Have a little fun. Maybe a little ... if you know what I mean.

MATT

Fuckin' "A" I know what you mean. And if you aint gone by the time I turn around, I'm gonna shove a night stick up your ass.

GERRY

Oh man! Oh yeah! Do it!

MATT

Lover boy –get lost. Get your little Irish dick out of my face.

GERRY

I love it when you talk dirty. You're getting me hard. You're making me come.

MATT (flashing his ID)

That's it, you fucking creep. You're under arrest.

(Matt now faces Gerry under the street lamp.)

GERRY

Matt Dougherty? (long pause) Matt Dougherty? (long pause) Is that you? (then)
Listen, it's me. Gerry. Gerry Doyle.

MATT

Hey, fuck face, I'm working undercover. Now get lost.

GERRY

Great to see you again.

MATT

This is no class reunion. Get the hell out of here.

GERRY

How long has it been? Fifteen years? Man, we had great times together.
Remember ...

MATT

Are you some kind of fucking nincompoop? Do me a favor and get lost. I'm
working undercover.

GERRY

Yeah yeah yeah.

MATT

And get that shit-eating grin off your face before I belt you.

GERRY

Matt! Matt Dougherty. What happened to you? You pull a ...who was that
weirdo? Christine Jorgensen? You pull a sex change?

MATT

No, ass hole, I told you: I'm working.

GERRY

What kind of “working”? You some kind of hooker. Holy shit, what happened to you? You giving blow jobs under the trees?

MATT

You keep talking, I’m gonna *bury* you under the trees.

GERRY

Come on, talk to me. I’ll understand. Matt, you and me, we used to be buddies. Remember when we used to come into the city and come down here? Remember those Friday nights? We had great times down here. “Greenwich Village!” Remember those gay bars? Remember ... ?

MATT

I don’t remember anything.

GERRY

Matt! Come on! We used to say, “Let’s go down to the Village and beat up some fags.” How about that?

MATT

I never said that.

GERRY

Sure you did. Every Friday night during our senior year. We’d come down here and get pissed. And then we’d sit right here in this park with some crappy beer like ... Old Bohemian. Remember? We’d sit in the shadows and

MATT

I never sat in the shadows. I never sat in this goddamned park. I never drank Old Bohemian Beer. You’ve got me mixed up with ... I don’t know who.

GERRY

I don’t have you mixed up with anybody. Remember when they had those fairy bars on Eighth Street? . There was one called Mary’s. And there was one called ... Main Street. And there was another called ...

MATT

You got me mixed up with ... I don’t know who. Okay, so we went to this Italian restaurant called ...

GERRY

Tony's! It had a tree growing in the back room. Remember the tree?

MATT

I don't remember no tree growing in the back room. But we ate spaghetti and drank a lot of Chianti. Yeah, a lot of Chianti.

GERRY

And after we drank a lot of Chianti, we'd go over to Mary's and Main Street and we'd have a few beers. Remember how we shouted to the bartender: "Two beers for two queers!"

MATT

I never said that.

GERRY

Those were great times. Great times.

MATT

I never went to those fruit bars, just Tony's Restaurant for the spaghetti and the Chianti.

GERRY

And then ... Mary's on Eighth Street. We'd go into the men's room to take a leak. Then we'd have to fight our way out. Remember? All those guys, three deep, at the bar?

MATT

Gerry ... I'm working.

GERRY

Yeah, you're working. It's fifteen years later. I'm a fireman and you're a fag. And that's okay.

MATT

I'm not a fag. And I'm gonna split your fucking head wide open if you use the "f" word.

GERRY

Just tell me what happened to you.

MATT

Nothing happened to me, ass hole. I'm a cop. I'm working undercover.

GERRY

Sure sure sure.

MATT

What "sure sure sure"? You think I like wearing this dress? I got a draft up my ass. (then) My goddamn ass feels totally exposed.

GERRY

As well it should.

MATT

What the fuck are you talking about?

GERRY

It's a great ass.

MATT

I don't believe this. You're talking about my ass.

GERRY (singing)

"If it should rain, well, let it ... "

MATT

What's *that* supposed to mean?

GERRY (singing)

"But for tonight, forget it ... "

MATT

And these heels are killing my feet.

GERRY (singing)

"I'm in the mood for love!"

MATT

And ... and ...my makeup is running. I'm a mess.

GERRY

Personally, I think you've never looked better.

MATT

Gerry ...

GERRY

I got sensitive feelings. I understand. Come on, let's go for a drive.

MATT

I've got no time for that ...

GERRY

You gotta make time. Like the song says, you gotta smell the roses.

MATT

Now listen to me! This here is Operation Decoy. I'm wearing this dress because I am the decoy.

GERRY

And you're a goddamn attractive decoy. Hey, you married?

MATT

I'm describing a confidential police operation and you're asking me if I'm married?

GERRY

I'm still not married. At my age, that's really a sin. How about you?

MATT

Of course I'm married. I married Linda Mahoney.

GERRY

Hot stuff. Linda Mahoney. Girl most likely. Yeah, girl most likely to become Mother Superior. You married her? Where do you live? In a convent?

MATT

You make one disparaging remark about Linda and I'm gonna split your lip. (then) Well, Linda and I *were* married. Couple of kids. Great kids. (pause) We got an annulment.

GERRY

Sure. Who wants to be married to a guy who walks around in a dress all day?

MATT

This is police business, you dumb motherfucker.

GERRY

What time do you knock off work?

MATT

None of your goddamn business.

GERRY

I'm just being friendly. I'm just an old friend being friendly. (then) So what time do you knock off work?

MATT (finally)

Midnight. But don't get your hopes up. Don't get *anything* up!

(They stand there uncertainly as Dennis Delaney enters the area.)

DENNIS

Hey, lady, this guy giving you any trouble?

MATT

No, no, no. That's all right.

DENNIS

Come on, I was observing him. This guy was harassing you.

GERRY

No, sir. Honest, I was just ...I don't know ... making small talk.

MATT

It was nothing. Mistaken identity.

DENNIS (to Gerry)

Take a walk.

GERRY (leaving)

Midnight! (then) Midnight!

(Gerry exits.)

GERRY (off-stage)

Midnight!

DENNIS

What's he talking about! (then) Hey, you okay? Man, you look all shook up.

MATT

I wanted to kill that guy.

DENNIS

I'll go get him.

(Dennis starts after Gerry.)

MATT

No, no, no. Let him alone.

(Matt is on the verge of tears. Dennis puts his arm around Matt.)

DENNIS

This is no job for a grown man.

MATT

I know; I know.

DENNIS

I told you not to do it. You never should have volunteered.

MATT

I believe in the program. I believe in the department.

DENNIS

And you're a hell of a cop. Come on, I'll buy you a drink.

MATT

I'm on duty.

DENNIS

So when you knock off work.

MATT

No. I've got a date.

DENNIS

No shit? Good for you! Don't let the grass grow under your feet.
Way to go! So who's the lucky lady?

MATT

Oh ... her name is ... Geraldine.

DENNIS (waiting)

So? You banging her?

MATT

I used to. A long time ago. Why?

DENNIS

Why? (laughing) Hey, if you don't bang *her*, you gonna be banging *me*!

MATT

You know, you got a queer sense of humor.

DENNIS

Hey, man, that hurt.

MATT

Sorry. Sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry.

DENNIS

I know you are one horny sonofabitch. Ever since you and your old lady split, you've been eyeing everything in skirts.

MATT

"Eyeing" is not doing it.

DENNIS

Yeah, but you've been thinking of "doing it" for a long time. How long is it?

MATT

How long is what?

DENNIS

Man, you are really out of it. What happened just now? Who was that guy?

MATT

Hey, you want to trade places with me? You want to slip into a dress and I'll be *your* backup?

DENNIS

No way, man. I don't have balls like you.

(Matt is close to tears.)

MATT (finally)

I went to high school with him.

DENNIS

With who?

MATT

The guy I was just talking to. We were on the same football team. We hung out. He even knew Linda.

DENNIS

I'm sorry. I'm truly sorry.

MATT

Not as sorry as me.

DENNIS

Did he make ... nasty remarks?

MATT

Yes! Yes he did. He made nasty remarks.

DENNIS

Well, all I can say is: I'm truly sorry.

MATT

You know ... and just hear me out ... men can be cruel.

DENNIS

Hey, tell me about it.

MATT

You know, we got feelings, same as everybody else. And our line of work – it's stressful. I mean, it's bad enough when you're in uniform. Because then you're a target for every weirdo in the city. Not just the blacks but everybody. And then tonight ... I'll tell you ... you know, we're just not appreciated. We're the ones in the line of fire. We're taking the heat.

(Matt starts to break down. Dennis puts a comforting hand on his shoulder.)

DENNIS

Go on, take the rest of the night off. I'll handle it.

MATT

What do you mean, "handle it"? You got a dress? You got pumps?

DENNIS

I'll wear yours. What are you, a size 14?

MATT

I'm a "Plus size 14".

DENNIS

No kidding? That big?

MATT

Yeah – "that big".

DENNIS

You're a good guy. Yeah, yeah, I know, men aren't supposed to talk this way. But you – you're a good guy. (then) You sure I can't get you anything?

MATT

That's okay. I'll get through the night.

DENNIS

No, come on. I want to do it.

MATT

What? You want to walk a mile in my shoes? Listen, man, with these pumps, you're gonna *hobble* a mile in my shoes. But hey what the hell - thanks, man, I'll be okay.

DENNIS

Can I bring you some coffee? Apple turnover?

MATT

No, no, I'm fine.

DENNIS

I tell you: one more guy tries any funny stuff with you, I'm gonna beat the crap out of him.

MATT

Appreciate that.

DENNIS

I'm going over to the station house but I'll check in with you – say, in about fifteen minutes.

MATT

Okay.

(Dennis exits. For a moment, Matt sits on the bench, trying to pull himself together. Then Gerry appears.)

GERRY(whispering)

Hey, Matt ... it's Gerry!.

MATT

What are you doing here?

GERRY

I couldn't stay away.

MATT

I'm on duty. And my partner is ready to put the cuffs on you.

GERRY

Understand. Fully understandable. Ful-ly un-der-stand-able. (then) I just wanted to hang out with you. I know, I know, you don't knock off until midnight. But hey it was too late to take in a movie.

MATT

This is Greenwich Village. You got a million restaurants. Go get yourself a good dinner.

GERRY

It's ten o'clock at night. I already ate – hours ago. You know, six o'clock at night and my stomach starts churning like clockwork. Gotta feed the face. But listen, I would be honored to take you out for a late night snack. Midnight supper?

MATT

Do me a real big favor.

GERRY

Anything. (then) Anything for an old buddy.

MATT

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Listen, you see that church over there? It's called Judson Memorial. Go lose yourself for a couple of hours. Say a couple of Hail Mary's, a couple of Our Fathers and one novena to ...

GERRY

Who should I say the novena to?

MATT

To all the defrocked fathers of the world. How the hell should I know?

GERRY

No matter. I've forgotten everything.

MATT

Bullshit. Holy Cross – our Holy Cross - that holiest of crosses - put a branding iron on our cocks. We forget nothing. And not only do we never forget: we've also got those voices in our heads. Remember the voices?

GERRY

I don't have any voices in my head.

MATT

Sure you do: the voices that whisper, "No – no no no" - when you're just *thinking* about "doing it".

GERRY

My voices say, "Yes – yes yes yes!"

MATT

Well, take your voices and take a hike to that church. It doesn't look good for you to be seen with me. Can you get that through your thick Irish skull?

GERRY

That's not a very nice thing to say. (He moves away.) I thought we were old friends. I was going to buy you a beer. A hamburger. A cheeseburger ... deluxe.

MATT

Thanks.

GERRY

So ... that friend of yours that ran me out of here. That's your pimp. Right?

MATT (exploding)

That's my backup, asshole.

GERRY

"Backup". I like that. You think maybe I can be your backup?

MATT

That's it! You're under arrest.

(Gerry takes out handcuffs.)

GERRY

Love those handcuffs! Looks more like a charm bracelet? (*flirting*)
What are you going to do, officer. "Cuff" me?

MATT

I'm gonna cuff you and buff you and ... and ...

GERRY (leaving)

Say no more! I'll see you at the church ... at midnight.

MATT

(shaken and disturbed)

Don't be late!

(*Music Cue: Frank Sinatra's recording of STRANGERS IN THE NIGHT*)

(Blackout)

THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS: *Regarding my one act play, WHEN MEN WERE MEN. You're not going to believe this but the story is based on a real incident that I witnessed in Washington Square Park, Greenwich Village, many, many years ago when a burly police officer was in drag and some local kids spotted the cop and began making fun of him.*

First the officer tried to shoo them away but they kept on making wise ass remarks. He tried to explain to the local kids that his dress, his jewelry and his high heel shoes were part of a sting operation to entice and trap drug dealers and guys who preyed on women. I just sat there on the bench, enjoying the whole scene. I don't know how those kids knew he was a cop - but I remember thinking, "Hey, that's the Village!"

I was asked what issues I like to write about; what issues I like to explore. My answer: everything and everyone.

AUTHOR BIO: As a very young screenwriter, Lawrence DuKore began his writing career with the Richard Pryor film, GREASED LIGHTNING, which was produced by Hanna Weinstein for Warner Bros. His television play, A MISTAKEN CHARITY was produced by Lindsay Law for PBS/American Playhouse and was nominated for a Writers Guild of America award for best dramatic writing. He is a member of both the HB (Herbert Berghof/Uta Hagen) Playwrights Foundation and the Actors Studio Playwrights/Directors Workshop. Most recently, his play, STAINED GLASS, premiered off-Broadway at the award-winning Metropolitan Playhouse. And his Latino comedy, SUNSHINE, just had a successful 3 week run off off Broadway at Teatro LATEA.

- **Writings;PLAYS**
- Virgin Territory, Actors Studio, New York City.
- The Emperor of My Baby's Heart, New York City, 1984.
- **Writings;SCREENPLAYS**
- Greased Lightning, Warner Brothers, 1977.
- **Writings;TELEPLAYS; EPISODIC**
- "A Mistaken Charity," American Playhouse, PBS, 1987.
- **Writings;SERIES**
- One Life to Live, ABC, 1979.
- Search for Tomorrow, NBC, 1984.

