

# What's Up Duck *(quack quack quack)*

By Scott Carter Cooper



**WHY I LIKE IT:** *Drama Editor JANET EHRLICH COLSON writes...*

*It's past midnight and my insane neighbor just screamed "I'd like to fuck a duck!" right as I was about to start writing about this play, What's Up Duck, by Scott Carter Cooper. How's that for Synchronicity? Now he's yelling about an AK47, but that's beside the point. The point is that What's Up Duck is a quirky play that "quacked" us up at the editorial water cooler, and that I'm proud to see this emerging playwright (and my neighbor) making a stellar print debut right here in Fleas. What's Up Duck has an apocalyptic retro feel to it, with an Abbot and Costello-like cadence that transcends gender identity politics as it picks at the weighty scabs of a power struggle/turf war between They and Duck. This isn't about THEM – not that we know who They is (and Who was on third, right?) but that doesn't matter when it all makes sense in a charming yet macabre way. What would you expect when They loves orange sauce and hates everything else, and Duck's, well, a duck?*

THEY

Yeah. I don't believe you're really a duck. Prove it.

DUCK  
*dryly*

Quack.

THEY

Oh.

DUCK

We cool?

*Are we? You're just gonna have to find out how cool we are...*

What's Up Duck

They: a person who wants to hide from the world, any age, gender or race

Duck: a duck who wants to hibernate for the winter, any age, gender or race

Synopsis:

Duck must come to terms with the fact that They has commandeered the cave Duck usually uses for a winter's nap. The two struggle to accommodate one another's needs and in the end, They comes out on top.

*Lights come up on THEY who is using duct tape to seal a door. There is a simple table at the middle of the stage and a dim red light upstage right. When finished with the door, THEY crosses to the table and empties their pockets of the contents. There are eight sunflower seeds. THEY separates them into two piles of four. THEY then looks around and crawls under the table, curls up and prepares to go to sleep. In short order, DUCK enters. DUCK is of non-specific species or sex. DUCK looks around, sizing up both the table and THEY.*

DUCK

's up?

THEY

Hi. Can I help you? How did you get in here?

DUCK

How did you get in here?

THEY

Through that door.

DUCK

Oh. I flew down from Canada, stopped at this little spot I know in Lake Superior where the mackerel are incredible. Then I flew in from the opening at the sea. Can I just say, that's a lot of flying, and boy are my arms tired!

THEY

I can't fly.

DUCK

Sucks to be you. But at least you have those opposable thumbs all the cool kids are raving about.

THEY

But you've got wings.

DUCK

Why yes. Yes, I do. Thank you for noticing. But seriously. What brings you here?

THEY

Have you seen what's out there? War. Pestilence. Pumpkin spice. Hillary Clinton. Lady Gaga!

DUCK

They say it gets better.

THEY

I'm They. I don't say that.

DUCK

No?

THEY

No.

DUCK

You're being quoted, like, all the time. "They say this."  
"They say that." There are plenty of them out there misquoting  
you.

THEY

That's my cousin.

DUCK

Who?

THEY

Them.

DUCK

Who is them?

THEY and DUCK

*directly to audience*

Third base!

THEY

How did you find my hideout?

DUCK

Oh. Your? Your? I don't connect with these aggressive  
pronouns, dude. That's not my thing. No. I come here every  
spring. I'm lead singer for a garage band. Maybe you've heard  
of us. Duck and Cover. We do all the greats. You know?  
Daffy. Donald. The Ugly... This my chill pad.

THEY

Ducks don't hibernate.

DUCK

This duck does.

THEY

Yeah. I don't believe you're really a duck. Prove it.

DUCK

*dryly*

Quack.

THEY

Oh.

DUCK

We cool?

THEY

I don't know. I don't have much experience with ducks.

DUCK

What you got against ducks?

THEY

Nothing. I like ducks. Donald. Daffy. The Ugly...

DUCK

Man, those are just commercialized representations drawn by capitalists who are less interested in telling the real story of the world's most common aquatic fowl than they are in exploiting us for their own entertainment and profit. Those are not ducks. I am an authentic duck. They are abominations. They. They.

THEY

This is what I'm getting away from!

DUCK

What?

THEY

Everywhere I go, someone...or something-

DUCK

Watch it, buddy.

THEY

-- is telling me what I'm supposed to think. I can't take it.  
I can't! I. Just. Can't!

DUCK

I'm not telling you what to think. I'm educating you to the facts! Daffy. Donald. The Ugly! All Abominations! The closest Walt Disney ever got to a real duck was when he slathered one with orange sauce.

THEY

Oh! Orange sauce is very tasty.

DUCK

I'm talking the plight of the animated ducks and you're -

THEY

But I mean, as sauces go -

DUCK

I get it. You like a good orange sauce.

THEY

Especially if there are little flecks of red chili peppers --

DUCK

OK! Let me explain something to you. You do realize you're talking to a duck.

THEY

Yeah?

DUCK

About orange sauce.

THEY

Right?

DUCK

Do you see the problem?

THEY

No.

DUCK

How am I supposed to feel about that?

THEY

How you feel is not my problem. Hey, it's just a condiment!

DUCK

Man, I'm trying to tell you that what you're saying is hurtful. We'll never get anywhere until you are able to acknowledge my pain. Just apologize and we'll move on.

THEY

I mean, if we're going to share this cave for several months --

DUCK

Hold up. Who says we're sharing this cave?

THEY

Well... I can't go back out there.

DUCK

But this is my cave. I found it first.

THEY

Yeah. But it's my duct tape on the door.

DUCK

What did you say?

THEY

That's my duct tape on the door.

DUCK

Duck?

THEY

Duct.

DUCK

No. Duck. It's Duck Tape.

THEY

Is not.

DUCK

It is too!

THEY

No. It's not.

DUCK

You ask anyone, they'll tell you it's duck tape.

THEY

This! This is part of the reason I can't go back out there.

DUCK

Why?

THEY

They are stupid.

DUCK

Didn't you say you were they? Well, I can't argue with that.

*THEY starts to cry.*

What's the matter?

THEY

That was my father! No. I will die from an overdose of stupidity if I go out there. All I want to do is curl up in here and wait until the stupidity of the human race dies out.

DUCK

What if there's no vaccine?

*THEY crawls under the table, curling up, preparing to sleep.*

DUCK

You can't --

THEY

Just six weeks until the stupidity of the human race dies out.

DUCK



No, what I mean is --

THEY

Don't be selfish. I promise, I won't bother you.

DUCK

No. The tide comes in here. If you stay under that table you'll drown.

THEY

OK. Then I'll sleep on top of the table.

*THEY climbs on top of the table.*

DUCK

Where I'm supposed to perch?

THEY

You said you float.

DUCK

And perch. I float. And perch. Float and perch. And fly. Float and perch and fly. But not when I'm hibernating. Then I just float. And perch. On that table.

THEY

I have an idea. I have eight sunflower seeds here. I'll let you have four of them if you'll share your perch with me. And... I don't want to offend you...

*THEY produces an orange from a pocket.*

THEY

I know how you feel about these, but they really are very good.

DUCK

Just go to sleep. I'll hunker down over here until the water starts to rise.

THEY

OK.

*The two are quiet for a minute.*

I have two of them.

DUCK

Two what?

THEY

Oranges. If you'd like to give one a try. If you just try one..

DUCK

No. No duck wants to try no orange.

*Slowly the red light begins to glow brighter.*

THEY

Oh no.

DUCK

What is that?

THEY

You've never seen one of those before?

DUCK

What is it?

THEY

It's a detector.

DUCK

For God's sake, what does it detect?!

THEY

Bullshit. There are lethal levels of bullshit. All around us.

DUCK

No quack.

THEY

This is what I've been trying to escape. It's too much! Too much!

DUCK

Dude. I hate to tell you, but it's everywhere. Just ignore it and go to sleep.

THEY

I...I can't. I'm scared.

DUCK

We're all scared. Calm down.

THEY

Will you hold me?

DUCK

OK.

*DUCK embraces THEY. THEY slowly embraces DUCK'S neck.*

OK. OK. That's - that's enough. Time to go - I can't breathe.

*THEY is staring out front as the duck's wings begin to flap frantically, and then subside. The red light glows brighter and brighter and as red light fills the stage...*

THEY

*Whispering*

Orange sauce.

*Red light fades to black.*

END OF PLAY

### **THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS...**

*"What's Up Duck" represents a stylistic change for me, jumping into absurdism from a much more naturalistic point of view. To say this play was inspired by the insanity of the Trump era covers a multitude of sins, and it's really far too early to say that we've actually survived the era. That said, if we are so lucky to get through it, I think history will show that a lot of good has come from it. Without the boil coming to a head, it cannot be lanced, cleansed and healed. That said, it doesn't mean we don't have the urge to hide during the lancing and cleaning phase. This play was actually written a year before Covid. Be careful what you wish for...*

**AUTHOR BIO:** Scott Carter Cooper was an invited participant in the 2020 Kennedy Center's Playwrighting intensive and has worked closely to develop his work with Chicago Dramatists and Primary Stages. His plays have been presented internationally, domestically, and during the time of Covid, online.