

# Duck, Duck, Excuse

By [Endelda](#) <[endeldas.writing@gmail.com](mailto:endeldas.writing@gmail.com)>

Rated: G

Submitted: October 2019

Summary: Lois finds out Clark has been keeping something from her but decides to help him anyway. After all, what are friends for?

Story Size: 4,606 words (25Kb as text)

Disclaimer: I own only the products of my own imagination. All recognizable Superman characters, plot points, & dialogue belong to DC Comics, Warner Bros., December 3rd Productions & anyone else with a stake in the Superman franchise.

This is set in early Season Two, after the episode “Church of Metropolis” but well before “Lucky Leon.” This also functions as a response to Deadly Chakram’s Father’s Day Challenge

\*\*\*

The first thing Lois Lane noticed about her partner, Clark Kent, was that he was back in the newsroom after his unexpected personal day the day before. Although it was normal (or at least, normal for Clark) for him to vanish at odd hours for varying lengths of time for a variety of weird and ridiculous reasons, it was rare for him to be gone for an entire day. As she bustled over to him, surprised to realize how much she’d missed him in just 24 hours, the second thing she noticed was that he was startlingly rumpled. His tie, loud as ever, was not just crooked but actually *wrinkled*, the back of his shirt collar was standing up, and his suit jacket was covered with flecks of lint, as though he’d gone three rounds against a laundromat and lost.

As she got closer to him, the third thing she noticed was his scent. Normally Clark smelled amazing — whether he’d just rolled out of bed, spent hours playing basketball with Jimmy and the guys, or been penned up in her Jeep on a stakeout all night, he invariably smelled of fresh air and well-scrubbed masculinity. She was a little addicted to it, if she was honest with herself, although she’d rather suffer a thousand paper cuts than admit it to another living soul. Today he still had his usual scent, but it was overlaid with a whiff of something odd, a slightly musty, slightly acrid smell that didn’t seem like him at all.

Lois’s nose wrinkled with distaste as she reached out to brush his jacket clean. “Clark! You’re late! Where were you yesterday?” —*I missed you*— “I was counting on you to run interference while I cornered Councilman Zimmerman about those budget discrepancies!” She took a closer look at his jacket when her efforts to de-lint him weren’t as effective as she’d expected. “Are those *feathers*?”

“Down!” chirped Clark with a grin, offering no other explanation as he shed his jacket. He draped it over the back of his chair, then wrapped several lengths of scotch tape around his hand, sticky-side out, and started cleaning the down from the garment.

Lois watched him for a moment, her brow wrinkled in confusion. She absently noted that his shirt tail was untucked as she worked to make sense of his behavior. “Clark! Down what? And why do you smell like... like...” Her Aunt Mabel had kept finches when Lois was a little girl, and the vague memory of the sweet elderly lady’s dim and feathery house suddenly clicked into place. “A bird cage! Why do you smell like a bird cage?”

Clark started to answer her when Perry strolled over with a playful grin. “Clark! Welcome back, I hope you managed to get all your ducks in a row yesterday?” Their boss gave Clark and his disheveled appearance the once-over. “Leave the house in a rush

this morning, son?”

Clark stripped the tape from his hand and dropped the sticky wad into the trash can next to his desk as he favored Perry with a slightly uneasy smile. “Sorry Chief, I was in a bit of a hurry. There were some... unanticipated developments, but everything’s fine.”

Perry nodded, not looking the least bit surprised. “That’s good to hear, you be sure to let me know if anything else comes up, alright?” He turned to Lois. “How’s that piece on Councilman Zimmerman coming along, Lois? Did you get the interview yesterday?”

She watched Clark tuck his shirt in and slip his jacket back on as she answered. “Yes, although it took a little more finesse than I’d been planning on.”

“Good, I knew you were up to it!” Perry said with enthusiasm. “Come on into my office, I want to go over some information I got for you from one of my sources.”

“But Perry—” She made an aborted gesture toward Clark, only to realize that he was already heading back out of the newsroom and toward the stairwell. Her shoulders slumped with a sigh. “Fine, let me get my notes and I’ll meet you there.” She headed toward her desk to grab yesterday’s notepad, then followed Perry into his office with a determined stride. Something was up with her partner, and she was going to find out what it was. No amount of editor meetings or unexplained vanishings was going to stop her, either.

\*\*\*

Every time she thought she had Clark pinned down for a good quizzing session, something else popped up. Between his more usual short-lived disappearances, progress reports for Perry, requests from Jimmy to clarify and narrow down what she wanted researched, and actually writing her story, she just hadn’t been able to find the time she needed to properly grill Clark about whatever secret he was keeping. The fact that Perry was apparently in on it and was just as adept at dodging her curiosity was just infuriating icing on the aggravating cake.

She couldn’t believe he was still keeping things from her after all they’d been through together! How dare that no good, so-called partner of hers not let her in when he had a problem! Didn’t he know by now that she was his friend, and if he had some emergency that needed a whole personal day, she’d be happy to help him? The nerve of some people! You open the door wide as anything, and they just refused to walk through!

She was still fuming to herself as she parked the Jeep at the curb next to Clark’s building and got out, then leaned back in to get the large pizza and the shopping bag full of soft drinks and movie rentals she’d brought. Friends always showed up with food when there was a crisis, right? Clark always fed her when *she* had a problem. She turned away with her arms full, kicked the Jeep’s door shut with her heel, then marched up the steps.

She slowed and took a deep breath as she reached Clark’s door. *Be calm*, she reminded herself, *you’re here to help the lunkhead, not skin him*. She knocked and waited a few minutes, but when there was no answer and the bag of drinks kept getting heavier she set her offerings down and fished her lock picks out of her pocket. Seconds later she pushed the door open, then picked up their dinner and went inside. Only one light was on, at the far end of the coffee table where she couldn’t remember Clark having a lamp, and she nearly tripped walking down the inside steps in the dimness. Her foot struck something at the base of the steps that slid away with a hissing noise, and a sudden rustling came from... the lamp?

There was a large open cardboard box on the floor next to the coffee table, with an industrial-looking light clipped to one side and pointed toward the inside of the box. She glanced over to see what she’d kicked and saw a styrofoam cooler that had a large hole cut in the lid for some reason, with a piece of glass taped over the hole.

She set the bag of drinks down on the coffee table with a thump. “Clark? Are you home?”

At the sound of her voice, the cardboard box erupted in a storm of frantic peeping. Startled, she jumped before leaning cautiously over the top of the box to look inside. It took her eyes a moment to recognize the seething movement for what it was — half a dozen black and yellow ducklings that were clearly alarmed and climbing all over each other as the volume of their cries increased.

“Lois!” Clark greeted her as he came through the door behind her. “What are you doing here? And didn’t I lock that door?”

She waved off his second question as she continued to peer into the box, fascinated in spite of herself. “You seemed like you were having some kind of problem, and since no one would tell me where you were yesterday, I came over to find out what was up and if you needed any help.” The peeping got louder as she leaned a little closer to the ducklings. “I’m guessing these little guys were the emergency?”

“Yup!” Came Clark’s slightly muffled voice. Lois glanced over at him to see her partner pulling on a baggy sweatshirt with a large pocket attached to the front. He scooted past her, “Excuse me, Lois,” and reached into the box where he started carefully scooping up the ducklings one by one and depositing them into the pocket. “They started hatching night before last, and I wanted to be here in case any of them had any trouble.”

Lois straightened up and gave him an incredulous look. “What are you doing? Aren’t pouches for baby kangaroos?”

Clark laughed as he fitted the last duckling into the limited space between its already-pocketed siblings. “Yeah, joeys, but this is just a substitute. Usually baby Mallards brood with their mother, under her wings where it’s warm and dark. I don’t have wings, so Mom modified some sweatshirts for me.”

“Didn’t you say they just hatched yesterday?”

Clark darted a vaguely panicky look in her direction. “Um, yeah, they hatched yesterday. Apparently Mom knew about the imprinting thing though, because she, uh, had the shirts ready and... overnighted them.”

“What imprinting thing?” Lois cocked her head curiously.

He looked uncomfortable as he cautiously sat down on the couch, careful to make sure none of the ducklings were getting squashed. There were a few peeps of complaint from the pocket and some restless movement, but everything settled pretty quickly once he was seated. “Well, they started following me around after they hatched, so I called Mom. None of the chicks on the farm ever did that. She said chickens don’t really do it as much, but ducklings imprint on the first moving thing they see, especially if their parents aren’t around.”

“Wait... so they think...” Lois barked out a laugh, then clapped a hand over her mouth when she heard an irritated cheep from Clark’s stomach. “They think you’re their *mother*?” She stepped over to the couch.

“Hey!” He protested. “They could think I’m their dad... if male ducks stuck around to help raise the babies...” Clark gave her a smile that was a little bit rueful and a little bit bashful as he gently patted the pocket full of ducklings. “But yeah, I guess they do.”

Lois sat down next to him carefully and leaned into his shoulder as she reached over to lift the edge of the pocket for a peek. “That’s sort of sweet, actually.” She tipped her face up toward him and grinned, “Happy Father’s Day!” then turned her attention back to the babies as Clark chuckled ‘*gee, thanks*’ in her ear. The ducklings were curled into fluffy balls of down, each with its head tucked under one of its stubby wings. “So, how did you wind up with a... group? A nest? A bundle of baby ducks, anyway?”

“A badling.”

“What?”

“The collective noun for a group of ducks when they’re not flying or swimming is a badling.” Clark explained.

Lois arched an eyebrow at him. “Of course it is. Am I supposed to be surprised that you know that?”

He grinned at her. “I had a lot of downtime yesterday while I was waiting for them to finish hatching.”

She shook her head, amused. “Of course you did. So c’mon, spill! How’d you end up playing Duck Mom?”

“Superman.”

“What do you mean, ‘Superman’?” Lois pulled her attention from the ducklings, eager to hear a story that involved her hero.

“Superman saw some idiot riding a four-wheeler through the park, off the paths where you’re not supposed to take vehicles. The idiot was riding near the pond, and by the time Superman spotted him he’d already run over the edge of the nest.”

Lois gasped and Clark nodded sadly. “Yeah. He ran over the mother and broke a bunch of the eggs. Superman didn’t want the rest to die, so he brought them ho- er, here.”

Lois scrunched her nose up. “Why didn’t he take them to the zoo or something?”

Clark shrugged. “I guess he figured I’d know what to do with them since I grew up on a farm. Maybe he doesn’t know anyone at the zoo.” He jerked his chin toward the cooler she’d kicked earlier. “Anyway, I rigged up a cooler into an incubator and just sort of... kept an eye on things for a week or so, and here they are!” He gently stroked a lump of duckling through the fabric and was rewarded with a sleepy peep.

Lois grinned at him. “Look at you with your babies! What are their names?”

He frowned. “Lois, they’re wild animals, it’s not like I’m going to keep them! What makes you think I named them?”

She stared at him until he started to squirm. “Clark Jerome Kent! There’s no way you hatched a *badling* of baby ducks, had your Mom make you special clothes to keep them happy, are currently toting them around like you’re their mother, and didn’t name them. Tell me already!”

He broke eye contact and cleared his throat, staring at the pocket like he could see the babies through the fabric. “Huey, Dewey, Louie, Daffy, Daisy, and... um... *mumble*.”

Lois giggled. “And *what*!?”

Clark darted a glance at her. “Howard.”

Her jaw dropped and she slapped him on the arm, pulling the punch at the last second when she remembered not to jostle the ducklings. “You named a sweet little innocent baby *Howard the Duck*?”

He gave an embarrassed laugh. “Hey, I was a sophomore in college when that came out! All my friends thought it was hilarious!”

Lois nudged him again. “It was disgusting!”

Clark grinned at her. “Well yeah, I know that *now*. It still seemed like a funny name for this little guy.” He patted one of the lumps.

She shook her head. “No. No way, you should change his name to Donald before he’s old enough to know better.”

He gave an exaggerated sigh and rolled his eyes, pretending to be heavily put-upon. “Fiiiiine. If it bothers you so much, I’ll change it to Donald.”

Lois poked him in the ribs. “Oh no, you’re not doing any favors for me, you’re doing it as a favor for this little guy.” She reached over and lightly patted the same lump, then lifted the edge of the pocket again and laid her head on Clark’s shoulder for a better view into the gap she’d created. “How can you tell that only one of them’s a girl duckling?” she asked after a moment, when she realized the significance of the names.

“Lois, I grew up on a farm, remember?” Clark reminded her, then relaxed when she ‘*hmm*’ed and accepted his explanation. He had no idea how regular people sexed ducklings — personally,

he'd treated each one to a brief shot of x-ray vision when his curiosity had overcome him the day before.

Cuddled up against the solid warmth of Clark in the dim room and watching the hatchlings sleep in their cozy nest, it was only a short time before Lois was asleep herself.

\*\*\*

Clark woke her up shortly afterward that night and walked her to the door, but after that she was a more frequent visitor to his apartment than ever. She was there the next night when he plugged the drain in the bottom of his shower to let the ducklings paddle around in a few inches of warm water, and she started dropping by alone during their lunch break to top up their food and water if Clark was too busy to run home and check on the babies himself, as well as coming over in the evenings more often to spend time with him — er, with the ducklings.

A few weeks later, when the ducklings were clearly outgrowing the puddle in the bottom of the shower stall, she stopped by a Cost Mart on her way over after work and showed up with a colorful plastic wading pool.

Clark rolled his eyes at her purchase as he led the ducklings into his bathroom and trapped them inside over their vigorous protests. “Really, Lois? Rubber ducks?”

“So sue me!” She shot back. “They had one with those ninja turtles on it, but I thought Huey, Dewey, Louie, Daffy, Daisy, and Donald would appreciate the thought!”

He shook his head and laughed as they maneuvered the stiff piece of plastic through his apartment and out onto the patio. After a discussion with his landlord, Clark had assured Floyd that he had no intention of keeping the ducks permanently and the man had agreed that Clark could set up a place out there for them to swim as long as it was temporary.

Together they arranged some loose bricks into steps leading into and out of the pool to give the ducklings easy access, then made a few trips back and forth with a large pitcher and Clark's stock pot to fill the pool to a level appropriate to the age and size of the growing waterfowl.

Clark let the ducklings out of his bathroom and led them onto the patio, where they excitedly ran for the small artificial pond as soon as they spotted it. He took a seat next to Lois on the short wall at the edge of the open space, their shoulders brushing as they enjoyed the antics of the small flock.

She nudged his shoulder. “They're really growing up, aren't they?”

He nodded, watching the ducklings play with a fond smile. “Yeah, they're definitely a paddling now.”

Lois laughed. “A-paddling? Clark, I know you're from the country, but—”

“What? No!” He laughed with her. “Not a-paddling, *a* paddling. That's what you call a group of ducks when they're swimming — a paddling, or some people call them a raft or a team.”

She wiped her eyes as their laughter tapered off, then bumped his shoulder again and gave him a serious look. “What do you call them when they're flying?”

Clark met her gaze and sighed. “A flock.”

“Don't be sad, Clark,” she told him earnestly, “It'll be good for them, and besides — wasn't that the whole idea?”

He looked away and watched the babies paddling around for a little while, finding his smile again as he watched them as they used the stacked bricks to splash in and out of the water or ran around the patio flapping and dripping everywhere. “I know, and you're right but... I'll miss them.” *And you.*

Lois leaned against his side and gave a sigh of her own, mourning the impending loss of the ducks and her ready-made excuse to spend so much personal time with her partner. “Yeah, me too.”

\*\*\*

A few weeks after bringing the pool over, Lois arrived at Clark's apartment one evening to find the door locked and the lights off. He'd been home after work with the lights on and the door unlocked every night for a couple of months, ever since the ducklings hatched, so Lois was immediately concerned. She quickly picked the lock and let herself in, calling for her partner as she did so. “Clark? Everything ok?”

The silence rang in her ears as she made her way down the steps. “Clark?” She headed toward his bedroom; maybe he wasn't feeling well. “Huey? Dewey? Louie? C'mon guys, this isn't funny!”

She flicked the lights on and couldn't help but notice that the portable fencing Clark had set up in the corner of his bedroom as a duck pen was folded against the wall and the area had been swept clean. *Oh no.* Surely he would have called her if their—the babies were flying? She hurried out to the patio. *Maybe they're having a swim and he's just letting the floor air out or something.* But the patio was as cold and dark as the apartment; the wading pool was leaning against one of the patio walls, empty and dry.

Her shoulders slumped in disappointment and something she insisted to herself wasn't heartache as she trudged back through the apartment and let herself out. It was such a nice evening that she'd walked over, which was a shame since she really wanted the solidity of her Jeep between herself and the rest of the world just then. She'd thought that she and Clark had been getting closer, deepening their bond and strengthening their friendship over care of the ducklings and maybe even moving toward something more than friendship, but evidently she'd just been a handy friend to share livestock chores with.

It was a warm night, so she slipped her jacket off as she neared the park, draping it over her arm and forcing herself to slow down from what had become an agitated march. She'd expected to spend her evening playing with the ducks — they'd really gotten too big to be called ducklings anymore — and spending time with Clark, and the clash between expectation and reality was fraying her temper. Once her upset over not being called about the ducks learning to fly was factored in, she was more than halfway to angry. She was muttering to herself about being put-upon and taken for granted and was almost back up to her previous marching speed when she heard an unusual quacking.

“Daisy?” Lois looked around for the young duck. She'd developed an unusual broken quack soon after her adult feathers started coming in, and Lois was sure that was what she'd heard. “Daisy!” Maybe she'd judged Clark too soon. Maybe the ducks had gotten out and he was out looking for them.

Lois heard the unique cry again and realized it was coming from above. She tipped her head back and peered into the darkness, cupping her hands around her eyes and wishing the lamp posts along the path were a little dimmer. She squinted and spotted a small flock of ducks flying overhead in a classic ‘V’ formation. She counted... yup, all six were there. There was something weird about the way they were flying though... with only six, shouldn't one leg of the ‘V’ be longer than the other? She traced the formation to the tip of the arrow and saw a broad-shouldered human shape. Oh, well, that was alright. They'd been following Clark faithfully since the day they hatched, no reason for them to stop now.

She made it two steps further along the path before she froze like she'd been struck by lightning. The ducklings were following Clark. The ducklings were *flying*, and they were following Clark.

*Clark was flying.*

She hissed through gritted teeth, then growled. “Clark Kent, if you don't get down here *right this instant*, I'm going to start screaming — and it won't be ‘*help, Superman!*’” She didn't doubt for a second that he could hear her, so she waited on the path with her toe tapping.

Lois turned a few seconds later when she heard a ‘*thud*’

behind her; Clark had landed a bit harder than usual. The flurry of feathers and the chorus of complaining avian voices was also new. She stalked over to his landing spot in the deeper shadows under the trees, snarling all the way.

“Cla—!”

He made a frantic shushing motion and stepped toward her, nudging a duck out of the way with his boot. “Lois, *please!* Not here!”

She ground her teeth together. “Fine, *Superman*, then where? When? We’ve been together nearly every day— night— evening— you know what I mean!— for two months, in complete privacy! Were you waiting for a place where you felt more comfortable than in your own apartment? Or some magical time when you felt like you could trust me?”

His forehead wrinkled in consternation. “Lois no, of course I trust you! You’re my best friend!”

“HA!”

“No really, you know me better than anyone else—”

“Clearly, I don’t!” She scoffed and started to turn away, but he reached out and grabbed her arm.

“No, Lois, really. You do know me, and I’m sorry I hadn’t told you yet. I wanted to, and so many times I almost did, it’s just...”

She gave him a suspicious look, wary for tricks or fresh lies. “Just what?”

Clark looked down at the ground, too nervous to make eye contact. “I never told anyone before, except Trask, and he was threatening you and my parents.”

Her jaw dropped a little. *Oh yeah, Trask... oooh Trask! And Clark really is Superman! Wow, that must have been terrifying...*

“Anyway, it’s not exactly easy to work into small talk, is it?”

“Hi, according to Perry I’m your new partner, hope you don’t mind working with me, by the way I can fly?” I guess I was just...”

“Just what?” she barked at him.

He shot her an uneasy look. “Just... shy?”

She opened her mouth to snap at him, then paused. There was her hero, standing before her in the starlight. He was dressed in his eye-catching Suit, which apparently *Martha Kent* had made for him, and he was valiantly trying to ignore the fact that he was... completely surrounded by ducks.

Daisy was trying to roost on his right boot, Huey and Dewey were pecking at his cape with their bills and trying to tug him toward the pond, Louie and Daffy were paddling around in the pond but kept waddling out to run over to him as if to say ‘*c’mon Dad, if we can’t fly can we at least go for a swim?*’, and Donald, who had turned out to be more of a Goofy, was sort of waddling around aimlessly, staring up at the stars and periodically bumping into one of Clark’s calves.

Lois tried to hang onto her anger, she really did. It lasted for all of five more seconds before a giggle snuck out.

Clark looked crestfallen. “Hey!”

She shook her head, still giggling. “I’m not laughing at you,” she gestured. “Your ducks!”

Clark looked down, and a smile slowly snuck its way onto his lips. He looked back up at her tentatively. “Don’t you mean *our* ducks?”

She took a few moments to wipe her eyes and catch her breath before answering. “Yeah, I guess they are our ducks, aren’t they?” She looked at him thoughtfully. “So... now what?”

He held out a careful hand. “Would you like to come flying with me and the kids?”

Lois took his hand, then whooped in surprise when he pulled her in close and scooped her into his arms. On second thought, she wasn’t sure why she was so surprised; he’d always carried her that way.

What was new was the way he wobbled in the air a bit when she grinned over his shoulder at the flock of ducks arrowing along behind them and threaded her fingers through the short hair at the

THE END