

# Adventures in Baby-Sitting

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Rating: T

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Supergirl Returns series #9. This is a Castle / Hancock / DC movieverse / Batteries Not Included crossover, set in a world where Supergirl visited earth during Superman's absence (his trip to Krypton in *Superman Returns*), returned a year or so after he did, and now lives as Linda Lee in Los Angeles.

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"Hey, Castle!"

Richard Castle finished taking Kate's coat, looked around to see who had called him, and recognised the tall, scruffy-looking black man in black leathers sitting at the bar and nursing a stein of beer. "John! It's been a while, how are you?"

"Not bad, all things considered."

Castle felt a none-too-gentle fist dig him in the ribs, and hastily said "John, this is Detective Kate Beckett. Kate, John Hancock."

Beckett smiled, and said "We've met, but it's been a couple of years. The thing with the hang-gliding nuns?"

"Of course," said Hancock, "just after I moved from LA. That was a weird one. I thought you looked familiar, what are you drinking?"

"Just a beer."

Castle followed her to the bar, saying "Hang-gliding nuns?"

"They were dressed as nuns, they had hang-gliders, they robbed some penthouse apartments, one of the tenants was shot," said Kate.

"That's it?"

"What were you expecting? Not every case has to be insanely complicated."

"Well, excuse me for bringing some mystery into your life."

"Cheers," said Hancock, after buying drinks. "Got any flashlight batteries?"

"Flashlight batteries? What size?"

"AA; or AAA will do if you haven't got them."

"I've got a couple in my Maglite," said Kate, fishing into her purse and pulling out the little flashlight. "Here we go, two AAs."

"Way to go. What about you, Castle?"

"Let's see..." He groped through his pockets and eventually pulled out an LED flashlight, taking it apart to get three AAA cells.

"Thanks, I forgot to hit the hardware store," said Hancock, "and it's feeding time." He raised two fingers to his lips and whistled loudly.

Three silvery hemispherical objects, about three inches across, appeared from somewhere on the other side of the bar, flying a few inches above the floor, swerving to avoid the stools and the other customers until they reached Hancock. Two slightly larger inverted bowls flew down from the ceiling beams. They hovered near Hancock, humming quietly and shining bright lights at the batteries.

"What the hell are they?" asked Castle.

"Well, the biggest one is Huey," said Hancock, holding up an AA battery. It swooped over to his hand, and a tiny hatch opened, revealing a metal claw which grabbed the battery and dragged it inside, then and rose back to the ceiling. "Next up we have Dewey..." The other large hemisphere ate the next AA battery and disappeared behind the bar, "Daffy, Duckula, and Howard," The last three flew down to grab the AAA

batteries, clanking against each other in their haste, and flew off together.

"What the hell are those things?" echoed Beckett.

"Baby flying saucers," said Hancock. "They think I'm their mom."

"Well," said Castle, in the stunned silence that followed, "I think they must take after the other side of the family."

## A Week Earlier

"What the fuck are these things? And why are they following me?"

"Why drag me across the country to ask me?"

"You're an alien, I thought you might know."

Linda held out her hand, and the tiny flying saucer landed on it and seemed to hum contentedly. "Fair point, though you could have asked my cousin just as easily. They're harmless; I don't know why you don't like them."

Hancock glared at another of the saucers, and swatted at it half-heartedly. It dodged out of the way, then flew back to hover behind him. "So what are they?"

"They're self-repairing robots that evolved into living organisms. I read about them in Argo City. Nobody really knows where they originated, or what they were originally built for, but they're found on a lot of worlds. They behave a lot like birds. The adults are about three times this size; they scavenge junk to build their young. Once the young leave the nest they find their own metal and power sources, get bigger, and eventually fly off into space."

"So they're going to... what, eat all the cars in New York?"

"It doesn't work like that. The space drive they have only works for small objects. They can't eat anything too big or they won't be able to fly to another world, and that's part of their life cycle. So they find little bits of junk, things like discarded ring pulls, bottle caps, bits of wire, nails and thumb tacks, and power sources like batteries, fuel cells, whatever exists on the world they land on." She looked more closely at the one on her hand. "The hull of this one seems to be made out of pieces of a pie dish; that one started out as the lid of a small saucepan. There are thousands of tiny nanobots working like the cells of their bodies, fixing the parts together, strengthening them, and gradually making them part of the organism."

"But why are they following me?" Hancock sprung into the air again, leaving the spire of the Chrysler Building behind, swooped down towards the street, then up to land with a thud on the observation deck of the Empire State Building. The saucers followed him in a neat V-formation, with Linda trailing behind, and resumed hovering near him once he landed.

"I'm not sure you're going to like this..."

"I'm *already* not liking it."

"I think they think you're the mother-ship."

"I'm the *WHAT?*"

"There's a phase they go through," said Linda, stooping and picking up a dime someone had dropped, "where they've learned to fly, but the parents are still teaching them how to do things. They follow them wherever they go. If something happens to the parents they instinctively follow the first flying thing they see that's bigger than they are." She tossed the dime towards the circling saucers, and one swooped to intercept it.

"So what happened to the parents?"

"I'm guessing you did."

"I did? I did what?"

"Think about it – have you smashed any flying saucers recently?"

"Ummm... how big did you say they were?"

"Like two hubcaps joined together at the rim."

"Oh crap."

"Yes?"

"Last week, I was in the middle of a fight with some punks who were knocking over an armoured car, they had military hardware. I flew into two of the damned things over Greenwich Village. I thought they were some sort of weird-ass missile. These things turned up the following day. They must have followed me home."

"Well... I guess you have a bit of a problem."

"Why me? Can't you get them to fly after you instead?"

"It doesn't work like that. They're imprinted on you now, like baby ducks that decide a Labrador is their mother. They'll follow you everywhere until they're a little more mature."

"You got that part right. I can't even go to the can without the little metal perverts following me in there. I need to get rid of them somehow; please, how can I trick them into following you?"

"I don't have any idea how to trick them," said Linda. "And I couldn't keep them with me anyway. I have a secret identity, having these little guys hang around would be a huge problem."

"One of these days I'll figure out who you are out of that costume. Supermodel? Movie star?"

"Nobody you're ever likely to have heard of. And the press still think that I have nothing to hide, I'd like to keep it that way."

"Don't worry; your secret is safe with me. Provided I get a little help with the small fry, of course."

"Okaaaay," said Linda. "Right now I think it's just me that's a little mad at you. Do you really want to annoy my cousin too?"

"Huh, he's not so tough."

"Then let me put it another way. Batman helped me set up my identity; do you really want to annoy *him*?"

Hancock winced, and hastily said "I was just kidding. Really."

"Thought so. Now, I'll try to help, but you'll have to look after them for the next few months."

"How?"

"Feed them junk and batteries, and keep them from doing anything stupid."

"Such as?"

"How would I know? Flying into furnaces, getting shot or captured by mad scientists, that sort of thing."

"I'm really not cut out for this."

"You're being too negative," said Linda. "Look at it this way; they're cute, they're harmless, they can fly, and they don't mess up the floor; they're the perfect pet for someone like you."

"Maybe I should just fly away for a few days, go to Tahiti or something. They might lose interest."

"They can probably fly through space already, and they have senses to match. You could take your vacation on Mars and they'd soon track you down."

"Wonderful," he said sourly. "Can you do anything to help?"

"Maybe we should look for the parents. They might be injured, not dead."

"I'm not even sure what I did to them, things were happening so fast. Let's see..." He sprung into the air again, followed by the tiny saucers. Linda waited a moment to see which way he was headed, then followed him towards Greenwich Village.

\* \* \*

"The only way I can figure it," said Hancock, "the remains ended up on the street and got trucked away by the sanitation department long before Supergirl and I started looking. Whatever, we must have checked most of Greenwich Village and every landfill and garbage dump around New York and we found nada. They probably got melted down and recycled."

"Or maybe," Castle said dramatically, "they were abducted by Men in Black."

Beckett raised her eyebrows.

"Imagine a sinister black van, its occupants tracking every move of your fight, and ready to take advantage of any opportunity to learn more about your powers. Their target is you, of course, but how can they possibly resist the lure of alien technology? As the saucers plummet to the ground, they pounce and bundle them into the van, drive them to their hidden fortress, and subject them to merciless experimentation."

"Or not," said Beckett. "Personally, I prefer the landfill explanation. It's where most of the junk in this town ends up."

"Or maybe not," said Castle.

"Again, Castle?" said Hancock. "Another stupid theory?"

"This one's better... bag ladies!"

"I hate to say it," said Beckett, "but that actually makes sense."

"Maybe," said Hancock. "Those things were about the size of hubcaps, you lose a hubcap in this town and some homeless dude will usually grab it before it stops rolling."

"Let me make a couple of calls," said Beckett, "Sixth Precinct covers that area, maybe they can point you at some places where homeless people hang out. But there must be hundreds in the area, you can't just search them all without due cause."

"We may not have to," said Castle. "You said that Supergirl thinks that the babies have really keen

senses. Maybe they'll react in some way if we can take them close enough."

\* \* \*

Alexis was finishing her homework when the apartment door opened, and Castle said "Alexis honey, we have guests."

"Okay, dad." She marked her page and looked around, said "Hi, Kate," and realised that they weren't alone. "Omigod, you're him! You're John Hancock!"

"In the flesh," said Hancock, "kinda smelly flesh right now, so don't get too close." He put a large cardboard carton down on one of the tables, and the five baby saucers started flying around it, trying to get inside.

"Wow!" said Alexis, "those are so *cute*! What are they?"

"You explain," said Hancock. "I need a shower."

"Guest bathroom's through that door and down the hall at the end," said Castle. "I'll have some food ready in about twenty minutes."

"Make enough for five," said Hancock, "She's in the middle of something, but she'll be here as soon as she can."

"Who will?" asked Alexis.

"Patience, padawan," said Castle. "All will be revealed."

\* \* \*

"So there we were," said Castle, "us and a couple of uniforms from the sixth precinct, asking a bunch of drunks and bums if any of them had seen flying saucers – and apparently a surprising number of them had, and were prepared to tell me all about it for the price of a drink – when all of the little saucers took off after one of the bums and started nosing against his shopping cart."

"So I try to identify myself and the idiot started to run," said Beckett, helping herself to Bolognese sauce, "pushing the damn cart and trying to swat the saucers as he ran." She gestured towards the saucers, which were flying in and out of the open box.

"And I could have told him," said Hancock, gesturing with a fork loaded with spaghetti, "those little fellas are fast, it just wasn't going to work."

"So eventually we get him stopped, and since he'd run from a police officer we had due cause to search him. I let Hancock do that, since they're his saucers."

"And it was surprisingly gross," said Castle. "I would have said that the bag they were in was his dirty laundry, but I'm not sure that he'd actually got hold of the concept of washing."

"Don't remind me," said Hancock. "Once I found the saucers I was going to give the bum twenty dollars, but then it turned out that he'd got about fifty wallets and a stack of credit cards under the clothes and the saucers, which was why he was trying to run."

"The uniforms took him in," said Beckett, "and that was about it, really."

"But what about the saucers?" asked Alexis; "are they okay?"

"Damned if I know," said Hancock, leaving the table to take a look in the box. "They're just lying there, but the babies are still nudging them and trying to get them to move, so I'm hoping they're injured, not dead."

"How can we find out?"

There was a knock on the door. "I hope that's your answer."

Castle opened it, and saw a blonde woman, about the same height as Beckett, wearing dark glasses. "Uh... I was expecting someone else."

"Supergirl? She'll be here in a couple of minutes."

"Mary?" said Hancock, his voice barely above a whisper.

"That's my name, don't wear it out."

"You know we can't be together, we'll both become mortal."

"Eventually," said Mary. "We'll be all right for a little while."

"Can I get you something to eat?" asked Castle.

"There isn't time," said Mary. "We've got a window of a few minutes. Right now Hancock and I are leaking life force; we need to get some of it diverted into the saucers before we bottom out."

"How do we do that?" asked Hancock.

"You hold one, I hold the other. If we touch them together the force should go through them rather than being wasted."

"Are you sure that will work?" asked Beckett.

"If it doesn't it shouldn't do us any harm," said Mary.

"Unless we stay together too long," said Hancock.

"Then let's get on with it."

Hancock took one of the saucers, and stood back while Mary took the other. They touched, metal to metal. Beckett noticed a rattling sound, and realised that the cutlery was vibrating. Soon the whole room seemed to be shaking. Hancock and Mary were both sweating and panting heavily.

"Stop it," shouted Beckett. "You're hurting yourselves." They ignored her.

Alexis picked up the bread board, dumped the bread onto the table, and ran forward to push it between the two saucers, forcing them apart. The shaking subsided, and eventually Hancock pulled himself back, saying "Good move, kid."

"Did it work?"

The saucer Mary was holding seemed to rock in her hands, and she carefully put it onto the floor. It started to spin slowly, and a dim light appeared in one of its eye-like lenses.

"Yes!" said Castle.

"One of us has to go," said Hancock, putting down his own saucer.

"Yes," said Mary. Neither of them moved.

Supergirl appeared in the open door. Despite the indirect lighting of the apartment she seemed to be glowing. "Are you ready for me?"

"Go for it," said Hancock.

Supergirl knelt and touched a hand to the casing of each of the saucers, saying "I've charged myself with solar energy; let's hope they can use it."

"Why didn't you tell me you were bringing Mary?" asked Hancock.

"Knew you wouldn't like it." She studied the saucers, and added "I think that it's working, they're starting to repair themselves. Don't want to overdo it though..." She waited another few seconds then took her hands away. "I'll give Mary a lift home, then come back and give them some more power."

"That's probably a good idea," said Hancock.

"We shouldn't stay together," said Mary. Neither made a move to leave.

Alexis kicked Hancock's shin, then Mary's, and said "Are you really that stupid?"

"Ow! No. Okay, time for me to leave."

"Arm over my shoulder," said Supergirl, "I'll help you fly until you get your powers back." She lifted Mary and flew out with her. Seconds later she flew past the window, and Mary waved to them as they vanished into the distance.

"Smart kid," said Hancock.

"Definitely the brains of the family," said Castle.

"So that's your ex?" asked Beckett. Hancock nodded curtly.

"She seemed nice," said Alexis. "Let's finish eating."

"*Definitely* the brains of the family," Castle repeated.

\* \* \*

"It was a gamble, but it worked," said Supergirl, pausing from her bowl of Rocky Road ice cream. "Everyone knows that you and Mary lose your powers when you're together too long, I figured that some sort of life force energy had to be going somewhere. I didn't really know that it would be compatible with the saucers, but it seems to be okay."

"A little warning would have been nice," said Hancock, "but I guess there wasn't time for it."

She blushed slightly. "I figured it out a week ago, but there wasn't much point telling you about it if we couldn't find the injured saucers."

"How did you get hold of Mary?"

"Batman gave me her number, of course."

"Batman's real?" asked Beckett, and added "Sorry, stupid question."

"He's real," Hancock said sourly, "and a major pain in the butt."

"Anyway," Supergirl said hastily, "it worked." She gestured towards the saucers, hovering a few inches above the carpet and busily taking in old jumping jacks, batteries, old electronic toys and pieces of Erector Set that Alexis had found for them. "They should finish repairing themselves in a few hours, and I should go and recharge myself in the sunlight and get some sleep. I'll call you tomorrow morning; you can tell me then if they need more power from me."

"I ought to head home too," said Beckett. "I'm on duty tomorrow morning."

"I'll fly you if you like," said Supergirl.

"Thanks, that's got to beat taking the subway." They left together, with Kate laughing at something inaudible Supergirl said.

"You don't suppose..." Castle began.

"Doubt it," said Hancock. "I think they're both pretty straight."

"So am I," said Alexis, taking another photograph of the saucers with her iPad's camera, "but I'd totally do Supergirl if I was old enough and I got the chance."

"Isn't it a school night?" Castle asked hastily.

"Nope, it's Friday. Don't worry, I'm not serious. Not entirely, anyway."

"I should head off too," said Hancock, "are you sure they'll be okay here overnight?"

"They're fine," said Alexis, most of her attention on the saucers. She drew a tic-tac-toe grid on the iPad, added an X in one corner, and showed it to the saucers. Daffy flew forward hesitantly, extended a gripper, and drew a cross of its own in the diagonally opposite corner. "That's either very clever or very dumb, and I think I'm going to go with clever. Let's try a prime number sequence instead..."

"That's a smart kid," said Hancock.

"She is that," Castle said with pride. "Goodnight."

"Night."

Castle let Hancock out, locked the door, and said "Do you think we can teach them poker?"

"I think they'd eat the money. The coins, anyway."

"We could always use chips..."

\* \* \*

Two months later Linda got another call from Hancock, and flew out to meet him in the air over Chicago.

"They've been acting kinda agitated the last few days, and when I woke this morning my apartment was sparkling clean and the leaky faucet wasn't dripping any more. I had a feeling that it was time for the guys to move on, so I followed them out here. Looks like I was right." Ahead of them dozens of tiny saucers were arriving from all directions; they started to orbit around an invisible centre. Five of the smaller saucers kept darting back to orbit Hancock and Linda, then returning to the main formation.

"You're right," said Linda. "This flock's getting ready to migrate. I hope that it'll go well for them."

"Do you feel something weird?"

"Like static electricity?"

"Yeah."

Suddenly all of the saucers were converging towards the centre of the formation, and a bright column of light flashed up into the sky. When Hancock stopped blinking the saucers were gone.

Linda watched the sky "Five hundred miles... a thousand... two... five... I'm losing them." Suddenly a bright blue line appeared across the evening sky, fading rapidly.

"What was that?"

"Cherenkov radiation, I think. The trace left by something travelling faster than light."

"They're gone, then."

"Looks like it."

"Let's hope that wherever they end up they find someone that likes poker. They won four hands out of five last game."

\* \* \*

The following spring Alexis was clearing out one of her closets when she found an odd tangle of wires,

metal foil, and steel wool inside an old shoe box. In the centre of it were four shiny metal spheres, about the size of golf balls. One of them seemed to be vibrating slightly, and she spotted a small slit on one side, with something that looked a lot like a piece of hacksaw blade sawing backwards and forwards to enlarge it.

"Dad, do you still have Hancock's phone number?"

"I think so. Why?"

She carefully carried the shoe box out to his desk, and said "Think he's ready to be a dad again?"

"Let's hope so." He started to make the call.

**END.**

Notes for the perplexed

The saucers of *Batteries Not Included* seem to be self-replicating robots, possibly using tiny nano-machines as the "cells" of their bodies. I've made some guesses about their life cycle, habits, and intelligence.

Hancock and Mary are the last of a race of immortal demigods, created to fight evil; they were created as soul-mates, but if they are together for any length of time they slowly lose their powers, and eventually become fully mortal. This is assumed to be a way of giving them a happy ending if they ever run out of evil to fight, but for various reasons they have decided that they need to continue to live apart; as a result Hancock now lives in New York, Mary in Los Angeles. Mary is not an active superhero, since she prefers to look after her current husband and child, and seems to find it easy to drop out of the public eye. How does Batman find her? Easy... he's Batman!

Rick Castle is a crime novelist, Beckett is a detective. Together they fight crime.

If you don't know who Supergirl is by now, why are you reading these stories?