

Adventures in House-Sitting

by Marcus Rowland

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Rating: K+

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Supergirl Returns #8. This is another sequel to my story *The Return*, a crossover between the DC movieverse and various other fandoms. The setting is a world where Supergirl visited Earth a few months after Superman left for Krypton (*Superman Returns*) and returned to Earth in 2008.

In *The Return* Linda Lee (Supergirl) decided to live in Los Angeles and found a job house-sitting for rock star Nigel Tuffnell, while preparing to study earth-style engineering at UCLA. When that job ended she decided to look for more work that would fit in with her plans. This story is set after the main events of *The Return*, but well before the final scene of the epilogue and the other stories of this series.

The house overlooked Silver Lake Reservoir, about twenty minutes by road from UCLA, a few seconds for Linda. It wasn't as big as Nigel's mansion, but it was spacious and had a big garden and a good view. There was one unusual requirement for the job, but Linda soon found out why.

"Your ASL is very good," signed Joey Lucas. Her assistant started to translate, then realised that it was pointless and sat watching, his head moving like a spectator at a tennis match.

"I have a friend with deaf parents," Linda replied, taking care to keep her hands moving at human speeds, avoid contractions, and throw in an occasional small mistake; "She taught me. It comes in handy at rock concerts."

"I cannot really hear music, but I can feel it sometimes, especially when it gets as loud as Spinal Tap. Okay, your references check out. When can you start?"

"Nigel returns to LA on Friday, as soon as possible after that."

"Good. You will be using the guest suite, move in on Friday or Saturday. I will be in Washington or travelling most of the time for the next three months. I will live here when I am in LA, but it will only be for a day or two at a time, no need for you to move out. Are you interested in politics?"

"College keeps me too busy."

"What are you studying?"

"Engineering."

Joey looked pleased. "Good; we need more women in the sciences. Now, there is one ground rule for this job, you must not talk to the press, or anyone else, about my clients, work, or movements. It is in the contract. Okay?"

"Yes, but you should know, my cousin is a reporter, I will need to talk to him about other things occasionally."

"Who is he? What paper?"

"Clark Kent. He works for the *Daily Planet*."

"Lane and Kent?"

"Yes."

"Good writers. All right, just keep me out of the conversation."

"No problem."

"Okay, I have to get on. Talk to Kenny, he will finalize things. I will see you at the weekend."

"Thank you." Linda held out her hand, and Joey briefly shook it then turned to a stack of papers and an ultra-thin laptop.

"If you'd like to come this way," said Kenny, "I'll show you around the place and we can discuss the arrangements." He led the way out of the spacious office and into a lounge running the length of the ground

floor, overlooking the garden and reservoir, with several modern but comfortable-looking couches and armchairs and a large plasma TV, with four smaller screens to one side.

“Why so many screens?”

“Miss Lucas sometimes needs to compare the coverage of news stories on several channels, especially when a new poll is launched.”

“She must have phenomenal concentration,” said Linda.

“She does. Now, you’ll be responsible for keeping the house safe and secure, and making sure that the cleaners and gardeners do their jobs properly. You can use most of the facilities, but please stay out of Miss Lucas’ office, and mine, unless there’s an emergency. I’ll leave you numbers for electricians, plumbers, and so forth. When Miss Lucas is at home she may have occasional business appointments; if that happens she would usually prefer that there are no interruptions, but if for any reason I’m not around she may need your help as a translator. We’ll try to avoid that, but you’ll be paid at the market rate for an unqualified translator if the need arises, I think it’s currently around thirty dollars an hour. Would that be acceptable?”

“That’s fine.”

“Good. That’s about it, really. If you’d like to come this way I’ll show you the rest of the house...”

* * *

It took Linda more than a week to notice the noise; it had been there all along, of course, but Earth’s electronics often leaked ultrasonics, and it was something she’d learned to ignore. If she’d thought about it at all she’d assumed that it was one of the screens in the lounge. But while she was in college that day the power company shut down the neighbourhood’s power lines to install a new transformer; she came home to find the electricity off and the house silent and still, apart from a faint high-pitched whine. She guessed it was something running on batteries, and wondered if she should switch it off.

Eventually she realised that the noise was coming from a ventilation duct outside Joey’s office, and used her x-ray vision to take a look. There was a little box in there, linked to a phone wire running through the duct, with a lead running to a microphone further down the duct, behind a grille in Joey’s office.

When the electricity came back on twenty minutes later she’d found three more well-concealed bugs; two in the lounge and one in Joey’s bedroom, all linked to phone lines. There was enough dust on them to make her think that they’d been there for a few months, which meant that someone was spying on Joey, not her. Fortunately there didn’t seem to be any cameras, and she couldn’t recall doing anything that might have revealed her secret identity to an eavesdropper.

She spent a few minutes making careful drawings of the boxes and their circuit boards and noting the numbers on the chips and other components. A few minutes research on line helped her to put the pieces together and identify the circuits; digital recorders connected to the phone lines and to microphones, drawing their power from the phone lines, with built-in cell-phone circuitry. Depending on how they were programmed, they could probably record a few hours of conversation, compress it, and transmit it to a remote receiver in a few minutes.

She couldn’t see any manufacturer’s logo on the outer casings, just long serial numbers. Eventually she checked the time; just after seven, so just after ten on the east coast. She needed to call ahead, the man she wanted to see would be going out soon, but she’d get well clear of the house first.

* * *

“I checked her out when I heard you were house-sitting for her,” said Bruce Wayne. “Given that she’s a pollster, I’d nevertheless class her as a good person. She seems to do her work honestly and without bias. She’s a Quaker and opposed to the death penalty, but doesn’t let that affect her work. I can’t think of any particular reason why someone would want to monitor her home.” He filled the Batcave’s huge video screen with icons for documents, newspaper stories, and video clips.

“It must be something in her personal life,” said Linda. “One of the bugs is in her bedroom.”

“That doesn’t necessarily follow, though I’d agree it seems likely. Hmmm...” He tapped one of the icons on the screen, and it opened a gossip column from the Washington Post: “Yes, early in the Bartlett administration she was rumoured to be involved with Josh Lyman, who was then the Deputy Chief of Staff at the White House. There doesn’t seem to have been much in it, but Lyman is Santos’ Chief of Staff now, which makes him even more important in the administration. They move in the same circles, politically and

socially, it's possible that someone thinks that there might be a more intimate connection, and wants to get proof."

"I guess it's possible."

"Are there any other signs that she's under observation?"

"I've scanned the area to about a mile out and can't find anything. No mysterious parked cars, no paparazzi lurking in the shrubbery. But it's possible that whoever it is knows that she's out of town and isn't bothering to watch."

Bruce steepled his fingers; "What do you want to do about it?"

"What I'd like to do is tell her, let her decide what to do. But there's no way I can explain finding the bugs, they're too well concealed."

"Why tell her? Think objectively. Is it really any of your business?"

"No... but I like Joey, and I don't like the idea that someone is spying on her. Or anyone else, for that matter."

"I agree; we all have secrets. But let me make a few enquiries first; it's always possible that a government agency planted the microphones, or that Miss Lucas put them there herself for some reason. I think I can trace the manufacturer, and if I can do that I may be able to find out who they were sold to."

"Considering that some of the parts were made by WayneTech I'd be surprised if you couldn't."

"I'll chase it up in the morning. How long have I got?"

"She's back in LA next Thursday, that's eight days. I'm not sure of her movements after that; she's already had to change her plans twice."

"Leave it with me; I'll get back to you when I know something."

* * *

Bruce called back next day when Linda was between classes. "The listening devices were a high-end model made by a company called Oceanic Security, part of the Oceanic Airlines group. They mostly sell to police departments and private detective agencies. The serial numbers match their model 6C."

"Does that help at all?"

"Yes. Less than ten thousand in the six series were sold before they were replaced by the series seven models. The power controller chip batch number you gave me is anomalous; the chips were manufactured after the series six was discontinued."

"How is that possible?"

"They were discontinued because there were problems with the chips; roughly five per cent were returned as defective. They eventually sold the faulty stock to Big Kahuna Electronics, a subsidiary of the Big Kahuna Burger chain based in Los Angeles. Big Kahuna refurbished them, replacing the defective chips with the WayneTech equivalent, and sold them off at a discount."

"Does that narrow it down?"

"Definitely; Big Kahuna aren't security specialists, their computer defences are a joke. I've accessed their sales records. Most customers only bought one or two, and most of the larger sales can be eliminated because they were the 6A model, which runs off a power line rather than the phone line, or the 6B battery model. Assuming that they were sold in one lot, and in the Los Angeles area, we have only two possibilities; a batch of thirty sold to the California Bureau of Investigation, and four sold to a private detective, The Rockford Agency, eight months ago."

"Is there any way to tell which they are?"

"Someone working for the CBI filled warranty cards for the thirty they bought; they don't match the serial numbers you found. Nobody has registered any of the numbers you saw, and the Rockford Agency has never registered its purchases."

"That isn't conclusive, but it does seem likely. What can you tell me about them?"

"It's a one-man operation run from an apartment in Malibu; most of the income seems to come from divorce cases. I'll send the details and GPS coordinates to your phone."

"Can you get into his system?"

"What system? There's a web site advertising his services, but there's no live content, it's just a static advertising site. The email address is a Hotmail account, if he has any internet access it's probably a dialup

modem.”

“Can you tell me anything else about the company?”

“Founded by a James Rockford in 1968, and had a good reputation for handling difficult cases. It was taken over by Evelyn Martin, AKA Angel Martin, when Rockford retired in 2001. Martin then tried to change the name of the company to Angel Investigations, but there was a dispute with a company of that name in Los Angeles, and he reverted to the old name. Since Martin took over his license has been suspended several times for misconduct, at the moment he shouldn't be advertising or taking cases. He's in his late sixties and has a criminal record; I'd be surprised if he'll be given another chance.”

“Sounds like our guy.”

“I should think so. How do you plan to handle this?”

“What would you suggest?”

“It's your investigation, and you're the person on the spot. I'd suggest that you come up with a plan, and run it past me or Lois and Clark if you have any doubts.”

“But...”

“If you're going to conduct your own investigations I can't always be there to advise you; this is interesting but doesn't seem to be life-threatening or time-sensitive, you might as well work it out for yourself. Think of it as a training exercise.”

“Okaaaay... you already have the answer, don't you?”

“No. I have some theories, but I'd need more information to verify them. Is there anything else?”

“Do you have a picture of Martin?”

“I'll send it to your phone.”

“Thanks. I've got to get into class; I'll get back to you when I have something.”

* * *

Linda spent most of the evening on the roof of an office block a few hundred yards from Martin's home, watching his movements with telescopic and X-ray vision. At six he went out and walked two blocks to a bar, where he spent the evening drinking and playing pool, returning at ten to watch TV and eventually go to bed. The apartment was at ground level and had its own street door, and Linda couldn't see anything to suggest that it had any security, just a basic Yale lock on the door.

“If he follows the same routine tonight,” she told Bruce early the following morning, “I'll get inside and take a look at his files. It shouldn't take more than a minute or two from what I saw last night.”

“Can you get inside without anyone noticing?”

“It's a Yale lock. Lois showed me how to pick them ages ago; it's easy if you can see inside them.”

“Show me.” He led her to a board studded with small doors bearing an assortment of locks, some simple, others horribly complicated.

Linda reached out, barely seemed to touch the lock, and pulled the door open.

“What did you use to open it? I didn't see any tools.”

“Straightened paper clip and a fingernail plus a little super-speed.”

“Excellent, you can't be arrested for carrying burglary tools. Let me see you do it again with gloves on.” He handed her a pack of surgical gloves, tinted to match her fair skin tones.

Linda pulled on a pair of gloves and started picking the lock. The first three times the glove split as Linda picked the lock, torn by her diamond-hard nails and speed. The fourth time it took Linda five seconds to get the lock open.

“Good. Don't try to do it faster, the gloves obviously can't take it. Practice some more, and tell me what you plan to do once you're inside.”

“Look round the place and memorize the positions of things, then look through his files and find the one for Joey. Memorize the contents then put things back exactly where I found them, and get out.”

“Why memorize? Why not take a camera?”

“It's an illegal search and anything I find wouldn't be admissible as evidence. I can memorise things faster than any camera, and it's one less thing to worry about if I have to get out in a hurry.”

“Good, I'm glad you realise that you're breaking the law. What will you do if you find something?”

“Find out as much as I can, then if it's something that needs to be brought out into the open I'll try to

find a way to do it that doesn't cause problems for us."

"Good. How much time do you think this will take?"

"Five minutes, ten if his files are badly organized."

"Allow twenty-five."

"Twenty-five?" Linda said incredulously.

"Possibly longer. This is not a well-organized man; he has a history of badly planned petty crime and he's probably doing business illegally. Expect his records to be muddled, hidden, non-existent, or all of the above."

"I've checked the place from a distance. There are filing cabinets, how bad can it be?"

"You'd be surprised." Batman wasn't smiling, and Linda had a sudden sinking feeling.

* * *

When Martin finally left the apartment that evening, a little before seven, Linda was on the office roof wearing jeans, sneakers, and a hooded track-suit top, with a dark wig and sunglasses concealing her face. She watched him until he reached the bar, quickly scanned the surrounding buildings for observers, then flew to an alley across the road from the apartment. She got out a piece of paper and pretended to be looking for the right address, eventually arriving at Martin's door at a moment when nobody was watching. She quickly glanced towards the bar, didn't see any sign of Martin heading back, and picked the lock with one hand while pretending to ring the bell. In moments she was inside.

The first thing she noticed was the smell; a mixture of stale beer and whisky fumes, cigarettes, grease, and badly-cleaned plumbing. A table in the hallway was buried several inches deep in letters, most of them obviously bills and circulars, and there were three odd socks lying on the floor. The office was at the front at street level; fortunately the blinds were down, and if she kept the lights off Linda would only be visible if someone came close to the window and peered through the gaps between the slats.

As Bruce had predicted, the office was a mess, the desk piled high with papers, which again mostly seemed to be bills. Without touching anything she looked around, memorising positions and trying to figure out if there was any underlying system. If there was, she couldn't figure it out. The only evidence of organization was a row of three battered-looking four-drawer filing cabinets; her X-Ray vision showed that they were full of files.

There was an elderly laptop on a side table, showing a Windows screen saver, with a GSM card plugged below the keyboard, probably used to download the recordings from the bugs. There was a stack of blank CD-ROMs and some mailers beside it.

Ten minutes later she was still looking for evidence of a link to Joey Lucas. The files were alphabetically organised in the cabinets, but jumped from Leonard to Mason with nothing in between. After opening several she realised that they were organized by the name of the client, not the subject of the investigation. About all that she'd established so far was that Joey wasn't a client, which wasn't much of a surprise. There were hundreds of files, crammed in so tightly that it would be difficult to get them in and out quickly without leaving traces; going through them all would take more time than she was allowing herself.

Frustrated, Linda turned to the laptop and found, as expected, that it was running a communications program. She checked for downloaded files and found them; fifty-two files, all named SILVRLK followed by a dash, one of the letters A to D, another dash, and a number. It didn't take super-intelligence to translate that; Silver Lake, bugs A through D, and the recording number. The most recent were numbered 264, the oldest 249, and they went back more than two weeks; one a day, downloaded around four in the morning, for each bug. That meant that recordings would have begun about eight months ago, a few days after Martin bought the bugs. It was part of the evidence she needed, but she was already running close to the deadline Bruce had suggested, and she had a feeling that staying much longer would be pushing her luck. She took a quick look at the program's settings then carefully closed all the folders she had opened, put the mouse back exactly where Martin had left it, and hoped that the screen saver would be showing again before he returned.

As she did so a shadow was cast on the window, and she ducked down, inadvertently knocking the stack of disk mailers towards the floor, but caught them before they hit the floor. She could hear somebody outside, and the rattle of keys. It had to be Martin, back early, and the only way out was the way he was coming in. Slipping into high speed, she tidied the mailers and put them back onto the table, and noticed as she did so

that they were already stamped and addressed to G. Thurman, at a mail box in Santa Monica; midway between Malibu and Silver Lake. She'd missed it because the top one was upside down. Something about the name was familiar, but she couldn't quite place it.

Silently, she flattened herself against the wall by the office door, so that she would be concealed if Martin opened it, and watched him through the wall. He went past the office without stopping, and into the next room where he started looking for something. Soon he picked up a narrow metal case nearly three feet long, containing two shadowy cylindrical objects, indistinct to her powers. It took her several seconds to identify it as a two-piece pool cue. He went into the kitchen, grabbed a can from the refrigerator, drained it and threw it into the trash, then went into the bathroom.

Listening to the sound of running water, she moved to the filing cabinets, opened a drawer labelled S-T, found the Thurman file, leafed through the pages and memorised them, put it back in the cabinet, and was back against the wall before the lavatory flushed. She tensed as Martin walked down the hall and seemed to hesitate outside the office door, but it was a false alarm; he hadn't slowed, her senses had speeded up. As he closed the street door she remembered to breathe, and watched through the walls as he walked away.

Two minutes later she was over a post office in Santa Monica, and trying to find an angle that would let her see the contents of the Thurman mailbox through several layers of metal and concrete. It turned out to be empty.

She'd agreed to see Bruce for a late breakfast the next day, so spent the rest of the evening patrolling along the West Coast. Which was lucky for the residents of five burning homes, a dozen car crash victims, and the crew of a sinking yacht, but extremely bad news for the bank robbers she encountered in San Francisco. Eventually she returned to Silver Lake, spent an hour studying, and had an early night.

* * *

"I thought that the name 'Thurman' was familiar," said Linda, "I could have kicked myself when I read the file and realised that it was Kenny's wife snooping on him. I knew that Kenny lives in Santa Monica, I should have put the pieces together."

"You don't think that there's something odd about that?" said Bruce, helping himself to a waffle.

"Not particularly. Kenny's a man, Joey's a woman, and they do spend a lot of time together, in the office and travelling on business. I can see that suspicions might arise. She's been spending a hundred dollars a week to keep an ear on him, which does seem a little excessive, but maybe she's after an expensive settlement."

"That might be the case," said Bruce, "if Kenny actually had a wife."

"He doesn't?"

"He doesn't. No wife, no girlfriend, and he split with his last boyfriend two years ago."

"He's gay?"

"He's gay. Which means that whoever hired Martin must have been posing as Thurman's wife, with a different agenda."

"Damn. I should have picked up on that."

"I don't see why. Thurman doesn't bring his personal life to work. You should have checked, of course."

"How much of this did you know before I started?"

"Less than I thought, actually. I did wonder if Thurman might be behind the bugging, he lives closer to Malibu than any other active associate of Lucas, I wasn't expecting anyone to use interest in him as cover for something else."

"Actually, there is one other associate of Joey living in Santa Monica," said Linda. "C.J. Cregg, Chief of Staff during the Bartlett administration. And she's married to a reporter, Danny Concannon."

"Interesting, I hadn't considered her. Do you think it's likely?"

"Not really. I've liked her the times I've met her, and her husband seems like a nice guy. I can't see either of them bugging Joey."

"Cregg manages Frank Hollis's charity foundation; the Wayne Foundation has worked with them on several occasions, I've no reasons to distrust her. We'll bear it in mind, of course, but I don't think it's a strong possibility."

"Neither do I," said Linda. "So what's the next step?"

"You tell me."

“Find the fake wife, I guess. She’s been sending Martin a cashier’s cheque for \$400 every month, maybe I can track that back, or I could stake out the post office and see who comes to pick up the next disk.”

“Both would be difficult and time-consuming without police help. I’m sure that you can come up with a better answer. Think about it.”

Linda thought as she ate, and eventually said “Bug the disks?”

“It’s certainly a possibility. You’d have to get into Martin’s apartment again, of course. How are they packaged?”

“The disks are in hard plastic cases, the mailers are padded envelopes.”

“What brands are they?”

She thought for a second, visualising the disks and mailers, then said “The disks are Sony CDQ80R 700MB, the mailers are Kraft.”

“Hm... Might as well forget about the mailer, the transparent bubble liner makes it almost impossible to hide anything. Are the disk cases the old type, about a centimetre thick, or the newer slimline package?”

“Slimline.”

“Not ideal – there isn’t much room for a transmitter inside the casing. Were they still in their cellophane packaging?”

“Yes.”

“Very well... we’ll need to prepare them in advance, it’s tricky getting through the packaging without leaving traces. When we’ve finished breakfast I’d suggest that you take a trip to the nearest office supply shop and find a pack of the same type; Alfred can give you directions. Get at least ten, we may need to experiment a little to find a way of tracking them that isn’t too obvious.”

“Another training exercise?”

“Why not?”

* * *

“I think that this is the best answer,” said Bruce, holding up something that looked like two black pins glued head to head, “It’s a transponder, basically a dipole antenna and receiver, just two pieces of copper wire cut to a precise length, with a sound generator between them. The beauty of it is that it’s tiny, light and very easy to conceal, and doesn’t need any batteries; you provide the power from a radio transmitter I’ll give you. When that precise wavelength hits the antenna it generates an ultrasonic chirp; you’ll be able to hear it, nobody else can. The closer you get to it with the transmitter, the louder it will be.”

“What if they get out of range altogether?”

“Then we’ll have to try something else. By the time it gets to Santa Monica I should have another transmitter and an ultrasonic receiver covering the post office, we’ll know when one of the disks arrives, and when it leaves the post office. Once we know it’s on the move you should be able to fly a grid search of Santa Monica and track it reasonably quickly; I don’t think it will be a problem.”

“It sounds good. How will you get the equipment to cover the post office?”

“I thought I’d rent a mail box and send it there.”

“That’s slow, and it would be traceable if things go badly wrong. Save your money; pack it up so that it looks like a junction box or something, I’ll leave it on the post office roof.”

Bruce nodded curtly, but Linda had the feeling that she’d just passed a test.

In the end they put the transponders into the cases of five disks. Martin mailed one of them two days later, and it reached Santa Monica the following morning, three days before Joey was to return from Washington.

Linda had a lab session all morning and couldn’t easily duck out from college, but knew that Bruce would text her if it left the post office.

The signal came when she was eating lunch with friends, and she made a hasty excuse about forgotten notes and was over Santa Monica in costume thirty seconds later. When she tried the transmitter there was a faint chirp in response, just at the limits of her hearing, and she followed it out along Lincoln Boulevard, catching up with the source, a battered green van, just as it turned onto Washington Boulevard. Once she had identified she flew up a half mile or so into thin cloud, and watched as it drove into the Marina del Rey and parked at the moorings of an 80ft yacht named *Mauretania*.

Two tough-looking men began to load crates into the yacht, while a woman boarded the yacht, carrying the mailer in her hand. The deck was no barrier to her vision, and she saw the woman sit down at a computer and slot the disk into its drive. If she was listening to the recordings she was about to hear several hours of TV, and very little else. There was something in the woman's handbag, much denser than the bag or her chair; Linda flew a few hundred yards to get a different view, and realised that it was a gun. She turned her attention to the men and the cargo they were unloading. Both had guns under their jackets, and the boxes held more weapons; Linda wasn't entirely sure, but she thought that they looked like assault rifles.

* * *

"What are they doing now?" asked Bruce.

Linda scanned the yacht again, and said "It looks like they finished loading, I think they may be getting ready to head out to sea. One of the men is pumping fuel into the yacht; I think the other is filling the water tanks. What should I do?"

"Keep them under observation, and make sure it doesn't reach international waters. I've found out something interesting about the yacht, I'll need you to make a phone call for me..."

* * *

Abby Sciuto was waiting for the mass spectrometer to finish with some paint particulates and dancing to a techno beat when her cell phone rang. She turned down the volume a little and checked the caller ID, smiling when she saw it was just the letter K. "Hi, Kara!"

"Hi, Abby. Um... I've got a bit of a situation here; can you give me Gibbs' number?"

"Sure." She read it off.

"Thanks. Warn him that he'll be getting a call in a couple of minutes, and that the caller will be the person he says he is. You might want to take it seriously."

"Make it three minutes; it might take me a minute or two to get hold of him."

"Okay. Talk to you soon."

As Supergirl disconnected, Abby raced for the lift. Whatever was happening, she wanted to be there when Gibbs took the call.

* * *

"Special Agent Gibbs?" The voice was flat, mechanical, and probably computer generated. Tim started a trace.

"Speaking. Who is this?"

"I'm Batman." Gibbs' eyebrows rose slightly, and Tony, Ziva and Abby moved closer to the phone. "Supergirl should have warned you I would call."

"What can I do for you?"

"You investigated the death of an arms dealer named René Benoit, AKA 'La Grenouille'"

"Yes."

"His yacht, the *Mauretania*, is currently moored at the Marina del Rey in Santa Monica. It's now owned by some of his former associates, the cargo may be of interest. You'll need to be quick, it's taking on fuel."

"Thanks. Who should I..?" Gibbs realised that he was speaking to a dead line. "McGee, what have you got?"

"Nothing good, boss; that number belongs to a burn phone sold in Gotham six months ago, I'd traced it through seven satellites and five cities when he disconnected, don't think I was even close."

"Holy crap," said Abby. "Batman called you!"

"I know," Gibbs said impatiently. "See what you can do with the recording, I'm going to make some calls."

* * *

"It's a big marina," said Sam Hanna, as he drove his SUV towards it, "Any idea where the boat might be?"

"I'm hacking the dockmaster's computers," Laura Macy said over the encrypted radio, "They've a berth rented at the Marina Del Ray, slip F300 opposite the hotel, two piers north of our boat house."

"That could get nasty," said G. Callen; "we need to make sure that they don't get a chance to fire at the hotel."

“That may not be a problem,” said Laura, “it looks like they’ve just cast off; we’ll have to get the Coast Guard to intercept them.”

“Should we head for their base?”

“No, there’s a green van parked at the slip, the information we have is that it was unloading weapons. Get over there and secure it, there may be evidence. Kensi and Dom are about two minutes behind you.”

“On it.”

Sam took two corners so hard that the SUV skidded, then drove along the service road serving the landing slips.

“I thought you said they were headed out,” said G., “they’re still only a few yards from the slip.”

“Looks like something’s wrong with their engines,” said Sam. He stopped the SUV fifty yards away, where a parked car gave them a little cover. Two men were leaning over the stern of the yacht, which was slowly drifting out into the harbour. “I wonder if they need a hand.”

“Let’s find out.” They climbed out of the SUV and walked into view, pretending to argue about baseball. When they reached the slip Sam stopped and shouted “You guys need help?”

“It’s just something tangled in the screws,” shouted one of the men, “we’re okay.”

“You’re drifting into traffic,” shouted G. “Throw me a line, I’ll moor you.”

For a moment the NCIS agents thought that the men aboard the yacht were buying it, then one of them shouted something and ran below decks.

“They’ve made us,” said Sam, looking for the nearest cover.

Aboard the yacht, the remaining man was drawing a big automatic. Sam shouted “NCIS Special Agents; drop your weapon.”

As usual the response was a burst of wild firing. There seemed to be an explosion a few yards aft of the yacht, and something blue surged out of the water. Before either agent could really process what they were seeing, the gunman was holding his wrist and swearing, his hand empty.

“What the fuck..?” said Sam.

The other man ran back out, carrying an assault rifle, and swung it round towards them, firing wildly. A red and blue blur flashed in front of them, and suddenly the other gunman was disarmed, and two .357 Desert Eagles, a Colt 733 assault rifle, and a stack of flattened bullets were on the ground in front of them.

There was another splash and the yacht began to rise into the air. Both gunmen clung to the hand rails.

“Now there’s something you don’t see every day,” said G., as Supergirl came into view, flying up with the yacht in her hands.

“Maybe if you lived in Metropolis,” Sam said calmly, “Though she’s prettier than Superman. How the hell does she do that without the yacht snapping in two?”

“If you can get it back to the mooring,” shouted G., “we’ll take it from there.”

“There’s a woman in the cabin,” Supergirl replied, “she’s also armed.”

“Could you help us with that?”

“Okay.”

The yacht was suddenly falling into the water from a height of several feet, rocking violently from side to side as it landed, and throwing the gunmen to the deck. There were two shots from inside the yacht, and Supergirl came out again, with a struggling woman tucked under one arm. They could hear sirens, rapidly getting closer, and a shriek of brakes as Kensi and Dom finally reached the scene.

“Where do you want them?”

“If you can just get them over here we’ll look after them,” said Sam.

“Okay,” said Supergirl. “Are you guys all right?” She handed the woman to Kensi and Dom, added a .38 revolver to the stack of weapons, and went back for the first gunman.

“We’re fine,” shouted Sam. “Are you okay?”

“No problems,” said Supergirl, landing with the last prisoner, “but I could really use a towel if you can find me one. My hair’s a mess.”

* * *

“Okay,” said Linda. “I told the police that you’d contacted me and asked me to keep an eye on the yacht, but I didn’t know how you’d found it. I didn’t hear anything to suggest that they weren’t buying it. To

cover my tracks I ‘accidentally’ broke the CD case while I was arresting the woman and got the transponder back, there was enough damage that nobody should notice anything odd. I picked up the rest from Martin’s apartment before I came here tonight.”

“The FBI and NCIS know about the microphones now,” said Bruce, “one of the gunmen caved in to get a better deal. It seems to have been a relatively small-scale operation, just a few survivors of Benoit’s American organization that avoided arrest after he was killed. A few containers of weapons that were supposed to be exported were still in one of his warehouses; they diverted them and started selling them up and down the California coast.”

“But I still don’t understand why gun-runners were bugging Joey.”

“If the FBI reports are accurate,” said Bruce, “it was market research. They were using their profits to import weapons that were barely legal, stockpiling them, and waiting for them to be banned so that they could sell them illegally at inflated prices. They’ve been doing it for some time, the batch you intercepted were intended for a biker gang in a town called Charming.”

“But why Joey?”

“Early warning; the first step in introducing legislation is finding out what the public thinks of the idea. And it wasn’t just Ms. Lucas; they were also bugging the California NRA and several members of the California legislature. You have to remember that she polls for local politicians as well as nationally.”

“Okay... so what happens about the bugs now?”

“The FBI will probably want them for evidence. It may take a while; until they’ve been removed you should assume that anything in that house can be overheard.”

“Great...” said Linda. “The sooner I can stop house-sitting and get my own place, the happier I’ll be.”

“Want a loan?”

“Too difficult to explain. Don’t worry; I ought to get my first royalty check from Ballitoy soon, that’ll cover the down payment on an apartment...”

* * *

“The official version is that NCIS acted on an anonymous tip-off,” said Vance, “and Supergirl intervened after the gunfight started.”

“Does Batman count as an anonymous tip-off?” asked Gibbs.

“We don’t know who he is, and he tipped us off. Good enough for me. It leaves some unanswered questions. Not least how Batman found out about the guns, how that yacht ended up with fifty feet of steel cable tangled around its screws, and whether Supergirl invaded their privacy with a little X-ray vision before our agents arrived.”

“The answer Kara gave for the first one when they interviewed her for TV news was a cute little shrug and ‘He’s Batman.’”

“And nobody seems too concerned about the others,” said Vance, “I think we can overlook them until someone actually asks questions. Just put it down to criminal incompetence or a lucky accident.”

“What about the bugs?”

“There are some interesting names on that list. Some we’d never get a warrant for, the lawyers would bury us. I’m not sure what the laws are about evidence from bugs planted illegally by someone else, it will probably take some time to figure it out. We can hold off on doing anything for now, we’ve got to investigate the people who planted them first. Maybe a few months down the line, once we’ve dotted all the i’s and crossed all the t’s.”

“Works for me,” said Gibbs. “Better not tell Agent Lee though. Or Kara.”

“Wasn’t planning to.”

“Me neither.”

Gibbs’ phone rang. He listened for a few moments then said “Two dead sailors at Chesapeake Bay. We’re the next team up.”

“Well, what are you waiting for?”

“On it.”

End.

Notes:

Joey Lucas, Kenny Thurman, C.J. Cregg and Danny Concannon are from *The West Wing* - The show does not reveal Kenny's sexual preferences.

The Rockford Agency and Angel Martin are from *The Rockford Files*; Rockford's business card establishes the agency as founded in 1968, the last *Rockford Files* TV movie was made in 1999, I've assumed that Rockford retired in 2001.

Details of the yacht *Mauretania* are from an episode subtitles file on the NCIS reference library.

Lara Macy appeared in the NCIS episode *Legend*, but was reassigned before the start of *NCIS: Los Angeles*, and killed in a subsequent NCIS episode. Dominic "Dom" Vail appeared in *Legend* and early episodes of *NCIS: Los Angeles* but was eventually written out.

Gratuitous crossover references: Oceanic Airlines comes from *Lost*, Big Kahuna burgers from Quentin Tarantino's movies, the California Bureau of Investigation from *The Mentalist*, and Angel Investigations from *Angel*. Charming, North California, is the setting for the TV series *Sons of Anarchy*.