

Five Dates Supergirl Didn't Enjoy And One She Did

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Rating: K+

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Note -- the first chapter is a reprise and continuation of the final scene of *The Return* from Supergirl's viewpoint, the others are set later. I've interpreted the term "date" fairly loosely in some chapters.

1: Timothy McGee (NCIS)

Linda's been living in her new house for a month, and she enjoys the daily routine of life in Los Angeles. She moved in with a puppy from the Kent farm, Shelby Junior, and most days she takes him for a walk, picks up a coffee and the papers, and spends a little time reading them in the sun before heading in to college or patrolling the area as Supergirl. She's learning to roller-skate, and plans to try ice-skating when she visits Metropolis next winter. It's near-perfect camouflage; nobody expects a roller-skating girl with a puppy to be the most powerful woman on Earth.

The accident is exactly that -- Junior runs off after a pigeon, and drags Linda after him. She could stop him instantly, of course, but not without hurting him. She's just getting him back under control, and not really looking where she's going, when she realises she's going to hit someone, a man carrying two coffees. She swerves left, the man swerves right, and the puppy dodges between his legs; somehow they end up sprawled on the ground, with the coffees spilled on the sidewalk. As they go down Linda realises that he's someone she knows and likes; Timothy McGee from Washington. She's horribly embarrassed, then realises that there isn't even a tiny glimmer of recognition in his eyes. Of course he knows her as Kara, so maybe the camouflage works. There's something lumpy touching her stomach, and as she gets off him she realises it's a gun, concealed under his jacket.

"Sorry about that," she says as she gets back on her feet, "Here, let me give you a hand." She reaches down and helps him up.

"I think it was my fault." He rubs the back of his head; she checks, but he doesn't seem to have taken any damage from the fall.

"I'm pretty sure it was me," say Linda, wondering if McGee is really that unobservant. "Hey, I owe you a couple of coffees."

"That's okay," says McGee, "I'm working, I get expenses; I'll just buy more."

"Then I'd better walk back with you, just in case you've got a concussion or something."

"There's no need, ah..."

"Linda." She puts her arm through his. "Linda Lee."

She insists on walking back with him, and tries to work out what's wrong. This is what the movies call "meeting cute," it should be romantic. Instead Tim seems to be wary, almost distrustful of her, and instead of feeling romantic she's feeling annoyed. They argue about paying for the coffee again and she flirts just a little, and gives him her phone number, but doesn't protest when he says he has to leave. She watches him through the wall, and sees him meet Gibbs a few minutes later. She can't resist listening for a moment.

"I made a mistake, boss, I was tripped by a dog and I think its owner spotted my gun."

"And?"

"And she started coming on to me, it was kinda creepy. For all she knew I might have been a hit-man."

"Some women like guns; it's how I met my second wife."

"Wasn't she the one who cleaned out your bank account?"

Gibbs swats the back of his head, and they move off. Linda's annoyed with herself; of course a woman should be wary of a stranger carrying a gun, if she doesn't know who he is. She puts it down to experience.

Two weeks later she notices that her house is being watched, and recognizes one of the watchers as a local NCIS agent she's met as Supergirl. For the next week she keeps a low profile, trying to avoid anything that might reveal her powers. Bruce knows why, of course; a few days after she and McGee met, an agent called Callan was shot in LA, and one of the suspects is a girl he met, apparently by accident. They're checking up on the contacts of all the agents in the area, making sure that there aren't any other surprises. When Linda doesn't give them any, they eventually lose interest and go away.

It's a shame; she thinks McGee's cute, if maybe just a little old for her, but there are just too many issues.

2: Xander Harris (Buffy the Vampire Slayer)

Linda's house needs work; it's structurally sound, and Clark helped her fix most of the immediate problems the day she moved in, but the kitchen is badly designed, three windows need replacement, and she's still finding occasional evidence of mice, though she's adopted a cat to deal with that. Streaky gets on pretty well with Shelby Junior, and he seems to be making inroads on the local rodents.

She asks around the UCLA campus, and several friends recommend a carpenter called Xander Harris. He arranges to visit her early the following week. She's a little surprised that he only has one eye, but he's handsome, if a little scarred, and seems to be able to work around his handicap.

"...It'll never be a proper Craftsman home," says Harris, "tens of thousands of these bungalows were built during the housing boom after the Second World War, and it was pretty much a production line operation. But you've got a nice garden, the trees give you plenty of privacy, and we can certainly fix it up the way you want it." He sketches three variants for the kitchen that maximise counter space, storage space, or compromise a little on both, and estimates their prices. Linda thinks for a moment then goes for the option that maximises counter space; it's unlikely she'll need it much, but flight plus super-speed mean that she'll never have to worry about running out of things; there's always a shop open somewhere, even if it's the other side of the world. Extra cupboard space isn't a priority.

Two weeks later he's finished the job, several days ahead of schedule, and Linda decides to christen the kitchen by making something special. She likes Indian food, and invites Xander to join her for a meal; lamb phall with saffron rice and half a dozen side dishes. She gets the meat and rice in Los Angeles, the spices in Bombay, peppers from Chile, and the beer and serving dishes from a shop in London. Everything comes together well, and she's happy with the results. So is Xander, once he's eaten some banana and drunk a little lassi; the yogurt drink helps take away some of the burn from the peppers and spices. Next time she'll have to remember that what's nicely hot for her might be unbearable for a human who isn't used to authentic Indian food. They're talking about the next stage of modernising the house when he turns pale, clutches his throat, and starts to choke.

"Are you okay?" asks Linda. He shakes his head, still coughing and spluttering.

"Did something go the wrong way?"

"Uhnnn nnooo,"

"Do you have any allergies?" He can't reply.

"I think I'd better get you to a doctor." She grabs her bag and helps him to his feet, still gasping for air, and pretends to have a hard time getting him to her car, an old Honda Accord that has a few unusual modifications. As she helps him into the passenger seat she presses her hand against a nerve point, applying a *Klurkor* sleeper hold which knocks him out in seconds. He's still wheezing for breath, of course, but an unconscious man should need less air, she's reasonably sure he'll be all right for a few minutes; long enough for her to buckle in, with the special high-strength straps Bruce designed for her, and fly the whole car to a quiet street near the Pasadena Medical Center. She drives the rest of the way; once there he's quickly

admitted.

The diagnosis is severe anaphylactic shock, probably from a food allergy; they treat him and keep him in the hospital for observation, and eventually tell Linda she might as well go home.

He comes back for his car on Thursday afternoon. "It turns out I'm allergic to cardamom. The doctors think I must have been sensitised to it when I was in Africa a few years ago, then I guess I didn't eat any for a while."

"And there was a lot of it in the curry. I'm so sorry!"

"Not your fault, just my usual luck. Something weird happens whenever I go on a date, at least this time I didn't need surgery."

"Surgery?"

"Trust me, you don't want to know. That was a Tuesday too."

"Maybe we should try this again some other evening... say next Friday?"

"I wish I could, but I'll have to give it a rain check, I've got business in Cleveland for the next couple of weeks, it might take a little longer. I'll call you when I get back."

"That'd be good. We still haven't talked about the bathroom."

As he drives off Linda decides things could have been much worse; he's alive, and when he gets back from Cleveland she can try again with something simpler. Maybe hot dogs...

3: Logan Echolls (Veronica Mars)

There's really no way that Linda can hide the fact that she looks like Supergirl. Coloured contacts and a quick change of hair style help a little, but her biggest defence is the appearance of having nothing to hide. When some of her college friends point out that there's going to be a Supergirl look-alike contest at Malibu Beach, with a \$5,000 prize, it seems a perfect opportunity to muddy the waters a little. She enters, comes in first in the beauty competition, second in the look-alike category, and drops out of the weight-lifting section at 28 kg. Overall that gets her third place, a glitzy trophy, and a \$250 gift voucher, which she later donates to an animal shelter.

One of the judges is Logan Echolls. He's reasonably attractive, the son of a movie star and moderately rich and famous. He seems to think that that gives him some special entitlement, which doesn't really endear him to her, especially when she remembers seeing him wearing a "Kneel Before Zod" t-shirt at a party a few months earlier. In hindsight, Linda is never entirely sure why she lets him fast-talks her into going to a fashionable pizzeria on the beach front after the competition. After all, how bad can it be?

The answer, apparently, is "very." It appears that Logan doesn't believe in paying his parking tickets; midway through the meal he looks out of the window and notices that his car is being impounded by a couple of guys with a tow truck and a court order, storms out and starts arguing, and ends up being arrested for brawling and disturbing the peace. During the arrest the police find an open bottle of vodka in the car, another offence under Californian law.

For a while it looks like they'll be arresting Linda too, but she manages to persuade them that she didn't know about the booze, and the tow truck guys confirm she wasn't involved in the fight. She's left on the sidewalk when the police take Logan away, before he goes he jots a phone number on a paper napkin and asks her to "call Veronica, she'll bail me out." She goes back inside and pays the tab, gets a doggie bag for the remaining pizza, and dials the number.

"FBI, Agent Mars. How may I help you?"

There's really only one way for Linda to play this; Full-out ditz mode. "Wow! FBI? Seriously? Are you kidding?"

"The FBI doesn't kid." The woman at the other end of the line sounds like she might be quoting someone.

"Okay... Well, Logan Echolls asked me to call someone called Veronica. Is she there?"

"This is Veronica Mars; what's Logan done now?" She sounds annoyed. Linda belatedly remembers her name; Clark included her father's account of the Kane murder in the books she read to get caught up on Earth

events and popular culture.

"Fighting, and there was an open bottle in his car..." She gives Veronica the details.

"Okay... I guess he thinks I'll bail him out."

"Will you?"

"Eventually, but a few hours in the slammer won't do him any harm, might teach him a lesson. Can you get home by yourself, or do you need a lift?"

"I'm fine, thanks."

"Okay then... look, Logan isn't a bad person. He's an asshole, but he's not a bad person. He just has a few problems."

"Too many for me, I think. Let me know if you need me to give evidence or anything."

"It shouldn't be necessary, but give me your number, just in case."

The following morning cell phone photos of the brawl are on the celebrity pages in the LA papers, and blurry videos are on YouTube; Logan isn't quite famous enough to be followed by paparazzi, but he's recognizable. Amongst other things she learns that Veronica is his ex-wife; they married after college and divorced within months. Linda's picture fortunately isn't clear, and she's named as "beauty contest competitor Linda Lane," which will probably annoy Lois if she ever sees it, but suits her nicely. She puts the clipping on the wall next to the trophy.

A few weeks later Logan leaves a message on her voicemail; he's trying for another date. She doesn't bother returning the call.

4: Charlie Young (The West Wing)

Note: This chapter is set a few months after *Adventures in House Sitting*, in which Linda worked temporarily as house-sitter for Joey Lucas, and nearly a year after the main events of *The Return*, in which she first met C.J. Cregg and her husband.

"It's good of you to help out with the party on such short notice," signs Joey Lucas. "All of the professional ASL interpreters seem to be busy today."

"I didn't have any plans," Linda signs back, "I was sorry to hear about Kenny, I hope he recovers soon." There's a buzz and a small light flashes, and she adds "There's someone at the door; I'd better get it."

Joey checks a monitor in her office and signs "It's C.J. Cregg and Danny with Charlie Young, you'll like them."

Linda's met C.J. Cregg and her husband several times; the trouble is that she's met them as Supergirl, not Linda, which could be a problem. But as usual the idea that Supergirl is casually answering the door, or doing anything other than fly and save lives, is so unlikely that she doesn't see the slightest glimmer of recognition in their eyes. She has an idea that Joey wouldn't be so easily fooled; Joey makes up for her deafness by extraordinary perceptiveness in other areas, and Linda plans to avoid meeting her as Supergirl unless it's absolutely essential. She doesn't know Charlie at all, although she knows who he is; former aide to President Bartlet and fiancé of Zoey Bartlet. Some news bulletins mentioning the couple and racist attacks on Charlie reached Argo City before Kara left for Earth.

An hour later the party's in full swing with twenty or so guests, mostly prominent local Democrats, and Linda's busy translating anecdotes about the odder moments of the Bartlet administration. Between stories she notices that Charlie doesn't seem to be enjoying himself much, and asks if he's okay.

"I'm fine," says Charlie. "It's just, you hear the same stupid stories enough times, you start losing the will to live. People should get on with their lives, not dwell on the past."

"Maybe you could talk about whatever it is you're doing now. Did someone say you're a lawyer?"

"Law student, it'll be a few years yet before I can practice."

"Which college?"

"Georgetown."

"I'm taking engineering at UCLA."

"Okay... I thought you were Kenny's replacement."

"No, just doing a favour for Joey, Kenny's got the flu."

Charlie grins, Joey beckons to her, and she leaves Charlie to go and interpret another story. A few minutes later Charlie chimes in with a story of his own, a weird campus encounter with extreme libertarians, and their reaction when he pointed out that if they had the courage of their convictions, they would be paying him to listen to them.

Towards the end of the evening as Charlie is leaving he thanks her for the suggestion, and mentions that he's in Los Angeles for a couple more days, and doesn't have anything planned for the following evening; would she like to come out for a meal?

"Won't your fiancée object?"

"Zoey and I are... well, it's complicated. We both think we need a little space right now."

"Okay... one condition, I'm not an escort, and I'm not playing relationship counsellor, or helping you drown your sorrows. I'm just going out for a meal."

"Okay, I can work with that. Italian?"

"Works for me."

The next evening they've finally got a table in the crowded restaurant when Charlie's phone rings. Linda makes an effort not to listen in, as he describes what he's been doing that day; after a couple of minutes he says "Love you too, honey," and disconnects. "Sorry, that was Zoey."

"I guessed."

"I think she's feeling a little lonely."

"I guessed that too. Did I mention that I'm not a relationship counsellor?"

"Okay, sorry. I guess I'm missing her too. That's pretty much why I wanted company this evening."

"Okay, if that's all this is, it's fine with me. Let's order."

About fifteen minutes later, as they're starting to eat, Linda feels an odd sense of unease, like the oppressive feeling before a storm breaks, and the whole restaurant seems to go quiet. Outside, for miles around, Linda can hear hundreds of dogs barking. There's an odd creaking noise, far outside the range of human hearing. Then the room lurches up and down once... twice... three times. Stacked glasses cascade from the bar, and hundreds of car alarms start to beep.

"Earthquake!" shouts Charlie, grabbing her arm, "we've got to get out of here." He starts to pull her towards the door.

Kara tries to think. She needs to get out of here, start rescuing people, but Charlie's not going to let go until he thinks she's safe. As they move towards the door, she says "You're a lawyer, right?"

"Law student. Come on, we need to get out of here."

All of the exits are crowded, but they're slowly making progress as Linda says "Do you do client confidentiality yet?"

"I can't take clients. Come on!"

She opens her handbag, pulls out a twenty-dollar bill, and hands it to him, saying "Consider this an advance."

"What?"

"Catch you later." She pulls her arm out of his hand, too fast for him to respond, and ducks behind a pillar. Only Charlie sees her blur into impossibly fast motion and fly through the entrance over the heads of the crowd.

Three hours later Charlie's still in the car park outside the restaurant, leaning against Linda's car and listening to its radio, as she walks out from behind some bushes.

"I didn't expect you to be here still."

"I figured the roads would be gridlocked, might as well wait here until things quietened down a little. I've phoned Zoey, she knows I'm okay. The radio says that was force 6.2, how bad was it?"

"A lot of casualties, not many fatalities."

"Not with you there."

"My cousin helped a lot."

"Yeah. Look... I can't take your money." He hands her the twenty dollar bill.

"Why not?"

"I'm not allowed to charge for any form of legal service until I qualify. I do that and the Bar Association finds out, I'm toast."

"Okay. So can you keep a secret?"

"It's one hell of a secret."

"You were President Bartlet's aide for seven years. I think you're probably pretty good at keeping secrets."

"Good point." Charlie grins. "Okay, yes, it's your secret, I'll keep it."

"That's good. Let me know when you start your practice, I should be finishing college then and I'll probably need a good lawyer."

"I'll hold you to that."

"Thanks. I have to get back out there soon; can I drop you off at your hotel first?"

"The roads still look pretty bad, that could take hours, I'm sure you have better things to do."

"Who said anything about the roads? Get into the car and fasten your seat belt, we'll be there in a couple of minutes."

As the car flies across Los Angeles, staying low to avoid rescue helicopters and other aircraft, Charlie realises that it's the story to end all stories. And one that he'll never be able to tell...

5: Steve Jinks (Warehouse 13)

"Miss Lee?"

Linda looks up from the test bench where her latest bridge model is gently swaying under the impact of a simulated 50 MPH wind. There are two strangers in the engineering lab, an attractive red-headed woman in her early twenties, and a slightly older man with close-cropped light brown hair, also very attractive. She smiles at them and says "Yes, I'm Linda, what can I do for you?"

"Would you mind switching that thing off?" the woman says loudly, "it's a little noisy."

"Sorry," says Linda, hitting the switch and taking off her unnecessary ear muffs and safety visor once the blowers stop, "I've been working on this for a week, I don't really notice any more."

"Tacoma Narrows?" asks the woman.

"Yes; this is my best shot so far at a low-cost repair that would have been possible with the technology and materials they had available, in the time that they had before it collapsed. The original failed in a sustained wind at 40 MPH. I've got a five thousand-dollar repair that would take a week but keeps it under control to about fifty-two, but it falls apart even faster than the original when I take it to fifty-five."

"That's not good," says the man. "Sorry, I'm forgetting my manners. I'm agent Jinks, this is agent Donovan, we're with ATF." He shows an ATF ID card, while Donovan is digging in her bag, apparently looking for hers.

Linda glimpses an odd device inside the bag; it looks like a gun made out of vacuum tubes with a metal framework and black butt, and various coils and rods. X-ray vision fills in the rest. The principle is obvious to her, a variant on the science she learned as a child; it must generate a polyphase energy vortex, a cone of plasma like ball lightning, which can be used like a Taser. It's unlikely to be dangerous to her, but it could knock out or kill a normal human. She wonders who designed it. Another device seems to be an odd radio-based video communicator, primitive by modern standards, though some details of the internal antennae suggest that it might channel its signals into hyperspace; again, a bizarre variant on Earth's current level of technology. Jinks has a similar gun under his jacket, somewhat larger, but no communicator. Donovan flashes her card, so fast that most people wouldn't recognize it; it identifies her as IRS, not ATF. Linda doesn't comment, of course.

"How can I help you?"

"Do you own a dark blue 2007 Honda Accord, license 4GUB555?"

"That's right, what about it?"

"Our records show that you purchased it second hand, via Big Kahuna Quality Autos, is that correct?"

"That's right. Though Big Kahuna Ripoff Artists would be a better description, you wouldn't believe the faults I found."

"Prior to that it passed through the hands of two other owners and the Helping Hand Acceptance Corporation, a repo company?"

"Two previous owners sounds right, I didn't know about the repo guys."

"We do," says Donovan. "Did you notice anything odd in the car when you bought it?"

Linda thinks back. "There was a really ugly carpet in the back, didn't match the rest of the car. I had to take it out and replace the original, as close as I could match it."

"What was underneath?"

"The original carpet, with bad moth damage."

"Not quite what we're looking for," says Jinks. "Was there a case of some sort? Maybe a large attaché case, or a metal flight case, dimensions about so big or bigger?" He mimes a box about a foot long, nine inches deep, and three high.

"No boxes at all. Why?"

"Miss Lee, have you noticed your car behaving at all oddly?"

"Oddly?"

"Does it ever seem to... move? By itself, I mean?"

"It's a car," says Linda, "isn't that what they do?"

"Not this way," says Jinks. He pulls out a packet of photos, a stretch of road. In the first two the road is clear, in the third a dark car is on the road. "These were taken by a traffic management camera shooting a frame every three seconds, on one of the roads near the Pasadena Medical Center. We're pretty sure that that's a Honda Accord, and we've got a partial read on the license plate. The first digit is 4; the last two are 55 or 56."

"It could be mine. What about it?" Linda can guess exactly when the picture was taken; the night she flew Xander Harris to hospital in her car.

"If you look at that picture, the front wheels seem to be slightly above the road surface."

"Maybe. Perhaps it hit a bump or something?"

"If we go back to the previous picture, this is only three seconds earlier, and the car isn't visible at all; to drive to that position between frames it would have to be travelling at more than 160 MPH. No Honda Accord ever built could do that. But right at the top of the frame there's something that looks like the bottom of a wheel."

"That's not very clear; it could be almost anything, like a kid's balloon or a plastic bag blowing in the wind."

"It could be, but the shadow beneath it is about the right size to be cast by a Honda Accord just out of shot, about twenty feet above the road."

"Or something smaller nearer the light?"

"Maybe. We don't think so. And there have subsequently been several other reports of a flying car in the Pasadena area, the last was just after the earthquake last month."

Linda curses herself for her carelessness. "So what's this about? Are you seriously telling me that there are two ATF agents here because you think I've got a flying car? Shouldn't that be the FAA's job?"

There's an awkward silence, then Donovan says "It's complicated."

"I'll bet it is," says Linda. "Look, I've got to get this finished by the end of the afternoon and I really need to try a few more variables with the bridge. Can this wait until this evening? I can give you all the time you need tonight."

"We can continue this later," says Jinks. "But if we may, we'd like to take a look inside your car. It shouldn't take long."

"Go ahead," says Linda, digging into her purse for the keys. "It's in parking lot seven, bay B23."

Linda puts on the ear muffs and visor, and starts the blowers again. It wouldn't be possible for anyone human to listen in on their conversation as they leave, but of course she doesn't have that limitation.

"What do you think, Steve?"

"I don't think, I know. She was lying when she queried the identification of the object in the second picture, she knew what it was, and she knows her car can fly. But she really doesn't know about the box. Or maybe doesn't know that she has it."

"Boy, I'll bet you were fun at school..." The voices fade beyond easy audibility as they move into a noisy corridor.

Five minutes later she's talking to Bruce Wayne in Gotham City, describing the visitors. There's a pause, then he tells her "Jinks used to be ATF, there's a notation in his file that he has 'an inexplicable ability to tell if someone is lying to him.' They have him listed as a transfer to the Secret Service, but no information I can access on his current posting. There's no Agent Donovan matching the woman's description in the IRS or ATF database, I'm guessing it's a cover. It may take me a while to get information out of the Secret Service, their security is much tighter."

"Well, it sounds like they're in the flying car business now. Any suggestions as to how I handle this?"

"Tell the truth where you can, and throw in a few misleading lies to keep him off track. I'm sure you can come up with some ideas. And try to find out why they're interested, of course."

"Gee, thanks."

"Always happy to help." He clicks off without saying goodbye.

Donovan comes back alone fifteen minutes later, alone, and says "Okay, we didn't find anything. Thanks for your help."

"Is that it?"

"We might follow up this evening, if we don't develop any other leads."

"Okay, make it after seven; that will give me time to get home and shower."

When the doorbell rings that evening, Jinks is alone. "Agent Donovan will be here a little later."

"Okay. Come on in, can I get you coffee, or a drink?"

"Coffee would be good."

When Linda comes back with the coffee, Jinks is looking at some of the books on her shelves and petting Streaky the cat. "Jane's Guide to Jetpacks and Personal Rotorcraft?"

"I have a friend in Washington, he's a big jetpack fan, I thought it might be interesting to find out more about the technology."

"What do you think of it?"

"Say you have a scale from one to ten for danger, and one to ten for stupidity. Jetpacks go up to eleven on both counts."

"You're a Spinal Tap fan?" He looks surprised.

"I house-sat for Nigel Tufnel last year, he gave me a copy of the documentary."

"Cool!"

"I've got some signed pictures somewhere if you want one; I'm not a big collector."

"Okay... Looking at these books here, about half of this shelf seems to be about aviation engineering and science related to flight. An Introduction to Avionics, The Science of Superman, Vector Thrust Dynamics, Gyroscopic Effects in Rotor Aircraft... are you sure that you're not working on a flying car?"

"Aviation technology is one of the units in my engineering course. What's this really about?"

Jinks sips his coffee, then says "Without getting too specific... a material was developed in 1961 which could have revolutionised flight. One of the first uses was a flying car, a modified model T Ford. The problem was that the material was incredibly dangerous. It accumulated energy from its surroundings, and unless the energy was released carefully it would eventually discharge it in lethally dangerous quantities. Most of the material was destroyed, but a couple of samples went missing."

"Stolen?"

"The guy who developed it was a little absent-minded, he left the samples in his car, and someone took them. One surfaced in eighty-four..." He hands Linda a photograph of a pair of boots, with a length of bone protruding from one boot, and wisps of smoke coming from them. "That's all that was left of a highway patrolman who flagged down a car carrying that sample outside Los Angeles."

"Ewww."

"The car was later impounded by repo men working for the Helping Hand Acceptance Corporation, who were apparently unaware of the box and its contents. Their mechanic seems to have had an inkling of its nature; when last seen the car was outbound past the moon's orbit and accelerating, with him and at least one other person believed to be aboard."

"This sounds like the premise for a bad movie."

"I wish. We believe that another sample somehow fell into the hands of a minor criminal called Brett Whaley, who was killed in ninety-four by Jules Winnfield and Vincent Vega, hit-men working for a gangster named Marcellus Wallace. According to Winfield's deathbed confession in ninety-seven, they also killed two of his associates, one of them in a car which was subsequently cleaned up, abandoned on the street and repossessed by the Helping Hand Acceptance Corporation. Vega was found dead the next day, apparently killed by his next intended victim, a boxer named Butch Coolidge. Winnfield was unable or unwilling to describe the contents of the box, except to say that it glowed with 'The light of The Lord,' which led to him giving up his life of crime; it's possible that he actually saw a radiation discharge, which may have caused the cancer that led to his death. We believe that the box ended up with Wallace, who amongst other things was the franchisee for eight lots in the Big Kahuna Quality Autos chain, including the one where you bought your car. He was last seen two days after you bought your car. He's now missing, believed dead. The box was never recovered."

"That's all very strange," says Linda, "and seriously creepy, but I haven't seen any glowing boxes."

"But your car flew."

"Did I say that?"

"I'm saying it. That's your car in the traffic camera picture."

"So you just want to eliminate me from your enquiries?"

"Yes. If you would please just answer the questions without going off at a tangent... is that your car?"

"Okay... yes, it's my car."

"Flying?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"You'll be disappointed."

"Try me."

"Supergirl flew the car there. It was an emergency, I was taking someone to hospital and the traffic was really bad. Supergirl flew the whole car there."

"She isn't in the picture."

"She's pretty fast." It isn't quite a lie.

"Why drop you there rather than at the hospital?"

"It's complicated."

"Try me."

"Superman and Supergirl have friends, people who know how to contact them quickly in an emergency. I'd rather not say how... The trouble is that if their enemies find out, their friends become targets for people who want to lure them into traps. It's advisable to keep a low profile. Look at how many times Superman has had to rescue Lois Lane."

"You're a friend of Supergirl?"

"I was in school in Midvale nine years ago, the first time Supergirl visited Earth. I'd better not say more." It's all true, and if he draws the right conclusions Linda's home free.

Jinks rubs his temples, then says "Okay... okay, I guess I believe that. One last question then... why didn't you tell us this afternoon?"

"You really want to know?"

"It would be nice."

"Can't it just be that you're a cute guy, I wanted to see more of you?" He really is cute, nice too, but there are too many lies in her life, she can't have a relationship with someone who can detect them.

"Nice try, but I'm pretty sure that isn't the reason. Also, I'm gay."

"Well then, maybe it was your cute sidekick I wanted to see?"

"Nope. You're not gay, neither is she."

"Sure about that?"

"I have pretty good gaydar."

"Okay... If I'd told you about Supergirl straight away, would you have told me about your glowing box thingy?"

"Oh crud. No, we wouldn't."

"So what happens now?"

"Did you ever see Men in Black?"

"Sure. You're planning to neuralyze me?"

"No," says Donovan; Linda tries to pretend that it's a surprise that she's appeared in the doorway behind her, when in fact she's heard her quieting down Shelby Junior outside, and every move she's made since picking the lock to let herself in. "That's my job."

As Linda turns, Donovan shoots her with her ray gun; the thing actually stings a little, and Linda guesses a normal human would be knocked out. She goes down, Jinks deftly catches her and lowers her gently to the floor. Linda feigns unconsciousness, eyes almost shut, and listens to their conversation.

"How long will she be out?" asks Jinks.

"About five minutes, with a five minute memory loss. Is that enough?"

"Plenty. We need to get her into the kitchen."

"What do you plan to tell her?"

"Electric shock, I think." They half carry and half drag her into the kitchen, and lay her on the floor by the counter. Donovan spills a little water on the floor, while Jinks does something to the coffee-maker.

"I've just arrived, she went to make me a cup;" says Donovan "then we heard her scream and the breaker tripped. Open the breaker box, switch off then on again as she comes around; you can be fixing it, I'm giving her first aid."

"Okay."

Linda waits until he's got the cupboard open and the lights off, plus a few seconds for luck, then moans and pretends to come round.

"Stay still," says Donovan, "You've had a bad shock; we need to make sure you weren't injured when you went down."

"What the hell happened?" asks Linda.

"I think you had an electric shock. You went to make me coffee then the lights went out."

"I've found the breaker," Jinks says on cue, and switches it on.

"Wonder what caused... there, there's a burn in the coffee maker's cable, I can see bare metal. It must have touched a hot pan."

"That shouldn't have given me a bad shock," says Linda. She's an engineering student, of course, she'd know that. "The breaker should have tripped first."

"There's water on the floor," says Donovan, "that would have made the shock more severe."

"Maybe," says Linda. "What happened?"

"You told me about Supergirl flying your car to the hospital," says Jinks, "then Claudia arrived and you went to make her coffee."

"I don't remember that." It's true; she doesn't because it didn't happen.

"You're still a little woozy there. Would you like me to call your doctor?"

"No, I think I'll be okay." She pretends to be a little shaky as she gets back on her feet, with Donovan helping her to stand. "Do you have any more questions?"

"I think we just about covered everything," says Jinks. Linda thinks he looks a little guilty, and guesses that he hasn't been doing this as long as Donovan.

"Maybe you should get an early night," says Donovan. "Can I get you anything?"

"Don't worry, I'll be fine. I'm just going to rest on the couch for a while. Would you mind letting yourselves out?"

"Sure."

"Goodnight, then."

Linda rests on the couch and listens to them leave, and to their conversation as they get into their car and drive off.

"Dibs I drive," says Donovan, "or Artie hears all about your interrogation technique when we get back to the Warehouse."

"I found out what happened, it just wasn't what we expected. Are you sure she'll be okay in there?"

"She'll be fine, just shaky for a little while; on that setting the Tesla's pretty safe. It's for her own good, if she goes looking for that stuff she might find it, and we don't want more deaths."

"Better hope that she is okay; you don't want Supergirl coming after you."

"Don't worry," thinks Linda. "I'm fine."

When she's quite sure that they've gone, and made sure that they didn't leave any bugs behind them, she calls Bruce and tells him what she's learned. Neither of them has any idea what the Warehouse might be, but tracking Jinks and Donovan shouldn't be beyond Batman's capabilities. It'll be interesting to find out...

End notes: Warehouse 13 is a secret organisation tasked with collecting and safekeeping dangerous artifacts. Superman fans who aren't familiar with the *Warehouse 13* cast, and in particular Steve Jinks, may have seen the same actor play Jimmy Olsen in *Smallville* seasons 6 onwards. The friend in Washington with an interest in jetpacks is Timothy McGee (see chapter 1 and my story *The Return*). The "dangerous energy-accumulating substance" is Flubber, from Disney's *The Absent-Minded Professor*, source of the flying Model T. I've made some changes to its properties. The Helping Hand Acceptance Corporation and the glowing thing (never seen clearly) that can make a car fly come from the movie *Repo Man*; another glowing box is seen (but never explained) in *Pulp Fiction*, the source for Marsellus Wallace and Big Kahuna Burgers, and inspiration for the sprawling Big Kahuna megacorporation I've invented for this and earlier stories.

6: ...And One She Did (DC Comicsverse)

Linda's phone rings silently (to normal people) as she's leaving the campus library. The ultrasonic ring tone tells her that it's Batman calling, and an emergency. Seconds later she's changing into her costume in Pasadena, and taking the call.

"There's something strange happening in space," says Bruce. "NASA has detected a luminous sphere that looks like ball of lightning, about half a mile across. It's inbound towards Earth at about fifty thousand miles an hour; it will impact the ocean off Atlantic City in approximately five minutes. Kent is dealing with a reactor fire in France and I can't contact Hancock, you'll have to take it."

"I'm... ..over Atlantic City," says Linda, a second later. "Give me a direction."

"Look on the plane of the ecliptic, coming in from the East at about forty-five degrees from vertical."

She scans the sky and eventually says "I've got it, but it's smaller than you described, and I think it's slowing."

"Can you see anything inside it?"

"No, there's too much light, it's swamping my senses."

"Radar update gives you four minutes. Try X-ray vision."

"No; just too much interference. I'd better fly up to take a closer look."

"Call me once you're back in atmosphere."

Faster than a speeding bullet... if it was fired from a rail gun at hypersonic speed... she heads up into space, flying up and loops around to match speed and course with the fireball as it plummets towards the ocean. It's about five hundred miles out and twenty yards across as she reaches it, dwindling in size by the second. Through the fire she can dimly see something inside it, a solid centre. Switching to X-ray vision she sees a human skeleton, hunched into a foetal ball, and some oddments of metal that might be tools or weapons. She flies towards the fireball, instinctively wanting to help, and is flung back by a colossal jolt of

electricity. By the time she recovers the ball is about ten miles up, and rapidly vanishing. Three miles and it's gone completely. She can see someone in a close-fitting dark costume, moving against the rush of wind; he spins into the sort of position she's seen skydivers use to reduce speed, except that she can't see any sign of a parachute.

As she flies towards him she has a much better view; a dark blue costume, yellow boot tops, belt, and shoulders, and a small mask. There are tools or weapons in the boot tops and belts. Dark hair, athletic build, rippling muscles... She shakes her head, remembering to concentrate on what's important. Two miles up she's flying alongside him and shouts "Need help?"

"No... I was just planning to fall into the ocean and get eaten by sharks." He has a nice baritone voice, even when he's shouting.

"Let me know if you change your mind."

"Okay... Help!"

Linda tries not to grin as she catches him and flies him back towards the shore. He twists round to stare at her, says "Linda?" and passes out.

When he wakes they're on the roof of an Atlantic City warehouse. Linda can see Navy helicopters miles out at sea, criss-crossing the sky in the area where the fireball should have landed. She hands him a bottle of water and says "Are you okay?"

"Linda? When did you grow up?"

"Who are you?"

"It's me... Dick." He takes off his mask, obviously expecting her to recognise him.

He's handsome... she shakes her head again and tries to stay focussed. "Sorry... Dick, I have no idea who you are."

"C'mon, Linda..."

"Why do you keep calling me that? I'm Kara Zor-El."

"Really? You have no idea who I am? Dick Grayson? Nightwing?"

She shakes her head.

"The name means nothing to you?"

"Nope."

"How about Robin?"

"Not a thing."

"Crap. Okay, it's complicated."

"Give me the Cliff's Notes version."

"I'm from a parallel universe, where I'm a crimefighter in Bludhaven. Before that I was Batman's sidekick. When I was a kid I worked with our version of Supergirl a few times, but she took off into the future with some guys from the thirtieth century when she was seventeen."

"How did you end up here?"

"There was a thing they called the Crisis, whole time lines collapsing and merging. A few of us were trapped in the Watchtower in Moon orbit when it went down, suddenly the teleporters wouldn't work and we could see the Earth changing; whole cities vanishing and appearing, total chaos everywhere." He shivered, and Linda could see horror in his eyes. "When it stopped the other guys had vanished, I was there on my own, and the Watchtower was slowly disintegrating. I could still hear radio from Earth, you wouldn't have known that anything had happened, but nobody responded to my calls. Then Fate teleported in and told me the bad news; somehow they'd ended up with two of me, there was another Nightwing on Earth, and the universe wouldn't let two of us exist simultaneously. The only way I could survive was in another universe. He did some sort of mojo that sent me here."

"Why here?"

"Maybe it had to be somewhere I don't exist... I was stupid asking if you know me. I guess I'm lucky I ended up somewhere I vaguely recognize."

"I have about fifty questions. Let's start with the easy ones... where's Bludhaven? And why did you call me Linda?"

"On the New Jersey shore around Brigantine Island."

"Take a look around, anything familiar?"

He staggers to his feet and looks around. "Yeah, this looks a hell of a lot like Bludhaven harbour, only cleaner. Some differences in the layout."

"Okay. This is Atlantic City. Now why did you call me Linda?"

"It's your name... Linda Lee, something... Danvers, that was it, Linda Lee Danvers."

She's too surprised to say anything coherent. Nine years earlier she'd thought of calling herself Danvers, the name of the principal of her school in Midavale, but decided to go with Linda Lee instead. She's never told anyone else.

"I'm right, aren't I?" says Dick, if that's really his name.

"Tell me something else."

"Does Lois know who Clark is in this world?"

"Frack."

"What?"

"They don't have Battlestar Galactica in your world?"

"That aired when I was about three, what's it got to do with anything?"

That evening Linda flies over Los Angeles, half her attention on the city, the rest on her phone.

"He claims to come from a parallel world where he's Batman's adopted son and former sidekick," says Linda. "The Batman in his world has been active since the eighties, so has Superman. He's refused to tell me your real name or anything about you apart from that, which makes me think he really has been trained by you, or someone like you. He's mentioned a couple of dozen superheroes that don't exist in this world, and says there are many more; there are so many that they've organised some sort of club, with headquarters on a space station orbiting the Moon. He's never heard of John Hancock. He believes that Lex Luthor is a billionaire with links to organised crime who once ran for president and was narrowly defeated. Some of the other criminals he's named appear to be much the same as our world, others I've never heard of. Luthor is still alive, as is Harvey Dent. You're not a fugitive, and the Joker is your most notable foe."

"Not Ra's al Ghul?"

"He's fought him but considers the Joker more dangerous."

"He might be right. Anything else?"

"Some differences, some things are the same. Different TV shows, Atlantic City is called Bludhaven in his world and is more industrialized, less of a vacation centre. The 9-11 attack targeted New York, not Metropolis. At the time someone called Bush was president, he's never heard of Bartlet or Santos."

"Where is he now?"

"Hancock's old place on the coast outside LA. It's a bit of a wreck but it doesn't have links to anyone with a secret identity. I cleaned it up and brought in some food and drinks, he'll be all right there for a day or two."

"Does Hancock know?"

"Yes, he's cool with it, provided I keep an eye on New York when he takes his next vacation."

"What do you think?"

"Honestly... I think he's telling the truth. It's all pretty consistent, and I can't detect the sort of heartbeat changes that might mean he's lying."

"Bring him here tomorrow afternoon, fly him straight to the Batcave and don't let him see where it is."

It's not the first time she's seen Bruce in costume, but it's always impressive. Dick seems a little confused by the layout of the cave, but takes Batman in his stride.

"Tell me something only you and I should know," says Bruce, his tone low and menacing.

"I don't think I can," says Dick, "Things are so different here. I looked you up on line; even your birth-date is different. I'm nearly as old as you are!"

"You gave him access to the internet?"

Linda shakes her head.

"I brought my own," says Dick. He reaches into his boot and tosses Bruce an ultra-slim PDA; "Your design."

"Hmph." Bruce examines it for a moment, then drops it to the floor and crushes it with his heel.

"Hey!"

"You left the GPS on. I'll replace it if I think I can trust you."

"Okay... my Batman had a ring with a kryptonite gem hidden away, in case Superman turned on humanity. Superman gave it to him, took it from Lex Luthor, I don't know where you'd get something like that."

"Why a ring?"

"So that Luthor could punch Superman and hurt him."

"Vicious." Linda can see something in his eyes, and guesses that Bruce has kryptonite somewhere, in a more efficient form than a ring.

"That's Luthor for you."

"Not in this universe," says Bruce. "Not any more."

"I'd want to see the body. Hell, I'd want to conduct the autopsy."

"I did."

"Cool!" Dick smiles for the first time since meeting Bruce.

"Assuming for the moment your story is true, why were you adopted?"

"My parents and I were aerialists, the Flying Graysons. Boss Zucco was working a protection racket, sabotaged our equipment to prove they could destroy the circus. They were both killed; Bruce was in the audience and couldn't save them. I think he felt responsible."

"How old were you?"

"Thirteen."

"I see." His eyes fill with old pain, and Linda remembers how Bruce's parents died.

"Look, I get that this is all strange to you... I've thought of my version of Bruce as my father for half my life, but you're not that man. I'm nearly as old as you are, I really don't want to be your son... in fact, I really don't want to be anywhere near Gotham City."

"Why not?" Bruce sounds suspicious.

"Too much history... old friends, old enemies, and I don't know what they are in this universe. There was a girl I nearly married; here she's ten years old. Watch out though, in a few years she might be dressing up in a bat-costume and fighting crime. In my time line she was pretty good at it too, until the Joker shot her. She ended up in a wheelchair, running communications for most of the Justice League."

"Who is she?"

"I'll tell you if it happens."

"Not acceptable."

"She can make her own decisions. I'm not going to have you grooming her to be a crime fighter, or trying to scare her off."

"So what good are you? And what do you want with me?"

Dick digs into his boot again, and produces a tiny memory stick. "I was active in Bludhaven... Atlantic City... the last few years, but it's not that far from Gotham. You kept me updated on the criminal scene here. I can't say how much is accurate in this universe, and there's certainly nothing you can use as evidence, but it might give you some leads."

"Perhaps. What about your version of Atlantic City? Do you have data?"

"You just smashed it."

"I can probably recover it." Bruce scoops up Dick's PDA and puts it on one of the work-benches. "What do you want from me?"

"Help with setting up a secret identity, maybe a start-up loan if you're feeling generous. I figure I'll find myself a city that doesn't have anyone watching over it and lend a hand."

"Not Atlantic City?"

"I'd keep tripping over the differences; I'll be better off making a clean start somewhere new."

"Make it the west coast," suggests Linda. "Less chance of running into people you knew in your old

world. San Francisco?"

"It's a possibility." Dick turns back to Bruce. "Something else I can give you, the names of a couple of dozen crime fighters from my world. I don't think any of them are active here, apart from Superman, but maybe some of them just need someone to suggest the possibilities. "

"Interesting... Alfred!"

"Yes?" Alfred steps from the shadows.

"Tomorrow morning, get all the details you need for a new identity. Will a million dollars cover your initial startup needs?"

"Two would be better," says Dick.

"We'll cost it out properly tomorrow. Now, tonight we have some business to attend to."

"We do?"

"I've been on the trail of the Zucco gang for the last month; it's possible you've just given me their next target. The Haly Circus just arrived in town and the Flying Graysons debut tonight. Can I trust you not to make a scene?"

"I think so," says Dick. "It's been so long... I never even thought to check if they were still alive, they probably aren't anything like the family I remember."

"Even if they are, they won't know you. Supergirl, I'd suggest that you and Grayson pretend to be on a date, I'll book tickets on line in your name."

"You'll need my credit card details."

Batman turns towards a computer, saying "Already got them..."

In unison, Linda and Dick say "Of course he has, he's Batman."

"This is Gotham News, every hour on the hour. Tragedy was narrowly averted tonight when a trapeze wire snapped during the opening performance of the Haly Circus. The Flying Graysons escaped death when Supergirl and an unknown associate intervened. Cheryl, over to you."

"The police are still picking up the pieces here, but it's clear that without the intervention of Supergirl and her masked associate all three performers would have been killed. Earlier I spoke to Carmella Smith, who was in the audience."

"I was sitting right next to this blonde girl, and she was wearing those red boots and a short skirt, and a hoody thing so I didn't see much of her face, cuddling up next to this real hunk wearing dark glasses, and I remember thinking that was stupid indoors. And then there's this twang and those fools on the trapeze are falling, and suddenly there's like a whoosh and the girl is gone, and the guy is shrugging off his coat, and he's wearing like tight dark spandex all over, don't leave nothing to the imagination, and this little mask instead of the glasses, firing some kind of gun up at the top of the tent and he kinda swings up into the air, and he catches one dude that's falling and Supergirl lands the other two in the ring. 'Course I thought it was all part of the act at first, but Supergirl and the guy don't stop to take no bows, they chase off and I hear shooting outside. And then Supergirl flies back in with these four other dudes wrapped in iron bars, says a few words to some like security guards that had run in, picks up the guy she was with, and flies off. It kinda ended the show, but damn, that was the best thirty dollars I ever spent."

"In related news, police made five arrests at the circus following this incident; the fifth man was found dangling from the tent rigging nearly a hundred feet above the circus grounds, it's alleged that those arrested were involved in a protection racket targeting the circus and theatrical performances. Claims that the mysterious Batman was involved in this incident are being downplayed by the authorities..."

Bruce mutes the TV, and says "I think that went reasonably well."

"It was easier to cope with than I expected," says Dick, "they were nothing like my parents."

"The original Flying Graysons retired in the seventies in this universe. They had no children to carry on the act, so sold the name to friends."

"You could have told us," says Linda.

"I wanted to see what happened. It would have been interesting, for example, if Grayson had claimed them as family."

"Interesting as in 'he's up to something', I guess."

"Exactly."

"So..." says Dick. "I guess I need to get some sleep. Would you mind flying me back to LA?" Linda nods.

"You could stay here overnight," says Bruce. "It ought to simplify things tomorrow."

"I'll be honest," says Dick, "the differences here kinda creep me out, I'm not sure I could sleep. No offence meant."

"None taken."

"Until tomorrow then..." He walks out onto the terrace with Linda, the distant city lights twinkling under a clear starlit sky. They rise into the air, their bodies pressed close together, aware of the infinite possibilities that might lie ahead.

End.

Note: In DC canon the Flying Graysons were killed by Boss Zucco as described. In other respects this isn't fully canon compliant with any particular version of the DC universe. Live with it...