

CHAPTER ONE

SWITCH KNEW THAT TODAY WAS going to be one of those days when President Adam Lucius Plutarch was nearly assassinated before her eyes by her favorite teacher. She knew it was going to be even worse when she learned of the prison break led by her father not long after.

The day had started out innocently enough. Switch had woken up earlier than usual in order to get ready for the arrival of President Plutarch, who was coming to the Academy that day to give a speech to the students about using their superpowers for the greater good. Her home room teacher, Arachnid, had not seemed entirely thrilled about the President's visit, and it wasn't because he had voted against Plutarch in the last election, either. It was because Arachnid had been convinced that Plutarch was going to try to sell the G-Men to the prospective students, because once they graduated, the Academy students would have freedom in choosing what to do with their lives afterward, and the G-Men were always recruiting new superhumans into their organization.

Switch had no idea if Plutarch planned to do that or not, though looking back, she should have realized that Arachnid's distrust of Plutarch was a subtle foreshadowing of Plutarch's near assassination. Truthfully, Switch didn't know very much about Plutarch in general. She was aware that Plutarch, prior to becoming the President of the United States, had once been a supervillain known as the Billionaire and had even worked with her mother, Electrica, on more than one occasion. She had never met Plutarch herself—he had retired from the supervillain life when Switch was very young—but she remembered that Mom always talked about Plutarch with respect and even admiration, so she didn't particularly hate or distrust Plutarch herself.

What she did hate, however, was having to sit in the Auditorium so early in the morning to listen to his speech. Bait, her twin brother, had said that Plutarch was a great speaker and that his speeches were never boring, but Switch wasn't so sure of that. She was glad it meant they got the morning off from their normal classes, but if the alternative instead was to listen to a politician drone on about being good little boys and girls, then she wasn't sure if it was as good a thing as she thought. At least by taking her classes Switch was getting one step closer to her dream of becoming a famous superhero who was loved and praised by the people.

And when is the speech even going to start? Switch thought, tapping her foot against the concrete floor of the Auditorium, glancing up at the stage every now and then to ensure that the President hadn't sneaked on without her noticing. *We've been sitting here for ten minutes and he still hasn't shown.*

Switch looked to her right. Bait and Tommy sat next to her, but unlike her, they were talking excitedly about Plutarch's speech. Tommy even wore a 'PLUTARCH/PORTER 2016' t-shirt, with the catch phrase 'MAKE AMERICA NORMAL AGAIN' written underneath it in smaller lettering. Switch would never be caught dead wearing such a tacky t-shirt herself, but Tommy didn't seem even remotely embarrassed about it. Then again, Tommy was kind of a huge nerd, so she shouldn't have been surprised that he would wear such a lame shirt.

What did surprise her was how Bait seemed even more excited about Plutarch than Tommy. Bait had explained to Switch that he viewed Plutarch as a kind of role model, because Plutarch had managed to go from being a supervillain to a popular President who won the most recent presidential election in a landslide. Bait took that as a good sign that it was possible for someone to be redeemed and become good, which was a big concern of his due to the fact that he and Switch were the children of infamous supervillains.

And Switch supposed that Bait had a point, but she still couldn't muster up the excitement he showed. She was just not very interested in politics in general. Most of it was too complicated and

confusing to understand, and what she did understand was incredibly boring. Who cared about tax cuts or regulations or random terrorists in the Middle East or whatever? It all seemed like a waste of time to her and she didn't think she'd ever understand why adults got so worked up over this crap.

Honestly, if it doesn't help me become a superhero or become more famous, then why should I care? Switch thought. *But the Headmaster said that attendance for this speech is mandatory, so I guess I have to be here.*

Switch glanced around the Auditorium. The Auditorium was full today, with the entirety of the student body in attendance, save for those who were recovering at the Clinic. As well, all of the teachers were present, sitting up in the center box above everyone else. Switch saw Balloon, the grounds keeper, arguing with Charger, the Combat class teacher, while Miss Shield, the Ethics teacher, was trying to get them to stop fighting. The only two members of the faculty who were not present up there were Headmaster Johanson—who was probably going to introduce Plutarch—and, oddly enough, Arachnid.

Switch looked at Bait. "Bait, do you know where Arachnid is? I don't see him with the other teachers."

"Hmm?" said Bait, looking at Switch as if he had forgotten she was there. "Arachnid? Oh, I saw him leaving the Auditorium in a hurry when we got here. I think he was going back to his office, though not sure why."

"I saw him, too," Tommy piped up. "He looked kind of worried and was talking to someone on his phone. Not sure who he was talking to, though."

In retrospect, Switch should have seen that as the second sign that everything was about to go to hell, but given how Switch lacked the ability to see into the future, she could only frown and say, "So he makes a big deal about making sure everyone attends the speech, but then bails at the last second? I thought Arachnid was better than that."

Bait shrugged. "Unlike us, he's got work to do. Maybe something came up that forced him to leave suddenly. It's always possible."

Switch folded her arms across her chest and pouted. She wished she could have been wherever Arachnid was. Whatever Arachnid was doing was probably a lot more interesting than listening to a speech by a politician, even if that politician was the President of the United States himself.

Then Headmaster Johanson—wearing a fancier-than-usual black suit—walked out onto the stage to the podium. He stood behind the podium and rested both hands on either side of it, looking out over the assembled crowd of students and teachers. Suddenly, everyone stopped talking as soon as they noticed Johanson standing on the stage.

As usual, Johanson was smiling, and when he spoke, his charming Swedish accent was magnified considerably by the microphone sticking out of the podium. "Students and faculty of the Theodore Jason Academy for Young Superhumans, it is wonderful to see that everyone is here. Well, nearly everyone. A few students are out due to illness, while some of the faculty and staff are out for other reasons. Nonetheless, this is a nearly full crowd, and that is good, because it isn't every day that you get to hear a speech from the President of the United States himself."

It's less amazing when you consider that attending this speech was mandatory, Switch thought, but did not say it aloud because she didn't want to interrupt Johanson.

"President Plutarch has made relations between normal humans and superhumans a top priority of his since being sworn into office in January of last year," Johanson continued. "And he's made a lot of progress in that area, helping to bridge the divide between both groups, as well as supporting important legislation which helps our nation as a whole, not merely one group or another. Today, he is going to give an important speech talking about this and many other issues. I hope you will all pay

very close attention to everything he says, because I believe that Plutarch will have a lot of important ideas for us to take away today, both for us as a community and as individuals.”

Switch slouched in her chair. She figured it was going to be yet another inspirational speech meant to pump them up. Switch didn't mind being pumped up, but she did mind cliches and so she expected Plutarch's speech to be full of them. She glanced at Bait and Tommy and saw that the two of them were listening aptly, not wanting to miss even one second of Plutarch, even though he wasn't on stage yet.

“And now, without further ado, allow me to introduce the man himself, Adam Lucius Plutarch, the current President of the United States of America!” said Johanson.

Plutarch walked out onto the stage. Though Plutarch was in his early seventies, he certainly didn't look like it. He was large and imposing, wearing a perfectly-done suit that fit his body very well. He walked with absolute authority and confidence. Indeed, his mere presence was enough to make Switch sit upright, even though he didn't even look at her.

The students and faculty burst out into applause when Plutarch appeared on stage, causing Switch to nearly jump in surprise. Bait was also clapping, while Tommy was actually standing up, clapping so hard that Switch was almost afraid that he would hurt himself.

Plutarch, to his credit, didn't look even remotely surprised at the sudden applause from everyone. He just smiled and waved in such a way that made it obvious that he was used to receiving spontaneous applause just for appearing. He stopped in front of the podium, shook Johanson's hand and said something to him that Switch couldn't hear, and then looked out over the crowd.

“Thank you, thank you,” said Plutarch as the applause started to die down. “I always love seeing enthusiastic young people showing respect to their elders. It gives me some hope for the country, especially when those young people are superhumans who will one day grow up to use their powers for good. And the teachers are great, too.”

Chuckles went through the crowd at Plutarch's last quip. Switch could not help but smile herself. She looked up at the box where the teachers sat and noticed that even they were smiling, but Arachnid was still missing. Once again, she wondered where he was.

“Now,” said Plutarch, lowering his hands onto the podium, “first, I just want to thank Headmaster Arnold Johanson for letting me come and speak to you. Johanson and I haven't always gotten along, but it is nice to know that, like me, he's willing to put aside our past differences in order to focus on something greater than ourselves. He's a great guy, simply fantastic, and you couldn't find a better headmaster if you tried.”

“What's he mean, they haven't always gotten along?” Switch muttered to Bait.

“Remember, Plutarch used to be a supervillain,” Bait whispered back. “I bet that Johanson, when he was Timestopper, probably fought with him a lot. Plutarch actually fought with a lot of different superheroes over the years, so it wouldn't surprise me if Timestopper was one of them.”

Switch nodded in understanding and then turned her attention back to Plutarch, who was still speaking.

“As for why I am here today, it's because I'm a firm believer in education for our children,” said Plutarch. “I believe that it is crucial that our children receive the best possible education they can get, whether superhuman or not. I've taken a few tours around the campus and am very pleased by what I see and have heard. Vice-President Porter already told me what a fantastic place this school is, but it wasn't until I came here and saw it for myself that I really believed it. And that, of course, is in part because of the great teachers you have working here.”

More than a few teachers looked rather pleased when Plutarch praised them. And once more, Switch still didn't see Arachnid. She did notice Miss Shield looking at the chair where he normally would have sat in confusion, as if she, too, wondered where Arachnid was.

In retrospect, that was the third—and final—clue which should have tipped Switch off that something was wrong.

"You guys have just the greatest teachers here, believe me," said Plutarch, gesturing at the teachers' box above. "I'm even familiar with more than a few of them from the old days. Great teachers and great heroes with an even greater sense of justice. You couldn't find better teachers if you—"

At that moment, Arachnid burst out from the side of the stage. Plutarch looked in his direction in surprise, but that was the last thing Plutarch did before Arachnid aimed something—a small handgun—and Plutarch and fired.

The bullet struck Plutarch in the chest and he immediately fell backward onto the stage.

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