



**“EXECUTIVE
PRIVILEGE”**

A Short Story by
LANCE WOODS

Based on the podcast series
produced by



“EXECUTIVE PRIVILEGE”

Prologue

With every story I wrote for *SuperHuman Times*, and with each character I met, I became more and more curious about the dynamics of a society where known superhumans had to make a living in human occupations.

I figured there might be some leftover resentment among humans who lived through the Superhuman Age -- anger about collateral damage, injuries and deaths incurred during the “never-ending battles” intended to protect them. Then I figured a lot of humans would resent the prospect of losing their jobs to these beings.

On the other side, I imagined that a number of superhumans might be depressed or angry about they and/or their powers not being needed, or not being utilized properly. Or if some of those superhumans might actually think themselves to be better than humanity ...

You get the idea. I created a monster.

Anyway, along the way I thought about what the politics of such a world might be like, especially at the Federal level. One thing I figured that Congress would do once superhumans emerged was to ensure that a superhuman couldn't run for high office, or hold any office that would be in the order of succession to the Presidency. Then, I started to wonder if there was a way around such a Constitutional Amendment or Act of Congress.

This is what I came up with.

As I wrote it, I thought it might have been a nice way to establish the world of *SuperHuman Times* as an alternate series pilot to “True North”. However, given its game-changing nature, and its potential impact on the *Times* Universe, it might also be a suitable series finale.

I leave it for you to decide.

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Transcript of President Mark Dodson’s address to the Joint Session of Congress

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notes provided by the Times political reporting staff.*

SERGEANT AT ARMS ANGELO FORTUNA: Mister Speaker, the President of the United States.

[Applause. The Sergeant at Arms of the House of Representatives steps aside to admit President Mark Dodson into the House chamber. He makes his way up the center aisle, shaking hands and receiving good wishes from Senators and Representatives from both parties on the floor. After the president reaches the rostrum podium, he shakes hands with Vice President Stephanie Marchand and Speaker of the House Alan Winslow. The Speaker gavels for order.]

SPEAKER WINSLOW: Members of Congress, it is my pleasure and my honor to present to you the President of the United States.

[Applause. After more than a minute, the Speaker gavels for order.]

PRESIDENT MARK DODSON: Thank you all very much.

Mister Speaker, members of Congress and my fellow Americans: Thank you for coming here tonight for this special joint session.

Let me begin by saying that I realize such gatherings are normally convened for State of the Union addresses, or to discuss grave matters of national urgency. That is not why I asked Speaker Winslow to bring us together. I merely felt — and he agreed — that, after the events of the past few weeks, including being cloistered in a hospital suite and the White House residence, you and our country deserved some visible proof that I am well and fit to resume doing the American people’s business.

[Applause.]

PRESIDENT DODSON: You may have noticed the slight breach of protocol in my greeting. I purposely omitted the customary “Madame Vice President” after thanking the Speaker because, in my opinion, the Vice President deserves more thanks than protocol can accommodate. During my convalescence, if you can call it that, she assumed many of my regular duties. She did so with the confidence, efficiency and passion that convinced me to make her my running mate three years ago, a decision I never regretted. Indeed, I almost regret coming back to work full time after I saw her popularity numbers compared to mine in the last Quinnipiac University poll.

[Laughter.]

PRESIDENT DODSON: I knew that one of my first official acts upon resuming work would be to publicly thank Vice President Stephanie Marchand for a job well done.

[Applause as President Dodson turns and shakes hands with, then hugs, Vice President Marchand.]

PRESIDENT DODSON: At this point, you may be dreading — or hoping, depending on your party affiliation — that my next remarks will contain something about my health that will require me to resign and turn the reins over to the Vice President permanently. I hate to disappoint you, but I can say with confidence that I’m not going anywhere for the duration of my term.

[Applause, with loud cheers from members of the President’s party.]

PRESIDENT DODSON: I arrived at this decision after extensive consultation with my doctors, my senior staff and, most importantly, my family. I have suffered no physical or mental injuries as a result of the incident of September 14th, and I can state in all honesty that I have never felt better.

“And,” to quote William Shakespeare, “thereby hangs a tale,” the reason I’ve asked for this joint session.

I won’t recount what happened on September 14th in great detail; the media has certainly shown and talked about what happened at the Ahrens Research Lab and nauseum. Considering the scope of the experiments being conducted at the lab, including several with radiation, things could have been far worse. In the end, we were fortunate that the only thing to escape one of the labs that day was the bright, blue light that engulfed our party when we visited. No one was burned or blinded. No one got sick. No one died. Including me.

But, when you have my job, people like to be sure, which is why I was ordered by physicians to stay at Walter Reed National Medical Military Center for a series of comprehensive tests. I received outstanding care and, from time to time, got to meet some of my fellow patients: the wounded members of our nation’s military. Even in these relatively peaceful times, there are still physical and psychological wounds that need to be treated. So, I spent a great deal of time with

my fellow patients when I wasn't being examined and treated by my own doctors. I was able to talk with men and women of every branch of the service and every race.

Human and superhuman.

All of these brave men and women moved me and inspired me, but talking to the superhumans in particular — the ones who often volunteer for the most dangerous missions because of their unique abilities — gave me something I didn't expect to find. They gave me the courage to stand up here tonight before you and the American people.

Now I want to tell you why I needed that courage.

When I was first elected to the Wayne County Council in my hometown of Detroit, my parents gave me a framed photograph of Abraham Lincoln, with one of his quotes engraved in a bronze plaque beside it. I'm sure many of you, like me, know this quote verbatim: “Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power.” That plaque, and those words, have followed me throughout my political career. Those of you who have entered the Oval Office during my term may have noticed it hanging near the doorway, facing my desk, where I can look to it for guidance.

Let me tell you why it means more to me now than ever.

One of the first things on my agenda upon returning to work was to meet with your leaders regarding the renewal of the Cathcart Act. As I’m sure all of you know, its five-year term expires at year’s end. I expect that both chambers plan to debate its merits and its faults vigorously.

That’s been the case ever since the act was put in place decades ago, after superhumans stopped trying to rule or save our world, after they realized that they would need jobs in that world — our world — to survive.

Congress, led by the late Senator Esmerelda Cathcart, wasted no time in drafting legislation that would prevent those superhumans from taking certain “human” jobs, specifically political office. It was, I think, the only time I’ve ever heard politics classified as a “human” anything.

[Laughter.]

PRESIDENT DODSON: At first, it was thought that this was the best way to keep these powerful beings from assuming undue control of the affairs of our nation. I remember working long nights as a freshman Senator to help draft and shore up support for the Cathcart Act. I remember the negotiations with our colleagues across the aisle that ultimately restricted the act to federal offices, and allowed states to determine for themselves which offices could be held by superhumans. Back then, I bridled at the thought of making such a concession. Today, I am ashamed of my short-sightedness, because that amendment has made it possible for many fine superhuman citizens to serve their neighbors — county sheriffs, city council members, governors and more. They are all a credit to their states, and to this nation.

[The President leads a round of applause.]

PRESIDENT DODSON: Back in my Senatorial youth, I thought that relinquishing this control to the states would pull many of the legislative teeth out of the act. But I’ve recently come to the conclusion that the Cathcart Act was toothless to begin with.

And so, I’m here tonight to urge you, respectfully, to debate not its renewal, but its repeal.

[Murmurs from the House floor and gallery. The Speaker lightly gavel for order.]

PRESIDENT DODSON: You’ll recall that the Cathcart Act states — and I’m paraphrasing — that no person possessing superhuman powers may run for, or assume the office of, the Presidency, Vice Presidency, or of any seat in Congress, nor can they be nominated to any Cabinet positions or various other political offices enumerated therein.

But one question has never been addressed in the Cathcart Act: Should a superhuman ever find themselves in one of these forbidden positions of power ... how would we ever make them give it up?

Let me show you why I’m asking this question.

[The President reaches into the jacket of his suit and pulls out a laminated card. He holds it up.]

PRESIDENT DODSON: There. I’ll give the cameras a moment to get in close on this. I want everyone watching to see it clearly.

This is the card issued by our government’s voluntary registry for superhumans, which asks those with special abilities to make themselves and their talents available in the event of a crisis. Everyone who registers gets one of these cards, and our government’s pledge that their powers will not be divulged without their permission, to avoid making them a target of prejudice and discrimination.

This is *my* registration card.

I carry it because, as a result of the Ahrens Lab incident — that harmless blue light — I have acquired superhuman powers.

[Loud, confused murmurs from the House floor. Speaker Winslow gavel to restore order.]

PRESIDENT DODSON: I wrestled with how I should reveal this to you: Shoot laser beams from my eyes? Ignite fire in the palms of my hands? Fly around the chamber? Juggle the delegation from New York over my head? But I realized that would probably just appear intimidating and possibly even frighten people. So, I have resolved to keep the exact nature of these powers to myself, unless a situation arises where they may be useful. In that case, I will first consult with the Cabinet, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Congressional leadership. You should also know

that I have shared the nature of my powers with the Secret Service, so that their agents will be able to neutralize them — or me — should it become necessary.

[More murmurs, some angry. The Speaker gavel for order.]

PRESIDENT DODSON: Some may wonder why I didn't deliver such personal news from the Oval Office instead of here. The answer, I'm embarrassed to say, is a selfish one: I didn't want to deprive the American people — or myself — of seeing your faces when I told you.

Now that you know, I'm sure that you and your constituents around the country are probably thinking: “So, we have a superhuman president ... now, what?”

Impeachment? I've committed no high crimes or misdemeanors. I was a human when I ran for the presidency. Neither the Constitution, nor the Cathcart Act, make provisions for a president who acquires superhuman powers *during* his term. Of course, if it turns out that I don't really *have* powers, that I'm standing up here telling you these things as part of some secret agenda, some of you might try to impeach me for lying to Congress. Good thing I didn't say it under oath.

The 25th Amendment? I can provide medical and psychological records that will refute any charge that I am “unable to discharge the powers and duties of [my] office,” although you may argue that what I'm doing tonight is pretty crazy. I'll take that chance.

Resign? No. However, to assure everyone that this is not the prelude to some kind of superhuman coup, I will not stand for re-election next year, in accordance with the Cathcart Act as it now stands, even if it is repealed.

[Hesitant applause.]

PRESIDENT DODSON: So, now what? What will you ask of me now that I have these abilities? I honestly can't imagine. All I know right now is what I will ask of you: only two favors.

The first is something that superhumans like the service members I met in Walter Reed — and superhumans everywhere — have asked of us for decades, since they began working and living among us at the end of their larger-than-life careers. I didn't hear them clearly until now, but now that I do, I realize that it's such a simple favor to grant.

Give them a chance. We've brought them into our businesses, our schools, our churches, our military and more. They have earned the right to be human. Repeal the Cathcart Act and bring these valuable citizens into positions where they can continue to serve our nation with their talents.

[Applause from part of the House chamber.]

PRESIDENT DODSON: In closing, I wish to ask my second favor of you: give *me* a chance.

President Lincoln said “If you want to test a man’s character, give him power.” Granted, this new type of power I’ve been given wasn’t what he had in mind. Nevertheless, this challenge is mine to meet, and I ask you — and all Americans — to allow me to meet it as your President.

[The President pauses and looks around the chamber. After a brief silence, Senator Jack Westfeldt (D-MN) begins to applaud, followed by other members of the President’s party, who rise. They are joined in their applause by the balance of the chamber, along with his supporters and guests seated in the gallery. Some members of Congress applaud, but do not rise.]

PRESIDENT DODSON [continuing over applause]: If this is, indeed, a test of character, I promise you that I will not fail it — and I will not fail you as I continue to preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States to the best of my ability — *all* of my abilities — so help me God.

Thank you, God bless all of you, and God bless America. Thank you very much.

[Standing ovation as the President looks to the gallery and smiles at First Lady Ria Dodson. She returns his gaze, but is the only person in the gallery who applauds, but does not smile.]

[The President then shakes hands with Vice President Marchand and Speaker Winslow before making his way up the center aisle.]

END TRANSCRIPT