

# Survival Gene

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## Chapter 1.

Lieutenant Andrew Barkov ran down a dark staircase to the basement of the food warehouse holding a pistol in his hand. A heavy metal door blocked his way with a red light on the magnetic card reader mounted on the wall next to it. The lieutenant took a universal police card out of his bullet-proof vest and placed it on the device. The red light changed to green. Having thrust the card back into the pocket, Barkov gripped the handle, his gun firm in his other hand, and pulled it.

In front of him there was a miraculous garden lit by myriads of light-emitting diode lamps. Bright, juicy peaches, apples, pineapples, bananas, melons, grapes—all of that growing on dwarf trees with dense crowns and thick trunks planted in holes in the concrete floor. The strong tang of sewage struck Andrew's nose.

There was no need for a laboratory analysis to see that these were genetically modified organisms. GMO. Direct evidence of criminal offense. Cultivation of such plants was prohibited by the World Government on all continents. The trees apparently were nourished by Miami feces supplied via the network of pipes under the ground. Use of sewage instead of soil was an aggravating circumstance. Mister Housman, the “product warehouse” owner, would do long time in prison for that in a high-security institution in the Colorado Desert or maybe in the north of Alaska. Those were the right places for such people. It remained only to find him.

*Where are you, bastard?*

Andrew moved forward slowly, his gun leading the way. The area was like half of a soccer field. There were hundreds of trees standing in an orderly manner. The criminal could have climbed any of them to hide in the crown. Andrew had no doubt that the man was nearby. Housman had slipped out of his office to the stairs as soon as the task force stormed into the warehouse. Andrew noticed him at the last moment and rushed after him.

The transmitter pinned onto the breast pocket of his vest squeaked.

“Lieutenant Barkov, where the hell are you?”

It was Captain Palmer. At the wrong time, as always.

“I’m downstairs,” Andrew answered in a low voice as he brought the transmitter closer to his lips. “I’m following the suspect.”

“I didn’t give orders to go downstairs. Come back and receive my orders!”

*Palmer, you are an idiot.* Sometimes Andrew wanted to shout these words right in the captain’s face. But such a pleasure would cost him the job. Palmer had no special sympathy for Andrew and would start hating him if insulted. Andrew had been thinking of quitting job for a long time, but what would he do after that? Catching criminals was the only thing he could do in his life. Nevertheless, he dreamed of a totally different career...

“Captain, I don’t get you. Too much noise!”

Barkov turned off the transmitter and strained his ears. From childhood, he had had an ability to sense danger. And a quick reaction, which had helped him to avoid being beaten by anyone at school or under other circumstances later in his life. This time, according to his senses, there was no danger. Moving on, he reached the first row of trees. And stopped.

All of a sudden he went hot and cold all over. A terrifying vision appeared in his mind: his chest exploded, parts of his body flew in different directions, slapping against walls and hanging on branches...

Housman was going to discharge a rifle-attached under-barrel grenade launcher at him. The man was sitting in the tree in the last right row, and the barrel was already projecting from the foliage. Barkov was looking the other way, but he could see the criminal so clearly in his mind it was as if he had gotten into the man's brain. He even felt the cold of the trigger with his forefinger. Five more millimeters—and he would be dead.

Andrew's heart started beating like a sledge hammer. Muscles of his whole body strengthened as if struck by electric current. As soon as they relaxed, a shiver went up his back and neck. Arms and legs became light, almost weightless, and were filled with extraordinary strength. A fat fly floated before his eyes as it flapped its wings unhurriedly, as if it was a slow-motion movie. There was no time to admire it. Bending down, Andrew darted to the side.

The vision turned out to be true. A shot resounded. A grenade exploded on the spot where Barkov had just been standing. A hail of grenade splinters drummed on the wall, the floor and the nearest tree trunks. They didn't reach Andrew as he had already left the effective zone heading for Housman. This took him a second—or a second and a half at most. Stopping under the tree in which Housman was sitting, he drew the branches apart. Before the shooter knew that he had missed and the target was already standing next to him, Andrew delivered a blow to his stomach. Housman breathed out sharply, bent forward, dropped his weapon, and fell from the branch.

Andrew kicked away the rifle with his foot and pointed his gun at the small plump man with a bald spot who had rolled himself up into a ball on the floor.

“Lie on your stomach! Hands forward!”

Housman raised his head slowly as he rolled out. His grimace of pain slowly turned into the expression of astonishment.

“That's impossible. How did you do that?”

“I can run fast. Hands forward!”

The criminal lay on his stomach and stretched his arms. “Don't be so proud. You'll be finished soon anyway. All of us will be finished!”

Making sure that Housman didn't have other weapons, Barkov took handcuffs off his belt and slapped them on the criminal's wrists, and turned Housman around to face him.

“You're mistaken, Mister Housman. We'll live long and happy lives without your GMO.”

Suddenly a kind and likable smile appeared on Housman's round face. “Now it's the year 2060. Didn't you hear about the prophecy of the greatest scientist Isaac Newton? He scrutinized the Bible and estimated that the world would end in 2060!”

“You're mistaken again. For Newton, it would be the beginning of a new era. Don't try to frighten me—I don't believe in prophecies.”

“Don't you listen to the news? An asteroid is already flying toward the Earth! You will die, and me, and the whole of humankind too! Why don't you let me free and have fun in the last days? I'll give you three hundred thousand credits! In cash!”

“The asteroid will fly past us. And as for the bribery attempt, that just adds to the charges against you,” Andrew answered as he stepped back to the wall.

His heartbeat slowed down, his muscles relaxed. Legs and arms grew heavy and sluggish. He had a desire to sit down or even to lie down for a while. Probably his body was just trying to regain strength after an adrenaline rush.

He measured the distance he had just overcome by eye. Really, it was surprisingly long. He had never run thirty meters in a second and a half before. The reason was, of course, the stress level. It was the first time in his life that someone had pointed a grenade launcher at him!

“You're right, three hundred thousand is barely sufficient,” Housman smiled even wider as he rose to his feet. “I'll give you five hundred! Done?”

The pistol in Andrew's hand was becoming heavy as lead, his legs started trembling with strain. He felt as tired as if he had carried sacks full of sand all day long. He didn't dare collapse on the floor and drop the gun. No doubt the criminal would take advantage of it at once!

Sound of hurried footsteps came from the staircase. A few policemen barged into the premise. Lining up along the wall, they took aim at Housman. Captain Palmer was the last one to come in.

"I can see the suspect!" he announced with triumph pointing with his forefinger at Housman. "Officers, arrest this man!"

*He's already arrested, you fool,* Barkov thought.

However, he was glad to see the captain—for the first time in all the years he'd worked for him.

Palmer looked at Barkov.

"Lieutenant, what are you doing here? You didn't hear my orders? That's a serious problem." It seemed he was about to reprimand Barkov but suddenly he cocked his head and scowled. "We'll take the suspect and you go to the doctor to check your ear. Move!"