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ECONOMIC CREATURES

BOOK ONE - A STORY ABOUT
THE UNDEAD

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The Creature

The sweat ran from every pore as I made my way through the forest. The darkness made my progress difficult, small branches regularly lashed my face, tearing skin. Slowly, the pain I suffered in my first fight with the creature spread. My face hurt from the lightning fast blow it had inflicted, intentionally or not. At least I was no longer bleeding from my nose – the blood had since dried and frozen. The damned snow fell relentlessly, partially obscuring my sight, although I could still clearly recognize the silhouettes of the numerous undead that I scurried past. From time to time, I stumbled over a branch, stone or dead stump in the cursed fog that covered the ground like a soft, downy blanket and hid it from view. Luckily, I was able to catch myself each time and avoided damaging myself any further. But with each step I took, the tide could turn in my opponent's favor. If I broke my leg now or otherwise injured myself, it would be all over. Amazing, what pranks the weather had played on me in the last few months.

I didn't know exactly what I was running away from, even though I had already faced the creature and had heard quite a bit about it. Whatever it was, it was gaining on me, getting closer and closer, bit by bit. Fleeing from a heartless beast through treacherous undergrowth is an intense experience that I wouldn't wish on anyone. Until now, I have always been the one who dished it out, not taken it. That's why the whole situation really pissed me off. Did people feel that way before I took their lives? A taste of my own medicine? No, I did not like this at all, and somehow the comparison wasn't quite fair. I had never murdered out of willfulness or revenge. I was just a victim of, let's say, circumstances. I killed when legally ordered, or just had to save my own skin. No, the situation I found myself in was the work of unscrupulous powers that didn't care a lick for humanity. They had created something unsurpassed in cruelty, something that had plunged the world into misery. A creature that infected us, transformed us and turned us into something that made a joke of the most frightening nightmare imaginable. It

made people into beings without conscience, fear or empathy, but with a relentless appetite for meat. It had begun insidiously. People hadn't given it much attention at first and were paying for their carelessness now. Thank God this only happens to others, that's how people think. Not only in terms of our immediate circumstances, no, but in terms of anything that could disturb our blissful existence. Wars didn't interest anyone as long as they were only far enough away. Our own lives were furnished and primed in just the way needed and wanted them to be, in imitation of a way of life that people who never lacked anything dangled in front of us, people who never went hungry or suffered loss. They were people who told us what was important in life but never had to work a single day for their luxurious existence. They grinned at us from screens with their false smiles and told what was right and what was wrong. They were the ones who hammered moral values into us, values about people and their rights, but who themselves went over dead bodies to get what they want. They told us that everything was fine while oppressing their own people, waging wars or, worse, raining war, poverty and hunger on us. But the zenith of our systematic extermination was the One.

The creature that was chasing me through a forest that apparently had no end. To be honest, that's how I had wanted it. Stupid when I think about it that way. Who jumps voluntarily into a shark tank after cutting into his own flesh? Why am I doing this to myself? After our world went down the crapper, there were no real goals to pursue, apart from simple survival. Many found it difficult enough to survive because there were no more shopping malls and burger joints. People only now realized how dependent they had been on the corporations that let them vegetate, sickly and incapable. Because they had consumed media that made them more and more stupid, had met on social networks that suggested friends to them. The primal instinct of the hunter, the individual, had been taken away from us a very long time ago. We've been bred into incompetent mass consumers who are not supposed to

think and would eventually be led like meek cattle to the slaughter. No one's going to slaughter me. You are welcome to try, but I won't willingly climb a scaffold. Especially not for the damned creature that's so hot on my heels that I thought I could feel it breathing down my neck. That thing caused me to turn my back on a quiet and perhaps even long life, to throw away all thoughts of safety and leave my new home. How many souls do you have to answer for? You may not be like the ones you bit and condemned to damnation, but you are also not as smart as a human being. I'll still get you, and when I do, I'll finish you off. You will no longer pump your poison into anyone's veins and turn defenseless people into raging beasts. Finally, the edge of the forest loomed in front of me now. Just don't stumble. Not now. I gradually slowed my pace until I came to a stop. With my hands braced on my thighs, I struggled for air and looked around alertly for a few seconds. A frightening scene like those I remembered from the old horror movies my father had often shown me. I loved those films and the unnatural fear that came over me. But reality, the here and now, did not scare me. The little boy back then, the one who could not fall asleep in the dark, had not existed for a long time now. Only a few meters to the edge of the forest. Beyond it stretched a clearing the size of a football field, which strangely enough was not as heavily covered in snow as the area around it. A sound tore me out of my thoughts, made me whirl around. Just darkness, branches, tree trunks and this ghostly silence. Something briefly scurried through the fog and cast a long shadow across the white, still life scene. I turned around and set off across the field, which ended abruptly at a steep slope. I looked down, couldn't see the ground and thought for an instant about risking a plunge. But my will to survive prevailed. Even the tops of the tall trees below could only be guessed. The dense fog enclosed them like a gigantic cape. Rambo could at least still see the tree when he broke away from the stone wall and leaped into the depths.

Completely soaked in sweat, I supported myself with my hands on my thighs, greedily sucking in air and exhaling steam. My lungs burned like fire. Hopefully, the snow hadn't blurred my tracks, the thought shot through my head. I turned around. No, I wouldn't kid myself. He would find me faster than I'd like. He just had to find me. It was something personal that needed to be settled, once and for all. Noises rang from the forest, which lay like a huge threatening shadow before me. I straightened, now totally alert. I stopped breathing, looked right and left. For a few seconds there was an icy silence. Then I saw him. Slowly, his figure peeled out of the dark forest and then stopped. The night, the falling snow and the foggy forest behind him made him seem unreal. Tall, lanky, with long hair and claws that could tear you to pieces. He just stood there, not a muscle twitching, just like a few minutes ago when we first met and fought. Even though I didn't see his eyes, I felt the cold look that sent a shiver down my spine. Arms dangling forward, in a slightly hunchbacked posture, he stood there and regarded me for half an eternity.

I got rid of my thick jacket and turtleneck sweater, which would have hindered me in what I now planned. I immediately felt the cold that stretched its icy fingers, reaching for the warmth of my body. At least now I was awake, refreshed and ready again. Now there was no escape, neither for me nor for him. Gradually, more silhouettes emerged behind him, peeled out of the fog and staggered directly towards me. They appeared in small groups at first, but their number quickly rose to over thirty as far as I could tell. His army of dull-witted undead, compelled to plunge the world even deeper into chaos, an army he does not even need to command, although I've long suspected him of the capability. My heart suddenly beat in my throat, my salivary glands failed their purpose. Nausea rose in me, and my hands began to tremble. I felt like Arnold in Predator, when he finally stood before the monster face to face and then took a huge beating before chance gave him an idea that saved his ass. I could only hope for such a chance. I had no firearm

now, and my knife also lay far away, somewhere beneath the snow. Despite the little surprise I carried hidden in my trouser leg pocket, doubts about my plan plagued me for a few heartbeats. Had I perhaps overestimated myself this time? A very bad time to weigh up the pros and cons of a situation that my big mouth had maneuvered me into. He seemed somehow bigger and more threatening than just a few minutes ago.

Suddenly, and with a speed I wouldn't have thought him capable, the dark figure rushed towards me. First on two legs, with short, quick steps, then on all fours, like a rabid animal determined not to miss a sure kill. Almost thirty meters separated us from each other. With every bound and every meter, the creature gained speed, like an onrushing wolf in bloodlust. Only this predator was even more determined, aggressive and unpredictable. Every time he touched the snow-covered ground, the fog, which resembled steam rising from a bathtub filled with hot water, fled from his path, as if nature itself feared this creature and voluntarily cleared the way. Another fifteen meters. It seemed strange, but with every meter closer, I grew calmer. My hands were no longer shaking, my pulse was almost at rest. A last dreamy look at the cloud-streaked moon, which now hung like a gigantic light bulb over the scene and colored the cold night into a dark gray-blue. I reached into my leg pocket and drew the only weapon that could save my life now. I wasn't afraid. Adrenaline coursed through my body, my muscles were on the verge of tearing with tension, and my focus was entirely on the thing in front of me. I had never lost a fight and wouldn't fail this time either. With these thoughts I also began my sprint, directly towards my adversary.

“Come on, you bastard.”