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ECONOMIC CREATURES

BOOK THREE – THE ARTIFICIAL
EVOLUTION

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The creature

The creature leapt out of its hiding place at breakneck speed and dashed across the snow-covered, expansive field. Her muscles were tense, her senses heightened and adrenaline coursed through her veins. With long leaps, she approached the deer standing unsuspectingly in the field, feasting on the sparse greenery poking through the snow. It had ventured into the field, which offered no protection from attackers, to satisfy its hunger. The harsh landscape made it impossible to be choosy and so the deer had followed its natural instincts to avoid starvation. From the very first second, the creature had been watching it from a hiding place, waiting for the right moment to strike.

The time had come. Under the cloudless starry sky, it sprinted across the snow and straight towards its prey, which still had no idea what was in store for it. The creature's goal was simply the same as the deer's. Something to eat at last. Just a few more meters and she would satisfy the burning hunger that tormented her. Before the all-important leap, the deer looked up, saw the approaching attacker at the last moment and retreated in fright. The creature flew just past its victim, who it thought was safe, landed forwards in the snow and rolled over before lying motionless. Then she jumped up, crouched on all fours and spotted the deer, which scampered through the snow to safety. The next part of the forest was still a long way off. A growl escaped the creature as it looked after the fleeing animal. No, this prey would not escape her. With a mighty leap forward, she took up the chase. With each leap, she became faster and faster. It almost seemed as if she was floating over the snow. The speed was far greater than the first, unsuccessful, attack. The deer jumped into the middle of a riverbed and wanted to use the momentum to reach the other bank with the next leap. At the highest point of this leap, the creature collided with the deer and clawed at the animal's body. Unlike the deer,

the creature had only needed one jump to get to the other side and snatched its victim out of the air. Uncoordinated and hard, they hit the bank. The force of the impact had separated them. The creature lay backwards in the snow, looking up at the sky and breathing deeply. Its heart rate had risen to a maximum during the chase and so it used the short respite to calm down. Its prey would not escape again. It would never run away again.

Slowly, the creature stood up and approached the deer, this time walking upright, which lay just a few meters away. The many bloodstains in the snow told her that she had badly injured her prey. Then she stood in front of the deer, which was fighting for its life and screaming like a small child. The creature tilted its head and looked at the defenceless creature beneath it, which was desperately trying to get back on its feet. The blood loss was too great. Slowly, the hunting instinct receded and her features relaxed. The long, dark hair hung in front of the creature's face as she got down on her knees, gently stroked the deer's head and looked at it sadly. This dying creature was not her enemy, but just one victim among many. The rules of evolution are merciless, but simple. The fittest survive, prevail and ensure the continuation of the species. To ensure this, every living creature needs food. This deer, its flesh and blood, would ensure their existence in this world. With one swift movement, the creature plunged its paw into the dying deer's neck to put an end to its suffering. The animal reared up one last time. Then its body went limp and its eyes rolled back. The creature pulled its paw out of the wound and looked at the warm, black-looking blood running down its forearm and dripping into the snow. Then she stood up, threw her arms far back and let out a loud roar. It was a cry of victory for the whole world to hear. Greedily, it gorged itself on its prey. The meat roused the creature's spirits. It felt the deer's energy transferring to it and giving it new strength. Once its hunger was satisfied, the creature lay down next to the deer and curled up. She

closed her eyes and fell into a sleep that revealed a secret to her. A dream that ranged from the birth of the deer, through its eventful life, to its abrupt end.

A little later, the creature woke up and heard the growling of wild animals that had scented prey. Slowly, it rose to its feet, remained crouched for seconds and looked around. Every now and then she saw shadows approaching, but then moving away again. A group of dangerous animals circled her, probably to get the remains of the deer she had killed. Then she saw the first wolves circling her, tightening their radius. For a moment, the creature looked at the deer and assumed an upright, relaxed posture. Let them take the rest of the carcass. If the wolves didn't do it, other scavengers would. At that moment, one of the wolves leapt at the creature from behind. It turned around and caught the animal in its leap. The gray wolf dangled growling from the creature's outstretched arm, its hand clutching its neck. Slowly, she pulled the wolf towards her until their faces were almost touching. She gazed into the eyes of the wriggling animal, still bristling for attack. All she had to do was squeeze to get rid of the wolf. Gradually, the animal's muscles slackened. The wolf's pitiful attempts to free itself had taken a lot of strength. The bared teeth and the angry look had disappeared. The growling sounded more and more like the whimpering of a whipped dog. The realization that you have messed with the wrong person is often paid for with your life. But not this time. The creature put down the wolf, which bowed its head submissively. This creature was also just part of a world in which everyone had to fend for themselves and their offspring. Its pups were probably already crying out for food. It had just followed its instinct and done what it had to do. Slowly, the creature walked past the wolf and heard them fighting over the remains of the deer from a distance.

Many hours had passed as the creature continued its route through the icy steppes of Russia. She didn't know why she was here. Something was guiding her, pulling her deeper and deeper into the heart of the country. An inexplicable force deep inside her had taken control and was dominating her destiny. The exertions of the journey had left her without a trace. She was unaware that she had been on the road for several weeks. Time no longer played a role. Neither did other conditioning she had once been subject to. Feelings such as pity, remorse or fear no longer existed. She had left the range of human emotions behind her and only followed her instincts. Nevertheless, she felt the urge to return here to finish something.

The creature had been following the tracks for some time, which seemed like a signpost to her. She stopped and stood at a long, crescent-shaped bridge over which the tracks ran. She looked briefly into the ravine and continued on her way. She skilfully jumped over several beams to which the steel rails were attached. One misstep would undoubtedly cost her her life. After a few minutes, she had left the bridge behind her and was running towards the meagre remains of a burnt-out wagon. A strange association sprouted in the creature that she could not explain. So she walked on and arrived at a station littered with lifeless bodies. Well-preserved specimens of the undead still lay under the canopies of the tracks. The same undead that stormed the station at the time and forced the people to flee. Many lost their lives that night or had to leave loved ones behind.

A new day dawned and dispelled the darkness. The creature leapt onto the platform and passed through a large gate, its doors hanging tattered on their hinges and dangling back and forth in the wind. She left the station and stood in front of a rubble field of destroyed houses. Slowly, she climbed one of the piles of rubble and reached the highest point. The

neighboring houses were badly damaged or also in ruins. But she also saw buildings that were still intact. The creature cleared the obstacles with playful ease and reached a road. It passed the end of the town, stopped and looked at a sign with the name of the town on it. OMSK. These letters, which she could neither read nor interpret, nevertheless triggered something in her. The destination, whatever it might be, was within her grasp. Soon she would find out what had led her to this godforsaken place. So she continued on her way, picking up speed within seconds. She came to a small bridge over which the tracks ran. She walked under the bridge, paused and touched the dilapidated walls with her hand. Suddenly, images of people appeared before her eyes that had something familiar about them. She clearly recognized a woman with black hair, two men and a boy looking shyly at the ground. One of the men spoke with a Russian accent and told jokes. She focused on the second man, who presented a well-groomed military appearance. His hair was carefully combed back and a three-day beard framed the lower half of his face. Unconsciously, she placed her other hand on her chest. There was a connection to this man whose eyes burned into her soul, and she felt a deep ache. The people blended into a blur of colors and strange tones that eventually dissolved into nothingness. The creature let go of the wall, stood motionless with its head bowed and stared at the floor. Then it shook its head several times, as if it needed to put something in its head right. No, these images, these people, were just an illusion, a fantasy. Something that didn't exist.

Another day was drawing to a close. In between, thick snowflakes fell from the sky and bathed the surroundings in a Christmas-like picture. Many hours and even more kilometers lay behind the creature when it reached the valley, in the middle of which lay a lake. Surrounded by trees, she spotted a wooden hut with smoke billowing out of the chimney. A hut in the middle of this wasteland where not a soul would settle. Even on the last few kilometers into this valley, the creature felt a deep inner

familiarity with its surroundings. As if it had been here before. Perhaps in another life. As she made her way down through the trees and undergrowth, the feeling grew stronger. She came to a fork in the road that was often used by people. One path led down to the hut, the other to the left to a large fir tree. An inexplicable, strange feeling magically drew the creature to the left. Right next to the fir tree, she recognized two wooden crosses, in front of which she stopped and tilted her head. The cross on the left read Franklin W. Smith - 1979 to 2030. Even though she couldn't read the name, the signs triggered a reaction in her. Images flashed before the creature's eyes again. The images of the well-groomed man she recognized from the visions under the bridge. Dark, neatly combed back hair, the beard and those eyes.

On the other cross was Bartosz Kowalczyk - 1958 to 2030. The creature slowly crouched down. Irritated, it turned its head sideways to the right and then to the left. This name, Bartosz, set off a firework of images and feelings in her. She saw a small man with a white beard and glasses on his nose striding through a gate strung with barbed wire. At his side walked a pale, parched woman who could barely stand on her feet. Her clothes were dirty and full of holes. Men in convict uniforms gathered around her, staring at her in horror. Armed men dressed like guards picked her up and led her into a building.

The vision changed to a dark room in which a lamp hung from the ceiling on a long cable and swung back and forth. The cone of light repeatedly hit a couch on which a person was slowly sitting up under a sheet. The white shroud slowly slid down, exposing the scrawny woman who had accompanied the old man through the gate. She slowly got off the cot and moved towards the creature with spindly steps. Panic broke out around her. A loud bang, the shot from a pistol, ended the vision and pushed the creature into the next one.

She was now standing in the middle of a cave and saw a man screaming loudly and clinging desperately to a rock while a wolf tried to drag him out of the cave. The lanky Russian man from his version under the bridge shot out of the cave into the darkness with an AK 47, and the howling of the animals that had been hit reached them.

A new leap of time led the creature into a cabin, in which she sat opposite the old man. He held a glass of whiskey in his hand and prostrated to her with a smile. Other people joined them, drinking, eating, laughing, hugging, but also shedding bitter tears. A suddenly emerging fog enveloped the protagonists of this play until they completely disappeared. The fog became more dense and the creature rotated in an orientationless circle. A terrible silence entered, broken by strange noises. It was a mixture of whirling and stoning. The creature quickly determined the direction from which the sounds came. Shortly thereafter, she noticed the torching form coming to her through the fog. She put herself in a defensive position, pulled out her claws and waited for the person approaching. Her eyebrows darkened while she was impatient. The shape took the shape of a small man. Slowly, the fog diminished and opened the sight of Bartosz, who, as undead, bowed to the creature. One side of the neck was broken and long, blood-filled, skin flaps hanging wrapping down. From dark eyes, Bartosz looked at the creature as he continued his journey. The faces of the creature relaxed as she took a upright stance and looked at the man with compassion. Bartosz was only a few steps away and had already raised his arms to access. The shaking sounded in the creature's ears almost like a cry of help. A cry for salvation. A gunshot sounded. There was a red spot on Bartosz's forehead. The old man twisted his eyes and squeezed into himself. Immediately after, a man ran past the creature. In his hand he held a beretta, from whose course a thin thread of smoke emerged. Unconsciously, the creature accompanied the man. They walked a few steps parallel to each other. Then at the same time they fell

on their knees and cried out loudly. The cry of man and creature mixed into a roar. She felt the pain of the man beside her as if it were her own. She felt the loss deep within herself, as well as the indescribable desire for revenge. For revenge? For what? Who was this insignificant old man whose death upset her so much that her intestines cramped? The vision also dissolved into nothing. The creature still hooked in front of Bartholomew's cross. Irritated, she wiped a tear from her cheek and looked at it. She didn't understand the reaction of her body.

A noise ripped her out of her mind. Slowly the creature came out of the hook, ran to the edge of the spring, and saw a light spreading through the opened door from the hut. Someone came out and threw a long shadow that reached to the stairs at the end of the porch. Quietly and squeezed, the creature coughed to the back of the cabin and jumped over a rocky spring to the roof. It slides smoothly and on all four over the cut-off roof to the front. Curiously she looked over the edge. Although the door was closed again, the creature clearly recognized a woman holding something in her arms and making incomprehensible sounds. Suddenly the woman stood still, looked suspiciously around and pulled the gun out of the hanger. The creature saw the face of the young black-haired woman slowly moving back towards the door. At that moment the creature understood why it had embarked on this journey. She was here to finish something. Slowly she stood up and fell from the edge of the roof. Almost silent, she had landed on the porch, right in front of the door. Madeline rode around, frightened and fled back as she trembling lifted the bell. Heat blows passed through her body and within seconds sweating beads ran over her forehead. Unbelievably, she stared at the creature, which slowly stood up and fixed Madeline with dreadful, orange-yellow eyes.