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**FROM LONELY
TO SINGLE**

A Novel

CORESI

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CHAPTER 1

It was a Saturday evening. Eva was watching *The Saint* starring Roger Moore on TV together with her mother and her husband, Camil. It was in the sixties. Not many families had a TV set back then. And those who had one could watch only one channel, the national TV, official channel of the communist state led by a dictator. Usually, the TV programs just praised him. When a foreign movie was on, it was a real treat. And on Saturdays, Eva could watch one of her favorite actors, in a TV series that she wouldn't have missed for the world. Literally she wouldn't have missed it for the world, because this particular evening, she was already in labor, but she was standing behind a chair, grabbing its backrest with both hands, because she was hardly able to bear the pain.

Eva was on the brink of giving birth to her second child. She already had an eight-year-old son, Eduard. She had quite a troubled marriage with her husband, Camil. But this evening, all she wanted was to see the series up to its end, then she was to go to the maternity, which was quite close to her block and then she could give birth to her child. Her mother and Camil were aware that she could hardly bear the pain and kept telling her every other minute:

"Come on, Eva, let's go now! You'll give birth here, in the apartment. Come on, let's go!"

"I am not going anywhere until the film is over..." She was to give birth to her second child; she knew it was better not to go so early to the maternity. She knew the labor could go on and on for hours. Why stay in that cold, unfriendly hospital when she could stay a little longer at home and watch her favorite TV series?

Eva had very few pleasures in life. She was born in the thirties, in an Eastern European country. She grew up in a very poor family, in Mineville.

Mineville was the main city in that region of the county. This area has always been inhabited by very strong, hard-working, proud, untamed people. The region is mountainous; people work hard to earn their living. They work a lot, they eat a lot and they drink a lot. And, besides the work at home, they go for a few months every year, all over the country to work some more, to gain some more money. With the money they bring home, they build huge, beautiful houses.

This region has always been sustained by the mining industry. Miners were not afraid of death, they were not afraid of anything. They went every day down into the guts of the earth, being fully aware it was possible they would never come back to the surface of the earth. The communist dictator did not like miners. He visited the region less often than other regions of the country; people could only thank God for that. What the dictator hated most about the miners was that they did not pretend to be as enthusiastic about his speeches as others did; oppressed people had to play ovations and applauses on huge loudspeakers

at each break in his speech. And gossip was that most of all, he was afraid of miners.

The location of the city is beautiful. It is situated in a depression, surrounded by mountains. The mountains hold and surround Mineville, as if they hold it in their arms. Actually, if you look at the city from a distance, it seems to be held in God's hands. And God did always protect this city. No serious earthquakes, no serious floods. A lot of gold and copper underground. In the old days, there was so much gold in Mineville that women could find it in the river that crosses the city. And a lot of citizens that love this city more than any other place on earth.

Eva's father worked in a gold mine near Mineville. Her mother stayed at home to raise the children. Eva had a brother and a sister. They all used to live off her father's low salary, who also drank more than half of it every month after getting it. At least they had a house of their own, even if it was small. They entered a small kitchen, after that a first room and then a second room. The entire house was around 30 square meters and they all lived there. As long as her father worked, the situation was hard, but they survived. But her father was also a Union member. As he had the bad habit of speaking out his mind, he got locked away for a few months by the capitalist regime. Then, after the Second World War, again he could not keep his big mouth shut, so he got locked away by the communists too.

The family lived a very hard life. Eva used to wake up early in the morning to go into the woods to bring home some branches and other fallen wood for the fire. She had a brother and a sister, but they were not sent for wood as they were weak and always ill. Eva was strong and healthy. She ate anything and

Re worked hard like a grown up. She got the worst shoes if any and the worst clothes and she worked the most of all the children but her mom looked after her siblings more carefully because she always felt Eva was strong enough to take care of herself.

Eva always wanted to become a school teacher but she only attended eight years of elementary school. Her parents could not afford more. They tried to buy her at least some better clothes and shoes so that she could go to school. More fortunate children went to school with an apple or a bagel. The poorer ones relied on the occasional food they received in school—a little milk or some biscuits. The state gave this food to the children, but they were told Daddy Stalin sent them the food.

Eva was sent to earn money when she was about sixteen. She got a nice job as a clerk and she started to contribute to her family's income. Eva was very proud that she had a good job and she could support the family. Her job was in a clean, warm office, she did not have to work in a factory or out in the field. And, one day, a nice young man came to the company where she worked. He looked well taken care of and also he seemed he knew what he wanted. He was interested in Eva, this very young girl, with long wavy black hair and beautiful blue eyes. Having met her several times in her office, one day he asked her out on a date. He told her he would go to her home to ask permission from her family to let her out and he did it. He came to her house and stopped at the gate. Everybody was curious to see Eva's date. He even came on his motorbike. Back then, in Eva's neighborhood not anybody had a motorbike. Eva was blown away. They went on their date. And a few dates later, Camil asked her hand from her father. Soon after this, Eva's father died, at the age of fifty. All those years of hard work in the mine, the months spent in jail, the

drinking and poor eating finally got to him. The family remained without his support, only with the pension received by Eva's mother and Eva's salary. Camil went to the army. All the healthy men were obliged to go to the army for three years. After he returned, they got married. For a while, they stayed together with Eva's family, in that small house of them. After two years, their first child was born. They named him Eduard. When Eduard turned two, they received a two-room apartment in a block of flats. Everybody got a place to live during the communist regime. All you had to do was to submit an application; after a year or two, the state assigned you a place to live, depending on the family members' number. You did not have to buy it, and you could live in it forever. Electricity, gas and water were very affordable. This was enthralling for the masses. In this little apartment, there was an entrance hall leading to the two rooms. The quieter, more isolated room was Camil's; the passing room was for Eva and the children.

The Saint finally ended. Eva took her coat and with her mother and husband started to walk towards the maternity. At the entrance, there was an old doorman. It was Saturday night and he was *a little* intoxicated with alcohol. He offered his arm to Eva to help her up to the second floor.

"Come on m'am, let me help you up the stairs," said the old doorman.

"Oh, thank you, it's not really necessary, I can manage," said Eva, as it looked like he needed some help.

"Oh, m'am, please let me help you, it's my duty. There are two floors to climb," he insisted.

So they started to climb the stairs. It was just like Eva thought; actually she helped him up to the second floor and not the other way around.

The labor did not take very long; Eva came to the maternity pretty late. At eleven o'clock, she gave birth to a baby girl. She named her Valerie. Valerie was a big, strong and healthy little baby. She was crying loudly; Eva was sure her little girl came to the world very hungry. Camil was waiting outside; as soon as his little girl was born, one of the nurses went and gave him the good news. Mother and child were healthy.

Camil went home, happy, even though a little disappointed. Actually, he would have liked to have another son. But he had an unyielding method to deal with emotion, disturbance, change in his life. He kept drinking. His daughter's birth was a big event in his life, so the few days Eva was in the maternity with the baby, he drank a lot. His first child, Eduard, was very used to see him like this. At least now he was preoccupied with the event and he was not aggressive and abusive.

The three days in maternity went by pretty fast. Eva was sent home with Valerie. They went home with Camil, who carried little Valerie in his arms. When Eva arrived home, she found the house in a terrible condition. All over the furniture, one bottle, one glass, one bottle, one glass. So, she left Valerie on a bed and started to clean up the house. Then, she remembered it was her turn to clean up the staircase of the block where they were living. So, she did that too. Then, she put all the dirty laundry to soak in hot water and detergent. So long as it got soaked, she also cooked dinner for her family. Finally, she hand-washed all the clothes. In the meantime, she fed her little girl and the other kid,

then she bathed her little one. When her husband arrived home, everything was in order.

After six weeks, Valerie was baptized as a Roman Catholic child. Eva was Roman Catholic, while Camil was Greek Catholic. Camil never declared whether he believed in God or not, he wasn't interested in religion. Eva, on the other hand, believed in God and wanted to baptize her girl after her faith.

Camil appreciated Eva's efforts, but he did not want to show it loud and clearly. He was convinced that if he showed the slightest sign of emotion, gratitude or love to his wife or children they would take advantage of it, they would walk all over him and he would lose their respect. And he managed to get a lot of respect this way. His wife, Eva, that gorgeous, blue-eyed, long black-haired, untamed, bold girl, respected him. She was really afraid of him and she managed to transmit this fear to her children too. Also, a great part of the fear they felt of their father was triggered by his aggressiveness towards his wife and his son whenever he dared to intervene to defend his mother. Camil's official reason was always jealousy. He was jealous of everything and everybody. This always started the family crisis, which ended invariably in beating his wife and son. And this always happened when he drank. It was also a strange thing about drinking, he could go on and on for months without drinking at all, but as soon as he tasted the stuff, he was not able to stop. And he drank and tortured them until he fell ill. Until the smell of alcohol oozed out of his flesh. Then, Eva took care of him and called his boss to excuse his absence from work, until he got back on his feet. And everything went on.

After little Valerie was born, there was kind of untold agreement between them, they all wanted to keep her away from

Re all these scenes. Valerie's first encounter with her father, with a man actually was while she was still in her mother's womb. Eva and Camil had to go to a wedding one evening. Camil dressed up faster than Eva. Eva wanted to wipe the floor before they left, so there she was, on her fours, pregnant, wiping the floor. Camil got angry she was not ready so he kicked her in the womb.

"Come on, come on, move it. I don't want to be late. Is this the most important thing for you to do now? Why do you like to keep me waiting?"

Even so, Valerie was a healthy little girl. She was always hungry and her mother was happy for this. Mothers always worry when their little ones don't eat. Eva had to go back to work as soon as little Valerie was three months old. Back then, maternity leave was three months. Eva searched very much for a good nanny. She found an old lady, but she had to take her daughter every morning to that old lady, as she was not willing to come to them. The other thing was that back then, in Mineville there were not so many bridges over the river that crosses the city as there are now. Eva had to wake up every morning at 4 o'clock. After the morning preparations, with her baby in her arms, she walked to the nanny, she left her baby there, and then she walked to her job. She worked for ten hours. Then, the way back to the nanny and back home. But it wasn't the hardest part of her life. After she arrived home, she began to cook, to clean the house, to wash the clothes. She fed her children. She checked her son's homework. It didn't seem hard to her either. What seemed hard to her though was to stay up in the evening and wait for her husband to come home. Camil finished his job around six o'clock in the afternoon, but from work he went straight to the pub, where he drank with his friends. And his friends knew very well that his

weakest point was jealousy, so they filled his head with all kind of lies about his wife. They said she cheated on him. As he was the man in the house he was supposed to teach her a lesson. In this condition, under the influence of booze and lies plus his aggressive nature, he went home. He never had a specific time when he arrived. Eva had to wait for him with warm food. If the food was too hot or too cold, it meant Eva did not love him and did not respect him, so the violent scene began. Therefore, Eva kept the food on the stove and waited on the window. When the food got a little cold, she warmed it up again. And so she continued on and on, until late at night. Then he arrived, he ate, and in the best case, he went to sleep. In the worst case, he started the scene, triggered by jealousy.

He even alleged that he was not Eduard and Valerie's father. Eva was very offended by this. She justified on and on that the two children were his, she never cheated on him. And the more she pleaded, the more he hit her. He beat her and asked her:

"Admit it, you whore, you cheated on me. The children are not mine. Don't you respect me at all? Why don't you admit it, you dirty whore?"

And after hours of beating and barking at her, she broke down and admitted crying:

"Alright, the children are not yours. You're right, you're always right. Just please stop this, you're killing me."

At this point, it seemed that he calmed down and he started complaining, especially to the children if they were around:

Respect per "Now you see, you see how much I suffer? I love your mother very much, but she doesn't love me. What can I do in this situation? I love her, but she loves someone else."

Then his crocodile tears followed. These scenes were the most devastating for Valerie. Seeing her father torturing her mother like this and then pretending he was the victim; he was hurt. To see such an aggressor actually shedding tears after terrorizing his own family. Did he actually think his children were so stupid and believed he was a good, sensitive person? Or he was so stupid to think they would believe anything related to his behavior...

Sometimes, Eduard intervened to try to protect his mother, so he got beaten too.

By dawn, Camil finally fell asleep. After one or two hours, Eva had to wake him, so that he could go to work. If she was not able to wake him up, she had to speak with his boss to tell him Camil was feeling sick and could not go to work. Of course, everybody knew what was going on. They knew his temper. They saw Eva going to work beaten, with broken nose and black eye. But everything went on unchanged, his friends still did not feel any compassion for Eva and the children and they went on filling his head with trash.

There were also calmer periods in the family. Camil had always been a difficult person, but when he was sober living with him was bearable. He left them alone, just retired in his room and got busy with his hobby. He liked to work on electric and electronic appliances and he learned everything about mending TV sets and radios on his own. Eva cooked for them and they all ate together and there was no fighting between them.

Valerie especially liked the Sunday mornings spent with her parents when her father was sober. Eva cooked a large pot of soup with a big cow bone and with meat and a lot of vegetables in it. She gave a smaller pot to Valerie and she could also cook soup, copying exactly what her mother did. Eva finished the soup around 9 or 10 o'clock in the morning and then they all sat down at the table and Camil ate some of Valerie's soup and some of Eva's soup and used to say that Valerie's soup was better than the soup cooked by her mother. This made Valerie very happy and proud of herself and encouraged her to cook with great pleasure. Other times, Valerie woke up later, just when the meal was ready. So, she came directly to the kitchen and ate together with her father the tendons and bone marrow and the vegetables from the soup. After the meal, Valerie went to play, Eva went to take a nap as she was up since 4 o'clock to cook and Camil went quietly to his room. This happy life was lived only in his periods of soberness.

However, in the other periods, the drunken ones, Valerie started to understand, or rather to feel, how things were going. She learned that her father's anger could be triggered by anything. In her little mind of a child, she set up rules like: "If I do bad things, my daddy will get angry and he will beat up mommy. So, I have to be a good little girl, not to upset him." But this rule did not apply. She learned that if for example she fell and hurt her knees and she started crying, her father would get angry and beat her mother because it was her fault her children were so stupid and so weak. She learned to study her father as soon as he stepped into the house. She used all her senses for this. If he was in a good mood (that is, not intoxicated with alcohol) she could breathe freely and speak a little if necessary.