



# The Baker of Blue Hour

Elouga



5:12 a.m.

Elena works in the soft glow of her bakery at 5:12 a.m., her hands moving rhythmically through the heavy dough. Outside, the streetlights hum in the pre-dawn stillness, waiting for the world to wake.



The oven's warmth begins to fill the small shop as the first loaves of sourdough turn a perfect golden brown. A gentle mist of flour hangs in the air, catching the light like tiny, dancing stars against the dark wood of the shelves.



As the clock ticks forward, the blue shadows of the street are broken by the warm light spilling from the bakery window. Elena sets out baskets of warm croissants, their buttery scent drifting through the keyhole and into the cool morning air.



While cleaning a shelf, Elena pauses to touch a faded photograph of herself as a young woman standing in this very spot. Twenty-two years have passed, yet the wood of the counter feels as familiar and sturdy as an old friend's hand.



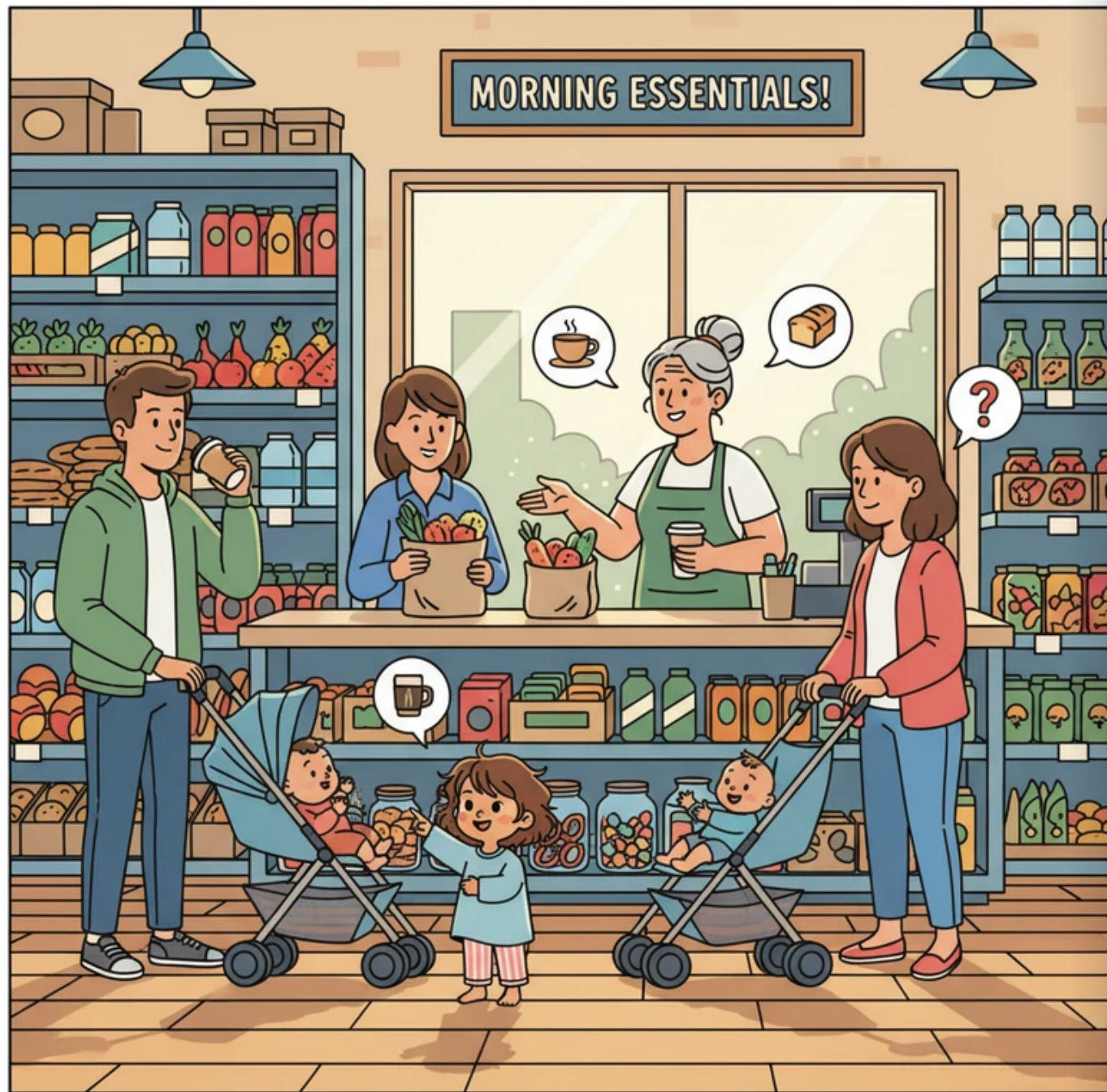
A small girl with messy morning hair stops at the window, her eyes wide with wonder at the rows of pastries. Elena catches her eye and offers a conspiratorial wink, dusting a little extra powdered sugar on a tray of fresh buns.



The girl enters the shop, and Elena shows her how to press her thumb into the dough to see if it has risen enough. The kitchen is filled with the soft sound of laughter and the comforting thud of dough on the floured wooden table.



The sun finally crests the horizon, turning the grey pavement into a river of liquid gold outside the shop. The city begins to stir with the sound of tires on asphalt, but for a moment, the bakery remains a peaceful island in a sea of waking noise.



The shop fills with the morning rush, a vibrant tapestry of neighbors sharing news and steam rising from paper coffee cups. Elena moves through the crowd with grace, knowing every neighbor's name and every favorite order by heart.



By mid-morning, the shelves are nearly empty, leaving behind only the lingering scent of yeast and cinnamon. Elena wipes down the flour-dusted counter, feeling the quiet satisfaction of a morning well-spent in service to her community.

# ELENA

Young Commander



Elena sits by the window with a small cup of coffee, watching the bustling city move past her door in the full light of day. Her hands are tired but her heart is full, ready to do it all again when the clock strikes five tomorrow.