

Story 5

Ikey Schoenstein's love-potion

The Blue Light **drugstore** was on the East Side of New York, near First Avenue. All the **medicines** there were made by hand. Ikey Schoenstein worked there at night. A thin, clever man, with a long nose and **glasses**, he was friendly to all who came for help when they were ill.

Ikey lived in a room in a house not far from the drugstore. His landlady was Mrs Riddle, and she had a daughter, Rosie. Ikey was deeply in love with Rosie, but he never told her about it. That was strange, because he was very good at talking to people in the drugstore.

There was another man living at Mrs Riddle's house who was in love with Rosie, too. His name was Chunk McGowan. Ikey had no hope of winning Rosie's love, but McGowan was very hopeful. He was also Ikey's friend. He often came to the drugstore, after a night fighting in the street, for something to put on a black eye or a cut.

One afternoon, he came hurriedly into the drugstore, and went straight to speak to his friend Ikey.

'I need some special medicine,' he said,

'Take off your coat,' said Ikey. 'And tell me where it hurts. Were you in a fight again? One of these days you'll get a knife in your back.'

'It wasn't a fight,' said McGowan, laughing. 'But you're right. It's under my coat that it hurts – in my **heart**. Ikey, Rosie and me are going to run away tonight to Harlem to get married.'

Ikey was mixing some medicine while he listened, and he tried not to drop it all on the floor.

McGowan's smiling face now looked worried.

'The thing is, we first thought of the plan two **weeks** ago.'

drugstore a place that sells medicines

medicine something you eat or drink to make you get better

glasses you wear these in front of your eyes to help you see better

heart the centre of feeling in someone; this is in your chest and it sends blood round your body

weeks a period of seven days

Sometimes Rosie says "yes" to it and sometimes "no". For the past two days she's said "yes", and we're hoping to leave in five hours' time. I don't want her to change her plans at the last minute.'



'And where does medicine come into it?' asked Ikey.

'Well, you see, old Mr Riddle doesn't like me. For a week now he's stopped Rosie coming out with me. I'm worried that she won't want to leave tonight because of him.

'Isn't there a medicine that you can give to a woman to make her like you better? I had a friend, Tim Lacy, who gave a **potion** like that to his girlfriend and they got married two weeks later.'

McGowan didn't notice Ikey's knowing smile at these words of his, and he went on.

'If I can just give a love-potion to Rosie at dinner tonight,

I'm sure that she'll come with me.'

'And when are you running away?'

'Nine o'clock. Dinner's at seven. At eight, Rosie goes to bed with a bad head. At nine, I come round the back of the house and help her down the **fire escape** from her window. Then we're going straight to church, to get married.'

'We have to be careful about selling love-potions,' said Ikey. 'But because you're my friend, I'll make it for you, and you'll see how it changes the way Rosie thinks of you.'

Then he carefully made a sleeping-potion. It was sure to make anyone who took it sleep for a number of hours without waking up.

He gave the potion to his friend, telling him to put it into a drink if possible. McGowan thanked him, and left.

After that, Ikey sent a note to Mr Riddle, telling him about McGowan's plans.

Riddle came to the drugstore that afternoon. He was a strong, red-faced, angry man.

'Thanks for telling me, Ikey,' he said. 'That lazy, good-for-nothing Irishman. My room is just over Rosie's room. After dinner, I'll wait up there with my gun. If McGowan comes this evening, he'll go straight to the hospital – and not to church – tonight.'

potion something that you drink to make you feel better, love someone, or sleep

fire escape metal stairs outside the back or side of a building that you can escape down if there's a fire inside

'With Rosie asleep in her room, and old Riddle upstairs with his gun, McGowan's chances aren't looking good,' thought Ikey happily after Riddle left.

Next morning, at 8 o'clock, Ikey finished work and started walking to Mrs Riddle's house to learn the latest news. There in the street he met Chunk McGowan. McGowan shook Ikey's hand, and thanked him warmly.

'It worked,' he said, smiling. 'Rosie and me are now man and wife. You must come for dinner over at our place in Harlem some time soon.'

'But the potion?!' asked Ikey.

'Oh, that!' laughed McGowan. 'In the end I felt bad about questioning Rosie's love, but old Riddle was very unfriendly to me at dinner. It wasn't right for him to be so hard on the man who wanted to marry his daughter, I felt. So I put the potion in his coffee!'

