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The
Elixir

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CHAPTER 1

My older sister Katherine flung open the door at the back of our family's apothecary shop. I had been weighing out herbs for our medicines, and they blew across the counter as the door slammed behind her.

"We are trying to serve customers, sister," said my brother Edward between gritted teeth. He was only twenty but had been left in charge of the shop while Mother and Father were away. Edward found it much easier to manage the shop than manage his sisters.

"Ann has left her things all over my room," said Katherine, glaring at me. There was only

a year between me and Katherine, and we looked as similar as twins. But Katherine was neat, sensible and normally almost impossible to ruffle.

“It’s *our* room now we have a new boarder coming to stay in what was my room,” I said as I helped Edward gather the spilled herbs.

Our customers were Old John and his grandson, Davy. They smiled, showing they both had the same two front teeth missing. Their pale hair shone in the sunlight pouring in from the windows. Old John’s was grey and fluffy, and Little Davy’s a mass of golden curls.

“I think Ann has a tincture for us?” said Old John.

Edward narrowed his eyes at me as I took a special tincture from under the counter. The label on the bottle said *Dandelion and Nettle Infusion*. Those were two of the ingredients, but that was not the whole story.

The rest of my family followed recipes exactly when they made our normal tinctures, infusions and syrups. It was an open secret that I didn’t follow a recipe. My parents only let me get away with it because my tinctures worked so well.

My family also knew I scratched a spiral mark into the base of the glass bottles containing my special tinctures. They didn’t know it was the sign our grandmother had taught me and that it helped my medicines work.

I handed the tincture over. “Are you feeling better, Davy?” I asked.

“Yes, Miss Storer,” said the little boy, hopping from one leg to the other. “I ran all the way here!”

I held out my hand, and as our fingers touched, Davy’s colour filled my mind. I’d always seen colours when I touched people.

The tincture in the bottle was a muddy green to look at. But in my mind's eye it shone a deep gold and was matched to the boy who needed it. No one knew that my special ability to see people's colours was why my tinctures worked so well.

Old John rested a hand on his grandson's head, his eyes soft, and gave me a nod filled with gratitude. Two months ago, Davy had been a very weak six year old. Old John had carried him everywhere on his back. To me, Davy's colour had been the sickly yellow of a leaf starved of light. Now he bounced around like any healthy young boy.

Edward disappeared to the stillroom where we made the medicines, and Old John slipped me an extra coin. Then he and Davy left the shop, the bell on the door tinkling after them.

Once we were alone together, Katherine started complaining again – about the mess I had made in the bedroom we now had to share and about the arrival of our new boarder.

“You might actually like him,” I said, trying to wind her up further.

“*Like* him?” Katherine replied. “This Isaac Newton boy? He'll be some skinny, slippery little schoolboy. More Newt than Newton.”

I sniggered. My sister could be funny when she wasn't so busy trying to be prim and responsible.

The apothecary door swung open, and in strode a boy with an angular face and a large, noble sort of nose. His wide brown eyes swept across the room.

“I have lodgings arranged,” he said.

I stepped forward. “Yes, you must be Isaac Newt ... Newt ...”

I paused. Katherine jabbed her elbow in my rib.

I thumped my chest, pretending I had something stuck in my throat. “Isaac Newton, I mean,” I added. “Newton. Welcome to our apothecary.”



CHAPTER 2

Isaac Newton carried a surprising number of trunks and cases into the apothecary shop. Then he came to the counter and began to look through our ledger – the big leather book where we listed our customers’ ailments and the medicines sold to them.

Katherine blinked, amazed at his rudeness, but I could see she was intrigued by him, as I was. Like this boy, good manners didn’t come naturally to me.

“I have an interest in apothecary. I may ask your father about it,” said Newton. A wavy lock

of pale brown hair fell over his face. He looked older than his twelve years.

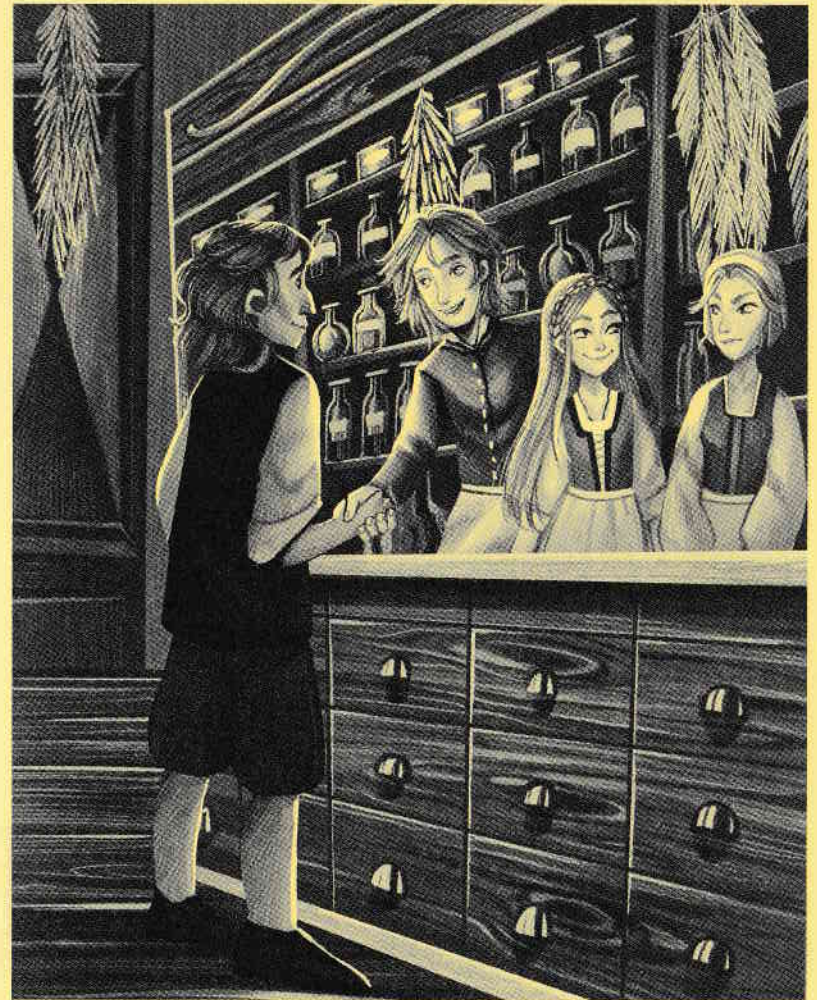
Katherine smiled and replied, “Our parents are away, but you are welcome to speak to—”

“Me,” I interrupted. “I am Ann Storer, and this is my sister Katherine. I hope to be apprenticed to my father one day.”

Katherine and Edward were better with sales and keeping the books, like Father. Mother was normally in charge of the stillroom. But my special tinctures got the best results, and nobody could make those but me.

Katherine gave a little cough, raising her eyebrows at the thought of me being an apothecary’s apprentice. But before she could contradict me, Edward entered the room and shook the boy’s hand.

“Ah, you must be Newton,” Edward said. “Well met. My sister Ann will see you to your room.”



I gave my sister a sweet smile. Her lips were drawn tight. She was jealous that I would get to talk to this bold young man first.