

The Elixir of Love

Synopsis

Act I

It is harvest time. Farm labourers take a break from the blazing noonday heat. Nemorino, a shepherd, hopelessly yearns for the love of Adina, who is a wealthy tenant farmer. She sits in the cool, perusing her book, the story of Isolde and of the magician who gave Tristan such a powerful love potion that Isolde never left him again. Adina and Nemorino (not to mention all the villagers) both fantasise about trying such an elixir, for different reasons.

Belcore, a sergeant at the head of a troop of soldiers, arrives. Nemorino watches helplessly as Belcore tries his best to capture Adina's heart. Adina flirtatiously plays along with him and brushes off Nemorino's desperate attempts to plead his own case.

Dulcamara, a travelling 'doctor', arrives in the district to much excitement. He advertises his universal elixir, which he claims will cure anything. Nemorino asks the doctor if he sells the famous love potion mentioned in Adina's book, The Elixir of Love. Dulcamara provides him with a worthless substitute, promising it will take effect after twenty-four hours, which gives him time to make good his escape.

Nemorino swallows the so-called love potion, and as he drinks his confidence grows. He is now certain that the elixir will make Adina fall in love with him. When Adina appears, Nemorino feigns disinterest and she is astonished by the sudden change in his behaviour.

By the time Belcore returns, Adina is so infuriated by Nemorino's apparent indifference to her that she accepts Belcore's proposal of marriage. The wedding is set for one week's time. Nemorino rejoices in the knowledge that within a day the potion will have worked and Adina will have no choice but to love him.

Giannetta and other girls from the village arrive with the soldiers who have received a message that the troops must make an immediate withdrawal. In order that the wedding may still go ahead, Adina agrees to get married later that same day. Nemorino is distraught and cries out for the help of Doctor Dulcamara. The others revel in the prospect of the wedding festivities and mock Nemorino's despair.

Act II

The celebrations are in progress.

By now Nemorino is desperate for the love potion to take its effect. Dulcamara assures him that a second dose of the elixir will speed up the process but Nemorino has no idea how to raise the money to buy an extra bottle.

Belcore returns, puzzled that Adina has delayed the wedding ceremony until later that evening. When he discovers that Nemorino is depressed about a cash shortage, he offers to sign him up for the army in return for a substantial down payment. Nemorino can now afford a double dose of the potion and Belcore is delighted to have enlisted his rival.

News has reached the village that Nemorino's rich uncle has died, leaving him a fortune. Giannetta and the village girls now flock around Nemorino, which he interprets as a sign that the elixir is working. Seeing Nemorino surrounded by admirers, Adina begins to feel jealous, and realising that Nemorino has joined the army out of devotion to her, she finally admits to herself that she loves him.

Dulcamara explains to Adina that he is responsible for Nemorino's popularity with the girls, as he sold him a love potion. He offers Adina a bottle of the same, but she refuses, preferring to rely on her own natural charm to win Nemorino.

Adina buys Nemorino a discharge from the army and presents it to him. When Nemorino refuses to accept it, Adina is forced to declare her love for him and they are united at last.