

DER FREISCHUTZ

By Carl Maria Von Weber

The Story in Brief

Max must win a shooting competition to win the hand of his beloved Agathe and the position of head forest ranger. The duplicitous Caspar, a marksman who has sold his soul to the devil, procures for Max seven magic bullets, six of which cannot fail to hit their mark while the seventh will go wherever the devil chooses. Max is winning the competition with the magic bullets. When he is asked to shoot a white dove with the seventh bullet, Agathe falls in a faint. The bullet miraculously kills not Agathe but Caspar. Max must spend a year doing penance before he is allowed to marry.

The Story in Depth

Before the opera begins, Max, a young forester, is in love with Agathe, the only child of Cuno, head forest ranger to Prince Ottokar. If Max performs well in a traditional shooting competition before the Prince, he will inherit Cuno's position—and will marry his daughter. Caspar, Max's comrade and fellow forester, was previously rejected by Agathe and has entered into an unholy bargain with Samiel, a demonic spirit. Caspar knows how to obtain from Samiel magic bullets that never fail to hit their mark. The last bullet in each batch, however, goes wherever Samiel chooses.

Act I

Outside a tavern in the forest. It is the day before Max's shooting competition, and also the day before Samiel comes to collect Caspar's soul. At Caspar's request, Samiel has sabotaged Max's performance. The villagers mock Max, who is near despair. Caspar tells him about the magic bullets. Max tests the bullets, shooting a faraway eagle with Caspar's gun. Amazed, he asks Caspar where he can obtain more magic bullets to use during the trial the next day. Caspar tells Max to meet him at midnight in the haunted Wolf's Glen.

Act II

Scene 1. Cuno's house. On the eve of her wedding, Agathe is troubled by premonitions of evil. Her cousin, Ännchen, tries to cheer her up, and Agathe finds comfort in prayer. Max shows her feathers from the eagle he shot and explains that he must go now to the Wolf's Glen to fetch a stag he has killed. Agathe and Ännchen try to dissuade him, but to no avail.

Scene 2. The Wolf's Glen. Caspar summons Samiel, who reminds him that his soul will be forfeit the next day. Caspar proposes a bargain: In exchange for a reprieve of three years, Caspar will help Samiel acquire Max's soul. Samiel says that tomorrow either Max or Caspar will be his. Max joins Caspar and, despite fearful apparitions, they cast seven new magic bullets.

Act III

Scene 1. Agathe's house. Agathe tells Ännchen of her nightmare, in which she turned into a white dove and Max shot her. Ännchen and the bridesmaids cheer her up.

Ännchen goes to get Agathe's bridal wreath but is horrified to see a funeral wreath instead. She makes Agathe a wreath from some roses blessed by the holy hermit who lives in the woods, and the girls leave for the ceremony.

Scene 2. The Forest. The hunters and Prince Ottokar make merry. The Prince tells Max he only needs to make one more shot, and then tells him to shoot a white dove that flies by. Agathe, appearing suddenly, calls out not to shoot, but too late: Max shoots, and both Agathe and Caspar collapse. Agathe recovers, but Caspar dies, struck by the Devil's bullet. Max confesses his dealings with Samiel. The Prince banishes him, but the hermit counsels the Prince to be merciful. His judgment is that Max must spend a year doing penance before marrying Agathe.