The marksman

Once upon a time, there was a forester called Max. He was in love with Agathe, the daughter of the head forester.

Agathe's father told Max that the winner of the village marksmanship contest would marry Agathe. Everybody thought Max would win. He was the best shot in the village.

On the first day of the contest, Max's bullets flew true. But on the second day, he lost to a stranger from far away. There was still a day left, but Max was worried. In his mind, he saw Agathe turning her face away from him.

Max didn't believe they would win. He told Max that he could give him a bag of magic bullets that all shot true, so Samiel gave him a bag of magic bullets.

The next day, Max won the contest easily. He shot a dot of red paint on a red leaf from a hundred paces away. He shot a running deer from the other side of a hill. And he married Agathe. The years passed quickly and in great happiness. Max became even more famous for his marksmanship. He never missed a shot.

Then one day Max was hunting and saw a man far away who looked like Samiel. Suddenly, Max took out his gun and fired a bullet at the man. It fell dead to the ground. The eagle was the last bullet, and it belonged to the devil. It was the last bullet, and it belonged to the devil.

Once Upon a Time

German tales of “der frießschütz” (“the marksman”) were around as early as the 14th century. In all of them, a marksman makes a deal with the devil. The devil gives him magic bullets. All of the bullets will shoot whatever the marksman wants — except for the last bullet, which belongs to the devil.

There are many different versions of the tale. Some have only seven bullets. Some have a second marksman who has also made a deal with the devil. One important version of the tale even has a happy ending — the 1821 opera Der Friesschütz by German composer Carl Maria von Weber.

But the message of all the tales is clear. If you make a deal with the devil, he will twist it until it backfires on you.

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