

The libretto in brief

Traduzione di Chris Owen

Christof Loy

In an idyllic house in the country near a provincial German town lives the former Bailiff with his eight children. Since the death of his wife, his eldest daughter, Charlotte, has taken care of the children and the house. Charlotte is engaged to Albert, a businessman and family friend. The wedding is only a few weeks away.

Act I

It is July. The whole town is preparing for the summer ball, planned for this very day. Charlotte, whose time is usually dedicated to tirelessly looking after her siblings, is going to the party with friends. The evening approaches: Charlotte is preparing to go out, while her sister, Sophie, takes her place in entertaining the children and putting them to bed. Her father has also agreed to have a glass of wine with his neighbours, Schmidt and Johann. Charlotte waits for her friends who will accompany her to the ball: Werther, a newcomer to the town, and Käthchen and Brühlmann, a couple in love and betrothed for seven years. Sophie greets Werther, the first to arrive. The young man enters the Bailiff's home for the first time and senses a magical atmosphere on this summer evening: nature, the children who, although it is only July, are already practising Christmas carols, the affection that unites the siblings and finally, Charlotte herself, who lovingly takes her leave of the children. The young people set out for the summer ball, while the Bailiff goes to the nearby tavern. Night has almost fallen when Charlotte's fiancé, Albert, unexpectedly

returns from a long business trip of some months. Sophie has to explain that Charlotte has taken the liberty of spending the evening with friends. Late that night, Werther accompanies Charlotte home. Before saying goodnight, they exchange confidences: the girl talks of the premature death of her mother and of the responsibility that she has assumed towards her siblings and father. Werther is overcome by his feelings for the girl and declares his love for her. Charlotte promises him they will meet again, but during this moment of tenderness, they are surprised by Sophie who, in Werther's presence, informs Charlotte of Albert's return. Charlotte is forced to reveal that Albert is her fiancé: she promised her dying mother that she would marry him to guarantee the whole family's economic security. Werther is devastated: that she might become the wife of another can only mean death to him.

Act II

It is September of the same year: Albert and Charlotte are now married. One Sunday morning, they are organising celebrations for the Golden Wedding of the local pastor and his wife. From a distance, Werther watches the preparations for the party, to which he has not been invited. Albert takes advantage of a moment when most of the guests are still at the church service and he takes him to one side to ask for an explanation: he knows that Werther has continued to see Charlotte since that evening in July and he demands Werther's word that the relationship will not jeopardise the harmony between himself and his new wife. Werther tells Albert what he wants to hear and gives him his hand as a token of friendship. Sophie, who has for some time had her eye on Werther, invites him to come to the banquet. Albert suggests he give heed to Sophie's attentions in future. Werther can no longer tolerate the suffocating situation that forces him to hide his real feelings and he decides to leave the town forever. However, when Charlotte unexpectedly appears before him, he goes back on his proposition and is ready to declare his love for her once again. The situation is difficult for Charlotte, too: conscious of the bond that ties her to Albert, she suggests that she and Werther should cease to see each other for a time. They can meet again at Christmas. This is the moment in which Werther considers taking his own life for the first time. When Sophie approaches him and flirts with

him, the young man is disgusted and swears to abandon the town forever. Albert has been present throughout the scene and is now certain that Werther is in love with his wife. Charlotte herself almost faints when she is told that Werther has suddenly left the town.

Act III

Christmas Day comes. Every day, Werther has written to Charlotte from his “exile”, as he calls it, and she has managed to keep the letters hidden from her husband. Since Werther’s departure, her feelings for him have become even stronger.

Sophie, meanwhile, has replaced her in caring for the children. She, too, finds herself in the same condition as Charlotte and misses Werther greatly. On the afternoon of Christmas Day, she goes to see her sister and asks her if she has any news of him. Charlotte remains silent. The two sisters bid each other goodbye in an unusually cold manner. The evening closes in and suddenly Charlotte finds Werther before her. He can barely control himself and again tells her he loves her, demanding she do the same. But Charlotte cannot bring herself to declare her feelings and she invites him to forget her once and for all. Werther does not insist: for him, there is only one way out. From here on, events come to a head: Albert returns and finds his wife utterly distraught; shortly afterwards, he receives a message from Werther asking him to lend him his pistols, as he is about to start on a long journey. Albert forces Charlotte to give up the pistols and allow events to take their course.

Act IV

Werther has shot himself. As he is dying, Charlotte declares that she loves him. For everyone else, life will somehow go on. In the distance, the children can be heard singing Christmas carols.