

# FORTIFYING FABLES: FILIPPA THE FILLY

## On wish fulfilment

"How do we corral her, Señor Verdadero?"

Filippa, a beautiful white filly with a long golden mane, overheard a stable hand ask this question of a tall black-bearded man in his early thirties, Señor Fiel Verdadero, Filippa's rider.

"Why, what is the problem?" he asked.

"Well, haven't you seen? Filippa keeps charging at the fence and rearing up with hooves flailing, especially when we come around. It's downright scary."

"Then take charge."

"Easier said than done, señor. She's ornery even when we try to lead her back into the stables for the night, brush her down and so on. Won't you please get her to submit?"

"I don't have a problem with her," said Fiel. "She's very submissive to me."

"Exactly, señor. You're the only rider she'll ever allow on her back. I meant for you to get her to submit to us. She just doesn't respect us."

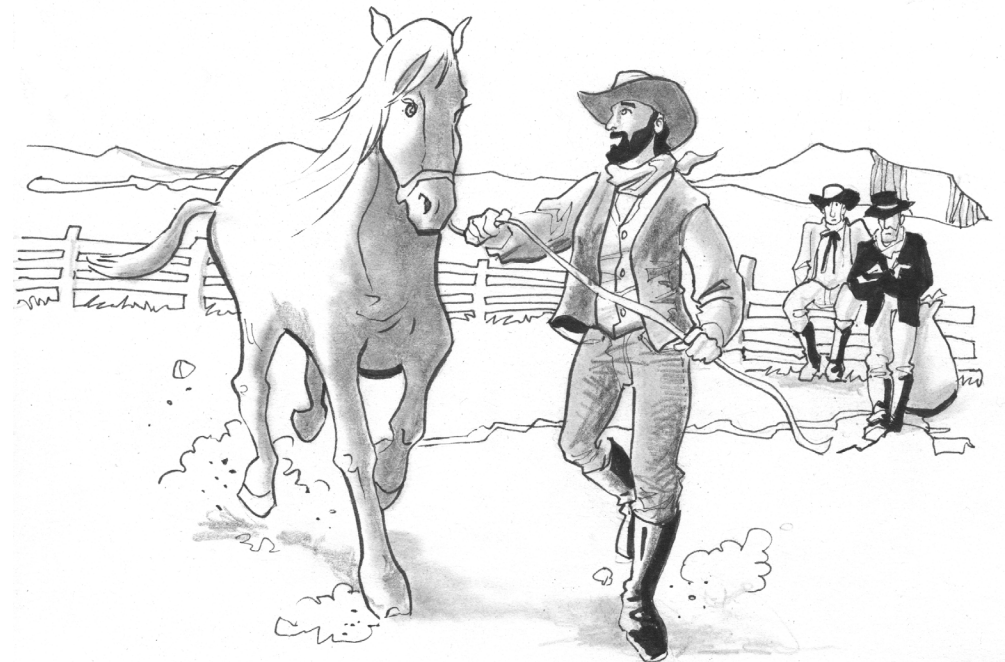
"I'm sorry to have to say this," Fiel softly said as he walked away, "but respect has to be won."

Oh, how discontent was Filippa! She disdainfully surveyed her surroundings and pawed at the dusty ground. In her opinion, the fencing was too small, and being cooped up in a stable stall was even worse.

*One of these days, I'm breaking out at the first opening in the corral. Then I'll roam the range and someday even scale that, she thought, wistfully gazing at the distant snowcapped sierra.*

"How was your day, Filippa?"

Her darkened countenance brightened at the sound of her beloved rider's voice, but she shamefacedly turned her head away from him. She could not do the same with her thoughts, however.



Fiel patted her nose. "Well, just be patient," he said, as though he had read those very thoughts (and he had). "We are working on that new enlarged corral which will give you room to gallop from end to end. I am sure you'll be happy with it."

Filippa snorted. *Oh yeah, I've heard that before, she thought. Even if he does enlarge the corral, I'll still be penned.*

At least his stroking of her mane comforted her. Then he gave her another pat on the nose, said a prayer for her, and left.

"Bored, aren't you?"

With great difficulty, the stable hands had bedded Filippa down for the night, and her eyelids were closing, but she recognized the sly tone of voice. It belonged to a fox that often slunk around the chicken pen, and with whom she had exchanged occasional pleasantries over the corral fence.

"Er ... a *bit*," said Filippa. "It's more a matter of needing space."

"And not being so controlled?"

"Well, it's not exactly enjoyable being fenced in and having to ... but..."

"Listen, I can arrange it so you can benefit from more space and even make it to the sierra. I'm talking about an escape."

Filippa neither liked nor trusted the fox, but his offer was tempting.

"And just how do you plan to do that?"

"By arranging a night flight."

"Hmm?"

"Tomorrow evening, while Verdadero's hands are leading you here, I will distract them by raiding the chicken pen, and you can make a bolt for it."

"But it would break my rider's heart."

"*Pah*, he'll get over it. Look, Señor Fiel Verdadero has a whole *herd* of horses. Don't presume you're *that* special."

"Maybe ... but he is special to me," Filippa said. "And he's promised to build a much bigger corral—one with room to gallop."

The fox snickered. "But has it happened yet?"

"Umm ... I suppose not. But..."

"But *nothing*. See? He's talking pie in the sky. Mark my words, it's not going to happen. And speaking of space, what is a measly hectare of pasture compared to the wide-open prairie?"

"True, but he does take me out to ride."

"But not that often, right?"

Even though the fox was voicing some of her very own sentiments, Filippa felt decidedly uncomfortable agreeing with him. Nevertheless, she reluctantly nodded.

"Just think, Filippa, no digging of spurs into your flanks or a humiliating slap on the rump to get you going when you don't feel like it. Or even a tug on the reins of your bridle to make you stop when you just want to *fly*!"

"Okay, fine, Mr. Fox. But what's in it for you?"

"Nothing, of course. I just want to see you *happy*. Anyway, think about it."

And so saying, the fox slunk out of the stable.

Oh, how thrilled was Filippa! After agreeing to the fox's offer and making her escape, she had been enjoying her newfound liberation for many an hour, when—at the sound of a horse's hooves drumming the distant turf—she turned to survey the horizon. It was with an inexplicable mixture of elation and apprehension that she saw her beloved rider approaching, and she surmised that he must have trailed her to bring her back to the ranch. Yet as he drew closer, she saw that he carried no bolas, nor even a lasso.

Filippa was undecided whether to bolt or straggle off. Not wishing to disappoint Fiel, she did neither and stood still.

He rode up close, and patted her nose. "You are aware that I could have brought a couple of my hands and easily roped you in."

Filippa was certainly aware, and with some shame lowered her head in acknowledgment.

"But I want you to enjoy your newfound freedom. ..."

*So he does not want me to return with him? He must not care that much.*

Fiel chuckled. "Now you know that is indeed not true, Filippa. I care for you more than you know. But returning is not the best for you right now, because if this is what you wish, I must let you go. I am allowing the wild to teach you to test, trust, and prove your natural 'horse sense'. ..."

Fiel kept talking as if he knew Filippa understood. And she did.

"Including that inborn sense of space ... that longing for unbounded freedom."

*Space, thought Filippa. That's what I always wanted ... but unlimited? No boundaries at all? Is that what I really want?*

"No. Deep in your heart you don't," Fiel said. "But don't fret. I have set up boundaries that you cannot see from here, yet your horse sense will tell you when you are about to step out of them.

"And above all, I would only wish you to be with me at the ranch of your own free will."

After giving Filippa further words of caution and reassurance, her beloved rider prayed for her and bid her adieu.

*No ... I don't need boundaries*, she thought after a few minutes of reflection, and let that bravado sweep her further onto the range, where she galloped and careened in blissful oblivion for a few hours more until the evening began to set on the vast, desolate terrain, and she began to feel tired.

And oh, how hungry was Filippa! Instinctively obeying her horse sense of what to avoid, when even the slightest scent of a potentially poisonous plant would repel her, Filippa nibbled on safe but sparse patches of tough, dry pasture. Nevertheless, as she did so, she thought of the water, abundant bales of hay, and bags of oats regularly provided for her back at the stable. She even thought of the salt lick that she would breathlessly savor after an afternoon of Fiel riding her at maximum speed.

Dear, gentle Fiel Verdadero. He had never pushed her too far, though, and Filippa remorsefully reflected on those moments when she had wanted to shrug him off her back as she had done with the other riders. She was now realizing that those impulses were even now attempting to make her belie the very horse sense of which Fiel had spoken.

And oh, how lonely was Filippa! Now she was by herself with only that—her horse sense. But could she trust it? She wasn't sure, and while pondering this question, she fell into fearful and fitful sleep broken by the howling of distant coyotes.

The next morning she awoke to the sun rising hot on her back. There was little to no shade on the prairie, and the day promised to be a scorcher, but Filippa was determined to take advantage of it regardless, and ran and galloped to her heart's content. And so she did for a couple of hours until she fell into an exhausted lope.

*Water*, she thought, panting. *I must get water. But will my horse sense lead me thither?*

She found herself sniffing the air and then pawing at the ground. She stopped.

*No water here—no underground spring*, she concluded.

How did she know? It amazed her, and she became more than a little pleased with herself. She cantered onward for a short space and again pawed the ground.

*No water here, either*, she thought. This time she felt not so pleased with herself but rather impatient.

Seeing a patch of shrubbery, Filippa approached it and pawed at the ground around it. Yes!

Suddenly she heard a rumbling and saw a cloud of dust rising in the distance. As it drew closer, she perceived about fifteen horses wearing no saddles, harnesses, or reins, and bearing no riders. While pacing the corral back at the ranch, she had seen such herds occasionally passing across the horizon.

And oh, how Filippa had wished to join them! Now her wish promised to come true as they galloped closer, and the lead stallion caught her eye. He cantered to a halt before her and whinnied.

*He does look stately*, Filippa thought. The rest of the herd had sensed their leader's inclinations and had stopped behind him, panting and snorting, and pawing the ground as he had done.

"You have found water," the leader said.

"I believe so."

"Then we shall dig into the earth with our hooves until we get it."

And so they did, and presently the vagabond herd gratefully drank their fill of a bubbling underground spring. Having done so himself, the lead stallion confidently cantered toward Filippa.

"Thank you. May I introduce myself? My name is Bayo. And you are...?"

"I'm Filippa."

"Why?"

"Why *what*?"

"Why did you name yourself that?"

"I did not name myself."

"No? By the law of the range we usually name ourselves."

"Is that so? When your mares foal, do not the parents or someone name him or her?"

"Nay. As soon as we are weaned, we name ourselves according to what or how we want to be."

"Interesting," said Filippa.

"Hmmp," said Bayo, stopping to nibble some scrub. "So who named you?"

"My rider."

"Your *rider*? A human?"

Filippa nodded. "A *wonderful* human."

"Ha! A 'wonderful human'! Does such exist?"

"He does," Filippa replied, and nostalgia clouded her eyes. "And he took such wonderful care of me on his ranch."

"So you're a '*reina del rancho*'?"

"A ranch queen?"

"Yeah. Raised, pampered, and petted by humans. No tough stuff."

"I don't know about that," said Filippa. "The discipline was tough and the quarters were a little confining, perhaps, but now, after all my rider's training, he's left me to trust my horse sense."

"Horse sense? What's that?"

Filippa looked at Bayo astonished. "It's what we horses are born with, of course."

"You mean instinct ... er ... *impulse*?"

"In a way. But I think it goes a bit deeper than just that. I believe that some of us horses need the bit and bridle to train us for something more. Even at the hand of humans. ..."

"Ah," said Bayo, "such an opinion is highly er ... *subjective*."

"*Subjective*? To what?"

Bayo snorted. "Umm, not sure. So, Filippa, what would you have named yourself if you had been given the choice?"

"I don't really know. Actually, I happen to like my name. It means 'lover of horses.' We are supposed to love our fellow creatures after all."

Bayo snorted again. "Out here, our names don't necessarily have to mean *anything*."

"Hey!" he suddenly announced to his followers after they had cantered on a short space. "Look to the west, between the gorges. Green pastures!"

"What are we waiting for? Let's go!" was the essence of the response behind him.

Filippa sniffed the air. "Wait," she said. "I smell something *bad*."

"What do you mean?"

"I smell *danger* ... *humans*—some with evil intent."

Her statement met with scornful snorts and snickering whinnies.

"I found water! Was that not enough to validate my trustworthiness?" Filippa said to the herd, and went on to explain that she, having been around humans (which they had not), had developed a keen sense of their character. Still the wild horses decried her.

"Then I shall not accompany you," Filippa declared and, leaving the impatient steeds to pursue their foray into the lush but far-flung greenery, ploddingly continued her journey toward the distant sierra. But half an hour had passed and she stopped to turn at the sound of galloping, which gradually fell into a limping trot as a tired white filly approached her.

"You were right, Filippa," she panted. "They captured them all."

"Who captured who?"

"A dozen mounted humans with lassoes and bolas. They captured all of us ... all except for me, because I believed what you told us, and so I lagged way behind. I watched it happening from behind a crag in the gorge. My friends didn't stand a chance, because they had feasted so unrestrainedly on that lush pasture till they were fit to burst and could hardly move."

"I'm so sorry ... umm...?"

"Cielo, I'm Cielo."

"A beautiful name," said Filippa.

"Yes, it means 'heaven.'"

"I know, but I thought wild horses didn't care to choose names with such meaning."

"Sad but true, Filippa, but I did—much to the ridicule of the rest of the herd. They teased me about wanting to be a *reina del rancho*."

"That's me," Filippa said with a suppressed whinny of a giggle.

"I could tell. But you are no longer. Why?"

"I don't know anymore," Filippa replied, as the two of them loped on together.

"I would so like to be a ranch queen," Cielo said. "It sounds glorious."

Filippa lowered her head. "It's not easy. There are many ... umm ... some constraints."

"Such as?"

"Would you care to find out?"

"Having met you, Filippa, and seeing and experiencing your astonishing horse sense, I would."

"Very well," said Filippa, and to the best of her recollection gave Cielo general directions to Fiel Verdadero's ranch.

"And what should I do if and when I show up?"

"Trust him," said Filippa. "Maybe he will take you in as a replace... oh ... nothing."

"You miss him, don't you?"

"I do, ever so much. But I feel I have to"—Filippa raised her eyes to the distant sierra and muttered something about her destiny.

"Your destiny? That big bunch of rocks? I tell you, that's all it is."

Startled, Filippa looked Cielo squarely in the eye but said nothing. Her companion's question had started a tumult in her own mind.

"You had better be getting along, Cielo," she whispered after a while, "if you want to reach the ranch before night-fall."

And so the two fillies bid each other *hasta luego*.

"I do hope so," said Filippa with some uncertainty.

Before long, night fell on Filippa, who by that time was feeling very hungry. Presently, she came upon a lush patch of jimsonweed, which indeed appeared appetizing. Maybe it was because she was so tired, and despite the weed's unpleasant pungency, she disregarded her horse sense—which even now was fruitlessly nagging her—and she ate her fill of the poisonous plant.

And oh, how bad Filippa felt! The nights get chilly on that open prairie where she now lay shivering and sweating under the glistening moon. She remorsefully thought of her warm stable, the comfort of the hay, and even the soothing evening rubdown from grumpy old Mr. McGuire.



Poor Mr. McGuire. He had originally been quite gentle with her and would speak to her softly, sometimes singing her a plaintive old Irish ballad about the horses of Kildare. But then he stopped even speaking to her and would dutifully rub her down with much resentment.

Tears came to Filippa's eyes as she pondered the reason. One day, about six months ago, Mr. McGuire had tried to ride her, and she bucked and threw him. Her action broke his leg seriously enough that he was unable to ride a horse again.

*Oh, beloved rider,* Filippa thought as she felt herself drifting away. *Please ask Mr. McGuire to forgive me. I am sorry ... so sorry. ...*

Her eyelids began falling heavily as though into sleep, but she wasn't sleeping; in fact, she felt more aware of her environment than ever, together with the presence of another dimension in which a multitude of ghostly white horses surrounded her.

One of them, a majestic stallion, trotted out from among them and addressed her. "Do you want to go home, filly?"

"Y-yes...", she weakly replied. "I most certainly do. But do I go with you?"

"Nay, it is not your time to join us here, but you will in due course. You have yet to go through a time of training back home. And it will be a joy if you accept it gratefully."

"With my beloved rider?"

"Of course, and with the others—his friends that he has entrusted with your care. Those whom you have treated less than kindly."

"I know. And for that, I am truly sorry. I wish I had another chance."

"You do. Your beloved rider even now awaits your return. He will sense your approach from a long way off."





"But what am I to be trained for?"

"To eventually join us, the greatest cavalry in all the heavens—of which I and my comrades here are but a small contingent—and to fight and win the greatest battle of all time."

"The greatest battle of all time? Which one is that?"

"You will find out in due season. ..."

So saying, the stately steed and his entourage disappeared, leaving Filippa lying and gazing at the stars with a thankful heart. Presently she fell asleep.

She awoke the next morning drenched with sweat, as the fever had broken, and she felt feisty and refreshed with purpose to return home to her ranch. The journey was hard. Strong winds made the direction of familiar scents difficult to discern, and she lost her way a few times and wondered if she would indeed make it home.

Nevertheless, Filippa doggedly loped on, and as the afternoon drew to a close, true to the white stallion's word, she saw her beloved rider on the horizon. Her heart skipped and she picked up speed, and Fiel, upon spotting her, dug his heels into his horse's flanks and sped toward her.

And guess who that horse was? Yes, Filippa's filly friend Cielo, and oh, how overjoyed they were to see each other again.

"And you are happy at the ranch?" Filippa asked her.

"So very much, thanks to you. Señor Fiel broke me in remarkably fast, but I have so much yet to learn—especially from you!"

"Oh, but I have much to learn from you," Filippa replied.

And of course, she had no way to express her joy at being with her beloved rider again, except to docilely lower her head and close her eyes in contentment as Fiel stroked and patted her nose.

"I suppose you would not object if I rode you back home," he said.

*I would be delighted*, Filippa thought, and Fiel unbuckled Cielo's harness and saddled Filippa up.

"And the new corral is finished," he added.

And oh, how joyful was Filippa as the three of them rode into the sunset.

