

Guerrino and the Wild Man

CHAPTER 1

For thousands of years, the island of Sicily was inhabited by tribes of people farming its rich soil and fishing from its abundant seas. As kingdoms rose and fell around it, conquerors and kings from faraway lands claimed the island and did battle against enemies trying to take it for themselves. Over the centuries, different kings and tribes built beautiful villages and castles among the hillsides and forests of Sicily. And it was during one of the few peaceful times on the island that King Filippomaria ruled.

King Filippomaria was an especially wise, loving, and virtuous man, and all the people agreed they were lucky to have him looking after them. His wife, Queen Caterina, was so polite, graceful, and beautiful, that it was said that just an approving look from her could bring tears of joy--as if being embraced by an angel. The king and queen had only one son, whom they called Guerrino, meaning "little warrior." They loved this little boy so much that sometimes they thought their hearts would burst. They doted on him and protected him, and gave him full run of the castle to run around and cause mischief.

The king had worked hard to get his kingdom running smoothly, and his trusted advisors took care of all the important matters from patching the roads to caring for the elders to training his armies. The king had a little secret—he worked so hard to keep things orderly and peaceful so it would be easier to take time off to hunt with the small group of barons and huntsmen who were his closest friends and confidants.

More than anything else, the king loved to hunt because on the hunt he could feel like a simple man without the burden of so much power and so many duties. He could be among his friends, joking, laughing, and camping under the stars. He could eat on the ground beside a fire with specks of dirt getting on his food as he ate with his hands, instead of sitting stiffly at the royal table in the great dining hall among the servants and silverware. It fed the king's spirit to go on these long hunting trips, and he grew stronger from the exercise. His body often felt tired, or wounded by a scrape here or a cut there, but he always returned to the castle feeling refreshed and invigorated. However, his latest hunt was about to deliver something quite different, as the king encountered a creature that would soon tear his family apart.

CHAPTER 2

One day, while hunting with several of his companions, King Filippomaria saw an enormous and broadly built Wild Man come out of the dense forest. He was so deformed and ugly that all the men stood there in shocked silence. The Wild Man's strength appeared to be so far superior to anything they had ever encountered that they simply could not move for a time. Finally rousing themselves from the trance, and seeing in him a dangerous foe, the king and his two best barons boldly attacked him; and after a long fight, they captured him. They tied his hands and brought him back to the palace, finding a cell strong enough to hold him. They locked the massive door with an enormous iron key and ordered him to be kept well-guarded. Because the king considered the Wild Man a very valuable prize, he decided that the key should remain in

the custody of the queen. Being a cautious and refined person, she would be especially careful with the key. After having done all this, the king went to the prison every day to see the Wild Man and gaze upon him with wonder.

Not many days had passed when the king was once again in the mood for a hunt. He prepared what was needed and left with his noblemen and huntsmen after giving the prison key to the queen. Guerrino was just a boy, and like most boys, he was curious and adventurous. While the king was hunting, a great desire came over the boy to see the Wild Man. Like any good adventurer, Guerrino wanted to be prepared for his visit to the prison. His favorite toys were his bow and arrow, and he carried them with him everywhere. So, naturally, he took his bow and arrow with him as he approached the iron bars of the prison where the monster was living. The Wild Man saw the boy, approached him, and began talking with him in a very sensible manner. Guerrino was surprised and delighted by how clearly the man addressed him, and was quickly caught up in the conversation. While the Wild Man was talking with him, he reached through the bars and embraced Guerrino, and then quickly grabbed his beautifully made arrow, taking it from his hand. The boy jumped back, stunned. He could not hold back his tears and began to cry, asking the Wild Man to give back his arrow. But the Wild Man said,

“If you are willing to open the door and free me from this prison, I will give you back your arrow; otherwise, I will never return it to you.”

To which the boy said, “But, how would you have me open it and free you if I have no way of freeing you?”

Then the Wild Man said, “If you are willing to help me escape from this cell, I will tell you the way to free me.”

“But how?” answered Guerrino. “Tell me the way.”

To which the Wild Man said, “Go to the queen, your mother. And when she is asleep during her afternoon nap, carefully sneak the prison key from under the pillow on which she lays her head; and do it quietly so that she does not sense it. Bring the key here and free me. Then, I will return your arrow at once. And then perhaps I can someday return the favor.”

Guerrino, anxious to have his golden arrow even more because he was just a child did not stop to think, and immediately ran toward his mother’s room. Having found that she was gently sleeping, he quietly took the key. And with it, he returned to the Wild Man and said to him, “Here is the key. But if I free you, you must go so far away that no one can even smell you. Otherwise, my father, who is a great master of the hunt, will easily find and capture you, and will just as easily kill you.”

CHAPTER 3

The Wild Man heard Guerrino’s words, and looked straight at him with a very serious expression on his face, saying firmly, “Do not doubt, my child, that as soon as you open the prison door, I will give you your arrow; and I will go very far indeed, so that neither your father nor anyone else will find me.” Guerrino, who was very strong for a boy his age, worked hard and finally opened the prison door. The Wild Man returned the arrow as promised, thanked him graciously, and left.

A long time ago, the Wild Man had been an extremely handsome young man, who, desperate from not being able to win the love of a woman he treasured, felt that nothing else mattered and left everything and everyone he knew behind in the sunny city. He went to be among the woodland creatures, living in the dense forest, eating grass and drinking water like an animal. This, he felt, was the only place he could bear living. And the longer he lived there, the more he forgot his previous life and the more wild he became. Eventually, the poor wretch grew a tremendous amount of hair, his skin became calloused, and he grew a thick and long beard. And from living this way and feeding on grass, his beard and his hair had become so green, matted, and dirty that he truly was a monstrous thing to behold. Living all alone in such a way as this had made him tough and strong, yet underneath his horrible appearance and behavior, beat the heart of the man he had been. And he lived there alone until the day the king and his companions captured him.

The queen awoke and put her hand under her pillow to take the key that she always kept by her side. Not finding it, she was aghast. She searched the bed from top to bottom and, finding nothing, she frantically went to the prison. Finding it open and not seeing the Wild Man, she felt like dying. She ran to the palace, running here and there, demanding of all the servants: Who had been so reckless and arrogant that they had the nerve to remove the prison key from under her while she slept? All the servants in the castle responded that they knew nothing. When Guerrino came upon his mother and saw her frantic and in a burning rage, he said, "Mother, do not blame anyone else for opening the prison—no one deserves to be punished. I am the one who must suffer, because I opened it." Upon hearing this, the queen felt an aching inside deeper than any she had ever felt. She feared that the king, returning from the hunt, might kill their son in a fit of rage, for he had prized the Wild Man, visiting him daily. He had personally entrusted the key to her and swore that anyone who released the Wild Man did so on pain of death. So the queen, believing she could fix one mistake, was about to commit an even worse mistake.

CHAPTER 4

Guerrino was the source of infinite joy for the queen, so she made her next decision while her heart was breaking. She immediately called her two most loyal servants and gave them her cherished son along with a great deal of money and beautiful horses. Barely managing a smile for him through her pain, she wished him good luck. She then earnestly begged the servants to watch over him and to take him as far away as possible, away from Sicily, such that the king could never find him.

Scarcely after the boy left his mother, the king returned to the palace from his hunt. He dismounted his horse and immediately went to the prison to see the Wild Man. Finding the door open and seeing that he had fled, the king burned with such fury that he swore he would kill whoever had caused it to happen. And going to the queen, who sat in a deep melancholy in her room, he demanded that she tell him who had been so audacious, and so brash, and so reckless, that they had the nerve to open the prison door and free the Wild Man.

The queen, with a trembling and weak voice, answered, "Do not be troubled, O king, for Guerrino—as he himself confessed to me—set the Wild Man free." And she told him as much as Guerrino had told her; and as the king came to understand what happened, he became more and more bitter. Then the queen added that, in fear that he would kill his son, she had sent him so far

away that he could never be found, and had him accompanied by two loyal servants with more than enough jewels and money for their needs.

Taking this in, the king felt wave after wave of grief wash over him, until almost anything could have knocked him over or driven him mad. And if it had not been for his advisors who held him back, he easily would have put her to death in that moment. The poor king returned to his senses and from a place below all his feelings of rage, he said to the queen, "O woman, what were you thinking to send our son to places you do not even know? Did you think that perhaps a Wild Man meant more to me than my own child?"

His anguish quickly turned to resolve, and without waiting for another word, he commanded that his many soldiers immediately mount on horseback, split up into four parties, and seek with all diligence to find him. But in vain they searched; for Guerrino went with the servants so far into hiding that no one knew where they were. The king and queen despaired that they would ever see their precious son again.

CHAPTER 5

The good Guerrino, riding with his servants, passed valleys, mountains, and rivers. And dwelling in one village after another, much time passed until he reached the age of sixteen years; and he was so handsome, that he looked like the glowing light of dawn. And as he grew into a man, an evil thought came to the servants: to kill Guerrino, take the remaining jewels and money, and divide it between them. But it never came to pass because they could not ever reach an agreement about how they should do it. As fortune would have it, one day a fair and graceful young man wandered by on a magnificent horse that was just as magnificently adorned.

He bowed his head and humbly greeted Guerrino, saying, "O kind horseman, if it would not be a nuisance, it would give me great pleasure to ride along with you."

To which Guerrino replied, "Your kindness does not allow me to refuse your company. Indeed, I thank you, and I beg that by grace you will dignify us by coming with us. We are strangers here, and we do not know the paths. If you will kindly show us the way, we will better manage it together if some accident occurs, and the journey will be less of a nuisance."

This young man was the same Wild Man whom Guerrino had freed from the prison of King Filippomaria. After being freed from the prison, he had wandered through various lands and strange places and was perchance seen by a fairy, who was beautiful but rather sick. Having seen how deformed and ugly he was, she wickedly laughed at his ugliness, so much so that an abscess pressing against her heart ruptured from all her laughing. And at that very moment, her illness passed as if it had never happened, saving her life.

Hence, the beautiful fairy in repayment for receiving such a great favor (indeed, having her life saved by him in a moment when she had regarded him so unkindly) and not wanting to seem ungrateful said: "O man, now so deformed and dirty and yet the cause of my desired health, come, and I will make you more handsome and more fair; and will share with you all the power and authority granted to me by nature. I cast this spell, empowering you to do and undo everything that you desire." And more than this, she presented him with a superb enchanted horse, and ordered it to take him wherever he wished to go. And so it was that he returned to his

former self as he had been before retreating to the forest. And so it was that he came to be with Guerrino once again.

CHAPTER 6

So Guerrino rode with the young man, not knowing who the young man was, but being known by him. They finally came to a fortified city, called Irlanda, over which King Zifroi reigned at that time. King Zifroi had two daughters of fair appearance and graceful regalia; and their beauty approached that of Venus. One was named Potentiana and the other was called Eleuteria. The king loved them so much, he could not see life through anyone's eyes but theirs.

Thus, Guerrino, the unknown young man, and the servants came to the city of Irlanda and took lodging with an innkeeper, the cleverest man found in all Irlanda; and he treated all of them honorably. The following day, the young man pretended to want to leave and move on to other parts; and he took leave of Guerrino, thanking him graciously for his very good company. But by now, Guerrino had developed such a strong fondness for him that he did not want him to leave. And after much persuading, the young man agreed to stay with him.

Around this land, there were two ferocious animals: one was a wild stallion, and the other was a similarly wild mare; and they were so vicious and dangerous that they not only tore up and ruined all the farmland, but also brutally attacked and killed the animals and people. And because of their ferocity, the countryside was in such a condition that no one wanted to live there. All the villagers abandoned their farms and their farmhouses, and went to live far away from there. And there was no man powerful and strong enough that dared to confront and kill them. Whereupon King Zifroi, seeing the country completely bare of crops and animals and people, and not knowing where to find a solution, grieved and cursed his hard and terrible luck.

Guerrino's two servants, who on the way had not been able to fulfill their cruel intentions because they could not agree and because of the arrival of the unknown youth, thought of ways to have Guerrino killed so they could remain lords over the jewels and money. They said to one another, "Can we find some way to kill our masters?" And finding no other way to fulfill it that would not endanger their own lives in the attempt, they thought to meet secretly with the innkeeper. They told him that Guerrino, their master, was a proud and valiant man, and several times had boasted of being able to kill that wild stallion without harm coming to anyone.

"And this will easily reach the ears of the king, who, desiring the death of the twin animals and the health of all his territory, will come to Guerrino himself, and will want to understand how it can be done. And if he does not know what to do or how to respond, he will easily die, and we will own the jewels and money." And they did this exactly as they had resolved.

CHAPTER 7

The innkeeper, when he heard of Guerrino's boasts, became the happiest man that nature had ever created; and without pausing for a moment, he ran to the palace. He knelt reverently, and secretly said to the king, "Sacred Crown, if it may please you to know, there is a fair and wandering horseman currently staying at my inn. He is called by the name of Guerrino; and his servants whispered many things to me, among which that their master is a famous and daring man, talented with weaponry; and that in all our days we have not known another like him, and

over and over again he has boasted that he is powerful and strong enough to slay the wild stallion that has done so much damage to your land.ö Upon hearing this, King Zifroi at once commanded that this horseman be brought to him. The innkeeper, with total obedience to his lord, returned to his inn and told Guerrino that he alone was to go to the king, because he wished to speak with him.

Guerrino, hearing this, immediately left to present himself to the king; and acting with appropriate reverence, asked why he had been summoned. To which King Zifroi said: öGuerrino, the reason I commanded you to come here is that I have heard you are a valorous knight and that there is none other like you in the world; and repeatedly you have said that your strength is such that, without injuring yourself and others, you can subdue the stallion that has miserably ravaged my kingdom. If you have the courage to take on a glorious enterprise such as this, and win it, I promise you over this head of mine to give you a gift such that all the time of your life you will be happy.ö Guerrino, hearing the high king's proposal, was completely baffled, denying that he had said words such as these.

In response to Guerrino, the king was very troubled and somewhat angry, saying, öI desire, Guerrino, that you take on this enterprise; and if you contradict what I want, plan on being deprived of your life.ö

Guerrino departed from the king and returned to the inn, overcome with grief, and not daring to share with anyone what he struggled with inside himself. Just then, the unknown young man, seeing something unfamiliar in Guerrino's melancholy feeling, softly asked what was the cause of his gloomy and pained expression. And Guerrino, because of the brotherly love that had so moved him, could not protest or deny such a fair and honest question, and told him in a calm and methodical way what was to come. Hearing this, the unknown young man said, öBe of good spirits and do not doubt a thing, because I shall teach you a way that you will not perish. Indeed, you will be the victor, and the king will achieve what he desires. Therefore, go back to the king, and tell him that you want him to provide you with a talented master blacksmith who shoes horses; and rather than four ordinary horseshoes, he must make them larger and rounder by about two large fingersøwidth, and well-roughened; and that two long spikes the length of a finger must stick out of the back, being both sharp and barbed. And this having been done, have him put them on the feet of my horse which is enchanted, and then have no doubt.ö

CHAPTER 8

Guerrino returned to the king, and told him what the young man had obliged him to do. The king had a great master blacksmith brought to him, and ordered him to make whatever Guerrino commanded. When they went to the blacksmith's shop, Guerrino ordered him in the way he had been told to have the four horseshoes made. Hearing it, the blacksmith did not want to make them. On the contrary, he scorned Guerrino and treated him as if he had gone mad because the design of these horseshoes made no sense to him, and he would not hear any more of it. Guerrino, seeing the blacksmith jeering at him and not being willing to obey, went to the king and complained to him about the blacksmith who was not willing to serve as commanded. Whereupon the king called for him, and strictly ordered him on pain of affliction that either he do what was required, or that the blacksmith would have to fulfill the enterprise that the king had given to Guerrino. The blacksmith, seeing that the king's commandment had him in its grip, made the items that the second man had devised, and put them on the horse.

Once the horse was shod and well fitted to do the job, the young man said to Guerrino, "Mount my horse, and go in peace; and when you hear the neighing of the wild stallion, dismount, remove the saddle and bridle, and set my horse free. And climb to the top of a tall tree, waiting for the end of the activity." Guerrino, well trained by his beloved companion about what had to be done, joyfully took his leave.

Word of the glorious news had already spread through the whole city of Irlanda that a charming and fair young man had accepted the challenge to capture the wild stallion and present it to the king. Naturally, men and women ran to the windows to watch him pass. Yes, he was handsome; undoubtedly, he was young; and surely, they had high regard for him such that they were moved to pity, and said, "Oh poor man, how he voluntarily goes to his death! Certainly, it is a grave sin that he dies so miserably." And in their sympathy, they could not contain their tears. But Guerrino, fearless and courageous, cheerfully went onward; and arrived at the place where the wild stallion lived. And hearing him neigh, he dismounted; and having stripped the saddle and bridle from his own horse, and having freed him, he climbed up to the top of a strong oak and waited for the bitter and bloody battle.

Just as Guerrino ascended to the top of the tree, the wild stallion came and faced the enchanted steed. And both began the most savage fight that the world had ever seen. For they seemed like two unleashed lions, and foamed at the mouth like sleek boars chased by rabid dogs; and after they had valiantly fought, finally the enchanted steed gave a couple of savage kicks to the stallion's jaw, dislocating it. Once this was done, the stallion could no longer fight or defend itself. On seeing that, Guerrino rejoiced; and came down from the oak, took a halter that he had brought with him, tied the stallion, and led him with his jaw like this to the city. And as promised, with great joy among all the people, he presented him to the king, who along with the whole city, held a tremendous celebration for this triumph. Yet, Guerrino's ordeal was not over.

CHAPTER 9

The two servants' frustration grew greater, because their evil purpose had not been fulfilled. So it was that with their anger and outrage ignited, they again made King Zifroi understand how Guerrino could also kill the mare with ease if it were ordered. After he understood this, the king ordered him to do as he had done with the stallion. And because Guerrino refused such an undertaking, which felt overwhelming to him, the king threatened to have him suspended by one foot as a rebel to the crown. Guerrino returned to the inn and told everything to his companion, who said with a smile: "Brother, never fear, but go and find the blacksmith, and order four more shoes just like the first, and see that they are well spiked and barbed, and do equally with the mare as you have done with the stallion, and return with even greater honor than with the first." He therefore ordered the barbed horseshoes, shod the strong enchanted steed, and at last went honorably toward his endeavor.

When Guerrino arrived at where the mare was and heard her neigh, he did just as he had done before. He set the enchanted horse free; the mare approached, and rose up on the enchanted horse with a terrible and horrendous bite. And the enchanted horse was in such a way as it could barely defend itself. But as vigorously as it came, the mare finally was struck by a kick to her right leg, making it lame. And Guerrino descended from his tall tree, and tightly tied the mare. He mounted his horse and went to the palace in triumph; and with the joy of all the people returning once more, he presented it to the king. And all ran in astonishment to see the horse that

had brought such terrible pain to their lives being pulled toward the castle. And so it was that the whole country was freed from this scourge.

Guerrino returned to the inn, needing a place to rest; and not being able to sleep from the irritating noise he heard, he got up, and heard the strange sound of something beating about in a jar of honey that could not escape. Guerrino opened the jar and saw a large hornet that was beating its wings but could not free itself. So, moved by pity, he took the little creature and freed him.

King Zifroi had not yet rewarded Guerrino for his double triumph, and it seemed to him that it would be extremely rude if he did not reward him, so he summoned him. And once he arrived, he said, "Guerrino, you see how because of your work, my kingdom is liberated; and I intend to repay you for this great benefit we have received. And finding no gift that befits what has merited it, I have decided to give you one of my daughters in marriage. But know that I have two: one is called Potentiana, and has hair adorned with graceful curls, shining like gold; the other is named Eleuteria, and has hair that gleams like the finest silver. So, if you can guess which of them has golden locks, you shall make her your wife and you will receive an enormous dowry. Otherwise, your head will be removed from your body."

CHAPTER 10

Guerrino, hearing King Zifroi's harsh proposal, was astonished; and he turned to him and said, "Sacred Crown, this is the reward for all my hard work? This is the prize for my sweat? This is the benefit you give me for freeing your kingdom, which was completely desolate and ruined? Alas, I do not deserve this; nor is it befitting of a king such as you. But then, so it pleases you, and I am in your hands, do with me whatever you please."

"Go now," said the king, "and no more delay; I give you until the end of tomorrow to decide." Guerrino left, despondent, and went to his dear companion and told him what King Zifroi had said. The friend, so regarding him, said, "Guerrino, be of good spirits and do not doubt; because I will free you from all of this. Remember that a few days ago you freed the hornet covered in honey. The hornet will be your salvation. So, tomorrow, after dinner at the palace, you will go do this, and the hornet will make three turns around the face of the one with the golden hair, humming as it flies. And she, with her delicate hand, will brush it away. And when you have seen this same thing done three times, you will know for certain that this one shall be your wife."

"Ah!" said Guerrino to his friend. "When will the time come when I can possibly repay you for all the good you have done for me? Clearly, if I live a thousand years, I could not compensate you for a fraction of it." Then, Guerrino's friend answered, "Guerrino, my brother, I do not need you to repay me for all my efforts; but it is now time that I reveal myself to you, and that you know who I am."

CHAPTER 11

"Guerrino, because you rescued me from death, I wanted to render to you the many obligations it merited. Know that I am the Wild Man that you lovingly freed from your father's prison, and am called by the name Rubinetto." He told him how the fairy returned him to his

previously charming and handsome state. Guerrino, upon hearing this, was astounded; and began to cry from the tenderness in his heart; and he hugged and received him as his brother.

And because the time had now arrived to give his decision to King Zifroi, the two went to the palace. And the king commanded that Potentiana and Eleuteria, his beloved daughters all veiled in pure white, be presented to Guerrino; and so it was done. Whereupon, the daughters came and the king being unable to tell one from the other said, "Which of these two do you want, Guerrino? Whom will I give to you for your wife?" Guerrino, being uncertain, gave no answer. The king, curious see how this would end, and extremely impatient, told him that time was running out and to choose now.

But Guerrino replied, "Venerable king, even if time is running out, the deadline that you gave me at the end of the day has not passed." All who were there agreed that this was true. In accordance with this, the king, Guerrino, and all the others waited a while longer until the hornet flew over. It hummed around the bright face and golden hair of Potentiana. And fearing it, she brushed it away with her hands; and having brushed it away more than three times, it finally took its leave.

Guerrino was still somewhat doubtful, trusting nevertheless in the words of Rubinetto, his beloved companion. The king said, "Let go, Guerrino. What are you doing? Now is the time that you must decide."

Guerrino, looked carefully and considered carefully first one and then the other maiden, laid his hand upon the head of Potentiana as the hornet had shown; and said, "Sacred Crown, this is your golden-haired daughter." And unveiling the face of this daughter, he could see clearly that she was the one. And in that moment, to all those present and nearby, and to the great satisfaction of all the people, King Zifroi gave her to him as his wife; and not yet parting, saw to it that Rubinetto, his trusty companion, married her sister. Afterwards, Guerrino revealed that he was the son of Filippomaria, King of Sicily. Whereupon Zifroi felt great joy, and commanded there be an even more extravagant and grand wedding celebration. And when Guerrino's father and mother were made aware of this marriage, they felt the greatest happiness and contentment, because they had believed their son to be lost. And Guerrino returned to Sicily with his dear wife and his beloved brother and sister-in-law who were graciously greeted and embraced by his father and mother. And they lived a long time in peace and happiness, leaving behind them beautiful children and heirs to the kingdom.