Sivka-Burka — Version 1

An old man had three sons: two were clever, and the third was Ivanushka the fool; day and night the fool lay about on the stove.
The old man sowed wheat, and a fine crop grew, but someone took to trampling and ruining that wheat by night. So the old man said to his children:
— My dear children, guard the wheat every night in turn, and catch the thief for me.
The first night came. The eldest son went to guard the wheat, but he felt sleepy: he climbed into the hayloft and slept until morning. He came home in the morning and said he hadn't slept all night, had caught a chill, and hadn't seen any thief.
On the second night the middle son went and likewise slept the whole night away in the hayloft.
On the third night it was the fool's turn to go. He took a lasso and set off. He came to the field boundary and sat down on a stone: he sat there, not sleeping, waiting for the thief.
At the stroke of midnight a piebald horse came galloping into the wheat: one hair was golden, another silver; as it ran, the earth shook, smoke poured from its ears in a column, and flame belched from its nostrils.
And the horse began to eat the wheat: it trampled more than it ate.
The fool crept up to the horse on all fours and at once flung the lasso around its neck. The horse strained with all its might — but to no avail. The fool braced himself, and the lasso tightened around its neck.
And there the horse began to beg the fool:
— Let me go, Ivanushka, and I will do you a great service!
— Very well, — answered Ivanushka the fool. — But how will I find you afterwards?
— Go beyond the village, — said the horse, — whistle three times and cry: "Sivka-Burka, prophetic Bayka! Stand before me as a leaf before the grass!" — and I will be there.
Ivanushka the fool let the horse go and took its word that it would no longer eat or trample the wheat.
Ivanushka came home.
— Well, fool, did you see anything? — the brothers asked.
— I caught, — said Ivanushka, — a piebald horse. It promised never to go into the wheat again — so I let it go.
The brothers had a good laugh over the fool, but from that night on no one touched the wheat.
Soon after this, heralds (town criers) sent by the tsar began going through the

villages and towns, making a proclamation: assemble, boyars and nobles, merchants and townsmen and simple peasants, all to the tsar's festival, for three days; bring your best horses with you; and whoever leaps on his horse to the tsar's daughter's tower and takes the ring from the tsar's daughter's hand, the tsar will give the tsar's daughter in marriage to him.

Ivanushka's brothers too began to get ready for the festival: not so much to leap themselves, as to watch the others. Ivanushka asked to go with them too.

— Where would you go, fool! — said the brothers. — Do you want to frighten people? Sit on the stove and sift the ashes.

The brothers rode off, and Ivanushka the fool took a little basket from his sisters-in-law and went to gather mushrooms.

Ivanushka went out into the field, threw down the basket, whistled three times and cried:

— Sivka-Burka, prophetic Bayka! Stand before me as a leaf before the grass!

The horse came running — the earth shook, flame from its ears, smoke pouring from its nostrils in a column. It came running up and stood before Ivanushka as if rooted to the ground.

— Now, — it said, — climb into my right ear, Ivanushka, and climb out of the left.

Ivanushka climbed into the horse's right ear and out of the left — and became such a fine fellow that no one could think it, guess it, or tell it in a tale.

Then Ivanushka mounted the horse and galloped off to the tsar's festival. He came galloping into the square before the palace and saw a countless crowd of people; and in the tall tower, at the window, sat the tsar's daughter: on her hand a ring beyond price, and she herself a beauty among beauties. No one even thought of leaping to her: no one cared to break his neck for certain.

Then Ivanushka struck his horse on its powerful flanks; the horse grew angry, sprang — and fell short of the tsar's daughter's window by only three courses of logs.

The people were amazed, and Ivanushka turned his horse and galloped back.

His brothers were slow to make way, so he lashed them with his silken whip. The crowd cried: "Stop him, stop him!" — but Ivanushka's trail had already vanished.

Ivan rode out of the town, dismounted, climbed into the horse's left ear and out of the right, and became again the former Ivanushka the fool. Ivanushka let the horse go, filled his basket with fly agarics and brought them home.

— Here, housewives, are some mushrooms for you, — he said.

The sisters-in-law grew angry with Ivan:

— What sort of mushrooms have you brought, fool? As if you were meant to eat them alone!

Ivan grinned and climbed back onto the stove.

The brothers came home and told their father how they had been in the town and

what they had seen, while Ivanushka lay on the stove and chuckled.
The next day the elder brothers went off to the festival again, and Ivanushka took the basket and went for mushrooms. He went out into the field, whistled, and bellowed:
— Sivka-Burka, prophetic Bayka! Stand before me as a leaf before the grass!
The horse came running and stood before Ivanushka as if rooted to the ground. Ivan disguised himself again and galloped off to the square. He saw that there were even more people in the square than before; all were admiring the tsar's daughter, but no one thought of leaping: who wants to break his neck! Then Ivanushka struck his horse on its powerful flanks; the horse grew angry, sprang — and fell short of the tsar's daughter's window by only two courses of logs. Ivanushka turned his horse, lashed his brothers to make them get out of the way, and galloped off.
The brothers came home, and Ivanushka was already lying on the stove, listening to what the brothers told and chuckling.
On the third day the brothers went off to the festival again, and Ivanushka came galloping too. He lashed his horse with the whip. The horse grew angrier than before: it sprang — and reached the window. Ivanushka kissed the tsar's daughter and galloped off, not forgetting to lay into his brothers with the whip.
Now the tsar and the tsar's daughter too began to cry: "Stop him, stop him!" — but Ivanushka's trail had vanished.
Ivanushka came home — one hand was wrapped in a rag.
— What is that on you? — Ivan's sisters-in-law asked.
— Oh, — he said, — while looking for mushrooms I pricked myself on a twig. — And Ivan climbed onto the stove.
The brothers came and began to tell what had happened and how. And Ivanushka on the stove felt like looking at the ring: as he lifted the rag, the whole hut was flooded with light.
— Stop playing with fire, fool! — the brothers shouted at him. — You'll burn the hut down. It's time to drive you, fool, out of the house for good!
About three days later a proclamation came from the tsar that all the people, as many as there were in his realm, should gather to him for a feast, and that no one dared stay at home, and whoever disdained the tsar's feast should have his head struck from his shoulders.
There was nothing to be done, so the old man himself went to the feast with his whole family.
They came and sat down at the oak tables; they drank and ate and made conversation.
At the end of the feast the tsar's daughter began to serve mead to the guests from her own hands. She went round to everyone and came to Ivanushka last; and the

fool was wearing a shabby little coat, covered in soot, his hair on end, one hand tied up with a dirty rag… simply dreadful.
— Why is your hand tied up, young fellow? — asked the tsar's daughter. — Untie it.
Ivanushka untied his hand, and on his finger was the tsar's daughter's ring — and it flooded everyone with light.
Then the tsar's daughter took the fool by the hand, led him to her father and said:
— Here, father, is my destined bridegroom.
The servants washed Ivanushka, combed his hair, dressed him in royal clothes, and he became such a fine fellow that his father and brothers looked — and could not believe their own eyes.