



CHAPTER 1

It was seven o'clock on a very warm evening in the Seonee hills when Father Wolf woke up from his day's rest, scratched himself, yawned, and spread out his paws one after the other to get rid of the sleepy feeling in their tips. Mother Wolf lay with her big gray nose dropped across her four tumbling, squealing cubs, and the moon shone into the mouth of the cave where they all lived. "*Augrh!*" said Father Wolf. "It is time to hunt again." He was going to spring down hill when a little shadow with a bushy tail crossed the threshold and whined: "Good luck go with you,

O Chief of the Wolves. And good luck and strong white teeth go with your noble children that they may never forget the hungry in this world.”

It was the jackal—Tabaqui. The wolves of India despise Tabaqui because he runs about making mischief, and telling tales, and eating rags and pieces of leather from the village rubbish-heaps. But they are afraid of him too, because Tabaqui, more than anyone else in the jungle, is apt to go mad, and then he forgets that he was ever afraid of anyone. He runs through the forest biting everything in his way. Even the tiger runs and hides when little Tabaqui goes mad, for madness is the most disgraceful thing that can overtake a wild creature. We call it hydrophobia—or rabies—but they call it *dewanee*—the madness—and they run.

“Enter, then, and look,” said Father Wolf stiffly, “but there is no food here.”

“For a wolf, no,” said Tabaqui, “but for so mean a person as myself a dry bone is a good feast. Who are we, the Gidur-log [the jackal people], to pick and choose?” He scuttled to the back of the cave, where he found the bone of a buck with some meat on it, and sat cracking the end merrily.

“All thanks for this good meal,” he said, licking his lips. “How beautiful are your noble children! How large are their eyes! And so young too! Indeed, indeed, I might have remembered that the children of kings are men from the beginning.”

Now, Tabaqui knew as well as anyone else that there is nothing so unlucky as to compliment children to their faces. It pleased him to see Mother and Father Wolf look uncomfortable.

Tabaqui sat still, rejoicing in the mischief that he had made, and then he said spitefully: “Shere Khan, the Big One, has shifted his hunting grounds. He will hunt among these hills for the next moon, so he has told me.”

Shere Khan was the tiger who lived near the Waingunga River, twenty miles away.

“He has no right!” Father Wolf began angrily. “By the Law of the Jungle he has no right to change his quarters without due warning. He will frighten every head of game within ten miles, and I—I have to kill for two, these days.”

“His mother did not call him Lungri [the Lame One] for nothing,” said Mother Wolf quietly. “He has been lame in one foot from his birth. That is why he has only killed cattle.

Now the villagers of the Waingunga are angry with him, and he has come here to make our villagers angry. They will scour the jungle for him when he is far away, and we and our children must run when the grass is set on fire. Indeed, we are very grateful to Shere Khan!"

"Shall I tell him of your gratitude?" said Tabaqui.

"Out!" snapped Father Wolf. "Out and hunt with thy master. Thou hast done harm enough for one night."

"I'll go," said Tabaqui quietly. "Ye can hear Shere Khan below in the thickets. I might have saved myself the message."

Father Wolf listened, and below in the valley that ran down to a little river he heard the dry, angry, snarling, singsong whine of a tiger who has caught nothing and does not care if all the jungle knows it.

"The fool!" said Father Wolf. "To begin a night's work of hunting with that noise! Does he think that our buck are foolish?"

"H'sh. It is neither bullock nor buck he hunts tonight," said Mother Wolf. "It is Man."

The whine had changed to a sort of humming purr that seemed to come from every direction. It is a noise that bewilders woodcutters and gypsies sleeping in the open, and

makes them run, sometimes right into the very mouth of the tiger.

“Man!” said Father Wolf, showing all his white teeth. “*Faugh!* Are there not enough beetles and frogs in the forest that he must eat Man, and on our ground too!”

The Law of the Jungle, which never orders anything without a reason, forbids every beast to eat Man except when he is killing to show his children how to kill, and then he must hunt outside the hunting grounds of his pack or tribe. The real reason for this is that man-killing means, sooner or later, the arrival of white men on elephants, with guns, and hundreds of brown men with gongs and rockets and torches. Then everybody in the jungle suffers. The reason the beasts give among themselves is that Man is the weakest and most defenseless of all living things, and it is unsportsmanlike to touch him. They say too—and it is true—that man-eaters become mangy and lose their teeth.

The purr grew louder, and ended in the full-throated “*Aaarh!*” of the tiger’s charge.

Then there was a howl—an untigerish howl—from Shere Khan. “He has missed,” said Mother Wolf. “What is it?”

Father Wolf ran out a few paces and heard

Shere Khan muttering and mumbling savagely as he tumbled about in the scrub.

“The fool has had no more sense than to jump at a woodcutter’s campfire. He has burned his feet,” said Father Wolf with a grunt. “Tabaqui is with him.”

“Something is coming uphill,” said Mother Wolf, twitching one ear. “Get ready.”

The bushes rustled a little in the thicket, and Father Wolf dropped with his haunches under him, ready for his leap. Then, if you had been watching, you would have seen the most wonderful thing in the world—the wolf checked in mid-spring. He made his bound before he saw what it was he was jumping at, and then he tried to stop himself. The result was that he shot up straight into the air for four or five feet, landing almost where he left ground.

“Man!” he snapped. “A man’s cub. Look!”

Directly in front of him, holding on by a low branch, stood a naked brown baby who could just walk—as soft and as dimpled a little being as ever came to a wolf’s cave at night. He looked up into Father Wolf’s face and laughed.

“Is that a man’s cub?” said Mother Wolf.



“I have never seen one. Bring it here.”

A Wolf accustomed to moving his own cubs can, if necessary, carry an egg in his mouth without breaking it, and though Father Wolf’s jaws closed right on the child’s back, not a tooth even scratched the skin as he laid it down among the cubs.

“How little! How naked, and—how bold!” said Mother Wolf softly. The baby was pushing his way between the cubs to get close to the warm hide. “*Ahai!* He is taking his meal with the others. So this is a man’s cub. Now, was there ever a wolf that could boast of a man’s cub among her children?”

“I have heard now and again of such a

thing, but never in our Pack or in my time," said Father Wolf. "He is altogether without hair, and I could kill him with a touch of my foot. But see, he looks up and is not afraid."

The moonlight was blocked out of the mouth of the cave, for Shere Khan's great square head and shoulders were thrust into the entrance. Tabaqui, behind him, was squeaking: "My lord, my lord, it went in here!"

"Shere Khan does us great honor," said Father Wolf, but his eyes were very angry. "What does Shere Khan need?"

"My prey. A man's cub went this way," said Shere Khan. "Its parents have run off. Give it to me."

Shere Khan had jumped at a woodcutter's campfire, as Father Wolf had said, and was furious from the pain of his burned feet. But Father Wolf knew that the mouth of the cave was too narrow for a tiger to come in by. Even where he was, Shere Khan's shoulders and forepaws were cramped for want of room, as a man's would be if he tried to fight in a barrel.

"The Wolves are a free people," said Father Wolf. "They take orders from the Head of the Pack, and not from any striped cattle-killer. The man's cub is ours—to kill if we choose."

“Ye choose and ye do not choose! How dare you talk of choosing? By the bull that I killed, I stand nosing into your den to get what’s due to me? It is I, Shere Khan, who speak!”

The tiger’s roar filled the cave with thunder. Mother Wolf shook herself clear of the cubs and sprang forward, her eyes, like two green moons in the darkness, facing the blazing eyes of Shere Khan.

“And it is I, Raksha [The Demon], who answers. The man’s cub is mine! He shall not be killed. He shall live to run with the Pack and to hunt with the Pack; and in the end, O hunter of little naked cubs—frog-eater— fish-killer—he shall hunt thee! Now go—go back to thy mother, burned beast of the jungle, lamer than thou came into the world! Go!”

Father Wolf looked on amazed. He had almost forgotten the days when he won Mother Wolf in a fair fight from five other wolves, when she ran in the Pack and was called The Demon for good reason. Shere Khan might have faced Father Wolf, but he could not stand up against Mother Wolf, for he knew that where he was she had all the advantage of being on her home ground, and would fight to the death. So he backed out of

the cave mouth growling, and when he was clear, he shouted:

“We will see what the Pack will say to this fostering of man-cubs. The cub is mine, and to my teeth he will come in the end, O bush-tailed thieves!”

Mother Wolf threw herself down panting among the cubs, and Father Wolf said to her gravely:

“Shere Khan speaks the truth. The cub must be shown to the Pack. Will thou still keep him, Mother?”

“Keep him!” she gasped. “He came naked, by night, alone and very hungry; yet he was not afraid! Look, he has pushed one of my babes to one side already. And that lame butcher would have killed him and then run off to the Waingunga while the villagers here hunted through all our lairs in revenge! Keep him? Assuredly I will keep him. Lie still, little frog. O thou Mowgli—for Mowgli the Frog I will call thee—the time will come when thou will hunt Shere Khan as he has hunted thee.”

“But what will our Pack say?” said Father Wolf.

The Law of the Jungle lays down very clearly that any wolf may, when he marries, withdraw from the Pack he belongs to. But as

soon as his cubs are old enough to stand on their feet, he must bring them to the Pack Council, which is generally held once a month at full moon, in order that the other wolves may identify them. After that inspection the cubs are free to run where they please, and until they have killed their first buck, no excuse is accepted if a grown wolf of the Pack kills one of them. The punishment is death if the murderer can be found; and if you think about this for a minute, you will see that this must be so.

Father Wolf waited till his cubs could run a little, and then on the night of the Pack Meeting took them and Mowgli and Mother Wolf to the Council Rock—a hilltop covered with stones and boulders where a hundred wolves could hide. Akela, the great gray Lone Wolf, who led all the Pack by strength and cunning, lay out at full length on his rock. Below him sat forty or more wolves of every size and color, from older badger-colored veterans who could handle a buck alone to young black three-year-olds who thought they could. The Lone Wolf had led them for a year now. He had fallen into a wolf trap twice in his youth, and once he had been beaten and left for dead; so he knew the manners and

customs of men. There was very little talking at the Rock. The cubs tumbled over each other in the center of the circle where their mothers and fathers sat, and now and again a senior wolf would go quietly up to a cub, look at him carefully, and return to his place on noiseless feet. Sometimes a mother would push her cub far out into the moonlight to be sure that he had not been overlooked. Akela from his rock would cry: "Ye know the Law—ye know the Law. Look well, O Wolves!" And the anxious mothers would take up the call: "Look—look well, O Wolves!"

At last—and Mother Wolf's neck bristles lifted as the time came—Father Wolf pushed "Mowgli the Frog," as they called him, into the center, where he sat laughing and playing with some pebbles that glistened in the moonlight.

Akela never raised his head from his paws, but went on with the monotonous cry: "Look well!" A muffled roar came up from behind the rocks—the voice of Shere Khan crying: "The cub is mine. Give him to me. What have the Free People to do with a man's cub?" Akela never even twitched his ears. All he said was: "Look well, O Wolves! What have we, the Free People, to do with the orders of any

except the Free People? Look well!”

There was a chorus of deep growls, and a young wolf in his fourth year flung back Shere Khan's question to Akela: “What have the Free People to do with a man's cub?” Now, the Law of the Jungle lays down that if there is any dispute as to the right of a cub to be accepted by the Pack, he must be spoken for by at least two members of the Pack who are not his father and mother.

“Who speaks for this cub?” said Akela. “Among the Free People, who speaks?” There was no answer, and Mother Wolf got ready for what she knew would be her last fight, if things came to fighting.

Then, Baloo, the only other creature who is allowed at the Pack Council, rose up on his hind quarters and grunted. Baloo is the sleepy brown bear who teaches the wolf cubs the Law of the Jungle—old Baloo, who can come and go where he pleases because he eats only nuts and roots and honey.

“The man's cub—the man's cub?” he said. “I speak for the man's cub. There is no harm in a man's cub. I am not good with words, but I speak the truth. Let him run with the Pack and be entered with the others. I myself will teach him.”



“We need yet another,” said Akela. “Baloo has spoken, and he is our teacher for the young cubs. Who speaks besides Baloo?”

A black shadow dropped down into the circle. It was Bagheera the Black Panther, inky black all over, but with the panther markings showing up in certain lights like the pattern of watered silk. Everybody knew Bagheera, and nobody cared to cross his path, for he was as cunning as Tabaqui, as bold as the wild buffalo, and as reckless as the wounded elephant. But he had a voice as soft as wild honey dripping from

a tree, and a skin softer than down.

“O Akela, and ye the Free People,” he purred, “I have no right in your assembly, but the Law of the Jungle says that if there is a doubt which is not a matter of killing in regard to a new cub, the life of that cub may be bought at a price. And the Law does not say who may or may not pay that price. Am I right?”

“Good! Good!” said the young wolves, who are always hungry. “Listen to Bagheera. The cub can be bought for a price. It is the Law.”

“Knowing that I have no right to speak here, I ask your permission.”

“Speak then,” cried twenty voices.

“To kill a naked cub is a shame. Besides, he may make better sport for you when he is grown. Baloo has spoken in his behalf. Now to Baloo’s word I will add one bull, and a fat one, newly killed, not half a mile from here, if ye will accept the man’s cub according to the Law. Do you accept this?”

There was a clamor of scores of voices, saying: “Why not? He will die in the winter rains. He will scorch in the sun. What harm can a naked frog do us? Let him run with the Pack. Where is the bull, Bagheera? Let him be

accepted." And then came Akela's deep bay, crying: "Look well—look well, O Wolves!"

Mowgli was still deeply interested in the pebbles, and he did not notice when the wolves came and looked at him one by one. At last they all went down the hill for the dead bull, and only Akela, Bagheera, Baloo, and Mowgli's own wolves were left. Shere Khan roared in the still night, for he was very angry that Mowgli had not been handed over to him.

"Ay, roar well," said Bagheera, under his whiskers, "for the time will come when this naked thing will make thee roar to another tune, or I know nothing of Man."

"This was done well," said Akela. "Men and their cubs are very wise. He may be a help in time."

"Truly, a help in time of need, for none can hope to lead the Pack forever," said Bagheera.

Akela said nothing. He was thinking of the time that comes to every leader of every pack when his strength goes from him and he gets feebler and feebler, till at last he is killed by the wolves and a new leader comes up—to be killed in his turn.

"Take him away," he said to Father Wolf,

“and train him as befits one of the Free People.”

And that is how Mowgli was entered into the Seonee Wolf Pack for the price of a bull and on Baloo’s good word.

Now you must be content to skip ten or eleven whole years, and only guess at the wonderful life that Mowgli led among the wolves, because if it were written out it would fill ever so many books. He grew up with the cubs, though they, of course, were grown wolves almost before he was a child. And Father Wolf taught him his business, and the meaning of things in the jungle, till every rustle in the grass, every breath of the warm night air, every note of the owls above his head, every scratch of a bat’s claws as it roosted for a while in a tree, and every splash of every little fish jumping in a pool meant just as much to him as the work of his office means to a businessman.

When he was not learning, he sat out in the sun and slept and ate and went to sleep again. When he felt dirty or hot, he swam in the forest pools; and when he wanted honey (Baloo told him that honey and nuts were just

as pleasant to eat as raw meat), he climbed up for it as Bagheera showed him how to do. Bagheera would lie out on a branch and call, "Come along, Little Brother." At first Mowgli would cling like the sloth, but afterward he would fling himself through the branches almost as boldly as the gray ape. He took his place at the Council Rock, too, when the Pack met, and there he discovered that if he stared hard at any wolf, the wolf would be forced to drop his eyes, and so he used to stare for fun.

At other times he would pick the long thorns out of the pads of his friends, for wolves suffer terribly from thorns and burs in their coats. He would go down the hillside into the cultivated lands at night, and look very curiously at the villagers in their huts, but he had a mistrust of men because Bagheera showed him a square box with a drop gate so cunningly hidden in the jungle that he nearly walked into it, and told him that it was a trap. Better than anything else, he loved to go with Bagheera into the dark warm heart of the forest, to sleep all through the drowsy day, and at night see how Bagheera did his killing. Bagheera killed right and left as he felt hungry, and so did Mowgli—with one exception.

As soon as he was old enough to understand, Bagheera told him that he must never touch cattle because he had been bought into the Pack at the price of a bull's life. "All the jungle is thine," said Bagheera, "and thou can kill everything that thou art strong enough to kill; but in honor of the bull that bought thee, thou must never kill or eat any cattle young or old. That is the Law of the Jungle." Mowgli obeyed faithfully.

And he grew and grew strong as a boy must grow who has nothing in the world to think about except what to eat. All the while, he learned many lessons without knowing he was learning.

Mother Wolf told him once or twice that Shere Khan was not a creature to be trusted, and that some day he must kill Shere Khan. But though a young wolf would have remembered that advice every hour, Mowgli forgot it because he was only a boy—though he would have called himself a wolf if he had been able to speak in any human tongue.

Shere Khan was always crossing his path in the jungle, for as Akela grew older and feebler, the lame tiger had come to be great friends with the younger wolves of the Pack, who followed him to pick up scraps of food. Akela

would never have allowed this friendship if he had dared to exercise his authority to the proper bounds. Then Shere Khan would flatter the wolves and wonder that such fine young hunters were content to be led by a dying wolf and a man's cub. "They tell me," Shere Khan would say, "that at Council ye dare not look him between the eyes." And the young wolves would growl and bristle.

Bagheera, who had eyes and ears everywhere, heard about this, and once or twice he told Mowgli in so many words that Shere Khan would kill him some day. Mowgli would laugh and answer: "I have the Pack and I have thee; and Baloo, though he is so lazy, might strike a blow or two for my sake. Why should I be afraid?"

It was one very warm day that a new notion came to Bagheera— born of something that he had heard. Perhaps Sahi the Porcupine had told him; but when they were deep in the jungle, he said to Mowgli as the boy lay with his head on Bagheera's beautiful black skin, "Little Brother, how often have I told thee that Shere Khan is thy enemy?"

"As many times as there are nuts on that palm," said Mowgli, who, naturally, could not count. "What of it? I am sleepy, Bagheera, and

Shere Khan is all long tail and loud talk—like Mao, the Peacock.”

“But this is no time for sleeping. Baloo knows it; I know it; the Pack know it; and even the foolish, foolish deer know. Tabaqui has told thee, too.”

“Ho! ho!” said Mowgli. “Tabaqui came to me not long ago with some rude talk, saying that I was a naked man’s cub and not fit to dig pig-nuts. But I caught Tabaqui by the tail and swung him twice against a palm tree to teach him better manners.”

“That was foolishness, for though Tabaqui is a mischief-maker, he told thee of something that is a serious concern. Open those eyes, Little Brother. Shere Khan dare not kill thee in the jungle. But remember, Akela is very old, and soon the day will come when he cannot kill his buck, and then he will be leader no more. Many of the wolves that looked thee over when thou was first brought to the Council are old too, and the young wolves believe, as Shere Khan has taught them, that a man-cub has no place with the Pack. In a little time thou will be a man.”

“And what is a man that he should not run with his brothers?” said Mowgli. “I was born in the jungle. I have obeyed the Law of

the Jungle, and there is no wolf of ours from whose paws I have not pulled a thorn. Surely they are my brothers!”

Bagheera stretched himself at full length and half shut his eyes. “Little Brother,” he said, “feel under my jaw.”

Mowgli put up his strong brown hand, and just under Bagheera’s silky chin, where the giant rolling muscles were all hid by the glossy hair, he came upon a little bald spot.

“There is no one in the jungle that knows that I, Bagheera, carry that mark—the mark of the collar. And yet, Little Brother, I was born among men, and it was among men that my mother died—in the cages of the king’s palace at Oodeypore. It was because of this that I paid the price for thee at the Council when thou was a little naked cub. Yes, I too was born among men. I had never seen the jungle. They fed me behind bars from an iron pan till one night I felt that I was Bagheera—the Panther—and no man’s plaything, and I broke the silly lock with one blow of my paw and ran away. And because I had learned the ways of men, I became more terrible in the jungle than Shere Khan. Is it not so?”

“Yes,” said Mowgli, “all in the jungle fear Bagheera—all except Mowgli.”

“Oh, thou art a man’s cub,” said the Black Panther very tenderly. “And as I returned to my jungle, so thou must go back to men at last—to the men who are thy brothers—if thou art not killed in the Council.”

“But why—but why should any wish to kill me?” said Mowgli.

“Look at me,” said Bagheera. And Mowgli looked at him steadily between the eyes. The big panther turned his head away in half a minute.

“That is why,” he said, shifting his paw on the leaves. “Not even I can look thee between the eyes, and I was born among men, and I love thee, Little Brother. The others they hate thee because their eyes cannot meet thine; because thou art wise; because thou hast pulled out thorns from their feet—because thou art a man.”

“I did not know these things,” said Mowgli sullenly, frowning under his heavy black eyebrows.

“What is the Law of the Jungle? Strike first and then speak. By thy very carelessness they know that thou art a man. But be wise. It is in my heart that when Akela misses his next kill—and at each hunt it becomes harder for him to pin the buck—the Pack will turn

against him and against thee. They will hold a jungle Council at the Rock, and then—and then . . . I have it!” said Bagheera, leaping up. “Go down quickly to the men’s huts in the valley, and take some of the Red Flower which they grow there, so that when the time comes thou may have even a stronger friend than I or Baloo or those of the Pack that love thee. Get the Red Flower.”

By Red Flower Bagheera meant fire, for no creature in the jungle will call fire by its proper name. Every beast lives in deadly fear of it, and invents a hundred ways of describing it.

“The Red Flower?” said Mowgli. “That grows outside their huts in the twilight. I will get some.”

“Spoken like a man’s cub,” said Bagheera proudly. “Remember that it grows in little pots. Get one swiftly, and keep it by thee for time of need.”

“Good!” said Mowgli. “I go. But art thou sure, O my Bagheera”—he slipped his arm around the splendid neck and looked deep into the big eyes—“art thou sure that all this is Shere Khan’s doing?”

“By the Broken Lock that freed me, I am sure, Little Brother.”

“Then, by the Bull that bought me, I will pay back Shere Khan in full for this, and maybe a little over,” said Mowgli, and he bounded away.

“That is a man. That is all a man,” said Bagheera to himself, lying down again. “Oh, Shere Khan, never have you made a bigger mistake than hunting the man-cub ten years ago!”

Mowgli ran far through the forest, running hard, his heart pounding inside him. He came to the cave as the evening mist rose, took a breath, and looked down the valley. The cubs were out, but Mother Wolf, at the back of the cave, knew by his breathing that something was troubling her frog.

“What is it, Son?” she said.

“Some bat’s chatter about Shere Khan,” he called back. “I hunt among the plowed fields tonight,” and he plunged downward through the bushes, to the stream at the bottom of the valley. There he stopped, for he heard the yell of the Pack hunting, and he heard the bellow of a hunted buck, and the snort as the buck turned at bay. Then there were wicked, bitter howls from the young wolves: “Akela! Akela! Let the Lone Wolf show his strength. Room for the leader of the

Pack! Spring, Akela!”

The Lone Wolf must have sprung and missed his hold, for Mowgli heard the snap of his teeth and then a yelp as the buck knocked him over with his forefoot.

He did not wait for anything more, but dashed on; and the yells grew fainter behind him as he ran into the croplands where the villagers lived.

“Bagheera spoke the truth,” he panted, as he nestled down in some straw by the window of a hut. “Tomorrow is a big day both for Akela and for me.”

Then he pressed his face close to the window and watched the fire on the hearth. He saw the man’s wife get up and feed it in the night with black lumps. And when the morning came and the mists were all white and cold, he saw the man’s child pick up a wicker pot plastered inside with earth, fill it with lumps of red-hot charcoal, put it under his blanket, and go out to tend the cows in the barn.

“Is that all?” said Mowgli. “If a cub can do it, there is nothing to fear.” So he strode round the corner and met the boy, took the pot from his hand, and disappeared into the mist while the boy howled with fear.

“They are very like me,” said Mowgli,

blowing into the pot as he had seen the woman do. "This thing will die if I do not give it things to eat"; and he dropped twigs and dried bark on the red stuff. Halfway up the hill he met Bagheera with the morning dew shining like moonstones on his coat.

"Akela has missed," said the Panther. "They would have killed him last night, but they needed thee also. They were looking for thee on the hill."

"I was among the plowed lands. I am ready. See!" Mowgli held up the fire pot.

"Good! Now, I have seen men thrust a dry branch into that stuff, and presently the Red Flower blossomed at the end of it. Art thou not afraid?"

"No. Why should I fear? I remember now—if it is not a dream—how, before I was a Wolf, I lay beside the Red Flower, and it was warm and pleasant."

All that day Mowgli sat in the cave tending his fire pot and dipping dry branches into it to see how they looked. He found a branch that satisfied him, and in the evening when Tabaqui came to the cave and rudely told him that he was wanted at the Council Rock, he laughed 'til Tabaqui ran away. Then Mowgli went to the Council, still laughing.

Akela the Lone Wolf lay by the side of his rock as a sign that the leadership of the Pack was open, and Shere Khan with his following of scrap-fed wolves walked to and fro. Bagheera lay close to Mowgli, and the fire-pot was between Mowgli's knees. When they were all gathered together, Shere Khan began to speak—a thing he would never have dared to do when Akela was in his prime.

“He has no right to speak,” whispered Bagheera. “Say so and he will be frightened.”

Mowgli sprang to his feet. “Free People,” he cried, “does Shere Khan lead the Pack? What has a tiger to do with our leadership?”

“Seeing that the leadership is yet open, and being asked to speak—” Shere Khan began.

“Who asks you to speak?” said Mowgli. “Are we all jackals, to fawn on this cattle butcher? The leadership of the Pack is with the Pack alone.”

There were yells of “Silence, thou man's cub!” “Let him speak. He has kept our Law”; and at last the seniors of the Pack thundered: “Let the Dead Wolf speak.” When a leader of the Pack has missed his kill, he is called the Dead Wolf as long as he lives, which is not long.

Akela raised his old head wearily:

“Free People, and ye too, jackals of Shere Khan, for twelve seasons I have led ye to and from the kill, and in all that time not one has been trapped or maimed. Now I have missed my kill. Ye know how that happened. Ye know how ye brought me up to an untried buck to make my weakness known. It was cleverly done. Your right is to kill me here on the Council Rock, now. Therefore, I ask, who comes to make an end of the Lone Wolf? For it is my right, by the Law of the Jungle, that ye come one by one.”

There was a long hush, for no single wolf cared to fight Akela to the death. Then Shere Khan roared: “Bah! What have we to do with this toothless fool? He is doomed to die! It is the man-cub who has lived too long. Free People, he was my meat from the first. Give him to me. I am weary of this man-wolf folly. He has troubled the jungle for ten seasons. Give me the man-cub, or I will hunt here always, and not give you one bone. He is a man, a man’s child, and from the marrow of my bones I hate him!”

Then more than half the Pack yelled: “A man! A man! What has a man to do with us? Let him go to his own place.”

“And turn all the people of the villages

against us?" clamored Shere Khan. "No, give him to me. He is a man, and none of us can look him between the eyes."

Akela lifted his head again and said, "He has eaten our food. He has slept with us. He has driven game for us. He has broken no word of the Law of the Jungle."

"Also, I paid for him with a bull when he was accepted. The worth of a bull is little, but Bagheera's honor is something that he will perhaps fight for," said Bagheera in his gentlest voice.

"A bull paid ten years ago!" the Pack snarled. "What do we care for bones ten years old?"

"Or for a pledge of honor?" said Bagheera, his white teeth bared under his lip. "Well are ye called the Free People!"

"No man's cub can run with the people of the jungle," howled Shere Khan. "Give him to me!"

"He is our brother in all but blood," Akela went on, "and ye would kill him here! In truth, I have lived too long. Some of ye are eaters of cattle, and I have heard that others, under Shere Khan's teaching, go by dark night and snatch children from the villager's doorstep. Therefore I know ye to be cowards,

and it is to those cowards I speak. It is certain that I must die, and my life is of no worth, or I would offer it in the man-cub's place. But for the sake of the Honor of the Pack—a little matter that by being without a leader ye have forgotten—I promise that if ye let the man-cub go to his own place, I will not, when my time comes to die, bare one tooth against ye. I will die without fighting. That will at least save the Pack three lives. I cannot do more; but if ye will agree, I can save ye the shame that comes of killing a brother against whom there is no fault—a brother spoken for and bought into the Pack according to the Law of the Jungle."

"He is a man—a man—a man!" snarled the Pack. And most of the wolves began to gather round Shere Khan, whose tail was beginning to switch.

"Now it's up to you," said Bagheera to Mowgli. "We can do no more except fight."

Mowgli stood upright—the fire-pot in his hands. Then he stretched out his arms, and yawned in the face of the Council; but he was furious with rage and sorrow, for the wolves had never told him how they hated him. "Listen you!" he cried. "There is no need for this jabber. Ye have told me so often tonight

that I am a man (and indeed I would have been a wolf with you to my life's end) that I feel your words are true. So I will not call ye my brothers any more. What ye will do, and what ye will not do, is not yours to say. That matter is with me; and that we may see the matter more plainly, I, the man, have brought here a little of the Red Flower which ye fear."

He flung the fire pot on the ground, and some of the red coals lit a tuft of dried moss that flared up, as all the Council drew back in terror before the leaping flames.

Mowgli thrust his dead branch into the fire till the twigs lit and crackled, and whirled it above his head among the cowering wolves.

"Thou art the master," whispered Bagheera. "Save Akela from the death. He was ever thy friend."

Akela, the grim old wolf who had never asked for mercy in his life, gave one pitiful look at Mowgli as the boy stood all naked, his long black hair tossing over his shoulders in the light of the blazing branch that made the shadows jump and quiver.

"Good!" said Mowgli, staring round slowly. "I see that ye are afraid. I go from you to my own people—if they are my own people. The jungle is shut to me, and I must forget



your talk and your companionship. But I will be more merciful than ye are. Because I was your brother in all but blood, I promise that when I am a man among men I will not betray ye to men as ye have betrayed me." He kicked the fire with his foot, and the sparks flew up. "There shall be no war between any of us in the Pack. But there is a debt to pay before I go." He strode forward to where Shere Khan sat blinking stupidly at the flames, and caught him by the tuft on his chin. Bagheera followed in case of accidents. "Up!" Mowgli cried. "Up, when a man speaks, or I will set that coat ablaze!"

Shere Khan's ears lay flat back on his head, and he shut his eyes, for the blazing branch was very near.

"This cattle-killer said he would kill me in the Council because he had not killed me when I was a cub. Move just one whisker, Lungri, and I will ram the Red Flower down thy throat!" He beat Shere Khan over the head with the branch, and the tiger whimpered and whined in an agony of fear.

"Pah! Singed jungle cat—go now! But remember when I next come to the Council Rock, as a man should come, it will be with Shere Khan's hide on my head. Now let Akela go free to live as he pleases. Ye will not kill him, because that is not my will. Nor do I think that ye will sit here any longer, lolling out your tongues as though ye were somebodies! Go!" The fire was burning furiously at the end of the branch, and Mowgli struck right and left round the circle, and the wolves ran howling with the sparks burning their fur. At last there were only Akela, Bagheera, and perhaps ten wolves that had taken Mowgli's side. Then something began to hurt Mowgli inside him, as he had never been hurt in his life before, and he caught his breath and sobbed, and the tears ran down his face.

“What is it? What is it?” he said. “I do not wish to leave the jungle, and I do not know what this is. Am I dying, Bagheera?”

“No, Little Brother. They are only tears such as men use,” said Bagheera. “Now I know thou art a man, and a man’s cub no longer. The jungle is indeed shut to thee from now on. Let them fall, Mowgli. They are only tears.” Mowgli had never cried in all his life before. Now he sat and cried as though his heart would break.

“Now,” he said, “I will go to men. But first I must say farewell to my mother.” He went to the cave where she lived with Father Wolf, and he cried on her coat, while the four cubs howled miserably.

“Ye will not forget me?” said Mowgli.

“Never while we can follow a trail,” said the cubs. “Come to the foot of the hill when thou art a man, and we will talk to thee; and we will come into the croplands to play with thee by night.”

“Come soon!” said Father Wolf. “Oh, wise little frog, come again soon; for we are old, thy mother and I.”

“Come soon,” said Mother Wolf, “little naked son of mine. For, listen, child of man, I loved thee more than ever I loved my cubs.”

“I will surely come,” said Mowgli. “And when I come it will be to lay out Shere Khan’s hide upon the Council Rock. Do not forget me! Tell them in the jungle never to forget me!”

The dawn was beginning to break when Mowgli went down the hillside alone, to meet those mysterious things that are called men.