

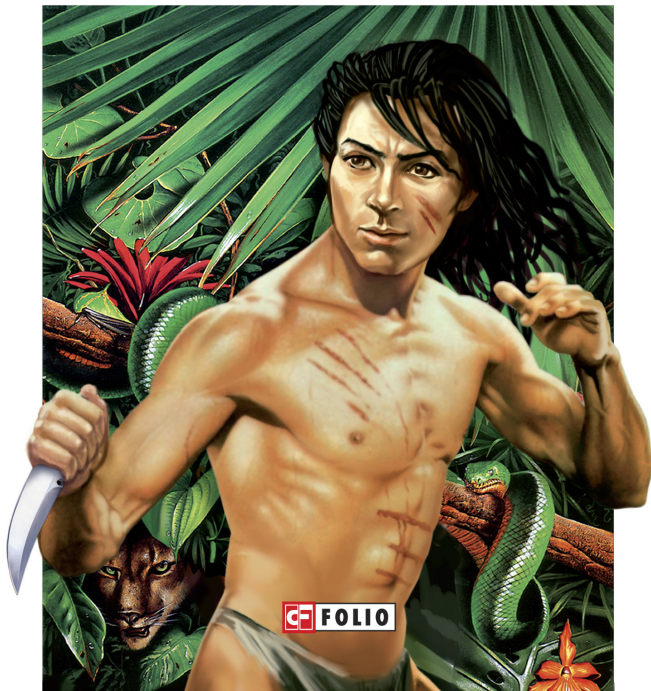
Редьярд Кіплінг

МАУГЛІ

ВИДАННЯ З ПАРАЛЕЛЬНИМ ТЕКСТОМ

Rudyard Kipling

MOWGLI



 FOLIO

Редьярд Кіплінг

Мауглі = Mowgli

Серія «Видання з паралельним текстом»

http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=45163818

Мауглі. Mowgli:

Аннотація

Редьярд Кіплінг (1865—1936) – відомий англійський письменник і поет, лауреат Нобелівської премії з літератури. Тривалий час він жив в Індії, захоплювався індійськими сказаннями і переказами, вивчав різні індійські мови.

Найвідоміший з його творів «Книга Джунглів» розповідає про пригоди маленького хлопчика Мауглі, який живе в джунглях серед диких тварин. Коли Мауглі випадково потрапляє в саме серце вовчої зграї Сіоні, в джунглях починають відбуватися неймовірні події...

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Редьярд Кіплінг Мауглі. Mowgli

З «Першої книги Джунглів». From 'The Jungle Book'

Mowgli's Brothers

*Now Chil the Kite brings home the night
That Mang the Bat sets free —
The herds are shut in byre and hut,
For loosed till dawn are we.
This is the hour of pride and power,
Talon and tush and claw.
Oh, hear the call! – Good hunting all
That keep the Jungle Law!*

Night Song in the Jungle

It was seven o'clock of a very warm evening in the Seeonee 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 grey 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.’ and he was going to spring downhill 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 the noble children, that they may never forget the hungry in this world.’

It was the jackal – Tabaqui, the Dish-licker – and 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, and 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, but they call it *dewanee* — the madness – and 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 the 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; and it pleased him to see Mother and Father Wolf look uncomfortable.

Tabaqui sat still, rejoicing in the mischief that he had made: 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 alight. 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 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, snarly, 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 with that noise! Does he think that our buck are like his fat Waingunga bullocks?'

'*Hsh!* 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 quarter of the compass. It was the noise that bewilders woodcutters and gypsies sleeping in the open, and makes them run sometimes 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 tanks 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 defenceless 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 camp-fire, and 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 atom 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, push an egg 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. And 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 honour,' said Father Wolf, but his eyes were very angry. 'What does Shere Khan need?'

'My quarry. 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 camp-fire, 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! What talk is this of choosing? By the bull that I killed, am I to stand nosing into your dog's den for my fair dues? 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 answer. The man's cub is mine, Lungri – mine to me! He shall not be killed. He shall live to run with the Pack and to hunt with the Pack; and in the end, look you, hunter of little naked cub – frog-eater – fish-killer – he shall hunt *thee*! Now get hence, or by the Sambhur that I killed (*I eat no starved cattle*), back thou goest to thy mother, burned beast of the Jungle, lamer than ever thou earnest into the world! Go!'

Father Wolf looked on amazed. He had almost forgotten the days when he won Mother Wolf in fair fight from five other wolves, when she ran in the Pack and was not called The Demon

for compliment's sake. 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 the ground, and would fight to the death. So he backed out of the cave-mouth growling, and when he was clear he shouted:

‘Each dog barks in his own yard! 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 this much truth. The cub must be shown to the Pack. Wilt 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 would have 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 wilt 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 where the murderer can be found; and if you think 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 grey Lone Wolf who led all the Pack by strength and cunning, lay out at full length on his rock, and below him sat forty or more wolves of every size and colour, from badger-coloured 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 twice into a wolf-trap 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 centre 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 centre, 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 the Free People to do with the orders of any save 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 the only other creature who is allowed at the Pack Council – Baloo, 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 – rose up on his hindquarters and grunted.

‘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 have no gift of 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 killing matter 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 leave.'

'Speak then,' cried twenty voices.

'To kill a naked cub is 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. Is it difficult?"

There was a clamour of scores of voices, saying: 'What matter? 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 still in the night, for he was very angry that Mowgli had not been handed over to him.

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

'It was well done,' 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 for ever,' 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 Seeonee Wolf Pack at 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 all 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 business man. 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, and that Bagheera showed him how to do. Bagheera would lie out on a branch and call, 'Come along, Little Brother,' and at first Mowgli would cling like the sloth, but afterward he would fling himself through the branches almost as boldly as the grey 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 burrs in their coats. He would go down the hillside into the cultivated lands by 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. He loved better than anything else to go with Bagheera into the dark warm heart of the forest, to sleep all through the drowsy day, and at night to 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 things, 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 canst kill everything that thou art strong enough to kill; but for the sake 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 does not know that he is learning any lessons, and who has nothing in the world to think of except things to eat.

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 for scraps, a thing that Akela would never have allowed if he had dared to push his authority to the proper bounds. Then Shere Khan would flatter them 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, knew something of this, and once or twice he told Mowgli in so many words that Shere Khan would kill him some day; and 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 he said to Mowgli when they were deep in the Jungle, 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 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 would have told thee of something that concerned thee closely. Open those eyes, Little Brother. Shere Khan dare not kill thee in the Jungle; but remember, Akela is very old, and soon the day comes when he cannot kill his buck, and then he will be leader no more. Many of the wolves that looked thee over when thou wast brought to the council first 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 wilt 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,’ said he, ‘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 wast 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 came 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 the Jungle fear Bagheera – all except Mowgli.'

'Oh, *thou* art a man's cub,' said the Black Panther, very tenderly; 'and even 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; and he frowned under his heavy black eyebrows.

'What is the Law of the Jungle? Strike first and then give tongue. 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 costs him more 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 thou 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 mayest 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, only 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.'

'There speaks the 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 round 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 Shere Khan full tale for this, and it may be 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 was a blacker hunting than that frog-hunt of thine ten years ago!’

Mowgli was far and far through the forest, running hard, and his heart was hot in him. He came to the cave as the evening mist rose, and drew 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 of Shere Khan,’ he called back. ‘I hunt among the ploughed fields tonight,’ and he plunged downward through the bushes, to the stream at the bottom of the valley. There he checked, for he heard the yell of the Pack hunting, heard the bellow of a hunted sambhur, 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 sambhur knocked him over with his fore-foot.

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 truth,’ he panted, as he nestled down in some cattle-fodder by the window of a hut. ‘Tomorrow is one 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 husbandman’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 byre.

‘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. Half-way 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 ploughed 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 told him rudely enough that he was wanted at the Council Rock, he laughed till 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 openly, being flattered. 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,’ whispered Bagheera. ‘Say so. He is a dog’s son. 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.

‘By whom?’ 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, as a rule.

Akela raised his old head wearily:

'Free People, and ye too, jackals of Shere Khan, for many seasons I have led ye to and from the kill, and in all my time not one has been trapped or maimed. Now I have missed my kill. Ye know how that plot was made. 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?’ clamoured 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 honour 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?’ 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 of others I have heard that, under Shere Khan’s teaching, ye go by dark night and snatch children from the villager’s doorstep. Therefore I know ye to be cowards, and it is to cowards I speak. It is certain that I must die, and my life is of no worth, or I would offer that in the man cub’s place. But for the sake of the honour 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. More I cannot do; but if ye will, 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 the business is in thy hands,’ 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, wolf-like, the wolves had never told him how they hated him. ‘Listen, you!’ he cried. ‘There is no need for this dog’s 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 do not call ye my brothers any more, but *sag* [dogs], as a man should. 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, dogs, 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,’ said Bagheera, in an undertone. ‘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 piteous 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 dogs. I go from you to my own people – if they be 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 all but your brother in 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 and the Pack. But here 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, dog!’ 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. Thus and thus, then, do we beat dogs when we are men. Stir a whisker, Lungri, and I ram the Red Flower down thy gullet!’ 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 next I come to the Council Rock, as a man should come, it will be with Shere Khan’s hide on my head. For the rest, Akela goes 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, instead of dogs whom I drive out – thus! 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 part. 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. Those 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 shut indeed to thee henceforward. Let them fall, Mowgli. They are only tears.’ So Mowgli sat and cried as though his heart would break; and he had never cried in all his life before.

‘Now,’ he said, ‘I will go to men. But first I must say farewell to my mother.’ and 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 crop-lands to play with thee by night.’

‘Come soon!’ said Father Wolf. ‘Oh, wise little frog, come again soon; for we be 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.

Hunting Song of the Seeonee Pack

As the dawn was breaking the Sambhur belled
Once, twice and again!
And a doe leaped up, and a doe leaped up
From the pond in the wood where the wild deer sup.
This I, scouting alone, beheld,
Once, twice and again!

As the dawn was breaking the Sambhur belled
Once, twice and again!
And a wolf stole back, and a wolf stole back
To carry the word to the waiting pack,
And we sought and we found and we bayed on his track
Once, twice and again!

As the dawn was breaking the Wolf Pack yelled
Once, twice and again!
Feet in the Jungle that leave no mark!
Eyes that can see in the dark – the dark!
Tongue – give tongue to it! Hark! Oh, hark!
Once, twice and again!

Брати Мауглі

*Ніч несе на крилах вечірній птах,
Кажан вилітає з пільми.
А людей у полоні тримає страх,
Бо вільні до ранку ми.
Наша влада – з вечора до світання,
Коли Зграя в лісі панує.
Чуєш поклик? Доброго полювання
Всім, хто Закон шанує!*

Нічна пісня Джунглів

Надвечір жаркого дня в Сіонійських горах батько-Вовк прокинувся після свого денного спочинку, почухався, позіхнув і струсонув обважнілими лапами, щоб розігнати дрімоту. Мати-Вовчиця спала, поклавши свою велику сіру голову на чотирьох вовченят, а вони вовтузилися і тихенько скиглили, і місяць заглядав у печеру, де жила вовча родина.

– Еге! – сказав батько-Вовк. – Час іти на полювання.

Він хотів було податися з гори у видолинок, аж раптом низькоросла тінь з кошлатим хвостом кинулася на поріг і завила:

– Хай тобі щастить, о Володарю Вовків! Щастя і міцних білих зубів твоїм славним діткам. Нехай вони не забувають, що в цьому світі є голодні!

То був шакал, підлий Табакі, – усі вовки Індії зневажа-

ють Табакі за те, що він усюди нишпорить, збурює ворожнечу, розносить плітки і збирає покидь на сільському смітнику. І все ж таки вони бояться Табакі, бо він частіше з-поміж інших звірів у Джунглях хворіє на сказ, а тоді никає лісом і може вкусити кожного, хто трапиться назустріч. Навіть тигр тікає від ницого скаженого Табакі, бо сказ – це найстрашніше лихо для дикого звіра. У нас цю хворобу називають сказом, а звірі прозвали її «дівані» і тікають від неї.

– Можеш зайти і подивитися сам, – похмуро мовив батько-Вовк. – Немає тут ніякої поживи.

– Для вовка – так, – зігнувся Табакі. – А для такого сіромахи, як я, і обгризений маслак – розкіш. Ми, Гідур-логи – шакали, – харчами не перебираємо.

Він шмигнув у глиб печери, схопив оленячу кістку, на якій лишалося трохи м'яса, і, радий-радісінський, вдоволено захрумав.

– Дякую за частування, – сказав він, облизуючись. – Які гарні, славні діточки! Які в них великі очі! А вони ж іще такі дрібні! Та що це я кажу, – мені слід пам'ятати, що королівські діти змалечку вже як дорослі.

Табакі пречудово знав, що хвалити дітей уголос не годиться – бо так їх можна зурочити, – і тішився, бачачи, як знітилися їхні батько й мати.

Він трохи помовчав, зловтішаючись, що вчинив капость, а потім додав:

– Шер-Хан, Великий Тигр, змінив місце ловів. Цього мі-

сяця він полюватиме тут, у горах. Отак він сказав.

Шер-Хан облюбував місцину за двадцять миль звідси, біля річки Вайнганги.

– За яким правом? – гримнув батько-Вовк. – Закон Джунглів забороняє міняти місце ловів без попередження! Він розполохає здобич на багато миль довкола, і що мені робити? Мушу нині полювати за двох.

– Недаремно рідна мати назвала його Лангрі – Кульгавий, – презирливо докинула мати-Вовчиця. – Він змалку кульгає на одну ногу, от і вистежує тільки домашню худобу. Селяни на берегах Вайнганги його ненавидять, а тепер він утік сюди і лихо веде за собою: люди полюватимуть за ним у хаші, зловити не зможуть, а нам із дітьми куди подітися, коли вони підпалять траву? Уклінна дяка Шер-Хану!

– То що – передати йому вашу подяку? – прискалив око Табакі.

– Геть, паскудо! – рикнув батько-Вовк. – Швендяй зі своїм паном! Ти сьогодні вже своє зробив.

– Ну що ж, піду, – хихикнув Табакі. – Згодом Шер-Хан і сам подасть голос. Он він – у долині. Я міг би й не трудити ноги, щоб сповістити про це.

Батько-Вовк прислухався: унизу, в долині при невеликій річці, пролунало люте й злісне ревіння тигра, котрий упустив здобич і з досади казився на всю околицю.

– От недоріка! – мовив батько-Вовк. – Зчинити галас на нічних ловах! Чи він не може відрізнити наших оленів від

товстих буйволів з Вайнганги?

– Цить! Він вистежує не буйвола і не оленя, – озвалася мати-Вовчиця. – Він полює на людину.

Ревіння змінилося глухим риком, що лунав немовби звідусіль. Це був той рик, що до смерті лякає дроворубів і селян, коли вони ночують у лісі, і часом змушує їх бігти просто до тигра в пазурі.

– Кажеш, на людину! – батько-Вовк вишкірив свої білі зуби. – Невже йому мало усілякої дрібноти та жаб у болоті, що його потягло на людське м'ясо, та ще й на наших угіддях?

Закон Джунглів, який завжди передбачливий, дозволяє звірам вистежувати людей лише тоді, коли вони навчають свою малечу полювати на здобич. Але навіть тоді звір не може вбити людину в тих краях, що їх обжила зграя чи його сім'я. Після загибелі людини з'являються білі люди на слонах, з рушницями і юрми темношкірих людей з гонгами та смолоскипами; і тоді усім звірам у Джунглях буде скрутно. А ще звірі знають, що людина – найбільш слабке та безпорадне створіння з-поміж усіх, і поважному мисливцю не годиться її чіпати. Вони кажуть – і це правда, – що в людожерів лісіє хутро і випадають зуби.

Ричання стало гучнішим і завершилося оглушливим «А-р-р!» – так тигр сповіщає, що готовий до нападу.

Потім почулося озвіріле виття, не таке, як зазвичай у тигра.

– Спіймав облизня, – мовила мати-Вовчиця. – Ти диви!

Батько-Вовк майнув на розвідини і неподалік від печери почув розлючений рик Шер-Хана, що шарудів у заростях.

– Цей дурило обпік собі лапи! З дурного розуму стрибонув у вогнище дроворуба! – пхикнув батько-Вовк. – А за ним і Табакі.

– Хтось лізе сюди, – сказала мати-Вовчиця, нашорошивши одне вухо. – Пильнуй.

У заростях почувся тихий шурхіт, і батько-Вовк присів на задні лапи, готуючись до стрибка. І якби хтось цієї миті подивився на нього, то побачив би найбільше диво – як вовк завмер посеред стрибка. Він кинувся наперед, іще не бачачи, на що кидається, і раптом укляк на місці. Тобто він підстрибнув на чотири-п'ять футів угору і грудкою впав на землю.

– Людина! – прогарчав він. – Людське дитинча! Поглянь!

Перед ним, схопившись за нахилену до землі гілку, стояв голісінький смаглявий малюк, що ледь навчився ходити, – малесенька, ніжна жива грудочка. Такої дитини ще ніколи зроду ніхто не бачив уночі та ще й біля вовчого лігва. Малюк подивився в очі батькові-Вовку і засміявся.

– Ти диви, людське дитинча! – подивовано сказала мати-Вовчиця. – Я їх ще ніколи не бачила. Ану принеси його сюди.

Вовк зазвичай носить своїх вовченят у пащі, тому він може, коли треба, взяти в зуби яйце і не розчавити його; і хоча зуби батька-Вовка ухопили за спину малюка, коли він поклав

дитину між вовчєнятами, на шкірі не лишилося й слїду.

– Яке ж воно малєсєньке! Голе, а таке хоробре! – лагідно мовила мати-Вовчиця. (Малий пробурався між вовчєнятами ближче до її теплогo підчерев'я.) – О, та ще й узався смоктати разом з усіма! То он яке воно, людське дитя! Яка б то вовчиця могла похвалитися, що має серед своєї малечі людську дитину?

– Я чув, таке колись бувало, тільки не в нашій Зграї і не за моєї пам'яті, – сказав батько-Вовк. – Шерсті на ньому немає, і я міг би його вбити одним махом. Та ба – він мене не боїться!

При вході в печеру стало темно – велика кута́ста голова і шия Шер-Хана затулили отвір. За ним верещав Табакі:

– Пане, пане, він побіг сюди!

– О, яка честь – до нас навідався Шер-Хан! – мовив батько-Вовк, грізно зблиснувши очима. – Чого бажає Шер-Хан?

– Віддай мою здобич! Людський вилупок сховався тут, – оголив ікла Шер-Хан. – Його батьки втекли. Віддайте дитину мені.

Шер-Хан, як і казав батько-Вовк, стрибнув через вогнище дроворуба, ненароком обпік лапи і розлютився. Проте батько-Вовк дуже добре знав, що вхід до печери для тигра завузький. У тому місці, де Шер-Хан стояв зараз, він не зміг би навіть ворухнути лапою. Йому було ніде розвернутись, як небораці, котрий надумав битись у діжці.

– Вовки – вільний народ, – сказав батько-Вовк. – Вони

слухаються тільки свого ватажка, а не якогось там смугастого людожера. Людська дитина належить нам. Якщо захочемо, то самі її вб'ємо.

– «Захочемо!» А мені що з того? Клянуся буйволом, якого я вполював, я не буду стовбичити біля вашого смердючого кубла і випрохувати те, що і так моє за правом! Це кажу я, Шер-Хан!

Від ревіння тигра відлунила печера. Мати-Вовчиця, відкинувши від себе вовчενят, рвонулася вперед, і її очі, що ссайнули у п'їтмі двома зеленими вогниками, стрілися з червонястими очима Шер-Хана.

– А я, Ракша (Чортиця), кажу тобі: людське дитинча моє, Лангрі, і лишиться в мене! Ніхто його не вб'є. Воно житиме і полюватиме у Зграї, разом з усіма! Гей, ти, мисливцю на голих дітлахів, рибожер, жаб'ячий глитай, – настане час, і він вистежить тебе! А тепер геть звідси – бо, клянуся оленем, якого я вполювала (а я не вживаю стерва), ти полетиш до дідька, кульгаючи на всі чотири лапи, обсмалений лісовий покидьок! Геть звідси!

Батько-Вовк дивився на неї із захватом. Він уже призабув ті часи, коли змагався за свою Вовчицю в чесному бою з п'ятьма вовками, – ті часи, коли вона полювала у Зграї і даремно мала прізвисько Чортиця. Шер-Хан не боявся батька-Вовка, та з Вовчицею стати на герць не посмів: знав, що перевага на її боці й вона битиметься не на життя, а на смерть. Він із гарчанням позадкував з печери і, опинившись

ззовні, ревнув:

– У своєму кублі і собака гавкає! Заждіть, що скаже Зграя про цього приблуду – людського покидька! Дитина моя, і рано чи пізно я її зжеру, довгохвості злодюги!

Мати Вовчиця задихано впала ницьма біля своїх вовчєнят, і батько-Вовк похмуро мовив до неї:

– Цього разу Шер-Хан казав слухне: малого треба показати Зграї. Ти намислила лишити його собі, Мати?

– Лишити його собі? – важко дихаючи, відлунила Вовчиця. – Та воно ж само прийшло до нас, голе-голісіньке, темної ночі, – і все ж таки не побоялося! Поглянь, воно уже відпихає одного з моїх вовчєнят! Цей кульгавий людожер убив би його і втік на Вайнгангу, а люди з помсти зруйнували б наше лігво. Лишити його собі? Так, я його лишаю. Ану, лежи тихо, жабєня! О, Мауглі – так я й називатиму тебе, Жабєня Мауглі, – настане час, і ти вистежиш Шер-Хана, як він вистєжував тебе.

– А що скаже Зграя? – спитав батько-Вовк.

У Законі Джунглів чітко сказано, що кожен вовк, завівши власну сім'ю, може покинути Зграю. Та коли його вовчєнята трохи підростуть, він мусить привести їх на Раду Зграї, яка збирається щоразу, коли місяць уповні, і показати їх усім вовам. Потім вовчєнята можуть гуляти де їм заманеться, і поки вони не вполюють свого першого оленя, нікому з дорослих вовків не дозволяється робити шкоди вовчєнятї. Якщо вбивцю буде спіймано, його скарають на смерть. Поміркуй

трохи, і ти збагнеш, що так воно й має бути.

Батько-Вовк чекав, поки його діти підросли і стали на ноги, і ось одної ночі, коли збиралася Зграя, повів вовченят, Мауглі і Вовчицю на Скелю Ради. То був гостроверхий пагорб, усипаний великим камінням, за яким могли б сховатись і сто вовків. Акела, здоровезний сірий вовк-одинак, обраний ватажком Зграї за свою силу та кмітливість, розлігся на скелі. Унизу сиділо більше сорока вовків різного віку та масті – від сивих, мов борсуки, старих одчайдухів, кожен сам-один міг здолати буйвола, до чорних трирічних недолітків, які потай гадали, буцімто й їм це також під силу. Вовк-одинак був їхнім ватажком уже близько року. Змолоду він двічі потрапляв у вовчу пастку. Якось люди жорстоко побили його і покинули, гадаючи, що він мертвий; тож із людськими звичаями він добре був обізнаний.

На Скелі Ради майже ніхто не розмовляв. Вовченята бавилися посередині, а довкруг сиділи їхні батьки. Подеколи хтось із дорослих вовків підводився, неквапно ступав до якогось вовченяти, пильно дивився на нього і тихо повертався на своє місце. Часом мати підганяла своє вовченя до смуги місячного сяйва, щоб його було видніше. Акела закликав з вершини:

– Ви знаєте Закон, ви знаєте Закон! Дивіться ж, гей, вовки!

І турботливі матері покvapливо відгукнулись:

– Придивляйтеся добре, гей, вовки!

Нарешті – мати-Вовчиця нашорошилася, бо черга підійшла до них, – батько-Вовк виштовхнув на середину кола Жабеня Мауглі. Гепнувшись додолу, Мауглі засміявся і почав бавитись камінцями, що виблискували в місячному світлі.

Акела жодного разу не підвів голови, що лежала на передніх лапах, лише час від часу скавулів:

– Дивіться ж, гей, вовки!

За скелею вчулося приглушене гарчання Шер-Хана:

– Дитина моя. Віддайте її мені! Нащо Вільному Народу людське дитя?

Акела навіть вухом не повів. Він лише мовив:

– Дивіться ж, о Вовки! Нащо Вільному Народу коритися чужій волі? Дивіться добре!

Вовки загарчали усі разом, і один з чотирирічних недоростків у відповідь Акелі повторив слова Шер-Хана:

– Нащо Вільному Народові здався підкидьок?

Закони Джунглів свідчать, що коли зчиниться суперечка про те, чи можна прийняти когось до Зграї, то за нього мають заступитись хоча б двоє вовків, окрім батька й матері.

– Хто за цю дитину? – спитав Акела. – Хто з Вільного Народу прохає слова?

Ніхто не відповів, і мати-Вовчиця приготувалася до бою, який міг бути для неї останнім.

І цієї миті звівся на задні лапи і загарчав звір іншої породи, присутній на Раді Зграї, – Балу, вайлуватий бурий ведмідь, який навчав вовчат Законів Джунглів, він блукав,

де хотів, бо споживав самі лише горіхи, мед та коріння.

– Людська дитина? Чом би й ні? – сказав він. – Я за дитину. Вона нікому не зашкодить. Я не вмію красно говорити, та кажу правду. Нехай малий бігає у Зграї. Візьмемо його вкупі з іншими. Я сам його навчатиму.

– Нам потрібен іще хтось, – мовив Акела. – Балу своє слово сказав, а він учитель наших дітей. Хто ще має щось до слова, окрім Балу?

На коло лягла чорна тінь. То була пантера Багіра, чорнюща, мов чорнило, але подекуди з цятками, котрі, як в усіх пантер, прозирали на її шкірі, наче світлий візерунок на дорогій тканині. Усі в Джунглях знали Багіру, і ніхто б не захотів ворогувати з нею, бо вона була хитра, як Табакі, хоробра, як дикий буйвол, і люта, як поранений слон. Та голос у неї був солодкий, мов дикий мед, а хутро м'яке, як шовк.

– О Акело, і ти, Вільний Народе, – замуркотіла вона, – я не маю жодних прав на вашій нараді, але в Законі Джунглів сказано, що коли зайде суперечка за когось із дитинчат, то життя цього дитинчати можна викупити. І в Законі не сказано, кому можна і кому не можна платити викуп. Адже так?

– Справді так! – заявили завжди голодні молоді вовки. – Послухаймо Багіру! За дитину можна взяти викуп. Так каже Закон.

– Я знаю, що не маю права говорити тут, отож прошу вашого дозволу.

– Говори! – загукали двадцяттеро голосів разом.

– Не слід убивати голошкірого малюка. До того ж, він стане вам за чудову іграшку, коли трохи підросте. Балу за нього заступився. А я додам до слів Балу ще й жирного буйвола, щойно впольованого за півмилі звідси, якщо ви приймете людську дитину до Зграї, як то велить Закон. Хіба вже це так обтяжливо?

Тут зчинився галас – десятки голосів загукали разом:

– Авжеж! Він однаково помре під час зимових дощів. Або його спалить сонце. Що нам може вдіяти голе жабеня? Нехай собі бігає у Зграї. То де ж буйвіл, Багіро? Ми приймаємо дитину!

І потім пролунав глухий голос Акелі:

– Дивіться добре, о Вовки, дивіться добре!

А Мауглі сидів собі й безжурно бавився камінцями і навіть не зважав, що вовки по черзі підходили та оглядали його. Нарешті усі подалися зі скелі за вбитим буйволом, і лишилися тільки Акела, Багіра, Балу і сім'я Жабеняти Мауглі. Шер-Хан усе ще нетямився в кущах – він страшенно розлютився, що Мауглі не віддали йому.

– Нумо, реви собі скільки заманеться! – промурчала Багіра у вуса. – Це Жабеня колись ще змусить тебе заспівати іншої – або я зовсім не розуміюся на людях.

– Ми вчинили добре! – сказав Акела. – Люди і їхні діти дуже кмітливі. Колись він зможе нам допомогти.

– Так, допомогти в тяжкі часи, бо ніхто не може бути ватажком Зграї вічно, – мовила Багіра.

Акела не відповів нічого. Він думав про ті лихі часи, які настають для кожного ватажка Зграї, коли він втрачає силу. Вовки вбивають його, зовсім охлялого, і новий ватажок заступає його місце, щоб колись теж бути вбитим.

– Візьми дитину, – сказав він батькові-Вовку, – і виховай її, як належить виховувати синів Вільного Народу.

Так Жабеня Мауглі прийняли до Сіонійської Зграї – за буйвола і за слово Балугу.

А тепер ви маєте проминути років десять чи одинадцять і просто уявити собі дивовижне життя, що очікувало Мауглі серед вовків, бо про всі його пригоди можна було б написати чимало книжок. Він ріс разом із вовчєнятами, хоча вони, звісно, стали зрілими вовками набагато раніше, ніж він став дорослим хлопцем, і батько-Вовк навчав його всьому, що знав сам, та ще й пояснював усе, що відбувалося довкола. І тому шурхіт кожної стеблинки у траві – і кожен подих ласкавого нічного леготу, і крик сови над головою, і лопотіння кажана, що зачепився кігтем за гілку і плюскіт дрібної риби у ставку – були для нього не менш важливі, ніж ділові справи для власника великої контори. Коли він не вчився, то дрімав на сонечку, підживлювався чимось і засинав знову. Коли він хотів помитись чи трохи освіжитись, він купався у лісових озерах; коли праглося скуштувати меду (він дізнався від Балуги, що мед та горіхи смакують не гірше від сирого м'яса), він залазив на дерево – Багіра навчила його це робити. Бувало, вона вмоється на гілці і гукає:

– Ану, ходи-но сюди, малий братику!

Спершу Мауглі просто чіплявся за гілки, як лінивець (є таке звірятко), а потім наловчився сміливо стрибати з однієї гілки на іншу, як мавпеня. На Скелі Ради, під час зборів Зграї, для нього теж знаходилося місце. Там він помітив, що жоден з вовків не може витримати його прискіпливого погляду, і тоді він для розваги став пильно вдивлятися у вовків. Часом йому доводилося витягати скіпки з лап своїх друзів, бо вовкам дуже дошкуляють реп'яхи та колючки. Вночі він спускався з пагорбів на зорані поля і роздивлявся на людей у сільських хатинах, але довіри до них не мав. Багіра якось показала йому скриньку із засувкою, так ретельно сховану в заростях, що Мауглі ледь не втрапив до неї, і сказала, що це пастка. Понад усе він любив забиратися з Багірою в самісіньку гущавину лісу, спати там весь день, а вночі стежити, як Багіра іде на лови. Вона полювала будь-яку дичину, коли була голодна. Мауглі робив так само – за одним винятком. Та коли він трохи підріс і почав дещо розуміти, Багіра наказала йому не чіпати домашню худобу, бо за нього сплатили викуп Зграї, убивши буйвола.

– Усе, що є в Джунглях, – твоє, – казала Багіра. – Можеш вполювати будь-яку здобич, яка тобі під силу. Але заради того буйвола, котрий послугував викупом, ти не повинен чіпати домашню худобу – ні молоду, ні стару. Такий Закон Джунглів.

І Мауглі запам'ятав це раз і назавжди.

Отак він зростав – сильним, яким і мусить бути хлопець, що вивчає все потрібне, навіть не знаючи, що навчається, і думає лише про те, як здобути їжу.

Якось мати-Вовчиця сказала йому, що Шер-Ханові не можна вірити і що колись він повинен буде вбити Шер-Хана. Вовчєня ніколи б не забуло сказаного, а Мауглі забув – адже він був усього лише малюком, хоч і вважав себе вовком і називав би себе так, якби вмів розмовляти людською мовою.

Шер-Хан весь час лишався небезпечним для нього, бо Акєла з віком ставав немічним, а кульгавий тигр уже встиг заприятелювати з усіма молодими вовками Зграї. Вони ходили за ним слідом і підбирали за ним недоїдки. Акєла ні-защо не дозволив би цього, якби мав таку владу, як раніше. А Шер-Хан усе нахвалював вовчєнят і не йняв віри, як це такі хоробрі молоді мисливці слухаються старого слабкого вовка і людського покидька. «Я чув, – казав Шер-Хан, – що на Раді ви і в очі йому дивитись не смієте». І молоді вовки сердито гарчали та шкірили зуби у відповідь.

Багіра все чула і бачила, до того ж їй було ще багато чого відомо; і кілька разів вона прямо казала Мауглі, що колись Шер-Хан його вб'є. Та Мауглі тільки сміявся:

– У мене є Зграя і ти. Та й Балу, хоч який лінивий, за мене стане горою. Чого ж мені боятися?

Якогось жаркого дня Багірі спало на думку дещо. Може, вона щось від когось почула, може, їй сказав про це дикобраз Сахі, – хай там як, та коли вони з Мауглі зайшли в гущавину

лісу і хлопець розлігся, вмоствоивши голову на лискучий чорній спині пантери, вона сказала йому:

– Малий Братику, ти не забув, як я казала тобі, що Шер-Хан – твій ворог?

– Авжеж, ти це повторювала стільки разів, скільки горіхів на цій пальмі, – відповів Мауглі (звісно, рахувати він не вмів). – Ну то й що? Мені страх як хочеться спати, Багіро. А Шер-Хан – то просто довгий хвіст і дурний оглушливий голос, як у павича Мора.

– Не час зараз спати! Це знає Балу, і я теж, і вся Зграя знає про це, найдурніший олень, і той знає! І Табакі казав те саме.

– Справді! – пхикнув Мауглі. – Табакі недавно прибiг до мене і наговорив усіляких дурниць, мовляв, що я голе цуцення і не здатен навіть вирити земляний горіх. Ну то я схопив його за хвіст і стукнув разів зо два об пальму, щоб навчився бути чемним.

– Ти зробив дурницю. Табакі хоч і пліткар, та може сказати багато такого, що тебе стосується. Розплющ очі, Малий Братику! Шер-Хан поки що не сміє зачіпати тебе у Джунглях, та не забувай, що Акела дуже старий. Ще трохи – і настане день, коли він не зможе вполювати буйвола, і тоді він більше не буде ватажком зграї. Ті вовки, що бачили тебе на Скелі Ради, теж постаріли, а молодих кульгавий тигр намовляє, що людській дитині не місце у вовчій зграї. А ти скоро станеш людиною.

– А що таке людина? Хіба їй не можна бігати зі своїми

братами? – спитав Мауглі. – Я народився у Джунглях, я жив за Законом Джунглів, і у Зграї нема такого вовка, якому б я не витягав колючок із лап. Усі вони мої брати!

Багіра випросталася на повен зріст і примружила очі.

– Малий Братику, – муркнула вона, – торкнися мене отут під щелепою.

Мауглі простяг свою міцну смагляву руку і на шиї Багіри під ніжним хутром намацав дужі м'язи і невеличку залисинку.

– Ніхто у Джунглях не знає, що я, Багіра, маю такий знак – слід від нашійника. Але я народилася серед людей, Малий Братику, і з-поміж людей вмерла моя мати – у королівському звіринці, в Удайпурі. Ось чому я сплатила за тебе викуп на Раді, коли ти був ще голим малюком. Так, я теж народилася серед людей. Змалку я не бачила джунглів. Мене годували в залізній клітці із залізної миски, та якось уночі я відчула, що я – Багіра, пантера, а не людська іграшка. Одним ударом лапи я зламала дурний замок і втекла. Оскільки я знаю людські звичаї, у Джунглях мене бояться більше від Шер-Хана. Хіба ж ні?

– Авжеж, – сказав Мауглі, – усі в Джунглях бояться Багіри, усі, окрім Мауглі.

– Ох ти ж, людське дитинчатко, – лагідно пригорнула його пантера. – Як я колись повернулася до своїх Джунглів, так і ти мусиш зрештою повернутися до людей, до своїх братів – якщо тебе не вб'ють на Раді.

– Навіщо комусь мене вбивати? – спитав Мауглі.

– Поглянь-но на мене, – мовила Багіра, і Мауглі пильно подивився їй в очі.

Велика пантера не витримала його погляду і відвернулася.

– Ось навіщо, – сказала вона і поворушила лапою листя. – Навіть я не можу дивитися тобі в очі, а я ж народилася серед людей і люблю тебе, Малий Братику. А хтось ненавидить тебе за те, що не може витримати твого погляду, за те, що ти розумний, за те, що ти витягаєш їм колючки з лап, за те, що ти людина.

– Я всього цього не знав, – похмуро відповів Мауглі і насупив густі чорні бровенята.

– А що велить Закон Джунглів? Спершу вдар, а тоді озивайся. Вони впізнають у тобі людину, бо ти необачний. Тож будь розсудливим! Серце підказує мені, що коли Акела схибить на найближчих ловах – а йому стає все важче полювати, – вовки більше не слухатимуться ні його, ні тебе. Вони зберуться на Скелі Ради, та ще й весь Народ Джунглів, і тоді... тоді... Ні, я знаю, що робити! – скрикнула Багіра і схопилася з місця. – Біжи швидше вниз, у долину, де людські хати, і візьми там Червону Квітку. Тоді в тебе буде заступник дужчий, ніж я, і Балу, і ті вовки Зграї, що тебе люблять. Візьми Червону Квітку!

Так Багіра називала вогонь, бо жоден звір у Джунглях не вимовить його справжню назву. Звірі страшенно бояться вогню і вигадують будь-яке назвисько, аби лише не сказати

істинного.

– Червону Квітку? – сказав Мауглі. – Вона виростає побіля хат надвечір. Я її здобуду.

– Оце таки людська дитина! – мовила Багіра з гордістю. – Не забудь, вона росте в малих горщиках. Дістань її чимшвидше і тримай під рукою, поки не знадобиться.

– Гаразд! – сказав Мауглі. – Я піду. А ти певна, моя Багіро, – і він обняв її за шию і зазирнув у великі очі пантери, – ти певна, що все це лихо – від Шер-Хана?

– Атож, клянуся зламаним замком, що звільнив мене, Малий Братику!

– Тоді клянуся буйволом, що був мені викупом, я віддячу Шер-Ханові сповна, а може, й із горою, – сказав Мауглі і побіг геть.

– Ось така людина! От і проглянуло людське, – мовила Багіра, лягаючи знову. – Ох, Шер-Хане, у лиху годину ти надумався полювати на Жабеня багато років тому!

А Мауглі був уже далеко звідси. Він мчав стрімголов, і серце в нього калатало. Він добіг до печери вже у вечірньому тумані, спинився, щоб трошки віддихатись, і поглянув униз, у долину. Вовчент не було вдома, але мати-Вовчиця, ледве зачувши подих свого Жабеняти, зрозуміла, що він чимось схвилюваний.

– Що трапилось, синку? – спитала вона.

– Просто дурні балачки Шер-Хана, – відповів він. – Сьогодні я полюватиму на людській землі.

І він подався через кущі вниз, до річки у видолинку, та враз спинився, почувши виття Зграї на ловах. Почув він і ревіння зацькованого оленя, і його тяжке дихання, коли олень приготувався боронитись. Потім долинуло злісне гарчання молодих вовків.

– Акело! Акело! Нехай вовк-одинак покаже свою силу! Пропустіть ватажка Зграї! Стрибай, Акело!

Мабуть, вовк-одинак стрибнув і схибив, бо Мауглі почув клацання його зубів, а потім – коротке вищання, коли олень збив Акелу з ніг ударом копита.

Мауглі не став чекати і рвонувся вперед. За мить він добіг до зораних полів поблизу села, а виття вдалині помалу стихло.

– Багіра казала правду, – прошепотів він і захекано влігся на купу трави під вікном хатини. – Завтрашній день буде вирішальним – і для мене, і для Акели.

Потім припав обличчям до вікна і задивився на вогонь у печі. Він бачив, як сільська жінка встала вночі і підкинула у вогонь якісь чорні камінці, і коли розвиднілося і над землею заklubочив вогкий білий туман, він побачив, як малий хлопець узяв горщик, обплетений лозою і вимазаний глиною зсередини, наповнив його приском із печі і, загорнувши у ковдру, пішов з ним до кошари.

– Оце і все? – мовив Мауглі. – Ну, коли дитина це вміє, то мені нема чого боятись.

Він завернув за ріг назустріч малому, вихопив горщик у

нього з рук і вмить зник у тумані, а хлопець заплакав з переляку.

— Люди дуже схожі на мене, — сказав Мауглі, роздмухуючи жар, як то робила жінка. — Якщо я оце не підгодую, то воно помре.

І Мауглі накидав на червоні жарини хмизу та сухої кори. На півдорозі до гори він зустрів Багіру. Ранкова роса блищала на її шкурі, мов місячне сяйво.

— Акела схибив, — сказала пантера. — Вони б убили його ще вночі, але їм потрібен ти. Вони шукали тебе на пагорбі.

— Я був на зораному полі. Я готовий. Поглянь. — І Мауглі підняв над головою горщик із жаром.

— Чудово! Слухай, я бачила, як люди тицяють туди суху гілку, і на її кінці палає Червона Квітка. Ти не боїшся?

— Ні! Чого мені боятись? Я пам'ятаю — якщо це не сон, — що коли іще не був вовком, часто лежав біля Червоної Світки, і мені було так тепло і хороше...

Увесь день Мауглі просидів у печері. Він сидів біля горщика з жаром і тицяв досередини сухе галуззя, щоб побачити, що з того вийде. Врешті-решт він знайшов потрібну гілку, і ввечері, коли Табакі підбіг до печери і дуже грубо гавкнув, що Мауглі треба йти на Склею Ради, він засміявся так знущально, що Табакі втік. І тоді Мауглі, так само сміючись, рушив до Склі Ради.

Акела, вовк-одинак, лежав біля свого виступу на знак того, що місце ватажка тепер вільне, а Шер-Хан зі своїми під-

гавкувачами походжав туди-сюди, і вигляд у нього був дуже вдоволений. Багіра лягла поруч із Мауглі, а він тримав між колін горщик із жаром. Коли всі зібралися, Шер-Хан виступив наперед. Він ніколи б не посмів так зробити, якби Акела був при силі.

– Він не має права! – прошепотіла Багіра. – Не бійся і скажи. Цей сучий син злякається.

Мауглі звівся на ноги.

– Вільний Народе! – вигукнув він. – Хіба Шер-Хан – ватажок Зграї? Хіба тигр може бути нашим ватажком?

– Місце ватажка ще вільне, а мене попрохали виступити... – почав було Шер-Хан.

– Хто тебе прохав? – вигукнув Мауглі. – Хіба ми шакали, щоб плазувати перед людоджером? Зграя обере ватажка сама, а зайди тут ні до чого!

Зчинився галас. «Мовчи, людський покидьку!» «Ні, хай говорить! Він шанує наш Закон!» Зрештою старі вовки загарчали: «Хай говорить Мертвий Вовк!»

Коли ватажок Зграї схибить на полюванні, його називають Мертвим Вовком аж до смерті, яка після цього вже не забариться.

Акела поволі звів сиву голову:

– Вільний Народе і ви, шакали Шер-Хана! Я дванадцять років водив вас на лови, і за ці роки жоден з вас не втрапив у пастку і не був скалічений. А ось тепер я схибив. Ви знаєте, як це було зроблено. Знаєте, що мені назустріч випусти-

ли дужого оленя, щоб усі побачили мою слабкість. Це була хитра витівка. Ви маєте право вбити мене тут, на Скелі Рад. І тому я питаю: хто з вас підійде і вб'є вовка-одинака? За Законом Джунглів я можу вимагати, щоб ви підходили поодиноці.

Запанувала тиша. Ніхто з вовків не хотів битися з Акелою на смерть. Потім заревів Шер-Хан:

– Нащо нам цей беззубий дурень? Він усе одно здохне! А людський вилупок теж зажився на цьому світі. Вільний Народе, він спершу був моєю здобиччю. Тож віддайте його мені! Гидко дивитись – ви всі наче подуріли через нього. Він десять років паскудить у Джунглях. Віддайте його мені, інакше я завжди полюватиму тут, а вам і кістки не залишу. Оце людське поріддя, і я ненавиджу його всім серцем!

І більше половини вовків завили:

– Людина! Людина! Нащо нам людина? Хай іде геть, до своїх!

– І збурить проти нас людей по всіх селах? – ревнув Шер-Хан. – Ні, віддайте його мені! Він людина, і ніхто з нас не може витримати його погляду.

Акела знов підвів голову і мовив:

– Він їв разом з нами. Він спав разом із нами. Він заганяв для нас здобич. Він жодного разу не порушив Закон Джунглів.

– І це ще не все. Коли його приймали до Зграї, я віддала за нього буйвола. Може, буйвіл – це дрібниця, за яку не варто

битись, але честь Багіри того варта, – промурчала Багіра тихо й спокійно.

– Буйвіл, відданий десять років тому! – завила Зграя. – Що нам до кісток, які уже давно зотліли!

– Або чи до того, щоб тримати свою обіцянку? – мовила Багіра, і її білі зуби зблиснули. – Авжеж, даремно ви називаєтеся Вільним Народом!

– Жодна людська дитина не може жити з Народом Джунглів! – заревів Шер-Хан. – Віддайте його мені!

– Він ваш брат, хоч і не по крові, – повів далі Акела, – а ви хочете вбити його тут! Мабуть-таки, я зажився на світі! Дехто з вас полює на домашню худобу, інші, я чував, слідом за Шер-Ханом нишпорять вночі по селах і крадуть людських дітей. Отож я знаю, що ви боягузи, і звертаюсь зараз до боягузів. Я скоро помру, і моє життя нічого не варте, а то б я віддав його за людську дитину. Та заради честі Зграї, про яку ви встигли забути без ватажка, я даю вам слово, що не кинусь на жодного з вас, коли прийде моя остання година – якщо ви дозволите людській дитині піти до своїх. Я помру без бою. Це збереже для Зграї щонайменше три життя. Більше я нічого не можу вдіяти, та якщо хочете, врятую вас від ганьби – вбити брата, який нічим не завинив, брата, якого прийняли до Зграї за Законом Джунглів.

– Він людина!.. Людина!.. Людина!.. – завили вовки.

І більше половини стали на бік Шер-Хана, який нетерпляче бив землю хвостом.

– Тепер усе залежить від тебе, – сказала Багіра Мауглі. – Нам лишається тільки стати до бою.

Мауглі випростався на весь зріст, тримаючи в руках горщик. Потім він потягся і позіхнув на збіговисько Ради, хоч душа його палала від гніву та обурення – адже вовки, за своїм потаємним звичаєм, ніколи не виказували Мауглі своєї ненависті.

– Гей, ви! – закричав він. – Цей собачий гавкіт ні до чого! Ви вже стільки разів називали мене людиною (а з вами я б на все життя лишився вовком), що тепер я й сам відчуваю – це таки правда. І я буду називати вас не братами, а собаками, як і слід людині робити. А чого ви хочете і чого не хочете – це мені байдуже! І щоб ви це краще втямили, я, людський син, приніс сюди Червону Квітку, якої ви, собаки, боїтеся!

Він жбурнув горщик на землю, розжарені вуглини запалили сухий мох, і він зайнявся яскравим полум'ям. Уся Рада, побачивши вогонь, кинулася хто куди. Мауглі тицьнув у полум'я суху гілку, а потім замахав нею в повітрі, щоб розігнати переляканих вовків.

– Ти тепер ватаг, – прошепотіла Багіра. – Врятуй Акелу від смерті. Він завжди був твоїм другом.

Акела, суворий старий вовк, що ніколи за життя не прохав ні в кого жалю, подивився благальним поглядом на Мауглі, який стояв із гілкою, голий, із розсипаним по плечах чорним волоссям, і чорні тіні миготіли навколо нього.

– Отак! – мовив Мауглі, повільно роззирнувшись довко-

ла. – Тепер бачу, що ви собаки. Я йду від вас до мого народу – якщо це справді мій народ. Тепер мені немає вороття до Джунглів, і я мушу забути вашу мову і вашу дружбу, але я ніколи не буду таким жорстоким, як ви. Я був вам справжнім братом, хоч і не по крові, і тому обіцяю, що коли стану людиною серед людей, не зраджу вас, як ви зрадили мене. – Він копнув багаття ногою, і вгору полетіли іскри. – Між нами, вовками Зграї, не буде війни. Та перш ніж піти, я маю сплатити борг.

Мауглі ступив туди, де сидів Шер-Хан, тупо вирячившись на вогонь, і схопив його за китицю на підборідді. Багіра про всяк випадок пішла слідом.

– Гей, підлий пес! – закричав Мауглі. – Ану встань, коли з тобою говорить людина, а то обсмалю тобі шкіру!

Шер-Хан прищулив вуха до голови і заплющив очі, бо вогняна гілка була дуже близько.

– Цей кровожер казав, що уб'є мене на Раді, бо не встиг убити змалку... Ага! Отак ми лупцюємо шельму, коли стаємо людьми! Спробуй-но ворухнути вусом, Кульгавий, і я запхну Червону Квітку тобі в пельку!

Він лупцював Шер-Хана по голові палаючою гілкою, і тигр ревів і вищав, ледь живий зо страху.

– Тьху! А тепер геть звідси, обсмалений котяра! А ви за-
тямте: коли я знов прийду на Склею Ради, то прийду так, як
личить людині – і зі шкірою Шер-Хана на голові! А тепер от
що: Акела може жити, як схоче. І ви його не вб'єте, бо я цьо-

го не дозволю. Я не думаю, що ви тут отак сидітимете, висо-
лопивши язики, буцімто якесь шановне панство, а не жалю-
гідні пси, котрих я зараз прожену геть! Отак! Геть!

Гілка палала жарким полум'ям, Мауглі нещадно лупцю-
вав нею вовків, і вони з виском кинулися навітки. Врешті-ре-
шт на скелі лишилися тільки Акела, Багіра і ще з десятеро
вовків, які стали на бік Мауглі. І тоді щось обпекло Мауглі
зсередини, як досі ще не бувало із ним. Йому забило подих,
він заплакав, і по обличчі в нього потекли сльози.

– Що це? Що це таке? – плакав він. – Я не хочу покидати
Джунглів, я не знаю, що зі мною сталося. Я вмираю, Багіро?

– Ні, Малий Братику, це просто сльози, таке буває з
людьми, – мовила Багіра. – Тепер я знаю, що ти вже не дити-
на. Тепер тобі немає дороги у Джунглі. Нехай сльози течуть,
Мауглі. Це просто сльози.

І Мауглі сидів і плакав так, наче в нього рвалося серце, бо
плакав він уперше в житті.

– Отепер я піду до людей, – сказав він. – Але спершу по-
прощаюся з матір'ю.

І він пішов до печери, де мати-Вовчиця жила з бать-
ком-Вовком, і заплакав, зарившись лицем у її шерсть, а чет-
веро вовченят жалібно скавчали.

– Ви мене не забудете? – спитав Мауглі.

– Ніколи, поки можемо йти по сліду! – відповіли вовче-
нята. – Приходь до підніжжя гори, коли станеш людиною, і
ми будемо говорити з тобою. Або прийдемо в поле і вночі

пограємось разом.

– Приходь скоріше! – сказав батько-Вовк. – О мудре Жабеня, приходь скоріше, бо ми з матір'ю вже старі.

– Приходь скоріше, мій голий синочку, – сказала мати-Вовчиця. – Знай, людська дитино, я люблю тебе більше од моїх власних дітей.

– Я прийду неодмінно, – сказав Мауглі. – Прийду, щоб припнути шкуру Шер-Хана на Склею Ради. Не забувайте мене! Скажіть усім у Джунглях – нехай мене не забувають!

Вже заяснів світанок, коли Мауглі сам-один спустився з пагорба в долину, назустріч тим дивним створінням, що звуться людьми.

Мисливська пісня сіонійської зграї

Світає, і в лісі олень закричав —
Раз, іще раз та й знов!
До озер, до далеких озер він помчав,
Та я його вистежив, слід розгадав —
Раз, іще раз та й знов!

Світає, і в лісі олень закричав —
Раз, іще раз та й знов!
А вовк-слідопит розвідав усе
І звістку до зграї вмить принесе —
Раз, іще раз та й знов!

Світає, і в лісі вовк заспівав —
Раз, іще раз та й знов!
Він полює тихцем, не лишає слідів
На стежинах нічних, серед темних лісів.
Хай джунглі слухають вовчий спів
Раз, іще раз та й знов!

Kaa's Hunting

His spots are the joy of the Leopard: his horns are the buffalo's pride.

Be clean, for the strength of the hunter is known by the gloss of his hide.

If ye find that the bullock can toss you, or the heavy-browed sambhur can gore;

Ye need not stop work to inform us: we knew it ten seasons before.

Oppress not the cubs of the stranger, but hail them as Sister and Brother,

For though they are little and fubsy, it may be the Bear is their mother.

'There is none like to me!' says the Cub in the pride of his earliest kill;

But the Jungle is large and the Cub he is small. Let him think and be still.

Maxims of Baloo

All that is told here happened some time before Mowgli was turned out of the Seeonee Wolf Pack, or revenged himself on Shere Khan the tiger. It was in the days when Baloo was teaching him the Law of the Jungle. The big, serious, old brown bear was delighted to have so quick a pupil, for the young wolves will only learn as much of the Law of the Jungle as applies to their own pack and tribe, and run away as soon as they can repeat the Hunting Verse – 'Feet that make no noise; eyes that can see in

the dark; ears that can hear the winds in their lairs, and sharp white teeth, all these things are the marks of our brothers except Tabaqui the Jackal and the hyaena whom we hate.’ But Mowgli, as a man cub, had to learn a great deal more than this. Sometimes Bagheera, the Black Panther, would come lounging through the Jungle to see how his pet was getting on, and would purr with his head against a tree while Mowgli recited the day’s lesson to Baloo. The boy could climb almost as well as he could swim, and swim almost as well as he could run; so Baloo, the Teacher of the Law, taught him the Wood and Water Laws; how to tell a rotten branch from a sound one; how to speak politely to the wild bees when he came upon a hive of them fifty feet above ground; what to say to Mang the Bat when he disturbed him in the branches at midday; and how to warn the water-snakes in the pools before he splashed down among them. None of the Jungle People like being disturbed, and all are very ready to fly at an intruder. Then, too, Mowgli was taught the Stranger’s Hunting Call, which must be repeated aloud till it is answered, whenever one of the Jungle People hunts outside his own grounds. It means, translated: ‘Give me leave to hunt here because I am hungry;’ and the answer is: ‘Hunt then for food, but not for pleasure.’

All this will show you how much Mowgli had to learn by heart, and he grew very tired of saying the same thing over a hundred times; but, as Baloo said to Bagheera, one day when Mowgli had been cuffed and run off in a temper: ‘A man cub is a man cub, and he must learn *all* the Law of the Jungle.’

‘But think how small he is,’ said the Black Panther, who would have spoiled Mowgli if he had had his own way. ‘How can his little head carry all thy long talk?’

‘Is there anything in the Jungle too little to be killed? No. That is why I teach him these things, and that is why I hit him, very softly, when he forgets.’

‘Softly! What dost thou know of softness, old Iron-feet?’ Bagheera grunted. ‘His face is all bruised today by thy – softness. *Ugh!*’

‘Better he should be bruised from head to foot by me who love him than that he should come to harm through ignorance,’ Baloo answered very earnestly. ‘I am now teaching him the Master Words of the Jungle that shall protect him with the birds and the Snake People, and all that hunt on four feet, except his own pack. He can now claim protection, if he will only remember the words, from all in the Jungle. Is not that worth a little beating?’

‘Well, look to it then that thou dost not kill the man cub. He is no tree-trunk to sharpen thy blunt claws upon. But what are those Master Words? I am more likely to give help than to ask it’ – Bagheera stretched out one paw and admired the steel-blue, ripping-chisel talons at the end of it – ‘still I should like to know.’

‘I will call Mowgli and he shall say them – if he will. Come, Little Brother!’

‘My head is ringing like a bee-tree,’ said a sullen little voice over their heads, and Mowgli slid down a tree-trunk very angry and indignant, adding as he reached the ground: ‘I come for

Bagheera and not for *thee*, fat old Baloo!’

‘That is all one to me,’ said Baloo, though he was hurt and grieved. ‘Tell Bagheera, then, the Master Words of the Jungle that I have taught thee this day.’

‘Master Words for which people?’ said Mowgli, delighted to show off. ‘The Jungle has many tongues. *I* know them all.’

‘A little thou knowest, but not much. See, O Bagheera, they never thank their teacher. Not one small wolfling has ever come back to thank old Baloo for his teachings. Say the word for the Hunting People, then – great scholar.’

‘We be of one blood, ye and I,’ said Mowgli, giving the words the Bear accent which all the Hunting People use.

‘Good. Now for the birds.’

Mowgli repeated, with the Kite’s whistle at the end of the sentence.

‘Now for the Snake People,’ said Bagheera.

The answer was a perfectly indescribable hiss, and Mowgli kicked up his feet behind, clapped his hands together to applaud himself, and jumped on to Bagheera’s back, where he sat sideways, drumming with his heels on the glossy skin and making the worst faces he could think of at Baloo.

‘There – there! That was worth a little bruise,’ said the brown bear tenderly. ‘Some day thou wilt remember me.’ Then he turned aside to tell Bagheera how he had begged the Master Words from Hathi the Wild Elephant, who knows all about these things, and how Hathi had taken Mowgli down to a pool to get

the Snake Word from a water-snake, because Baloo could not pronounce it, and how Mowgli was now reasonably safe against all accidents in the Jungle, because neither snake, bird, nor beast would hurt him.

‘No one, then, is to be feared,’ Baloo wound up, patting his big furry stomach with pride.

‘Except his own tribe,’ said Bagheera, under his breath; and then aloud to Mowgli: ‘Have a care for my ribs, Little Brother! What is all this dancing up and down?’

Mowgli had been trying to make himself heard by pulling at Bagheera’s shoulder-fur and kicking hard. When the two listened to him he was shouting at the top of his voice: ‘And so I shall have a tribe of my own, and lead them through the branches all day long.’

‘What is this new folly, little dreamer of dreams?’ said Bagheera.

‘Yes, and throw branches and dirt at old Baloo,’ Mowgli went on. ‘They have promised me this. Ah!’

‘*Whoof!*’ Baloo’s big paw scooped Mowgli off Bagheera’s back, and as the boy lay between the big fore-paws he could see the Bear was angry.

‘Mowgli,’ said Baloo, ‘thou hast been talking with the *Bandar-log* — the Monkey People.’

Mowgli looked at Bagheera to see if the Panther was angry too, and Bagheera’s eyes were as hard as jade stones.

‘Thou hast been with the Monkey People the grey apes – the

people without a Law – the eaters of everything. That is great shame.’

‘When Baloo hurt my head,’ said Mowgli (he was still on his back), ‘I went away, and the grey apes came down from the trees and had pity on me. No one else cared.’ He snuffled a little.

‘The pity of the Monkey-People!’ Baloo snorted. ‘The stillness of the mountain stream! The cool of the summer sun! And then, man cub?’

‘And then, and then, they gave me nuts and pleasant things to eat, and they – they carried me in their arms up to the top of the trees and said I was their blood-brother except that I had no tail, and should be their leader some day.’

‘They have *no* leader,’ said Bagheera. ‘They lie. They have always lied.’

‘They were very kind and bade me come again. Why have I never been taken among the Monkey People? They stand on their feet as I do. They do not hit me with hard paws. They play all day. Let me get up! Bad Baloo, let me up! I will play with them again.’

‘Listen, man cub,’ said the Bear, and his voice rumbled like thunder on a hot night. ‘I have taught thee all the Law of the Jungle for all the peoples of the Jungle – except the Monkey Folk who live in the trees. They have no Law. They are outcasts. They have no speech of their own, but use the stolen words which they overhear when they listen, and peep, and wait up above in the branches. Their way is not our way. They are without leaders.

They have no remembrance. They boast and chatter and pretend that they are a great people about to do great affairs in the Jungle, but the falling of a nut turns their minds to laughter and all is forgotten. We of the Jungle have no dealings with them. We do not drink where the monkeys drink; we do not go where the monkeys go; we do not hunt where they hunt; we do not die where they die. Hast thou ever heard me speak of the *Bandar-log*, till to-day?’

‘No,’ said Mowgli in a whisper, for the forest was very still now Baloo had finished.

‘The Jungle People put them out of their mouths and out of their minds. They are very many, evil, dirty, shameless, and they desire, if they have any fixed desire, to be noticed by the Jungle People. But we do *not* notice them even when they throw nuts and filth on our heads.’

He had hardly spoken when a shower of nuts and twigs spattered down through the branches; and they could hear coughings and howlings and angry jumpings high up in the air among the thin branches.

‘The Monkey People are forbidden,’ said Baloo, ‘forbidden to the Jungle People. Remember.’

‘Forbidden,’ said Bagheera; ‘but I still think Baloo should have warned thee against them.’

‘I—I? How was I to guess he would play with such dirt? The Monkey People! *Faugh!*’

A fresh shower came down on their heads and the two trotted

away, taking Mowgli with them. What Baloo had said about the monkeys was perfectly true. They belonged to the tree-tops, and as beasts very seldom look up, there was no occasion for the monkeys and the Jungle People to cross each other's path. But whenever they found a sick wolf, or a wounded tiger, or bear, the monkeys would torment him, and would throw sticks and nuts at any beast for fun and in the hope of being noticed. Then they would howl and shriek senseless songs, and invite the Jungle People to climb up their trees and fight them, or would start furious battles over nothing among themselves, and leave the dead monkeys where the Jungle People could see them. They were always just going to have a leader, and laws and customs of their own, but they never did, because their memories would not hold over from day to day, and so they compromised things by making up a saying: 'What the *Bandar-log* think now the Jungle will think later,' and that comforted them a great deal. None of the beasts could reach them, but on the other hand none of the beasts would notice them, and that was why they were so pleased when Mowgli came to play with them, and they heard how angry Baloo was.

They never meant to do any more – the *Bandar-log* never mean anything at all; but one of them invented what seemed to him a brilliant idea, and he told all the others that Mowgli would be a useful person to keep in the tribe, because he could weave sticks together for protection from the wind; so, if they caught him, they could make him teach them. Of course, Mowgli, as

a woodcutter's child, inherited all sorts of instincts, and used to make little huts of fallen branches without thinking how he came to do it, and the Monkey People, watching in the trees, considered his play most wonderful. This time, they said, they were really going to have a leader and become the wisest people in the Jungle – so wise that everyone else would notice and envy them. Therefore they followed Baloo and Bagheera and Mowgli through the Jungle very quietly till it was time for the midday nap, and Mowgli, who was very much ashamed of himself, slept between the Panther and the Bear, resolving to have no more to do with the Monkey People.

The next thing he remembered was feeling hands on his legs and arms – hard, strong, little hands – and then a swash of branches in his face, and then he was staring down through the swaying boughs as Baloo woke the Jungle with his deep cries and Bagheera bounded up the trunk with every tooth bared. The *Bandar-log* howled with triumph and scuffled away to the upper branches where Bagheera dared not follow, shouting: 'He has noticed us! Bagheera has noticed us. All the Jungle People admire us for our skill and our cunning.' Then they began their flight; and the flight of the Monkey People through tree-land is one of the things nobody can describe. They have their regular roads and crossroads, up hills and down hills, all laid out from fifty to seventy or a hundred feet above ground, and by these they can travel even at night if necessary. Two of the strongest monkeys caught Mowgli under the arms and swung off with him

through the tree-tops, twenty feet at a bound. Had they been alone they could have gone twice as fast, but the boy's weight held them back. Sick and giddy as Mowgli was he could not help enjoying the wild rush, though the glimpses of earth far down below frightened him, and the terrible check and jerk at the end of the swing over nothing but empty air brought his heart between his teeth. His escort would rush him up a tree till he felt the thinnest topmost branches crackle and bend under them, and then with a cough and a whoop would fling themselves into the air outward and downward, and bring up, hanging by their hands or their feet to the lower limbs of the next tree. Sometimes he could see for miles and miles across the still green Jungle, as a man on the top of a mast can see for miles across the sea, and then the branches and leaves would lash him across the face, and he and his two guards would be almost down to earth again. So, bounding and crashing and whooping and yelling, the whole tribe of *Bandar-log* swept along the tree-roads with Mowgli their prisoner.

For a time he was afraid of being dropped: then he grew angry but knew better than to struggle, and then he began to think. The first thing was to send back word to Baloo and Bagheera, for, at the pace the monkeys were going, he knew his friends would be left far behind. It was useless to look down, for he could only see the top-sides of the branches, so he stared upward and saw, far away in the blue, Chil the Kite balancing and wheeling as he kept watch over the Jungle waiting for things to die. Chil saw that the

monkeys were carrying something, and dropped a few hundred yards to find out whether their load was good to eat. He whistled with surprise when he saw Mowgli being dragged up to a tree-top and heard him give the Kite call for – ‘We be of one blood, thou and I.’ The waves of the branches closed over the boy, but Chil balanced away to the next tree in time to see the little brown face come up again. ‘Mark my trail,’ Mowgli shouted. ‘Tell Baloo of the Seeonee Pack and Bagheera of the Council Rock.’

‘In whose name, Brother?’ Chil had never seen Mowgli before, though of course he had heard of him.

‘Mowgli, the Frog. man cub they call me! Mark my trail!’

The last words were shrieked as he was being swung through the air, but Chil nodded and rose up till he looked no bigger than a speck of dust, and there he hung, watching with his telescope eyes the swaying of the tree-tops as Mowgli’s escort whirled along.

‘They never go far,’ he said with a chuckle. ‘They never do what they set out to do. Always pecking at new things are the *Bandar-log*. This time, if I have any eyesight, they have pecked down trouble for themselves, for Baloo is no fledgling and Bagheera can, as I know, kill more than goats.’

So he rocked on his wings, his feet gathered up under him, and waited.

Meantime, Baloo and Bagheera were furious with rage and grief. Bagheera climbed as he had never climbed before, but the thin branches broke beneath his weight, and he slipped down, his

claws full of bark.

‘Why didst thou not warn the man cub?’ he roared to poor Baloo, who had set off at a clumsy trot in the hope of overtaking the monkeys. ‘What was the use of half slaying him with blows if thou didst not warn him?’

‘Haste! Oh, haste! We – we may catch them yet!’ Baloo panted.

‘At that speed! It would not tire a wounded cow. Teacher of the Law – cub-beater – a mile of that rolling to and fro would burst thee open. Sit still and think! Make a plan. This is no time for chasing. They may drop him if we follow too close.’

‘*Arrula! Whoo!* They may have dropped him already, being tired of carrying him. Who can trust the *Bandar-log*? Put dead bats on my head! Give me black bones to eat! Roll me into the hives of the wild bees that I may be stung to death, and bury me with the hyaena, for I am the most miserable of bears! *Arrulala! Wahooa!* Oh, Mowgli, Mowgli! why did I not warn thee against the Monkey Folk instead of breaking thy head? Now perhaps I may have knocked the day’s lesson out of his mind, and he will be alone in the Jungle without the Master Words.’

Baloo clasped his paws over his ears and rolled to and fro moaning.

‘At least he gave me all the Words correctly a little time ago,’ said Bagheera impatiently. ‘Baloo, thou hast neither memory nor respect. What would the Jungle think if I, the Black Panther, curled myself up like Sahi the Porcupine, and howled?’

‘What do I care what the Jungle thinks? He may be dead by now.’

‘Unless and until they drop him from the branches in sport, or kill him out of idleness, I have no fear for the man cub. He is wise and well taught, and above all he has the eyes that make the Jungle People afraid. But (and it is a great evil) he is in the power of the *Bandar-log*, and they, because they live in trees, have no fear of any of our people.’ Bagheera licked one forepaw thoughtfully.

‘Fool that I am! Oh, fat, brown, root-digging fool that I am,’ said Baloo, uncurling himself with a jerk, ‘it is true what Hathi the Wild Elephant says: “*To each his own fear.*” And they, the *Bandar-log*, fear Kaa the Rock Snake. He can climb as well as they can. He steals the young monkeys in the night. The whisper of his name makes their wicked tails cold. Let us go to Kaa.’

‘What will he do for us? He is not of our tribe, being footless – and with most evil eyes,’ said Bagheera.

‘He is very old and very cunning. Above all, he is always hungry,’ said Baloo hopefully. ‘Promise him many goats.’

‘He sleeps for a full month after he has once eaten. He may be asleep now, and even were he awake what if he would rather kill his own goats?’ Bagheera, who did not know much about Kaa, was naturally suspicious.

‘Then in that case, thou and I together, old hunter, might make him see reason.’ Here Baloo rubbed his faded brown shoulder against the Panther, and they went off to look for Kaa the Rock

Python.

They found him stretched out on a warm ledge in the afternoon sun, admiring his beautiful new coat, for he had been in retirement for the last ten days, changing his skin, and now he was very splendid – darting his big blunt-nosed head along the ground, and twisting the thirty feet of his body into fantastic knots and curves, and licking his lips as he thought of his dinner to come.

‘He has not eaten,’ said Baloo, with a grunt of relief, as soon as he saw the beautifully mottled brown-and-yellow jacket. ‘Be careful, Bagheera! He is always a little blind after he has changed his skin, and very quick to strike.’

Kaa was not a poison-snake – in fact he rather despised the poison-snakes as cowards – but his strength lay in his hug, and when he had once lapped his huge coils round anybody there was no more to be said. ‘Good hunting!’ cried Baloo, sitting up on his haunches. Like all snakes of his breed, Kaa was rather deaf, and did not hear the call at first. Then he curled up ready for any accident, his head lowered.

‘Good hunting for us all!’ he answered. ‘Oho, Baloo, what dost thou do here? Good hunting, Bagheera! One of us at least needs food. Is there any news of game afoot? A doe now, or even a young buck? I am as empty as a dried well.’

‘We are hunting,’ said Baloo carelessly. He knew that you must not hurry Kaa. He is too big.

‘Give me permission to come with you,’ said Kaa. ‘A blow

more or less is nothing to thee, Bagheera or Baloo, but I – I have to wait and wait for days in a wood-path and climb half a night on the mere chance of a young ape. *Psshaw!* The branches are not what they were when I was young. Rotten twigs and dry boughs are they all.’

‘Maybe thy great weight has something to do with the matter,’ said Baloo.

‘I am a fair length – a fair length,’ said Kaa, with a little pride. ‘But for all that, it is the fault of this new-grown timber. I came very near to falling on my last hunt – very near indeed – and the noise of my slipping, for my tail was not tight wrapped round the tree, waked the *Bandar-log*, and they called me most evil names.’

‘Footless, yellow earthworm,’ said Bagheera under his whiskers, as though he were trying to remember something.

‘*Sssss!* Have they ever called me *that?*’ said Kaa.

‘Something of that kind it was that they shouted to us last moon, but we never noticed them. They will say anything – even that thou hast lost all thy teeth, and wilt not face anything bigger than a kid, because (they are indeed shameless, these *Bandar-log*) — because thou art afraid of the he-goat’s horns,’ Bagheera went on sweetly.

Now a snake, especially a wary old python like Kaa, very seldom shows that he is angry, but Baloo and Bagheera could see the big swallowing-muscles on either side of Kaa’s throat ripple and bulge.

‘The *Bandar-log* have shifted their grounds,’ he said quietly.

'When I came up into the sun today I heard them whooping among the tree-tops.'

'It – it is the *Bandar-log* that we follow now,' said Baloo; but the words stuck in his throat, for that was the first time in his memory that one of the Jungle People had owned to being interested in the doings of the monkeys.

'Beyond doubt then it is no small thing that takes two such hunters – leaders in their own Jungle I am certain – on the trail of the *Bandar-log*,' Kaa replied courteously, as he swelled with curiosity.

'Indeed,' Baloo began, 'I am no more than the old and sometimes very foolish Teacher of the Law to the Seeonee wolf-cubs, and Bagheera here —'

'Is Bagheera,' said the Black Panther, and his jaws shut with a snap, for he did not believe in being humble. 'The trouble is this, Kaa. Those nut-stealers and pickers of palm-leaves have stolen away our man cub, of whom thou hast perhaps heard.'

'I heard some news from Sahi (his quills make him presumptuous) of a man-thing that was entered into a wolf-pack, but I did not believe. Sahi is full of stories half heard and very badly told.'

'But it is true. He is such a man cub as never was,' said Baloo. 'The best and wisest and boldest of man cubs – my own pupil, who shall make the name of Baloo famous through all the Jungles; and besides, I – we – love him, Kaa.'

'Ts! Ts!' said Kaa, shaking his head to and fro. 'I also have

known what love is. There are tales I could tell that —'

'That need a clear night when we are all well fed to praise properly,' said Bagheera quickly. 'Our man cub is in the hands of the *Bandar-log* now, and we know that of all the Jungle People they fear Kaa alone.'

'They fear me alone. They have good reason,' said Kaa. 'Chattering, foolish, vain – vain, foolish, and chattering, are the monkeys. But a man-thing in their hands is in no good luck. They grow tired of the nuts they pick, and throw them down. They carry a branch half a day, meaning to do great things with it, and then they snap it in two. That man-thing is not to be envied. They called me also – "yellow fish", was it not?'

'Worm – worm – earthworm,' said Bagheera, 'as well as other things which I cannot now say for shame.'

'We must remind them to speak well of their master. *Aaa-ssh!* We must help their wandering memories. Now, whither went they with the cub?'

'The Jungle alone knows. Toward the sunset, I believe,' said Baloo. 'We had thought that thou wouldst know, Kaa.'

'I? How? I take them when they come in my way, but I do not hunt the *Bandar-log*, or frogs – or green scum on a water-hole for that matter.'

'Up, up! Up, up! Hillo! Illo! Illo, lookup, Baloo of the Seeonee Wolf Pack!'

Baloo looked up to see where the voice came from, and there was Chil the Kite, sweeping down with the sun shining on the

upturned flanges of his wings. It was near Chil's bedtime, but he had ranged all over the Jungle looking for the Bear and had missed him in the thick foliage.

‘What is it?’ said Baloo.

‘I have seen Mowgli among the *Bandar-log*. He bade me tell you. I watched. The *Bandar-log* have taken him beyond the river to the monkey city – to the Cold Lairs. They may stay there for a night, or ten nights, or an hour. I have told the bats to watch through the dark time. That is my message. Good hunting, all you below!’

‘Full gorge and a deep sleep to you, Chil,’ cried Bagheera. ‘I will remember thee in my next kill, and put aside the head for thee alone – oh, best of kites!’

‘It is nothing. It is nothing. The boy held the Master Word. I could have done no less,’ and Chil circled up again to his roost.

‘He has not forgotten to use his tongue,’ said Baloo, with a chuckle of pride. ‘To think of one so young remembering the Master Word for the birds too while he was being pulled across-trees!’

‘It was most firmly driven into him,’ said Bagheera. ‘But I am proud of him, and now we must go to the Cold Lairs.’

They all knew where that place was, but few of the Jungle People ever went there, because what they called the Cold Lairs was an old deserted city, lost and buried in the Jungle, and beasts seldom use a place that men have once used. The wild boar will, but the hunting tribes do not. Besides, the monkeys lived

there as much as they could be said to live anywhere, and no self-respecting animal would come within eyeshot of it except in times of drouth, when the half-ruined tanks and reservoirs held a little water.

‘It is half a night’s journey – at full speed,’ said Bagheera, and Baloo looked very serious. ‘I will go as fast as I can,’ he said anxiously.

‘We dare not wait for thee. Follow, Baloo. We must go on the quick-foot – Kaa and I.’

‘Feet or no feet, I can keep abreast of all thy four,’ said Kaa shortly. Baloo made one effort to hurry, but had to sit down panting, and so they left him to come on later, while Bagheera hurried forward, at the quick panther-canter. Kaa said nothing, but, strive as Bagheera might, the huge Rock Python held level with him. When they came to a hill-stream, Bagheera gained, because he bounded across while Kaa swam, his head and two feet of his neck clearing the water, but on level ground Kaa made up the distance.

‘By the Broken Lock that freed me,’ said Bagheera, when twilight had fallen, ‘thou art no slow goer!’

‘I am hungry,’ said Kaa. ‘Besides, they called me speckled frog.’

‘Worm – earth-worm, and yellow to boot.’

‘All one. Let us go on,’ and Kaa seemed to pour himself along the ground, finding the shortest road with his steady eyes, and keeping to it.

In the Cold Lairs the Monkey People were not thinking of Mowgli's friends at all. They had brought the boy to the Lost City, and were very pleased with themselves for the time. Mowgli had never seen an Indian city before, and though this was almost a heap of ruins it seemed very wonderful and splendid. Some king had built it long ago on a little hill. You could still trace the stone causeways that led up to the ruined gates where the last splinters of wood hung to the worn, rusted hinges. Trees had grown into and out of the walls; the battlements were tumbled down and decayed, and wild creepers hung out of the windows of the towers on the walls in bushy hanging clumps.

A great roofless palace crowned the hill, and the marble of the courtyards and the fountains was split, and stained with red and green, and the very cobblestones in the courtyard where the king's elephants used to live had been thrust up and apart by grasses and young trees. From the palace you could see the rows and rows of roofless houses that made up the city looking like empty honeycombs filled with blackness; the shapeless block of stone that had been an idol, in the square where four roads met; the pits and dimples at street-corners where the public wells once stood, and the shattered domes of temples with wild figs sprouting on their sides. The monkeys called the place their city, and pretended to despise the Jungle People because they lived in the forest. And yet they never knew what the buildings were made for nor how to use them. They would sit in circles on the hall of the king's council chamber, and scratch for fleas and

pretend to be men; or they would run in and out of the roofless houses and collect pieces of plaster and old bricks in a corner, and forget where they had hidden them, and fight and cry in scuffling crowds, and then break off to play up and down the terraces of the king's garden, where they would shake the rose trees and the oranges in sport to see the fruit and flowers fall. They explored all the passages and dark tunnels in the palace and the hundreds of little dark rooms, but they never remembered what they had seen and what they had not; and so drifted about in ones and twos or crowds telling each other that they were doing as men did. They drank at the tanks and made the water all muddy, and then they fought over it, and then they would all rush together in mobs and shout: 'There is no one in the Jungle so wise and good and clever and strong and gentle as the *Bandar-log*.' Then all would begin again till they grew tired of the city and went back to the tree-tops, hoping the Jungle People would notice them.

Mowgli, who had been trained under the Law of the Jungle, did not like or understand this kind of life. The monkeys dragged him into the Cold Lairs late in the afternoon, and instead of going to sleep, as Mowgli would have done after a long journey, they joined hands and danced about and sang their foolish songs. One of the monkeys made a speech and told his companions that Mowgli's capture marked a new thing in the history of the *Bandar-log*, for Mowgli was going to show them how to weave sticks and canes together as a protection against rain and cold. Mowgli picked up some creepers and began to work them in and

out, and the monkeys tried to imitate; but in a very few minutes they lost interest and began to pull their friends' tails or jump up and down on all fours, coughing.

'I wish to eat,' said Mowgli. 'I am a stranger in this part of the Jungle. Bring me food, or give me leave to hunt here.'

Twenty or thirty monkeys bounded away to bring him nuts and wild pawpaws; but they fell to fighting on the road, and it was too much trouble to go back with what was left of the fruit. Mowgli was sore and angry as well as hungry, and he roamed through the empty city giving the Stranger's Hunting Call from time to time, but no one answered him, and Mowgli felt that he had reached a very bad place indeed. 'All that Baloo has said about the *Bandar-log* is true,' he thought to himself. 'They have no Law, no Hunting Call, and no leaders – nothing but foolish words and little picking thievish hands. So if I am starved or killed here, it will be all my own fault. But I must try to return to my own Jungle. Baloo will surely beat me, but that is better than chasing silly rose-leaves with the *Bandar-log*?'

No sooner had he walked to the city wall than the monkeys pulled him back, telling him that he did not know how happy he was, and pinching him to make him grateful. He set his teeth and said nothing, but went with the shouting monkeys to a terrace above the red sandstone reservoirs that were half-full of rainwater. There was a ruined summerhouse of white marble in the centre of the terrace, built for queens dead a hundred years ago. The domed roof had half fallen in and blocked up the

underground passage from the palace by which the queens used to enter; but the walls were made of screens of marble tracery – beautiful milk-white fretwork, set with agates and cornelians and jasper and lapis lazuli, and as the moon came up behind the hill it shone through the open-work, casting shadows on the ground like black velvet embroidery. Sore, sleepy, and hungry as he was, Mowgli could not help laughing when the *Bandar-log* began, twenty at a time, to tell him how great and wise and strong and gentle they were, and how foolish he was to wish to leave them. ‘We are great. We are free. We are wonderful. We are the most wonderful people in all the Jungle! We all say so, and so it must be true,’ they shouted. ‘Now, as you are a new listener and can carry our words back to the Jungle People so that they may notice us in future, we will tell you all about our most excellent selves.’ Mowgli made no objection, and the monkeys gathered by hundreds and hundreds on the terrace to listen to their own speakers singing the praises of the *Bandar-log*, and whenever a speaker stopped for want of breath they would all shout together: ‘This is true; we all say so.’ Mowgli nodded and blinked, and said ‘Yes’ when they asked him a question, and his head spun with the noise. ‘Tabaqui the Jackal must have bitten all these people,’ he said to himself, ‘and now they have the madness. Certainly this is *dewanee*, the madness. Do they never go to sleep? Now there is a cloud coming to cover that moon. If it were only a big enough cloud I might try to run away in the darkness. But I am tired.’

That same cloud was being watched by two good friends in the

ruined ditch below the city wall, for Bagheera and Kaa, knowing well how dangerous the Monkey People were in large numbers, did not wish to run any risks. The monkeys never fight unless they are a hundred to one, and few in the Jungle care for those odds.

‘I will go to the west wall,’ Kaa whispered, ‘and come down swiftly with the slope of the ground in my favour. They will not throw themselves upon *my* back in their hundreds, but —’

‘I know it,’ said Bagheera. ‘Would that Baloo were here; but we must do what we can. When that cloud covers the moon I shall go to the terrace. They hold some sort of council there over the boy.’

‘Good hunting!’ said Kaa grimly, and glided away to the west wall. That happened to be the least ruined of any, and the big snake was delayed a while before he could find a way up the stones. The cloud hid the moon, and as Mowgli wondered what would come next he heard Bagheera’s light feet on the terrace. The Black Panther had raced up the slope almost without a sound and was striking – he knew better than to waste time in biting – right and left among the monkeys, who were seated round Mowgli in circles fifty and sixty deep. There was a howl of fright and rage, and then as Bagheera tripped on the rolling kicking bodies beneath him, a monkey shouted: ‘There is only one here! Kill him! Kill!’ A scuffling mass of monkeys, biting, scratching, tearing, and pulling, closed over Bagheera, while five or six laid hold of Mowgli, dragged him up the wall of the summerhouse and pushed him through the hole of the broken

dome. A man-trained boy would have been badly bruised, for the fall was a good fifteen feet, but Mowgli fell as Baloo had taught him to fall, and landed on his feet.

‘Stay there,’ shouted the monkeys, ‘till we have killed thy friends, and later we will play with thee – if the Poison People leave thee alive.’

‘We be of one blood, ye and I,’ said Mowgli, quickly giving the Snake’s Call. He could hear rustling and hissing in the rubbish all round him and gave the Call a second time, to make sure.

‘Even sso! Down hoods all!’ said half a dozen low voices (every ruin in India becomes sooner or later a dwelling-place of snakes, and the old summerhouse was alive with cobras). ‘Stand still, Little Brother, for thy feet may do us harm.’

Mowgli stood as quietly as he could, peering through the open-work and listening to the furious din of the fight round the Black Panther – the yells and chatterings and scufflings, and Bagheera’s deep, hoarse cough as he backed and bucked and twisted and plunged under the heaps of his enemies. For the first time since he was born, Bagheera was fighting for his life.

‘Baloo must be at hand; Bagheera would not have come alone,’ Mowgli thought; and then he called aloud: ‘To the tank, Bagheera! Roll to the water-tank. Roll and plunge! Get to the water!’

Bagheera heard, and the cry that told him Mowgli was safe gave him new courage. He worked his way desperately, inch by inch, straight for the reservoirs, hitting in silence. Then from

the ruined wall nearest the Jungle rose up the rumbling war-shout of Baloo. The old bear had done his best, but he could not come before. 'Bagheera,' he shouted, 'I am here. I climb! I haste! *Ahuwora!* The stones slip under my feet! Wait my coming, O most infamous *Bandar-log!*' He panted up the terrace only to disappear to the head in a wave of monkeys, but he threw himself squarely on his haunches, and, spreading out his fore-paws, hugged as many as he could hold, and then began to hit with a regular *bat-bat-bat*, like the flipping strokes of a paddle-wheel. A crash and a splash told Mowgli that Bagheera had fought his way to the tank where the monkeys could not follow. The panther lay gasping for breath, his head just out of water, while the monkeys stood three deep on the red steps, dancing up and down with rage, ready to spring upon him from all sides if he came out to help Baloo. It was then that Bagheera lifted up his dripping chin, and in despair gave the Snake's Call for protection – 'We be of one blood, ye and I' – for he believed that Kaa had turned tail at the last minute. Even Baloo, half smothered under the monkeys on the edge of the terrace, could not help chuckling as he heard the Black Panther asking for help.

Kaa had only just worked his way over the west wall, landing with a wrench that dislodged a coping-stone into the ditch. He had no intention of losing any advantage of the ground, and coiled and uncoiled himself once or twice, to be sure that every foot of his long body was in working order. All that while the fight with Baloo went on, and the monkeys yelled in the tank

around Bagheera, and Mang the Bat, flying to and fro, carried the news of the great battle over the Jungle, till even Hathi the Wild Elephant trumpeted, and, far away, scattered bands of the Monkey Folk woke and came leaping along the tree-roads to help their comrades in the Cold Lairs, and the noise of the fight roused all the day-birds for miles round. Then Kaa came straight, quickly, and anxious to kill. The fighting-strength of a python is in the driving blow of his head backed by all the strength and weight of his body. If you can imagine a lance, or a battering-ram, or a hammer weighing nearly half a ton driven by a cool, quiet mind living in the handle of it, you can roughly imagine what Kaa was like when he fought. A python four or five feet long can knock a man down if he hits him fairly in the chest, and Kaa was thirty feet long, as you know. His first stroke was delivered into the heart of the crowd round Baloo – was sent home with shut mouth in silence, and there was no need of a second. The monkeys scattered with cries of ‘Kaa! It is Kaa! Run! Run!’

Generations of monkeys had been scared into good behaviour by the stories their elders told them of Kaa, the night-thief, who could slip along the branches as quietly as moss grows, and steal away the strongest monkey that ever lived; of old Kaa, who could make himself look so like a dead branch or a rotten stump that the wisest were deceived, till the branch caught them. Kaa was everything that the monkeys feared in the Jungle, for none of them knew the limits of his power, none of them could look him in the face, and none had ever come alive out of his hug. And so

they ran, stammering with terror, to the walls and the roofs of the houses, and Baloo drew a deep breath of relief. His fur was much thicker than Bagheera's, but he had suffered sorely in the fight. Then Kaa opened his mouth for the first time and spoke one long hissing word, and the far-away monkeys, hurrying to the defence of the Cold Lairs, stayed where they were, cowering, till the loaded branches bent and crackled under them. The monkeys on the walls and the empty houses stopped their cries, and in the stillness that fell upon the city Mowgli heard Bagheera shaking his wet sides as he came up from the tank. Then the clamour broke out again. The monkeys leaped higher up the walls; they clung round the necks of the big stone idols and shrieked as they skipped along the battlements, while Mowgli, dancing in the summerhouse, put his eye to the screen-work and hooted owl-fashion between his front teeth, to show his derision and contempt.

‘Get the man cub out of that trap; I can do no more,’ Bagheera gasped. ‘Let us take the man cub and go. They may attack again.’

‘They will not move till I order them. Stay you sssso!’ Kaa hissed, and the city was silent once more. ‘I could not come before, Brother, but I *think* I heard thee call’ – this was to Bagheera.

‘I – I may have cried out in the battle,’ Bagheera answered. ‘Baloo, art thou hurt?’

‘I am not sure that they have not pulled me into a hundred little headings,’ said Baloo gravely, shaking one leg after the other.

‘Wow! I am sore. Kaa, we owe thee, I think, our lives – Bagheera and I.’

‘No matter. Where is the manling?’

‘Here, in a trap. I cannot climb out,’ cried Mowgli. The curve of the broken dome was above his head.

‘Take him away. He dances like Mao the Peacock. He will crush our young,’ said the cobras inside.

‘Hah!’ said Kaa, with a chuckle, ‘he has friends everywhere, this manling. Stand back, manling; and hide you, O Poison People. I break down the wall.’

Kaa looked carefully till he found a discoloured crack in the marble tracery showing a weak spot, made two or three light taps with his head to get the distance, and then, lifting up six feet of his body clear of the ground, sent home half a dozen full-power, smashing blows, nose-first. The screen-work broke and fell away in a cloud of dust and rubbish, and Mowgli leaped through the opening and flung himself between Baloo and Bagheera – an arm round each big neck.

‘Art thou hurt?’ said Baloo, hugging him softly.

‘I am sore, hungry, and not a little bruised; but, oh, they have handled ye grievously, my Brothers! Ye bleed.’

‘Others also,’ said Bagheera, licking his lips, and looking at the monkey-dead on the terrace and round the tank.

‘It is nothing, it is nothing, if thou art safe, O my pride of all little frogs!’ whimpered Baloo.

‘Of that we shall judge later,’ said Bagheera, in a dry voice

that Mowgli did not at all like. 'But here is Kaa, to whom we owe the battle and thou owest thy life. Thank him according to our customs, Mowgli.'

Mowgli turned and saw the great python's head swaying a foot above his own.

'So this is the manling,' said Kaa. 'Very soft is his skin, and he is not so unlike the *Bandar-log*. Have a care, manling, that I do not mistake thee for a monkey some twilight when I have newly changed my coat.'

'We be of one blood, thou and I,' Mowgli answered. 'I take my life from thee, tonight. My kill shall be thy kill if ever thou art hungry, O Kaa.'

'All thanks, Little Brother,' said Kaa, though his eyes twinkled. 'And what may so bold a hunter kill? I ask that I may follow when next he goes abroad.'

'I kill nothing – I am too little – but I drive goats toward such as can use them. When thou art empty come to me and see if I speak the truth. I have some skill in these' – he held out his hands – 'and if ever thou art in a trap, I may pay the debt which I owe to thee, to Bagheera, and to Baloo, here. Good hunting to ye all, my masters.'

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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