

## Mowgli's Brothers

It was a very warm evening when Father Wolf woke up from his day's rest. Mother Wolf lay beside him. Her nose was draped across four tumbling, squealing cubs. The moon rose over the mouth of the cave where they all lived.

"Arugh!" said Father Wolf. "It is time to hunt again." He was about to run downhill when a little shadow crossed the entrance of the cave.

A small voice whined, "Good luck go with you, O Chief of the Wolves. And may your children never forget those who are hungry!"

It was the despised jackal, Tabaqui—the one who runs about making mischief and telling tales.

Father Wolf said stiffly, "Enter then, and look for yourself."

Tabaqui found a bone with some meat on it. Licking it merrily, he said, "Shere Khan has moved his hunting grounds. He will hunt here next."

Shere Khan was the tiger who lived near the Wainganga River, 20 miles away.

Father Wolf cried, "He has no *right!* The Law of the Jungle forbids him to move his hunting grounds without fair warning. He will frighten off the game for ten miles around!"

Mother Wolf said quietly, "His mother did not call him Lungri (the Lame One) for nothing. That is why he has only killed men's cattle. The villagers of the Wainganga are angry with him. Now he has come here to make our villagers angry. They will hunt the jungle for him, and we must be ready to run when they burn the grass."

"*Out!*" snapped Father Wolf.

"I go," said Tabaqui. "But listen! You can hear Shere Kahn coming now. I might have saved myself the message."

From the valley below the cave came the angry whine of a tiger. He had caught nothing and did not care if the whole jungle knew it.

Father Wolf said, "The fool! Does he think our deer cannot hear such noise?"

"Hush," said Mother Wolf. "It is not our deer he hunts tonight. It is Man."

"*Man!*" Father Wolf snorted in disgust. "And on *our* ground, too! Who does he think he is?"

The Law of the Jungle forbids every beast to eat Man—except when he is showing his children how to kill. The reason is that man-killing brings white men riding on elephants and carrying guns. Along with them, the white men would bring hundreds of brown men with gongs and torches.

They heard the full-throated “Aaarh!” of the tiger’s charge, followed by a howl.

Father Wolf frowned. “The fool! He must have jumped at a woodcutter’s campfire again. He probably burned his feet.”

“Something is coming up the hill,” Mother Wolf warned, twitching one ear. “Get ready.”

When the bushes rustled near the cave, Father Wolf sprang. But the big wolf stopped his leap in midair. He landed almost where he left the ground.

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

Right in front of him stood a naked brown baby who could just walk. The child looked up into Father Wolf’s face and laughed.

“A *man’s* cub?” said Mother Wolf. “Quickly—bring it into the cave.”

Father Wolf’s jaws closed gently around the child’s back. Then he laid the naked baby down among the squirming cubs.

“How little and smooth he is! How *bold!*” said



Mother Wolf softly. The baby was pushing his way between the cubs to get closer to the mother wolf's warm hide.

“Ahai!” cried Mother Wolf. “Look! He is taking his meal with the others. Was there ever a wolf who could boast of a man's cub among her children?”

Suddenly the moonlight was blocked from the cave by Shere Khan's great head and shoulders. Behind him Tabaqui squeaked, “My lord, it went in here!”

“I have come for my game,” said Shere Khan. “Give me the man's cub at once.”

The wolves could see that Shere Khan was furious from hunger and the pain of his burned feet. But Father Wolf knew the mouth of the cave was too narrow for him to enter. “The wolves take orders from the head of the pack,” he said, “not from a striped cattle-killer. The man-cub is ours—to kill if *we* choose.”

“What talk is this of choosing? Must I beg for what already belongs to me? It is I, Shere Khan, who speaks!”

Mother Wolf sprang forward. Her eyes, like two green moons in the darkness, faced the blazing eyes of Shere Khan. She said, “And it is I, Raksha (the Demon), who answers. The cub is *mine*, Lungri—mine to me! He shall not be killed. He shall live to run with the pack and hunt with the pack. Someday, perhaps he shall hunt *you*! Now go back to the jungle, lame cattle-killer! Go!”

Shere Khan backed out of the cave’s mouth. “We will see what the pack will say about this! The cub is mine, and to *my* teeth he will come in the end, you thieves!” he shouted.

Panting, Mother Wolf threw herself down among the cubs. “Shere Khan speaks the truth,” Father Wolf said. “The cub must be shown to the pack. Will you still keep him, Mother?”