



## The Story of Akela and Mowgli

By Rudyard Kipling

Once upon a time in the jungles of India on a warm summer evening, Father Wolf awoke, stretched his paws, and prepared to go hunting.

The moon shone into the mouth of the cave where Mother Wolf lay sleeping with their four young cubs. Suddenly, a shadow crossed the opening of the cave and a whining voice said, "Good Hunting, O' Chief of the Wolves, and good luck to your children." It was Tabaqui, the sneaky little jackal who, because he is too lazy to hunt for himself, picks up scraps left by other animals.

Father Wolf told him, "There is no food here, but in come in if you wish."

Tabaqui said, "For a poor animal like myself a dry bone is a feast," and in no time at all he was cracking away on a bone at the back of the cave. Now Tabaqui was always ready to make trouble and to talk about others. He said, "Shere Khan, the might tiger, has changed his hunting ground. He hunts in these hills for the next moon." (Shere Khan was the tiger who lived about twenty miles away, near the big river.)

Father Wolf said, "By the Law of the Jungle, he had no right to change his hunting ground. He will scare the animals away for miles around."

Tabaqui said, "I could have saved myself the trouble of telling. You can hear him now in the jungle below." And he trotted off to find the tiger.

Father and Mother Wolf listened. From the valley below, they could hear the angry whine of a tiger who had caught nothing and didn't care if the whole jungle knew it.

"The fool," said Father Wolf, "to start a night's hunting with all that noise!" The whine changed to a humming-purr, which is the noise a tiger makes when he is hunting man. Father Wolf said, "Are there not enough frogs and beetles that he must hunt humans?"

Just then there was a most untigerish howl from Shere Khan, and Mother Wolf said, "He missed! What happened?"

Father Wolf ran out a few paces and looked down to a clearing where there were several woodcutters' huts. He said, "Shere Khan has had no more sense than to jump at the woodcutters' fire. He burned his feet! Tabaqui is with him and they have frightened all the people away."

"Listen," Mother Wolf said, "something is coming up the hill. Get ready!"

Father Wolf crouched and sprang, but as he sprang, he stopped himself midair because what he saw was a little baby boy!

"Man!" he said. "A man cub. Look!"

"I have never seen one," Mother Wolf said. "Bring him to me."

Father Wolf brought him into the cave and put him down beside Mother Wolf. The baby snuggled close to the young wolf cubs. "How little he is," said Mother Wolf.

Suddenly, the moonlight was blocked from the door of the cave by the great head and shoulders of Shere Khan.

"What does Shere Khan want?" said Father Wolf with angry eyes.

"The man-cub!" said Shere Khan. "Give him to me!"

Father Wolf said, "The wolves take orders only from Akela, the head of the wolf pack. The man-cub is ours."

The tiger's roar filled the cave with thunder. "The man-cub is mine. Give him to me!" said Shere Khan.

Mother Wolf sprang quickly and said, "The man-cub is ours. You have frightened his family away. He shall not be killed. He shall live to run with the pack and hunt with the pack."

Shere Khan knew he could not fight the two wolves in the cave; therefore, he went away growling, snarling, and saying, "We will see what the pack has to say about this man-cub."

When the tiger had gone, Father Wolf said, "Shere Khan is right. What will the pack say?" But Mother Wolf had decided to keep him. And they called him Mowgli ("the frog") because his skin was smooth and without hair. Mowgli stayed with the young cubs.

When they were old enough to run, Father and Mother Wolf set off with them one night, through the jungle to a meeting of the wolf pack at the Council Rock. The Law of the Jungle states that wolves must gather to look over the new wolf cubs of the pack, so that they will know them and take care of them when they see them in the jungle.

As each young wolf was pushed to the circle, Akela, the great leader of the wolf pack, sitting high on the Council Rock, called, "Look at each cub, O' Wolves. Look Well." At last it was Mowgli's turn and Mother Wolf pushed him into the circle where he sat playing with some stones in the moonlight. Akela did not even twitch an ear as he called, "Look well, O' Wolves."

From outside the circle came a roar from Shere Khan. "The man-cub is mine. Give him to me." Some of the wolves took up the cry, "What do we want with a man-cub in the pack?"

There is a law that says if there is an argument as to the right of a cub to join the pack, two people must speak for him. Akela asked, "Who speaks for this cub?"

At first there was no answer, but then Baloo, the sleepy brown bear who teaches the cubs the Law of the Pack, stepped into the circle and said, "I will speak for the man-cub. Let him join the pack and I, myself, will teach him the law and the ways of the jungle."

"We need another," said Akela. "Who beside Baloo speaks?"

An inky black shadow dripped silently into the circle. It was Bagheera, the Black Panther, the mighty hunter who teaches the cubs the skills of the jungle. In his soft silky voice he said, "If there is a question about the right of a cub to join the pack, his life may be bought at a price. Isn't that the law?"

"Yes," said the pack.

"Then to Baloo's good word, I will add fresh meat which is in the valley below, if you will accept Mowgli into the pack."

The wolves cried, "Let him join. What harm can a man-cub do?" They looked him over; then, one by one, the wolves went down the hill, leaving Mowgli with Father and Mother Wolf, Baloo, and Bagheera at the Council Rock with Akela. Akela said, "Now take him away and teach him the Law of the Pack."

And that is how Mowgli joined the Seeonee Wolf Pack.

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