The Jungle Book

by Rudyard Kipling

Father Wolf listened, and below in the valley, 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.

"Shere Khan – the fool!" said Father Wolf. "To begin a night's hunting with that noise!"

"Hush. It is neither bullock nor deer he hunts tonight," said Mother Wolf, "It is Man."

"Man!" said Father Wolf, showing all his white teeth. "Ha! Are there not enough beetles and frogs 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 men on elephants, with guns, and hundreds of 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 "Aargh!" 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.

"Something is coming," said Mother Wolf, twitching one car. Get ready."

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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 baby who could just walk - as soft and as dimpled a little thing 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, mouth 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. "Ah! 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."