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THE JUNGLE BOOK

By Rudyard Kipling

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Now Rann 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 gray nose dropped across her

four tumbling, squealing cubs, and the moon shone into the mouth of the

cave where they all lived. “Augrh!” said Father Wolf. “It is time to

hunt again.” He was going to spring down hill when a little shadow with

a bushy tail crossed the threshold and whined: “Good luck go with you, O

Chief of the Wolves. And good luck and strong white teeth go with 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. It pleased him to see

Mother and Father Wolf look uncomfortable.

Tabaqui sat still, rejoicing in the mischief that he had made, and then

he said spitefully:

“Shere Khan, the Big One, has shifted his hunting grounds. He will hunt

among these hills for the next moon, so he has told me.”

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

miles away.

“He has no right!” Father Wolf began angrily--“By the Law of the Jungle

he has no right to change his quarters without due warning. He will

frighten every head of game within ten miles, and I--I have to kill for

two, these days.”

“His mother did not call him Lungri [the Lame One] for nothing,” said

Mother Wolf quietly. “He has been lame in one foot from his birth. That

is why he has only killed cattle. Now the villagers of the Waingunga are

angry with him, and he has come here to make our villagers angry.

They will scour the jungle for him when he is far away, and we and our

children must run when the grass is set 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?”

“H’sh. It is neither bullock nor buck he hunts to-night,” 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 defenseless of all living

things, and it is unsportsmanlike to touch him. They say too--and it is

true--that man-eaters become mangy, and lose their teeth.

The purr grew louder, and ended in the full-throated “Aaarh!” of the

tiger’s charge.

Then there was a howl--an untigerish howl--from Shere Khan. “He has

missed,” said Mother Wolf. “What is it?”

Father Wolf ran out a few paces and heard Shere Khan muttering and

mumbling savagely as he tumbled about in the scrub.

“The fool has had no more sense than to jump at a woodcutter’s campfire,

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, 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.

“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 honor,” 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 campfire, as Father Wolf had

said, and was furious from the pain of his burned feet. But Father Wolf

knew that the mouth of the cave was too narrow for a tiger to come in

by. Even where he was, Shere Khan’s shoulders and forepaws were cramped

for want of room, as a man’s would be if he tried to fight in a barrel.

“The Wolves are a free people,” said Father Wolf. “They take orders from

the Head of the Pack, and not from any striped cattle-killer. The man’s

cub is ours--to kill if we choose.”

“Ye choose and ye do not choose! 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 answers. 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 cubs--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 camest 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 gray 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 color, from

badger-colored veterans who could handle a buck alone to young black

three-year-olds who thought they could. The Lone Wolf had led them for a

year now. He had fallen 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 center of the circle where their mothers and fathers

sat, and now and again a senior wolf would go quietly up to a cub, look

at him carefully, and return to his place on noiseless feet. Sometimes a

mother would push her cub far out into the moonlight to be sure that

he had not been overlooked. Akela from his rock would cry: “Ye know

the Law--ye know the Law. Look well, O Wolves!” And the anxious mothers

would take up the call: “Look--look well, O Wolves!”

At last--and Mother Wolf’s neck bristles lifted as the time came--Father

Wolf pushed “Mowgli the Frog,” as they called him, into the center,

where he sat laughing and playing with some pebbles that glistened in

the moonlight.

Akela never raised his head from his paws, but went on with the

monotonous cry: “Look well!” A muffled roar came up from behind the

rocks--the voice of Shere Khan crying: “The cub is mine. Give him to

me. What have the Free People to do with a man’s cub?” Akela never even

twitched his ears. All he said was: “Look well, O Wolves! What have

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 upon his hind quarters 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 clamor 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.

“Ay, roar well,” said Bagheera, under his whiskers, “for the time will

come when this naked thing will make thee roar to another tune, or I

know nothing of man.”

“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

forever,” said Bagheera.

Akela said nothing. He was thinking of the time that comes to every

leader of every pack when his strength goes from him and he gets feebler

and feebler, till at last he is killed by the wolves and a new leader

comes up--to be killed in his turn.

“Take him away,” he said to Father Wolf, “and train him as befits one of

the Free People.”

And that is how Mowgli was entered into the Seeonee Wolf Pack for the

price of a bull and on Baloo’s good word.

Now you must be content to skip ten or eleven whole years, and only

guess at 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 gray ape. He took his place at the Council Rock, too,

when the Pack met, and there he discovered that if he stared hard at any

wolf, the wolf would be forced to drop his eyes, and so he used to stare

for fun. At other times he would pick the long thorns out of the pads

of his friends, for wolves suffer terribly from thorns and burs in their

coats. He would go down the hillside into the cultivated lands 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 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 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. 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 Ikki 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 around the splendid neck and looked deep into the big

eyes--“art thou sure that all this is Shere Khan’s doing?”

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

“Then, by the Bull that bought me, I will pay 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

plowed 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 forefoot.

He did not wait for anything more, but dashed on; and the yells grew

fainter behind him as he ran into the croplands where the villagers

lived.

“Bagheera spoke truth,” he panted, as he nestled down in some cattle

fodder by the window of a hut. “To-morrow 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. Halfway up

the hill he met Bagheera with the morning dew shining like moonstones on

his coat.

“Akela has missed,” said the Panther. “They would have killed him last

night, but they needed thee also. They were looking for thee on the

hill.”

“I was among the plowed lands. I am ready. See!” Mowgli held up the

fire-pot.

“Good! Now, I have seen men thrust a dry branch into that stuff, and

presently the Red Flower blossomed at the end of it. Art thou not

afraid?”

“No. Why should I fear? I remember now--if it is not a dream--how,

before I was a Wolf, I lay beside the Red Flower, and it was warm and

pleasant.”

All that day Mowgli sat in the cave tending his fire pot and dipping

dry branches into it to see how they looked. He found a branch that

satisfied him, and in the evening when Tabaqui came to the cave and 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.

Akela raised his old head wearily:--

“Free People, and ye too, jackals of Shere Khan, for twelve seasons I

have led ye to and from the kill, and in all that time not one has been

trapped or maimed. Now I have missed my kill. Ye know how that 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?” clamored Shere

Khan. “No, give him to me. He is a man, and none of us can look him

between the eyes.”

Akela lifted his head again and said, “He has eaten our food. He has

slept with us. He has driven game for us. He has broken no word of the

Law of the Jungle.”

“Also, I paid for him with a bull when he was accepted. The worth of a

bull is little, but Bagheera’s honor is something that he will perhaps

fight for,” said Bagheera in his gentlest voice.

“A bull paid ten years ago!” the Pack snarled. “What do we care for

bones ten years old?”

“Or for a pledge?” 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 Honor of

the Pack,--a little matter that by being without a leader ye have

forgotten,--I promise that if ye let the man-cub go to his own place, I

will not, when my time comes to die, bare one tooth against ye. I will

die without fighting. That will at least save the Pack three lives.

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, wolflike, 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 in 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. That is 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 croplands 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! O hark!

Once, twice and again!

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 Strangers’ 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’s cub is a man’s 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 gray 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 gray 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 their 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 today?”

“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. 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 treetops, 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 topsides of the branches, so he

stared upward and saw, far away in the blue, Rann the Kite balancing

and wheeling as he kept watch over the jungle waiting for things to die.

Rann 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 treetop

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 Rann 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?” Rann 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

Rann 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

treetops 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 eye-sight, 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! O 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 most

miserable of bears! Arulala! Wahooa! O 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

Ikki 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, uncoiling 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 around the tree, waked the

Bandar-log, and they called me most evil names.”

“Footless, yellow earth-worm,” 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 Ikki (his quills make him presumptuous) of a

man-thing that was entered into a wolf pack, but I did not believe. Ikki

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, weaving 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--earth-worm,” 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-ssp! 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, look up, Baloo of the Seeonee Wolf

Pack!”

Baloo looked up to see where the voice came from, and there was Rann the

Kite, sweeping down with the sun shining on the upturned flanges of his

wings. It was near Rann’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, Rann,” cried Bagheera. “I will

remember thee in my next kill, and put aside the head for thee alone, O

best of kites!”

“It is nothing. It is nothing. The boy held the Master Word. I could

have done no less,” and Rann 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 drought, when the half-ruined tanks and reservoirs

held a little water.

[Illustration: The “Cold Lairs”]

“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 much 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

Strangers’ 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 rain water. There was a ruined

summer-house of white marble in the center 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

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 favor. 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

awhile 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 ssso! 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 tanks. 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, halting 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 forepaws, 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 the 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 round 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. It 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 behavior 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 defense 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

clamor broke out again. The monkeys leaped higher up the walls. They

clung around 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 screenwork 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 did not pull me into a hundred little

bearlings,” 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 discolored 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 around 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, oh, 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 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 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.”

“Well said,” growled Baloo, for Mowgli had returned thanks very

prettily. The Python dropped his head lightly for a minute on Mowgli’s

shoulder. “A brave heart and a courteous tongue,” said he. “They shall

carry thee far through the jungle, manling. But now go hence quickly

with thy friends. Go and sleep, for the moon sets, and what follows it

is not well that thou shouldst see.”

The moon was sinking behind the hills and the lines of trembling monkeys

huddled together on the walls and battlements looked like ragged shaky

fringes of things. Baloo went down to the tank for a drink and Bagheera

began to put his fur in order, as Kaa glided out into the center of the

terrace and brought his jaws together with a ringing snap that drew all

the monkeys’ eyes upon him.

“The moon sets,” he said. “Is there yet light enough to see?”

From the walls came a moan like the wind in the tree-tops--“We see, O

Kaa.”

“Good. Begins now the dance--the Dance of the Hunger of Kaa. Sit still

and watch.”

He turned twice or thrice in a big circle, weaving his head from right

to left. Then he began making loops and figures of eight with his

body, and soft, oozy triangles that melted into squares and five-sided

figures, and coiled mounds, never resting, never hurrying, and never

stopping his low humming song. It grew darker and darker, till at last

the dragging, shifting coils disappeared, but they could hear the rustle

of the scales.

Baloo and Bagheera stood still as stone, growling in their throats,

their neck hair bristling, and Mowgli watched and wondered.

“Bandar-log,” said the voice of Kaa at last, “can ye stir foot or hand

without my order? Speak!”

“Without thy order we cannot stir foot or hand, O Kaa!”

“Good! Come all one pace nearer to me.”

The lines of the monkeys swayed forward helplessly, and Baloo and

Bagheera took one stiff step forward with them.

“Nearer!” hissed Kaa, and they all moved again.

Mowgli laid his hands on Baloo and Bagheera to get them away, and the

two great beasts started as though they had been waked from a dream.

“Keep thy hand on my shoulder,” Bagheera whispered. “Keep it there, or I

must go back--must go back to Kaa. Aah!”

“It is only old Kaa making circles on the dust,” said Mowgli. “Let us

go.” And the three slipped off through a gap in the walls to the jungle.

“Whoof!” said Baloo, when he stood under the still trees again. “Never

more will I make an ally of Kaa,” and he shook himself all over.

“He knows more than we,” said Bagheera, trembling. “In a little time,

had I stayed, I should have walked down his throat.”

“Many will walk by that road before the moon rises again,” said Baloo.

“He will have good hunting--after his own fashion.”

“But what was the meaning of it all?” said Mowgli, who did not know

anything of a python’s powers of fascination. “I saw no more than a big

snake making foolish circles till the dark came. And his nose was all

sore. Ho! Ho!”

“Mowgli,” said Bagheera angrily, “his nose was sore on thy account, as

my ears and sides and paws, and Baloo’s neck and shoulders are bitten

on thy account. Neither Baloo nor Bagheera will be able to hunt with

pleasure for many days.”

“It is nothing,” said Baloo; “we have the man-cub again.”

“True, but he has cost us heavily in time which might have been spent in

good hunting, in wounds, in hair--I am half plucked along my back--and

last of all, in honor. For, remember, Mowgli, I, who am the Black

Panther, was forced to call upon Kaa for protection, and Baloo and I

were both made stupid as little birds by the Hunger Dance. All this,

man-cub, came of thy playing with the Bandar-log.”

“True, it is true,” said Mowgli sorrowfully. “I am an evil man-cub, and

my stomach is sad in me.”

“Mf! What says the Law of the Jungle, Baloo?”

Baloo did not wish to bring Mowgli into any more trouble, but he could

not tamper with the Law, so he mumbled: “Sorrow never stays punishment.

But remember, Bagheera, he is very little.”

“I will remember. But he has done mischief, and blows must be dealt now.

Mowgli, hast thou anything to say?”

“Nothing. I did wrong. Baloo and thou are wounded. It is just.”

Bagheera gave him half a dozen love-taps from a panther’s point of

view (they would hardly have waked one of his own cubs), but for a

seven-year-old boy they amounted to as severe a beating as you could

wish to avoid. When it was all over Mowgli sneezed, and picked himself

up without a word.

“Now,” said Bagheera, “jump on my back, Little Brother, and we will go

home.”

One of the beauties of Jungle Law is that punishment settles all scores.

There is no nagging afterward.

Mowgli laid his head down on Bagheera’s back and slept so deeply that he

never waked when he was put down in the home-cave.

Road-Song of the Bandar-Log

Here we go in a flung festoon,

Half-way up to the jealous moon!

Don’t you envy our pranceful bands?

Don’t you wish you had extra hands?

Wouldn’t you like if your tails were--so--

Curved in the shape of a Cupid’s bow?

Now you’re angry, but--never mind,

\_Brother, thy tail hangs down behind!\_

Here we sit in a branchy row,

Thinking of beautiful things we know;

Dreaming of deeds that we mean to do,

All complete, in a minute or two--

Something noble and wise and good,

Done by merely wishing we could.

We’ve forgotten, but--never mind,

\_Brother, thy tail hangs down behind!\_

All the talk we ever have heard

Uttered by bat or beast or bird--

Hide or fin or scale or feather--

Jabber it quickly and all together!

Excellent! Wonderful! Once again!

Now we are talking just like men!

Let’s pretend we are ... never mind,

\_Brother, thy tail hangs down behind!\_

This is the way of the Monkey-kind.

\_Then join our leaping lines that scumfish through the pines,

That rocket by where, light and high, the wild grape swings.

By the rubbish in our wake, and the noble noise we make,

Be sure, be sure, we’re going to do some splendid things!\_

“Tiger! Tiger!”

What of the hunting, hunter bold?

Brother, the watch was long and cold.

What of the quarry ye went to kill?

Brother, he crops in the jungle still.

Where is the power that made your pride?

Brother, it ebbs from my flank and side.

Where is the haste that ye hurry by?

Brother, I go to my lair--to die.

Now we must go back to the first tale. When Mowgli left the wolf’s cave

after the fight with the Pack at the Council Rock, he went down to the

plowed lands where the villagers lived, but he would not stop there

because it was too near to the jungle, and he knew that he had made at

least one bad enemy at the Council. So he hurried on, keeping to

the rough road that ran down the valley, and followed it at a steady

jog-trot for nearly twenty miles, till he came to a country that he

did not know. The valley opened out into a great plain dotted over with

rocks and cut up by ravines. At one end stood a little village, and at

the other the thick jungle came down in a sweep to the grazing-grounds,

and stopped there as though it had been cut off with a hoe. All over the

plain, cattle and buffaloes were grazing, and when the little boys in

charge of the herds saw Mowgli they shouted and ran away, and the yellow

pariah dogs that hang about every Indian village barked. Mowgli walked

on, for he was feeling hungry, and when he came to the village gate he

saw the big thorn-bush that was drawn up before the gate at twilight,

pushed to one side.

“Umph!” he said, for he had come across more than one such barricade in

his night rambles after things to eat. “So men are afraid of the People

of the Jungle here also.” He sat down by the gate, and when a man came

out he stood up, opened his mouth, and pointed down it to show that

he wanted food. The man stared, and ran back up the one street of the

village shouting for the priest, who was a big, fat man dressed in

white, with a red and yellow mark on his forehead. The priest came to

the gate, and with him at least a hundred people, who stared and talked

and shouted and pointed at Mowgli.

“They have no manners, these Men Folk,” said Mowgli to himself. “Only

the gray ape would behave as they do.” So he threw back his long hair

and frowned at the crowd.

“What is there to be afraid of?” said the priest. “Look at the marks on

his arms and legs. They are the bites of wolves. He is but a wolf-child

run away from the jungle.”

Of course, in playing together, the cubs had often nipped Mowgli harder

than they intended, and there were white scars all over his arms and

legs. But he would have been the last person in the world to call these

bites, for he knew what real biting meant.

“Arre! Arre!” said two or three women together. “To be bitten by wolves,

poor child! He is a handsome boy. He has eyes like red fire. By my

honor, Messua, he is not unlike thy boy that was taken by the tiger.”

“Let me look,” said a woman with heavy copper rings on her wrists and

ankles, and she peered at Mowgli under the palm of her hand. “Indeed he

is not. He is thinner, but he has the very look of my boy.”

The priest was a clever man, and he knew that Messua was wife to the

richest villager in the place. So he looked up at the sky for a minute

and said solemnly: “What the jungle has taken the jungle has restored.

Take the boy into thy house, my sister, and forget not to honor the

priest who sees so far into the lives of men.”

“By the Bull that bought me,” said Mowgli to himself, “but all this

talking is like another looking-over by the Pack! Well, if I am a man, a

man I must become.”

The crowd parted as the woman beckoned Mowgli to her hut, where there

was a red lacquered bedstead, a great earthen grain chest with funny

raised patterns on it, half a dozen copper cooking pots, an image of a

Hindu god in a little alcove, and on the wall a real looking glass, such

as they sell at the country fairs.

She gave him a long drink of milk and some bread, and then she laid her

hand on his head and looked into his eyes; for she thought perhaps that

he might be her real son come back from the jungle where the tiger had

taken him. So she said, “Nathoo, O Nathoo!” Mowgli did not show that he

knew the name. “Dost thou not remember the day when I gave thee thy new

shoes?” She touched his foot, and it was almost as hard as horn. “No,”

she said sorrowfully, “those feet have never worn shoes, but thou art

very like my Nathoo, and thou shalt be my son.”

Mowgli was uneasy, because he had never been under a roof before. But as

he looked at the thatch, he saw that he could tear it out any time if he

wanted to get away, and that the window had no fastenings. “What is the

good of a man,” he said to himself at last, “if he does not understand

man’s talk? Now I am as silly and dumb as a man would be with us in the

jungle. I must speak their talk.”

It was not for fun that he had learned while he was with the wolves to

imitate the challenge of bucks in the jungle and the grunt of the little

wild pig. So, as soon as Messua pronounced a word Mowgli would imitate

it almost perfectly, and before dark he had learned the names of many

things in the hut.

There was a difficulty at bedtime, because Mowgli would not sleep under

anything that looked so like a panther trap as that hut, and when they

shut the door he went through the window. “Give him his will,” said

Messua’s husband. “Remember he can never till now have slept on a bed.

If he is indeed sent in the place of our son he will not run away.”

So Mowgli stretched himself in some long, clean grass at the edge of

the field, but before he had closed his eyes a soft gray nose poked him

under the chin.

“Phew!” said Gray Brother (he was the eldest of Mother Wolf’s cubs).

“This is a poor reward for following thee twenty miles. Thou smellest

of wood smoke and cattle--altogether like a man already. Wake, Little

Brother; I bring news.”

“Are all well in the jungle?” said Mowgli, hugging him.

“All except the wolves that were burned with the Red Flower. Now,

listen. Shere Khan has gone away to hunt far off till his coat grows

again, for he is badly singed. When he returns he swears that he will

lay thy bones in the Waingunga.”

“There are two words to that. I also have made a little promise. But

news is always good. I am tired to-night,--very tired with new things,

Gray Brother,--but bring me the news always.”

“Thou wilt not forget that thou art a wolf? Men will not make thee

forget?” said Gray Brother anxiously.

“Never. I will always remember that I love thee and all in our cave. But

also I will always remember that I have been cast out of the Pack.”

“And that thou mayest be cast out of another pack. Men are only men,

Little Brother, and their talk is like the talk of frogs in a pond. When

I come down here again, I will wait for thee in the bamboos at the edge

of the grazing-ground.”

For three months after that night Mowgli hardly ever left the village

gate, he was so busy learning the ways and customs of men. First he had

to wear a cloth round him, which annoyed him horribly; and then he had

to learn about money, which he did not in the least understand, and

about plowing, of which he did not see the use. Then the little children

in the village made him very angry. Luckily, the Law of the Jungle had

taught him to keep his temper, for in the jungle life and food depend on

keeping your temper; but when they made fun of him because he would not

play games or fly kites, or because he mispronounced some word, only the

knowledge that it was unsportsmanlike to kill little naked cubs kept him

from picking them up and breaking them in two.

He did not know his own strength in the least. In the jungle he knew he

was weak compared with the beasts, but in the village people said that

he was as strong as a bull.

And Mowgli had not the faintest idea of the difference that caste makes

between man and man. When the potter’s donkey slipped in the clay pit,

Mowgli hauled it out by the tail, and helped to stack the pots for their

journey to the market at Khanhiwara. That was very shocking, too, for

the potter is a low-caste man, and his donkey is worse. When the priest

scolded him, Mowgli threatened to put him on the donkey too, and the

priest told Messua’s husband that Mowgli had better be set to work as

soon as possible; and the village head-man told Mowgli that he would

have to go out with the buffaloes next day, and herd them while they

grazed. No one was more pleased than Mowgli; and that night, because he

had been appointed a servant of the village, as it were, he went off

to a circle that met every evening on a masonry platform under a great

fig-tree. It was the village club, and the head-man and the watchman and

the barber, who knew all the gossip of the village, and old Buldeo, the

village hunter, who had a Tower musket, met and smoked. The monkeys

sat and talked in the upper branches, and there was a hole under the

platform where a cobra lived, and he had his little platter of milk

every night because he was sacred; and the old men sat around the tree

and talked, and pulled at the big huqas (the water-pipes) till far into

the night. They told wonderful tales of gods and men and ghosts; and

Buldeo told even more wonderful ones of the ways of beasts in the

jungle, till the eyes of the children sitting outside the circle bulged

out of their heads. Most of the tales were about animals, for the jungle

was always at their door. The deer and the wild pig grubbed up their

crops, and now and again the tiger carried off a man at twilight, within

sight of the village gates.

Mowgli, who naturally knew something about what they were talking of,

had to cover his face not to show that he was laughing, while Buldeo,

the Tower musket across his knees, climbed on from one wonderful story

to another, and Mowgli’s shoulders shook.

Buldeo was explaining how the tiger that had carried away Messua’s son

was a ghost-tiger, and his body was inhabited by the ghost of a wicked,

old money-lender, who had died some years ago. “And I know that this is

true,” he said, “because Purun Dass always limped from the blow that he

got in a riot when his account books were burned, and the tiger that I

speak of he limps, too, for the tracks of his pads are unequal.”

“True, true, that must be the truth,” said the gray-beards, nodding

together.

“Are all these tales such cobwebs and moontalk?” said Mowgli. “That

tiger limps because he was born lame, as everyone knows. To talk of the

soul of a money-lender in a beast that never had the courage of a jackal

is child’s talk.”

Buldeo was speechless with surprise for a moment, and the head-man

stared.

“Oho! It is the jungle brat, is it?” said Buldeo. “If thou art so

wise, better bring his hide to Khanhiwara, for the Government has set

a hundred rupees on his life. Better still, talk not when thy elders

speak.”

Mowgli rose to go. “All the evening I have lain here listening,” he

called back over his shoulder, “and, except once or twice, Buldeo has

not said one word of truth concerning the jungle, which is at his very

doors. How, then, shall I believe the tales of ghosts and gods and

goblins which he says he has seen?”

“It is full time that boy went to herding,” said the head-man, while

Buldeo puffed and snorted at Mowgli’s impertinence.

The custom of most Indian villages is for a few boys to take the cattle

and buffaloes out to graze in the early morning, and bring them back

at night. The very cattle that would trample a white man to death allow

themselves to be banged and bullied and shouted at by children that

hardly come up to their noses. So long as the boys keep with the herds

they are safe, for not even the tiger will charge a mob of cattle. But

if they straggle to pick flowers or hunt lizards, they are sometimes

carried off. Mowgli went through the village street in the dawn, sitting

on the back of Rama, the great herd bull. The slaty-blue buffaloes,

with their long, backward-sweeping horns and savage eyes, rose out their

byres, one by one, and followed him, and Mowgli made it very clear to

the children with him that he was the master. He beat the buffaloes with

a long, polished bamboo, and told Kamya, one of the boys, to graze the

cattle by themselves, while he went on with the buffaloes, and to be

very careful not to stray away from the herd.

An Indian grazing ground is all rocks and scrub and tussocks and little

ravines, among which the herds scatter and disappear. The buffaloes

generally keep to the pools and muddy places, where they lie wallowing

or basking in the warm mud for hours. Mowgli drove them on to the edge

of the plain where the Waingunga came out of the jungle; then he dropped

from Rama’s neck, trotted off to a bamboo clump, and found Gray Brother.

“Ah,” said Gray Brother, “I have waited here very many days. What is the

meaning of this cattle-herding work?”

“It is an order,” said Mowgli. “I am a village herd for a while. What

news of Shere Khan?”

“He has come back to this country, and has waited here a long time for

thee. Now he has gone off again, for the game is scarce. But he means to

kill thee.”

“Very good,” said Mowgli. “So long as he is away do thou or one of the

four brothers sit on that rock, so that I can see thee as I come out of

the village. When he comes back wait for me in the ravine by the \_dhâk\_

tree in the center of the plain. We need not walk into Shere Khan’s

mouth.”

Then Mowgli picked out a shady place, and lay down and slept while

the buffaloes grazed round him. Herding in India is one of the laziest

things in the world. The cattle move and crunch, and lie down, and move

on again, and they do not even low. They only grunt, and the buffaloes

very seldom say anything, but get down into the muddy pools one after

another, and work their way into the mud till only their noses and

staring china-blue eyes show above the surface, and then they lie like

logs. The sun makes the rocks dance in the heat, and the herd children

hear one kite (never any more) whistling almost out of sight overhead,

and they know that if they died, or a cow died, that kite would sweep

down, and the next kite miles away would see him drop and follow, and

the next, and the next, and almost before they were dead there would be

a score of hungry kites come out of nowhere. Then they sleep and

wake and sleep again, and weave little baskets of dried grass and put

grasshoppers in them; or catch two praying mantises and make them fight;

or string a necklace of red and black jungle nuts; or watch a lizard

basking on a rock, or a snake hunting a frog near the wallows. Then they

sing long, long songs with odd native quavers at the end of them, and

the day seems longer than most people’s whole lives, and perhaps they

make a mud castle with mud figures of men and horses and buffaloes, and

put reeds into the men’s hands, and pretend that they are kings and the

figures are their armies, or that they are gods to be worshiped. Then

evening comes and the children call, and the buffaloes lumber up out of

the sticky mud with noises like gunshots going off one after the other,

and they all string across the gray plain back to the twinkling village

lights.

Day after day Mowgli would lead the buffaloes out to their wallows, and

day after day he would see Gray Brother’s back a mile and a half away

across the plain (so he knew that Shere Khan had not come back), and day

after day he would lie on the grass listening to the noises round him,

and dreaming of old days in the jungle. If Shere Khan had made a false

step with his lame paw up in the jungles by the Waingunga, Mowgli would

have heard him in those long, still mornings.

At last a day came when he did not see Gray Brother at the signal place,

and he laughed and headed the buffaloes for the ravine by the dhk tree,

which was all covered with golden-red flowers. There sat Gray Brother,

every bristle on his back lifted.

“He has hidden for a month to throw thee off thy guard. He crossed the

ranges last night with Tabaqui, hot-foot on thy trail,” said the Wolf,

panting.

Mowgli frowned. “I am not afraid of Shere Khan, but Tabaqui is very

cunning.”

“Have no fear,” said Gray Brother, licking his lips a little. “I met

Tabaqui in the dawn. Now he is telling all his wisdom to the kites, but

he told me everything before I broke his back. Shere Khan’s plan is to

wait for thee at the village gate this evening--for thee and for no one

else. He is lying up now, in the big dry ravine of the Waingunga.”

“Has he eaten today, or does he hunt empty?” said Mowgli, for the answer

meant life and death to him.

“He killed at dawn,--a pig,--and he has drunk too. Remember, Shere Khan

could never fast, even for the sake of revenge.”

“Oh! Fool, fool! What a cub’s cub it is! Eaten and drunk too, and he

thinks that I shall wait till he has slept! Now, where does he lie up?

If there were but ten of us we might pull him down as he lies. These

buffaloes will not charge unless they wind him, and I cannot speak their

language. Can we get behind his track so that they may smell it?”

“He swam far down the Waingunga to cut that off,” said Gray Brother.

“Tabaqui told him that, I know. He would never have thought of it

alone.” Mowgli stood with his finger in his mouth, thinking. “The big

ravine of the Waingunga. That opens out on the plain not half a mile

from here. I can take the herd round through the jungle to the head of

the ravine and then sweep down--but he would slink out at the foot. We

must block that end. Gray Brother, canst thou cut the herd in two for

me?”

“Not I, perhaps--but I have brought a wise helper.” Gray Brother trotted

off and dropped into a hole. Then there lifted up a huge gray head that

Mowgli knew well, and the hot air was filled with the most desolate cry

of all the jungle--the hunting howl of a wolf at midday.

“Akela! Akela!” said Mowgli, clapping his hands. “I might have known

that thou wouldst not forget me. We have a big work in hand. Cut the

herd in two, Akela. Keep the cows and calves together, and the bulls and

the plow buffaloes by themselves.”

The two wolves ran, ladies’-chain fashion, in and out of the herd, which

snorted and threw up its head, and separated into two clumps. In one,

the cow-buffaloes stood with their calves in the center, and glared

and pawed, ready, if a wolf would only stay still, to charge down and

trample the life out of him. In the other, the bulls and the young bulls

snorted and stamped, but though they looked more imposing they were much

less dangerous, for they had no calves to protect. No six men could have

divided the herd so neatly.

“What orders!” panted Akela. “They are trying to join again.”

Mowgli slipped on to Rama’s back. “Drive the bulls away to the left,

Akela. Gray Brother, when we are gone, hold the cows together, and drive

them into the foot of the ravine.”

“How far?” said Gray Brother, panting and snapping.

“Till the sides are higher than Shere Khan can jump,” shouted Mowgli.

“Keep them there till we come down.” The bulls swept off as Akela bayed,

and Gray Brother stopped in front of the cows. They charged down on him,

and he ran just before them to the foot of the ravine, as Akela drove

the bulls far to the left.

“Well done! Another charge and they are fairly started. Careful,

now--careful, Akela. A snap too much and the bulls will charge. Hujah!

This is wilder work than driving black-buck. Didst thou think these

creatures could move so swiftly?” Mowgli called.

“I have--have hunted these too in my time,” gasped Akela in the dust.

“Shall I turn them into the jungle?”

“Ay! Turn. Swiftly turn them! Rama is mad with rage. Oh, if I could only

tell him what I need of him to-day.”

The bulls were turned, to the right this time, and crashed into the

standing thicket. The other herd children, watching with the cattle half

a mile away, hurried to the village as fast as their legs could carry

them, crying that the buffaloes had gone mad and run away.

But Mowgli’s plan was simple enough. All he wanted to do was to make a

big circle uphill and get at the head of the ravine, and then take the

bulls down it and catch Shere Khan between the bulls and the cows; for

he knew that after a meal and a full drink Shere Khan would not be in

any condition to fight or to clamber up the sides of the ravine. He was

soothing the buffaloes now by voice, and Akela had dropped far to the

rear, only whimpering once or twice to hurry the rear-guard. It was a

long, long circle, for they did not wish to get too near the ravine and

give Shere Khan warning. At last Mowgli rounded up the bewildered herd

at the head of the ravine on a grassy patch that sloped steeply down to

the ravine itself. From that height you could see across the tops of the

trees down to the plain below; but what Mowgli looked at was the sides

of the ravine, and he saw with a great deal of satisfaction that they

ran nearly straight up and down, while the vines and creepers that hung

over them would give no foothold to a tiger who wanted to get out.

“Let them breathe, Akela,” he said, holding up his hand. “They have not

winded him yet. Let them breathe. I must tell Shere Khan who comes. We

have him in the trap.”

He put his hands to his mouth and shouted down the ravine--it was almost

like shouting down a tunnel--and the echoes jumped from rock to rock.

After a long time there came back the drawling, sleepy snarl of a

full-fed tiger just wakened.

“Who calls?” said Shere Khan, and a splendid peacock fluttered up out of

the ravine screeching.

“I, Mowgli. Cattle thief, it is time to come to the Council Rock!

Down--hurry them down, Akela! Down, Rama, down!”

The herd paused for an instant at the edge of the slope, but Akela gave

tongue in the full hunting-yell, and they pitched over one after the

other, just as steamers shoot rapids, the sand and stones spurting up

round them. Once started, there was no chance of stopping, and before

they were fairly in the bed of the ravine Rama winded Shere Khan and

bellowed.

“Ha! Ha!” said Mowgli, on his back. “Now thou knowest!” and the torrent

of black horns, foaming muzzles, and staring eyes whirled down the

ravine just as boulders go down in floodtime; the weaker buffaloes being

shouldered out to the sides of the ravine where they tore through the

creepers. They knew what the business was before them--the terrible

charge of the buffalo herd against which no tiger can hope to stand.

Shere Khan heard the thunder of their hoofs, picked himself up, and

lumbered down the ravine, looking from side to side for some way of

escape, but the walls of the ravine were straight and he had to hold on,

heavy with his dinner and his drink, willing to do anything rather than

fight. The herd splashed through the pool he had just left, bellowing

till the narrow cut rang. Mowgli heard an answering bellow from the foot

of the ravine, saw Shere Khan turn (the tiger knew if the worst came

to the worst it was better to meet the bulls than the cows with their

calves), and then Rama tripped, stumbled, and went on again over

something soft, and, with the bulls at his heels, crashed full into the

other herd, while the weaker buffaloes were lifted clean off their feet

by the shock of the meeting. That charge carried both herds out into the

plain, goring and stamping and snorting. Mowgli watched his time, and

slipped off Rama’s neck, laying about him right and left with his stick.

“Quick, Akela! Break them up. Scatter them, or they will be fighting one

another. Drive them away, Akela. Hai, Rama! Hai, hai, hai! my children.

Softly now, softly! It is all over.”

Akela and Gray Brother ran to and fro nipping the buffaloes’ legs,

and though the herd wheeled once to charge up the ravine again, Mowgli

managed to turn Rama, and the others followed him to the wallows.

Shere Khan needed no more trampling. He was dead, and the kites were

coming for him already.

“Brothers, that was a dog’s death,” said Mowgli, feeling for the knife

he always carried in a sheath round his neck now that he lived with men.

“But he would never have shown fight. His hide will look well on the

Council Rock. We must get to work swiftly.”

A boy trained among men would never have dreamed of skinning a ten-foot

tiger alone, but Mowgli knew better than anyone else how an animal’s

skin is fitted on, and how it can be taken off. But it was hard work,

and Mowgli slashed and tore and grunted for an hour, while the wolves

lolled out their tongues, or came forward and tugged as he ordered them.

Presently a hand fell on his shoulder, and looking up he saw Buldeo with

the Tower musket. The children had told the village about the buffalo

stampede, and Buldeo went out angrily, only too anxious to correct

Mowgli for not taking better care of the herd. The wolves dropped out of

sight as soon as they saw the man coming.

“What is this folly?” said Buldeo angrily. “To think that thou canst

skin a tiger! Where did the buffaloes kill him? It is the Lame Tiger

too, and there is a hundred rupees on his head. Well, well, we will

overlook thy letting the herd run off, and perhaps I will give thee one

of the rupees of the reward when I have taken the skin to Khanhiwara.”

He fumbled in his waist cloth for flint and steel, and stooped down to

singe Shere Khan’s whiskers. Most native hunters always singe a tiger’s

whiskers to prevent his ghost from haunting them.

“Hum!” said Mowgli, half to himself as he ripped back the skin of a

forepaw. “So thou wilt take the hide to Khanhiwara for the reward, and

perhaps give me one rupee? Now it is in my mind that I need the skin for

my own use. Heh! Old man, take away that fire!”

“What talk is this to the chief hunter of the village? Thy luck and the

stupidity of thy buffaloes have helped thee to this kill. The tiger has

just fed, or he would have gone twenty miles by this time. Thou canst

not even skin him properly, little beggar brat, and forsooth I, Buldeo,

must be told not to singe his whiskers. Mowgli, I will not give thee one

anna of the reward, but only a very big beating. Leave the carcass!”

“By the Bull that bought me,” said Mowgli, who was trying to get at the

shoulder, “must I stay babbling to an old ape all noon? Here, Akela,

this man plagues me.”

Buldeo, who was still stooping over Shere Khan’s head, found himself

sprawling on the grass, with a gray wolf standing over him, while Mowgli

went on skinning as though he were alone in all India.

“Ye-es,” he said, between his teeth. “Thou art altogether right, Buldeo.

Thou wilt never give me one anna of the reward. There is an old war

between this lame tiger and myself--a very old war, and--I have won.”

To do Buldeo justice, if he had been ten years younger he would have

taken his chance with Akela had he met the wolf in the woods, but a wolf

who obeyed the orders of this boy who had private wars with man-eating

tigers was not a common animal. It was sorcery, magic of the worst kind,

thought Buldeo, and he wondered whether the amulet round his neck would

protect him. He lay as still as still, expecting every minute to see

Mowgli turn into a tiger too.

“Maharaj! Great King,” he said at last in a husky whisper.

“Yes,” said Mowgli, without turning his head, chuckling a little.

“I am an old man. I did not know that thou wast anything more than a

herdsboy. May I rise up and go away, or will thy servant tear me to

pieces?”

“Go, and peace go with thee. Only, another time do not meddle with my

game. Let him go, Akela.”

Buldeo hobbled away to the village as fast as he could, looking back

over his shoulder in case Mowgli should change into something terrible.

When he got to the village he told a tale of magic and enchantment and

sorcery that made the priest look very grave.

Mowgli went on with his work, but it was nearly twilight before he and

the wolves had drawn the great gay skin clear of the body.

“Now we must hide this and take the buffaloes home! Help me to herd

them, Akela.”

The herd rounded up in the misty twilight, and when they got near the

village Mowgli saw lights, and heard the conches and bells in the temple

blowing and banging. Half the village seemed to be waiting for him

by the gate. “That is because I have killed Shere Khan,” he said

to himself. But a shower of stones whistled about his ears, and the

villagers shouted: “Sorcerer! Wolf’s brat! Jungle demon! Go away! Get

hence quickly or the priest will turn thee into a wolf again. Shoot,

Buldeo, shoot!”

The old Tower musket went off with a bang, and a young buffalo bellowed

in pain.

“More sorcery!” shouted the villagers. “He can turn bullets. Buldeo,

that was thy buffalo.”

“Now what is this?” said Mowgli, bewildered, as the stones flew thicker.

“They are not unlike the Pack, these brothers of thine,” said Akela,

sitting down composedly. “It is in my head that, if bullets mean

anything, they would cast thee out.”

“Wolf! Wolf’s cub! Go away!” shouted the priest, waving a sprig of the

sacred tulsi plant.

“Again? Last time it was because I was a man. This time it is because I

am a wolf. Let us go, Akela.”

A woman--it was Messua--ran across to the herd, and cried: “Oh, my son,

my son! They say thou art a sorcerer who can turn himself into a beast

at will. I do not believe, but go away or they will kill thee. Buldeo

says thou art a wizard, but I know thou hast avenged Nathoo’s death.”

“Come back, Messua!” shouted the crowd. “Come back, or we will stone

thee.”

Mowgli laughed a little short ugly laugh, for a stone had hit him in

the mouth. “Run back, Messua. This is one of the foolish tales they tell

under the big tree at dusk. I have at least paid for thy son’s life.

Farewell; and run quickly, for I shall send the herd in more swiftly

than their brickbats. I am no wizard, Messua. Farewell!”

“Now, once more, Akela,” he cried. “Bring the herd in.”

The buffaloes were anxious enough to get to the village. They hardly

needed Akela’s yell, but charged through the gate like a whirlwind,

scattering the crowd right and left.

“Keep count!” shouted Mowgli scornfully. “It may be that I have stolen

one of them. Keep count, for I will do your herding no more. Fare you

well, children of men, and thank Messua that I do not come in with my

wolves and hunt you up and down your street.”

He turned on his heel and walked away with the Lone Wolf, and as he

looked up at the stars he felt happy. “No more sleeping in traps for me,

Akela. Let us get Shere Khan’s skin and go away. No, we will not hurt

the village, for Messua was kind to me.”

When the moon rose over the plain, making it look all milky, the

horrified villagers saw Mowgli, with two wolves at his heels and a

bundle on his head, trotting across at the steady wolf’s trot that eats

up the long miles like fire. Then they banged the temple bells and blew

the conches louder than ever. And Messua cried, and Buldeo embroidered

the story of his adventures in the jungle, till he ended by saying that

Akela stood up on his hind legs and talked like a man.

The moon was just going down when Mowgli and the two wolves came to the

hill of the Council Rock, and they stopped at Mother Wolf’s cave.

“They have cast me out from the Man-Pack, Mother,” shouted Mowgli, “but

I come with the hide of Shere Khan to keep my word.”

Mother Wolf walked stiffly from the cave with the cubs behind her, and

her eyes glowed as she saw the skin.

“I told him on that day, when he crammed his head and shoulders into

this cave, hunting for thy life, Little Frog--I told him that the hunter

would be the hunted. It is well done.”

“Little Brother, it is well done,” said a deep voice in the thicket.

“We were lonely in the jungle without thee,” and Bagheera came running

to Mowgli’s bare feet. They clambered up the Council Rock together, and

Mowgli spread the skin out on the flat stone where Akela used to sit,

and pegged it down with four slivers of bamboo, and Akela lay down upon

it, and called the old call to the Council, “Look--look well, O Wolves,”

exactly as he had called when Mowgli was first brought there.

Ever since Akela had been deposed, the Pack had been without a leader,

hunting and fighting at their own pleasure. But they answered the call

from habit; and some of them were lame from the traps they had fallen

into, and some limped from shot wounds, and some were mangy from eating

bad food, and many were missing. But they came to the Council Rock, all

that were left of them, and saw Shere Khan’s striped hide on the rock,

and the huge claws dangling at the end of the empty dangling feet. It

was then that Mowgli made up a song that came up into his throat all

by itself, and he shouted it aloud, leaping up and down on the rattling

skin, and beating time with his heels till he had no more breath left,

while Gray Brother and Akela howled between the verses.

“Look well, O Wolves. Have I kept my word?” said Mowgli. And the wolves

bayed “Yes,” and one tattered wolf howled:

“Lead us again, O Akela. Lead us again, O Man-cub, for we be sick of

this lawlessness, and we would be the Free People once more.”

“Nay,” purred Bagheera, “that may not be. When ye are full-fed, the

madness may come upon you again. Not for nothing are ye called the Free

People. Ye fought for freedom, and it is yours. Eat it, O Wolves.”

“Man-Pack and Wolf-Pack have cast me out,” said Mowgli. “Now I will hunt

alone in the jungle.”

“And we will hunt with thee,” said the four cubs.

So Mowgli went away and hunted with the four cubs in the jungle from

that day on. But he was not always alone, because, years afterward, he

became a man and married.

But that is a story for grown-ups.

Mowgli’s Song

THAT HE SANG AT THE COUNCIL ROCK WHEN HE

DANCED ON SHERE KHAN’S HIDE

The Song of Mowgli—I, Mowgli, am singing. Let the jungle listen to the

things I have done.

Shere Khan said he would kill—would kill! At the gates in the twilight

he would kill Mowgli, the Frog!

He ate and he drank. Drink deep, Shere Khan, for when wilt thou drink

again? Sleep and dream of the kill.

I am alone on the grazing-grounds. Gray Brother, come to me! Come to

me, Lone Wolf, for there is big game afoot!

Bring up the great bull buffaloes, the blue-skinned herd bulls with the

angry eyes. Drive them to and fro as I order.

Sleepest thou still, Shere Khan? Wake, oh, wake! Here come I, and the

bulls are behind.

Rama, the King of the Buffaloes, stamped with his foot. Waters of the

Waingunga, whither went Shere Khan?

He is not Ikki to dig holes, nor Mao, the Peacock, that he should fly.

He is not Mang the Bat, to hang in the branches. Little bamboos that

creak together, tell me where he ran?

\_Ow!\_ He is there. \_Ahoo!\_ He is there. Under the feet of Rama lies the

Lame One! Up, Shere Khan!

Up and kill! Here is meat; break the necks of the bulls!

\_Hsh!\_ He is asleep. We will not wake him, for his strength is very

great. The kites have come down to see it. The black ants have come up

to know it. There is a great assembly in his honor.

\_Alala!\_ I have no cloth to wrap me. The kites will see that I am

naked. I am ashamed to meet all these people.

Lend me thy coat, Shere Khan. Lend me thy gay striped coat that I may

go to the Council Rock.

By the Bull that bought me I made a promise—a little promise. Only thy

coat is lacking before I keep my word.

With the knife, with the knife that men use, with the knife of the

hunter, I will stoop down for my gift.

Waters of the Waingunga, Shere Khan gives me his coat for the love that

he bears me. Pull, Gray Brother! Pull, Akela! Heavy is the hide of

Shere Khan.

The Man Pack are angry. They throw stones and talk child’s talk. My

mouth is bleeding. Let me run away.

Through the night, through the hot night, run swiftly with me, my

brothers. We will leave the lights of the village and go to the low

moon.

Waters of the Waingunga, the Man-Pack have cast me out. I did them no

harm, but they were afraid of me. Why?

Wolf Pack, ye have cast me out too. The jungle is shut to me and the

village gates are shut. Why?

As Mang flies between the beasts and birds, so fly I between the

village and the jungle. Why?

I dance on the hide of Shere Khan, but my heart is very heavy. My mouth

is cut and wounded with the stones from the village, but my heart is

very light, because I have come back to the jungle. Why?

These two things fight together in me as the snakes fight in the

spring. The water comes out of my eyes; yet I laugh while it falls.

Why?

I am two Mowglis, but the hide of Shere Khan is under my feet.

All the jungle knows that I have killed Shere Khan. Look—look well, O

Wolves!

\_Ahae!\_ My heart is heavy with the things that I do not understand.

The White Seal

Oh! hush thee, my baby, the night is behind us,

And black are the waters that sparkled so green.

The moon, o’er the combers, looks downward to find us

At rest in the hollows that rustle between.

Where billow meets billow, then soft be thy pillow,

Ah, weary wee flipperling, curl at thy ease!

The storm shall not wake thee, nor shark overtake thee,

Asleep in the arms of the slow-swinging seas!

Seal Lullaby

All these things happened several years ago at a place called

Novastoshnah, or North East Point, on the Island of St. Paul, away and

away in the Bering Sea. Limmershin, the Winter Wren, told me the tale

when he was blown on to the rigging of a steamer going to Japan, and I

took him down into my cabin and warmed and fed him for a couple of days

till he was fit to fly back to St. Paul’s again. Limmershin is a very

quaint little bird, but he knows how to tell the truth.

Nobody comes to Novastoshnah except on business, and the only people

who have regular business there are the seals. They come in the summer

months by hundreds and hundreds of thousands out of the cold gray sea.

For Novastoshnah Beach has the finest accommodation for seals of any

place in all the world.

Sea Catch knew that, and every spring would swim from whatever place

he happened to be in--would swim like a torpedo-boat straight for

Novastoshnah and spend a month fighting with his companions for a good

place on the rocks, as close to the sea as possible. Sea Catch was

fifteen years old, a huge gray fur seal with almost a mane on his

shoulders, and long, wicked dog teeth. When he heaved himself up on his

front flippers he stood more than four feet clear of the ground, and his

weight, if anyone had been bold enough to weigh him, was nearly seven

hundred pounds. He was scarred all over with the marks of savage fights,

but he was always ready for just one fight more. He would put his head

on one side, as though he were afraid to look his enemy in the face;

then he would shoot it out like lightning, and when the big teeth were

firmly fixed on the other seal’s neck, the other seal might get away if

he could, but Sea Catch would not help him.

Yet Sea Catch never chased a beaten seal, for that was against the Rules

of the Beach. He only wanted room by the sea for his nursery. But as

there were forty or fifty thousand other seals hunting for the same

thing each spring, the whistling, bellowing, roaring, and blowing on the

beach was something frightful.

From a little hill called Hutchinson’s Hill, you could look over three

and a half miles of ground covered with fighting seals; and the surf was

dotted all over with the heads of seals hurrying to land and begin their

share of the fighting. They fought in the breakers, they fought in the

sand, and they fought on the smooth-worn basalt rocks of the nurseries,

for they were just as stupid and unaccommodating as men. Their wives

never came to the island until late in May or early in June, for they

did not care to be torn to pieces; and the young two-, three-, and

four-year-old seals who had not begun housekeeping went inland about

half a mile through the ranks of the fighters and played about on the

sand dunes in droves and legions, and rubbed off every single green

thing that grew. They were called the holluschickie--the bachelors--and

there were perhaps two or three hundred thousand of them at Novastoshnah

alone.

Sea Catch had just finished his forty-fifth fight one spring when

Matkah, his soft, sleek, gentle-eyed wife, came up out of the sea,

and he caught her by the scruff of the neck and dumped her down on his

reservation, saying gruffly: “Late as usual. Where have you been?”

It was not the fashion for Sea Catch to eat anything during the four

months he stayed on the beaches, and so his temper was generally bad.

Matkah knew better than to answer back. She looked round and cooed: “How

thoughtful of you. You’ve taken the old place again.”

“I should think I had,” said Sea Catch. “Look at me!”

He was scratched and bleeding in twenty places; one eye was almost out,

and his sides were torn to ribbons.

“Oh, you men, you men!” Matkah said, fanning herself with her hind

flipper. “Why can’t you be sensible and settle your places quietly? You

look as though you had been fighting with the Killer Whale.”

“I haven’t been doing anything but fight since the middle of May. The

beach is disgracefully crowded this season. I’ve met at least a hundred

seals from Lukannon Beach, house hunting. Why can’t people stay where

they belong?”

“I’ve often thought we should be much happier if we hauled out at Otter

Island instead of this crowded place,” said Matkah.

“Bah! Only the holluschickie go to Otter Island. If we went there they

would say we were afraid. We must preserve appearances, my dear.”

Sea Catch sunk his head proudly between his fat shoulders and pretended

to go to sleep for a few minutes, but all the time he was keeping a

sharp lookout for a fight. Now that all the seals and their wives were

on the land, you could hear their clamor miles out to sea above the

loudest gales. At the lowest counting there were over a million seals

on the beach--old seals, mother seals, tiny babies, and holluschickie,

fighting, scuffling, bleating, crawling, and playing together--going

down to the sea and coming up from it in gangs and regiments, lying

over every foot of ground as far as the eye could reach, and skirmishing

about in brigades through the fog. It is nearly always foggy at

Novastoshnah, except when the sun comes out and makes everything look

all pearly and rainbow-colored for a little while.

Kotick, Matkah’s baby, was born in the middle of that confusion, and he

was all head and shoulders, with pale, watery blue eyes, as tiny seals

must be, but there was something about his coat that made his mother

look at him very closely.

“Sea Catch,” she said, at last, “our baby’s going to be white!”

“Empty clam-shells and dry seaweed!” snorted Sea Catch. “There never has

been such a thing in the world as a white seal.”

“I can’t help that,” said Matkah; “there’s going to be now.” And she

sang the low, crooning seal song that all the mother seals sing to their

babies:

You mustn’t swim till you’re six weeks old,

Or your head will be sunk by your heels;

And summer gales and Killer Whales

Are bad for baby seals.

Are bad for baby seals, dear rat,

As bad as bad can be;

But splash and grow strong,

And you can’t be wrong.

Child of the Open Sea!

Of course the little fellow did not understand the words at first. He

paddled and scrambled about by his mother’s side, and learned to scuffle

out of the way when his father was fighting with another seal, and the

two rolled and roared up and down the slippery rocks. Matkah used to go

to sea to get things to eat, and the baby was fed only once in two days,

but then he ate all he could and throve upon it.

The first thing he did was to crawl inland, and there he met tens

of thousands of babies of his own age, and they played together like

puppies, went to sleep on the clean sand, and played again. The old

people in the nurseries took no notice of them, and the holluschickie

kept to their own grounds, and the babies had a beautiful playtime.

When Matkah came back from her deep-sea fishing she would go straight

to their playground and call as a sheep calls for a lamb, and wait until

she heard Kotick bleat. Then she would take the straightest of straight

lines in his direction, striking out with her fore flippers and knocking

the youngsters head over heels right and left. There were always a few

hundred mothers hunting for their children through the playgrounds, and

the babies were kept lively. But, as Matkah told Kotick, “So long as you

don’t lie in muddy water and get mange, or rub the hard sand into a cut

or scratch, and so long as you never go swimming when there is a heavy

sea, nothing will hurt you here.”

Little seals can no more swim than little children, but they are unhappy

till they learn. The first time that Kotick went down to the sea a wave

carried him out beyond his depth, and his big head sank and his little

hind flippers flew up exactly as his mother had told him in the song,

and if the next wave had not thrown him back again he would have

drowned.

After that, he learned to lie in a beach pool and let the wash of the

waves just cover him and lift him up while he paddled, but he always

kept his eye open for big waves that might hurt. He was two weeks

learning to use his flippers; and all that while he floundered in and

out of the water, and coughed and grunted and crawled up the beach and

took catnaps on the sand, and went back again, until at last he found

that he truly belonged to the water.

Then you can imagine the times that he had with his companions, ducking

under the rollers; or coming in on top of a comber and landing with a

swash and a splutter as the big wave went whirling far up the beach; or

standing up on his tail and scratching his head as the old people did;

or playing “I’m the King of the Castle” on slippery, weedy rocks that

just stuck out of the wash. Now and then he would see a thin fin, like

a big shark’s fin, drifting along close to shore, and he knew that that

was the Killer Whale, the Grampus, who eats young seals when he can get

them; and Kotick would head for the beach like an arrow, and the fin

would jig off slowly, as if it were looking for nothing at all.

Late in October the seals began to leave St. Paul’s for the deep sea, by

families and tribes, and there was no more fighting over the nurseries,

and the holluschickie played anywhere they liked. “Next year,” said

Matkah to Kotick, “you will be a holluschickie; but this year you must

learn how to catch fish.”

They set out together across the Pacific, and Matkah showed Kotick how

to sleep on his back with his flippers tucked down by his side and his

little nose just out of the water. No cradle is so comfortable as the

long, rocking swell of the Pacific. When Kotick felt his skin tingle all

over, Matkah told him he was learning the “feel of the water,” and that

tingly, prickly feelings meant bad weather coming, and he must swim hard

and get away.

“In a little time,” she said, “you’ll know where to swim to, but just

now we’ll follow Sea Pig, the Porpoise, for he is very wise.” A school

of porpoises were ducking and tearing through the water, and little

Kotick followed them as fast as he could. “How do you know where to go

to?” he panted. The leader of the school rolled his white eye and ducked

under. “My tail tingles, youngster,” he said. “That means there’s a gale

behind me. Come along! When you’re south of the Sticky Water [he meant

the Equator] and your tail tingles, that means there’s a gale in front

of you and you must head north. Come along! The water feels bad here.”

This was one of very many things that Kotick learned, and he was always

learning. Matkah taught him to follow the cod and the halibut along the

under-sea banks and wrench the rockling out of his hole among the weeds;

how to skirt the wrecks lying a hundred fathoms below water and dart

like a rifle bullet in at one porthole and out at another as the fishes

ran; how to dance on the top of the waves when the lightning was racing

all over the sky, and wave his flipper politely to the stumpy-tailed

Albatross and the Man-of-war Hawk as they went down the wind; how to

jump three or four feet clear of the water like a dolphin, flippers

close to the side and tail curved; to leave the flying fish alone

because they are all bony; to take the shoulder-piece out of a cod at

full speed ten fathoms deep, and never to stop and look at a boat or a

ship, but particularly a row-boat. At the end of six months what Kotick

did not know about deep-sea fishing was not worth the knowing. And all

that time he never set flipper on dry ground.

One day, however, as he was lying half asleep in the warm water

somewhere off the Island of Juan Fernandez, he felt faint and lazy all

over, just as human people do when the spring is in their legs, and he

remembered the good firm beaches of Novastoshnah seven thousand miles

away, the games his companions played, the smell of the seaweed, the

seal roar, and the fighting. That very minute he turned north, swimming

steadily, and as he went on he met scores of his mates, all bound for

the same place, and they said: “Greeting, Kotick! This year we are

all holluschickie, and we can dance the Fire-dance in the breakers off

Lukannon and play on the new grass. But where did you get that coat?”

Kotick’s fur was almost pure white now, and though he felt very proud of

it, he only said, “Swim quickly! My bones are aching for the land.” And

so they all came to the beaches where they had been born, and heard the

old seals, their fathers, fighting in the rolling mist.

That night Kotick danced the Fire-dance with the yearling seals. The sea

is full of fire on summer nights all the way down from Novastoshnah to

Lukannon, and each seal leaves a wake like burning oil behind him and a

flaming flash when he jumps, and the waves break in great phosphorescent

streaks and swirls. Then they went inland to the holluschickie grounds

and rolled up and down in the new wild wheat and told stories of what

they had done while they had been at sea. They talked about the Pacific

as boys would talk about a wood that they had been nutting in, and if

anyone had understood them he could have gone away and made such a chart

of that ocean as never was. The three- and four-year-old holluschickie

romped down from Hutchinson’s Hill crying: “Out of the way, youngsters!

The sea is deep and you don’t know all that’s in it yet. Wait till

you’ve rounded the Horn. Hi, you yearling, where did you get that white

coat?”

“I didn’t get it,” said Kotick. “It grew.” And just as he was going to

roll the speaker over, a couple of black-haired men with flat red faces

came from behind a sand dune, and Kotick, who had never seen a man

before, coughed and lowered his head. The holluschickie just bundled off

a few yards and sat staring stupidly. The men were no less than Kerick

Booterin, the chief of the seal-hunters on the island, and Patalamon,

his son. They came from the little village not half a mile from the sea

nurseries, and they were deciding what seals they would drive up to the

killing pens--for the seals were driven just like sheep--to be turned

into seal-skin jackets later on.

“Ho!” said Patalamon. “Look! There’s a white seal!”

Kerick Booterin turned nearly white under his oil and smoke, for he was

an Aleut, and Aleuts are not clean people. Then he began to mutter a

prayer. “Don’t touch him, Patalamon. There has never been a white seal

since--since I was born. Perhaps it is old Zaharrof’s ghost. He was lost

last year in the big gale.”

“I’m not going near him,” said Patalamon. “He’s unlucky. Do you really

think he is old Zaharrof come back? I owe him for some gulls’ eggs.”

“Don’t look at him,” said Kerick. “Head off that drove of

four-year-olds. The men ought to skin two hundred to-day, but it’s the

beginning of the season and they are new to the work. A hundred will do.

Quick!”

Patalamon rattled a pair of seal’s shoulder bones in front of a herd

of holluschickie and they stopped dead, puffing and blowing. Then he

stepped near and the seals began to move, and Kerick headed them inland,

and they never tried to get back to their companions. Hundreds and

hundreds of thousands of seals watched them being driven, but they went

on playing just the same. Kotick was the only one who asked questions,

and none of his companions could tell him anything, except that the

men always drove seals in that way for six weeks or two months of every

year.

“I am going to follow,” he said, and his eyes nearly popped out of his

head as he shuffled along in the wake of the herd.

“The white seal is coming after us,” cried Patalamon. “That’s the first

time a seal has ever come to the killing-grounds alone.”

“Hsh! Don’t look behind you,” said Kerick. “It is Zaharrof’s ghost! I

must speak to the priest about this.”

The distance to the killing-grounds was only half a mile, but it took an

hour to cover, because if the seals went too fast Kerick knew that they

would get heated and then their fur would come off in patches when they

were skinned. So they went on very slowly, past Sea Lion’s Neck, past

Webster House, till they came to the Salt House just beyond the sight

of the seals on the beach. Kotick followed, panting and wondering.

He thought that he was at the world’s end, but the roar of the seal

nurseries behind him sounded as loud as the roar of a train in a tunnel.

Then Kerick sat down on the moss and pulled out a heavy pewter watch

and let the drove cool off for thirty minutes, and Kotick could hear the

fog-dew dripping off the brim of his cap. Then ten or twelve men, each

with an iron-bound club three or four feet long, came up, and Kerick

pointed out one or two of the drove that were bitten by their companions

or too hot, and the men kicked those aside with their heavy boots made

of the skin of a walrus’s throat, and then Kerick said, “Let go!” and

then the men clubbed the seals on the head as fast as they could.

Ten minutes later little Kotick did not recognize his friends any more,

for their skins were ripped off from the nose to the hind flippers,

whipped off and thrown down on the ground in a pile. That was enough

for Kotick. He turned and galloped (a seal can gallop very swiftly for

a short time) back to the sea; his little new mustache bristling with

horror. At Sea Lion’s Neck, where the great sea lions sit on the edge

of the surf, he flung himself flipper-overhead into the cool water and

rocked there, gasping miserably. “What’s here?” said a sea lion gruffly,

for as a rule the sea lions keep themselves to themselves.

“Scoochnie! Ochen scoochnie!” (“I’m lonesome, very lonesome!”) said

Kotick. “They’re killing all the holluschickie on all the beaches!”

The Sea Lion turned his head inshore. “Nonsense!” he said. “Your

friends are making as much noise as ever. You must have seen old Kerick

polishing off a drove. He’s done that for thirty years.”

“It’s horrible,” said Kotick, backing water as a wave went over him, and

steadying himself with a screw stroke of his flippers that brought him

all standing within three inches of a jagged edge of rock.

“Well done for a yearling!” said the Sea Lion, who could appreciate good

swimming. “I suppose it is rather awful from your way of looking at it,

but if you seals will come here year after year, of course the men get

to know of it, and unless you can find an island where no men ever come

you will always be driven.”

“Isn’t there any such island?” began Kotick.

“I’ve followed the poltoos [the halibut] for twenty years, and I can’t

say I’ve found it yet. But look here--you seem to have a fondness for

talking to your betters--suppose you go to Walrus Islet and talk to

Sea Vitch. He may know something. Don’t flounce off like that. It’s a

six-mile swim, and if I were you I should haul out and take a nap first,

little one.”

Kotick thought that that was good advice, so he swam round to his own

beach, hauled out, and slept for half an hour, twitching all over, as

seals will. Then he headed straight for Walrus Islet, a little low sheet

of rocky island almost due northeast from Novastoshnah, all ledges and

rock and gulls’ nests, where the walrus herded by themselves.

He landed close to old Sea Vitch--the big, ugly, bloated, pimpled,

fat-necked, long-tusked walrus of the North Pacific, who has no manners

except when he is asleep--as he was then, with his hind flippers half in

and half out of the surf.

“Wake up!” barked Kotick, for the gulls were making a great noise.

“Hah! Ho! Hmph! What’s that?” said Sea Vitch, and he struck the next

walrus a blow with his tusks and waked him up, and the next struck the

next, and so on till they were all awake and staring in every direction

but the right one.

“Hi! It’s me,” said Kotick, bobbing in the surf and looking like a

little white slug.

“Well! May I be--skinned!” said Sea Vitch, and they all looked at Kotick

as you can fancy a club full of drowsy old gentlemen would look at a

little boy. Kotick did not care to hear any more about skinning just

then; he had seen enough of it. So he called out: “Isn’t there any place

for seals to go where men don’t ever come?”

“Go and find out,” said Sea Vitch, shutting his eyes. “Run away. We’re

busy here.”

Kotick made his dolphin-jump in the air and shouted as loud as he could:

“Clam-eater! Clam-eater!” He knew that Sea Vitch never caught a fish in

his life but always rooted for clams and seaweed; though he pretended to

be a very terrible person. Naturally the Chickies and the Gooverooskies

and the Epatkas--the Burgomaster Gulls and the Kittiwakes and the

Puffins, who are always looking for a chance to be rude, took up the

cry, and--so Limmershin told me--for nearly five minutes you could not

have heard a gun fired on Walrus Islet. All the population was yelling

and screaming “Clam-eater! Stareek [old man]!” while Sea Vitch rolled

from side to side grunting and coughing.

“Now will you tell?” said Kotick, all out of breath.

“Go and ask Sea Cow,” said Sea Vitch. “If he is living still, he’ll be

able to tell you.”

“How shall I know Sea Cow when I meet him?” said Kotick, sheering off.

“He’s the only thing in the sea uglier than Sea Vitch,” screamed a

Burgomaster gull, wheeling under Sea Vitch’s nose. “Uglier, and with

worse manners! Stareek!”

Kotick swam back to Novastoshnah, leaving the gulls to scream. There he

found that no one sympathized with him in his little attempt to discover

a quiet place for the seals. They told him that men had always driven

the holluschickie--it was part of the day’s work--and that if he did not

like to see ugly things he should not have gone to the killing grounds.

But none of the other seals had seen the killing, and that made the

difference between him and his friends. Besides, Kotick was a white

seal.

“What you must do,” said old Sea Catch, after he had heard his son’s

adventures, “is to grow up and be a big seal like your father, and have

a nursery on the beach, and then they will leave you alone. In another

five years you ought to be able to fight for yourself.” Even gentle

Matkah, his mother, said: “You will never be able to stop the killing.

Go and play in the sea, Kotick.” And Kotick went off and danced the

Fire-dance with a very heavy little heart.

That autumn he left the beach as soon as he could, and set off alone

because of a notion in his bullet-head. He was going to find Sea Cow,

if there was such a person in the sea, and he was going to find a quiet

island with good firm beaches for seals to live on, where men could not

get at them. So he explored and explored by himself from the North to

the South Pacific, swimming as much as three hundred miles in a day

and a night. He met with more adventures than can be told, and narrowly

escaped being caught by the Basking Shark, and the Spotted Shark, and

the Hammerhead, and he met all the untrustworthy ruffians that loaf up

and down the seas, and the heavy polite fish, and the scarlet spotted

scallops that are moored in one place for hundreds of years, and grow

very proud of it; but he never met Sea Cow, and he never found an island

that he could fancy.

If the beach was good and hard, with a slope behind it for seals to play

on, there was always the smoke of a whaler on the horizon, boiling down

blubber, and Kotick knew what that meant. Or else he could see that

seals had once visited the island and been killed off, and Kotick knew

that where men had come once they would come again.

He picked up with an old stumpy-tailed albatross, who told him that

Kerguelen Island was the very place for peace and quiet, and when Kotick

went down there he was all but smashed to pieces against some wicked

black cliffs in a heavy sleet-storm with lightning and thunder. Yet as

he pulled out against the gale he could see that even there had once

been a seal nursery. And it was so in all the other islands that he

visited.

Limmershin gave a long list of them, for he said that Kotick spent five

seasons exploring, with a four months’ rest each year at Novastoshnah,

when the holluschickie used to make fun of him and his imaginary

islands. He went to the Gallapagos, a horrid dry place on the Equator,

where he was nearly baked to death; he went to the Georgia Islands,

the Orkneys, Emerald Island, Little Nightingale Island, Gough’s Island,

Bouvet’s Island, the Crossets, and even to a little speck of an island

south of the Cape of Good Hope. But everywhere the People of the Sea

told him the same things. Seals had come to those islands once upon a

time, but men had killed them all off. Even when he swam thousands of

miles out of the Pacific and got to a place called Cape Corrientes (that

was when he was coming back from Gough’s Island), he found a few hundred

mangy seals on a rock and they told him that men came there too.

That nearly broke his heart, and he headed round the Horn back to his

own beaches; and on his way north he hauled out on an island full of

green trees, where he found an old, old seal who was dying, and Kotick

caught fish for him and told him all his sorrows. “Now,” said Kotick,

“I am going back to Novastoshnah, and if I am driven to the killing-pens

with the holluschickie I shall not care.”

The old seal said, “Try once more. I am the last of the Lost Rookery of

Masafuera, and in the days when men killed us by the hundred thousand

there was a story on the beaches that some day a white seal would come

out of the North and lead the seal people to a quiet place. I am old,

and I shall never live to see that day, but others will. Try once more.”

And Kotick curled up his mustache (it was a beauty) and said, “I am the

only white seal that has ever been born on the beaches, and I am the

only seal, black or white, who ever thought of looking for new islands.”

This cheered him immensely; and when he came back to Novastoshnah that

summer, Matkah, his mother, begged him to marry and settle down, for

he was no longer a holluschick but a full-grown sea-catch, with a curly

white mane on his shoulders, as heavy, as big, and as fierce as his

father. “Give me another season,” he said. “Remember, Mother, it is

always the seventh wave that goes farthest up the beach.”

Curiously enough, there was another seal who thought that she would put

off marrying till the next year, and Kotick danced the Fire-dance with

her all down Lukannon Beach the night before he set off on his last

exploration. This time he went westward, because he had fallen on the

trail of a great shoal of halibut, and he needed at least one hundred

pounds of fish a day to keep him in good condition. He chased them till

he was tired, and then he curled himself up and went to sleep on the

hollows of the ground swell that sets in to Copper Island. He knew the

coast perfectly well, so about midnight, when he felt himself gently

bumped on a weed-bed, he said, “Hm, tide’s running strong tonight,” and

turning over under water opened his eyes slowly and stretched. Then

he jumped like a cat, for he saw huge things nosing about in the shoal

water and browsing on the heavy fringes of the weeds.

“By the Great Combers of Magellan!” he said, beneath his mustache. “Who

in the Deep Sea are these people?”

They were like no walrus, sea lion, seal, bear, whale, shark, fish,

squid, or scallop that Kotick had ever seen before. They were between

twenty and thirty feet long, and they had no hind flippers, but a

shovel-like tail that looked as if it had been whittled out of wet

leather. Their heads were the most foolish-looking things you ever saw,

and they balanced on the ends of their tails in deep water when they

weren’t grazing, bowing solemnly to each other and waving their front

flippers as a fat man waves his arm.

“Ahem!” said Kotick. “Good sport, gentlemen?” The big things answered by

bowing and waving their flippers like the Frog Footman. When they began

feeding again Kotick saw that their upper lip was split into two pieces

that they could twitch apart about a foot and bring together again with

a whole bushel of seaweed between the splits. They tucked the stuff into

their mouths and chumped solemnly.

“Messy style of feeding, that,” said Kotick. They bowed again, and

Kotick began to lose his temper. “Very good,” he said. “If you do happen

to have an extra joint in your front flipper you needn’t show off so. I

see you bow gracefully, but I should like to know your names.” The split

lips moved and twitched; and the glassy green eyes stared, but they did

not speak.

“Well!” said Kotick. “You’re the only people I’ve ever met uglier than

Sea Vitch--and with worse manners.”

Then he remembered in a flash what the Burgomaster gull had screamed

to him when he was a little yearling at Walrus Islet, and he tumbled

backward in the water, for he knew that he had found Sea Cow at last.

The sea cows went on schlooping and grazing and chumping in the weed,

and Kotick asked them questions in every language that he had picked

up in his travels; and the Sea People talk nearly as many languages as

human beings. But the sea cows did not answer because Sea Cow cannot

talk. He has only six bones in his neck where he ought to have seven,

and they say under the sea that that prevents him from speaking even

to his companions. But, as you know, he has an extra joint in his

foreflipper, and by waving it up and down and about he makes what

answers to a sort of clumsy telegraphic code.

By daylight Kotick’s mane was standing on end and his temper was gone

where the dead crabs go. Then the Sea Cow began to travel northward very

slowly, stopping to hold absurd bowing councils from time to time, and

Kotick followed them, saying to himself, “People who are such idiots as

these are would have been killed long ago if they hadn’t found out some

safe island. And what is good enough for the Sea Cow is good enough for

the Sea Catch. All the same, I wish they’d hurry.”

It was weary work for Kotick. The herd never went more than forty or

fifty miles a day, and stopped to feed at night, and kept close to the

shore all the time; while Kotick swam round them, and over them, and

under them, but he could not hurry them up one-half mile. As they went

farther north they held a bowing council every few hours, and Kotick

nearly bit off his mustache with impatience till he saw that they were

following up a warm current of water, and then he respected them more.

One night they sank through the shiny water--sank like stones--and for

the first time since he had known them began to swim quickly. Kotick

followed, and the pace astonished him, for he never dreamed that Sea Cow

was anything of a swimmer. They headed for a cliff by the shore--a cliff

that ran down into deep water, and plunged into a dark hole at the

foot of it, twenty fathoms under the sea. It was a long, long swim, and

Kotick badly wanted fresh air before he was out of the dark tunnel they

led him through.

“My wig!” he said, when he rose, gasping and puffing, into open water at

the farther end. “It was a long dive, but it was worth it.”

The sea cows had separated and were browsing lazily along the edges of

the finest beaches that Kotick had ever seen. There were long

stretches of smooth-worn rock running for miles, exactly fitted to make

seal-nurseries, and there were play-grounds of hard sand sloping inland

behind them, and there were rollers for seals to dance in, and long

grass to roll in, and sand dunes to climb up and down, and, best of all,

Kotick knew by the feel of the water, which never deceives a true sea

catch, that no men had ever come there.

The first thing he did was to assure himself that the fishing was good,

and then he swam along the beaches and counted up the delightful low

sandy islands half hidden in the beautiful rolling fog. Away to the

northward, out to sea, ran a line of bars and shoals and rocks that

would never let a ship come within six miles of the beach, and between

the islands and the mainland was a stretch of deep water that ran up to

the perpendicular cliffs, and somewhere below the cliffs was the mouth

of the tunnel.

“It’s Novastoshnah over again, but ten times better,” said Kotick. “Sea

Cow must be wiser than I thought. Men can’t come down the cliffs, even

if there were any men; and the shoals to seaward would knock a ship to

splinters. If any place in the sea is safe, this is it.”

He began to think of the seal he had left behind him, but though he was

in a hurry to go back to Novastoshnah, he thoroughly explored the new

country, so that he would be able to answer all questions.

Then he dived and made sure of the mouth of the tunnel, and raced

through to the southward. No one but a sea cow or a seal would have

dreamed of there being such a place, and when he looked back at the

cliffs even Kotick could hardly believe that he had been under them.

He was six days going home, though he was not swimming slowly; and when

he hauled out just above Sea Lion’s Neck the first person he met was the

seal who had been waiting for him, and she saw by the look in his eyes

that he had found his island at last.

But the holluschickie and Sea Catch, his father, and all the other seals

laughed at him when he told them what he had discovered, and a young

seal about his own age said, “This is all very well, Kotick, but you

can’t come from no one knows where and order us off like this. Remember

we’ve been fighting for our nurseries, and that’s a thing you never did.

You preferred prowling about in the sea.”

The other seals laughed at this, and the young seal began twisting his

head from side to side. He had just married that year, and was making a

great fuss about it.

“I’ve no nursery to fight for,” said Kotick. “I only want to show you

all a place where you will be safe. What’s the use of fighting?”

“Oh, if you’re trying to back out, of course I’ve no more to say,” said

the young seal with an ugly chuckle.

“Will you come with me if I win?” said Kotick. And a green light came

into his eye, for he was very angry at having to fight at all.

“Very good,” said the young seal carelessly. “If you win, I’ll come.”

He had no time to change his mind, for Kotick’s head was out and his

teeth sunk in the blubber of the young seal’s neck. Then he threw

himself back on his haunches and hauled his enemy down the beach, shook

him, and knocked him over. Then Kotick roared to the seals: “I’ve done

my best for you these five seasons past. I’ve found you the island where

you’ll be safe, but unless your heads are dragged off your silly necks

you won’t believe. I’m going to teach you now. Look out for yourselves!”

Limmershin told me that never in his life--and Limmershin sees ten

thousand big seals fighting every year--never in all his little life

did he see anything like Kotick’s charge into the nurseries. He flung

himself at the biggest sea catch he could find, caught him by the

throat, choked him and bumped him and banged him till he grunted for

mercy, and then threw him aside and attacked the next. You see, Kotick

had never fasted for four months as the big seals did every year, and

his deep-sea swimming trips kept him in perfect condition, and, best

of all, he had never fought before. His curly white mane stood up with

rage, and his eyes flamed, and his big dog teeth glistened, and he was

splendid to look at. Old Sea Catch, his father, saw him tearing past,

hauling the grizzled old seals about as though they had been halibut,

and upsetting the young bachelors in all directions; and Sea Catch gave

a roar and shouted: “He may be a fool, but he is the best fighter on the

beaches! Don’t tackle your father, my son! He’s with you!”

Kotick roared in answer, and old Sea Catch waddled in with his mustache

on end, blowing like a locomotive, while Matkah and the seal that was

going to marry Kotick cowered down and admired their men-folk. It was

a gorgeous fight, for the two fought as long as there was a seal that

dared lift up his head, and when there were none they paraded grandly up

and down the beach side by side, bellowing.

At night, just as the Northern Lights were winking and flashing through

the fog, Kotick climbed a bare rock and looked down on the scattered

nurseries and the torn and bleeding seals. “Now,” he said, “I’ve taught

you your lesson.”

“My wig!” said old Sea Catch, boosting himself up stiffly, for he was

fearfully mauled. “The Killer Whale himself could not have cut them up

worse. Son, I’m proud of you, and what’s more, I’ll come with you to

your island--if there is such a place.”

“Hear you, fat pigs of the sea. Who comes with me to the Sea Cow’s

tunnel? Answer, or I shall teach you again,” roared Kotick.

There was a murmur like the ripple of the tide all up and down the

beaches. “We will come,” said thousands of tired voices. “We will follow

Kotick, the White Seal.”

Then Kotick dropped his head between his shoulders and shut his eyes

proudly. He was not a white seal any more, but red from head to tail.

All the same he would have scorned to look at or touch one of his

wounds.

A week later he and his army (nearly ten thousand holluschickie and old

seals) went away north to the Sea Cow’s tunnel, Kotick leading them,

and the seals that stayed at Novastoshnah called them idiots. But next

spring, when they all met off the fishing banks of the Pacific, Kotick’s

seals told such tales of the new beaches beyond Sea Cow’s tunnel that

more and more seals left Novastoshnah. Of course it was not all done at

once, for the seals are not very clever, and they need a long time to

turn things over in their minds, but year after year more seals went

away from Novastoshnah, and Lukannon, and the other nurseries, to the

quiet, sheltered beaches where Kotick sits all the summer through,

getting bigger and fatter and stronger each year, while the

holluschickie play around him, in that sea where no man comes.

Lukannon

This is the great deep-sea song that all the St. Paul seals sing when

they are heading back to their beaches in the summer. It is a sort of

very sad seal National Anthem.

I met my mates in the morning (and, oh, but I am old!)

Where roaring on the ledges the summer ground-swell rolled;

I heard them lift the chorus that drowned the breakers’ song—

The Beaches of Lukannon—two million voices strong.

\_The song of pleasant stations beside the salt lagoons,

The song of blowing squadrons that shuffled down the dunes,

The song of midnight dances that churned the sea to flame—

The Beaches of Lukannon—before the sealers came!\_

I met my mates in the morning (I’ll never meet them more!);

They came and went in legions that darkened all the shore.

And o’er the foam-flecked offing as far as voice could reach

We hailed the landing-parties and we sang them up the beach.

\_The Beaches of Lukannon—the winter wheat so tall—

The dripping, crinkled lichens, and the sea-fog drenching all!

The platforms of our playground, all shining smooth and worn!

The Beaches of Lukannon—the home where we were born!\_

I met my mates in the morning, a broken, scattered band.

Men shoot us in the water and club us on the land;

Men drive us to the Salt House like silly sheep and tame,

And still we sing Lukannon—before the sealers came.

\_Wheel down, wheel down to southward; oh, Gooverooska, go!

And tell the Deep-Sea Viceroys the story of our woe;

Ere, empty as the shark’s egg the tempest flings ashore,

The Beaches of Lukannon shall know their sons no more!\_

“Rikki-Tikki-Tavi”

At the hole where he went in

Red-Eye called to Wrinkle-Skin.

Hear what little Red-Eye saith:

“Nag, come up and dance with death!”

Eye to eye and head to head,

(\_Keep the measure, Nag.\_)

This shall end when one is dead;

(\_At thy pleasure, Nag.\_)

Turn for turn and twist for twist—

(\_Run and hide thee, Nag.\_)

Hah! The hooded Death has missed!

(\_Woe betide thee, Nag!\_)

This is the story of the great war that Rikki-tikki-tavi fought

single-handed, through the bath-rooms of the big bungalow in Segowlee

cantonment. Darzee, the Tailorbird, helped him, and Chuchundra, the

muskrat, who never comes out into the middle of the floor, but always

creeps round by the wall, gave him advice, but Rikki-tikki did the real

fighting.

He was a mongoose, rather like a little cat in his fur and his tail, but

quite like a weasel in his head and his habits. His eyes and the end

of his restless nose were pink. He could scratch himself anywhere he

pleased with any leg, front or back, that he chose to use. He could

fluff up his tail till it looked like a bottle brush, and his war cry as

he scuttled through the long grass was: “Rikk-tikk-tikki-tikki-tchk!”

One day, a high summer flood washed him out of the burrow where he lived

with his father and mother, and carried him, kicking and clucking, down

a roadside ditch. He found a little wisp of grass floating there, and

clung to it till he lost his senses. When he revived, he was lying in

the hot sun on the middle of a garden path, very draggled indeed, and a

small boy was saying, “Here’s a dead mongoose. Let’s have a funeral.”

“No,” said his mother, “let’s take him in and dry him. Perhaps he isn’t

really dead.”

They took him into the house, and a big man picked him up between his

finger and thumb and said he was not dead but half choked. So they

wrapped him in cotton wool, and warmed him over a little fire, and he

opened his eyes and sneezed.

“Now,” said the big man (he was an Englishman who had just moved into

the bungalow), “don’t frighten him, and we’ll see what he’ll do.”

It is the hardest thing in the world to frighten a mongoose, because

he is eaten up from nose to tail with curiosity. The motto of all

the mongoose family is “Run and find out,” and Rikki-tikki was a true

mongoose. He looked at the cotton wool, decided that it was not good to

eat, ran all round the table, sat up and put his fur in order, scratched

himself, and jumped on the small boy’s shoulder.

“Don’t be frightened, Teddy,” said his father. “That’s his way of making

friends.”

“Ouch! He’s tickling under my chin,” said Teddy.

Rikki-tikki looked down between the boy’s collar and neck, snuffed at

his ear, and climbed down to the floor, where he sat rubbing his nose.

“Good gracious,” said Teddy’s mother, “and that’s a wild creature! I

suppose he’s so tame because we’ve been kind to him.”

“All mongooses are like that,” said her husband. “If Teddy doesn’t pick

him up by the tail, or try to put him in a cage, he’ll run in and out of

the house all day long. Let’s give him something to eat.”

They gave him a little piece of raw meat. Rikki-tikki liked it

immensely, and when it was finished he went out into the veranda and sat

in the sunshine and fluffed up his fur to make it dry to the roots. Then

he felt better.

“There are more things to find out about in this house,” he said to

himself, “than all my family could find out in all their lives. I shall

certainly stay and find out.”

He spent all that day roaming over the house. He nearly drowned himself

in the bath-tubs, put his nose into the ink on a writing table, and

burned it on the end of the big man’s cigar, for he climbed up in the

big man’s lap to see how writing was done. At nightfall he ran into

Teddy’s nursery to watch how kerosene lamps were lighted, and when Teddy

went to bed Rikki-tikki climbed up too. But he was a restless companion,

because he had to get up and attend to every noise all through the

night, and find out what made it. Teddy’s mother and father came in,

the last thing, to look at their boy, and Rikki-tikki was awake on

the pillow. “I don’t like that,” said Teddy’s mother. “He may bite the

child.” “He’ll do no such thing,” said the father. “Teddy’s safer with

that little beast than if he had a bloodhound to watch him. If a snake

came into the nursery now--”

But Teddy’s mother wouldn’t think of anything so awful.

Early in the morning Rikki-tikki came to early breakfast in the veranda

riding on Teddy’s shoulder, and they gave him banana and some boiled

egg. He sat on all their laps one after the other, because every

well-brought-up mongoose always hopes to be a house mongoose some day

and have rooms to run about in; and Rikki-tikki’s mother (she used to

live in the general’s house at Segowlee) had carefully told Rikki what

to do if ever he came across white men.

Then Rikki-tikki went out into the garden to see what was to be seen.

It was a large garden, only half cultivated, with bushes, as big as

summer-houses, of Marshal Niel roses, lime and orange trees, clumps of

bamboos, and thickets of high grass. Rikki-tikki licked his lips. “This

is a splendid hunting-ground,” he said, and his tail grew bottle-brushy

at the thought of it, and he scuttled up and down the garden, snuffing

here and there till he heard very sorrowful voices in a thorn-bush.

It was Darzee, the Tailorbird, and his wife. They had made a beautiful

nest by pulling two big leaves together and stitching them up the edges

with fibers, and had filled the hollow with cotton and downy fluff. The

nest swayed to and fro, as they sat on the rim and cried.

“What is the matter?” asked Rikki-tikki.

“We are very miserable,” said Darzee. “One of our babies fell out of the

nest yesterday and Nag ate him.”

“H’m!” said Rikki-tikki, “that is very sad--but I am a stranger here.

Who is Nag?”

Darzee and his wife only cowered down in the nest without answering, for

from the thick grass at the foot of the bush there came a low hiss--a

horrid cold sound that made Rikki-tikki jump back two clear feet. Then

inch by inch out of the grass rose up the head and spread hood of Nag,

the big black cobra, and he was five feet long from tongue to tail.

When he had lifted one-third of himself clear of the ground, he stayed

balancing to and fro exactly as a dandelion tuft balances in the wind,

and he looked at Rikki-tikki with the wicked snake’s eyes that never

change their expression, whatever the snake may be thinking of.

“Who is Nag?” said he. “I am Nag. The great God Brahm put his mark upon

all our people, when the first cobra spread his hood to keep the sun off

Brahm as he slept. Look, and be afraid!”

He spread out his hood more than ever, and Rikki-tikki saw the

spectacle-mark on the back of it that looks exactly like the eye part

of a hook-and-eye fastening. He was afraid for the minute, but it is

impossible for a mongoose to stay frightened for any length of time, and

though Rikki-tikki had never met a live cobra before, his mother had fed

him on dead ones, and he knew that all a grown mongoose’s business in

life was to fight and eat snakes. Nag knew that too and, at the bottom

of his cold heart, he was afraid.

“Well,” said Rikki-tikki, and his tail began to fluff up again, “marks

or no marks, do you think it is right for you to eat fledglings out of a

nest?”

Nag was thinking to himself, and watching the least little movement in

the grass behind Rikki-tikki. He knew that mongooses in the garden

meant death sooner or later for him and his family, but he wanted to get

Rikki-tikki off his guard. So he dropped his head a little, and put it

on one side.

“Let us talk,” he said. “You eat eggs. Why should not I eat birds?”

“Behind you! Look behind you!” sang Darzee.

Rikki-tikki knew better than to waste time in staring. He jumped up in

the air as high as he could go, and just under him whizzed by the head

of Nagaina, Nag’s wicked wife. She had crept up behind him as he was

talking, to make an end of him. He heard her savage hiss as the stroke

missed. He came down almost across her back, and if he had been an old

mongoose he would have known that then was the time to break her back

with one bite; but he was afraid of the terrible lashing return stroke

of the cobra. He bit, indeed, but did not bite long enough, and he

jumped clear of the whisking tail, leaving Nagaina torn and angry.

“Wicked, wicked Darzee!” said Nag, lashing up as high as he could reach

toward the nest in the thorn-bush. But Darzee had built it out of reach

of snakes, and it only swayed to and fro.

Rikki-tikki felt his eyes growing red and hot (when a mongoose’s eyes

grow red, he is angry), and he sat back on his tail and hind legs like a

little kangaroo, and looked all round him, and chattered with rage. But

Nag and Nagaina had disappeared into the grass. When a snake misses its

stroke, it never says anything or gives any sign of what it means to do

next. Rikki-tikki did not care to follow them, for he did not feel sure

that he could manage two snakes at once. So he trotted off to the gravel

path near the house, and sat down to think. It was a serious matter for

him.

If you read the old books of natural history, you will find they say

that when the mongoose fights the snake and happens to get bitten,

he runs off and eats some herb that cures him. That is not true.

The victory is only a matter of quickness of eye and quickness of

foot--snake’s blow against mongoose’s jump--and as no eye can follow the

motion of a snake’s head when it strikes, this makes things much more

wonderful than any magic herb. Rikki-tikki knew he was a young mongoose,

and it made him all the more pleased to think that he had managed to

escape a blow from behind. It gave him confidence in himself, and when

Teddy came running down the path, Rikki-tikki was ready to be petted.

But just as Teddy was stooping, something wriggled a little in the dust,

and a tiny voice said: “Be careful. I am Death!” It was Karait, the

dusty brown snakeling that lies for choice on the dusty earth; and his

bite is as dangerous as the cobra’s. But he is so small that nobody

thinks of him, and so he does the more harm to people.

Rikki-tikki’s eyes grew red again, and he danced up to Karait with the

peculiar rocking, swaying motion that he had inherited from his family.

It looks very funny, but it is so perfectly balanced a gait that you can

fly off from it at any angle you please, and in dealing with snakes this

is an advantage. If Rikki-tikki had only known, he was doing a much more

dangerous thing than fighting Nag, for Karait is so small, and can turn

so quickly, that unless Rikki bit him close to the back of the head,

he would get the return stroke in his eye or his lip. But Rikki did not

know. His eyes were all red, and he rocked back and forth, looking for

a good place to hold. Karait struck out. Rikki jumped sideways and

tried to run in, but the wicked little dusty gray head lashed within a

fraction of his shoulder, and he had to jump over the body, and the head

followed his heels close.

Teddy shouted to the house: “Oh, look here! Our mongoose is killing a

snake.” And Rikki-tikki heard a scream from Teddy’s mother. His father

ran out with a stick, but by the time he came up, Karait had lunged out

once too far, and Rikki-tikki had sprung, jumped on the snake’s back,

dropped his head far between his forelegs, bitten as high up the back

as he could get hold, and rolled away. That bite paralyzed Karait, and

Rikki-tikki was just going to eat him up from the tail, after the custom

of his family at dinner, when he remembered that a full meal makes a

slow mongoose, and if he wanted all his strength and quickness ready, he

must keep himself thin.

He went away for a dust bath under the castor-oil bushes, while

Teddy’s father beat the dead Karait. “What is the use of that?” thought

Rikki-tikki. “I have settled it all;” and then Teddy’s mother picked

him up from the dust and hugged him, crying that he had saved Teddy

from death, and Teddy’s father said that he was a providence, and Teddy

looked on with big scared eyes. Rikki-tikki was rather amused at all the

fuss, which, of course, he did not understand. Teddy’s mother might just

as well have petted Teddy for playing in the dust. Rikki was thoroughly

enjoying himself.

That night at dinner, walking to and fro among the wine-glasses on the

table, he might have stuffed himself three times over with nice things.

But he remembered Nag and Nagaina, and though it was very pleasant to be

patted and petted by Teddy’s mother, and to sit on Teddy’s shoulder, his

eyes would get red from time to time, and he would go off into his long

war cry of “Rikk-tikk-tikki-tikki-tchk!”

Teddy carried him off to bed, and insisted on Rikki-tikki sleeping under

his chin. Rikki-tikki was too well bred to bite or scratch, but as soon

as Teddy was asleep he went off for his nightly walk round the house,

and in the dark he ran up against Chuchundra, the muskrat, creeping

around by the wall. Chuchundra is a broken-hearted little beast. He

whimpers and cheeps all the night, trying to make up his mind to run

into the middle of the room. But he never gets there.

“Don’t kill me,” said Chuchundra, almost weeping. “Rikki-tikki, don’t

kill me!”

“Do you think a snake-killer kills muskrats?” said Rikki-tikki

scornfully.

“Those who kill snakes get killed by snakes,” said Chuchundra, more

sorrowfully than ever. “And how am I to be sure that Nag won’t mistake

me for you some dark night?”

“There’s not the least danger,” said Rikki-tikki. “But Nag is in the

garden, and I know you don’t go there.”

“My cousin Chua, the rat, told me--” said Chuchundra, and then he

stopped.

“Told you what?”

“H’sh! Nag is everywhere, Rikki-tikki. You should have talked to Chua in

the garden.”

“I didn’t--so you must tell me. Quick, Chuchundra, or I’ll bite you!”

Chuchundra sat down and cried till the tears rolled off his whiskers.

“I am a very poor man,” he sobbed. “I never had spirit enough to run out

into the middle of the room. H’sh! I mustn’t tell you anything. Can’t

you hear, Rikki-tikki?”

Rikki-tikki listened. The house was as still as still, but he thought he

could just catch the faintest scratch-scratch in the world--a noise as

faint as that of a wasp walking on a window-pane--the dry scratch of a

snake’s scales on brick-work.

“That’s Nag or Nagaina,” he said to himself, “and he is crawling into

the bath-room sluice. You’re right, Chuchundra; I should have talked to

Chua.”

He stole off to Teddy’s bath-room, but there was nothing there, and then

to Teddy’s mother’s bathroom. At the bottom of the smooth plaster wall

there was a brick pulled out to make a sluice for the bath water, and as

Rikki-tikki stole in by the masonry curb where the bath is put, he heard

Nag and Nagaina whispering together outside in the moonlight.

“When the house is emptied of people,” said Nagaina to her husband, “he

will have to go away, and then the garden will be our own again. Go in

quietly, and remember that the big man who killed Karait is the first

one to bite. Then come out and tell me, and we will hunt for Rikki-tikki

together.”

“But are you sure that there is anything to be gained by killing the

people?” said Nag.

“Everything. When there were no people in the bungalow, did we have any

mongoose in the garden? So long as the bungalow is empty, we are king

and queen of the garden; and remember that as soon as our eggs in the

melon bed hatch (as they may tomorrow), our children will need room and

quiet.”

“I had not thought of that,” said Nag. “I will go, but there is no need

that we should hunt for Rikki-tikki afterward. I will kill the big man

and his wife, and the child if I can, and come away quietly. Then the

bungalow will be empty, and Rikki-tikki will go.”

Rikki-tikki tingled all over with rage and hatred at this, and then

Nag’s head came through the sluice, and his five feet of cold body

followed it. Angry as he was, Rikki-tikki was very frightened as he saw

the size of the big cobra. Nag coiled himself up, raised his head,

and looked into the bathroom in the dark, and Rikki could see his eyes

glitter.

“Now, if I kill him here, Nagaina will know; and if I fight him on

the open floor, the odds are in his favor. What am I to do?” said

Rikki-tikki-tavi.

Nag waved to and fro, and then Rikki-tikki heard him drinking from the

biggest water-jar that was used to fill the bath. “That is good,” said

the snake. “Now, when Karait was killed, the big man had a stick. He may

have that stick still, but when he comes in to bathe in the morning he

will not have a stick. I shall wait here till he comes. Nagaina--do you

hear me?--I shall wait here in the cool till daytime.”

There was no answer from outside, so Rikki-tikki knew Nagaina had gone

away. Nag coiled himself down, coil by coil, round the bulge at the

bottom of the water jar, and Rikki-tikki stayed still as death. After an

hour he began to move, muscle by muscle, toward the jar. Nag was asleep,

and Rikki-tikki looked at his big back, wondering which would be the

best place for a good hold. “If I don’t break his back at the first

jump,” said Rikki, “he can still fight. And if he fights--O Rikki!” He

looked at the thickness of the neck below the hood, but that was too

much for him; and a bite near the tail would only make Nag savage.

“It must be the head”’ he said at last; “the head above the hood. And,

when I am once there, I must not let go.”

Then he jumped. The head was lying a little clear of the water jar,

under the curve of it; and, as his teeth met, Rikki braced his back

against the bulge of the red earthenware to hold down the head. This

gave him just one second’s purchase, and he made the most of it. Then he

was battered to and fro as a rat is shaken by a dog--to and fro on the

floor, up and down, and around in great circles, but his eyes were red

and he held on as the body cart-whipped over the floor, upsetting the

tin dipper and the soap dish and the flesh brush, and banged against the

tin side of the bath. As he held he closed his jaws tighter and tighter,

for he made sure he would be banged to death, and, for the honor of his

family, he preferred to be found with his teeth locked. He was dizzy,

aching, and felt shaken to pieces when something went off like a

thunderclap just behind him. A hot wind knocked him senseless and red

fire singed his fur. The big man had been wakened by the noise, and had

fired both barrels of a shotgun into Nag just behind the hood.

Rikki-tikki held on with his eyes shut, for now he was quite sure he was

dead. But the head did not move, and the big man picked him up and said,

“It’s the mongoose again, Alice. The little chap has saved our lives

now.”

Then Teddy’s mother came in with a very white face, and saw what was

left of Nag, and Rikki-tikki dragged himself to Teddy’s bedroom and

spent half the rest of the night shaking himself tenderly to find out

whether he really was broken into forty pieces, as he fancied.

When morning came he was very stiff, but well pleased with his doings.

“Now I have Nagaina to settle with, and she will be worse than five

Nags, and there’s no knowing when the eggs she spoke of will hatch.

Goodness! I must go and see Darzee,” he said.

Without waiting for breakfast, Rikki-tikki ran to the thornbush where

Darzee was singing a song of triumph at the top of his voice. The news

of Nag’s death was all over the garden, for the sweeper had thrown the

body on the rubbish-heap.

“Oh, you stupid tuft of feathers!” said Rikki-tikki angrily. “Is this

the time to sing?”

“Nag is dead--is dead--is dead!” sang Darzee. “The valiant Rikki-tikki

caught him by the head and held fast. The big man brought the

bang-stick, and Nag fell in two pieces! He will never eat my babies

again.”

“All that’s true enough. But where’s Nagaina?” said Rikki-tikki, looking

carefully round him.

“Nagaina came to the bathroom sluice and called for Nag,” Darzee went

on, “and Nag came out on the end of a stick--the sweeper picked him up

on the end of a stick and threw him upon the rubbish heap. Let us sing

about the great, the red-eyed Rikki-tikki!” And Darzee filled his throat

and sang.

“If I could get up to your nest, I’d roll your babies out!” said

Rikki-tikki. “You don’t know when to do the right thing at the right

time. You’re safe enough in your nest there, but it’s war for me down

here. Stop singing a minute, Darzee.”

“For the great, the beautiful Rikki-tikki’s sake I will stop,” said

Darzee. “What is it, O Killer of the terrible Nag?”

“Where is Nagaina, for the third time?”

“On the rubbish heap by the stables, mourning for Nag. Great is

Rikki-tikki with the white teeth.”

“Bother my white teeth! Have you ever heard where she keeps her eggs?”

“In the melon bed, on the end nearest the wall, where the sun strikes

nearly all day. She hid them there weeks ago.”

“And you never thought it worth while to tell me? The end nearest the

wall, you said?”

“Rikki-tikki, you are not going to eat her eggs?”

“Not eat exactly; no. Darzee, if you have a grain of sense you will fly

off to the stables and pretend that your wing is broken, and let Nagaina

chase you away to this bush. I must get to the melon-bed, and if I went

there now she’d see me.”

Darzee was a feather-brained little fellow who could never hold more

than one idea at a time in his head. And just because he knew that

Nagaina’s children were born in eggs like his own, he didn’t think at

first that it was fair to kill them. But his wife was a sensible bird,

and she knew that cobra’s eggs meant young cobras later on. So she flew

off from the nest, and left Darzee to keep the babies warm, and continue

his song about the death of Nag. Darzee was very like a man in some

ways.

She fluttered in front of Nagaina by the rubbish heap and cried out,

“Oh, my wing is broken! The boy in the house threw a stone at me and

broke it.” Then she fluttered more desperately than ever.

Nagaina lifted up her head and hissed, “You warned Rikki-tikki when I

would have killed him. Indeed and truly, you’ve chosen a bad place to

be lame in.” And she moved toward Darzee’s wife, slipping along over the

dust.

“The boy broke it with a stone!” shrieked Darzee’s wife.

“Well! It may be some consolation to you when you’re dead to know that I

shall settle accounts with the boy. My husband lies on the rubbish heap

this morning, but before night the boy in the house will lie very still.

What is the use of running away? I am sure to catch you. Little fool,

look at me!”

Darzee’s wife knew better than to do that, for a bird who looks at a

snake’s eyes gets so frightened that she cannot move. Darzee’s wife

fluttered on, piping sorrowfully, and never leaving the ground, and

Nagaina quickened her pace.

Rikki-tikki heard them going up the path from the stables, and he raced

for the end of the melon patch near the wall. There, in the warm litter

above the melons, very cunningly hidden, he found twenty-five eggs,

about the size of a bantam’s eggs, but with whitish skin instead of

shell.

“I was not a day too soon,” he said, for he could see the baby cobras

curled up inside the skin, and he knew that the minute they were hatched

they could each kill a man or a mongoose. He bit off the tops of the

eggs as fast as he could, taking care to crush the young cobras, and

turned over the litter from time to time to see whether he had missed

any. At last there were only three eggs left, and Rikki-tikki began to

chuckle to himself, when he heard Darzee’s wife screaming:

“Rikki-tikki, I led Nagaina toward the house, and she has gone into the

veranda, and--oh, come quickly--she means killing!”

Rikki-tikki smashed two eggs, and tumbled backward down the melon-bed

with the third egg in his mouth, and scuttled to the veranda as hard as

he could put foot to the ground. Teddy and his mother and father were

there at early breakfast, but Rikki-tikki saw that they were not eating

anything. They sat stone-still, and their faces were white. Nagaina was

coiled up on the matting by Teddy’s chair, within easy striking distance

of Teddy’s bare leg, and she was swaying to and fro, singing a song of

triumph.

“Son of the big man that killed Nag,” she hissed, “stay still. I am not

ready yet. Wait a little. Keep very still, all you three! If you move I

strike, and if you do not move I strike. Oh, foolish people, who killed

my Nag!”

Teddy’s eyes were fixed on his father, and all his father could do was

to whisper, “Sit still, Teddy. You mustn’t move. Teddy, keep still.”

Then Rikki-tikki came up and cried, “Turn round, Nagaina. Turn and

fight!”

“All in good time,” said she, without moving her eyes. “I will settle my

account with you presently. Look at your friends, Rikki-tikki. They are

still and white. They are afraid. They dare not move, and if you come a

step nearer I strike.”

“Look at your eggs,” said Rikki-tikki, “in the melon bed near the wall.

Go and look, Nagaina!”

The big snake turned half around, and saw the egg on the veranda. “Ah-h!

Give it to me,” she said.

Rikki-tikki put his paws one on each side of the egg, and his eyes were

blood-red. “What price for a snake’s egg? For a young cobra? For a

young king cobra? For the last--the very last of the brood? The ants are

eating all the others down by the melon bed.”

Nagaina spun clear round, forgetting everything for the sake of the one

egg. Rikki-tikki saw Teddy’s father shoot out a big hand, catch Teddy

by the shoulder, and drag him across the little table with the tea-cups,

safe and out of reach of Nagaina.

“Tricked! Tricked! Tricked! Rikk-tck-tck!” chuckled Rikki-tikki. “The

boy is safe, and it was I--I--I that caught Nag by the hood last night

in the bathroom.” Then he began to jump up and down, all four feet

together, his head close to the floor. “He threw me to and fro, but he

could not shake me off. He was dead before the big man blew him in two.

I did it! Rikki-tikki-tck-tck! Come then, Nagaina. Come and fight with

me. You shall not be a widow long.”

Nagaina saw that she had lost her chance of killing Teddy, and the egg

lay between Rikki-tikki’s paws. “Give me the egg, Rikki-tikki. Give me

the last of my eggs, and I will go away and never come back,” she said,

lowering her hood.

“Yes, you will go away, and you will never come back. For you will go

to the rubbish heap with Nag. Fight, widow! The big man has gone for his

gun! Fight!”

Rikki-tikki was bounding all round Nagaina, keeping just out of reach

of her stroke, his little eyes like hot coals. Nagaina gathered herself

together and flung out at him. Rikki-tikki jumped up and backward. Again

and again and again she struck, and each time her head came with a whack

on the matting of the veranda and she gathered herself together like a

watch spring. Then Rikki-tikki danced in a circle to get behind her, and

Nagaina spun round to keep her head to his head, so that the rustle of

her tail on the matting sounded like dry leaves blown along by the wind.

He had forgotten the egg. It still lay on the veranda, and Nagaina came

nearer and nearer to it, till at last, while Rikki-tikki was drawing

breath, she caught it in her mouth, turned to the veranda steps, and

flew like an arrow down the path, with Rikki-tikki behind her. When

the cobra runs for her life, she goes like a whip-lash flicked across a

horse’s neck.

Rikki-tikki knew that he must catch her, or all the trouble would begin

again. She headed straight for the long grass by the thorn-bush, and as

he was running Rikki-tikki heard Darzee still singing his foolish little

song of triumph. But Darzee’s wife was wiser. She flew off her nest

as Nagaina came along, and flapped her wings about Nagaina’s head. If

Darzee had helped they might have turned her, but Nagaina only lowered

her hood and went on. Still, the instant’s delay brought Rikki-tikki up

to her, and as she plunged into the rat-hole where she and Nag used to

live, his little white teeth were clenched on her tail, and he went down

with her--and very few mongooses, however wise and old they may be,

care to follow a cobra into its hole. It was dark in the hole; and

Rikki-tikki never knew when it might open out and give Nagaina room to

turn and strike at him. He held on savagely, and stuck out his feet to

act as brakes on the dark slope of the hot, moist earth.

Then the grass by the mouth of the hole stopped waving, and Darzee said,

“It is all over with Rikki-tikki! We must sing his death song. Valiant

Rikki-tikki is dead! For Nagaina will surely kill him underground.”

So he sang a very mournful song that he made up on the spur of the

minute, and just as he got to the most touching part, the grass quivered

again, and Rikki-tikki, covered with dirt, dragged himself out of the

hole leg by leg, licking his whiskers. Darzee stopped with a little

shout. Rikki-tikki shook some of the dust out of his fur and sneezed.

“It is all over,” he said. “The widow will never come out again.” And

the red ants that live between the grass stems heard him, and began to

troop down one after another to see if he had spoken the truth.

Rikki-tikki curled himself up in the grass and slept where he was--slept

and slept till it was late in the afternoon, for he had done a hard

day’s work.

“Now,” he said, when he awoke, “I will go back to the house. Tell the

Coppersmith, Darzee, and he will tell the garden that Nagaina is dead.”

The Coppersmith is a bird who makes a noise exactly like the beating of

a little hammer on a copper pot; and the reason he is always making it

is because he is the town crier to every Indian garden, and tells all

the news to everybody who cares to listen. As Rikki-tikki went up the

path, he heard his “attention” notes like a tiny dinner gong, and

then the steady “Ding-dong-tock! Nag is dead--dong! Nagaina is dead!

Ding-dong-tock!” That set all the birds in the garden singing, and the

frogs croaking, for Nag and Nagaina used to eat frogs as well as little

birds.

When Rikki got to the house, Teddy and Teddy’s mother (she looked very

white still, for she had been fainting) and Teddy’s father came out and

almost cried over him; and that night he ate all that was given him till

he could eat no more, and went to bed on Teddy’s shoulder, where Teddy’s

mother saw him when she came to look late at night.

“He saved our lives and Teddy’s life,” she said to her husband. “Just

think, he saved all our lives.”

Rikki-tikki woke up with a jump, for the mongooses are light sleepers.

“Oh, it’s you,” said he. “What are you bothering for? All the cobras are

dead. And if they weren’t, I’m here.”

Rikki-tikki had a right to be proud of himself. But he did not grow too

proud, and he kept that garden as a mongoose should keep it, with tooth

and jump and spring and bite, till never a cobra dared show its head

inside the walls.

Darzee’s Chant

(Sung in honor of Rikki-tikki-tavi)

Singer and tailor am I--

Doubled the joys that I know--

Proud of my lilt to the sky,

Proud of the house that I sew--

Over and under, so weave I my music--so weave I the house that I

sew.

Sing to your fledglings again,

Mother, oh lift up your head!

Evil that plagued us is slain,

Death in the garden lies dead.

Terror that hid in the roses is impotent--flung on the dung-hill

and dead!

Who has delivered us, who?

Tell me his nest and his name.

Rikki, the valiant, the true,

Tikki, with eyeballs of flame,

Rikk-tikki-tikki, the ivory-fanged, the hunter with eyeballs of

flame!

Give him the Thanks of the Birds,

Bowing with tail feathers spread!

Praise him with nightingale words--

Nay, I will praise him instead.

Hear! I will sing you the praise of the bottle-tailed Rikki, with

eyeballs of red!

(\_Here Rikki-tikki interrupted, and the rest of the song is lost.\_)

Toomai of the Elephants

I will remember what I was, I am sick of rope and chain--

I will remember my old strength and all my forest affairs.

I will not sell my back to man for a bundle of sugar-cane:

I will go out to my own kind, and the wood-folk in their lairs.

I will go out until the day, until the morning break--

Out to the wind’s untainted kiss, the water’s clean caress;

I will forget my ankle-ring and snap my picket stake.

I will revisit my lost loves, and playmates masterless!

Kala Nag, which means Black Snake, had served the Indian Government in

every way that an elephant could serve it for forty-seven years, and as

he was fully twenty years old when he was caught, that makes him nearly

seventy--a ripe age for an elephant. He remembered pushing, with a big

leather pad on his forehead, at a gun stuck in deep mud, and that was

before the Afghan War of 1842, and he had not then come to his full

strength.

His mother Radha Pyari,--Radha the darling,--who had been caught in the

same drive with Kala Nag, told him, before his little milk tusks had

dropped out, that elephants who were afraid always got hurt. Kala Nag

knew that that advice was good, for the first time that he saw a shell

burst he backed, screaming, into a stand of piled rifles, and the

bayonets pricked him in all his softest places. So, before he was

twenty-five, he gave up being afraid, and so he was the best-loved

and the best-looked-after elephant in the service of the Government of

India. He had carried tents, twelve hundred pounds’ weight of tents, on

the march in Upper India. He had been hoisted into a ship at the end of

a steam crane and taken for days across the water, and made to carry a

mortar on his back in a strange and rocky country very far from India,

and had seen the Emperor Theodore lying dead in Magdala, and had

come back again in the steamer entitled, so the soldiers said, to the

Abyssinian War medal. He had seen his fellow elephants die of cold and

epilepsy and starvation and sunstroke up at a place called Ali Musjid,

ten years later; and afterward he had been sent down thousands of miles

south to haul and pile big balks of teak in the timberyards at Moulmein.

There he had half killed an insubordinate young elephant who was

shirking his fair share of work.

After that he was taken off timber-hauling, and employed, with a few

score other elephants who were trained to the business, in helping to

catch wild elephants among the Garo hills. Elephants are very strictly

preserved by the Indian Government. There is one whole department which

does nothing else but hunt them, and catch them, and break them in, and

send them up and down the country as they are needed for work.

Kala Nag stood ten fair feet at the shoulders, and his tusks had been

cut off short at five feet, and bound round the ends, to prevent them

splitting, with bands of copper; but he could do more with those stumps

than any untrained elephant could do with the real sharpened ones. When,

after weeks and weeks of cautious driving of scattered elephants across

the hills, the forty or fifty wild monsters were driven into the last

stockade, and the big drop gate, made of tree trunks lashed together,

jarred down behind them, Kala Nag, at the word of command, would go

into that flaring, trumpeting pandemonium (generally at night, when

the flicker of the torches made it difficult to judge distances), and,

picking out the biggest and wildest tusker of the mob, would hammer

him and hustle him into quiet while the men on the backs of the other

elephants roped and tied the smaller ones.

There was nothing in the way of fighting that Kala Nag, the old wise

Black Snake, did not know, for he had stood up more than once in his

time to the charge of the wounded tiger, and, curling up his soft trunk

to be out of harm’s way, had knocked the springing brute sideways in

mid-air with a quick sickle cut of his head, that he had invented all by

himself; had knocked him over, and kneeled upon him with his huge knees

till the life went out with a gasp and a howl, and there was only a

fluffy striped thing on the ground for Kala Nag to pull by the tail.

“Yes,” said Big Toomai, his driver, the son of Black Toomai who had

taken him to Abyssinia, and grandson of Toomai of the Elephants who had

seen him caught, “there is nothing that the Black Snake fears except me.

He has seen three generations of us feed him and groom him, and he will

live to see four.”

“He is afraid of me also,” said Little Toomai, standing up to his full

height of four feet, with only one rag upon him. He was ten years old,

the eldest son of Big Toomai, and, according to custom, he would take

his father’s place on Kala Nag’s neck when he grew up, and would handle

the heavy iron ankus, the elephant goad, that had been worn smooth by

his father, and his grandfather, and his great-grandfather.

He knew what he was talking of; for he had been born under Kala Nag’s

shadow, had played with the end of his trunk before he could walk, had

taken him down to water as soon as he could walk, and Kala Nag would no

more have dreamed of disobeying his shrill little orders than he would

have dreamed of killing him on that day when Big Toomai carried the

little brown baby under Kala Nag’s tusks, and told him to salute his

master that was to be.

“Yes,” said Little Toomai, “he is afraid of me,” and he took long

strides up to Kala Nag, called him a fat old pig, and made him lift up

his feet one after the other.

“Wah!” said Little Toomai, “thou art a big elephant,” and he wagged his

fluffy head, quoting his father. “The Government may pay for elephants,

but they belong to us mahouts. When thou art old, Kala Nag, there will

come some rich rajah, and he will buy thee from the Government, on

account of thy size and thy manners, and then thou wilt have nothing

to do but to carry gold earrings in thy ears, and a gold howdah on thy

back, and a red cloth covered with gold on thy sides, and walk at the

head of the processions of the King. Then I shall sit on thy neck, O

Kala Nag, with a silver ankus, and men will run before us with golden

sticks, crying, `Room for the King’s elephant!’ That will be good, Kala

Nag, but not so good as this hunting in the jungles.”

“Umph!” said Big Toomai. “Thou art a boy, and as wild as a buffalo-calf.

This running up and down among the hills is not the best Government

service. I am getting old, and I do not love wild elephants. Give me

brick elephant lines, one stall to each elephant, and big stumps to tie

them to safely, and flat, broad roads to exercise upon, instead of this

come-and-go camping. Aha, the Cawnpore barracks were good. There was a

bazaar close by, and only three hours’ work a day.”

Little Toomai remembered the Cawnpore elephant-lines and said nothing.

He very much preferred the camp life, and hated those broad, flat roads,

with the daily grubbing for grass in the forage reserve, and the long

hours when there was nothing to do except to watch Kala Nag fidgeting in

his pickets.

What Little Toomai liked was to scramble up bridle paths that only an

elephant could take; the dip into the valley below; the glimpses of the

wild elephants browsing miles away; the rush of the frightened pig and

peacock under Kala Nag’s feet; the blinding warm rains, when all the

hills and valleys smoked; the beautiful misty mornings when nobody knew

where they would camp that night; the steady, cautious drive of the wild

elephants, and the mad rush and blaze and hullabaloo of the last night’s

drive, when the elephants poured into the stockade like boulders in a

landslide, found that they could not get out, and flung themselves at

the heavy posts only to be driven back by yells and flaring torches and

volleys of blank cartridge.

Even a little boy could be of use there, and Toomai was as useful as

three boys. He would get his torch and wave it, and yell with the

best. But the really good time came when the driving out began, and the

Keddah--that is, the stockade--looked like a picture of the end of the

world, and men had to make signs to one another, because they could not

hear themselves speak. Then Little Toomai would climb up to the top of

one of the quivering stockade posts, his sun-bleached brown hair flying

loose all over his shoulders, and he looking like a goblin in the

torch-light. And as soon as there was a lull you could hear his

high-pitched yells of encouragement to Kala Nag, above the trumpeting

and crashing, and snapping of ropes, and groans of the tethered

elephants. “Mael, mael, Kala Nag! (Go on, go on, Black Snake!) Dant do!

(Give him the tusk!) Somalo! Somalo! (Careful, careful!) Maro! Mar! (Hit

him, hit him!) Mind the post! Arre! Arre! Hai! Yai! Kya-a-ah!” he would

shout, and the big fight between Kala Nag and the wild elephant would

sway to and fro across the Keddah, and the old elephant catchers would

wipe the sweat out of their eyes, and find time to nod to Little Toomai

wriggling with joy on the top of the posts.

He did more than wriggle. One night he slid down from the post and

slipped in between the elephants and threw up the loose end of a rope,

which had dropped, to a driver who was trying to get a purchase on

the leg of a kicking young calf (calves always give more trouble than

full-grown animals). Kala Nag saw him, caught him in his trunk, and

handed him up to Big Toomai, who slapped him then and there, and put him

back on the post.

Next morning he gave him a scolding and said, “Are not good brick

elephant lines and a little tent carrying enough, that thou must needs

go elephant catching on thy own account, little worthless? Now those

foolish hunters, whose pay is less than my pay, have spoken to Petersen

Sahib of the matter.” Little Toomai was frightened. He did not know much

of white men, but Petersen Sahib was the greatest white man in the world

to him. He was the head of all the Keddah operations--the man who caught

all the elephants for the Government of India, and who knew more about

the ways of elephants than any living man.

“What--what will happen?” said Little Toomai.

“Happen! The worst that can happen. Petersen Sahib is a madman. Else why

should he go hunting these wild devils? He may even require thee to be

an elephant catcher, to sleep anywhere in these fever-filled jungles,

and at last to be trampled to death in the Keddah. It is well that this

nonsense ends safely. Next week the catching is over, and we of the

plains are sent back to our stations. Then we will march on smooth

roads, and forget all this hunting. But, son, I am angry that thou

shouldst meddle in the business that belongs to these dirty Assamese

jungle folk. Kala Nag will obey none but me, so I must go with him into

the Keddah, but he is only a fighting elephant, and he does not help

to rope them. So I sit at my ease, as befits a mahout,--not a mere

hunter,--a mahout, I say, and a man who gets a pension at the end of

his service. Is the family of Toomai of the Elephants to be trodden

underfoot in the dirt of a Keddah? Bad one! Wicked one! Worthless son!

Go and wash Kala Nag and attend to his ears, and see that there are no

thorns in his feet. Or else Petersen Sahib will surely catch thee and

make thee a wild hunter--a follower of elephant’s foot tracks, a jungle

bear. Bah! Shame! Go!”

Little Toomai went off without saying a word, but he told Kala Nag all

his grievances while he was examining his feet. “No matter,” said Little

Toomai, turning up the fringe of Kala Nag’s huge right ear. “They

have said my name to Petersen Sahib, and perhaps--and perhaps--and

perhaps--who knows? Hai! That is a big thorn that I have pulled out!”

The next few days were spent in getting the elephants together, in

walking the newly caught wild elephants up and down between a couple of

tame ones to prevent them giving too much trouble on the downward march

to the plains, and in taking stock of the blankets and ropes and things

that had been worn out or lost in the forest.

Petersen Sahib came in on his clever she-elephant Pudmini; he had been

paying off other camps among the hills, for the season was coming to an

end, and there was a native clerk sitting at a table under a tree, to

pay the drivers their wages. As each man was paid he went back to his

elephant, and joined the line that stood ready to start. The catchers,

and hunters, and beaters, the men of the regular Keddah, who stayed in

the jungle year in and year out, sat on the backs of the elephants that

belonged to Petersen Sahib’s permanent force, or leaned against the

trees with their guns across their arms, and made fun of the drivers who

were going away, and laughed when the newly caught elephants broke the

line and ran about.

Big Toomai went up to the clerk with Little Toomai behind him, and

Machua Appa, the head tracker, said in an undertone to a friend of his,

“There goes one piece of good elephant stuff at least. ’Tis a pity to

send that young jungle-cock to molt in the plains.”

Now Petersen Sahib had ears all over him, as a man must have who listens

to the most silent of all living things--the wild elephant. He turned

where he was lying all along on Pudmini’s back and said, “What is that?

I did not know of a man among the plains-drivers who had wit enough to

rope even a dead elephant.”

“This is not a man, but a boy. He went into the Keddah at the last

drive, and threw Barmao there the rope, when we were trying to get that

young calf with the blotch on his shoulder away from his mother.”

Machua Appa pointed at Little Toomai, and Petersen Sahib looked, and

Little Toomai bowed to the earth.

“He throw a rope? He is smaller than a picket-pin. Little one, what is

thy name?” said Petersen Sahib.

Little Toomai was too frightened to speak, but Kala Nag was behind him,

and Toomai made a sign with his hand, and the elephant caught him up in

his trunk and held him level with Pudmini’s forehead, in front of the

great Petersen Sahib. Then Little Toomai covered his face with his

hands, for he was only a child, and except where elephants were

concerned, he was just as bashful as a child could be.

“Oho!” said Petersen Sahib, smiling underneath his mustache, “and why

didst thou teach thy elephant that trick? Was it to help thee steal

green corn from the roofs of the houses when the ears are put out to

dry?”

“Not green corn, Protector of the Poor,--melons,” said Little Toomai,

and all the men sitting about broke into a roar of laughter. Most of

them had taught their elephants that trick when they were boys. Little

Toomai was hanging eight feet up in the air, and he wished very much

that he were eight feet underground.

“He is Toomai, my son, Sahib,” said Big Toomai, scowling. “He is a very

bad boy, and he will end in a jail, Sahib.”

“Of that I have my doubts,” said Petersen Sahib. “A boy who can face a

full Keddah at his age does not end in jails. See, little one, here are

four annas to spend in sweetmeats because thou hast a little head under

that great thatch of hair. In time thou mayest become a hunter too.” Big

Toomai scowled more than ever. “Remember, though, that Keddahs are not

good for children to play in,” Petersen Sahib went on.

“Must I never go there, Sahib?” asked Little Toomai with a big gasp.

“Yes.” Petersen Sahib smiled again. “When thou hast seen the elephants

dance. That is the proper time. Come to me when thou hast seen the

elephants dance, and then I will let thee go into all the Keddahs.”

There was another roar of laughter, for that is an old joke among

elephant-catchers, and it means just never. There are great cleared flat

places hidden away in the forests that are called elephants’ ball-rooms,

but even these are only found by accident, and no man has ever seen the

elephants dance. When a driver boasts of his skill and bravery the other

drivers say, “And when didst thou see the elephants dance?”

Kala Nag put Little Toomai down, and he bowed to the earth again and

went away with his father, and gave the silver four-anna piece to his

mother, who was nursing his baby brother, and they all were put up on

Kala Nag’s back, and the line of grunting, squealing elephants rolled

down the hill path to the plains. It was a very lively march on account

of the new elephants, who gave trouble at every ford, and needed coaxing

or beating every other minute.

Big Toomai prodded Kala Nag spitefully, for he was very angry, but

Little Toomai was too happy to speak. Petersen Sahib had noticed him,

and given him money, so he felt as a private soldier would feel if he

had been called out of the ranks and praised by his commander-in-chief.

“What did Petersen Sahib mean by the elephant dance?” he said, at last,

softly to his mother.

Big Toomai heard him and grunted. “That thou shouldst never be one of

these hill buffaloes of trackers. That was what he meant. Oh, you in

front, what is blocking the way?”

An Assamese driver, two or three elephants ahead, turned round angrily,

crying: “Bring up Kala Nag, and knock this youngster of mine into good

behavior. Why should Petersen Sahib have chosen me to go down with you

donkeys of the rice fields? Lay your beast alongside, Toomai, and

let him prod with his tusks. By all the Gods of the Hills, these new

elephants are possessed, or else they can smell their companions in the

jungle.” Kala Nag hit the new elephant in the ribs and knocked the

wind out of him, as Big Toomai said, “We have swept the hills of wild

elephants at the last catch. It is only your carelessness in driving.

Must I keep order along the whole line?”

“Hear him!” said the other driver. “We have swept the hills! Ho! Ho! You

are very wise, you plains people. Anyone but a mud-head who never saw

the jungle would know that they know that the drives are ended for the

season. Therefore all the wild elephants to-night will--but why should I

waste wisdom on a river-turtle?”

“What will they do?” Little Toomai called out.

“Ohe, little one. Art thou there? Well, I will tell thee, for thou hast

a cool head. They will dance, and it behooves thy father, who has

swept all the hills of all the elephants, to double-chain his pickets

to-night.”

“What talk is this?” said Big Toomai. “For forty years, father and son,

we have tended elephants, and we have never heard such moonshine about

dances.”

“Yes; but a plainsman who lives in a hut knows only the four walls

of his hut. Well, leave thy elephants unshackled tonight and see what

comes. As for their dancing, I have seen the place where--Bapree-bap!

How many windings has the Dihang River? Here is another ford, and we

must swim the calves. Stop still, you behind there.”

And in this way, talking and wrangling and splashing through the rivers,

they made their first march to a sort of receiving camp for the new

elephants. But they lost their tempers long before they got there.

Then the elephants were chained by their hind legs to their big stumps

of pickets, and extra ropes were fitted to the new elephants, and the

fodder was piled before them, and the hill drivers went back to Petersen

Sahib through the afternoon light, telling the plains drivers to be

extra careful that night, and laughing when the plains drivers asked the

reason.

Little Toomai attended to Kala Nag’s supper, and as evening fell,

wandered through the camp, unspeakably happy, in search of a tom-tom.

When an Indian child’s heart is full, he does not run about and make a

noise in an irregular fashion. He sits down to a sort of revel all by

himself. And Little Toomai had been spoken to by Petersen Sahib! If he

had not found what he wanted, I believe he would have been ill. But the

sweetmeat seller in the camp lent him a little tom-tom--a drum beaten

with the flat of the hand--and he sat down, cross-legged, before Kala

Nag as the stars began to come out, the tom-tom in his lap, and he

thumped and he thumped and he thumped, and the more he thought of the

great honor that had been done to him, the more he thumped, all alone

among the elephant fodder. There was no tune and no words, but the

thumping made him happy.

The new elephants strained at their ropes, and squealed and trumpeted

from time to time, and he could hear his mother in the camp hut putting

his small brother to sleep with an old, old song about the great God

Shiv, who once told all the animals what they should eat. It is a very

soothing lullaby, and the first verse says:

Shiv, who poured the harvest and made the winds to blow,

Sitting at the doorways of a day of long ago,

Gave to each his portion, food and toil and fate,

From the King upon the \_guddee\_ to the Beggar at the gate.

All things made he--Shiva the Preserver.

Mahadeo! Mahadeo! He made all--

Thorn for the camel, fodder for the kine,

And mother’s heart for sleepy head, O little son of mine!

Little Toomai came in with a joyous tunk-a-tunk at the end of each

verse, till he felt sleepy and stretched himself on the fodder at Kala

Nag’s side. At last the elephants began to lie down one after another

as is their custom, till only Kala Nag at the right of the line was

left standing up; and he rocked slowly from side to side, his ears put

forward to listen to the night wind as it blew very slowly across the

hills. The air was full of all the night noises that, taken together,

make one big silence--the click of one bamboo stem against the other,

the rustle of something alive in the undergrowth, the scratch and squawk

of a half-waked bird (birds are awake in the night much more often than

we imagine), and the fall of water ever so far away. Little Toomai slept

for some time, and when he waked it was brilliant moonlight, and Kala

Nag was still standing up with his ears cocked. Little Toomai turned,

rustling in the fodder, and watched the curve of his big back against

half the stars in heaven, and while he watched he heard, so far away

that it sounded no more than a pinhole of noise pricked through the

stillness, the “hoot-toot” of a wild elephant.

All the elephants in the lines jumped up as if they had been shot, and

their grunts at last waked the sleeping mahouts, and they came out and

drove in the picket pegs with big mallets, and tightened this rope and

knotted that till all was quiet. One new elephant had nearly grubbed up

his picket, and Big Toomai took off Kala Nag’s leg chain and shackled

that elephant fore-foot to hind-foot, but slipped a loop of grass string

round Kala Nag’s leg, and told him to remember that he was tied fast. He

knew that he and his father and his grandfather had done the very same

thing hundreds of times before. Kala Nag did not answer to the order

by gurgling, as he usually did. He stood still, looking out across the

moonlight, his head a little raised and his ears spread like fans, up to

the great folds of the Garo hills.

“Tend to him if he grows restless in the night,” said Big Toomai to

Little Toomai, and he went into the hut and slept. Little Toomai was

just going to sleep, too, when he heard the coir string snap with a

little “tang,” and Kala Nag rolled out of his pickets as slowly and as

silently as a cloud rolls out of the mouth of a valley. Little Toomai

pattered after him, barefooted, down the road in the moonlight, calling

under his breath, “Kala Nag! Kala Nag! Take me with you, O Kala Nag!”

The elephant turned, without a sound, took three strides back to the

boy in the moonlight, put down his trunk, swung him up to his neck,

and almost before Little Toomai had settled his knees, slipped into the

forest.

There was one blast of furious trumpeting from the lines, and then the

silence shut down on everything, and Kala Nag began to move. Sometimes

a tuft of high grass washed along his sides as a wave washes along the

sides of a ship, and sometimes a cluster of wild-pepper vines would

scrape along his back, or a bamboo would creak where his shoulder

touched it. But between those times he moved absolutely without any

sound, drifting through the thick Garo forest as though it had been

smoke. He was going uphill, but though Little Toomai watched the stars

in the rifts of the trees, he could not tell in what direction.

Then Kala Nag reached the crest of the ascent and stopped for a minute,

and Little Toomai could see the tops of the trees lying all speckled and

furry under the moonlight for miles and miles, and the blue-white mist

over the river in the hollow. Toomai leaned forward and looked, and he

felt that the forest was awake below him--awake and alive and crowded.

A big brown fruit-eating bat brushed past his ear; a porcupine’s quills

rattled in the thicket; and in the darkness between the tree stems he

heard a hog-bear digging hard in the moist warm earth, and snuffing as

it digged.

Then the branches closed over his head again, and Kala Nag began to go

down into the valley--not quietly this time, but as a runaway gun goes

down a steep bank--in one rush. The huge limbs moved as steadily as

pistons, eight feet to each stride, and the wrinkled skin of the elbow

points rustled. The undergrowth on either side of him ripped with a

noise like torn canvas, and the saplings that he heaved away right and

left with his shoulders sprang back again and banged him on the flank,

and great trails of creepers, all matted together, hung from his tusks

as he threw his head from side to side and plowed out his pathway. Then

Little Toomai laid himself down close to the great neck lest a swinging

bough should sweep him to the ground, and he wished that he were back in

the lines again.

The grass began to get squashy, and Kala Nag’s feet sucked and squelched

as he put them down, and the night mist at the bottom of the valley

chilled Little Toomai. There was a splash and a trample, and the rush of

running water, and Kala Nag strode through the bed of a river, feeling

his way at each step. Above the noise of the water, as it swirled round

the elephant’s legs, Little Toomai could hear more splashing and some

trumpeting both upstream and down--great grunts and angry snortings, and

all the mist about him seemed to be full of rolling, wavy shadows.

“Ai!” he said, half aloud, his teeth chattering. “The elephant-folk are

out tonight. It is the dance, then!”

Kala Nag swashed out of the water, blew his trunk clear, and began

another climb. But this time he was not alone, and he had not to make

his path. That was made already, six feet wide, in front of him, where

the bent jungle-grass was trying to recover itself and stand up. Many

elephants must have gone that way only a few minutes before. Little

Toomai looked back, and behind him a great wild tusker with his little

pig’s eyes glowing like hot coals was just lifting himself out of the

misty river. Then the trees closed up again, and they went on and up,

with trumpetings and crashings, and the sound of breaking branches on

every side of them.

At last Kala Nag stood still between two tree-trunks at the very top

of the hill. They were part of a circle of trees that grew round an

irregular space of some three or four acres, and in all that space, as

Little Toomai could see, the ground had been trampled down as hard as

a brick floor. Some trees grew in the center of the clearing, but their

bark was rubbed away, and the white wood beneath showed all shiny and

polished in the patches of moonlight. There were creepers hanging from

the upper branches, and the bells of the flowers of the creepers, great

waxy white things like convolvuluses, hung down fast asleep. But

within the limits of the clearing there was not a single blade of

green--nothing but the trampled earth.

The moonlight showed it all iron gray, except where some elephants

stood upon it, and their shadows were inky black. Little Toomai looked,

holding his breath, with his eyes starting out of his head, and as he

looked, more and more and more elephants swung out into the open from

between the tree trunks. Little Toomai could only count up to ten, and

he counted again and again on his fingers till he lost count of the

tens, and his head began to swim. Outside the clearing he could hear

them crashing in the undergrowth as they worked their way up the

hillside, but as soon as they were within the circle of the tree trunks

they moved like ghosts.

There were white-tusked wild males, with fallen leaves and nuts and

twigs lying in the wrinkles of their necks and the folds of their ears;

fat, slow-footed she-elephants, with restless, little pinky black

calves only three or four feet high running under their stomachs; young

elephants with their tusks just beginning to show, and very proud of

them; lanky, scraggy old-maid elephants, with their hollow anxious

faces, and trunks like rough bark; savage old bull elephants, scarred

from shoulder to flank with great weals and cuts of bygone fights,

and the caked dirt of their solitary mud baths dropping from their

shoulders; and there was one with a broken tusk and the marks of the

full-stroke, the terrible drawing scrape, of a tiger’s claws on his

side.

They were standing head to head, or walking to and fro across the ground

in couples, or rocking and swaying all by themselves--scores and scores

of elephants.

Toomai knew that so long as he lay still on Kala Nag’s neck nothing

would happen to him, for even in the rush and scramble of a Keddah drive

a wild elephant does not reach up with his trunk and drag a man off the

neck of a tame elephant. And these elephants were not thinking of men

that night. Once they started and put their ears forward when they heard

the chinking of a leg iron in the forest, but it was Pudmini, Petersen

Sahib’s pet elephant, her chain snapped short off, grunting, snuffling

up the hillside. She must have broken her pickets and come straight from

Petersen Sahib’s camp; and Little Toomai saw another elephant, one that

he did not know, with deep rope galls on his back and breast. He, too,

must have run away from some camp in the hills about.

At last there was no sound of any more elephants moving in the forest,

and Kala Nag rolled out from his station between the trees and went into

the middle of the crowd, clucking and gurgling, and all the elephants

began to talk in their own tongue, and to move about.

Still lying down, Little Toomai looked down upon scores and scores of

broad backs, and wagging ears, and tossing trunks, and little rolling

eyes. He heard the click of tusks as they crossed other tusks by

accident, and the dry rustle of trunks twined together, and the chafing

of enormous sides and shoulders in the crowd, and the incessant flick

and hissh of the great tails. Then a cloud came over the moon, and he

sat in black darkness. But the quiet, steady hustling and pushing and

gurgling went on just the same. He knew that there were elephants all

round Kala Nag, and that there was no chance of backing him out of the

assembly; so he set his teeth and shivered. In a Keddah at least there

was torchlight and shouting, but here he was all alone in the dark, and

once a trunk came up and touched him on the knee.

Then an elephant trumpeted, and they all took it up for five or ten

terrible seconds. The dew from the trees above spattered down like rain

on the unseen backs, and a dull booming noise began, not very loud at

first, and Little Toomai could not tell what it was. But it grew and

grew, and Kala Nag lifted up one forefoot and then the other, and

brought them down on the ground--one-two, one-two, as steadily as

trip-hammers. The elephants were stamping all together now, and it

sounded like a war drum beaten at the mouth of a cave. The dew fell from

the trees till there was no more left to fall, and the booming went on,

and the ground rocked and shivered, and Little Toomai put his hands up

to his ears to shut out the sound. But it was all one gigantic jar that

ran through him--this stamp of hundreds of heavy feet on the raw earth.

Once or twice he could feel Kala Nag and all the others surge forward

a few strides, and the thumping would change to the crushing sound of

juicy green things being bruised, but in a minute or two the boom

of feet on hard earth began again. A tree was creaking and groaning

somewhere near him. He put out his arm and felt the bark, but Kala Nag

moved forward, still tramping, and he could not tell where he was in the

clearing. There was no sound from the elephants, except once, when two

or three little calves squeaked together. Then he heard a thump and a

shuffle, and the booming went on. It must have lasted fully two hours,

and Little Toomai ached in every nerve, but he knew by the smell of the

night air that the dawn was coming.

The morning broke in one sheet of pale yellow behind the green hills,

and the booming stopped with the first ray, as though the light had

been an order. Before Little Toomai had got the ringing out of his head,

before even he had shifted his position, there was not an elephant in

sight except Kala Nag, Pudmini, and the elephant with the rope-galls,

and there was neither sign nor rustle nor whisper down the hillsides to

show where the others had gone.

Little Toomai stared again and again. The clearing, as he remembered it,

had grown in the night. More trees stood in the middle of it, but the

undergrowth and the jungle grass at the sides had been rolled back.

Little Toomai stared once more. Now he understood the trampling. The

elephants had stamped out more room--had stamped the thick grass and

juicy cane to trash, the trash into slivers, the slivers into tiny

fibers, and the fibers into hard earth.

“Wah!” said Little Toomai, and his eyes were very heavy. “Kala Nag, my

lord, let us keep by Pudmini and go to Petersen Sahib’s camp, or I shall

drop from thy neck.”

The third elephant watched the two go away, snorted, wheeled round, and

took his own path. He may have belonged to some little native king’s

establishment, fifty or sixty or a hundred miles away.

Two hours later, as Petersen Sahib was eating early breakfast, his

elephants, who had been double chained that night, began to trumpet, and

Pudmini, mired to the shoulders, with Kala Nag, very footsore, shambled

into the camp. Little Toomai’s face was gray and pinched, and his

hair was full of leaves and drenched with dew, but he tried to salute

Petersen Sahib, and cried faintly: “The dance--the elephant dance! I

have seen it, and--I die!” As Kala Nag sat down, he slid off his neck in

a dead faint.

But, since native children have no nerves worth speaking of, in two

hours he was lying very contentedly in Petersen Sahib’s hammock with

Petersen Sahib’s shooting-coat under his head, and a glass of warm milk,

a little brandy, with a dash of quinine, inside of him, and while the

old hairy, scarred hunters of the jungles sat three deep before him,

looking at him as though he were a spirit, he told his tale in short

words, as a child will, and wound up with:

“Now, if I lie in one word, send men to see, and they will find that the

elephant folk have trampled down more room in their dance-room, and

they will find ten and ten, and many times ten, tracks leading to that

dance-room. They made more room with their feet. I have seen it. Kala

Nag took me, and I saw. Also Kala Nag is very leg-weary!”

Little Toomai lay back and slept all through the long afternoon and into

the twilight, and while he slept Petersen Sahib and Machua Appa followed

the track of the two elephants for fifteen miles across the hills.

Petersen Sahib had spent eighteen years in catching elephants, and he

had only once before found such a dance-place. Machua Appa had no need

to look twice at the clearing to see what had been done there, or to

scratch with his toe in the packed, rammed earth.

“The child speaks truth,” said he. “All this was done last night, and

I have counted seventy tracks crossing the river. See, Sahib, where

Pudmini’s leg-iron cut the bark of that tree! Yes; she was there too.”

They looked at one another and up and down, and they wondered. For the

ways of elephants are beyond the wit of any man, black or white, to

fathom.

“Forty years and five,” said Machua Appa, “have I followed my lord, the

elephant, but never have I heard that any child of man had seen what

this child has seen. By all the Gods of the Hills, it is--what can we

say?” and he shook his head.

When they got back to camp it was time for the evening meal. Petersen

Sahib ate alone in his tent, but he gave orders that the camp should

have two sheep and some fowls, as well as a double ration of flour and

rice and salt, for he knew that there would be a feast.

Big Toomai had come up hotfoot from the camp in the plains to search for

his son and his elephant, and now that he had found them he looked at

them as though he were afraid of them both. And there was a feast by

the blazing campfires in front of the lines of picketed elephants,

and Little Toomai was the hero of it all. And the big brown elephant

catchers, the trackers and drivers and ropers, and the men who know all

the secrets of breaking the wildest elephants, passed him from one to

the other, and they marked his forehead with blood from the breast of a

newly killed jungle-cock, to show that he was a forester, initiated and

free of all the jungles.

And at last, when the flames died down, and the red light of the logs

made the elephants look as though they had been dipped in blood too,

Machua Appa, the head of all the drivers of all the Keddahs--Machua

Appa, Petersen Sahib’s other self, who had never seen a made road in

forty years: Machua Appa, who was so great that he had no other name

than Machua Appa,--leaped to his feet, with Little Toomai held high in

the air above his head, and shouted: “Listen, my brothers. Listen, too,

you my lords in the lines there, for I, Machua Appa, am speaking! This

little one shall no more be called Little Toomai, but Toomai of the

Elephants, as his great-grandfather was called before him. What never

man has seen he has seen through the long night, and the favor of the

elephant-folk and of the Gods of the Jungles is with him. He shall

become a great tracker. He shall become greater than I, even I, Machua

Appa! He shall follow the new trail, and the stale trail, and the mixed

trail, with a clear eye! He shall take no harm in the Keddah when he

runs under their bellies to rope the wild tuskers; and if he slips

before the feet of the charging bull elephant, the bull elephant

shall know who he is and shall not crush him. Aihai! my lords in the

chains,”--he whirled up the line of pickets--“here is the little one

that has seen your dances in your hidden places,--the sight that never

man saw! Give him honor, my lords! Salaam karo, my children. Make your

salute to Toomai of the Elephants! Gunga Pershad, ahaa! Hira Guj, Birchi

Guj, Kuttar Guj, ahaa! Pudmini,--thou hast seen him at the dance, and

thou too, Kala Nag, my pearl among elephants!--ahaa! Together! To Toomai

of the Elephants. Barrao!”

And at that last wild yell the whole line flung up their trunks till the

tips touched their foreheads, and broke out into the full salute--the

crashing trumpet-peal that only the Viceroy of India hears, the Salaamut

of the Keddah.

But it was all for the sake of Little Toomai, who had seen what never

man had seen before--the dance of the elephants at night and alone in

the heart of the Garo hills!

Shiv and the Grasshopper

(The song that Toomai’s mother sang to the baby)

Shiv, who poured the harvest and made the winds to blow,

Sitting at the doorways of a day of long ago,

Gave to each his portion, food and toil and fate,

From the King upon the \_guddee\_ to the Beggar at the gate.

\_All things made he--Shiva the Preserver.

Mahadeo! Mahadeo! He made all,--

Thorn for the camel, fodder for the kine,

And mother’s heart for sleepy head, O little son of mine!\_

Wheat he gave to rich folk, millet to the poor,

Broken scraps for holy men that beg from door to door;

Battle to the tiger, carrion to the kite,

And rags and bones to wicked wolves without the wall at night.

Naught he found too lofty, none he saw too low--

Parbati beside him watched them come and go;

Thought to cheat her husband, turning Shiv to jest--

Stole the little grasshopper and hid it in her breast.

\_So she tricked him, Shiva the Preserver.

Mahadeo! Mahadeo! Turn and see.

Tall are the camels, heavy are the kine,

But this was Least of Little Things, O little son of mine!\_

When the dole was ended, laughingly she said,

“Master, of a million mouths, is not one unfed?”

Laughing, Shiv made answer, “All have had their part,

Even he, the little one, hidden ’neath thy heart.”

From her breast she plucked it, Parbati the thief,

Saw the Least of Little Things gnawed a new-grown leaf!

Saw and feared and wondered, making prayer to Shiv,

Who hath surely given meat to all that live.

\_All things made he--Shiva the Preserver.

Mahadeo! Mahadeo! He made all,--

Thorn for the camel, fodder for the kine,

And mother’s heart for sleepy head, O little son of mine!\_

Her Majesty’s Servants

You can work it out by Fractions or by simple Rule of Three,

But the way of Tweedle-dum is not the way of Tweedle-dee.

You can twist it, you can turn it, you can plait it till you drop,

But the way of Pilly Winky’s not the way of Winkie Pop!

It had been raining heavily for one whole month--raining on a camp

of thirty thousand men and thousands of camels, elephants, horses,

bullocks, and mules all gathered together at a place called Rawal Pindi,

to be reviewed by the Viceroy of India. He was receiving a visit from

the Amir of Afghanistan--a wild king of a very wild country. The Amir

had brought with him for a bodyguard eight hundred men and horses who

had never seen a camp or a locomotive before in their lives--savage

men and savage horses from somewhere at the back of Central Asia. Every

night a mob of these horses would be sure to break their heel ropes and

stampede up and down the camp through the mud in the dark, or the camels

would break loose and run about and fall over the ropes of the tents,

and you can imagine how pleasant that was for men trying to go to sleep.

My tent lay far away from the camel lines, and I thought it was safe.

But one night a man popped his head in and shouted, “Get out, quick!

They’re coming! My tent’s gone!”

I knew who “they” were, so I put on my boots and waterproof and scuttled

out into the slush. Little Vixen, my fox terrier, went out through the

other side; and then there was a roaring and a grunting and bubbling,

and I saw the tent cave in, as the pole snapped, and begin to dance

about like a mad ghost. A camel had blundered into it, and wet and angry

as I was, I could not help laughing. Then I ran on, because I did not

know how many camels might have got loose, and before long I was out of

sight of the camp, plowing my way through the mud.

At last I fell over the tail-end of a gun, and by that knew I was

somewhere near the artillery lines where the cannon were stacked at

night. As I did not want to plowter about any more in the drizzle and

the dark, I put my waterproof over the muzzle of one gun, and made a

sort of wigwam with two or three rammers that I found, and lay along the

tail of another gun, wondering where Vixen had got to, and where I might

be.

Just as I was getting ready to go to sleep I heard a jingle of harness

and a grunt, and a mule passed me shaking his wet ears. He belonged to

a screw-gun battery, for I could hear the rattle of the straps and rings

and chains and things on his saddle pad. The screw-guns are tiny little

cannon made in two pieces, that are screwed together when the time comes

to use them. They are taken up mountains, anywhere that a mule can find

a road, and they are very useful for fighting in rocky country.

Behind the mule there was a camel, with his big soft feet squelching

and slipping in the mud, and his neck bobbing to and fro like a

strayed hen’s. Luckily, I knew enough of beast language--not wild-beast

language, but camp-beast language, of course--from the natives to know

what he was saying.

He must have been the one that flopped into my tent, for he called to

the mule, “What shall I do? Where shall I go? I have fought with a white

thing that waved, and it took a stick and hit me on the neck.” (That was

my broken tent pole, and I was very glad to know it.) “Shall we run on?”

“Oh, it was you,” said the mule, “you and your friends, that have

been disturbing the camp? All right. You’ll be beaten for this in the

morning. But I may as well give you something on account now.”

I heard the harness jingle as the mule backed and caught the camel

two kicks in the ribs that rang like a drum. “Another time,” he said,

“you’ll know better than to run through a mule battery at night,

shouting `Thieves and fire!’ Sit down, and keep your silly neck quiet.”

The camel doubled up camel-fashion, like a two-foot rule, and sat down

whimpering. There was a regular beat of hoofs in the darkness, and a big

troop-horse cantered up as steadily as though he were on parade, jumped

a gun tail, and landed close to the mule.

“It’s disgraceful,” he said, blowing out his nostrils. “Those camels

have racketed through our lines again--the third time this week. How’s a

horse to keep his condition if he isn’t allowed to sleep. Who’s here?”

“I’m the breech-piece mule of number two gun of the First Screw

Battery,” said the mule, “and the other’s one of your friends. He’s

waked me up too. Who are you?”

“Number Fifteen, E troop, Ninth Lancers--Dick Cunliffe’s horse. Stand

over a little, there.”

“Oh, beg your pardon,” said the mule. “It’s too dark to see much. Aren’t

these camels too sickening for anything? I walked out of my lines to get

a little peace and quiet here.”

“My lords,” said the camel humbly, “we dreamed bad dreams in the night,

and we were very much afraid. I am only a baggage camel of the 39th

Native Infantry, and I am not as brave as you are, my lords.”

“Then why didn’t you stay and carry baggage for the 39th Native

Infantry, instead of running all round the camp?” said the mule.

“They were such very bad dreams,” said the camel. “I am sorry. Listen!

What is that? Shall we run on again?”

“Sit down,” said the mule, “or you’ll snap your long stick-legs between

the guns.” He cocked one ear and listened. “Bullocks!” he said. “Gun

bullocks. On my word, you and your friends have waked the camp very

thoroughly. It takes a good deal of prodding to put up a gun-bullock.”

I heard a chain dragging along the ground, and a yoke of the great sulky

white bullocks that drag the heavy siege guns when the elephants won’t

go any nearer to the firing, came shouldering along together. And almost

stepping on the chain was another battery mule, calling wildly for

“Billy.”

“That’s one of our recruits,” said the old mule to the troop horse.

“He’s calling for me. Here, youngster, stop squealing. The dark never

hurt anybody yet.”

The gun-bullocks lay down together and began chewing the cud, but the

young mule huddled close to Billy.

“Things!” he said. “Fearful and horrible, Billy! They came into our

lines while we were asleep. D’you think they’ll kill us?”

“I’ve a very great mind to give you a number-one kicking,” said Billy.

“The idea of a fourteen-hand mule with your training disgracing the

battery before this gentleman!”

“Gently, gently!” said the troop-horse. “Remember they are always like

this to begin with. The first time I ever saw a man (it was in Australia

when I was a three-year-old) I ran for half a day, and if I’d seen a

camel, I should have been running still.”

Nearly all our horses for the English cavalry are brought to India from

Australia, and are broken in by the troopers themselves.

“True enough,” said Billy. “Stop shaking, youngster. The first time

they put the full harness with all its chains on my back I stood on

my forelegs and kicked every bit of it off. I hadn’t learned the real

science of kicking then, but the battery said they had never seen

anything like it.”

“But this wasn’t harness or anything that jingled,” said the young mule.

“You know I don’t mind that now, Billy. It was Things like trees, and

they fell up and down the lines and bubbled; and my head-rope broke, and

I couldn’t find my driver, and I couldn’t find you, Billy, so I ran off

with--with these gentlemen.”

“H’m!” said Billy. “As soon as I heard the camels were loose I came away

on my own account. When a battery--a screw-gun mule calls gun-bullocks

gentlemen, he must be very badly shaken up. Who are you fellows on the

ground there?”

The gun bullocks rolled their cuds, and answered both together: “The

seventh yoke of the first gun of the Big Gun Battery. We were asleep

when the camels came, but when we were trampled on we got up and walked

away. It is better to lie quiet in the mud than to be disturbed on good

bedding. We told your friend here that there was nothing to be afraid

of, but he knew so much that he thought otherwise. Wah!”

They went on chewing.

“That comes of being afraid,” said Billy. “You get laughed at by

gun-bullocks. I hope you like it, young un.”

The young mule’s teeth snapped, and I heard him say something about not

being afraid of any beefy old bullock in the world. But the bullocks

only clicked their horns together and went on chewing.

“Now, don’t be angry after you’ve been afraid. That’s the worst kind

of cowardice,” said the troop-horse. “Anybody can be forgiven for being

scared in the night, I think, if they see things they don’t understand.

We’ve broken out of our pickets, again and again, four hundred and fifty

of us, just because a new recruit got to telling tales of whip snakes at

home in Australia till we were scared to death of the loose ends of our

head-ropes.”

“That’s all very well in camp,” said Billy. “I’m not above stampeding

myself, for the fun of the thing, when I haven’t been out for a day or

two. But what do you do on active service?”

“Oh, that’s quite another set of new shoes,” said the troop horse. “Dick

Cunliffe’s on my back then, and drives his knees into me, and all I have

to do is to watch where I am putting my feet, and to keep my hind legs

well under me, and be bridle-wise.”

“What’s bridle-wise?” said the young mule.

“By the Blue Gums of the Back Blocks,” snorted the troop-horse, “do you

mean to say that you aren’t taught to be bridle-wise in your business?

How can you do anything, unless you can spin round at once when the

rein is pressed on your neck? It means life or death to your man, and of

course that’s life and death to you. Get round with your hind legs under

you the instant you feel the rein on your neck. If you haven’t room to

swing round, rear up a little and come round on your hind legs. That’s

being bridle-wise.”

“We aren’t taught that way,” said Billy the mule stiffly. “We’re taught

to obey the man at our head: step off when he says so, and step in when

he says so. I suppose it comes to the same thing. Now, with all this

fine fancy business and rearing, which must be very bad for your hocks,

what do you do?”

“That depends,” said the troop-horse. “Generally I have to go in among a

lot of yelling, hairy men with knives--long shiny knives, worse than

the farrier’s knives--and I have to take care that Dick’s boot is just

touching the next man’s boot without crushing it. I can see Dick’s lance

to the right of my right eye, and I know I’m safe. I shouldn’t care to

be the man or horse that stood up to Dick and me when we’re in a hurry.”

“Don’t the knives hurt?” said the young mule.

“Well, I got one cut across the chest once, but that wasn’t Dick’s

fault--”

“A lot I should have cared whose fault it was, if it hurt!” said the

young mule.

“You must,” said the troop horse. “If you don’t trust your man, you may

as well run away at once. That’s what some of our horses do, and I don’t

blame them. As I was saying, it wasn’t Dick’s fault. The man was lying

on the ground, and I stretched myself not to tread on him, and he

slashed up at me. Next time I have to go over a man lying down I shall

step on him--hard.”

“H’m!” said Billy. “It sounds very foolish. Knives are dirty things

at any time. The proper thing to do is to climb up a mountain with a

well-balanced saddle, hang on by all four feet and your ears too, and

creep and crawl and wriggle along, till you come out hundreds of feet

above anyone else on a ledge where there’s just room enough for your

hoofs. Then you stand still and keep quiet--never ask a man to hold your

head, young un--keep quiet while the guns are being put together, and

then you watch the little poppy shells drop down into the tree-tops ever

so far below.”

“Don’t you ever trip?” said the troop-horse.

“They say that when a mule trips you can split a hen’s ear,” said Billy.

“Now and again perhaps a badly packed saddle will upset a mule, but it’s

very seldom. I wish I could show you our business. It’s beautiful. Why,

it took me three years to find out what the men were driving at. The

science of the thing is never to show up against the sky line, because,

if you do, you may get fired at. Remember that, young un. Always keep

hidden as much as possible, even if you have to go a mile out of your

way. I lead the battery when it comes to that sort of climbing.”

“Fired at without the chance of running into the people who are firing!”

said the troop-horse, thinking hard. “I couldn’t stand that. I should

want to charge--with Dick.”

“Oh, no, you wouldn’t. You know that as soon as the guns are in

position they’ll do all the charging. That’s scientific and neat. But

knives--pah!”

The baggage-camel had been bobbing his head to and fro for some time

past, anxious to get a word in edgewise. Then I heard him say, as he

cleared his throat, nervously:

“I--I--I have fought a little, but not in that climbing way or that

running way.”

“No. Now you mention it,” said Billy, “you don’t look as though you were

made for climbing or running--much. Well, how was it, old Hay-bales?”

“The proper way,” said the camel. “We all sat down--”

“Oh, my crupper and breastplate!” said the troop-horse under his breath.

“Sat down!”

“We sat down--a hundred of us,” the camel went on, “in a big square, and

the men piled our packs and saddles, outside the square, and they fired

over our backs, the men did, on all sides of the square.”

“What sort of men? Any men that came along?” said the troop-horse. “They

teach us in riding school to lie down and let our masters fire across

us, but Dick Cunliffe is the only man I’d trust to do that. It tickles

my girths, and, besides, I can’t see with my head on the ground.”

“What does it matter who fires across you?” said the camel. “There are

plenty of men and plenty of other camels close by, and a great many

clouds of smoke. I am not frightened then. I sit still and wait.”

“And yet,” said Billy, “you dream bad dreams and upset the camp at

night. Well, well! Before I’d lie down, not to speak of sitting down,

and let a man fire across me, my heels and his head would have something

to say to each other. Did you ever hear anything so awful as that?”

There was a long silence, and then one of the gun bullocks lifted up his

big head and said, “This is very foolish indeed. There is only one way

of fighting.”

“Oh, go on,” said Billy. “Please don’t mind me. I suppose you fellows

fight standing on your tails?”

“Only one way,” said the two together. (They must have been twins.)

“This is that way. To put all twenty yoke of us to the big gun as soon

as Two Tails trumpets.” (“Two Tails” is camp slang for the elephant.)

“What does Two Tails trumpet for?” said the young mule.

“To show that he is not going any nearer to the smoke on the other

side. Two Tails is a great coward. Then we tug the big gun all

together--Heya--Hullah! Heeyah! Hullah! We do not climb like cats nor

run like calves. We go across the level plain, twenty yoke of us, till

we are unyoked again, and we graze while the big guns talk across the

plain to some town with mud walls, and pieces of the wall fall out, and

the dust goes up as though many cattle were coming home.”

“Oh! And you choose that time for grazing?” said the young mule.

“That time or any other. Eating is always good. We eat till we are yoked

up again and tug the gun back to where Two Tails is waiting for it.

Sometimes there are big guns in the city that speak back, and some of

us are killed, and then there is all the more grazing for those that are

left. This is Fate. None the less, Two Tails is a great coward. That is

the proper way to fight. We are brothers from Hapur. Our father was a

sacred bull of Shiva. We have spoken.”

“Well, I’ve certainly learned something tonight,” said the troop-horse.

“Do you gentlemen of the screw-gun battery feel inclined to eat when you

are being fired at with big guns, and Two Tails is behind you?”

“About as much as we feel inclined to sit down and let men sprawl all

over us, or run into people with knives. I never heard such stuff. A

mountain ledge, a well-balanced load, a driver you can trust to let you

pick your own way, and I’m your mule. But--the other things--no!” said

Billy, with a stamp of his foot.

“Of course,” said the troop horse, “everyone is not made in the same

way, and I can quite see that your family, on your father’s side, would

fail to understand a great many things.”

“Never you mind my family on my father’s side,” said Billy angrily, for

every mule hates to be reminded that his father was a donkey. “My father

was a Southern gentleman, and he could pull down and bite and kick into

rags every horse he came across. Remember that, you big brown Brumby!”

Brumby means wild horse without any breeding. Imagine the feelings of

Sunol if a car-horse called her a “skate,” and you can imagine how the

Australian horse felt. I saw the white of his eye glitter in the dark.

“See here, you son of an imported Malaga jackass,” he said between

his teeth, “I’d have you know that I’m related on my mother’s side to

Carbine, winner of the Melbourne Cup, and where I come from we aren’t

accustomed to being ridden over roughshod by any parrot-mouthed,

pig-headed mule in a pop-gun pea-shooter battery. Are you ready?”

“On your hind legs!” squealed Billy. They both reared up facing each

other, and I was expecting a furious fight, when a gurgly, rumbly

voice, called out of the darkness to the right--“Children, what are you

fighting about there? Be quiet.”

Both beasts dropped down with a snort of disgust, for neither horse nor

mule can bear to listen to an elephant’s voice.

“It’s Two Tails!” said the troop-horse. “I can’t stand him. A tail at

each end isn’t fair!”

“My feelings exactly,” said Billy, crowding into the troop-horse for

company. “We’re very alike in some things.”

“I suppose we’ve inherited them from our mothers,” said the troop horse.

“It’s not worth quarreling about. Hi! Two Tails, are you tied up?”

“Yes,” said Two Tails, with a laugh all up his trunk. “I’m picketed for

the night. I’ve heard what you fellows have been saying. But don’t be

afraid. I’m not coming over.”

The bullocks and the camel said, half aloud, “Afraid of Two Tails--what

nonsense!” And the bullocks went on, “We are sorry that you heard, but

it is true. Two Tails, why are you afraid of the guns when they fire?”

“Well,” said Two Tails, rubbing one hind leg against the other, exactly

like a little boy saying a poem, “I don’t quite know whether you’d

understand.”

“We don’t, but we have to pull the guns,” said the bullocks.

“I know it, and I know you are a good deal braver than you think

you are. But it’s different with me. My battery captain called me a

Pachydermatous Anachronism the other day.”

“That’s another way of fighting, I suppose?” said Billy, who was

recovering his spirits.

“You don’t know what that means, of course, but I do. It means betwixt

and between, and that is just where I am. I can see inside my head what

will happen when a shell bursts, and you bullocks can’t.”

“I can,” said the troop-horse. “At least a little bit. I try not to

think about it.”

“I can see more than you, and I do think about it. I know there’s a

great deal of me to take care of, and I know that nobody knows how to

cure me when I’m sick. All they can do is to stop my driver’s pay till I

get well, and I can’t trust my driver.”

“Ah!” said the troop horse. “That explains it. I can trust Dick.”

“You could put a whole regiment of Dicks on my back without making me

feel any better. I know just enough to be uncomfortable, and not enough

to go on in spite of it.”

“We do not understand,” said the bullocks.

“I know you don’t. I’m not talking to you. You don’t know what blood

is.”

“We do,” said the bullocks. “It is red stuff that soaks into the ground

and smells.”

The troop-horse gave a kick and a bound and a snort.

“Don’t talk of it,” he said. “I can smell it now, just thinking of it.

It makes me want to run--when I haven’t Dick on my back.”

“But it is not here,” said the camel and the bullocks. “Why are you so

stupid?”

“It’s vile stuff,” said Billy. “I don’t want to run, but I don’t want to

talk about it.”

“There you are!” said Two Tails, waving his tail to explain.

“Surely. Yes, we have been here all night,” said the bullocks.

Two Tails stamped his foot till the iron ring on it jingled. “Oh, I’m

not talking to you. You can’t see inside your heads.”

“No. We see out of our four eyes,” said the bullocks. “We see straight

in front of us.”

“If I could do that and nothing else, you wouldn’t be needed to pull the

big guns at all. If I was like my captain--he can see things inside his

head before the firing begins, and he shakes all over, but he knows too

much to run away--if I was like him I could pull the guns. But if I were

as wise as all that I should never be here. I should be a king in the

forest, as I used to be, sleeping half the day and bathing when I liked.

I haven’t had a good bath for a month.”

“That’s all very fine,” said Billy. “But giving a thing a long name

doesn’t make it any better.”

“H’sh!” said the troop horse. “I think I understand what Two Tails

means.”

“You’ll understand better in a minute,” said Two Tails angrily. “Now you

just explain to me why you don’t like this!”

He began trumpeting furiously at the top of his trumpet.

“Stop that!” said Billy and the troop horse together, and I could

hear them stamp and shiver. An elephant’s trumpeting is always nasty,

especially on a dark night.

“I shan’t stop,” said Two Tails. “Won’t you explain that, please?

Hhrrmph! Rrrt! Rrrmph! Rrrhha!” Then he stopped suddenly, and I heard

a little whimper in the dark, and knew that Vixen had found me at last.

She knew as well as I did that if there is one thing in the world the

elephant is more afraid of than another it is a little barking dog. So

she stopped to bully Two Tails in his pickets, and yapped round his big

feet. Two Tails shuffled and squeaked. “Go away, little dog!” he said.

“Don’t snuff at my ankles, or I’ll kick at you. Good little dog--nice

little doggie, then! Go home, you yelping little beast! Oh, why doesn’t

someone take her away? She’ll bite me in a minute.”

“Seems to me,” said Billy to the troop horse, “that our friend Two Tails

is afraid of most things. Now, if I had a full meal for every dog I’ve

kicked across the parade-ground I should be as fat as Two Tails nearly.”

I whistled, and Vixen ran up to me, muddy all over, and licked my nose,

and told me a long tale about hunting for me all through the camp. I

never let her know that I understood beast talk, or she would have

taken all sorts of liberties. So I buttoned her into the breast of my

overcoat, and Two Tails shuffled and stamped and growled to himself.

“Extraordinary! Most extraordinary!” he said. “It runs in our family.

Now, where has that nasty little beast gone to?”

I heard him feeling about with his trunk.

“We all seem to be affected in various ways,” he went on, blowing his

nose. “Now, you gentlemen were alarmed, I believe, when I trumpeted.”

“Not alarmed, exactly,” said the troop-horse, “but it made me feel as

though I had hornets where my saddle ought to be. Don’t begin again.”

“I’m frightened of a little dog, and the camel here is frightened by bad

dreams in the night.”

“It is very lucky for us that we haven’t all got to fight in the same

way,” said the troop-horse.

“What I want to know,” said the young mule, who had been quiet for a

long time--“what I want to know is, why we have to fight at all.”

“Because we’re told to,” said the troop-horse, with a snort of contempt.

“Orders,” said Billy the mule, and his teeth snapped.

“Hukm hai!” (It is an order!), said the camel with a gurgle, and Two

Tails and the bullocks repeated, “Hukm hai!”

“Yes, but who gives the orders?” said the recruit-mule.

“The man who walks at your head--Or sits on your back--Or holds the nose

rope--Or twists your tail,” said Billy and the troop-horse and the camel

and the bullocks one after the other.

“But who gives them the orders?”

“Now you want to know too much, young un,” said Billy, “and that is one

way of getting kicked. All you have to do is to obey the man at your

head and ask no questions.”

“He’s quite right,” said Two Tails. “I can’t always obey, because I’m

betwixt and between. But Billy’s right. Obey the man next to you who

gives the order, or you’ll stop all the battery, besides getting a

thrashing.”

The gun-bullocks got up to go. “Morning is coming,” they said. “We will

go back to our lines. It is true that we only see out of our eyes, and

we are not very clever. But still, we are the only people to-night who

have not been afraid. Good-night, you brave people.”

Nobody answered, and the troop-horse said, to change the conversation,

“Where’s that little dog? A dog means a man somewhere about.”

“Here I am,” yapped Vixen, “under the gun tail with my man. You big,

blundering beast of a camel you, you upset our tent. My man’s very

angry.”

“Phew!” said the bullocks. “He must be white!”

“Of course he is,” said Vixen. “Do you suppose I’m looked after by a

black bullock-driver?”

“Huah! Ouach! Ugh!” said the bullocks. “Let us get away quickly.”

They plunged forward in the mud, and managed somehow to run their yoke

on the pole of an ammunition wagon, where it jammed.

“Now you have done it,” said Billy calmly. “Don’t struggle. You’re hung

up till daylight. What on earth’s the matter?”

The bullocks went off into the long hissing snorts that Indian cattle

give, and pushed and crowded and slued and stamped and slipped and

nearly fell down in the mud, grunting savagely.

“You’ll break your necks in a minute,” said the troop-horse. “What’s the

matter with white men? I live with ’em.”

“They--eat--us! Pull!” said the near bullock. The yoke snapped with a

twang, and they lumbered off together.

I never knew before what made Indian cattle so scared of Englishmen.

We eat beef--a thing that no cattle-driver touches--and of course the

cattle do not like it.

“May I be flogged with my own pad-chains! Who’d have thought of two big

lumps like those losing their heads?” said Billy.

“Never mind. I’m going to look at this man. Most of the white men, I

know, have things in their pockets,” said the troop-horse.

“I’ll leave you, then. I can’t say I’m over-fond of ’em myself. Besides,

white men who haven’t a place to sleep in are more than likely to be

thieves, and I’ve a good deal of Government property on my back. Come

along, young un, and we’ll go back to our lines. Good-night, Australia!

See you on parade to-morrow, I suppose. Good-night, old Hay-bale!--try

to control your feelings, won’t you? Good-night, Two Tails! If you pass

us on the ground tomorrow, don’t trumpet. It spoils our formation.”

Billy the Mule stumped off with the swaggering limp of an old

campaigner, as the troop-horse’s head came nuzzling into my breast, and

I gave him biscuits, while Vixen, who is a most conceited little dog,

told him fibs about the scores of horses that she and I kept.

“I’m coming to the parade to-morrow in my dog-cart,” she said. “Where

will you be?”

“On the left hand of the second squadron. I set the time for all my

troop, little lady,” he said politely. “Now I must go back to Dick. My

tail’s all muddy, and he’ll have two hours’ hard work dressing me for

parade.”

The big parade of all the thirty thousand men was held that afternoon,

and Vixen and I had a good place close to the Viceroy and the Amir of

Afghanistan, with high, big black hat of astrakhan wool and the great

diamond star in the center. The first part of the review was all

sunshine, and the regiments went by in wave upon wave of legs all moving

together, and guns all in a line, till our eyes grew dizzy. Then the

cavalry came up, to the beautiful cavalry canter of “Bonnie Dundee,” and

Vixen cocked her ear where she sat on the dog-cart. The second squadron

of the Lancers shot by, and there was the troop-horse, with his tail

like spun silk, his head pulled into his breast, one ear forward and one

back, setting the time for all his squadron, his legs going as smoothly

as waltz music. Then the big guns came by, and I saw Two Tails and two

other elephants harnessed in line to a forty-pounder siege gun, while

twenty yoke of oxen walked behind. The seventh pair had a new yoke, and

they looked rather stiff and tired. Last came the screw guns, and Billy

the mule carried himself as though he commanded all the troops, and his

harness was oiled and polished till it winked. I gave a cheer all by

myself for Billy the mule, but he never looked right or left.

The rain began to fall again, and for a while it was too misty to see

what the troops were doing. They had made a big half circle across the

plain, and were spreading out into a line. That line grew and grew and

grew till it was three-quarters of a mile long from wing to wing--one

solid wall of men, horses, and guns. Then it came on straight toward the

Viceroy and the Amir, and as it got nearer the ground began to shake,

like the deck of a steamer when the engines are going fast.

Unless you have been there you cannot imagine what a frightening effect

this steady come-down of troops has on the spectators, even when they

know it is only a review. I looked at the Amir. Up till then he had not

shown the shadow of a sign of astonishment or anything else. But now his

eyes began to get bigger and bigger, and he picked up the reins on his

horse’s neck and looked behind him. For a minute it seemed as though he

were going to draw his sword and slash his way out through the English

men and women in the carriages at the back. Then the advance stopped

dead, the ground stood still, the whole line saluted, and thirty bands

began to play all together. That was the end of the review, and the

regiments went off to their camps in the rain, and an infantry band

struck up with--

The animals went in two by two,

Hurrah!

The animals went in two by two,

The elephant and the battery mul’,

and they all got into the Ark

For to get out of the rain!

Then I heard an old grizzled, long-haired Central Asian chief, who had

come down with the Amir, asking questions of a native officer.

“Now,” said he, “in what manner was this wonderful thing done?”

And the officer answered, “An order was given, and they obeyed.”

“But are the beasts as wise as the men?” said the chief.

“They obey, as the men do. Mule, horse, elephant, or bullock, he

obeys his driver, and the driver his sergeant, and the sergeant his

lieutenant, and the lieutenant his captain, and the captain his major,

and the major his colonel, and the colonel his brigadier commanding

three regiments, and the brigadier the general, who obeys the Viceroy,

who is the servant of the Empress. Thus it is done.”

“Would it were so in Afghanistan!” said the chief, “for there we obey

only our own wills.”

“And for that reason,” said the native officer, twirling his mustache,

“your Amir whom you do not obey must come here and take orders from our

Viceroy.”

Parade Song of the Camp Animals

ELEPHANTS OF THE GUN TEAMS

We lent to Alexander the strength of Hercules,

The wisdom of our foreheads, the cunning of our knees;

We bowed our necks to service: they ne’er were loosed again,--

Make way there--way for the ten-foot teams

Of the Forty-Pounder train!

GUN BULLOCKS

Those heroes in their harnesses avoid a cannon-ball,

And what they know of powder upsets them one and all;

Then we come into action and tug the guns again--

Make way there--way for the twenty yoke

Of the Forty-Pounder train!

CAVALRY HORSES

By the brand on my shoulder, the finest of tunes

Is played by the Lancers, Hussars, and Dragoons,

And it’s sweeter than “Stables” or “Water” to me--

The Cavalry Canter of “Bonnie Dundee”!

Then feed us and break us and handle and groom,

And give us good riders and plenty of room,

And launch us in column of squadron and see

The way of the war-horse to “Bonnie Dundee”!

SCREW-GUN MULES

As me and my companions were scrambling up a hill,

The path was lost in rolling stones, but we went forward still;

For we can wriggle and climb, my lads, and turn up everywhere,

Oh, it’s our delight on a mountain height, with a leg or two to

spare!

Good luck to every sergeant, then, that lets us pick our road;

Bad luck to all the driver-men that cannot pack a load:

For we can wriggle and climb, my lads, and turn up everywhere,

Oh, it’s our delight on a mountain height, with a leg or two to

spare!

COMMISSARIAT CAMELS

We haven’t a camelty tune of our own

To help us trollop along,

But every neck is a hair trombone

(\_Rtt-ta-ta-ta!\_ is a hair trombone!)

And this our marching-song:

\_Can’t! Don’t! Sha’n’t! Won’t!\_

Pass it along the line!

Somebody’s pack has slid from his back,

Wish it were only mine!

Somebody’s load has tipped off in the road--

Cheer for a halt and a row!

\_Urrr! Yarrh! Grr! Arrh!\_

Somebody’s catching it now!

ALL THE BEASTS TOGETHER

Children of the Camp are we,

Serving each in his degree;

Children of the yoke and goad,

Pack and harness, pad and load.

See our line across the plain,

Like a heel-rope bent again,

Reaching, writhing, rolling far,

Sweeping all away to war!

While the men that walk beside,

Dusty, silent, heavy-eyed,

Cannot tell why we or they

March and suffer day by day.

\_Children of the Camp are we,

Serving each in his degree;

Children of the yoke and goad,

Pack and harness, pad and load!\_

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