The purr grew louder, and ended in the full throated, “Arghh!” 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 wood-cutter’s campfire, and has burned his feet,” said Father Wolf with a grunt. “Tabaqui is with him.”

“Something is coming up the hill,” 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. “Aha! 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!”

“My quarry. A man’s cub went this way,” said Sheer Khan. “Its parents have run off. Give it to me.” Shere Khan had jumped at a woodcutter’s camp fire, as Father Wolf had said, and was furious from the pain of his burned feet. But Father Wolf knew that the mouth of the cave was too narrow for a tiger to come in by. Even where he was, Shere Khan’s shoulders and fore paws were cramped for want of room, as a man’s would be if he tried to fight in a barrel.

“The wolves are 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.”

“You choose and you 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 with thunder. Mother Wolf shook herself clear of the cubs and sprang forward, her eyes like two green moons in the darkness, facing the blazing eyes of Shere Khan.

“And it is I, Raksha (the Demon), who answer. The man’s cub is mine! He shall not be killed. He shall live to run with the Pack and to hunt with the Pack; and in the end, look you hunter of little naked cub, frog eater, fish killer, he shall hunt you! Now get hence or by the Sambhur that I killed (I eat no starved cattle), back you go to your mother, burned beast of the jungle, lamer than ever you came into the world! Go!”

Father wolf looked 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 her 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. Will you still keep him?”

“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 lam 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. Lis still little frog. O thou Mowgli- for Mowgli the Frog I will call thee- the time will come when you will hunt Shere Khan as he has hunted you.