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Kipling's Jungle Book Stories

an adaptation by John Chambers

with verse by Rudyard Kipling

KIPLING'S JUNGLE BOOK STORIES

Characters:

16 main characters playable by a minimum of 12 actors (with suggested doubling if necessary). Scope for more.

Akela - the wolf (m) / Rama - the buffalo (m or f)
Bagheera - the black panther (m)
Baldeo - the hunter (m)
Mowgli - the man cub (m)
Baloo - the bear (m)
Grey Brother - the wolf cub (m)
Raksha - the mother wolf (f) / Hathi - the elephant (m or f) / Chil – the kite (m or f)
Messua - the woman (f)
Bandar-log Monkey Leader (m or f)
Bandar-log Monkey DEPUTY (m or f)
Tabaqui - the jackal (m or f)
Shere Khan - the tiger (m) / Kaa – the snake (m or f)
Wolves, Monkeys (Bandar-log) and Villagers played by the company.
A chorus of various animals may also be used.

ACT ONE, Scene 1

(The wolves' homeground.

The Seeonee Hills, India. Early evening. Exotic calls and cries drift from the surrounding jungle.

Akela, the old grey lone wolf, enters. He calls the pack to the council meeting.)

AKELA: (Calls) Ye know the Law – ye know the Law. Look well, o wolves. Look – look well.

(The wolves, except Mother Wolf, Grey Brother and Mowgli, enter. As they arrive they sing.)

WOLVES: (sing) Now this is the law of the jungle – as old and as true as the sky;
And the wolf that shall keep it may prosper,
But the wolf that shall break it must die.
As the creeper that girdles the tree-trunk
The law runneth forward and back –
For the strength of the pack is the wolf,
And the strength of the wolf is the pack.

(Baloo the bear enters – shambling, scratching, good natured. He joins in the singing.)

Keep peace with the lords of the jungle -
The tiger, the panther, the bear;
And trouble not Hathi the silent,
And mock not the boar in his lair.
When pack meets with pack in the jungle,
And neither will go from the trail,
Lie down till the Leaders have spoken –
It may be fair words shall prevail.

AKELA: Look well, o wolves. Are the sons of Raksha to be accepted into the pack?

WOLVES: We accept them.

AKELA: Accept them both?

WOLVES: Accept them both.

AKELA: The Council Meeting of the Seeonee Pack ends.

(The Wolves go, leaving Akela who sits and considers things, and Baloo.)

BALOO: That's good news, Akela.

(Akela nods and smiles, then goes deep into thought.)

BALOO: You worry too much.

(To audience) He worries too much.

So you have come to the Seeonee Hills, to take your place as *honorary* members of the Seeonee Pack. I too am an *honorary* member of the pack.

As the observant among you will notice, I'm not a wolf – I'm a bear. My name's Baloo. My occupation is teacher. What d'you mean, I don't look like a teacher! What d'you mean, I look like a shambling, rambling scruffbag!! In my experience all teachers look like that! I teach the young wolves the laws of the jungle.

My main interests are eating, sleeping and having a good scratch. (He has a good scratch.)

So you must have travelled from all over India. And from some strange places further afield. (*Some of the strangest of all strange places – name. Insert local place name if wished.*)

(Baloo has another scratch.)

AKELA: Must you scratch, Baloo?

BALOO: Only when I itch, old friend – only when I itch.

AKELA: (gumbling) I'm not old. Alright, my muzzle's grizzled and my bones are stiff. But old I am not.

(Grand) I am Akela – the Lone Wolf – Leader of the Seeonee Pack.
(Weary) But being Leader carries heavy responsibilities...

(Raksha, worried, emerges from the den. Baloo goes over to her.)

BALOO: And being a mother, even greater ones...

AKELA: Greetings, Raksha.

RAKSHA: Akela... Baloo... This is the day I dreaded. The day I begged the sun not to rise. The day that has darkened every other day since...

BALOO: There was no need to dread it, Raksha – the cubs have been accepted.

RAKSHA: Both of them?

AKELA: Both of them.

RAKSHA: I'm grateful...

AKELA: You're still troubled...

RAKSHA: (Nods) Now they're old enough to leave home. And now is the day Shere Khan has vowed to return.

BALOO: Ignore the striped cattle-killer.

RAKSHA: If only it was that easy.

(Grey Brother tumbles out of the den.)

GREY BROTHER: Hi Baloo.

BALOO: Hello, Grey Brother.

GREY BROTHER: What did the pack decide, Akela?

AKELA: You are both accepted.

GREY BROTHER: Both of us?

AKELA/BALOO/RAKSHA: Both of you.

GREY BROTHER: (Howls with delight) Wow! Yes! I'm a full grown, full blown wolf.

BALOO: (To audience) He's wolfish – no doubt about that.

GREY BROTHER: No doubt about that – and there’s good reason – I am a wolf!
Pointy ears, shiny nose, bushy tail, fine grey coat. I’m wolfish alright
(Calls into den) Come on, Mowgli.

(Mowgli appears, definitely more human than wolf)

GREY BROTHER: About time!

BALOO: The most unlikely looking wolf – definitely non-vulpine.

(Raksha goes to him and touches him as she speaks – almost willing him to assume a wolf-like appearance.)

RAKSHA: If only your ears were pointy.

MOWGLI: I can hear well enough.

RAKSHA: And your nose shiny, on a long muzzle.

MOWGLI: I can smell well enough to follow a trail.

RAKSHA: And why can’t you sprout a bushy tail?

MOWGLI: It might get torn on a briar.

RAKSHA: And run on all fours.

MOWGLI: I can see more standing up.

RAKSHA: And grow a coat.

MOWGLI: (Indicates costume) I find a coat when the jungle is cold.

RAKSHA: It’s no good, you’ll never look like a wolf. You are more like a frog.

(Mowgli laughs.)

MOWGLI: (Affectionate) That’s why you called me “Mowgli” when you found me.
Your little frog.

RAKSHA: My little frog...

GREY BROTHER: He’s my brother and he’s a wolf inside. And we have been
accepted into the pack.

MOWGLI: Yes!!! I am a true wolf! One of the Free People!

RAKSHA: One of the Free People...

MOWGLI: You should be happy, mum.

RAKSHA: I am... and sad. You're free to make your own way in the world.

MOWGLI: It's exciting.

AKELA: And dangerous.

MOWGLI: We aren't afraid, are we, Grey Brother?

GREY BROTHER: Na.

AKELA: You face an added danger, Mowgli.

MOWGLI: What danger?

(The Bandar-Log Leader and Bandar-Log DEPUTY enter, stupidly, noisily – monkey-ishly!

B-L Leader: What's happening?

AKELA: Clear off.

B-L DEPUTY: What's happening?

BALOO: You heard Akela, get back to your tree tops, Bandar-Log.

B-L Leader: How dare you speak to we Monkey People as if we're stupid.

BALOO: You are stupid.

B-L Leader: We're not. Well, maybe just a little bit.

B-L DEPUTY: Well, quite a lot really.

B-L Leader: In fact, we're totally tapped! But tell us anyway.

BALOO: No.

B-L Leader: Go on.

BALOO: No.

B-L DEPUTY: Go on.

BALOO: No.

Both B-L: Go on.

BALOO: (Shouts) No – you don't obey the Laws of The Jungle.

Both B-L: We will.

BALOO: I'm still not telling you.

Both B-L: Go on.

BALOO: Don't start that again.

B-L Leader: We weren't going to obey your stupid laws anyway.

AKELA: The Council Meeting is only open to wolves of the Seeonee Pack.

B-L Leader: (Jumping around Baloo) Funny looking wolf...

B-L DEPUTY: Funny looking bear come to that.

AKELA: Baloo is an honorary member.

Both B-L: Oo – "honorary".

AKELA: *Now leave us.*

B-L Leader: Can't make us.

B-L DEPUTY: Can't make us.

BALOO: Ignore them, Akela.

(Baloo and Akela turn their backs on the Bandar-Log.)

B-L Leader: (Sulky) They're ignoring us.

B-L DEPUTY: (Sulky) It's not fair.

B-L Leader: It's no fun acting the idiot if they ignore you. (Chatters hysterically, monkey fashion)

(No response from Baloo and Akela.)

Both B-L: It's not fair.

(A loud gun shot. The Bandar-Log scurry back to trees.

Baloo, Akela, Mowgli, Grey Brother and Raksha hide, but remain in view to audience.

Buldeo, the hunter, and Messua, a young woman, enter. It is obvious that Buldeo has accidentally discharged his gun.)

MESSUA: Are you alright, Buldeo?

BULDEO: I – me – alright? Of course I am. Why should I – me – Buldeo not be?

MESSUA: But the gun?

BULDEO: What about it?

MESSUA: It went off.

BULDEO: Did it? Yes, course it did. I was aiming at...

MESSUA: Yes?

BULDEO: At something only a great hunter like I – me – Buldeo could see. Something wild, ferocious.

MESSUA: I can't see anything.

BULDEO: That's because they've all heard of my reputation. There isn't an animal with a hundred miles of here.

(Animals look at each other. As Messua and Buldeo stand looking about them Mowgli emerges and stands behind them. Raksha tries to call him back. During the following Mowgli compares his own ears, nose and general shape with that of Messua and Buldeo. He is fascinated by their speech and silently mimics it. Grey Brother nips out and finally drags him back to hiding.)

BULDEO: No – there's not a living soul here or hereabouts.

MESSUA: You promised me we'd find my son.

BULDEO: And so we will, Messua.

MESSUA: I've already paid you well.

BULDEO: (Aside) With the promise of more to come! (To Messua) It is only a matter of time, good lady.

MESSUA: I've searched for him for so many years.

BULDEO: Ah, but now you have my assistance.

MESSUA: Do you think these rumours of a boy being cared for by the wolves are true?

BULDEO: I believe they are. And I believe I – me – Buldeo will find your missing son. (Aside) And if not I'll find a jolly good substitute and claim the reward.

(To Messua) You were right to come to me – I will find the boy. And nothing will stop me – I for I – me – Buldeo am fearless.

(There is a might roar from the jungle and Buldeo runs for it.)

MESSUA: Where are you going?

BULDEO: Leading you to safety. Hurry!

(And he's gone. Messua hurries after. The animals emerge from "hiding".)

RAKSHA: (To Mowgli) When I say "come", come – there's danger.

MOWGLI: Sorry.

BALOO: Don't be too stern, Raksha. (To Mowgli) Do as your mother says. (He kicks Mowgli's behind.)

MOWGLI: But I'm a full grown wolf now.

BALOO: Then act like one.

(There is another loud roar. All are alarmed. More Bandar-Log can enter here, chattering excitedly, prefacing the arrival of the hyperactive Tabaqui the jackal. He/she constantly circles and moves towards and away from the wolves. He occasionally cocks his/her leg.)

TABAQUI: Yes, yes, yes. (Goes to Mowgli) Your time has come, you hairless frog-faced fool.

MOWGLI: (Going towards Tabaqui) I'll twist your tail 'til tears trickle down your bottom-licking face. You cackling jackal.

TABAQUI: (Calls) Khan, oh meat-munching master, did you hear what he said to your most grovelling of lackeys?

(Khan bounds into view. All the animals visibly cautious – apart from Mowgli.)

B-Log: Tiger, tiger, tiger, tiger.

(Chorus sing the following. Khan delivers his lines ironically to Akela.)

B-Log Chorus: (Sing) 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 you hurry by?
Brother, I go to my lair to die.

KHAN: (Sings) What of the hunting, hunter bold?

B-L Chorus: (Sing) Brother, the watch was long and cold.

KHAN: (Sings) What of the quarry ye went to kill?

B-L Chorus: (Sings) Brother, he crops in the jungle still.

KHAN: (Sings) Where is the power that made your pride?

B-L Chorus: (Sings) Brother, it ebbs from my flank and side.

KHAN: (Sings) Where is the haste that you hurry by?

B-L Chorus: (Sing) Brother I go to my lair to die.

(Song ends.)

AKELA: We have pack business here, Khan.

KHAN: Pack business is my business today. I'll sit and watch.

TABAQUI: The grass is damp, oh growly one.

(After fussing for a dry patch, Tabaqui kneels and forms a bench for Khan to sit on.)

AKELA: (Irritated by Khan) Proceed. Bring forward the two cubs.

KHAN: I see only one cub.

(Mother Wolf brings Grey Brother and Mowgli before Akela.)

AKELA: You know the law – you know the law. Look well, o wolves. (More friendly) These two fine young fellows are now full members of the Seeonee Pack. Free to roam where they will.

Now repeat the Hunting Verse to me and your induction is complete.

GREY BROTHER / MOWGLI: Feet that make no noise; eyes that can see in the dark; ears that can hear the wind in their lairs; and sharp white teeth – all these things are the marks of our brothers.

AKELA: Welcome o wolves, welcome.

(Khan stands.)

KHAN: Your eyesight must be fading along with your reason, old wolf. The Man Cub is a Man Cub and belongs to me.

B-Log: Yes, yes, yes.

TABAQUI: Kill, kill, kill.

BALOO: Could I speak, Akela.

KHAN: What right has Baloo, the buffoon, to speak?

(Akela motions Baloo to speak.)

BALOO: (Nervous, stumbling) Well... erm... has ha honorary member...

KHAN: Get on with it, you hold hidiot.

BALOO: (Angrily confident) Shere Khan has no place here. He tried to kill the Man Cub at birth. He has tried to bribe other wolves with bones, and tricked them with lies, saying that Mowgli, being a Man Cub, would harm them.

MOWGLI: I would never harm my wolf brothers.

KHAN: I've had enough of this wolf waffling – especially as it's not even a wolf who's waffling. (Steps forward) The Man Cub is mine.

RAKSHA: (Confronts him) He is mine – I cared for him.

KHAN: You *stole* him after I killed his human parents.

RAKSHA: I have loved him... and I will fight to defend him. They call me Raksha the Demon, and you will know why if you harm Mowgli. Leave my son alone.

KHAN: (Bravado) You might fight me, Raksha, but not all the other wolves who hang on my every word...

(FX. A loud purring growl from the trees.)

(Khan stops nervous.)

BAGHEERA:(OOV.) Not now, Khan, not now...

MOWGLI: Bagheera!

(Bagheera, the black panther, enters.)

KHAN: What business have you got here, panther?

AKELA: You are welcome, Bagheera.

TABAQUI: (Excited) Kill him, Khan, kill him.

KHAN: (Aside) Shut up, you fool. (To Bagheera) Once you were held captive by men, Bagheera – caged, humiliated.

BAGHEERA: That's true.

KHAN: Then why waste your time on this Man Cub? Let me dispose of him. You know what men are like when they are full grown – they are cruel.

BAGHEERA: Not all men... (pointed) and not only men. Raksha protected him when he came young and naked, And I will protect him now. He has learned the ways of the jungle and respects them. And so I respect him.

KHAN: He's learned our ways so he can spy and trick us.

BAGHEERA: Leave the boy alone.

KHAN: I'll leave you all alone – just give me the Man Cub.

AKELA: It is the will of the pack that he stays.

KHAN: Liar!

TABAQUI: Yes, because you bribed them, didn't you, master.

KHAN: Shut up!

BAGHEERA: Unfortunately the few bones you threw them weren't enough.

KHAN: What do you mean?

BAGHEERA: I gave them a whole bull that I killed – a gift.

TABAQUI: A whole bull – let's go, master. They might have left some bones.

KHAN: The only bones I want are the Man Cub's!

AKELA: Go, Khan...

(Khan hesitates, considering the combined threat of Akela, Raksha and Bagheera.)

KHAN: (Leaving) He (Mowgli) will be mine. Every path he takes, I'll follow. In every shadow, I'll wait.

AKELA: Go.

MOWGLI: Yes, go!

(Mowgli makes as if to attack Khan but Baloo drags him back. A moment then Khan and Tabaqui leave.)

BAGHEERA: This isn't a game, Mowgli – you've got to take great care from now on. Khan will never leave you alone.

MOWGLI: I'm not scared of him.

BALOO: (Cuffs him) You should be.

(FX. A loud elephant's trumpeting.)

(They all look at Baloo.)

MOWGLI: Have you been eating chilli pods again, Baloo?

BALOO: It wasn't me!

(FX. Trumpeting.)

AKELA: It is Hathi the elephant. She's telling us there's a greater threat to us all than Khan.

GREY BROTHER: There is no greater threat.

AKELA: Oh yes there is... (Sniffs the air) It's nature.

(The others sniff and sense something strange.)

MOWGLI: What is it?

GREY BROTHER: Why does the air feel different?

AKELA: Drought it coming...

BAGHEERA: I must go to the Peace Roack.

MOWGLI: Can we come?

GREY BROTHER: Please.

(Bagheera looks to Akela and Raksha.)

RAKSHA: (Reluctant) You are wolves now...Take care, my sons.

(Bagheera leads Mowgli and Grey Brother off. Bandar-Log follow in the general direction.)

BALOO: (To Raksha) I'll go and keep an eye on them.

(Akela and Raksha exit.)

(Lights fade slowly as...)

CHORUS: (Sing) Wash daily from nose-tip; drink deeply, but never too deep;
And remember that night is for hunting, and forget not the day is for
sleep.

The jackal may follow the tiger, but, cub, when thy whiskers are grown,
Remember the wolf is a hunter – go forth and get food on thine own.

(Repeat)

End of Scene One.

ACT ONE, Scene 2

The Peace Rock.

(A hot yellow midday sun. Hathi the elephant, imposing dominates proceedings. The Bandar-Log are in situ. We imagine they are by a lake.)

HATHI: Dry times mean changed ways. Soon cool water will give way to dust. Shimmering cascades will be no more, their mossy carpets will scorch and die.

(Sings) The stream is shrunk – the pool is dry,
And we be comrades, thou and I;
With fevered jowl and dusty flank.

B-LOG: (Sing) Each jostling each along the bank;
And by one drouthy fear made still,
Foregoing thought of quest or kill.
Now 'neath his dam the fawn may see,

(Mowgli, Grey Brother, Baloo and Bagheera arrive, tired and thirsty. They join in the end of the song.)

The lean pack-wolf as cowed as he,
And the tall buck, unflinching note
The fangs that tore his father's throat.
The pools are shrunk – the streams are dry,
And we be playmates, thou and I,
Till yonder cloud – good hunting! – loose
The rain that breaks our Water Truce.

(Song ends.)

BALOO: Ah water – I could drink the lake dry.

BAGHEERA: Don't you dare – we've all got to share it.

BALOO: I know, I know...

MOWGLI: This'd be a brilliant place to hunt – all the People of the Jungle have to come here – it's the only water for miles.

(Hathi trumpets loudly.)

BALOO: It wasn't me.

HATHI: It is I, Hathi – the Silent One.

GREY BROTHER: (To Mowgli) Silent one! She sounds like a very loud fart in a very deep canyon.

(Baloo shushes him.)

BAGHEERA: Why have you called us, Hathi?

HATHI: Bagheera – the drought is here and I have to remind everyone – especially the young cubs, of the oldest Law of the Jungle – the Water Truce.

MOWGLI: What's the Water Truce?

HATHI: (Sighs) Don't be impatient, Man Cub.

MOWGLI: My name is Mowgli – I'm grown up!

HATHI: I know your name.

MOWGLI: How?

BALOO: Because Hathi is wise.

MOWGLI: Are you saying I'm stupid?

BALOO: I'm saying you're cheeky.

(Baloo kicks Mowgli's behind.)

HATHI: (Trumpets her annoyance) The Water Truce says that in time of drought all animals can come to drink without fear of being hunted.

MOWGLI: That seems fair to me.

HATHI: (Sarcastic) Oh, I'm pleased you think so. (Continues) And so all may come, as the fish find safety in the cracks of the mud.

(Tabaqui enters, circles and listens.)

GREY BROTHER: But if we can't hunt, how do we eat?

HATHI: Hunting is permitted – but not here at the watering hole.

BAGHEERA: I better go and find food before the rain stops and the grass dries and the river dries.

MOWGLI: We'll come, Bagheera.

BAGHEERA: Stay.

MOWGLI: Why?

BAGHEERA: (Angry) By the bull that bought you – stay. It's safer here.

(Mowgli humbled.)

BALOO: (To Bagheera) Good hunting.

(Bagheera goes, and Tabaqui, pleased to see the back of Bagheera, becomes more animated, Tabaqui cackles.)

BALOO: Oh don't cackle, jackal.

TABAQUI: The panther's gone then...

MOWGLI: What's it got to do with you?

TABAQUI: He's taken off, has he – tail between his legs, is it – because he's heard, has he, that my mighty one is about to arrive.

GREY BROTHER: We might have known the striped sheep stealer wouldn't be far away.

(Khan roars loudly.)

GREY BROTHER: Oops!

(Khan enters. He is covered with blood.)

B-L Leader: (Chatters) Blood. Blood. He's covered in blood.

TABAQUI: That's right. Blood. Blood. He's covered in blood.

KHAN: (To B-L Leader) And I'll be covered in yours, monkey, if you don't shut up.

B-Log: (Quiet but animated) Blood. Blood. He's covered in blood. Blood. Blood. He's covered in blood.

HATHI: (Loud) Silence!

TABAQUI: Hathi the silent one!

HATHI: What business have you here, Shere Khan?

KHAN: I have as much right as you, droopy snout.
(Tabaqui is in paroxysms).

KHAN: I am here to drink. And then I'll wash.

B-L LEADER: The blood. The blood. He's going to wash the blood.

B-LOG: The blood. The blood. He's going to wash the blood.

KHAN: (Moves towards B-L) It's the blood of an ape.
(Bandar-Log step back, shut up, cover their mouths & eyes as one.)

HATHI: You mustn't taint our drinking water.

KHAN: No?
(And Khan slowly, deliberately rinses his paws in the lake. B-L slowly uncover eyes and mouths and watch in horror.)

B-LOG: The blood. The blood. He's washed the blood in the water.

KHAN: The blood of an ape.
(B-L step back, cover mouth and eyes.)

KHAN: An ape, without fur. (Pointed to Mowgli) An ape called "man".

HATHI: Shere Khan – the Law says we people of the jungle must never kill man.

KHAN: I obey my own laws.

HATHI: Man returns with guns and none is safe.

KHAN: I fear no man... In fact I fear I've developed a taste for one – a young tender one. (He moves towards Mowgli)

GREY BROTHER: (Leaps towards Khan) Leave my brother alone, you bully.

(Khan swipes him out of the way.)

BALOO: It's the Water Truce, Khan.

KHAN: Go and scratch your backside against a tree, you moth-eaten mincer of words.

(Baloo steps between Khan and Mowgli.)

MOWGLI: (Steps forward) I'm not afraid of him.

BALOO: (Quiet to Mowgli) Give your mouth a rest and let your brain have a chance. (To Khan) He's over-excited.

KHAN: He's as good as dead.

(Khan moves forward.)

BALOO: Run, Mowgli.

(Baloo tries, unsuccessfully to block Khan's way. Mowgli does not run.)

HATHI: Run, Man Cub, run.

B-LOG: Run, Man Cub, run.

MOWGLI: No.

B-LOG: He says no.

(Mowgli and Khan confront each other.)

TABAQUI: Now, Shere Khan. Strike now... Can I have his skull to play with?

BALOO: He's doomed.

MOWGLI: Better dead than living in fear. Come on, Khan – your teeth are sharper, and your claws will tear me in two at a stroke – but I’m running nowhere.

HATHI: You have one weapon he can’t match, Mowgli.

KHAN: (Sarc) Oh yes – is he going to maul me with his chewed finger nails?

HATHI: Your gaze, Mowgli – your stare.

(Khan laughs, dismissively. Mowgli hesitates for an instant then stares Khan full in the face.)

TABAQUI: (apoplectic) Te he he – ho ho – ha ha – o o o o... Master – mind he doesn’t beat you with his mighty eye-lashes!

B-L LEADER: The Man Cub looks death in the face.

B-LOG / TABAQUI: Kill, kill, kill, kill.

(Their chant dries as they realise that Khan, fixed by Mowgli’s gaze, is no longer advancing. He is becoming submissive, lowering his head. Mowgli turns his head to cheekily wink at Grey Brother and Baloo. Khan instantly prepares to go on the offensive. But Mowgli again fixes him with his stare.)

TABAQUI: Master! What’s the matter?

(Khan backs off.)

KHAN: Another time, Man Cub.

(Khan turns to go.)

TABAQUI: Why didn’t you kill him, Master?

(Khan, angry, preoccupied, doesn’t answer.)

B-L LEADER: Khan’s a coward, Khan’s a coward.

B-LOG: Khan’s a coward, Khan’s a coward

TABAQUI: Khan is merciful – he’s spared the Man Cub because he’s kind. Isn’t that right, Master?

(Khan and Tabaqui exit.)

BALOO: How did you know that a look would scare him off, Hathi?

HATHI: Man is in many ways foolish – so foolish that he doesn’t realise the power of his gaze over us People of the Jungle.

(Bagheera enters, carrying food.)

MOWGLI: (Flexing his muscles) Bagheera – you missed my show of strength – I sent Khan packing with my stony stare.

BAGHEERA: Modesty never was man’s strong point.

GREY BROTHER: You’re a show off, Mowgli.

MOWGLI: There’s no need to be jealous of me, Grey Brother.

GREY BROTHER: Jealous!

MOWGLI: You’re jealous of my special powers. It’s obvious. You always have been – green with envy.

GREY BROTHER: I’ve stuck up for you when the others bullied you for being different.

MOWGLI: I’m different alright – I’m better. I’ve proved that. Do you really think I need you or anyone else to protect me?

GREY BROTHER: I’ll leave you to it then. (Turns to go)

MOWGLI: Where are you going?

GREY BROTHER: You’re becoming unbearable, Mowgli. And I don’t have to put up with it. I’m going home.

(Grey Brother acknowledges Baloo and Bagheera and leaves for home.)

MOWGLI: (Shouts after him) Jealous!

(Sees Bagheera and Baloo looking at him accusingly.)

MOWGLI: Everyone in the Jungle is jealous of me. All of you. None of the Free People can look me in the eye. Can you, Baloo?

(Bagheera & Baloo turn their backs on him. Mowgli mooches off. Hathi, Baloo & Bagheera exit.)

MOWGLI: (To himself, grumbling) And even Bagheera has never sent Shere Khan on his way. It was me, using my superior brain.

(Hathi coughs.)

MOWGLI: Well, Hathi suggested it – but I'd already thought of it. I am special.

B-LOG: Oooh.

B-L LEADER: (To other B-Log) Listen, my giddy chums. I've got a plot. We, the Bandar Log, can prove we are special – extra special.

B-LOG: Are we?

B-L LEADER: Follow me and see – quietly.

B-LOG: (Loudly) Quietly, quietly, quietly, quietly!

(B-L Leader shushes DEPUTY who shushes the B-Log. Then they shush themselves.)

(The B-Log Leader, followed by others, creeps up on the sulking Mowgli.)

B-L LEADER: Now... grab him!

B-L DEPUTY: Grab, grab, grab him!

B-LOG: (Hysterical) Grab, grab, grab, grab, grab.

(The Bandar-Log grab Mowgli and drag him away. He struggles but his mouth is gagged. Baloo, Hathi and Bagheera enter having heard the commotion. The B-Log see them.)

B-L LEADER: (Shouts) Yah-hoo – you haven't noticed as we silently cub-nap the Man Cub.

B-L DEPUTY: You were cat-napping. Yah-boo!

(And they exit with Mowgli.)

BALOO: Mowgli...

HATHI: Don't be hasty, Baloo – those Bandar-Log are stupid enough to drop Mowgli from the highest tree if they think you're following.

BAGHEERA: We can't let them get away.

HATHI: They will need to rest – far better to attempt a rescue then.

BALOO: How can we follow their trail?

HATHI: The Free People of the Jungle will help – but there is only one who can free him.

BAGHEERA: Who? Tell us, Hathi.

HATHI: Kaa.

BALOO: Kaa! Not Kaa the Rock Python! I can't stand Kaa! (He shivers)

BAGHEERA: Shut up, Baloo. (To Hathi) Where can we find Kaa?

BALOO: Urrgh – Kaa... (To audience) He can wrap himself round an ox and crush it to death – then swallow it whole.

(Bagheera looks.)

BALOO: I know, "Shut up, Baloo". (Quiet) Urrgh – Kaa.

HATHI: Kaa can be found in the Cold Lairs.

BALOO: This gets worse.

BAGHEERA: (Moving off) Come on.

BALOO: Wait for me... (To audience) You probably aren't brave enough to go to the Cold Lairs... (Second thought) I've a good mind to stay here and look after you.

BAGHEERA: (Shouts) Baloo – move it!

BALOO: (Goes) Kaa – uggh. (To audience) See you there... if you dare.

(Baloo goes. Hathi trumpets loudly.)

BALOO: (offstage) It wasn't me.

(There's an even louder trumpeting sound.)

BALOO: Excuse me.

End of Scene 2

ACT ONE, Scene 3

The Cold Lairs.

(Dark, dank and scary. The sounds here are more sinister than any we have heard before, more primaeval. Then there is the hysterical chattering of the Bandar-Log. Then a cracked, scratchy voice sings. It's Chil the Kite, who will appear during the first verse.)

CHIL: (Sings) Anger is the egg of fear
Only lidless eyes are clear
Cobra-poison none may leech
Even so with cobra-speech.

(Chil watches.
Then we hear the approaching Bandar-Log singing the chorus. They arrive, with Mowgli, during...)

B-LOG: (Sing) Wood and water, wind and tree
Jungle-favour go with thee.
Wood and water, wind and tree
Jungle-favour go with thee.

MOWGLI: (Calling for help) Help me... please help... If anyone can see me...
dashed through the trees... stolen by the monkey people... help me...

(Mowgli tries to make a break for it. A chase ensues, but the Bandar-Log are always too quick and too numerous for Mowgli. They deliberately let him think he's about to escape and then trap him. He's defeated.)

B-LOG: (Sing, increasingly manic) Wood and water, wind and tree
Jungle-favour go with thee
Wood and water, wind and tree
Jungle-favour go with thee
Jungle-favour go with thee.

(The Bandar-Log suddenly get active, ready to move on.)

B-L LEADER: This is no place for us, my primate pals. We've got the Man
Cub.

B-L DEPUTY: We're the talk the jungle.

B-L LEADER: We're deserving of a grander gaff.

(They work themselves up into an ape-ish lather and set off.)

B-L LEADER: Onwards and upwards.

B-LOG: Onwards and upwards.

MOWGLI: (Calls) If anyone can hear me... Tell Baloo of the Seeonee Pack... Tell Grey Brother I'm sorry... Tell Bagheera of the Council Rock... Tell my dear mother, my dear mother. Tell them, Mowgli – the Man Cub they call me – passed this way. Mark my trail... Mark my trail... No one can hear... (Fading) No one...

(And the Bandar-Log head off with Mowgli and they've gone. A loud squawk reminds us that Chil is still present.)

CHIL: What does he mean, no one can hear? Am I no one? No, I'm not no one. If I'm not no one did I hear? He said no one can hear – but I heard him. If I carry on like this I'll fall off my perch. I better rest for a while... (Muttering) I'm not no one. I'm Chil the kite.

(Suddenly a flurry of gunshots as Buldeo enters. He's firing up into trees wildly.)

BULDEO: Aye, monkeys – you might as well flee. It is I – me – Buldeo. Mighty hunter, silent stalker.

CHIL: (Croaks) Silent!

(Buldeo lets off another volley, but doesn't see Chil.)

BULDEO: Now – with my hawk-like eyes I espied something with the apes that could pay for my retirement. Yes, Buldeo – the good *rich* woman Messua will be mighty pleased if I find her child. The emptiness in her heart is so great – I'm sure I can fill it with a substitute – IF I can collar the boy off the monkeys. If! IF! Did I – me – Buldeo say "IF"? I – me – Buldeo meant WHEN.

(Chil cackles with laughter. Buldeo sees Chil.)

BULDEO: And why not have some target practise...

CHIL: (Aside) He's going to fire his banging stick at I – me – Chil the Kite.

(Buldeo aims.)

BULDEO: You've breathed your last, bird.

CHIL: Keep still, Chil – he'll miss as sure as eggs are very painful to lay.

BULDEO: You perish.

(Click. The gun's empty.)

CHIL: Am I dead?

(Buldeo sets about re-loading his gun when a loud hissing can be heard. Buldeo can't see its source, but runs off in the direction that the Bandar-Log took Mowgli. The hissing subsides as Bagheera enters – searching, moving agilely. He decides he should wait for Baloo, who duly, and breathlessly, arrives.)

BALOO: Hurry. Haste. Get a move on. (And he trots a pace or two past Bagheera who watches impatiently.) Tired, panther! Worn out! Is it left to me to continue to search alone? So be it – leave it to me. I'll trot 'til I drop. I'll wear them down.

BAGHEERA: At your speed it wouldn't tire a wounded slug. Listen, "Teacher of the Law" – a mile more of your shambling, rambling, rocking and rolling and you'll burst open. This is no time for chasing – it's time for using our brains.

BALOO: It's a good job I came along then.

BAGHEERA: If we follow too close those nut-throwers might well drop hm from a great height.

BALOO: (Starts wailing) Oh, no, woe is me. Poor Mowgli. It's all my fault. I was too impatient. Too stern. I drove him into the arms of the Bandar-Log. He's gone forever. (Big mournful wail.)

CHIL: I know where he is.

BALOO: (Amazed, to Bagheera) How did you do that?

BAGHEERA: What are you on about?

BALOO: What magic power have you, my sleek pussy pal, to talk like a strangulated buzzard. (Mimics) "I know where he is."

CHIL: (Impatient)_I know where he is, you dim bear.

BALOO: (Mimics) "I know where he is, you dim bear." (Realises what he's said. Still thinks it's Bagheera.) You'd use this awful power to humiliate your friend?

BAGHEERA: You can be dim, Baloo.

BALOO: Ha – I saw your mouth move.

(Bagheera pushes Baloo out of the way and addresses Chil.)

BAGHEERA: What news have you, Chil?

CHIL: At last.... I saw the Man Cub, a prisoner of the Bandar-Log.

BALOO: (Chimes in) I knew it wasn't you talking really, Bagheera. (To Chil) Dim, am I, kite?

CHIL: Yes. (Continues) They took him towards the Lost Temple.

BALOO: Let's go.

BAGHEERA: Wait! In the Jungle I might be able to climb to reach him. But in the passages and tunnels of that wretched place... We must follow Hathi's advice – she said find Kaa.

BALOO: Let's go home.

BAGHEERA: You aren't frightened, Baloo?

BALOO: Me! Frightened of silly stupid Kaa! Phhh.

(Without warning, a huge discarded snake skin drops on Baloo, who freezes.)

BALOO: Ah, what is it? I'm done for. Deaded while still in my pomp. Thwarted before I can rescue Mowgli.

(Baloo closes his eyes and waits for death. Bagheera sees it's just a skin.)

BAGHEERA: You're not frightened, Baloo?

BALOO: I'm about to die an excruciating death from something very nasty, and you're asking if I'm frightened.

BAGHEERA: I didn't think you'd be afraid of an empty, discarded snake skin.

BALOO: ...an empty discarded snake skin... (Opens his eyes) It's an empty discarded snake skin. Ha! You were worried for a moment, weren't you?

BAGHEERA: But just think, Baloo – the size of the snake which must have filled this.

(Baloo takes in the full length of the skin.)

BALOO: What sort of creature loses its own skin! It's like us walking round in the nuddy!

(At that moment, Kaa begins to emerge from a tree right behind Baloo. Kaa will end up towering about Baloo, who remains unaware of his presence. Bagheera and Chil do see Kaa, but let Baloo rattle on.)

BALOO: See Bagheera – look about – do you see Kaa? Course you don't. Methinks it should be "Hathi the senile one". Personally, I'm very disappointed I *didn't* get to meet Kaa. But well, there it is. I dare say, Bagheera, you're a bit relieved. So let's go. Blow Kaa.

KAA: (Into Baloo's ear) Sssso pleasssed to meet you.

BALOO: (Frozen with fear, then turns to look at Kaa) Oh my giddy aunt. Ghastly or what. (Looks away, then back to Kaa) He really is as gruesome as I thought he would be – only worse.

(Kaa wraps him/herself around Baloo.)

KAA: Are you referring to me, Bear?

BALOO: (Big pause) No...

KAA: Good of you to bring me this snack, Bagheera. A bit old and gristly – a gristly bear!

BALOO: My worst nightmare – a snake who thinks they’ve got a sense of humour.

KAA: Let me give you a hug.

BALOO: What!

BAGHEERA: (Enjoying this) Give Kaa a hug, Baloo.

BALOO: I would only... only...

KAA: I’m waiting, big boy...

BALOO: Only I’m allergic to worms.

KAA: (Angry, hisses) Worms! Worms! I’m not a worm.

BAGHEERA: Sorry, Kaa – Bagheera is a bit of an insensitive old clod – aren’t you, Baloo?

BALOO: What?

BAGHEERA: Aren’t you, Baloo?

BALOO: (Reluctant) Yes.

KAA: (Inviting Baloo to repeat) “I’m an insensitive clod of a stupid bear.”

CHIL: (Laughs) Say it, bear, say it.

KAA: (To Baloo) I’m waiting.

BAGHEERA: (To Baloo) For Mowgli’s sake.

BALOO: I’m an insensitive clod of a...

KAA: ...”stupid bear”.

BALOO: Stupid bear.

KAA: “Who doesn’t appreciate beauty when he sees it.”

CHIL: (Laughs) Say it, bear, say it.

BALOO: Who doesn't appreciate... beauty.

KAA: Now we're all friends again.

BALOO: (Aside) Truly beautiful – for a slippery, slimy, outsized worm who has problems with his sssspeech.

BAGHEERA: We've come to you for help, Kaa.

KAA: I'm ssstarving.

BALOO: (Aside) Say it, don't spray it.

BAGHEERA: We're searching for Mowgli, the Man Cub.

KAA: I'm ssstill ssstarving.

BALOO: He's our friend. He's been taken by the Bandar-Log. (Upset) They'll kill him when they tire of him. Tear him apart.

KAA: Ssso what?

BAGHEERA: You're right, Kaa – it's no concern of yours.

BALOO: Bagheera!

KAA: Now I'll get on with my dinner.

BALOO: What dinner?

KAA: You.

BALOO: What!

BAGHEERA: Of course...

(Bagheera starts to move off.)

BALOO: Traitor. Double traitor. Triple traitor...

BAGHEERA: You enjoy your meal, Kaa. (Beat) Don't let the things the Bandar-Log say about you ruin your appetite.

(Kaa hisses loudly.)

BALOO: Oh that's right – wind him up as well!

KAA: What things?

BAGHEERA: You don't want to know. .

KAA: Tell me.

BAGHEERA: I wouldn't dream of repeating it. The vile slanders they scream from the tree tops – about you being a great slimy yellow earth worm.

KAA: Worm!

BAGHEERA: Earth worm.

KAA: Earth worn!

BAGHEERA: All slimy, yellow and yucky.

KAA: (Agitated.) Where are they? *Where are those prattling primates? We must save the gentle Man Cub before one of those stupid monkeys drops him from the highest tree.*

BAGHEERA: Hathi, the wisest in the whole jungle, said that only you – *only the mighty Kaa* – could help us.

KAA: Where have the cowardly Bandar-Log taken the poor Man Cub?

CHIL: The Lost Temple...

BALOO: It'll take you weeks to slither there on your belly.

KAA: I'll be there before you, you hairy set of bellows.

BALOO: How?

KAA: I have my own ssslippery sssilent sssecret way... (Evil) Would you like to sssee it?

BALOO: (Quick) No fear.

BAGHEERA: (Moving off) To the Lost Temple...

(Baloo and Bagheera leave for the Temple. Kaa exits. Chil sings as they depart.)

CHIL: (Sings) Prisoned from our mother-sky
Hearing us, the loves, go by;
In the dawns, when thou shalt wake
To the toil thou canst not break,
Heartsick for the jungle's sake;
Wood and water, wind and tree,
Jungle-favour go with thee!

CHORUS: (Sing) Prisoned from our mother-sky
Hearing us, the loves, go by;
In the dawns, when thou shalt wake
To the toil thou canst not break,
Heartsick for the jungle's sake;
Wood and water, wind and tree,
Jungle-favour go with thee!

(FX: Blackout.)

End of Act One

ACT TWO, Scene 1

The Lost Temple

(There's an entrance to the temple with raised stages and hanging vines, if possible, for the Bandar-Log to cavort on.
The Bandar-Log bring Mowgli, tethered with vines, from the temple.)

B-LOG: (Sing) 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?
Would you like it 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!*

(Bandar-Log DEPUTY looks for fleas in Mowgli's hair.)

All the talk we ever have heard
Uttered by bat or beast or bird
Hide or fin or scale or feather
Jabber it! Wonderful! Once again!
Now we're 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.

(Song ends.)

B-L LEADER: You're wasting time, Bandar-Log sister – the Man Cub is deficient.

MOWGLI: What d'you mean, deficient?

B-L LEADER: You haven't got a single solitary flea on your bonce.

B-L DEPUTY: (Taunting) Not a single solitary flea – not a single nit for us to nibble.

MOWGLI: I don't want fleas!

B-L LEADER: You're in luck then.

MOWGLI: (Aside) This lot really are the most nutty, dippy, daft, crazy, insane, idiotic, balmy army of flea-brained bare-bottomed bozos I've ever seen.

B-LOG: (Jumping around) What's he say, what's he say...

B-L LEADER: He says, my fine intelligent chums, that we the Bandar-Log, are the most intelligent, sober, sensible creatures who ever... who ever scratched their armpits.

B-L DEPUTY: Hoo-ra!

MOWGLI: (Aside) They can only concentrate on one thing for two seconds at a time.

B-L LEADER: Now what was I saying?

B-L DEPUTY: Hoo-ra – our heads are as empty as – something we've forgotten the name of.

MOWGLI: My stomach's empty. I'm hungry.

B-L LEADER: (Finds a fleas on his own head and offers it to Mowgli) Have a flea, hairless one.

MOWGLI: I don't want a flea.

B-L DEPUTY: You'll never be big and strong if you don't eat your fleas... (Eats flea)

MOWGLI: If I don't have some proper food I'll die... I'll die of starvation...

B-LOG: See if we care...

B-L LEADER: Wait, you little leaping geniuses... The baldy one here might have a point. Imagine how greatly greater we would be if he... if he...

B-LOG: If he what?

B-L LEADER: If he showed us how to make pointy sticks...

B-LOG: A-ha...

MOWGLI: That's right – bring me food, and I'll show you how to sharpen sticks.

B-LOG: Pointy sticks!

MOWGLI: Sharper than Khan's claws.

B-L LEADER: That's sharp enough for us, Frog-face. (To others) Let's feed this scrawny sapling.

(The Bandar-Log scurry off, randomly, to find some food.)

MOWGLI: Now I've proved my superior brain power by distracting the tree-swingers, I'll make good my escape. (Grumbles on as he sets about untying himself.) My so-called friends are nowhere to be seen. They've forgotten about me – typical.

If I was ever to teach the Bandar-Log anything I'd show them how to tie a proper knot. Not this tangle...

(He doesn't see the Bandar-Log return. The Leader has the sum total of the food gathered for him – a peanut. B-L Leader signals the others to be quiet. All, scarcely able to contain themselves, hands over mouths, dying to giggle, creep up on Mowgli. Very exaggerated in manner, enjoying every minute. He is about to free himself. They are about to grab him.)

MOWGLI: Yes, I've shown them... I've shown them all...

(Bandar-Log can't contain themselves any longer. They go ape. Mowgli horrified.)

B-L LEADER: A close thing, Wolf Boy.

B-L DEPUTY: A very close thing.

B-LOG: (All) A very close thing. A very, very close thing. A very, very, very, very, very, very, very, very close thing.

(They hop round him, entangling him once more in the vine.)

MOWGLI: Let me go!

B-LOG: No.

B-L LEADER: You're ungrateful.

MOWGLI: Why should I be grateful to you screaming ninnies?

B-L LEADER: Because we went to a deal of trouble.

B-L DEPUTY: *A deal of trouble...*

B-LOG: A very, very, very great deal of trouble.

B-L LEADER: (Continues) To provide you with the finest vittels. (Grandly produces peanut) Here...

MOWGLI: A peanut!

B-L LEADER: Low in polyunsaturates – high in... sort of crunchiness. So nice – I'll eat it. (Eats peanut)

MOWGLI: Idiot!

B-L DEPUTY: How dare you!

B-L LEADER: Don't worry – we'll feed you alright – to the crocodiles.

B-LOG: Snap, snap, snap – snappity snap.

B-L LEADER: Or drop you from up there.

B-LOG: Drop, drop, drop – droppity drop.

B-L LEADER: Or rip you apart.

B-LOG: Rip, rip, rip – rippity rip.

B-L LEADER: Because we're tired of you, boy.

B-L DEPUTY: Tired, boy, tired...

B-LOG: (Becoming tired) Tired, boy, so very, very, very fatigued.

(They begin to stretch and yawn.)

B-L LEADER: Tired, boy, tired... So first we nap – then we do our simian worst.

B-LOG: (Settling down) Nap time!

(The Bandar-Log snooze. Mowgli is trapped, in deep despair. None of them is aware of the arrival of Bagheera, then the lumbering Baloo, who creep up on the temple.)

BALOO: Shall I charge them now?

BAGHEERA: What!

BALOO: Well, when I've caught my breath...

BAGHEERA: Alright...

(Baloo builds up to a charge.)

BAGHEERA: ...and I'll sit here and watch while they tear you, or Mowgli, or even both of you, limb from limb...

BALOO: (Stops) Limb from limb, you say...

(Bagheera does a pulling action, complete with sucking then snapping sound.)

Baloo repeats it.)

BALOO: So, my feline friend, what's your plan?

(Bagheera ponders.)

BALOO: Of course, I knew the snake would be useless. Where's it got to – that's what I'd like to know. Well, I wouldn't really – too grotesque for words. I don't know why we wasted our time talking to the long streak of hiss. (Mimics Kaa) "Ooo, I'm a ssslippery ssslimy ssssnake..."

BAGHEERA: Shut up, Baloo.

BALOO: (Ignores him, wrapped up in his impressions) “Ssslippery ssslimy sssnakesss...”

BAGHEERA: Shut up!

(Mowgli sees them.)

MOWGLI: Bagheera... Baloo... You've not deserted me.

BALOO: Guess who this is, Mowgli. “I'm a ssslippery ssslimy...”

BAGHEERA: Shut up!

(Bandar-Log suddenly springing into life.)

B-LOG: Panther... Bear... Panther... Bear... Panther... Bear...

B-L LEADER: Take the Man Cub... He's ours.

(They grab Mowgli and run towards the temple door before Bagheera and Baloo can stop them. Then Kaa appears – either from inside the temple or dangling over the side. Bandar-Log stop in their tracks. Baloo doesn't see Kaa at first.)

B-LOG: Ooo, a ssslippery ssslimy sssnake.

BALOO: You call that a snake impression!

KAA: Release the boy.

BALOO: That's a bit better.

BAGHEERA: It is the snake.

BALOO: (Slowly looks) Oh crikey.

B-L LEADER: I say, Snakey chap speaks with forked tongue.

(Bandar-Log giggle.)

KAA: Release him.

B-L DEPUTY: Out run us, could you – on your fine muscular legs!

(Bandar-Log laugh.)

KAA: Release him, I said.

B-LOG: Won't, shan't, can't.

B-L LEADER: And anything else that rhymes with "aren't".

KAA: I sssee.

BALOO: (Aside) I knew wonder worm was a long shot.

(Kaa makes a high-pitched hissing and begins to rotate his head.)

BALOO: The long think bloke has gone out of his tiny tubular brain...

(But Kaa continues – the circular motion becoming more and more marked. Then the Bandar-Log, imperceptibly at first, but increasingly, follow his every move. He's mesmerising them. He's also mesmerising Baloo and Mowgli.)

BAGHEERA: (To Baloo) He's mesmerising them.

(Looks and sees that Baloo is well and truly entranced. Bagheera gives him a dig.)

BALOO: What d'you do that for?

(Bagheera shakes his head.)

BALOO: Ha – look, those mindless monkeys are mesmerised. I bet you're glad that I persuaded you to bring the python.

BAGHEERA: Come on...

(They move to rescue Mowgli. He's quickly untied but his head's still rotating. Baloo kicks him up the behind. Mowgli comes out of his trance. He's unaware of Kaa still mesmerising the Bandar-Log behind him.)

MOWGLI: What d'you do that for?

BALOO: I promise it's the last time I'll ever do it - if you promise not to sulk when I tell you off.

MOWGLI: I've given up sulking. I've had this terrible dream – the Bandar-Log captured me and took me to the Lost Temple...

(Bagheera and Baloo cough. Mowgli looks about.)

MOWGLI: (Sees Bandar-Log and Kaa) It wasn't a dream.

BALOO: I rescued you... with Bagheera's help.

KAA: (Stops rotating. To Baloo) You were saying... Just a ssslippery ssslimy ssssnake, am I? Useless?

BALOO: Who said that of you, Mighty Kaa – I'll strike them down. Mowgli – you owe everything to the worm – I mean, snake – Kaa.

KAA: I must say, Man Cub, you are frog-like.

MOWGLI: That's why my mother called me Mowgli.

KAA: Very interesting – I eat frogs.

(Bagheera steps between Kaa and Mowgli.)

KAA: Only joking, Bagheera. What shall we do about the Bandar-Log?

BAGHEERA: I must say I rather like them in their present state – quiet.

B-L LEADER: (Snaps out of it) Did someone say quiet?

B-LOG: Quiet. Quiet. QUIET!

KAA: (Apologetic to Bagheera) I'm afraid it wears off.

B-LOG: (Horrorified) Ah, a python! Ah, a panther! Ah, a bear!

(And they scatter, but remain in view. Suddenly Buldeo enters with a flourish and a couple of volleys from his gun to boot.)

BULDEO: Yes, 'til truly I – me – Buldeo – here in person... I – myself... (Tails off as he runs out of pronouns) It's the boy I want. Mind, the panther skin will fetch a pretty rupee for a rich woman's coat. And the snake, shoes and bag to match. I suppose the bear skin might make a rug – for a peasant.

BALOO: (Aside) Cheek!

BULDEO: But tis the boy who'll make me rich.

(Raises his gun and points it at Bagheera, Mowgli steps forward to protect his friends – but has no human words, He appeals to Buldeo.)

BULDEO: Out of the way, boy – if I shoot you my little plan is doomed.

MOWGLI: (To Baloo and Bagheera) I don't have the sounds to make him understand.

BAGHEERA: He only understands killing and wanting what isn't his.

(Mowgli howls wolf-like.)

BULDEO: Ha – I can put you in a freak show, Wolf Boy, if you don't suit the woman, Messua.

(FX: A loud Wolf's howling. Then another from a different direction, then another.)

BULDEO: (Panicking) One or two I can kill... but a pack... as night falls...

(Another howl from another direction. Mowgli, Bagheera and Baloo run to hide while Buldeo is disoriented with fear.)

BULDEO: (Going) I'll be back, Wolf Boy, I – me...

(FX: Another howl.)

BULDEO: (Running) Buldeo...

(And he's gone. Mowgli, Buldeo and Bagheera re-emerge.)

BALOO: What was that?

MOWGLI: I know. (He howls)

(FX: The howl is returned.)

(Grey Brother enters. Mowgli runs to greet him.)

MOWGLI: Grey Brother.

GREY BROTHER: Mowgli, my brother.

BALOO: You bought the rest of the pack.

GREY BROTHER: No – it was just me doing a lot of howling and a lot of running.

MOWGLI: You came even though I hurt you.

GREY BROTHER: You are my Wolf Brother – even if you do have some silly Man
Cub ways.

BALOO: How did you find us, Grey Brother?

GREY BROTHER: Followed my nose – and with a bit of help from Chil the Kite. Chil
told me something else – Shere Khan is coming this way.

MOWGLI: Let him come.

GREY BROTHER: He is sworn to kill you.

MOWGLI: I'm not ready to die.

GREY BROTHER: Come on – let's all go back to the Seonee Hills.

(They start to leave, but Mowgli hangs back. They turn to look at him.)

MOWGLI: And I'm not ready to go back.

BAGHEERA: (To Baloo) It's the Spring Running...

BALOO: Aye.

MOWGLI: What's the Spring Running...

BALOO: It happens to all the Free People of the Jungle – as we change from
cubs to grown ups... when we find out about ourselves and the world.

GREY BROTHER: Is that why I was driven to follow?

BAGHEERA: Yes. And it's why Mowgli must go on alone.

(During the following song, the friends say their farewells.)

ALL: (Sing) Man goes to man! Cry the challenge through the Jungle!
He that was our brother goes away.
Hear now and judge, O ye people of the Jungle.
Answer, who shall turn him – who shall stay?
Man goes to Man! He is weeping in the Jungle.
He that was our brother sorrows sore!
Man goes to Man! *Oh we loved him in the Jungle!*
To the man-trail where we may not follow more.
Man goes to man! Cry the challenge through the Jungle!
He that was our brother goes away.
Hear now and judge, O ye people of the Jungle
Answer, who shall turn him – who shall stay?

MOWGLI: I want to go with my friends, return to my mother where it's safe...
(Looks in other direction) But something inside drives me to go on, to
find out more.

(A moment then Mowgli exits in the opposite direction to his friends.)

ALL: (Sing) Man goes to Man! He is weeping in the Jungle.
He that was our brother sorrows sore!
Man goes to Man! *Oh we loved him in the Jungle!*
To the man-trail where we may not follow more.

(End of Act Two, Scene 1)

ACT TWO, Scene 2

The Village

(A village. Tinkling bells, incense, flowing silks, another world. Messua and others dance, almost float, in their saris.

Mowgli comes up on this – he circles, watching, unseen by the villagers. He gets closer, drawn in, but remaining out of their view. The dance ends.

Buldeo emerges from a hut/tent. It's his turn to do the entertaining – he's a story-teller. The villagers know what to expect and are bored even before he starts.)

BULDEO: Yes, villagers – here I am...

(Villagers mouth the familiar "I – me – Buldeo" as he says it.)

BULDEO: It is I – me – Buldeo, safe home from another hunting expedition, a trip of monumentally dangerous proportions. A jaunt of which there is plenty to tell.

MOWGLI: (Aside) I bet there is.

MESSUA: (To Buldeo) You promised to return with my long lost son, Buldeo.

BULDEO: Who! I? Me? Buldeo?

MESSUA & VILLAGERS: Yes, you, that's who, Buldeo.

BULDEO: So I did. And so I will. (Beat) And so I would have done – if I had not been attacked... by a thousand wolves!

MOWGLI: (Aside) You what!

BULDEO: ...and a giant bear, taller than a tree...

MOWGLI: As wide as a tree may be.

BULDEO: *And* a panther, as black as night with nostrils that breathed fire.

MOWGLI: (Aside) This hunter breathes more hot air than my friend Bagheera ever did.

BULDEO: But fear not – I have returned safe – the wild beasts slain.

MESSUA: And my boy?

BULDEO: The boy.... er...

MESSUA: Enough of this wind-baggery, Buldeo.

BULDEO: (Pathetic) I... me... (Beat) What about my fee?

MESSUA: (Upset) Leave me alone.

(Some villagers go to comfort her but she waves them away.)

MESSUA: Leave me alone.

(The Villagers go. Buldeo goes some way off, standing with his back to Messua. She is alone, quietly crying. Mowgli watches her, something inside him makes him want to comfort her. She's unaware of his presence as he goes quietly to her. He kneels by her, then rests his head against her. She's startled, just for a moment, but is instantly drawn to Mowgli.)

MESSUA: My son?

MOWGLI: (Imitates her) My son?

MESSUA: My son!

MOWGLI: (Imitates her) My son!

(She hugs him. From now on Mowgli will imitate the human voices until he learns to speak. Buldeo turns and sees what is happening.)

BULDEO: (Aside) Does Lady Fate smile on me? Or has she dropped I – Me – in the biggest dollop of droppings ever dropped... Has fate denied me my fat fee?

(Fires his gun in the air, then charges towards Messua and Mowgli.)

BULDEO: Stand clear, good lady – I have the savage in my sights.

(Other Villagers re-emerge.)

BULDEO: Fear not, friends – I have saved Messua.

MESSUA: He didn't threaten me.

BULDEO: No, madam – because I – me – Buldeo intervened.

(Messua goes to hold the terrified Mowgli.)

MESSUA: You better not harm him, Buldeo.

MOWGLI: (Aside) She defends me with her life as my Wolf-Mother did when Shere Khan came.

MESSUA: The boy is mine – he came to me.

BULDEO: (Thinking quickly) I brought him to you, madam – by my cunning I lead him to you, I – me...

MESSUA: (Cuts in) You produce more bull than all your bison, Buldeo.

BULDEO: !! Me!

MESSUA: (Hands him bag of money) But I will pay you off, so leave him alone.

MOWGLI: Pay you off...

BULDEO: (Grabs money) There's gratitude.

MOWGLI: There's gratitude.

BULDEO: Get lost.

MOWGLI: Get lost.

(Messua and Villagers laugh, and Buldeo slinks off to sit by fire.)

MOWGLI: (Shouts after him) Get lost! Get lost!

MESSUA: (Scolds) Nathoo!

(Mowgli looks at her puzzled.)

MESSUA: Do you remember your name?

MOWGLI: Name...

MESSUA: Nathoo.

MOWGLI: Nathoo.

MESSUA: You do remember.

MOWGLI: (Aside) I don't know what she says, I know what she feels though... and what I feel...

MESSUA: (Touches her breast) Mama.

MOWGLI: Mama.

MESSUA: That's right. I am your mama. (Aside) I don't know if he's mine, but I know I feel a mother's love.

MOWGLI: Mama.

(She holds him.)

MESSUA: I'll fetch you food.

MOWGLI: Food.

(Mowgli sits looking at the new surroundings as the following is sung. He is immediately frightened and fascinated by the fire.)

VILLAGERS: (Sing) Man goes to man! He is weeping in the jungle.
He that was our brother sorrows sore!
Man goes to man! *Oh, we loved him in the jungle!*
To the man-trail where we may not follow more.

(During this, Rama, the buffalo, enters, wanders over, cautious.)

MOWGLI: What's your name?

RAMA: You speak the language of the jungle.

MOWGLI: I am Mowgli of the Seeonee pack.

RAMA: The famous man cub. I am Rama, leader of Buldeo's buffalo herd.

MOWGLI: How can a man own free people of the jungle?

RAMA: It is their way.

MOWGLI: They have many strange ways.

RAMA: They are primitive.

MOWGLI: You seem a decent cove, Rama.

RAMA: Pleasant of you to say.

MOWGLI: Which is fortunate because I'm starving. I don't think I could bring you down on my own.

RAMA: You could try.

(Mowgli laughs. He then returns to the fire.)

MOWGLI: Is this what they call the Red Flower?

RAMA: It is. (Aside) This should be fun.

(Mowgli touches the fire and burns himself. He yelps and rolls about holding his hand. Buldeo laughs. Messua comes carrying a bowl of milk.)

MESSUA: What's the matter?

MOWGLI: The Red Flower bit me.

MESSUA: That's fire. It's hot!

RAMA: (Aside) Bit late for that.

(Messua kisses Mowgli's hand better. After some reticence he enjoys it. Buldeo can barely conceal his contempt. Messua then sets about giving Mowgli the food, shooing Rama away.)

RAMA: (Moving off, grumbles) I'm going, I'm going...

(Rama stands some way off.)

MESSUA: Food, my son.

MOWGLI: Food, my son.

(She hands him the bowl. Mowgli immediately puts it on the ground and scoffs it on all fours – milk and bread all over the place.)

MESSUA: Nathoo!

(But Mowgli finishes it and burps.)

MESSUA: You don't have very good manners.

MOWGLI: Good manners... (Burps again then stretches and yawns)

MESSUA: Never mind. You're exhausted, come inside and sleep.

(She leads him to the door of the hut/tent. He suddenly resists, and pulls away.)

MESSUA: Come on, son, this is home.

MOWGLI: (Aside) She's taking me inside a panther trap!

MESSUA: What's the matter?

(But Mowgli pulls clear.)

BULDEO: He needs a good beating. Lick him into shape. I'll do it.

MESSUA: You'll do no such thing, you loud-mouthed bully – he's frightened, not used to our ways. (To Mowgli) You rest here if you're happier.

(Mowgli curls up, putting his tongue out at Buldeo as he does so. Buldeo and Messua exit. Mowgli remains sleeping, Rama wanders a little way off. Shere Khan and Tabaqui enter unseen. They creep up and watch Mowgli.)

KHAN: There he is.

TABAQUI: Attack him now, master, his eyes are closed from us – there's no need to be scared.

KHAN: What?

TABAQUI: Did I say “scared”? I mean... I mean... I mean... I mean... I’m in such a state I think I better run round in circles and hope the mighty Shere Khan forgets I implied he was sc... (Can’t say it) sc... sc...

KHAN: Come here, you fool.

(Tabaqui returns.)

KHAN: Only an idiot would blunder into man’s encampment.

TABAQUI: Should I do it now?

KHAN: Tempting, yes – but after they’d disposed of you they’d turn their guns on me. No, we wait. I have stalked the man cub for many years, Khan will choose his moment.

(They leave to hide. Rama addresses the audience.)

RAMA: The day turns to night many times, and seasons pass. It doesn’t take long for Mowgli to learning talking noises of the people – and some of their primitive ways.

(Mowgli wakes, finds a crook which is now his.)

MOWGLI: Come on, Rama – move on.

RAMA: (Grumbles) Very primitive ways.

MOWGLI: The people have given me a job to do.

RAMA: They’ve given you a crooked stick to...

MOWGLI: To poke you with if you don’t move.

RAMA: Precisely – what self-respecting wolf needs a stick to make buffalo shift?

MOWGLI: I’m not a wolf now. (Grand) I’m a herdsman.

RAMA: Really.

MOWGLI: It is the way of the people.

RAMA: Is it your way?

MOWGLI: Yes! (Less sure) It has to be while I'm here.

RAMA: I must say Mowgli, you're a kinder herdsman than Buldeo.

MOWGLI: (Mimics Buldeo) "I – me – Buldeo, I – me – the greatest bag of wind who ever blustered."

(Rama laughs and moves a little way off with Mowgli. Grey Brother, out of view, howls quietly.)

RAMA: (Nervous to Mowgli) Friend or foe?

(Mowgli howls quietly. Grey Brother appears, careful not to be seen, and runs to Mowgli. They greet each other.)

GREY BROTHER: (Eyes Rama) My word – that's a feast on four legs.

RAMA: Do you mind?

MOWGLI: He's my friend.

GREY BROTHER: If you ever fall out, let me know.

MOWGLI: It's good to see you, brother.

GREY BROTHER: You might not be too pleased when you hear my news. Shere Khan and the jackal are resting just along the valley. Khan tells all the free people of the jungle that you are a traitor – now that you live with man.

MOWGLI: Khan is a trouble-maker.

RAMA: We buffalo know him well – he picks off the weakest member of the herd – the old, the young, the sick.

GREY BROTHER: You've got to leave here, Mowgli.

MOWGLI: Along the valley you say?

GREY BROTHER: Where the sides are steep.

MOWGLI: How would you like to rid this place of Khan, Rama?

RAMA: What d'you think?

MOWGLI: When he attacks one of your herd, what do you do?

RAMA: Stampede.

MOWGLI: Run away?

RAMA: No – erm – yes. It's instinct. Run away...

MOWGLI: Do the opposite.

RAMA: What d'you mean?

MOWGLI: Charge him – all of you. No creature – not even the bravest could stand up to you all. Especially a coward like Khan.

GREY BROTHER: Do it, Rama.

RAMA: I will... but the others... You must “persuade” them. I'll lead them up the valley, if you drive them.

GREY BROTHER: Easy.

MOWGLI: Come on.

(Rama heads off towards the hidden valley.)

RAMA: (Shouts) Charge!

(FX: Loud buffalo call to arms.

And he disappears out of view as Mowgli and Grey Brother chase after him, kicking up a din.

SFX: Stampede.

Buldeo comes running to see what's happening. Messua and villagers also come to see.)

BULDEO: The little fool. He's stampeded my herd!

(He fires off the obligatory shots in the direction of the stampede before Messua manages to grapple the rifle off him. Mowgli and Grey Brother return.)

BULDEO: Fiend. See, he's a fiend. A maker of trouble. Let me execute this wolf man.

(FX: A loud baleful moo.

Rama enters, holding his behind.)

RAMA: Which fool shot me up the behind – need I ask.

MESSUA: You shot your own buffalo, Buldeo.

BULDEO: What! !! Me!

MOWGLI: Yes, that's the reward this fine beast Rama gets for driving away Shere Khan the tiger.

BULDEO: (Blusters, for Villagers' benefit) There was no tiger. Tiger – ha! More wicked words of sorcery. Yes, that's it. The Wolf Man did his magic on me – yes, I – Buldeo. How else would the finest shot in the whole of India – the whole of Asia – the whole of the world – shoot my own buffalo?

(Villagers sceptical.)

BULDEO: He brings us bad luck. It's witchcraft.

MOWGLI: Don't listen to him.

BULDEO: How else can he tame a wolf? It's against our natural laws.

MOWGLI: Your laws are nothing against the laws of the jungle.

BULDEO: See, he's a traitor.

VILLAGERS: Traitor.

BULDEO: A savage at heart.

VILLAGERS: (Hostile) Savage!

BULDEO: Yes, a savage.

VILLAGERS: Yes, a savage. Savage, savage, SAVAGE!

RAMA: (Aside) What did I tell you – primitives.

MOWGLI: I've got to go – I don't belong here.

MESSUA: But I love you, son.

MOWGLI: I love you, mother – but how can I stay where people won't accept me for what I am. I can't be the son you want. I only bring you trouble. Your neighbours believe his (Buldeo's) lies. They torment my brother – soon they'll torment you. I have no place here.

MESSUA: Where will you go?

MOWGLI: I've got to find where I do belong.

MESSUA: Let me give you something - to take – to remember me by.

MOWGLI: I won't forget you.

MESSUA: Please, something – money, jewels, anything.

MOWGLI: I don't need those things.

(Messua disappointed.)

MOWGLI: I will take something. The Red Flower. (Points to the fire)

MESSUA: Fire?

BULDEO: Wizard's talk – the "Red Flower".

MESSUA: Take it, Nathoo.

MOWGLI: It's flame will burn like your love.

(Mowgli takes a pot containing some fire and starts to leave with Grey Brother.)

MESSUA: Is there anything else I can do?

(Beat.)

MOWGLI: There is one thing – tend to Rama’s wound.

MESSUA: (Clocks Rama holding his behind) Must I?

MOWGLI: It would make me happy.

RAMA: Not half as happy as me.

MESSUA: Come on, old buffalo.

RAMA: (To Mowgli) She’s not bad for a primitive. Take care.

(Rama exits. Messua watches as Mowgli and Grey Brother leave. The Villagers sing.)

VILLAGERS: (Sing) When the heat-cloud sucks the tempest, when the slivered pine trees fall,
When the blinding, blaring rain-squalls lash and veer;
Through the trumpets of the thunder rings a voice more loud than all –
It is Fear, o little hunter, it is fear.

(Villagers leave, then Buldeo – already plotting. Lastly Messua, alone and sad.

Tabaqui enters and checks the coast is clear.)

TABAQUI: (Calls) It’s safe – no danger of being nearly squashed, oh nasty one.

(Khan enters, foul tempered.)

TABAQUI: I know you were frightened of the marauding buffalo, master. I mean, anyone would dodge out of the way... I was hoping your mighty roar might stop them, but... Anyway, we live to fight another day.

KHAN: You won’t live to do anything another day if you don’t stop cackling and jackaling, you dog-featured hench-mutt.

TABAQUI: Thank you, master, most kind. I say, your majesty, it was very cunning of the buffalo to charge you.

KHAN: It wasn’t their idea. The wolf boy was behind it. And he’ll regret it – we’ll follow him to Council Rock.

TABAQUI: How d'you know he'll go there, oh clever thing?

KHAN: If he doesn't belong here, he'll think he belongs there. Slinking back to curry favour with that old fool Akela. But this time no good will it do him.

TABAQUI: Oo goody – the final conflict.

KHAN: There will be no final conflict – I'll just kill him, bump him off, wipe him out, eradicate him...

TABAQUI: Master...

KHAN: Yes, you can have his skull – now come on.

TABAQUI: Complete with the eyeballs!

(They hear Messua approaching and leave. Messua enters alone. She looks in the direction Mowgli departed.)

MESSUA: (Sings) Now the spates are banked and deep;
Now the footless bounders leap;
Now the lightning shows each littlest leaf-rib clear,
But the throat is shut and dried, and thy heart against thy side
Fear, o little hunter – this is fear!

(As Messua finishes song, Buldeo enters and creeps up behind her. He puts the gun to her temple.)

BULDEO: Your little hunter has much to fear, woman – and so do you. Do you think I'll wait for him to return to humiliate me – or that I'll put up with your accusing eyes? I – me – never!

(He leads her off at gun point.)

(End of Act Two, Scene 2.)

ACT TWO, Scene 3

The Council Rock.

CHORUS: (Sing) I will let loose against you the fleet-footed vines –
I will call in the jungle to stamp out your lines!
The roofs shall fade before it,
The house beams shall fall,
And the *karela*, the bitter *karela*,
Shall cover it all!

(Akela, enters, deep in thought.)

CHORUS: (Sing) In the gates of these councils my people shall sing,
In the doors of these your garners the Bat-Folk shall cling;
And the snake shall be your watchman,
By the hearthstone unswept;
For the *karela*, the bitter *karela*,
Shall fruit where ye slept!

(Raksha enters. She's lonely and concerned for her sons.)

CHORUS: Ye shall not see my strikers; ye shall hear them and guess;
By night, before the moon-rise, I will send for my cess,
And the wolf shall be your herdsman
By a landmark removed,
For the *karela*, the bitter *karela*,
Shall feed where ye loved!

(As the song finishes, Raksha looks out again to see if she can see her lost sons.)

RAKSHA: Will they ever return, Akela?

AKELA: I wish I knew.

RAKSHA: Why are they so headstrong?

AKELA: Because you are a good mother – you taught them to be free.

RAKSHA: And I'm a prisoner – chained by love to them.

AKELA: Would you have it another way?

RAKSHA: I would have them here, near by... (Sees something) There's something...

(Tabaqui enters with a flourish, circling, full of anticipation. Bouncing nearer then away, taunting with snippets of information.)

TABAQUI: Something stirs alright, missus – it's me.

RAKSHA: Have you seen my boys?

TABAQUI: Do you really think I'd tell you, Raksha, you who dared to fly at Shere Khan! (Beat) I have seen them actually.

RAKSHA: Are they alive?

TABAQUI: Do you think I'd tell you that? (Beat) Yes, and they are coming this way.

RAKSHA: They're safe and alive?

TABAQUI: Do you think I'd tell you that? (Beat) Yes, but not for long.

(Tabaqui cackles and taunts Raksha until Bagheera bounds in.)

BAGHEERA: Clear off, Tabaqui.

(Tabaqui laughs, but hovers on the fringe of things.)

RAKSHA: No sign of them, Bagheera?

(Bagheera shakes his head.)

RAKSHA: You and Baloo shouldn't have left Mowgli at the Lost Temple.

AKELA: Don't blame them, Raksha – they knew Mowgli had to go into the world just as Grey Brother had to follow.

RAKSHA: I know...

(Bandar-Log Leader and his cohort enter excitedly.)

B-L LEADER: Hunter, here comes the hunter...

B-LOG: We must chatter, then scatter, chatter then scatter.

(They do just that and the other animals take their cue and hide. Buldeo leads in Messua, at gun point and tied with rope.)

MESSUA: You're mad, Buldeo – let me go.

BULDEO: I – me- Mad! (And he cackles, madly) If I am mad, madam, you have made me so.

MESSUA: Your greed and pride have made you so.

BULDEO: You've put a spell on me – if the boy is a sorcerer, then you, his mother, must be a witch.

(He begins to tie her to a tree.)

BULDEO: Let's see if your magic powers keep you safe now. And if your cries bring the Wolf-Man, so much the better – I'll shoot him.

(Messua is now tied up.)

BULDEO: (Taunts Messua with his gun.) Or should I just kill you and let him find your bones?

BAGHEERA: (Aside) Enough of this! (Roars loudly) Kill *me*, bully. (Leaps forward) Kill me, if you dare!

(Buldeo just manages to escape. As he goes he almost bumps into Baloo who's arriving. Baloo at first panics, thinking Buldeo's after him.)

BALOO: Don't shoot – it is I – me – Baloo!

BULDEO: (Terrified) Ah – a bear!

(And he goes, dropping his gun. Baloo sees the others who emerge from hiding.)

BALOO: Fear not – I dispatched of the hunter.

(Bandar-Log Leader finds Buldeo's gun.)

B-L LEADER: But it is we who are all powerful now.

B-L DEPUTY: We the Bandar-Log hold the banging stick.

B-LOG: We will rule the jungle.

(The proceed to dismantle the gun, having a bit each.)

B-L LEADER: (Brandishing his fragment) Who will quarrel with us now. Bang.
Bang.

B-LOG: (Leaping about with bits of gun.) Bang. Bang. Bang.

(Others turn away from Bandar-Log, who are miffed and sulk away.
Baghreea goes to Messua.)

MESSUA: Leave me alone. (Calls) Help – Nathoo... (Beat) Mowgli... Mowgli... If
you can answer to your wolf name, please help me... (She sobs.)

RAKSHA: She said Mowgli. How does she know my son?

TABAQUI: I, Tabaqui the wise, know.

BALOO: Tabaqui the ear-ache, more like.

TABAQUI: Well, baggy-coat, this time you are very wrong. I am right, I have
knowledge.

RAKSHA: Tell us what you know, Tabaqui.

TABAQUI: What's it worth?

BALOO: Don't encourage him, Raksha.

AKELA: You can have the biggest bone from our next kill.

TABAQUI: (Spinning round) Let me see – to tell or not to tell.

BAGHEERA: You will be our next kill if you don't.

TABAQUI: It's a deal. The woman thinks she is the Man Cub's mother.

RAKSHA: I am Mowgli's mother.

TABAQUI: (To Raksha) Mowgli lives in this woman's den... If you don't believe me
ask that most honest, honourable, righteous person in the Jungle –
Shere Khan. He who the wicked Man Cub set buffaloes on. They nearly
made a rug of my lord and master.

AKELA: So Mowgli and Grey Brother are still alive.

TABAQUI: (Beat) They might be...

BAGHEERA: (Leaving) I must continue searching...

BALOO: Should I come?

BAGHEERA: Rest, Baloo – I'll end up having to carry you.

(Bagheera goes.)

BALOO: (Sits tired) You're right, panther – I wasn't built for speed.

TABAQUI: (Sarc) What were you built for?

BALOO: Sitting on jackals.

B-LOG: Te he he he he he.

BALOO: And monkeys.

(Bandar-Log go quiet and sit back. Tabaqui cackles loudly. They all look at him.)

TABAQUI: (Howls, then calls) Mighty one – the panther has gone. (For Baloo's benefit) And the bear threatens to squash me.

(SFX: Loud roar.

Shere Khan enters. He immediately sees Messua still tied up.)

KHAN: Well, what have we here?

TABAQUI: It's a human woman, sire.

KHAN: I was being rhetorical.

TABAQUI: (Over jolly) Ha! Of course you were, oh rhetorical one.

(Khan looks at him, impatient, waiting for him to finish.)

KHAN: (Eyes Messua) A tasty dish.

RAKSHA: Call yourself a hunter, Khan – is that the limit of your valour, torturing tethered creatures

KHAN: What does she matter to you?

RAKSHA: Nothing...

TABAQUI: I know, I know...

KHAN: You don't know anything, jackal.

TABAQUI: Begging your pardon, your cruelty, but I do. This is the human mother of the man cub.

KHAN: I killed his parents.

TABAQUI: She, like Raksha here, claims the boy.

RAKSHA: I love Mowgli.

MESSUA: Mowgli – you are Nathoo's wolf mother?

KHAN: Ha – what sport. Two deluded females – both laying claim to the Man Cub. Both here to see him die.

AKELA: What do you gain from tormenting then in this way?

KHAN: Pleasure...

MOWGLI: (Low) The pleasure is mine.

(And Mowgli enters. He carries the bowl containing the red flower (fire). Grey Brother follows.)

RAKSHA: Mowgli...

MESSUA: Nathoo...

(Mowgli looks at them both, surprised, then torn between them.)

RAKSHA: Come, my little frog.

MESSUA: Here, my son.

(Mowgli goes to each.)

MOWGLI: Mother... Mother...

(Shere Khan sees this is the time to strike. He attacks Mowgli from behind. A stylised battle ensues. Mowgli discourages help from his friends. Khan has the upper hand.)

CHORUS: (Increasingly manic) 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 you hurry by?
Brother, I go to my lair to die.

(Khan about to kill Mowgli.)

MESSUA: (Helpless) Nathoo...

RAKSHA: Mowgli, I'll die for you.

GREY BROTHER: And me.

MOWGLI: No! This is my destiny.

(Bagheera returns and is about to help.)

MOWGLI: *My destiny, Bagheera.*

(Mowgli just about gets clear of Khan and gets the pot containing the fire.)

MOWGLI: (Laughs) Tiger, tiger, burning bright!

(Mowgli opens the pot – it should blow a flame (fire eater fashion) and / or create a flash sufficient to terrify Khan. A moment, then Mowgli's superiority is established. Khan and Tabaqui leave, defeated. Others (Chil, Hathi, Kaa, etc) may enter if desired.)

B-L LEADER: We knew Mowgli would win, didn't we, apey chums?

B-L DEPUTY: We taught him everything he knows. Hoo-ra!

B-LOG: Hoo-ra!

GREY BROTHER: Shere Khan won't bother you again, brother.

MOWGLI: That conflict was easily settled... It's the one here... (Touches his breast and looks towards Messua and Raksha) Who am I?

BAGHEERA: Did you keep your eyes closed on your journey?

MOWGLI: Course I didn't.

BAGHEERA: You should be able to see who you are.

MOWGLI: Why can't you tell me, Bagheera? Akela? Baloo? (Looks to each) – you're all wiser than me.

BALOO: You've learnt something then.

MOWGLI: I've learnt that I don't know very much. Wolf or Man? Boy or Cub? Nathoo or Mowgli? I don't even know who to call "mother".

BAGHEERA: On your journey have you seen cruelty?

MOWGLI: Yes. Shere Khan was cruel – and Buldeo the hunter.

BAGHEERA: And have you seen kindness?

MOWGLI: Lots of it – from Rama, Chil and Kaa – and from Messua. (Beat. Realisation) The Free People of the Jungle can be both, and so can Man. Can I be one of the Free People and be a man? (Beat) I can, can't I? I can choose – when to run through the forest, or work the land.

BAGHEERA: You can choose.

MOWGLI: (To Raksha and Messua) Do you still choose to call me son?

RAKSHA: You are my son.

MESSUA: And mine.

(He goes to them both.)

MOWGLI: I am lucky. (Howls long and loud) I am Mowgli – the man cub!

CHIL: (Sings) Now Chil the kite brings home the night.
That Mang the bat sets free –
The herds are shut in byre and hut
For loosed 'til 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!

CHORUS: (Sing) Now Chil the kite brings home the night.
That Mang the bat sets free –
The herds are shut in byre and hut
For loosed 'til 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!

THE END

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