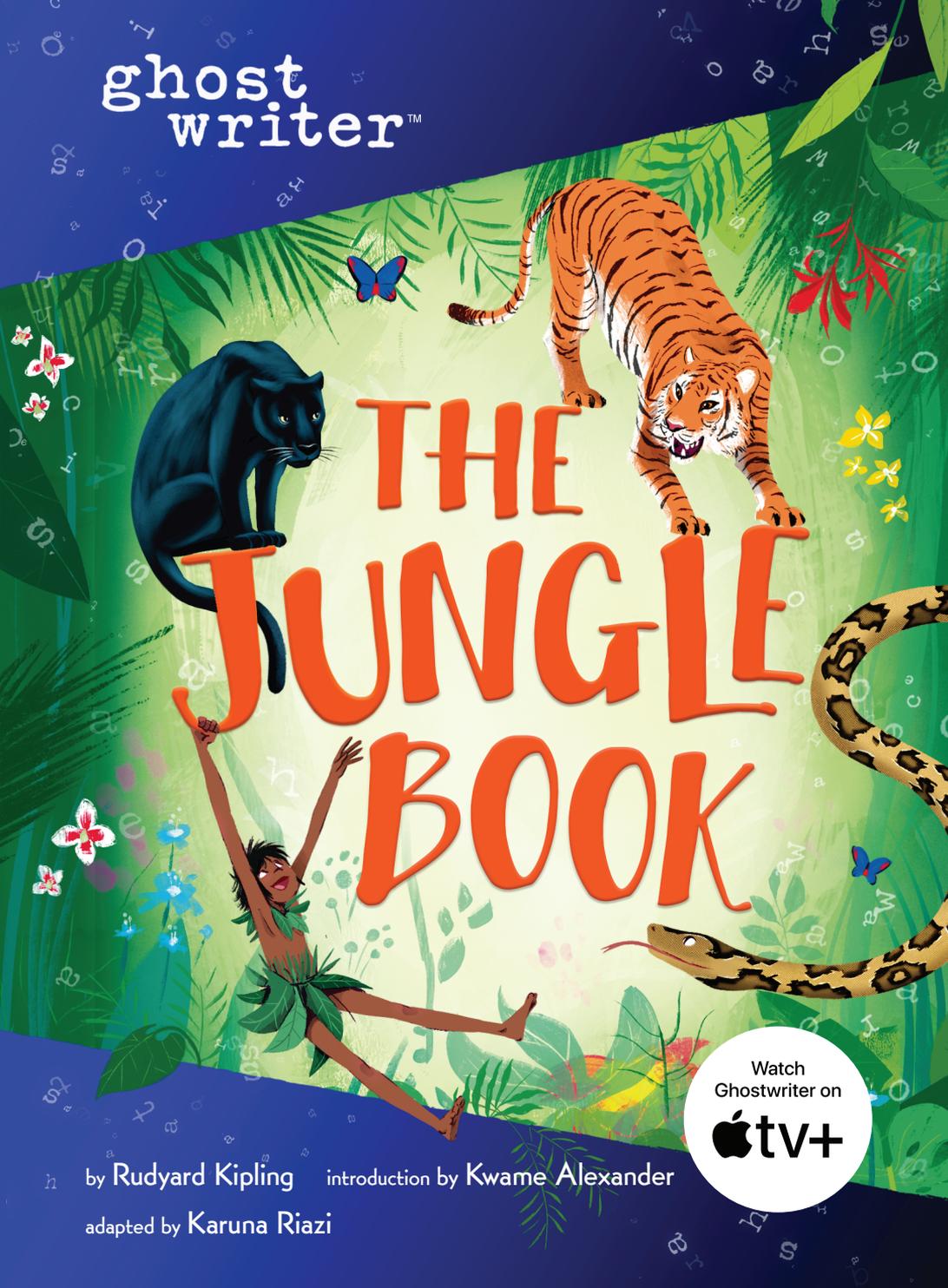


ghost
writer™



THE
JUNGLE
BOOK

Watch
Ghostwriter on



by Rudyard Kipling introduction by Kwame Alexander

adapted by Karuna Riazi

chapter 4

Ow!” Mowgli rolled over and was poked in the back by a branch.

He opened his eyes and sighed. He’d hoped to wake up safe and snuggled between his sleeping brothers, warm in their fur. Instead, he was exactly where he was the night before.

Out in the middle of the jungle.

Chased off by his own pack.

Twigs and branches from the tent he’d made tumbled onto his head. Mowgli gave a sniff and rubbed his arm across his nose.

“Why the long face, friend?” a voice chattered overhead.

“Yeah, why so sad?” called another voice.

Mowgli looked up. “Who’s there?”

“Oh, everyone.”

“And no one.”

“Just us, you see. The monkeys!”

Sure enough, several little monkeys with wide grins peered down at him from the trees. They dangled on matted, wildly spiked tails. Mowgli had seen them swinging through the treetops and nibbling on sweet bananas. He’d wanted to play with them, but his mother disapproved. She

called them “little troublemakers.”

Mowgli felt a pang in his heart at the thought of his parents, then shook it away. They weren’t here now. *They* told him to leave. They didn’t have a right to decide what he did anymore.

As soon as he thought that, he felt ashamed. No. Being mad at his parents wasn’t the answer. This was Shere Khan’s fault.

“Cheer up!” one of the monkeys chirped, handing him a ripe mango. Mowgli was surprised and a little pleased to have someone looking out for him.

“Yeah! Cheer up!” called another monkey. “We think you’re cool!”

“How did you make that log cave? Looks quite snugly—eek!” The first monkey nearly toppled out of the tree as a large, furry brown paw knocked the trunk.

“Oops.” A shaggy sloth bear lumbered into view. “I must have slipped.”

“Baloo!” Mowgli exclaimed happily. “Why are you here, too?”

Along with Bagheera, Baloo was Mowgli’s other best friend. Baloo scratched his round belly.

“Bagheera was worried about you wandering off,” he explained, patting Mowgli’s head. “I showed up while you were sleeping last night. He left me to watch you until he gets back.”

“Bagheera shouldn’t worry,” Mowgli said, but he was secretly glad his friends were with him. “I’m fine. Don’t you have better things to do?”

“Good friends never leave you alone,” Bagheera called from behind them. The panther sauntered up and carefully dropped a banana from between his teeth. “Eat that. You’re a growing cub. Now, why were you talking to the monkeys?”

“They seem nice,” Mowgli said, breaking off a chunk of the banana and walking with his friends. “They gave me this mango.”

Baloo sniffed. “They seem nice for now. Just you wait. Listen, Mowgli. We’ve taught you a lot about the ways of the jungle, right?”

“Right!”

“And we’ve never steered you wrong, right?”

“Of course!” Mowgli said firmly. “You’ve been



my teachers for years. You guys know everything about the jungle.”

“That’s right.” Bagheera purred proudly.

Baloo split open the mango with his long claws. “We’ve told you the ways to greet others in the jungle, yes?”

Mowgli furrowed his brow thoughtfully. “You taught me how to call hello to the birds, but...I forget the exact sound.”

Bagheera let out a high chirrup. A great bird of paradise trilled back and spread its wings on an overhead branch.

“May the air carry you like a feather and your nest be safe,” Bagheera said to the bird.

“Good morning, brother,” it called down.

“It doesn’t matter if you know the right word or not, as long as you’re polite. Your mother told you that, yes?” asked Bagheera.

Mowgli lowered his head sadly. "She did."

Raksha made sure her cubs were the best behaved in the pack. The thought of his mother roughly patting his back with her paw and sighing about how naughty her little frog was made Mowgli's eyes prickle all over again.

"No tears," Baloo said hurriedly. "Bagheera, show him how you greet the snakes!"

Bagheera quickly stuck out his long pink tongue.

"That looks so silly, Bagheera!" Mowgli giggled.

"Not if you're a snake," Bagheera replied. "Be careful to show your whole tongue and not only the tip. If it's just the tip, you're laughing at them."

"Got it." A tickle on Mowgli's foot startled him, and he looked down at a mouse climbing over it. He lifted it into his hands. "What about this mouse? How do I greet it?"

As Bagheera started to answer, the monkeys above them began to chitter and giggle.

"Is that what you're going to do all day?"

"So boring!"

"Let's do something fun!"

One of the monkeys dropped onto a branch and did a headstand. "Like this, panther! Do this!"

"You know very well I can't," Bagheera said tiredly. "And I'm not here to entertain you. Why don't you do something useful, like collect fruit, instead of your silly monkey business?"

The monkey sniffed. "That sounds *bo-rrring*."

"Besides," another chimed in, "the human child is more interesting."

"We want to play with him!"

"The human child has no time to play with you," Baloo insisted. "We need to make sure he gets to the human dens before dark. Go on, now."

The monkeys chattered unhappily.

“No, no, no! We want him to play with us now!”

“Come, human child! Swing with us!”

Before Bagheera could say anything more or Baloo could use one of his large paws, two monkeys reached down and snatched Mowgli up into the treetops. They tossed him from monkey to monkey. Mowgli flew through the air from one wiry set of arms to another.

“See?” one monkey cried. “It’s like you’re a bird!”

Mowgli laughed happily. The sun shone warm on his face and back. When he looked down, the jungle was spread out all bright and green and beautiful.

“Okay,” he said after a while. “This was fun. You can put me down. I’m getting a little dizzy.”

“But we’ve only just started playing!” the monkeys protested.

“But I want to be put down,” Mowgli insisted. “When someone is done playing, you stop.”

“Not until you’ve seen our home!”

“Yes! Yes, let us show you our home, human child!”

“Baloo!” Mowgli cried out. “Bagheera!”

He heard Bagheera’s and Baloo’s worried voices far below, but they soon faded away. Air rushed past Mowgli’s ears and whipped tears into his eyes. All he could do was wait as the monkeys carried him far, far away.