



PREVIEW

Rikki-Tikki-Tavi is a mongoose by birth and a snake-killer by profession. He thinks he has found the perfect home when he is adopted by a human family. But that's before he learns about Nag and Nagaina, the dangerous cobras that live in the garden. The cobras, Nag and Nagaina soon have Rikki—and his human friends—marked for death.



RIKKI-TIKKI-TAVI

Rudyard Kipling

This is the story of the great war that Rikki-Tikki-Tavi fought single-handedly, through the bathrooms of a big bungalow. Darzee, the tailorbird, helped him. Chuchundra, the muskrat, who never comes out into the middle of the floor, but always creeps around by the wall, gave him advice. But Rikki-Tikki-Tavi did the real fighting.

Rikki-Tikki-Tavi was a mongoose—his fur and his tail rather like a cat's, but his head and his habits quite like a weasel's. His eyes and the end of his restless nose were pink. He could scratch himself anywhere he

pleased, with any leg he chose to use, front or back. He could fluff up his tail till it looked like a brush. And as he scuttled through the long grass, his war cry was *Rikk-tikk-tikki-tikki-tichk!*

One summer day, a flood washed him out of the burrow where he lived with his mother and father 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 consciousness. When he revived, he was lying in the hot sun in the middle of a garden path, very wet, dirty, and tired indeed. 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 at all but half choked. They wrapped him in a blanket and warmed him over a small fire. He opened his eyes and sneezed.

"Now," said the big man, "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 with curiosity from his nose to his tail. The motto of all the mongoose family is, "Run

and find out,” and Rikki-Tikki was a true mongoose. He looked at the blanket, decided that it was not good to eat, ran all around the table, sat up, smoothed his fur, 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.”

“Oooh! He’s tickling under my chin,” said Teddy.

Rikki-Tikki looked down between the boy’s collar and neck, sniffed at his ear, and climbed down to the floor, where he sat rubbing his nose.

“Good gracious,” said Teddy’s mother, “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. When it was finished, he went out onto the veranda, 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 than all my family could find

out in all their lives," he said to himself. "I shall certainly stay and find out."

He spent all that day roaming around the house. He nearly drowned himself in the bathtubs. He put his nose into the ink on a writing table and burned it on the end of the big man's cigar when he climbed into his lap to watch 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 there too. But he was a restless companion because he had to check out every noise all through the night to find out what made it. Teddy's mother and father came in, the last thing in the evening, 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 breakfast on the veranda, riding on Teddy's shoulder. They gave him a banana and some boiled eggs, and he sat on all their

laps one after the other because a very-well-brought-up mongoose always hopes to someday be a house mongoose and have rooms to run about in. Rikki-Tikki's mother had carefully taught Rikki what to do if he ever got the chance to live in a house with people.

Then Rikki-Tikki went out into the garden to see what was to be seen. It was a large garden, with bushes as big as houses, lime and orange trees, clumps of bamboo, and thickets of high grass. Rikki-Tikki licked his lips.

"This is a splendid hunting ground," he said, and his tail grew thick and bushy at the thought of it. He scuttled up and down the garden, sniffing here and there till he heard very sorrowful voices in a thornbush. It was Darzee, the tailorbird, and his wife. They had made a beautiful nest by pulling two big leaves together, stitching them up the edges with fibers, and filling the hollow with cotton and downy fluff. The nest swayed to and fro as they sat on the rim and cried.

"What's 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."

"HMMMM!" said Rikki-Tikki, "that is

very sad—but I am a stranger here. Who is Nag?”

Darzee and his wife 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 sound that made Rikki-Tikki jump back two feet. Then inch by inch out of the grass rose up the head and spread hood of Nag, the big black cobra. He was five feet long from tongue to tail. When he had lifted one-third of himself up—clear of the ground—he stayed swaying to and fro, exactly like a dandelion sways in the wind. He looked at Rikki-Tikki with the wicked eyes of a snake that never change their expression, whatever the snake may be thinking.

“What is Nag?” he said. “I am Nag. The great God Brahma put his mark upon all cobras when the first cobra spread his hood to keep the sun off Brahma as he slept. Look and be afraid!”

He spread out his hood more than ever, and Rikki-Tikki saw a grand marking on the back of it. It looked exactly like the eye part of a hook-and-eye fastening. He was afraid for a 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. He knew that 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," he said, as his tail began to fluff up again, "marks or no marks, do you think it's right for you to eat baby birds 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. He wanted to get Rikki-Tikki off his guard, so he dropped his head a little, leaning it to one side.

"Let us talk," he said. "You eat eggs. Why should I not eat birds?"

"Behind you! Look behind you!" sang Darzee.

Rikki-Tikki knew better than to waste time 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 to kill him. He heard her savage hiss as her stroke missed and he came down almost across her back. If he had been an older 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 her whisking tail, leaving Nagaina torn and angry.

“Wicked, wicked Darzee!” said Nag, reaching up as high as he could toward the nest in the thornbush; 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). He sat back on his tail and hind legs like a small kangaroo and looked all around him, chattering 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 one time. So he trotted off to the gravel path near the house and sat down to think. This 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—a snake’s strike against the

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 down, 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 in the dusty earth. His bite is as dangerous as the cobra's, but he is so small that nobody gives him a thought, and so he does much more harm to people.

Rikki-Tikki's eyes grew red again, and he danced up to Karait with the peculiar rocking, swaying motion he had inherited from his family. It looks very funny, but it is so perfectly balanced a gait that he can fly off and attack from any angle he pleases. 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, the snake would strike in

return, hitting his eye or lip.

But Rikki did not know this: his eyes were all red and he rocked back and forth, looking for a good place to grab hold. Karait struck out. Rikki jumped sideways and tried to dodge the strike, but the wicked little dusty gray head lashed within a fraction of his shoulder. Rikki had to jump over the body, and the snake's head followed closely on his heels.

Teddy shouted into 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 got there, Karait had lunged out once too far. Rikki-Tikki-Tavi had sprung, jumped on the snake's back, dropped his head far between his forelegs, bitten as high up on the snake's back as he could get hold, and then rolled away. This bite paralyzed Karait, and Rikki-Tikki was going to eat him up from the tail as was the custom of his family at dinner. Then he remembered that a full meal makes a slow mongoose. If he wanted all his strength and quickness, he must keep himself thin. He went away to bathe in the dust under the bushes, while Teddy's father beat the dead Karait.

"What's the use of that?" thought Rikki-Tikki. "I have finished it all." And then

Teddy's mother picked him up from the dust and hugged him, crying that he had saved Teddy from death. Teddy's father said he was a blessing. 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 up and back among the wineglasses 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 petted by Teddy's mother, and to sit on Teddy's shoulder. From time to time his eyes would get red, and he would sound off with his long war cry of *Rikk-tikk-tikki-tikki-tchk!*

Teddy carried him off to bed and insisted that Rikki-Tikki sleep 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 around the house. In the dark, he ran into Chuchundra, the muskrat, creeping around by the wall. Chuchundra is a broken-hearted little beast. He whimpers and chirps all night long, 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?” Rikki-Tikki said scornfully.

“Those who kill snakes get killed by snakes,” said Chuchundra, more sorrowfully than ever. “And how can I be sure that Nag won’t mistake me for you some dark night?”

“There’s not the least danger,” said Rikki-Tikki. “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?”

“Hush! 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 muskrat,” he sobbed. “I never had enough spirit to run out into the middle of the room. Hush! 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 windowpane—the dry scratch of a

snake's scales on brickwork.

"That's Nag or Nagaina," he said to himself, "and he is crawling into the bathroom drain. You're right, Chuchundra. I should have talked to Chua."

He stole off to Teddy's bathroom, 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 drain for the bathwater, and as Rikki-Tikki snuck in by the bathtub, 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 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 house, did we have any mongoose in the garden? As long as the house is empty, we are king and queen of the garden. And remember, 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 to 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 house will be empty, and Rikki-Tikki will go away.”

Rikki-Tikki tingled all over with rage and hatred at this. And then Nag’s head came through the drain, 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. 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.

Nag waved to and fro, and then Rikki-Tikki heard him drinking from the 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 still have that stick. But when he comes to bathe in the morning, he surely will not have a stick. I shall wait here until he comes. Nagaina—do you hear me?—I shall wait here where it’s cool till daytime.”

There was no answer from outside, so

Rikki-Tikki knew Nagaina had gone away. Nag coiled himself down, coil by coil, and wrapped himself around the bottom of the water jar. Rikki-Tikki stayed as 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 to attack and grab hold. "If I don't break his back at the first jump," said Rikki, "he can still fight; and if he fights, oh Rikki!" He looked at the thickness of the snake's neck, below the hood, but that was too much for him. And a bite near the tail would only make Nag savage.

"I must go for the head," he said at last, "the head above the hood; and once I am there, I must not let go,"

Then he jumped at the snake. Nag's head was lying just clear of the water jar, and as his teeth met, Rikki braced his back against the jar to hold down the head. This gave him one extra second, and he made the most of it. Then he was battered to and fro, as the snake fought his grip. Back and forth on the floor, up and down and around in great circles. But his eyes were red and he held on as his body was whipped over the floor and banged against the side of the bathtub. He held on

and closed his jaws tighter and tighter. He was 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 and 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 his shotgun into Nag just behind the hood.

Rikki-Tikki held on tight with his eyes shut, for now he was quite sure he was dead. The snake's 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." Teddy's mother came in with a very white face and saw what was left of Nag. Rikki-Tikki dragged himself to Teddy's bedroom and spent half the night shaking himself tenderly to find out whether he really was broken into forty pieces as he imagined.

When morning came he was very stiff, but well pleased with what he had done. "Now I have Nagaina to settle with, and she will be worse than five Nags. And there's no way of 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 already all over the garden because the body had been thrown in 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 bangstick 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 around him.

"Nagaina came to the bathroom drain and called for Nag," Darzee went on, "and Nag came out on the end of a stick—thrown on the rubbish heap. Let us sing about the great red-eyed Rikki-Tikki-Tavi!" and Darzee filled his throat and sang.

"If I could get up to your nest, I'd throw 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 for a minute, Darzee."

"For the great, beautiful Rikki-Tikki-

Tavi's sake, I will stop," said Darzee. "What is it, oh killer of the terrible Nag?"

"Again I ask, where is Nagaina?"

"On the rubbish heap by the stables, mourning for Nag. Great is Rikki-Tikki with the white teeth!"

"Forget my white teeth! Have you heard where she keeps her eggs?"

"In the melon bed, on the end nearest the wall, where the sun shines nearly all day. She hid them there weeks ago."

"And you never thought it worthwhile to tell me? The end nearest the wall, you said?"

"Rikki-Tikki, you are not going to eat her eggs?"

"Not eat exactly, Darzee, no. 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 go to the melon bed, and if I went there now, she'd see me."

Darzee was a feather-brained little fellow who could never keep more than one idea in his head at a time. 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.

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 come with a broken wing." And she moved toward Darzee's wife, sliding along the dust.

"The boy broke it with a stone!" shrieked Darzee's wife.

"Well! It may be some consolation to you, to know that when you're dead I shall settle accounts with the boy. My husband lies on the rubbish heap this morning, and before nightfall, the boy too will be 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 in 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 to the end of the melon bed near the wall. There, very cunningly hidden, he found twenty-five eggs, about the size of a small bird's eggs, but with whitish skins instead of shells.

"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 onto the veranda, and—oh, come quickly—she means killing!"

Rikki-Tikki smashed two eggs, tumbled backward down the melon bed with the third egg in his mouth, and scuttled to the veranda as fast 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 around, Nagaina; turn and fight!"

"All in good time," she said 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 around, forgetting everything for the sake of the one egg, and Rikki-Tikki saw Teddy's father shoot out a big hand, grab Teddy by the shoulder, and drag him across the table, 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 around Nagaina, keeping just out of reach of her stroke, his little eyes like hot coals. Nagaina gathered herself together and lunged out at him. Rikki-Tikki jumped up and backwards. Again and again and again she struck, and each time her head came down with a whack on the matting of the veranda and she gathered herself together like a watchspring. Then Rikki-Tikki danced in a little circle to get behind her, and Nagaina spun around 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 whiplash 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 thornbush, 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 distracted 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. 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 for Rikki-Tikki!" We must sing his death song. Valiant Rikki-Tikki-Tavi 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 moment, 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 short with a little shout. Rikki-Tikki shook

some of the dust out of his fur and sneezed.

“It’s 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 hammer on a copper pot. The reason he is always making it is that he is the town crier to every garden and tells the news to everybody who cares to listen. As Rikki-Tikki went up the path, he heard the Coppersmith’s sound—like a tiny dinner gong—and then a 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 and father came out and

almost cried with joy over him. And that night he ate all that was given to him, till he could eat no more, and went to bed on Teddy's shoulder where Teddy's mother saw him when she came in late that 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 mongooses are light sleepers.

"Oh, it's you," he said. "What are you worrying about? 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, so a cobra never dared to show its head inside the walls. ■