

# RIKKI-TIKKI-TAVI

## (The First Jungle Book)

### by Rudyard Kipling

*At the hole where he went in  
Red-Eye called to Wrinkle-Skin.  
Hear what little Red-Eye saith:  
«Nag, come up and dance with death!»  
Eye to eye and head to head,  
    (Keep the measure, Nag.)  
This shall end when one is dead;  
    (At thy pleasure, Nag.)  
Turn for turn and twist for twist —  
    (Run and hide thee, Nag.)  
Hah! The hooded Death has missed!  
    (Woe betide thee, Nag!)*

This is the story of the great war that Rikki-tikki-tavi fought single-handed, through the bath-rooms of the big bungalow in Segowlee cantonment. Darzee, the Tailorbird, helped him, and Chuchundra, the musk-rat, who never comes out into the middle of the floor, but always creeps round by the wall, gave him advice, but Rikki-tikki did the real fighting.

He was a mongoose, rather like a little cat in his

fur and his tail, but quite like a weasel in his head and his habits. His eyes and the end of his restless nose were pink. He could scratch himself anywhere he pleased with any leg, front or back, that he chose to use. He could fluff up his tail till it looked like a bottle brush, and his war cry as he scuttled through the long grass was: «Rikk-tikk-tikki-tikki-tchk!»

One day, a high summer flood washed him out of the burrow where he lived with his father and mother, and carried him, kicking and clucking, down a roadside ditch. He found a little wisp of grass floating there, and clung to it till he lost his senses. When he revived, he was lying in the hot sun in the middle of a garden path, very draggled indeed, and a small boy was saying, «Here's a dead mongoose. Let's have a funeral».

«No», said his mother, «let's take him in and dry him. Perhaps he isn't really dead».

They took him into the house, and a big man picked him up between his finger and thumb and said he was not dead but half choked. So they wrapped him in cotton wool, and warmed him over a little fire, and he opened his eyes and sneezed.

«Now», said the big man (he was an Englishman who had just moved into the bungalow), «don't frighten him, and we'll see what he'll do».

It is the hardest thing in the world to frighten a mon-goose, because he is eaten up from nose to tail with curiosity. The motto of all the mongoose family is

«Run and find out», and Rikki-tikki was a true mongoose. He looked at the cotton wool, decided that it was not good to eat, ran all round the table, sat up and put his fur in order, scratched himself, and jumped on the small boy's shoulder.

«Don't be frightened, Teddy», said his father. «That's his way of making friends».

«Ouch! He's tickling under my chin», said Teddy.

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

«Good gracious», said Teddy's mother, «and that's a wild creature! I suppose he's so tame because we've been kind to him».

«All mongooses are like that», said her husband. «If Teddy doesn't pick him up by the tail, or try to put him in a cage, he'll run in and out of the house all day long. Let's give him something to eat».

They gave him a little piece of raw meat. Rikki-tikki liked it immensely, and when it was finished he went out into the veranda and sat in the sunshine and fluffed up his fur to make it dry to the roots. Then he felt better.

«There are more things to find out about in this house», he said to himself, «than all my family could find out in all their lives. I shall certainly stay and find out».