

The Kipling Reader: Illustrated

Rudyard Kipling

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From this book....

'RIKKI-TIKKI-TAVI'

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 tailor-bird, 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 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-tikki-tikki-tikki-tikki'.

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 on 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.'



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Catherine Riddle:

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