

Rikki-tikki-tavi 2 RISING TIDES

Prologue

Dark waters, slowly rising.

New dangers, quite surprising.

Even if you have won the day,

Will you continue here to stay?

Rikki-tikki-tavi, when it seems there is peace at last.....

Beware of an old enemy from your past.

When at last it seems you've won....

Beware, your troubles have only just begun!

This story tells of how Rikki-tikki-tavi fought against the wicked Nagasta and saved the garden once more. Though others like Darzee and his wife helped, Rikki-tikki once more did the real fighting. It tells of the rise of Nagasta¹, The Heartless Cunning One², who would later become the dreaded Cobra Queen of the Jungle. It tells of the first encounters between Rikki-tikki and Nagasta and her wicked husband Karistan and how Rikki-tikki and Nagasta became archenemies.

¹ Though my own original invention, it does sound very similar to Nagastra, the deadly Hindu snake/arrow capable of massive destruction, very fitting for Nagasta herself.

² I've decided to make that her title, probably self-bestowed. Her name might mean "Snake of Doom" or something. "Nag" means snake.

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Unanswered Questions

Rikki-tikki-tavi, a young Indian mongoose, sat in the garden outside the bungalow in Segowlee cantonment feeling rather bored. He still enjoyed exploring the house, for there were always new things to find, but he had, in the four months that he had lived there, explored the garden thoroughly. Not that life at the bungalow had been dull. Apart from having a house to explore, he had had to fight off three snakes who had tried to kill the family who lived in the bungalow. Karait the dusty brown snakeling had tried to kill the boy, Teddy, but Rikki-tikki had fought, paralyzed, and killed him. Rikki-tikki then had to save the family from two murderous king cobras, Nag and Nagaina, who had tried to kill Rikki-tikki once and, having failed at that, had decided that the best way to be rid of him was to kill the family sheltering him. Rikki-tikki, who had learned of the plan thanks to Chuchundra the muskrat, had attacked Nag before he could bite the big man, and Nag was shot beneath the hood. The next day, he had had the wife of his friend Darzee the tailorbird distract Nagaina while he smashed her eggs. He had smashed all but one and had to go back to the house to stop Nagaina from killing the boy. Nagaina had fled with her last egg and Rikki-tikki had chased her, fought her underground, and killed her. He didn't understand the last thing she had said to him "If you strike me down, you will see how much more powerful I shall become!". She had said that a few seconds before she had died. Probably just dramatic but pointless last words. The garden was free to rule itself. Nagaina was dead. There would be no more snake kings and queens of the garden. How could she become more powerful? She was dead! He hadn't seen any cobras since then either.

However, he had thought that he had heard something odd the night Nagaina had died. He could have sworn that he had heard someone say, in a low voice, "You'll pay for this,

humans!”. However, he thought he had probably just been very tired and had been hearing things. The voice had never said anything else. Still, whatever it was, it had made him postpone leaving the house. He had been loath to leave it anyway, though he constantly thought of his family. He had decided to stay around and, hopefully, his family could join him here.

Dead Frogs

However, there was something to preoccupy him even without the threat of snakes. The rising water, the same water that had separated Rikki from his family, was rising in the river near his family’s home, not only keeping him from returning, but also slowly advancing toward his new home as well.

“Heard about the rising water?” Rikki asked his friend, Darzee the tailorbird. “Yes. It seems to be rising quite fast.” said Darzee. “Well we seem to be safe.....” said Rikki. Rikki started³. He thought he heard a voice that said “Enjoy your time while you can, humansssss! We will get you soon!”. “What?!” said Rikki-tikki-tavi. “Pardon?” said Darzee’s wife. “I thought I heard something.” said Rikki. “What?” said Darzee. “It almost sounded like a.... nah!” said Rikki, chuckling. “They’d never come near here. Not if they’ve heard of the deaths of Nag and Nagaina. I must just be tired. This isn’t the first time I’ve thought I’ve heard a voice when I was tired.” “What do you mean?” asked his friend Chuchundra the muskrat. “I thought I heard something the night that Nagaina had died. Somebody seemed mad at the people. However, I was really tired. I’ve been a bit on edge ever since I fought Karait, Nag, and Nagaina. Never been quite the same. I think it might be a heightened sense of alertness that makes me more sensitive to danger. However, concerning that voice, I’m probably just a bit paranoid. Still, I think I’ll have a look.” said Rikki-tikki. “I have nightmares sometimes about

³ to make a sudden movement out of surprise, pain, fear, or anger

Nag and Nagaina. I have to make sure there aren't any others." He got up and headed out of the garden and into the jungle. He didn't find any cobras or any other snakes, but he did hear a scuttling in the grass and pursued it. By the time he got to the place where he thought the sound had come from, however, he only found two dead frogs. "Odd," said Rikki. He examined the frogs and found fang marks on their chests. "Just as I feared," he said. He carried the two dead frogs in his mouth back to the garden. "Eating frogs now, eh Rikki?" said Chuchundra's cousin, Chua. Rikki spat out the two dead frogs. "It appears that my hunch was correct," he said gravely. "How can you be sure?" asked Darzee. "Come and see for yourself," said Rikki-tikki. "These don't look like the bites of a mongoose. They look more like..." said Darzee's wife, turning pale. "Cobras," said Rikki solemnly, finishing her sentence.

"So I've got to stay here for a while. I can't attempt to go back to my family now. Not now that the flood is here, even if there weren't danger." "Danger?" said Azil, a tailorbird friend of Darzee's. "Yes. Apparently Nag and Nagaina weren't the only of their kind in the area. The garden isn't safe anymore. I've found some dead frogs, and they were definitely killed by a snake," said Rikki-tikki. "But why did it run....?" said Darzee's wife. "Maybe they spotted Rikki," laughed Chuchundra. "No cobra is coming here!" The other animals, except Rikki, and Darzee's wife, who possessed a good deal of sense and didn't believe in the invincibility of the garden, cheered. "Well, those two over there don't seem to be very frightened of him, now do they?" said Darzee's wife, causing all of the others to turn around. Rikki's heart leapt into his stomach. Two young cobras, who appeared to have hatched recently as they were quite small, were approaching. One was black and the other light green. More cobras. Just what he needed. But he knew what to do.

The Cobras Return

"Go away if you know what's good for you!" he said, barring the way of the two

approaching cobras. He sized them up. *I think I can take them. They're younger than me. There are two, but I've fought adults before. Still, I hope this doesn't lead to a fight. Maybe I can persuade them to leave.* he thought. "Who is this mongoose who dares interfere with our designs?" hissed the nearest angrily. She lashed at him, her fangs narrowly missing him. He struck her with his paws and batted her away from him. She recoiled angrily. "My name is Rikki-tikki-tavi. And might I ask who you are? And what are you designs? I don't think I would much care for them." he said to them. "I am Ragiva and this is my brother Kinsta. We are here to kill the humans." she hissed. Kinsta lunged at him. Rikki kicked him and pushed him away. "Out of the way mongoose!" hissed Kinsta irritably.



"Be careful. I am Death!" Rikki-tikki said, bearing his teeth. "I have been nice so far. But I can kill you if I have to." "Get lost, if you know what's good for you. Our Mother Nagasta only wishes to harm the humans. She's not come to fight with you." "Well, she will be fighting with me if she comes to harm them. They're like my family." said Rikki. "We're not afraid to fight you!" hissed Ragiva. "I'm not afraid of you or your mother! And tell her that an attack on the family here is an attack on **me**, so she'll have to deal with me if she dares come near this place." said Rikki. "You look a little young to be going on killing missions." "Our Mother fears that the

man there has a bang stick! She thinks we've a better chance of avoiding its fire since we're smaller." said Kinsta. "I'm sure she really loves you. Sending you possibly to your deaths like this." said Rikki sarcastically, though he couldn't help agreeing. They could easily dodge a gunshot due to their small size. "Well he doesn't know about us, does he?" asked Ragiva. "No." said Rikki, realizing that she was right. "But that can be changed. I can always get him and have him get you with his gun! That is if I don't get you first!" said Rikki, jumping at Ragiva, who moved out of the way and slithered off in anger. Kinsta moved at Rikki, who backed up just in time to avoid being bitten. "We'll be back and you'll be sorry you messed with us!" hissed Kinsta, before slithering away as well. "I'll be waiting!" said Rikki-tikki.

Nagasta the Heartless Cunning One

They came to their mother, Nagasta⁴, who had a figure very similar to Nagaina's but cold unfeeling eyes like that of Nag's. She had patches of dark green and black on her. Bad-tempered, cruel, and unpredictable, Nagasta had spent months planning her attack on the garden. With luck, she had thought, her two children would have the boy bitten, slightly so he wouldn't die right off, but would fall in pain. They would watch him suffer from the poison. If the big man came, they would bite and flee. The boy would die and they would escape. They were to bite the boy if he ventured too near the gate of the garden. The big man would not be able to fetch his bang stick in time. She would laugh as the big man buried his son. Then, the night after the burial, she'd send two more children. They would bite his wife, getting her and killing her slowly. The big man wouldn't likely have his gun beside his bed. Her children could escape through a crack in the wall. The big man would be all alone. After watching with glee as he

⁴ Nagasta- central antagonist for the rest of the Rikki-tikki-tavi stories. You'll have to read more to find out more about her.

buried his wife, she'd wait a month to let him suffer in grief. Then, at night, she'd come and slowly kill him. She had to be the one to finish him personally as he'd grievously wronged her.

She laughed as she saw her children coming. The boy might be dead. "So, is he dead?" she asked. "Did he die right away or did he die slowly? I wanted them to feel the pain they caused me. I told you not to give them lethal bites, at least not right away." she hissed. "We didn't bite him." said Kinsta. "You didn't?! I told you to....." she snapped. "We met a mongoose." said Ragiva. "A mongoose?" said Nagasta. "He chased us off." said Kinsta. "There was no mongoose when I was last there. I've never seen one there when I spied on the people, though I couldn't watch long so I might have missed him. Perhaps I should go and kill him. You were lucky he didn't kill you." she said. "He mainly hit and kicked us away from him. He did have a go at us right before we left." said Ragiva. "Why didn't you stay and kill him? The boy could be dead by now!" hissed Nagasta angrily. "He was fighting pretty hard. He's no pushover." said Kinsta.

A mongoose: this was something she hadn't counted on. Not that it mattered that much. She'd killed and even eaten mongooses before. "What is his name? Perhaps I can talk him out of his mission. My eyes scare mongooses and lesser creatures alike. They even scare cobras for that matter. Mongooses are so hard to scare, but I can teach them true fear." she hissed. "Rikki-tikki-tavi." said Ragiva. "Curious name." said Nagasta. "He's only a child." said Kinsta. Nagasta laughed coldly. "A child? Very brave then, isn't he? In that case, you and your brothers and sisters all go to the garden. Kill the mongoose if he gets in the way. I want the boy dead." said Nagasta. *A mongoose. This is unfortunate. Unfortunate for **him** anyway.* Nagasta thought to herself as Kinsta and Ragiva left. A young mongoose taking on two king cobras, even young ones, was something unusual to her. He couldn't have been in a fight before. *He has*

courage, I'll admit that. But he hasn't messed with me before. Me, the Heartless Cunning⁵ One. The garden is my birthright.⁶ Rikki-tikki-tavi will get out of the way once all 25 of my children show up. He can't fight them all at once and he'll know it. If he's such a fool as to try and take them all on, well, I'll just have another dead mongoose to eat. she thought to herself. She didn't know it, but she had underestimated Rikki-tikki-tavi's own cunning and ability.

Warning the Family

"Why didn't you chase after them? Now they've gotten away and they're pretty angry!" said Darzee to Rikki-tikki. "Only a stupid mongoose takes on two cobras at once if he can help it. I wasn't fighting for my life." replied Rikki-tikki. "What do you make of all of this? What should we do?" Darzee's wife asked Rikki-tikki. "This Nagasta seems very determined. Teddy and his family should be alerted to the new cobras here." said Rikki. "And I think I'll do that myself." he said again. He picked up the two dead frogs in his mouth and ran into Teddy's bedroom and dropped them next to the sleeping boy. Teddy woke and stared at Rikki. "What are you doing here fellow?" he said, rubbing Rikki's fur. Teddy stared at the dead frogs. "You got a frog boy?" said Teddy. He went off to show them to his father. "Most unusual." said the big man. "They almost look more like the fangs of a snake." "Snake?" said Teddy. "I think our mongoose has fought off another snake nearby." said the big man.

"So, I think our mongoose has chased off a snake. That's definitely what killed these

5

1. **crafty and deceitful:** clever or artful in a way that is intended to deceive
2. **cleverly thought out:** showing skill, shrewdness, and ingenuity in planning or doing something

6

1. **basic entitlement:** a basic right that somebody has or is thought to be entitled to from birth
 - *Freedom of speech is our birthright.*
2. **family property somebody expects to own:** property or money that somebody feels entitled to because it belongs in the family.

frogs. I can see it from the teeth marks. Those are from a snake's fangs, not from a mongoose. I think we should be on our guard. We nearly lost Teddy the last time we underestimated cobras." said the big man, heading for his gun. "That ought to slow down this Nagasta." said Rikki to himself, slipping out an open window unnoticed.

"So, did it work?" said Darzee's wife. "Yes. He's got the gun in his hand. His gun that killed Nag. Well, finished him off anyway. And nearly got me too!" Rikki shuddered. "I don't fancy their chances against that." said Rikki-tikki-tavi. "I see they aren't going to let the cobras sneak up so easily on them. And neither will I. I won't let what happened with Nagaina happen again. That was too close!" he said. He recalled how he had fought off Nagaina. After fighting her above ground, he had chased her underground. He had fought her. Her last egg had fallen out of her mouth in the fight and rolled away. However, after nearly getting killed by Nagaina, he had managed to kill her, and had caused the tunnel to cave in behind them, which certainly would have destroyed her last egg. He was glad that that cobra family was gone forever. Now a new one threatened the humans.

"I have a favor to ask from you and Darzee." he said again. "Anything." said Darzee's wife. "The garden is once more at war. Go across the rising stream and tell my family, in case I don't come out of this alive, that I love them. Tell them I'm fine right now. They must think me dead by now." said Rikki. After a long while of searching, Darzee and his wife had finally found Rikki's family two days earlier. As it had been near night, they had decided to wait till the next day to go and speak to them. They had come back to find the home flooded and the family gone. His family had moved to another house to avoid the flooding. They had searched that day and couldn't find them.

Darzee and his wife left and came back a few hours later. "I found them. Lovely family.

They were simply overjoyed to hear that you were still alive. Thought you had been drowned or killed by a snake.” said Darzee. “Not yet.” said Rikki. “They were glad that you had become a house mongoose.” said Darzee’s wife. “I miss them terribly. Once this flood is over and the cobras are all dead I can come back to them. But I think I’ll stay here. I love it here. We can all live here.” said Rikki longingly. “Well, that would do us all good. With a family of mongooses, no cobra will dare come within ten miles of this place.” said Darzee’s wife happily. “Well, let’s hope not.” said Rikki. “But in the meantime, we need to find out about this Nagasta.” he said again. “Could you follow some of these cobras if you spot them. Follow them to this Nagasta. Then report back to me. I want to know what I’m up against.” he said. “Sure thing.” said Darzee’s wife, flying off. “I hope you haven’t sent her off to her death.” said Darzee, ruffling his feathers. “I really hope I haven’t either.” said Rikki uneasily.

Darzee’s Wife’s Frightful Tale

She was gone for several hours and Darzee began composing a lament for his wife, thinking her dead. When he reached the most touching part, however, she returned, though with a grim face. “You’re alive!” exclaimed Darzee, ending his song at once and hugging her. “I barely escaped.” she said. “Well, I’ve got bad news. There are 27 of them. And she’s a fiercer cobra than I’ve ever seen before, even Nagaina I reckon. Something about her looks familiar, but I can’t figure out what. And her mate is nearly as frightening as her. I spied on them for hours and she tried to get me. Something about her voice frightens me. She said ‘Come down nosy bird! Come down!’ and I foolishly looked down at her, surprised that she had noticed me, and I saw her eyes. I was paralyzed with fear. I actually fell out of the air from terror. She moved over me and licked me with her tongue. She said ‘Where are you from and why did you come to spy upon me? Answer me! The longer you talk, the longer you live.’ I told her where I lived. I really had no choice, her fangs were so close to me. She said ‘I know where that is. It

belongs to me or it should. Why did you come to spy?’ I slowly moved away from her. To help buy me time, I answered her reply and said that I’d been sent by Rikki-tikki-tavi to spy her out and find out about her. She laughed and said ‘So, did you find me amusing? Do I terrify you enough? ‘I told her that she certainly did. She kept me in her gaze. She said ‘Rikki-tikki is wise to find out about me. But he shall know about me soon enough. He’ll be getting company soon. But, as for you, you were really foolish to come. I don’t have much love for friends of mongooses. And it seems your mongoose friend needs you so little that he has sent you to be my lunch! Your end approaches!’

I begged her to let me live. That I had a husband and two children. Then she said ‘Of course little bird.’ and I thought she actually might let me go and I started to thank her for her kindness but then she laughed wickedly and said ‘Children can grow up without their mother. I did. As for your family, after I’m done eating you, I’ll make sure to eat them too so they won’t be lonely.’ I thought she’d be eating me for her lunch, but in desperation I closed my eyes and was able to blindly fly away from her. She called after me saying ‘Fly away little bird! I’ll find you, you nosy little bird, and I’ll gobble up you and your family all the same! And tell Rikki-tikki-tavi that he shall learn the fear of Nagasta!’ She’s evil I tell you! Very evil!” she said grimly.

The others trembled, looking to Rikki for guidance. “Well, I’ll have to outwit them. I can’t overpower that many. No mongoose, not even the oldest and most skilled, can handle that many at once.” said Rikki-tikki. “We’re doomed!” said Darzee. “I’ve got an idea.” said Rikki, heading away from the others. “Where are you going?” said Chua. “Hunting.” said Rikki-tikki. “Hunting?” said Chua. “You’re not going cobra hunting, are you?” “No. Actually mouse hunting.” said Rikki. “Mouse hunting. Very odd for being about to fight snakes, but I guess if

you're hungry..." said Darzee, not wanting to think about eating mice.

"Oh, it's not that, though I haven't eaten as the humans forgot to feed me today. I'm going to need your help," he said to Darzee and his wife. "I can't do this with my teeth. They'll never fall for it," said Rikki-tikki-tavi. "I'm not that good at hunting mice," said Darzee. Rikki laughed. "I know that. I meant, my little surprise for the snakes. It involves mice. I'll do the hunting part right now. In the meantime, call the Coppersmith. Tell him to spread the word. The garden is once more in danger," said Rikki solemnly. "Have you hunted mice before?" said Darzee's wife. "No, but I can kill snakes. I'm certain I can snag a few mice," said Rikki-tikki-tavi, walking out of the garden.

A Trap for the Snakes

"Ding-dong-tock! We're under attack! Ding-dong-tock! They're coming back! There's more cobras! Ding-dong-tock!" cried the Coppersmith. All around, frogs were running to shelter and birds were flying as high as they could in the trees. Rabbits were hopping into their holes and ants were running into their hills. "I haven't seen such a panic since Nag and Nagaina and Karait came to the garden!" said Darzee, very frightened. "I wonder what Rikki's going to do with all of those mice. Thought he said that eating a lot would make him a slow mongoose, and that's not what we want. Especially now," said Darzee's wife. Just then Rikki came back with several carcasses of dead mice. Darzee and his wife gave Rikki a fearful look. "You're on our side. I know that. But still, you're a little scary at times," said Darzee.

"You know I'd never hurt the innocent," said Rikki. "These died as painlessly as possible. They were killed for food, and I needed them for our plan. I wouldn't have harmed them otherwise," said Rikki. He burped. "Pardon me," he said. "I've had an idea. I've eaten out the insides. And we're going to fill them with tiny little pebbles of different sizes, then

you're going to use your special skills⁷. You guys are going to use small vines and stuff, not that big, to put back the skins so they don't know they've been tampered with." said Rikki-tikki-tavi. "You ate *all* of their insides?!" said Darzee's wife in shock. "No, just some of them. I buried the rest to eat later." said Rikki. "We'll do it. Though personally I'd rather be eaten by a cobra." said Darzee, causing Rikki and Darzee's wife to laugh. The two birds did the task, though they washed their beaks out in a nearby creek once the task was done. "Nice." said Rikki, admiring their work.

Just then, several cobras approached them, heading toward the garden. "Tailorbirds." said Kinsta. "Had one this morning. Love their taste." "The poor thing." whispered Darzee's wife. "Not as much as I do." said Rikki, startling both the cobras and Darzee and his wife, causing the tailorbirds to collide in midair and fall to the ground next to Rikki, startled. "Who's there?" hissed a cobra. "A friend." said Rikki, causing Darzee and his wife to stare at him, dumbfounded. "Show yourself then, friend!" hissed another cobra. Rikki came out a few feet from behind the tree clump that he and Darzee and his wife had been working on their project behind. "You're Rikki-tikki-tavi! The mongoose who said he'd attack us if we came back." hissed Ragiva. "Yes. Though I can assure you, I no longer care what you do to the family. In fact, I'd almost like to see what you do to them." said Rikki. "Didn't their taking you in mean anything to you?" said Darzee, falling for Rikki's charade.

"Yes. But they left me without food for a long while. I've been hungry. Today, they kicked me out to fend for myself. I've been having to sustain myself on....tailorbird eggs." said

⁷ Tailorbirds are known for their ability to sew nests using twigs and straw and such. Rikki has wisely figured they'd be best for sewing the parts where he tore open the mice to eat out their guts back together, once he's put the stones in, that is. Needless to say, Darzee and his wife weren't pleased with this arrangement.

Rikki coldly, staring at Darzee and his wife. Darzee's wife gave Rikki a fake cold look. "You little weasel⁸!" she said in fake anger. "Actually, I think I'll eat these two, who by the way were glad to see the end of Nag and Nagaina, two cobras who rightfully should have controlled the garden. These tailorbirds would love for you all to die, preferably at my hand, with all of my effort, while they sit and watch." said Rikki, pretending to be disgusted with Darzee and his wife. "Eat us?" said Darzee and his wife in mock fright, their eyes bulging. Rikki grinned. "They were about to find out about my egg eating anyway. So now with them dead, I can go and eat the rest of their children." he said. "So, that's how it's going to be? After all we've done for you!" said Darzee in fake fury. "Oh please." said Rikki in fake disgust. "You've known where my family was all along. You've told them I'm dead and told me the garden was in danger from snakes for a while because you've been too afraid I might not be there to be your slave in case the real thing came along." said Rikki, starting to lick his lips.

"Leave me to my lunch. In the meantime, I've left several mice as a peace offering for you and your mother. I hope you can forgive my rudeness earlier. For now, I've got some birds I've got to attend to." said Rikki-tikki-tavi. The snakes moved away to go look at the mice. Darzee and his wife whimpered in mock fear as Rikki pinned them down. "Rikki, we're your friends. Please don't eat us!" said Darzee. "Tell you what Darzee. Since you're my friend, I'll eat *you* first!" said Rikki. "Rikki-tikki! No, please! Don't eat me!" begged Darzee in mock fright. The cobras left to go eat the booby-trapped mice and, as soon as they were out of sight, Rikki began chewing on a stick, pretending to be eating Darzee. Darzee cried out in mock agony while Darzee's wife pleaded with Rikki to stop. Darzee became silent, pretending to have been eaten by Rikki. "Delicious!" said Rikki. "You heartless monster!" screamed Darzee's wife.

⁸ Mongooses do kind of look like weasels, but that's not the point of her fake comment.

“Don’t worry, I have room for seconds!” said Rikki. “No! Don’t!” screamed Darzee’s wife in mock fear. She cried out and after about a minute became silent, pretending to have been eaten too. “Ate them, eh. How’d they taste?” said Kinsta’s voice, coming nearer toward them. “I’m sorry about this Darzee.” whispered Rikki. “Sorry about what?” whispered Darzee. His question was answered a second later as Rikki quickly bit, not hard, into Darzee’s left wing, drawing blood. He then pulled out a few of Darzee’s feathers and quickly sat on the two tailorbirds to hide them from view as Kinsta came into view. He noticed the blood on Rikki’s lips and the tailorbird feathers next to him. Rikki let out a loud belch and licked his lips. He gave his stomach a pat. “They were most delicious! Darzee and his wife. Two tailorbirds that would have stood in our way. Now all they’ll do is be digested in my stomach!” said Rikki. Rikki and Kinsta laughed. “They had two live children. I’ll throw them down to you...er...later. Just let me have the eggs. I love eggs. In the meantime, enjoy the mice I’ve brought. Killed them myself.” said Rikki.

“Wow. Won’t Mother be pleased at this! With Rikki-tikki-tavi, not only refusing to help the humans anymore, but actually befriending us, we should make quick work of the humans. And maybe eat more of those tailorbirds.” said Ragiva, coming near the stuffed mice. “Yeah, those tailorbirds over there sure got it. I expect they’d have been happier to meet us than him.” hissed another, picking up a stuffed mouse in her mouth. “Especially nice of him to kill these for us.” she hissed, swallowing the stuffed mouse. “Mmmmmm...a nice fat one. We’ll have to tell Mother and Father to let him have his pick of the garden creatures once we rule the garden.” she said, belching. About three-fifths of the others ate the remaining mice. “Delicious! Praise be to Rikki-tikki-tavi, our new mongoose friend!” hissed a cobra. “I don’t feel so well.” said Ragiva. “Come on, Ragiva, we all know some mice give you gas, but we don’t mind. Quite good and fat

mice too.” said Kinsta.

Ragiva suddenly swayed, her stomach rumbling with painful indigestion. She hit the ground,. “Ragiva! Ragiva!” said another cobra, moving next to her. “She’s really sick.” he said. “Tricked! Tricked! Tricked! Rikk-tck-tck!” chuckled Rikki, coming toward them, with the very much alive Darzee and his wife. “I hope you cobras love to eat rock!” he chuckled, quickly scurrying away from the cobras with Darzee and his wife flying behind him as fast as they could. At the edge of their vision, he called back, as more cobras fell over from indigestion, “Rikki-tick-tck! You sure all look sick! Send my love to your mother.” he laughed, before leaving them.

“They’ve been gone far too long!” said Chuchundra. “I’m back.” said Rikki. “Did you eat those cobras for lunch?” said Chua. “No, I’ve eaten mice.” said Rikki. “And us.” laughed Darzee and his wife. I didn’t hurt them.....”he laughed, “at least not that much.” Several animals stared at him in horror. “No, no. Nothing mean. I promise! I pretended like I had seen the error of my ways. That the humans had neglected me and I had...in my hunger...eaten Darzee’s eggs. Well, these cobras weren’t the brightest lamps in the bungalow, so they didn’t question me. I then told them I was going to eat Darzee and his wife, before they could tell everyone how I eat tailorbird eggs. No, no, I really don’t. We all made it look really convincing. I’d given them mice, as a ‘peace offering’ to them and their mother. Well, those foolish cobras ate them. Thing is, Darzee and his wife and I stuffed them with some stones. We figured they’d like to eat rocks.” he said as the others laughed.

Nagasta and Karistan

Meanwhile, the cobras that hadn’t eaten the mice made their way back to their mother and father. They approached Karistan, a tall and dark green king cobra. “So, are the humans dead at last?” hissed Nagasta. “Er, no...but many our siblings are out of action from

indigestion.” said another king cobra. “What?! How? What were you eating? I told you guys not to eat those mushrooms! They don’t help with gas!” she hissed angrily. “That mongoose Rikki-tikki-tavi did it!” said one of her children. “I am not going to believe,” she hissed angrily “that one lone young mongoose defeated so many of my children!” she said. “No, it was him. Him and the tailorbirds. He pretended that he hated the humans, that he ate the tailorbirds’ eggs and then said he’d eat the tailorbirds. He must have bitten them to draw blood and fake their deaths. He offered us a peace offering of mice, which he and his bird friends must have stuffed with stones. The others ate those without thinking and got sick. We never thought much of it because he did of a pretty convincing job of pretending to eat those tailorbirds and they did a pretty good job of pretending to be eaten.” “You never thought much?! You didn’t think that much at all!” she hissed angrily. “Oh that I could have had this Rikki-tikki-tavi for a child instead of you duffers⁹! He’s the type of schemer I’d need for this job! Pity he’s not with us.” said Nagasta. They related the rest of the story to her. “Well, I’ll settle him and his bird friends now too! I’ll strike them down, though maybe I can convince Rikki-tikki to join us!” she said, striking up and attacking a bird that had been flying too close and not paying attention to her. “Yes” hissed Karistan “and I’ll see to those two nasty tailorbirds. I haven’t eaten anything in three days.” “I wish our children could be as resourceful at getting *in* to the garden as this mongoose has been at keeping them *out*.” said Nagasta, putting the dead bird in her mouth. “At least he’s not dangerous. A proper mongoose would have killed them all. It’s what I would have done.” she said, swallowing the dead bird. “I think I’ll deal with him *personally*!”

“Still no sign of those cobras.” said Teddy’s mother. “Our mongoose must have chased

⁹ **unintelligent person/cobra:** somebody regarded as a slow learner or not competent at something (*informal dated insult*)

them off.” said Teddy’s father. “We haven’t fed him today, have we?” said Teddy. “No, I’ll go feed him now! I’m so glad we’ve found him!” said Alice.

The partying over the defeat of the cobras continued into the night in the garden. Rikki had grown tired of explaining over and over how he had managed to knock them out without having to fight them head on. “They’ll be back you know. This was only to give me more time to think.” said Rikki-tikki. The animals stared at him. “Back?” asked a frog. “Yes. It won’t be long now. I’ve got a plan. I think I’ll wait on the garden wall. When this Nagasta comes, as she certainly will I think, I’ll jump on her and finish her off.” said Rikki. “You are certain she’s coming?” asked Darzee. Rikki nodded. “When do you think....?” asked Darzee. “I’m not sure. I know she’ll be here though.” said Rikki.

Nagasta and Karistan hid nearby with two of their children. “Silly garden creatures. Partying all day. So unaware of how short life can be.” laughed Nagasta. “Kill Rikki-tikki!” Nagasta told Karistan. “With pleasure.” said Karistan, sliding off very slowly and quietly as he could into the grass. Nagasta and their two sons followed behind. Nagasta had a plan to attack Rikki herself as well, should he somehow get past Karistan. Not that Rikki would. He couldn’t have killed before, and even if he had, Karistan had killed mongooses older than him by surprise before.

Rikki Meets Karistan

“Look. I’m getting tired. I....” Rikki said, pausing and hearing a rustling in the grass. It sounded familiar. None of the others had noticed this. Had he been younger, like he was when he first entered the garden, he surely would have been killed, but he knew, or at least suspected anyway, and jumped into the air just in time as Karistan came flying at him. Rikki bit him in the tail but, because Rikki-tikki didn’t have a chance to get a good hold, he easily broke free and scurried out of reach. The other animals backed away in fright. “It’s a cobra! A fully grown

one!” said Darzee. “It’s the husband of Nagasta!” said Darzee’s wife. “So, you are cleverer than we thought, and faster too.” said Karistan, looking at Rikki as though hoping to kill him with his stare.



“And who might you be?” said Rikki. “I am Karistan! A very dangerous king cobra! You were most foolish to harm my children!” he hissed, darting at Rikki who kept jumping out of the way, causing Karistan to hit his head on vines and trees and the ground. “And your children were most foolish to eat mice filled with stones.” chuckled Rikki. “You’ve attacked your last cobra!” hissed Karistan, swaying left and right and narrowly missing Rikki several times. “I know a ripe subject for my next one.” said Rikki, swiping back at Karistan. “So, you’re the husband of this Nagasta.” said Rikki. “My wife Nagasta has been very determined to kill the people. Now be gone or die too!” hissed Karistan angrily. “Who is this Nagasta?” asked Rikki-tikki.

“How did he get away from that one?” Nagasta asked herself. “Must be tougher than I thought. I love a challenge. I’ll deal with him myself!” She moved quickly and quietly through the grass.

Rikki Meets Nagasta

Rikki heard her in time and jumped out of the way as Nagasta, Karistan’s evil wife, came

hurtling at him. "It's her!" said Darzee's wife in fright. "I am Nagasta! Look and be afraid!" she hissed. "So, we meet at last." said Rikki, getting back on his feet. "Well, I admit you're stronger than I thought. I thought for sure we'd get you." she hissed. "Sorry to disappoint you." said Rikki. Her voice sounded familiar. "Did you hiss earlier today 'Enjoy your time while you can, humansssss! We will get you soon!'" asked Rikki. "Yes." she said. "'Why didn't you come yourself? And why did you run when I came close?'" asked Rikki. "Children can dodge a gun easier. Also, I have been watching the people for days. They wouldn't expect us I think." said Nagasta. "As for the dead frogs, Kinsta and Ragiva killed them. I told them to leave them as sticking around to eat them would slow up my plan. I thought that you were the big man and so I left. My plan needs surprise. I have plans, of course, if they spot us, but I don't fancy fighting an armed human who knows I'm there as soon as I arrive. I can assure you that if I had known that it was just you, you wouldn't be here right now." "Well I *am* here now!" said Rikki. "How do you know about the gun? The man hasn't used it in weeks." Nagasta didn't reply. "How much does the family here care for you?" she asked. "I think they adore me." said Rikki. "Why?" "They will throw you on the rubbish heap once I've killed you. They only care about you because you protect them." said Nagasta. "That's not true!" said Rikki. There was something about her. Something more than your usual evil.

"I'm not coming here to hurt you guys." said Nagasta to the garden creatures. There was an outcry of protest against her. "No, I'm after the humans. You must realize that the humans chase you out of their home, destroy your homes, and take over and chase you off." said Nagasta. "Yes," she continued, "no more humans and you get back the land that was yours before they came." The creatures were silent. The people had indeed sometimes chased them off. "Yes, I can help you. Tell your mongoose friend here to get out of my way. I can make

things better here for all of us.” said Nagasta. “But you are a snake.” said Azil. “So what?” said Nagasta. “Snakes kill and eat us.” said Azil. “So I eat meat. So does your mongoose friend.” said Nagasta. “I need not eat any of you.” she said. “I don’t eat kids and I kill mercifully. Also, I’ve learned not to trust snakes.” said Rikki-tikki. “Nag and Nagaina controlled us. It is snakes that we hate, not the people!” said Darzee. “They came here about 16 months ago. What about before then?” said Nagasta. “How do you know when they came?” said Darzee’s wife in shock. “Never mind. It would be more of the same if she takes over. But I’ve set things up so she won’t!” said Rikki. “It could be better. It could be worse. It depends on how you all act.” said Nagasta. “It won’t happen! Your time is up!” said Rikki-tikki.

“I think our mongoose friend here is trying to trap us. The people will be here any minute. Be on guard.” she said to Karistan. “Beware. Watch out for the people, they may be after us in a moment.” Karistan called behind him. Two of his sons came slithering out of the shadows. The other garden creatures turned and fled. “Some friends they are.” laughed Nagasta. “They’ve had bad experiences under Karait, Nag, and Nagaina.” said Rikki. He was used to working alone when the snakes came too close.

“Why isn’t our mongoose back? He always likes to sleep in here.” said Teddy. “Oh, all right, I’ll go get him.” said the big man. He headed outside, then, noticing Nagasta and Karistan, headed for his gun.

Rikki, Karistan, and Nagasta saw him coming. Nagasta, who already had made up her mind what to do if the people came with guns, hid behind Rikki, who failed to strike at her as she passed. Karistan slid away into the grass. “Aren’t you going to stick around? You’ll make a nice addition to the rubbish heap.” said Rikki. The big man lowered his gun, unwilling to risk hitting Rikki.

Rikki-tikki moved out of the way. The big man fired two rounds at Nagasta. But in the time it took to raise his gun and fire, Nagasta was ready. She jumped aside, and the rounds made a hole in the ground. She was completely unharmed! “You won’t get *me* with a bang stick!” she laughed. She moved back toward the big man, but Rikki-tikki blocked her path. Rikki, whose eyes had turned red, stared straight into Nagasta’s eyes. He ~~at last~~ finally understood why birds were terrified when looking into the eyes of a king cobra. He held his gaze, though he couldn’t help but think that there was indeed something familiar about Nagasta. But what? She was indeed very evil. Far more than Darzee’s wife had gathered from their brief encounter. And he felt a strange emotion for a mongoose. One he had never really felt much in his life, certainly not this much, before: fear.

Nevertheless, Nagasta was shocked that somebody could stare her down. Nobody, not even the other cobras, save her own family, could stare her down. “I like you Rikki-tikki-tavi. You are very clever and quick. In fact, I respect you enough that I’ll let you stay in my garden once I am queen of it, if only you will back down.” she hissed. “We’ll never have you as Queen!” shouted Darzee. “We’ll have no more Nagainas!” shouted Darzee’s wife. “Well, if it isn’t the little bird who spied on me. You are a brave one, little bird. However, if you and your mate here give me anymore grief, I promise you that you’ll miss dear old Nagaina once *I* am queen!” hissed Nagasta.

“That *isn’t* going to happen!” said Rikki. “I’d really love to strike you dead where you stand!” she hissed angrily. “Well, come and fight!” said Rikki, still staring into her eyes, though really wishing he could look away, but knowing full well that doing so would be the death of him. “I find it a pity that such a wonderful creature as yourself should be wasted so needlessly.” she said, moving her head toward him. “What use could I possibly be to you?” he asked,

following her head carefully with his eyes.

“I know that you can move fast. You could easily subdue the garden for me. We’d let you have power only less than Karistan and myself. Someday, I’d like to rule the jungle. And you could be my right hand man. Think of the power you could have!” she hissed. “Yes, far more than these stupid humans could offer you!” “Two problems with that. First, the creatures of the garden are my friends, as are the people. I’m not going to subdue them. Second, you’d make a terrible queen!” he said, bearing his teeth. “You’ve hurt my feelings.” she hissed, moving nearer to Rikki-tikki. “Come closer and I’ll hurt more than that!” he threatened. “How very brave of you.” she hissed. “A few mongooses, on separate occasions, have all tried to kill me. They were all dead within two minutes!” “I’m not afraid of dying.” said Rikki. *Though I’d prefer not to.* he thought. “You’re so young. Why die for a bunch of stupid humans?” she said. “They are my family. And you won’t be able to harm them!” he said, leaping at her. She moved aside and struck at him. He barely dodged her. *Wow, she wasn’t kidding!* he thought.

“Since I respect you, Rikki-tikki, I’ll grant you a quick death.” she said, moving at him several times and swinging back to avoid his counterattack. “What will your family say when you don’t come home? You appear all alone. Why aren’t your mother and father here?” she asked. “We, er, got separated. I hope to meet them soon.” he said. “No chance of that happening by deciding to fight me, Nagasta the Powerful and Terrible.” she said, hitting him in the head with her tail. “Nice name. Your mother give it to you?” he chuckled. She paused, and then seemed to become even angrier. “I’ve waited a long time for this moment! I’m not going to let a little pesky mongoose like you get in my way!” she hissed, darting at him. Somehow, he could never explain it as long as he lived, he moved away just in time and was able to kick her, causing her to fly backward and away from him and into a tree. “Ready for more pain?” he said.

“Fool! You outmaneuvered me once and you think you’re something! I am Nagasta, the Heartless Cunning One! I gave myself this name! I’ve spent a lot of time planning this!” “Well, I’m here to wreck your plans!” said Rikki-tikki. The big man was getting nearer. He had a stick, for his gun needed reloading. Nagasta didn’t want to try and take them both.

“Aren’t you going to be busy?” said Nagasta evilly. “Your tailorbird friends will be *dying* to meet Karistan. In the meantime, I think I’ll leave. I don’t fancy my chances against that stick. But rest assured, O Rikki-tikki-tavi, you and the big man and his family will soon be dead and the garden will be ours!” she hissed, sliding away as Rikki ran toward Darzee and his wife.

Rikki-tikki-tavi Saves Darzee and His Family

He’d come not a moment too soon. Karistan had managed to reach the top of the tree, two of his sons right behind him. “Wicked tailorbirds!” hissed Karistan. “Did you think you were funny, attacking my children?” “Well, we thought the stone trick was pretty humorous.” said Darzee. “Did you ever think of what will happens to *your* children when you are dead? Perhaps my sons can have them too. Now see what happens to those who befriend mongooses and humans!” he hissed. He struck Darzee, who fell out the tree and hit the ground. “I find this pretty humorous!” laughed Karistan. “Grab the kids and go! I’ll hold him off!” shouted Darzee to his wife. “How very touching.” said Karistan. “I think I’ll eat your mate first.” said Karistan to Darzee’s wife. “Fly Biwi, fly. Take Dindác and Yindelsan.” said Darzee to his wife. “Don’t eat him!” shouted Biwi at Karistan. Biwi grabbed her two children and took into the air. Karistan struck Darzee again with his tail. Darzee fell down, dazed. “Perhaps I don’t need to kill you to get my displeasure across. The memory of the death of your mate will help remind you of the day you crossed me!” Karistan shouted at Biwi. “Now for my dinner!” he said, licking Darzee with his tongue. “Biwi, I don’t want you to watch this. Go save yourself and the kids!” said Darzee. “Bye bye bird!” said Karistan, moving his fangs toward Darzee.

“No, don’t!” said Darzee’s wife. She flew toward him. Karistan smirked. *The stupid bird. She could have let her mate go. I’m going to kill him anyway. Now she’ll go after me and I shall have both of them for my dinner. These birds are too predictable. They’ll die just like the bird family I devoured last week. As for their two children, I’ll feed each of them to one of my sons.* Karistan thought. Karistan slapped Biwi with his tail. “Very brave of you but very stupid! I’ll eat your mate, as I haven’t eaten in three days. But don’t worry, I’ll get to you next!” said Karistan. “You and your mate will make a terrible king and queen!” said Biwi. “And you and your mate will make a delicious meal!” laughed Karistan, licking his lips. “Now, look at me!” said the king cobra. Darzee and Biwi saw his eyes, and were frightened. “Don’t worry about your kids. My children will be eating well.” laughed Karistan, licking both of them with his tongue. “Darzee, I love you!” said Biwi, looking at her mate. “I love you too Biwi!” said Darzee.

Rikki knew he had to act immediately. He silently pounced upon one of Karistan’s sons. “What would you give for one of your children?” said Rikki. Karistan, who had been very close to sinking his fangs into Darzee, turned, allowing Darzee to fly toward his kids. Biwi got up and joined her husband. “What did you say Rikki-tikki-tavi? I was just about to eat your little friend here.” hissed Karistan, now turning to stare at Darzee and his wife, who were shielding their children. “Let them live, or I’ll bite him in half!” said Rikki, coming toward Karistan with the snake trapped in his mouth, unable to bite Rikki and too afraid to do so, lest he be bitten in half.

“Let him go!” snarled Karistan, jumping at Rikki, who spat out the cobra, causing him to fall to the ground and recoil angrily. Rikki and Karistan collided. Both hit the ground and were separated by the impact. Suddenly, the big man’s gun fired off twice, narrowly missing Karistan’s two children, who slithered off, alarmed. “We’ll meet again, Rikki-tikki!” he hissed,

moving past Rikki and into a hole and under the garden wall. “And I’ll be waiting!” said Rikki-tikki. Darzee sang a song about Rikki’s bravery. His wife joined in. “You are really brave Mr. Rikki.” said Yindelsan. “Thank you.” said Rikki-tikki. “I thought that cobra was going to eat us.” she said. “I’m sure he planned to. I think he still does. But he learned that I don’t take kindly to those who try and eat my friends.” said Rikki-tikki. “You’re a hero!” said Dindac. The big man and Teddy came to get Rikki. Teddy picked up the mongoose.

Nagasta’s Taunt

“That mongoose has saved us again.” said Teddy’s father. “You won’t let anything happen to us, will you fella?” said Teddy, stroking Rikki’s fur. Rikki and Teddy went to bed. Rikki felt that he really needed to rest as he would need his wits about him to keep protecting the family from these new intruders. He lay awake for a while, though, trying to think of what looked so familiar about Nagasta but couldn’t think of anything. He suddenly heard something in the distance. “Oh big man who did me wrong!” a voice hissed, “I am not ready yet. If you come for me I strike, and if you do not leave, I will soon strike. Oh, foolish people, who did me wrong!” It was Nagasta. *Almost like Nagaina.* he thought. Darzee and his wife had stopped singing outside. “You cannot stop me. Twice now you have failed to kill me. Next time, I shall kill *you*.” sang Nagasta. “Twice? She only was here once.” said Rikki-tikki to himself.

He headed outside. He looked around but couldn’t see her. Her singing stopped and he looked around, wary, in case she came rushing into sight to try another attack on the people. However, after waiting for over two hours, Rikki-tikki finally concluded that she had left, and he went back to Teddy’s room and fell asleep. He awoke sometime later when he heard a noise.

“Rikki...oh you’re asleep.” It was Darzee. “I *was*.” said Rikki, getting up and yawning. “Sorry.” said Biwi. “Any news on the cobras?” said Rikki eagerly. “Nothing. However, the flood water is rising. We went to visit your family and they were just leaving your home. The

water's coming in too quickly. They're going to try and come here, but they will probably have to wait for the water to go down. Several of Chuchundra's friends have had to move their nest banks to avoid the rising water. If this keeps up, the water could be near here." said Darzee solemnly. "Well, that just caps off the day, doesn't it?" said Rikki gloomily. "I'm trying to stop a bunch of cobras from killing the people and now I have to worry about a flood." he said. "And, I don't get her last comment. What does she mean they failed to kill her twice? She was only here once." he said. "I don't get it either." said Biwi. "Thank you for saving our lives." said Darzee. "Oh, you've saved me before too. It's the least I can do." said Rikki. "Because of you, our children can have a future." said Darzee's wife, suddenly hugging him. "You're welcome." said Rikki. "Now, I need my sleep. I can't go fighting those cobras half-asleep, now can I?" he said, lying back down and closing his eyes.

"I wonder what Nagasta and her friends are up to now." said Darzee. "Something sinister no doubt." said his wife. "I'm trying to sleep!" said Rikki, irritably. "We'll be quiet." said Darzee as he and his wife flew out of the room. Rain started to pour outside. Rikki, annoyed at the new source of noise, stuck his head under the pillow to drown it out and fell asleep again.

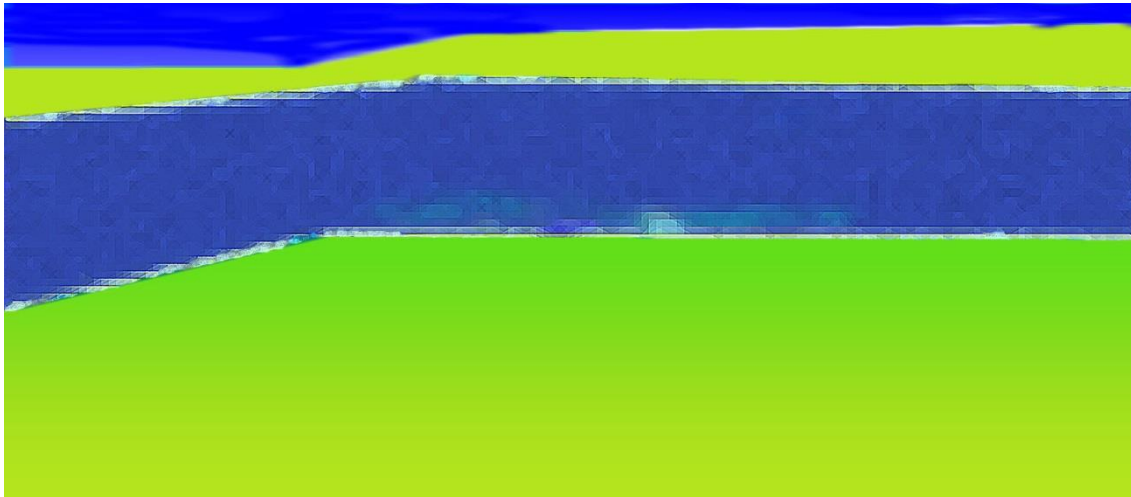
Tivía

He awoke the next morning and went for a walk outside the garden. He had decided to return to go eat early breakfast when he heard a voice nearby.

"And so, what do you plan to do exactly, Nagasta?" "Nagasta!" said Rikki. He crept toward the sound of the voice. "Well, I'd like to get even; we should kill the boy and his mother. Leave the big man all alone, without his wife or son. But don't worry, I'll settle him too. Then I'll be the rightful queen of the garden, as I should have been. Anyway, the water will soon have them trapped. They'll be dead before the big man can get to his gun. And I'll be out before he can load it." hissed what was clearly Nagasta's voice. Rikki-tikki's eyes turned red and he

chattered with rage.

“Over my dead body!” yelled Rikki, springing toward her. She turned and glared at Rikki-tikki. “I should love to see that¹⁰! Oh silly me! I’d forgotten what to do with you. How kind of you to come to me so that I can finish you now and not have to worry about you later.” she hissed in mock sweetness, advancing toward Rikki. “Kill him Tivía!” she hissed. “I am Tivía, a powerful snake that has killed five mongooses! You’ll make my sixth one!” Tivía hissed. “I’ve killed more snakes than five!” said Rikki. Rikki fought Tivía while Nagasta watched, eagerly. He soon had decided that, while fighting a snake in the open, it would be best to avoid coming too close to her until she had made herself vulnerable and he was out of range of her strike. She was surprised with him. “I’d expected a mongoose your age to be dead within a minute.” she hissed.



The noise of the fighting had attracted the attention of Chuchundra. “Why are you trying to kill the human family?” Chuchundra asked Nagasta. “I have my reasons! If I had my way, I’d kill every last human in the world!” she hissed, advancing toward Chuchundra. “Rikki, I

¹⁰ Rikki-tikki-tavi lying dead.

need help!” said Chuchundra, starting to run. Nagasta pursued him away from Rikki and Tivía. Rikki and Tivía were at the water’s edge. Tivía nearly bit Rikki. She cornered him against the water. “Trapped! Silly fool, to think you could kill me!” said Tivía. “Well, I killed Nag, Nagaina, and Karait. I can’t say that I didn’t have a chance.” said Rikki. “What?! Impossible! They were too powerful! You could never have killed them!” “Did you know them?” said Rikki, shocked. “I did. I told Nagasta all about them. She was most interested as...” she was cut off as Rikki, on instinct, leapt over her and quickly seized her head in between his paws and pulled it under the water until Tivía had drowned. “Have a drink.” said Rikki.

“Come and fight Nagasta!” said Rikki. Nagasta turned from Chuchundra and stared at him. “You’ve killed Tivía!” hissed Nagasta angrily. “You killed her! How did you beat her?” hissed Nagasta. “I’m a mongoose. I’m born to kill snakes. I drowned her. Wanna join her?” he asked.

“I could kill your right now. I think, though, that I’ll let the water drown you.” she hissed, backing further away from the water. The water was rising fast and had come up to his waist while he was talking to Nagasta. He got away just in time.

The sound of the fighting had attracted the big man. He fired at Nagasta. However, she saw him in time and jumped, once more dodging his rounds. “Stupid big man! Out of fire again!” she laughed. The big man went to go get a stick. “Since I’m in a hurry to leave, I’ll let you live. If it was just you alone, I’d kill you right now for messing with me and killing Tivía! However, you’d best get out of here and never come back. If you continue to oppose me, you will most certainly meet your end!” she hissed before fleeing. “Nice one Rikki.” said Chuchundra.

“Our mongoose has killed another snake.” said the big man. “He’s such a hero!” said

Teddy. Rikki let them pet him. They gave him a lot of food. He ate very little, though, for he knew that he needed to remain thin so he could be as quick as possible. He was certain that Nagasta would come back that night.

Preparations

Rikki headed back and rested for the rest of the day. The water came to within five feet of the garden wall. “Nagasta wants to kill Teddy and his mother¹¹,” said Rikki to Darzee and his wife upon waking up that evening. “She wants to kill the big man last, as she wants him to suffer the most. I think whatever she’s mad about, he did it,” said Rikki. “What did he do?” they said in unison. “I don’t know. What’s even stranger is that she seems to think she’s the rightful queen of the garden,” said Rikki-tikki. “I don’t know what she’s like, but I hated it when Nagaina was queen of the garden,” said Darzee, not wanting to think about those days. “Why would she think that?” asked Biwi. “No idea. Perhaps she was a spoiled little brat as a child and thinks the world owes her. That doesn’t quite fit though as her parents didn’t even bother to take the time to name her. She told me she had to name herself,” said Rikki. “Maybe she likes the garden and wants to own it,” said Biwi. “Well she’ll never be queen of this garden as long as I’m here!” declared Rikki boldly. “However, I know she’s going to try attacking until she wins. I can tell she really wants them dead. I’ve seen that kind of hatred once before. It was the same look Nagaina had before she tried to kill the big people. She’ll be coming back soon to kill them,” said Rikki. Darzee and his wife shuddered. “Also, that’s another odd thing,” said Rikki-tikki-tavi. “What?” said Darzee. “Nagasta is fascinated with Nag and Nagaina. I don’t know how she knew them, but Tivía did and Nagasta wanted to know all about them.” “Great, another

¹¹ The reason for that, yet to be revealed, will be one of the things keeping Rikki-tikki-tavi from being too proud (see end of first story).

Nagaina fan!” said Darzee’s wife. “She means *killing*. Tonight I fear.” said Rikki-tikki again.

“Are you certain?” said Darzee. Teddy and his father were sandbagging the area inside the garden wall to prevent the water from coming in if it got that far.

“Yes. And I think she plans to kill me in my sleep.” said Rikki. “She’ll never be able to do that. You’re such a light sleeper.” said Darzee. “Hopefully my family can finish her if she gets me.” said Rikki-tikki-tavi. “Don’t say such things!” said Darzee’s wife. “Then again my family doesn’t know about her, unless you’ve told them.” said Rikki. Darzee’s wife shook her head. “She could lay a trap for them. They think there are no cobras nearby. With her cobra friends, she might be able to overwhelm my family if it came to a surprise attack.” said Rikki. “Yes, she might lose some of her cobras if she attempts it, but if done cleverly enough, she could kill them all in the end anyway.” said Rikki in response to Darzee’s open mouth of astonishment. “Mongooses aren’t invincible! It was sheer dumb luck that saved me from Karait and Nag. And even greater luck that saved me from Nagaina.” said Rikki-tikki-tavi.

“So you’re going to fight her?” said Darzee. “Better than lying here and waiting for her to bite me in my sleep.” said Rikki. “And” said Rikki-tikki, “she knows that you’ve helped me attack her children. What’s stopping her from coming here at night and crawling up the tree to get your children? You’ve moved your nest to a lower branch after Nagaina’s death. She can reach up there, you know.” said Rikki. Darzee’s eyes widened as he realized the same thing.

“Our children are nearly grown. We’ve already lost one to Nag. We’re not losing any more!”¹² said Darzee’s wife. “What would you do?” said Rikki sarcastically. “Peck out her eyes?” “If I have to.” said Darzee. “My kids will be able to fly on their own in a week and then the cobras can’t get them.” “She’s coming *tonight*!” said Rikki, feeling that they weren’t taking

¹² Not *this* year. ☹☹☹☹

him seriously.

“That’s enough Teddy.” said Teddy’s father. The two headed inside. “I’m going to defend them. She’s coming tonight I tell you!” said Rikki-tikki-tavi. He walked toward the garden wall and climbed up a tree and then jumped to the top of the wall. “Be careful.” said Darzee’s wife. The sun set and, four hours later, the rest of the creatures went to bed. Rikki sat, awake and alert on the wall. After about an hour, he noticed that the water was two feet from the wall. “She’ll never be able to come from over there.” said Rikki, noticing the fast moving current blocking all paths heading toward the garden. However, while climbing around on the wall, he noticed, on the side opposite the garden, a small dip in the land that had been blocked from the water thus far by a large pile of boulders. And he noticed a path heading upward away from the garden, where there wasn’t likely to be water. “Aha!” he said to himself and jumped from the wall, heading toward it. He waited till midnight and then heard two voices in the dark.

Night Attack

“I’d like to do this personally. It’s me that they’ve wronged. Not you.” said what was clearly Nagasta’s voice. “You’re my wife. They’ve wronged you. They’ve wronged me.” said what was obviously Karistan’s voice. “I was right!” muttered Rikki under his breath. “No, I want to do this personally. We can go together to get the big man. Right now, I want the boy and his mother. I figured it would be better if the big man lost them both at once. I’ll also deal with Rikki-tikki-tavi. I’ll bite him in his sleep. He’ll be dead before he wakes up!” hissed Nagasta proudly. *Not if I can help it!* Rikki-tikki thought.

“May the great god Brahm, favorer of our kind, protect you.” said Karistan, turning and leaving. Lightning flashed in the sky. It began to rain. “This will make easy work!” hissed Nagasta, heading across the valley. “Nice night, isn’t it, eh Wrinkle Skin?” said Rikki, revealing himself to her. It started to rain and thunder rumbled nearby. “Rikki-tikki-tavi, I presume?” said

Nagasta casually. “Turn back or die Nagasta!” said Rikki, his eyes growing hot.

The Daughter of Nag and Nagaina

“You will not stop my revenge!” she hissed, raising herself to her full height and raising her hood. “The humans wronged me! Now they’re going to pay for it!” Rikki suddenly realized with a jolt another familiar thing about Nagasta. The voice that he had heard months ago, it had belonged to her. “You were in the garden before. Months ago.” said Rikki. “You said that the humans would pay for something. It was *you* that spoke that night four months ago!” “Yes, it was I. Your friends tell you about it?” said Nagasta. “What do you have against the people anyway? What were you doing in the garden? When did the people try and kill you before last night?” said Rikki-tikki. “And what do you care about Nag and Nagaina? They’re dead in case you didn’t notice!” said Rikki. “I’ve noticed. They’ve been dead for four months now.” she said. “Then why do you care?” he asked. “What does it matter? You never met them I presume.” “Of course I never met them. And, that, Rikki-tikki-tavi, completely matters!” she hissed. “I learned from Tivía that they planned to kill the people there. The big people had murdered Karait and so they....” said Nagasta. “The big people didn’t kill Karait!” Rikki-tikki interrupted. “Silence fool! Don’t talk about what you don’t know about!” she said angrily. “So, they were worried about the big people and planned to kill them in the night.” she continued. “So, how did that work out for them? You must be dumb to try and copy them to get revenge at the big people the same way, and you have yet to tell me why you want the big people dead!” said Rikki.

“Nag and Nagaina, the rightful rulers of the garden, were both killed and 24 of their eggs were destroyed.” “24? They had 25!” he said. “Yes, there were.” she said, a wicked grin on her face. “And all 25 were destroyed!” “No, no, Rikki-tikki. The humans have failed. The big man shot Nag and he must have killed Nagaina too! All but one of their children were killed. They were in the melon bed. However, one egg, the 25th egg, it seems Nag and Nagaina were able to

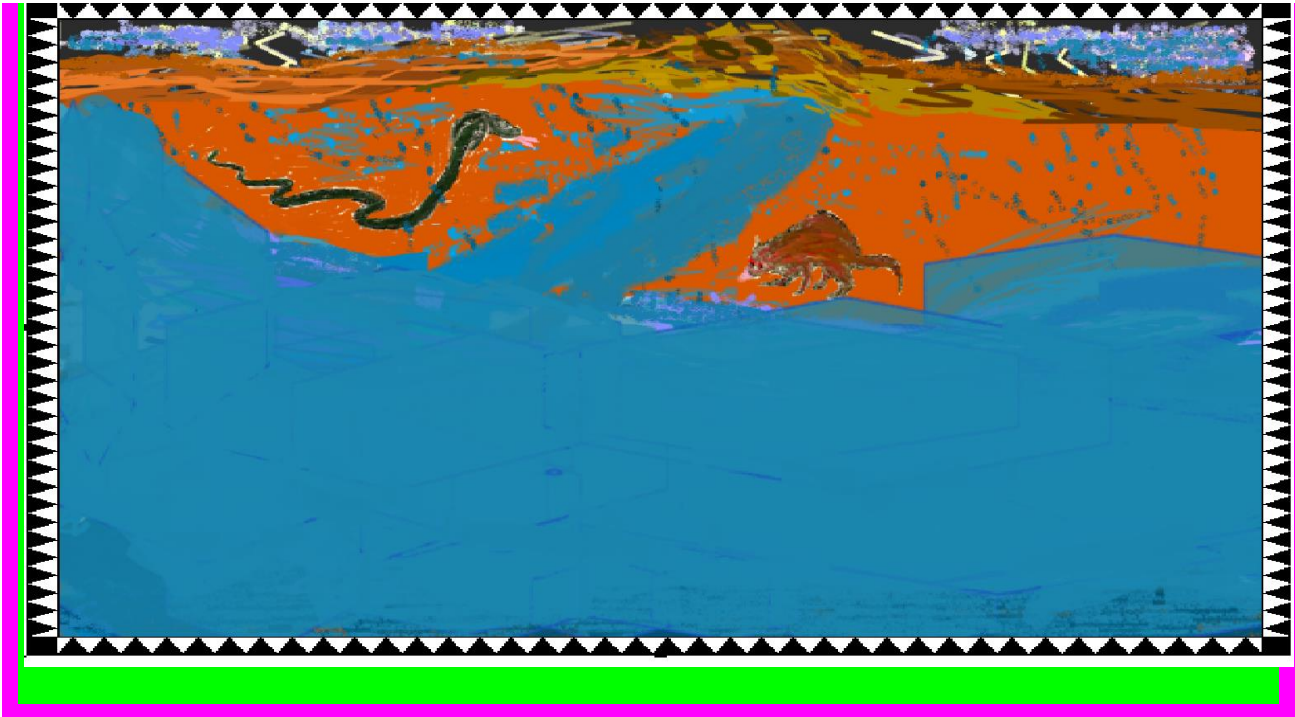
move that egg, the egg of their last child, to safety, though they died themselves, and it hatched underground. Their last daughter heard enough from that loud Coppersmith and the others to learn the names of her parents. The stupid birds had credited the big man for the death of Nag. She left that night, vowing revenge.” said Nagasta, laughing wickedly.

“What?!” said Rikki-tikki-tavi in shock. “Who is this snake? What happened to her? Where is she now? Unless.....unless....” he said, dreading the answer. Nagasta advanced toward him, grinning, her pointed white fangs glistening in the light of the lightning around them. “Yes, the 25th egg was my egg. Nag and Nagaina are *my* parents, meddlesome fool! I want their deaths avenged. I should be the Queen of the Garden as they were King and Queen. Since they died before they named me, I had to name myself. Soon the world will see that our family isn’t dead! I’m going to finish what they intended for the humans that so foolishly killed them!” she said, laughing.



“I found Father’s body on their rubbish pile and the bodies of my siblings and of his friend Karait. The foolish garden crier dared to cry out their names. Everyone seemed to be pleased they were dead. I never found Mother but she is obviously dead. I waited till the little beasts were asleep, and, knowing they might be too on the alert for cobras at the time, went off,

all alone and looked for friends of my parents. One of them was Tivía. I was able to tell them about their deaths, how the big man had murdered them. Foolish man! He didn't get *my* egg! Now I can get back at him! Now I will kill his son and wife!" said Nagasta, moving toward him and starting to sway¹³. Rikki stood there, lost for words. This was **not** what he had expected. This made things far, far worse! Far, far worse indeed!



"What?!" said Rikki again, unable to take it in. *You're Nag and Nagaina's daughter?!?* he thought. *No, it can't be! Can it?* He thought back to his fight with Nagaina. *"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?" said Rikki. "Give me the egg, Rikki-tikki. Give me the last of my eggs, and I will go away and never come back," Nagaina 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 said. Nagaina rushed*

¹³ The king cobra can sway and still move forward, though it is the only kind of cobra to be able to do so.

forward and took the egg to her den. He thought of when he had caught up with Nagaina and what had happened. Now he thought of something, yes, he recalled it now. He could he have been so stupid? He recalled that he had stopped biting her and moved aside to avoid her strike. He had just barely dodged her, and had felt increasingly foolish in engaging her in a fight in an area where she so clearly had the advantage. He thought back to the conversation and the event that had followed, the event that had led to the survival of Nagasta, his greatest enemy.

“And once you are dead, I shall make short work of your muskrat friend and your bird friends and especially,” Nagaina hissed gleefully, “those human vermin! I’ll be Queen of the Garden forever!” “Never!” yelled Rikki, charging at her and causing the egg to fall out of her mouth and roll several feet away from the two combatants.

He had later been pinned down by Nagaina. She had nearly killed him, but he had managed to overpower and kill her. As she died, she hit the wall of the tunnel, causing it to cave in. As he had been on the ground, he had misjudged the position of the falling debris. Most of it had missed the egg. The egg would have been hit by some falling dirt, but not buried or crushed by it. The falling rocks would have missed it. One member of the evil cobra family was still alive! The terror in the melon bed was not dead and impotent! The evil cobra in the last egg was not slain!

Now he realized his blunder. Nagasta was “the very last of the brood.” It hit him like the lightning bolts starting to fall around them nearby. He **hadn’t** destroyed the last egg! She had Nag’s eyes, that’s what looked familiar about her. She looked like Nag and Nagaina. And there was Nagaina’s last words: “If you strike me down, you shall see how much more powerful I shall become!” Now it made sense. The evil queen had known that her egg had survived. Even in death, she had mocked them. Outsmarted him and the garden creatures. Nagasta would try and

finish her evil mission to kill the people.

“No, it can’t be!” said Rikki-tikki-tavi, still in disbelief. *It can’t be. It can’t be.* he thought. “Yes! You’ve heard of Nag and Nagaina; I trust your tailorbird friends have told you about them. They were glad to see them gone, I expect. But I’ve had the last laugh! Those humans failed to destroy my egg! Now I shall destroy them!” hissed Nagasta. “Now, out of my way or you will die!” she hissed. *No, I killed your family!* he thought. *And hopefully you’ll join them tonight!*

Should he dare tell her¹⁴? *No!* he thought. *She’ll only be all the madder at me. Anyway, those boulders won’t hold out much longer. Best let the water finish her, like I should have done months ago!* he thought. “I know about your family! And they will all die as will you if you do not get out of the way now!” she hissed, again trying to strike him. “Well, you can’t get to them with this flood!” said Rikki-tikki defiantly. “True. But I can get my cobras to ambush them after I am done with my errand!” she hissed.

WAR!

“You’ll never be going back to them!” said Rikki. “And just why not?” she hissed angrily. “You’ll be dead before sunrise!” he said. He let out his war cry, “Rikk-tikk-tikki-tikki-tchk¹⁵!” “More and more cobras are joining my cause every day! Young fool!” she hissed, trying several times to bite him and narrowly missing him. “Now feel the wrath of the daughter of Nag and Nagaina, true king and queen of the garden!” she hissed, swaying like crazy and driving Rikki back toward the garden wall with her many swipes at him. *Oh boy!* he thought.

¹⁴ That it was he who killed Nag and Nagaina.

¹⁵ Odd. He’s never used his war cry on an actual enemy before. He probably would have with Nag, Nagaina, or Karait if he had had time. Also, Nagasta is his archenemy. No surprise he used it with her first.

She's worse than Nag and Nagaina put together!

It's now or never! he thought, ~~starting to swipe~~ swiping at Nagasta with his claws and trying to bite her and punching wildly at her, driving her back down the hill toward the valley. Finally he managed to claw her and drew some blood. However, her fangs came so close to him in the effort that he could feel her hot breath and the venom dripped onto his skin, burning it slightly. *Was this the end? Was he going to die defending the garden from Nagasta, the last vile child of Nag and Nagaina, who had escaped him? Would his family be safe?* he thought. "It's over Nagasta! You'll never be queen of the garden!" he said, knowing he had very little chance of killing her.

Much to his surprise, he was able to bite her, drawing more blood. He had outsmarted her and bit her. She stopped moving. *Did I kill her?* he thought to himself. Nagasta wasn't dead. She was slightly hurt, but this was merely a ploy. A ploy to lure the young mongoose to his doom. She had faked being badly hurt before. Older mongooses than Rikki-tikki had thought her dead and come to finish her off and eat her. She always struck at them when they came to bite. They always got bitten in the throat and were too hurt to attack her.

Rikki stared at her. *Is this a trick?* he thought. Water slowly rose around them as the rain kept falling. The boulders, however, still held back the main deluge. He waited. She didn't move. He moved closer. *Come closer fool. You will die like all of the other fools who tried to kill me!* Nagasta thought. Rikki moved closer. He had decided to bite off her head. However, as he moved near, he saw a faint flicker of her eyes. He jumped back several feet. SNAP! Nagasta's fangs sliced through the air, right where his throat had just been! "Clever mongoose! I've used that trick to claim the lives of mongooses older than you! Now I shall try harder than ever!" she hissed. She rose up quickly before Rikki could get in a jab at her. Her long black and

green body moved toward her. She swung at him. “Die Rikki-tikki!” she hissed, laughing evilly. He dodged her. “Come on Rikki-tikki-tavi. Come and dance with death!” she hissed, striking at him again.

He moved left and right, dancing to avoid her. He swung at her and she was hit, but not injured. *This is getting nowhere fast.* he thought. *This little pest is stronger than I thought!* thought Nagasta in her purely evil heart. Confident as she was of her superior abilities over the young, foolish mongoose, deep down, she was slightly afraid. However, the battle seemed to be going her way as she drove Rikki several feet away from the boulders and down the valley. *So this is how I die.* thought Rikki. *I’ve got to make one last attempt! I owe my family and Teddy’s family that much!* he thought.

He thought of telling her the truth. He figured his life was nearly over anyway. The thought of death was unpleasant, but he knew that there were worse things than death. However, Nagasta would definitely kill his family if he told. But, on the other hand, if he died fighting her, which seemed certain, Teddy and his mother would be killed by Nagasta and the big man by Nagasta and Karistan. A family would die either way. His family or Teddy’s? His family or Teddy’s? He decided, finally, that he would not tell her and would make a final attack on her to end her. He’d get bitten, that was certain, but he’d keep attacking her until the venom killed him. His own family would live and he’d have at least a chance of saving the humans. It seemed his best hope, if hope it could be. He didn’t cry over his own impending¹⁶ end. He would face it bravely. As he prepared to make a suicidal¹⁷ leap at her in a desperate attempt to kill her, the boulders gave way and the water started coming! The two turned and stared at it.

¹⁶ **imminent or threatening:** about to happen

¹⁷ Even if he made contact with a vital organ, her fangs would puncture him, and he’d have about 5 minutes to live before dying from the poison. Even if he manages to kill her, he’ll die himself too.

“Have fun drowning Rikki-tikki! I’ll be back to claim my garden someday! We’ll meet again!” she hissed, fleeing and swimming over some rising water. Rikki ran with all of his strength and managed to reach the garden wall. The water was right behind him. *Am I going to escape her only to drown?* he thought miserably. He leapt into the air, hoping to grab onto the ledge, but he hadn’t jumped quite high enough to reach it. Suddenly two paws reached out, he grabbed them, and they pulled him up over the wall. He was staring at an adult male mongoose who resembled Rikki in some ways. “Father?” he said in astonishment and joy.

Family Reunion

“What were you trying to prove by taking on that cobra? We managed to get past her. What was she on about? We didn’t quite hear her. The rain is too loud to hear anything from very far. She nearly killed you!” said his father. “She was after the family that lives here.” said Rikki. He didn’t feel like going into the story of how he’d failed to destroy the last egg at that time. In fact, he thought, no need to worry Darzee or the others either. Nagasta wouldn’t dare come within miles of the garden now that his family was living there. As long as she didn’t find out that he had killed Nag and Nagaina, his own family would be safe. There was no way he could tell the garden creatures or even his own family. Darzee would surely sing some annoying chant about how Rikki had killed Nag and Nagaina to taunt Nagasta and then she’d be on them. While he and his family were seen as pests, rather than the true enemy they sought, the people would also be safe for a while as well. But still, he thought of her words. *More and more cobras are joining my cause every day!* “I think she will come back someday. Anyway, she’s after the wrong people. It wasn’t the people that did it.” said Rikki. “Did what?” said his mother. “I can’t say. No, it’s not just that I don’t think you can hear it without being frightened.” said Rikki at his mother’s confused look. “Darzee will hear it and then his big mouth will ensure that she finds out. I don’t want that right now.”

Nagasta's Army Grows

Karistan, Ragiva, and Kinsta were sleeping. They suddenly heard a movement in the grass and slithered toward it. "So, are the humans dead?" said Karistan. "No!" said Nagasta. "Perhaps I should have come with you. What went wrong?" said Karistan. "The little red-eyed pest. It seems we've underestimated him!" hissed Nagasta. "Send out our friends. We'll deal with this pest!" hissed Karistan. Near dawn, about a dozen cobras moved toward the garden. They noticed the mongoose family and retreated. "So is he dead?" said Karistan. "No. There are five of them!" said one of the cobras. "Five. Hmmm. And eleven of you! A little cowardly, aren't we?" hissed Karistan in disgust. "Well, that and there's not much room to get through due to the water." said another. "Never mind! I'll kill the humans in the end all the same! In fact, I think we'd all be better off without humans altogether! Go to every part of the jungle. Get our kind to unite. We'll drive the humans from this jungle and get rid of the mongoose vermin too!" hissed Nagasta. "It shall be done." said a cobra.

Rikki Ruminates on His Failure

The rain stopped. The next day, the water started to slowly recede and within two weeks, was nearly back to its normal level. *Nagasta must have gotten word that my family has managed to get past her and come here. Neither she nor any of her cobras have shown up.* Rikki thought joyfully, though he knew in the depths of his heart that she would certainly be back someday.

"We have a whole family of mongooses now!" cheered Darzee. "They'll never come here!" said Chua. "Not for a long time." said Rikki. Nagasta would come back, he was certain. But in the meantime, he would spend the next several months with his family, unbothered by snakes. "Did you kill her?" said Darzee. Rikki shook his head. "No! I was lucky she didn't kill me!" said Rikki-tikki. "Are you going to finish her off?" said Darzee. "Sure." said Rikki-tikki-tavi. "I think I'll use you as live bait to lure her to her death." he said. "You wouldn't do that!"

said Darzee. “Perhaps I might if you don’t shut that big beak of yours! I don’t want praises! Frankly, I don’t deserve them. I can tell you’re about to compose some song about my fight outside the garden with Nagasta.” he said, as Darzee stared at him, astonished. “Please don’t. Otherwise I might have my family bring back a live cobra for you to play with.” he said, laughing.

His sister and brother ran around the house, exploring every bit of it. Apparently, his parents had had more children, thinking Rikki dead. Rikki sat in the sun, trying not to think about Nagasta. *I am the true Queen of the Garden! Those humans failed to destroy my egg! Now I shall destroy them!*

Well, come and take it then! he thought. *I, the true killer of Nag and Nagaina, will be here to protect them!* He rested for a while and then was awoken by Dindác. “Mr. Rikki-tikki. Sorry to bother you. But is that cobra coming back? Dad thinks she’s going away.” he chirped. “She’ll be back. I know why she wants to kill the family. I can tell you she’s mistaken.” said Rikki. “About what?” chirped Dindác. “I’m afraid it’s me. I’m the actual one who’s done the things she blames the humans for.” said Rikki. “What’d you do?” said Dindác. “It’s more of what I didn’t do that’s the problem.” he said. “What did you forget to do?” “I don’t want to say now. This whole thing is Nag and Nagaina all over again. Quite frankly, it’s *exactly* Nag and Nagaina all over again. However, you’re safe for now. That’s the important thing.” he said.

“Rikki-tikki, who are your friends? This tailorbird seems to have wild stories about you. Imagine you killing three cobras and a dusty brown snakeling. Surely he’s a bragger.” said his mother. “Darzee. Yeah, he’s a bit of a featherbrain. But he’s telling the truth. Also, that part about the stones inside the mice was true.” he said. “Nice one, Rikki. Killing cobras at your age!” laughed his brother. “Laugh all you want! I saw Nag and he was dead! Karait too!” said

Darzee.

“Surely this is a joke.” said his sister. “I’m afraid it might be the truth.” said his father. “I’ve seen him at it with that cobra. You were too busy talking to your brother to notice. And your mother was too afraid to look. However, I couldn’t have survived her. She’s got plenty of strength and skill.” he said. “Far more than Nag or Nagaina.” said Rikki.

“So, it’s really true?” said his mother, still in disbelief. “Yep. Lucky I didn’t die.” he said. “You must be a natural.” said his father. “I’ve pretty much always had help, except against Karait, the dusty brown snakeling. Darzee and his wife helped a lot especially.” said Rikki.

Resting

“Can we keep the mongooses?” asked Teddy. “Of course. I just hope we have enough to feed them all.” said the big man. “Care to go mouse hunting?” said Rikki’s mother to Rikki. “I heard that you hunted mice as part of a trap on the cobras.” “Sure.” said Rikki-tikki.

As for right now, he was going to rest in Teddy’s bedroom, after first getting some food. He knew the garden war wasn’t over. In fact, it had only just begun. But for now, Rikki-tikki-tavi was happier than he had been in months. He would fight future battles. Battles greater by far than any he had ever fought before. Greater even than his father, grandfather, great-grandfather, and great-great grandfather had fought in fact! But right now he was content. Not bothered by anything, not even Nagasta.

Darzee's Second Chant

by Paul Adcock

(Sung about Nagasta, the Heartless Cunning One)

Worried and uneasy am I!

Great is the fear that I know!

I raise my lilt to the sky!

My family's terror doth grow!

Guard your fledglings again,

Mother, oh lay down your head!

Go hide in your den!

Oh what a feeling of dread!

About whom do I groan?

The evil snake with a heart of stone.

Nagasta is her name.

Of her wickedness I proclaim.

The king cobra who tried to take my life,

who wickedly tried to eat my wife!

She has done evils untold,

and her eyes are black and cold!

Evil has once more drawn near!

She seeks to destroy all that we hold dear!

The Heartless Cunning One, the cobra we most fear!

Nagasta the foe of the birds,

her vile deeds cannot be expressed in words!

Her hatred for mankind is strong,

and the list of her crimes is long.

Of snakes she's the worst that has been bred,

and we all wish she were dead.