



**RIKKI-TIKKI-TAVI**

A Play for Young Audiences

by Lane Riosley  
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## THE CHARACTERS

CHUCHUNDRA.....A musk-rat  
DARZEE\*.....A male tailor-bird  
DARZINA\*.....A female tailor-bird  
RIKKI TIKKI TAVI.....A mongoose  
MOTHER.....Teddy's mother  
FATHER.....Teddy's father  
TEDDY.....A little boy  
NAGG.....A queen cobra  
NAGGAINA.....A king cobra

\* Puppets

THE SINGLE SETTING is a child's room with adjacent garden in an English home in India.

Running time is 60 minutes.

SYNOPSIS: An English family living in India takes in a nearly drowned baby mongoose. They name it Rikki-Tikki-Tavi and it becomes a household resident. The mongoose is naturally courageous and can fight deadly cobras to the death using only its great speed and amazing agility.

Rikki-Tikki-Tavi grows to be friends with young Teddy and when a pair of cobras decide they want the garden all to themselves and become a threat to the family, only Rikki stands between his human family and the deadly snakes.

RIKKI-TIKKI-TAVI is adapted from THE JUNGLE BOOK story by Rudyard Kipling.

## RIKKI-TIKKI-TAVI

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THE SETTING is a house in the edge of a forest in India. Behind the house is a fragment of a ruined temple. There is a tree center with two carved stone chairs of coiled vines like the coils of snakes, one on each side of the tree. A piece of shattered temple wall stands center left, and in a niche of the broken masonry is a bird's nest. Downstage is a wall of a house with a child's room: A bed, a box of toys and a water jar.

CHUCHUNDRA enters, a musk-rat with a long coat and broad brim hat with a rat's face beneath. He is very frightened, and walks onstage with a matchstick the size of a walking stick.

### CHUCHUNDRA

A... attention! A... (He raps the matchstick sharply, but it scares him and he jumps back, dropping it, runs to the wall, flattens out like a cornered felon) Oh... (He tentatively eases back to the center of the room, a foot at a time, retrieves the matchstick) I did that, I made that noise. (Laughs nervously) I'm so sorry! I never go out into the center of the room, you see, but this is a very special day. I can just have your kind attention, please... (He raps the matchstick experimentally, it seems safe enough he laughs a nervous rat's laugh) My name is Chuchundra. I am a musk-rat. (He laughs nervously)

DARZEE

(A tailor-bird puppet emerges from the nest on the wall) Ta-talk! Ta-talk! Ta-talk-talk! Ta-talk! Talk, will you! Say something! Don't you have a speech prepared?

CHUCHUNDRA

OH! (Reaches into a pocket, pulls out a large sheet of paper)

DARZEE

Musk-rats! They make such poor public speakers!

CHUCHUNDRA

I have a speech! (He looks around at the crowd, then at his speech, then he begins to shake and tremble so violently the paper shakes like crackling fire)

DARZEE

Chuchundra!? Oh, give it to me I'll read it!

CHUCHUNDRA

I c-can read it! (He steadies his hands a little and reads) Ivat ikkit ikkir taht raw tearg eht... (He stares at the paper in confusion) Oh, well, that isn't at all right! (TEDDY, a boy, enters, looks at the paper, turns it right side up) Oh, thank you!

TEDDY

(Out) Musk-rats! (He exits)

CHUCHUNDRA

(Clears his throat) This is the story of the great war that Rikki-tikki-tavi fought single-handed,

through the big bungalow in Segowlee. Darzee, the tailor-bird, helped him...

DARZEE

Darzee! Darzeeee! Darzee the clever! Darzee the brave! D... (DARZINA pops up from the nest)

DARZINA

Darzee the WHAT?!

DARZEE

Nothing...

CHUCHUNDRA

And not to forget Darzee's wife, Darzina!

DARZINA

I should hope not!

CHUCHUNDRA

And Chuchundra the musk-rat... that's me! Who never comes out into the middle of the floor... quite right... but always creeps round by the wall, gave him advice. But Rikki-tikki did the real fighting.

MOTHER

(Enters) He was a mongoose. (CHUCHUNDRA takes one look at MOTHER and runs to the wall, screaming)

CHUCHUNDRA

AAAUUUGHHH! It's... the mother! (Cowers by the wall, then quickly skitters to exit)

MOTHER

A mongoose is rather like a little cat in his fur

and his tail, but quite like a weasel in his head and his habits. When Rikki-tikki was just a baby in the burrow with his mother, there was a high summer flood! (SOUND of thunder and rain, LIGHTS dim) The rain washed him right out of the burrow where he lived with his mother and his father and carried him kicking and clucking, down a roadside ditch, where he was found by...

TEDDY

Mother! Look! (Enters carrying BABY RIKKI puppet wrapped in a blanket) Here's a dead mongoose! Let's have a funeral!

MOTHER

No, Teddy, let's dry him. Perhaps he isn't really dead. (They dry BABY RIKKI with the towel and he revives, looks around, sneezes) Oh! (Laughs) You see?

TEDDY

He's alive! (RIKKI investigates TEDDY's pockets)

MOTHER

He's alive and very hungry.

TEDDY

Wait... I have a bit of chocolate. (He "feeds" RIKKI who eats and searches for more) What shall we do with him? Can we keep him?

MOTHER

He's a wild animal, Teddy, he must decide for himself if he will go or stay. (RIKKI snuggles under TEDDY's chin)

TEDDY

He's very friendly.

MOTHER

Be careful, if you frighten him, he might bite you.

TEDDY

Oh, I don't think so. You're a good little chap, aren't you? (RIKKI nods "yes")

FATHER

(Enters) All right! What's all this, then?

MOTHER

A baby mongoose, look.

FATHER

Soaking wet. Half drowned, I'd say. Now, don't frighten him. Let's see what he'll do. (BABY RIKKI looks around, and decides to fasten his nose to TEDDY's nose)

TEDDY

(Nasal) Uhbub... Daddy...

FATHER

Don't be afraid, Teddy! That's his way of making friends!

TEDDY

(BABY RIKKI noses under TEDDY's chin) Ow! He's tickling under my chin!

MOTHER

Good gracious! And that's a wild creature! I suppose he's so tame because we've been kind to

him.

FATHER

All mongooses are like that. 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. (He pulls a bag from his pocket and hands something to BABY RIKKI who takes it and nearly a finger) Heh, heh! Hungry!

TEDDY

Come on, Rikki! Let's go find you some real food!  
(Exits with BABY RIKKI)

MOTHER

Needless to say, Rikki-tikki was well fed.  
(RIKKI-TIKKI enters, walks over to stand between MOTHER and FATHER.)

FATHER

And after awhile he became just another member of the family. (RIKKI drapes an arm congenially around FATHER'S shoulders, looks around. FATHER gives him a stern look, RIKKI walks over to MOTHER, stands beside her)

MOTHER

I think I have something to do in the house.  
(Exits)

FATHER

Teddy! Come do something with this mongoose!

TEDDY

(Enters sans puppet) A mongoose is made of fur and



bright eyes, a pink nose, and all the rest is curiosity. The motto of the mongoose family is "run and find out". (RIKKI runs over to TEDDY and curls up at his feet)

RIKKI

There are more things to find out about in this house than all the family of -tchk!- mongoose could find out in all their lives.

TEDDY

Rikki spent his days roaming over the house. (RIKKI roams) He nearly drowned himself in the bathtubs.

RIKKI

(Drowning) Glug, glug!

TEDDY

He put his nose in the ink on a writing table.

RIKKI

(Nasal) I had a bloo dose for a week!

(FATHER enters with a cigar, RIKKI runs over to investigate)

TEDDY

And then he burnt his nose on the end of Father's cigar!

RIKKI

Ow! I don't know why he must smoke those smelly cigars! Ouch!

FATHER

Teddy! Come do something with this mongoose!  
(Exits)

TEDDY

But most of all, he is my companion! (Goes to his bed, climbs in) When I go to bed, Rikki-tikki climbs in, too! (RIKKI grabs his teddy bear and climbs in) But he is a restless companion for he must get up and attend to every noise all through the night.

RIKKI

What was that? (Jumps up, runs to the wall, peers around, runs back to the bed, climbs in, peers around)

MOTHER

(Enters with FATHER) Look! He may bite the child!

FATHER

He'll do no such thing! Teddy is safer with that little beast than if he had a bloodhound to watch him. If a snake came into the nursery now...

MOTHER

Snake? No! No, I won't hear of anything so awful!  
(She exits)

FATHER

Dear? Dear!? (He exits)

DARZEE

(Pops up) Oh, woe! Oh, woe, woe, woe!

RIKKI

(Jumps out of bed) What was that? (Runs over to the wall) What's the matter?

DARZINA

(Pops up) Oh, woe! Oh, woe, woe, woe!

DARZEE

We are very miserable! One of our babies fell out of the nest yesterday and Nagg ate him!

RIKKI

Hmmm! That is very sad. But who is Nagg?

DARZEE

Who-who-who is NAGG!? Nagg is... a snake! (COBRA MUSIC) SQUAWK! Here he comes! (DARZEE and his WIFE fly off in terror)

RIKKI

What...? Wait! Come back! (The birds exit and RIKKI ticks in annoyance) Rikk-tikk-tikki-tikki-tchk! Snake? What do I care? My mother once told me that my business in life is to fight and eat snakes! She taught me to jump and strike and dance the war dance of the tribe of mongoose! (He dances)

At the hole where he went in  
Red-Eye called to Cobra-skin!  
Hear what little Red-Eye saith:  
Cobra, come and dance with death!

(COBRA MUSIC)

NAGG

(Off) HISS! Who invites me? (Enters, a huge black cobra, he slithers along the ground, then stands, swaying, watching RIKKI) Who invites Nagg to dance with death?

RIKKI

I am Rikki-tikki-tavi!

NAGG

Ah, little mongoose! Look upon me and know fear! See my great hood and its mark? The great god Brahm put his mark upon all our people when the first cobra spread his hood to keep the sun off Brahm as he slept! Look and be afraid!

RIKKI

I... I am only a little afraid. Just... no! No! I am not afraid at all! It is impossible for a - tchk!- mongoose to be frightened for any length of time!

NAGG

HISS!

RIKKI

So you, with your wicked snake's eyes and your cold heart, YOU are the one who had better be afraid!

NAGG

HISS!

RIKKI

Now, then, do you think it is right for you to eat fledglings out of a nest?

NAGG

Let us talk. (SNAKE DOOM MUSIC, NAGG Slithers his way around RIKKI) You eat eggs. The humans give you eggs at break fast every morning. You eat eggs, so why should I not eat birds?

DARZEE

(Pops up in time to see NAGGAINA slither from around the tree) CAW! CAW! SQUAWK! (NAGGAINA strikes at RIKKI with her forked hands and RIKKI moves quickly aside)

RIKKI

Rikk-tikk-tikki-tikki-tchk! (He somersaults out of the way and jumps up, standing on tiptoe and swaying as the cobras sway.)

NAGGAINA

HISSS! I am injured!

NAGG

Wicked, wicked Darzee!

DARZEE

AWK! (Pops into his nest)

RIKKI

You would not be injured, Naggaina, if you had not tried to kill me!

NAGGAINA

I missed you, this time, little mongoose!

But long as Nagg and I are loose,

This house will have not one safe place!

I'll give no sign of what comes next!

(She slithers to exit behind the tree, NAGG follows)

RIKKI

Go! Go quickly! I will not follow you! (Pause)  
Even I cannot manage two snakes at once. I must think! (He sits on the wall. CHUCHUNDRA enters creeping along the wall) Chuchundra! There you are!

CHUCHUNDRA

Don't kill me! Rikki-tikki, don't kill me!

RIKKI

Do you think a snake killer kills musk-rats?

CHUCHUNDRA

Those who kill snakes get killed by snakes!

RIKKI

Not if they are of the family -tchk!- mongoose!

CHUCHUNDRA

Tell me, Rikki-tikki, when the mongoose fights the snake, and happens to get bitten, does he truly run off and eat some herb which cures him of the poison?

RIKKI

No! Tchk! Mongoose victory is a matter of quickness of eye and quickness of foot - snake's blow against -tchk!- mongoose jump! HA! (RIKKI mimes a fight with a snake - he wins, of course)

Rikk-tikk-tikki-tikki-tchk! And no eye can follow the motion of a snake's head when it strikes! (He uses his hand like a snake to strike at CHUCHUNDRA who cowers and whines)

CHUCHUNDRA

Oh! Rikki-tikki! Do not hurt me!

RIKKI

HA! Magic herb? Mongoose speed is much more wonderful than any magic herb! Did you see me, Chuchundra? Did you see me escape that blow from behind? Naggaina was not fast enough!

CHUCHUNDRA

I saw, Rikki-tikki! I saw! But how am I to be sure that Nagg won't mistake me for you some dark night?

RIKKI

There's not the least danger! But Nagg is in the garden, and I know you don't go there.

CHUCHUNDRA

My cousin Chua told me--

RIKKI

Chua?

CHUCHUNDRA

Chua the rat.

RIKKI

What did Chua the rat tell you?

CHUCHUNDRA

Hush! Nagg is everywhere! Rikki-tikki, you should have talked to Chua in the garden!

RIKKI

(Impatiently) Well, I didn't, so you must tell me! Quick, Chuchundra, or I'll bite you!

CHUCHUNDRA

Oh, no! (He sits and cries pitifully) I am a very poor man!

RIKKI

Don't cry Chuchundra!

CHUCHUNDRA

Oh, I never even had spirit enough to run out into the middle of the room!

RIKKI

Well, that's all right, I won't bite you. I just wanted to know what Chua the rat said, and...

CHUCHUNDRA

Hush!

RIKKI

(Irritated) Now what?

CHUCHUNDRA

Can't you hear, Rikki-tikki!? (Pause) I mustn't tell you anything! Can't you hear? (RIKKI listens, there is only silence, but his head turns sharply, he listens)



RIKKI

That scratching sound...

CHUCHUNDRA

Yes!

RIKKI

As faint as the noise of a wasp walking on a windowpane!

CHUCHUNDRA

Yes!! Yes!

RIKKI

The sound... the sound of a snake's skin on dry brickwork! That's Nagg or Naggaina! Crawling into the bathroom sluice! You're right, Chuchundra, I should have talked to Chua!

CHUCHUNDRA

Do not tell Nagg that I told, Rikki-tikki!

RIKKI

I will tell no one, Chuchundra! Now, I must go!  
(RIKKI darts offstage, CHUCHUNDRA wrings his paws)

CHUCHUNDRA

Oh! Oh, I hope I have done the right thing! I hope Nagg does not find out! Or... or Naggaina! That would be worse! Oh! Oh! (He skitters to exit)

(COBRA MUSIC)

NAGG

(Enters, sits on his tree throne. NAGGAINA enters,

joins him)

Cobra hiss and cobra strike!

NAGGAINA

Hooded brother, move silently!  
Hunt the grand and base alike!

NAGG

Hooded sister, hunt silently!  
Near to ground we coil our way!

NAGGAINA

Hooded kinsmen prowl carefully!  
Close to walls, in shadows by day!

NAGG

Hooded people live carefully!

NAGG and NAGGAINA

We, the nation of fang and venom!  
Hunting kind of the lowly kingdom!  
Hisss! Hisss! Hisss!

(RIKKI scampers around the wall, entering where the  
cobras cannot see him, but he can overhear them)

NAGG

Now is good hunting, Naggaina! Hisss!

NAGGAINA

When the house is emptied of people, HE will have  
to go away! Then the garden will be our own again!  
Go in quietly, Nagg, and remember that the big man  
is the first one to bite!

NAGG

The one they call "father"?

NAGGAINA

Yes! Bite him from below, he will not see you!  
Then come out and tell me, and we will hunt for  
Rikki-tikki together!

NAGG

Naggaina, are you sure there is anything to be  
gained by killing the people?

NAGGAINA

Everything! Hisss! When there were no people in  
the bungalow, did we have any mongoose in the  
garden?

NAGG

No!

NAGGAINA

So long as the bungalow is empty, we are king and  
queen of the garden! And remember that as soon as  
our eggs in the melon-bed hatch, as they may  
tomorrow, our children will need room and quiet!

NAGG

I had not thought of that! I will go, but there is  
no need that we should hunt for Rikki-tikki  
afterwards.

NAGGAINA

Why not? Is he not the enemy of all the kingdom of  
snakes?

NAGG

I will kill the big man and his wife, and the child if I can, and come away quickly. Then the bungalow will be empty and Rikki-tikki will go!

NAGGAINA

Hisss!

NAGG

I will not fight with a mongoose if I can help it! Even a young mongoose is a danger to us!

NAGGAINA

Are you afraid?

NAGG

No!

NAGGAINA

I believe you are! The king cobra is afraid of the little furry weasel! HISSSS-SSS-SSS! (Snake laughter)

NAGG

I am afraid of nothing with fur or paws or hands and feet!

NAGGAINA

(Mocking) But you will not fight with a mongoose if you can help it! HISSSS-SSS-SSS!

NAGG

I will kill all the people! It is enough! Then Rikki-tikki will go!

NAGGAINA

The little furry one nearly caught me, but he is young, and does not know yet how to fight! He only wounded me and made me angry!

NAGG

When he is left alone to hunt in the woods, with no house to sleep in, and no one to feed him, it will be enough!

NAGGAINA

When he is dead, it will be enough! HISS!

NAGG

HISS!

(SNAKE DOOM MUSIC, NAGG slithers down from the throne and exits behind the wall)

NAGGAINA

Remember! Do not fight the mongoose if you can help it! HISS-SSS! HISS-SSS-SSS! (She curls up comfortably)

RIKKI

(Out) How dare they threaten my family! Rikk-tikk-tikki-tikki-tchk! Come on, then Nagg! (RIKKI does his mongoose war dance)

(MONGOOSE WAR DANCE MUSIC)

At the hole where he went in  
Red-Eye called to Wrinkle-skin!  
Hear what little Red-Eye saith:  
'Nagg, come up and dance with death!'  
Eye to eye and head to head,  
Keep the measure, Nagg!

This shall end when one is dead!  
At thy pleasure, Nagg!  
Turn for turn and twist for twist!  
Run and hide thee, Nagg!  
Hah! The hooded Death has missed!  
Woe betide thee, Nagg!

(NAGG enters, RIKKI jumps back, NAGG does not see him, but slithers in)

NAGG

Ah, Hisss! It is good! It is dark! And they are all asleep!

RIKKI

(Out) Now, if I kill him here, Naggaina will know! And if I fight him on the open floor, the odds are in his favor! What am I to do!?

NAGG

Hisss! I will take a drink from the child's water jar! (He does)

RIKKI

(Out) Teddy will be coming to bed any time now! I must act quickly!

NAGG

That was good! I shall wait here until the child comes to bed! Come to bed, little one! Nagg is waiting! Naggaina, do you hear me?

NAGGAINA

I hear you! Hisss!

NAGG

Nagg is waiting!

MOTHER

(Enters with TEDDY) Teddy, you must go to bed now!

TEDDY

But I am not sleepy!

MOTHER

You are, you just don't know it.

TEDDY

How can I be sleepy if I don't know it?

MOTHER

Here, where is that mongoose?

RIKKI

Rikk-tikk-tikki-tikki-tchk!

MOTHER

Look, there is Rikki, he looks sleepy.

TEDDY

No, he doesn't. He looks angry.

MOTHER

He's sleepy, I'm sure of it. (She tucks him into bed) Now, you sleep tight.

TEDDY

Can I have a drink of water?

MOTHER

You had a drink and you've had a story. Now go to sleep.

TEDDY

Oh, all right. Goodnight.

MOTHER

Goodnight, dear. Rikki?

RIKKI

Rikki-tick-tick-tick?

MOTHER

Goodnight to you, too! (She exits past NAGG who reaches for her and barely misses. MOTHER exits)

TEDDY

Good night, Rikki.

RIKKI

Rikk-tikk-tikki-tikki-tchk!

TEDDY

(Drowsy) I guess that must be your sleepy sound...  
(yawn) but it sure sounds like your angry sound.  
(He sleeps)

RIKKI

(Out) Oh, how I wish I could talk to my people family! Sometimes I think they almost know what I am trying to say, then, for no reason, they take the entirely wrong meaning!

NAGG

HISSS! (He moves out from cover and RIKKI circles him, staying behind him)

RIKKI

(Out) If I don't break his back at the first jump,



he can still fight, and if he fights.... oh,  
Rikki! Maybe below the hood... not too near the  
tail, or he can turn on me!

NAGG

HISSS!

(COBRA DOOM MUSIC)

RIKKI

It must be the head! The head above the hood! And  
when I am once there, I must not let go! Nagg!  
Turn and fight!

(FIGHT MUSIC)

NAGG

HISSS! Rikki-tikki! How foolish! I would have  
let you go after I killed the humans in this house!

RIKKI

You should have known I could not let you do that,  
Nagg!

(RIKKI and NAGG fight, RIKKI trying to grab his  
head, NAGG trying to strike)

TEDDY

(Wakes) Rikki...? (He sees the fight) RIKKI!  
Look out!

NAGG

Follow me, Rikki! Follow me out into the garden!

HISSS!

(NAGG exits)

RIKKI

I cannot let you go, Nagg! You will only come back

again and again! I will follow you! (He exits)

NAGGAINA

HISSS! What is happening? I cannot see!

TEDDY

Mother! Father! Rikki is fighting the king cobra!

(He runs to the wall, watching) Rikki! No!

Rikki!

(MOTHER and FATHER enter, go to TEDDY)

FATHER

What is happening?

MOTHER

Look! A cobra!

FATHER

It's the mongoose, Alice! The little chap has saved our lives!

TEDDY

Rikki!?

FATHER

I'd better go make sure that snake is dead!

(Exits)

MOTHER

Teddy, are you all right?

TEDDY

Yes! Rikki fought the snake! Did you see? Rikki?

RIKKI!

RIKKI

(Enters around the wall, shaking an arm, a leg) I don't think anything is broken. It certainly feels like it, though.

TEDDY

Rikki! (Runs to RIKKI, hugs him)

RIKKI

It was nothing!

FATHER

(Enters) I made sure the thing is dead.

RIKKI

What? I have settled it all!

MOTHER

What a brave little think you are, Rikki!

RIKKI

Quite right!

FATHER

I have thrown the dead snake on the rubbish heap.  
(SNAKE DOOM MUSIC)

NAGGAINA

HISSS!

FATHER

Come on, let's go celebrate this great battle with cookies and hot chocolate!

TEDDY

Yay! (They exit, leaving RIKKI. TEDDY re-enters)

Rikki? You coming?

RIKKI

Rikki-tick-tick-tick!

TEDDY

Oh. Okay! (Exits)

RIKKI

(Out) Now I have Naggaina to settle with, and she will be worse than five Naggs! (He strolls to exit)

NAGGAINA

True! That is so, so true! HISS! (She slithers to exit)

(Morning, LIGHTS up. DARZEE pops out from his nest)

DARZEE

(Sings)

Here we sit in a branchy row,  
Thinking of beautiful things we know;  
Dreaming of deeds that we mean to do,  
All complete in a minute or two-  
Something noble and grand and good,  
Won by merely wishing we could!

All the talk we have ever heard  
Uttered by bat or beast or bird -  
Hide or find or scale or feather-  
Jabber it quickly and all together!  
Excellent! Wonderful! Once again!  
Now we are talking just like men!

DARZINA

(Pops up) Will you be quiet!? I was still sleeping!

DARZEE

It is my duty to sing the song of morning!

DARZINA

Couldn't you sing the song of morning a little later?

RIKKI

(Enters) Good morning!

DARZEE

Good morning, Rikki-tikki!

DARZINA

Good morning, Rikki-tikki!

RIKKI

Did you hear about my fight with Nagg last night?

DARZEE

Oh, yes! Chuchundra told me all about it this morning!

DARZINA

Well, I didn't hear!

DARZEE

That's because you sleep so late!

DARZINA

What happened, Rikki-tikki?

RIKKI

Oh, nothing! You just won't have to worry about Nagg coming around any more!

DARZINA

Oh, wonderful!

RIKKI

I got a hold on him, and though he battered and shook me like a dog shakes a rat, I did not let go! I was thrown round in great circles, but I held on tight! Just when I was sure I would be banged to pieces...

DARZINA

Yes?

RIKKI

I won!

DARZINA

You are sure Nagg is dead?

RIKKI

The Father made sure of it.

DARZEE

(Sings)

Let us sing of the great, the valiant Rikki-tikki!

Nagg is dead -is dead -is dead!

Rikki-tikki caught him by the head!

Naggaina came to the wall and called for Nagg...

RIKKI

Oh, you stupid tuft of feathers! Stop singing a minute, Darzee!

DARZEE

Squawk!?

DARZINA

You tell him, Rikki-tikki!

DARZEE

For the great, the beautiful Rikki-tikki's sake I will stop! What is it, O killer of cobras?

RIKKI

Is this any time to sing?

DARZEE

I was singing your song of victory, Rikki-tikki-tavi! Great is Rikki-tikki with the white teeth!

RIKKI

Bother my white teeth! Have you forgotten Naggaina? She is still here!

DARZINA

Oh, no! (Pops inside)

RIKKI

Darzee! Where is Naggaina!?

DARZEE

Uh... y-y-y-yes! But, won't she...

RIKKI

For the third time! Where is Naggaina!

DARZEE

She... she.... she is by the rubbish heap,  
mourning Nagg! Gr-great is Rikki-tikki with the  
wh-white teeth! Maybe she will just go away...  
now?

RIKKI

I don't think so. I think she will be very, very  
angry now.

DARZEE

Peep!

RIKKI

Have you ever heard where she keeps her eggs?

DARZEE

EGGS? Oh, no! Little baby cobras... peep! Peep!  
Peep!

RIKKI

Darzee!

DARZEE

Oh... she keeps her eggs in the melon bed, next to  
the wall. She hid them there weeks ago.

RIKKI

What!? And you never thought it worthwhile to tell  
me?! Rikk-tikk-tikki-tikki-tchk!

DARZEE

Uh... nice talking to you, Rikki-tikki! Uh...  
really... I have to clean the nest right now!  
(Pops into his nest)



RIKKI

(Out) I really can't blame Darzee. He's safe enough in his nest, but it's dangerous for me down here! I can't hide and I can't wait! (He turns and hears...)

(COBRA MUSIC)

NAGGAINA

(Off) HISS! Rikki-tikki-tavi!

RIKKI

I am here, Naggaina!

NAGGAINA

(Off) HISS! I will settle my account with you presently! HISS!

RIKKI

(Runs to the tree, looks around, sees nothing) She is gone!

MOTHER

(Enters with TEDDY) Now, Teddy, you stay here and study your alphabet. Your father is going to be working in the garden and I will be in the kitchen. When you have studied for a half-hour and copied all the letters from the book, you may go out and play.

TEDDY

May I take Rikki-tikki with me?

MOTHER

Yes, you may take Rikki-tikki anywhere you like.

He is very good and very brave.

RIKKI

Quite right!

MOTHER

Try not to get too dirty, the both of you. (Exits)

TEDDY

Rikki-tikki? (Gets a book from his box and a pad of paper) Come on, I'll teach you the alphabet, too! (He draws)

RIKKI

(Out) I just realized, this is terrible! Father in the garden, Mother in the kitchen and Teddy in here! How can I watch them all at once?

TEDDY

Rikki, look, here is "a"...

RIKKI

(Out) How can I tell them Naggaina is hunting for us all!? I must get to her eggs! If they hatch, there will be dozens, maybe... maybe hundreds of little baby cobras all over the house!

TEDDY

And "b" and "c" and "d"... I think...

RIKKI

(Out) hundreds and hundreds of baby cobras... and Naggaina will teach them all to come hunting for us!

TEDDY

Rikki, I can't make this letter properly! See?

RIKKI

It looks fine to me.

TEDDY

I'd better go ask Mother to show me how!

RIKKI

No! Wait! Let me run ahead of you and... (TEDDY picks up his books and exits) Wait! Wait! Look out where you are stepping! (Exits)

CHUCHUNDRA

(Enters hugging the wall) Rikki? Rikki-tikki?  
Where are you?

DARZEE

(Pops out) Wh-who's there?

CHUCHUNDRA

Darzee?

DARZEE

Chuchundra?

CHUCHUNDRA

Where is Rikki-tikki?

DARZEE

He was here, but he must have gone to look for Naggaina!

CHUCHUNDRA

I came to tell him I saw her!

DARZEE

Where?!

CHUCHUNDRA

On the path near the garden!

DARZEE

I hear him say the Father is out there!

Chuchundra! You must run and tell Rikki at once!

CHUCHUNDRA

M-m-me?

DARZEE

Yes!

CHUCHUNDRA

Why don't you go?

DARZEE

ME? I cannot leave my nest!

CHUCHUNDRA

Why not?

DARZEE

Well... I...

CHUCHUNDRA

I can only crawl on the ground and you can fly!  
Naggaina could easily find me! She would never  
catch you!

DARZEE

Well, I mean, I have a responsibility here! I have

a responsibility to my nest!

CHUCHUNDRA

Darzee, if Naggaina finds a way into your nest,  
your responsibility won't matter a bit!

DARZEE

Into... into my nest?! Squawk!

CHUCHUNDRA

Now, go and...

NAGGAINA

(Off) HISS!

(SNAKE DOOM MUSIC)

DARZEE

What was that?

CHUCHUNDRA

N-n-n-n-n...

DARZEE

Naggaina? (CHUCHUNDRA merely nods, too terrified to  
speak) SQUAWK! (Pops into this nest)

NAGGAINA

(Enters) Hello, little musk-rat!

CHUCHUNDRA

Oh, Naggaina! Don't kill me!

NAGGAINA

I don't want you! Silly little ratling!

CHUCHUNDRA

Ch-ch-ch-ch-ch-ch-Chuchundra d-d-d-doesn't mean anyone any harm!

NAGGAINA

OH? You don't mean ME any harm, is that it?  
HISS!

CHUCHUNDRA

I dd-d-d-don't mean you any harm! Not any harm at all!

NAGGAINA

Then you won't be running to Rikki-tikki to tell him where I am or to warn him I am coming?

CHUCHUNDRA

N-n-n-n-no...

NAGGAINA

How can I be sure?

CHUCHUNDRA

I could go far, far away...

NAGGAINA

You would do that? For me?

CHUCHUNDRA

Y-y-y-y-yes?

NAGGAINA

I know another way to make sure you don't tell Rikki-tikki anything!

CHUCHUNDRA

Oh...?

NAGGAINA

Can you guess what that other way might be?

CHUCHUNDRA

W-w-w-well...

NAGGAINA

(Leaps up on the bed, stands over him swaying and hissing) HISS! HISS! Chuchundra? (Tries to skitter away, but she catches him in her gaze and he cannot move)

DARZINA

(Pops out) What is going on out here... squawk!

NAGGAINA

Stay out of this, tailor-bird!

DARZINA

Chuchundra! SQUAWK! Move, Chuchundra, move!  
SQUAWK!

CHUCHUNDRA

Wha.... (He staggers back and covers his eyes)

DARZINA

Run, Chuchundra, run while you can!

CHUCHUNDRA

(Keeping his eyes covered) Naggaina! I will go far, far away! I promise!

NAGGAINA

What you do, or don't do won't matter, little musk-rat! When I have finished with this house, there will only be dust and shadows and darkness! A fitting home for me and my children, when they hatch!

CHUCHUNDRA

Ch-ch-children?

DARZINA

Naggaina has a nest of eggs, Chuchundra! They will hatch soon!

CHUCHUNDRA

OH... no!

NAGGAINA

Run, then, Chuchundra! I will save my energy for Rikki-tikki! I will move much faster if I am not full! HISS!

CHUCHUNDRA

Th-thank you, Naggaina! Thank you! (He skitters to exit)

DARZINA

Chuchundra! Run and tell Rikki-tikki!

NAGGAINA

He is so afraid he will run and tell no one, little bird!

DARZINA

Oh, if I could only leave my eggs, I would fly away and tell him! Darzee! Darzee can go and warn



Rikki-tikki!

DARZEE

(Pops out) What? (Sees NAGGAINA) EEEEE! (Pops back in)

DARZINA

Darzee! DARZEE!

NAGGAINA

Well, this must be my lucky day! Chuchundra so frightened he runs far, far away and the tailor-birds will not leave their nest to fly to Rikki-tikki! HISS! How wonderful!

DARZINA

I will warn Rikki-tikki if I can! Oh, Darzee!  
(Pops back into her nest)

NAGGAINA

(Goes to her throne) I will watch the house and wait until night! Then I will crawl in through the hole in the brickwork, and I will do what Nagg could not do! HISS! Under cover of night!

(LIGHTS down, it is night)

RIKKI

(Enters, looks around, searches under the bed, turns and signals off) Okay! The room is clear, I checked it!

TEDDY

(Enters) Rikki, I don't know why you are acting so strangely! After all, you killed the cobra last night! You act as if you expect to find a cobra

under every piece of furniture and along every wall!

RIKKI

(Out) That's exactly right!

TEDDY

Well, it's late... (Yawns) And for once I am sleepy! I was up half the night last night. You need some sleep, too, don't you?

RIKKI

(Yawns, stifles it) I do, but I can't afford to sleep! (Out) Naggaina will be back tonight! And where is Chuchundra? I have not seen him all day! Oh, no!

TEDDY

Mother!? I'm ready to be tucked in, now!

RIKKI

I hope Naggaina did not get Chuchundra!

MOTHER

(Enters) Are you, now? For once you are sleepy!

TEDDY

I am very sleepy, and so is Rikki. See?

RIKKI

(Yawns) I am not at all sleepy and quit saying so!  
(Yawns)

MOTHER

Well, you will both sleep tonight! Here, now.  
(Tucks him in) Sweet dreams. You too, Rikki.

(She exits)

TEDDY

'Night, Rikki! (Goes to sleep)

RIKKI

I'm not sleepy. I'm not at all sleepy. I'll just rest one eye, though, for a moment... (starts to drift to sleep, snaps upright) I'm awake! I'm awake! See? Oh, this is terrible! (He stands, circles the room, searching) I will stand here, awake, all night long! (He stands, resolute)

NAGGAINA

Stand there, all night, little mongoose! Grow sleepy and tired! I will still be here in the morning! HISS! And tomorrow morning you will be so tired, you will take a nap, thinking I will not strike in the daylight! Oh, yes! And how wrong will you be! How very sad and wrong you will be! HISS! HISS! HISS!

(LIGHTS UP as RIKKI dozes off standing up.)

DARZEE

(Pops out, sings)

Here we sit in a branchy row,  
Thinking of beautiful things we know;  
Dreaming of deeds that we mean to do,  
All complete in a minute or two-

(RIKKI shakes himself awake and runs to DARZEE)

RIKKI

Darzee! You foolish bird!

DARZEE

Good morning, Rikki-tikki! What happened last night? Have you done away with Naggaina already?

RIKKI

No! (DARZEE pops back in) Darzee! Darzee, come out or I will come jump in and pull you out!  
(DARZEE's head pops out) All right, then! Nothing happened last night! I was up all night and Naggaina never came into the bungalow!

DARZEE

Wh-where is she?

RIKKI

I have a plan, Darzee, and I need your help!

DARZEE

M-me? Oh, no! Rikki-tikki! You are the brave one, not me! NO, I couldn't! I just couldn't!

DARZINA

(Pops out) What is going on here?

RIKKI

Your foolish husband will not even listen to my plan to catch Naggaina!

DARZINA

Oh? What plan is that, Rikki-tikki?

RIKKI

Well, if you have a grain of sense, Darzee, you will fly off to the stables and pretend that your wing is broken!

DARZEE

What good will that do?

RIKKI

You will let Naggaina chase you away to this bush!  
(Points to the bush at the end of the wall.)

DARZEE

Oh, that is a terrible idea!

RIKKI

While you have Naggaina here, I will go to the  
melon-bed and break open all her eggs!

DARZINA

Eggs! Oh, if those eggs hatch, there will be  
dozens, maybe hundreds of baby cobras! Oh, Darzee,  
none of us would ever be safe again!

RIKKI

I am glad your wife, at least, is a sensible bird,  
Darzee!

DARZEE

Well, if Snakes are born of eggs, and birds are  
born of eggs, I don't see that it's quite right to  
kill them!

DARZINA

If Nagg and Naggaina had ever left us alone, it  
would not have come to this! But Naggaina has said  
she will never rest until we were all gone, and she  
has the garden to herself!

RIKKI

That is true, Darzee, we did not go looking for this fight, but it is ours, now.

DARZEE

Well, that is all find, but I cannot possibly leave my nest with all these eggs and they won't hatch for such along time and...

DARZINA

Darzee! Oh, Darzee! You just stay with the eggs! I will help Rikki-tikki with his plan!

DARZEE

OH. Oh, all right, dear! I will sing! I will sing the song of the great, the valiant Rikki-tikki!

RIKKI

You do that, Darzee!

DARZEE

Ah, how does that song go again... where is my music... (He pops back into the nest)

DARZINA

Here I go, Rikki-tikki! I hope you know what you are doing!

RIKKI

I will not let you down, Darzina!

DARZINA

(Moves along the wall, begins fluttering one loose wing) Oh! Oh, my wing is broken! The boy in the house threw a stone at me and broke it! Oh! Oh!!

(To RIKKI) Is she looking?

RIKKI

(Moves to where he can peer around the wall at NAGGAINA on her throne, she is watching) She is looking! Keep it up!

DARZINA

(To RIKKI) Go now and hurry! (Out) Oh! Now I cannot fly! I cannot fly at all! Oh! Oh! (RIKKI exits)

NAGGAINA

What is this, Darzina? A broken wing? How sad, how very unlucky!

DARZINA

The boy threw a stone at me and broke my wing!

NAGGAINA

You warned Rikki-tikki when I would have killed him!

DARZINA

Oh, I know! I know!

NAGGAINA

Indeed and truly, you have chosen a bad place to be lame in!

DARZINA

The boy broke my wing! He broke my wing with a stone!

NAGGAINA

Well, it may be some consolation to you when you're

dead to know that I shall settle accounts with the boy! My husband lies on the rubbish heap this morning, but before night, they boy in the house will lie very still!

DARZINA

Oh! (Hops back and forth, NAGGAINA moves closer)  
OH! OH! OH!

NAGGAINA

What is the use of running away? I am sure to catch you! Little fool, look at me!

DARZINA

Oh! OH! OH! (She does not look at NAGGAINA)

TEDDY

(Wakes up) What's going on? What's all the noise!?

MOTHER

(Enters) Teddy? What is wrong with that little bird in the garden?

NAGGAINA

(Hides) HISS!

TEDDY

I think the bird's wing is broken. Mother!

MOTHER

Oh, poor thing!

FATHER

(Enters) What's all the fuss?



MOTHER

There is a little bird in the garden with a broken wing!

DARZINA

Oh, no! RIKKI! RIKKI-TIKKI-TAVI! Hurry back, Rikki-tikki!

MOTHER

Listen to it! Poor little thing!

DARZINA

Hurry back! This is not going at all as planned!

MOTHER

You know, I think that is the mother bird who has a nest out back.

TEDDY

Could we mend her wing and put her back in the nest?

FATHER

We could try!

DARZINA

Rikki-tikki! OH! OH! (NAGGAINA clears the wall and rises up in front of the family)

MOTHER

(Still, terrified) Teddy, don't move.

TEDDY

Mother...

MOTHER

I know you're frightened son, but don't move!

NAGGAINA

(Focusing on TEDDY) Son of the big man who killed Nagg, stay still! I am not ready, yet! HISSS! HISSS!

FATHER

Stand still, Teddy. You mustn't move. Teddy, keep still.

NAGGAINA

Wait, wait, wait a little! Keep very still, all you three! If you move, I strike! And if you do not move, I strike! (Snake laugh) Oh, foolish people who killed my Nagg!

DARZINA

RIKKI-TIKKI! HELP, RIKKI-TIKKI-TAVI!

RIKKI

(Enters, holding something behind his back) Turn 'round, Naggaina! Turn and fight!

NAGGAINA

All in good time! HISSS!

(MONGOOSE WAR DANCE MUSIC)

RIKKI

(Trying to incite her to turn, he chants, dancing)

At the hole where he went in  
Red-Eye called to Cobra-skin!  
Hear what little Red-Eye saith:

`Naggaina! Come and dance with death!'

NAGGAINA

It will not work, Rikki-tikki! No, I will settle my account with you presently. Now, look at your friends! They are still and white! They are afraid. They dare not move and if you come a step nearer, I strike!

RIKKI

Go and look at your eggs, Naggaina!

NAGGAINA

Ahhh?

RIKKI

In the melon bed, near the wall. Go and look, Naggaina!

NAGGAINA

What have you done to my eggs, Rikki-tikki!? (She turns as if to strike him, he produces a large, white egg from behind his back. FATHER pulls TEDDY out of the way) AHHH! HISS! Give that to me!

RIKKI

What price for a snake's egg? For a young king cobra? For the last, the very last of the brood? The ants are eating all the others down my the melon-bed!

NAGGAINA

Give me that egg, Rikki-tikki! I may let you go, if you do!

RIKKI

I have tricked you, Naggaina! Tricked! Rikk-tck-tck! You see? the boy is safe, and it was I- I- I that caught Nagg by the hood and killed him, not the man!

NAGGAINA

You!? HISS!

RIKKI

(Circles NAGGAINA) He threw me to and fro, but he could not shake me off!

NAGGAINA

HISS!

RIKKI

He was dead before the big man ever reached him! I did it! Rikki-tikki-tck-tck-tck! Come, then, Naggaina! Come and fight with me! You shall not be a widow long!

NAGGAINA

Give me the egg, Rikki-tikki! Give me the last of my eggs and I will go away and never come back!

(FIGHT MUSIC)

RIKKI

I cannot trust you, Naggaina! And so, there is no place for you or your egg, but to lie on the rubbish heap beside Nagg! Fight! Fight me now!  
(NAGGAINA strikes at him, RIKKI dodges and ducks, bobs and weaves, staying out of reach of her forked hands.)

TEDDY

Rikki-tikki, be careful!

MOTHER

Stay back, Teddy!

NAGGAINA

HISSS! Enough! I go now! (She grabs the egg and dodges past RIKKI, slithering back against the wall, eyes on RIKKI, she does not see DARZINA)

DARZINA

(Fluttering and shrieking wildly, she startles NAGGAINA) RIKKI-TIKKI, STOP HER! STOP HER BEFORE SHE GETS AWAY!

NAGGAINA

HISSS! Do not follow me into my burrow, Rikki-tikki! It will mean certain death! (She slithers behind the tree and vanishes)

RIKKI

I will follow you, Naggaina, wherever you may hide!  
(He follows her to exit)

DARZINA

Oh, Rikki-tikki! She will kill you! Poor Rikki-tikki!

TEDDY

Rikki! (Starts after RIKKI, his FATHER catches him)

FATHER

Teddy, no!

TEDDY

RIKKI! She will kill him, Father, let me go!

FATHER

Come along, son! There is nothing we can do!  
(Pulls TEDDY to exit)

TEDDY

Rikki! Rikki-tikki! (Exits with FATHER)

MOTHER

Poor Rikki-tikki! (She exits)

DARZEE

(Pops out) Valiant Rikki-tikki is surely dead!  
Naggaina will surely kill him underground! I will  
sing a song for him!

DARZINA

You foolish bird! Do not think Rikki-tikki will be  
killed that easily! Wait and see!

DARZEE

But, I must sing the song of the brave, the  
valiant, the dead Rikki-tikki!

RIKKI

(Enters, dragging his feet) Do not sing my death-  
song, yet, Darzee!

DARZINA

Rikki-tikki-tavi!

RIKKI

(Brushes himself off, sneezes) What a dusty home  
she had!

DARZEE

Had?

RIKKI

Naggaina will never again come out of her burrow!

DARZEE

I must tell all the rest of the birds in the garden the good news! We are all safe again, thanks to Rikki-tikki-tavi! (Exits)

DARZINA

And tell the frogs! They will want to know, too!

CHUCHUNDRA

(Enters) D-did I hear that Naggaina is dead?

RIKKI

Chuchundra! Where have you been!?

CHUCHUNDRA

Oh, Rikki-tikki! I am such a worthless little musk-rat! Naggaina said she would kill me if I helped you! So I ran and hid! I did not help you at all!

RIKKI

You need never worry about her again, Chuchundra!

CHUCHUNDRA

Oh, but you must think I am a terrible, worthless little creature, Rikki! I should have stayed and helped you!

DARZINA

I stayed! I helped!

RIKKI

You helped, Chuchundra, in your own way, as much as you could.

CHUCHUNDRA

Do you really think so?

RIKKI

You are a musk-rat, Chuchundra, not a -tchk!- mongoose! It is not up to you to fight the cobras!

CHUCHUNDRA

I will go and tell Chua, my cousin, that the cobras are gone! He will be so happy! Chua and all his family! And I will tell the mice, too! We are all safe again! (Looks offstage) Uh-oh!

MOTHER

(Enters with TEDDY) Son, you know Rikki followed the cobra into its burrow and once he is trapped there...

TEDDY

Rikki will win! Rikki always wins!

CHUCHUNDRA

Excuse me again, Rikki-tikki! Humans... even your humans, frighten me! (Exits)

MOTHER

Teddy, you must realize, Rikki-tikki cannot possibly be...



RIKKI

Tchk!

MOTHER

(Turns, sees RIKKI) Alive?

TEDDY

RIKKI! (Runs to RIKKI, hugs him)

RIKKI

OW- ow-ow-ow-ow-ow!

TEDDY

Are you hurt?

RIKKI

Well, of course I'm hurt, I just killed a giant cobra! I'm hurt all over. OW!

MOTHER

Oh, Rikki! Thank you! Thank you for saving us all! (Hugs him)

RIKKI

Ow-ow-ow-ow-ow-ow-ow!

TEDDY

See? I told you! Rikki always wins!

DARZINA

Well, he did have some help!

RIKKI

Quite right!

DARZINA

Ding-dong-tock!

Nagg is gone!

DARZEE

(Enters)

Ding-dong-tock!

Naggaina, too!

DARZEE & DARZINA

DING-DONG-TOCK! DING-DONG-TOCK!

FATHER

(Enters) What's going on, here? That bird is making such a racket again... Rikki!

RIKKI

Please don't hug me!

TEDDY

Isn't he wonderful, Father?

MOTHER

He saved our lives and Teddy's life.

RIKKI

But of course! That's my job, isn't it? All the cobras are dead; and if they weren't, I'm here. I will always keep the house and garden as a -tchk!-mongoose should! With tooth and jump and spring and bite, till never a cobra dares show its head inside the walls! Rikk-tikk-tikki-tikki-tchk!

TEDDY

Three cheers for Rikki-tikki! Hip-hip!

ALL: Hooray!

TEDDY

Hip-hip!

ALL: Hooray!

TEDDY

Hip- hip!

ALL

HOORAY!

RIKKI

Quite right!

(Blackout)

CURTAIN