

# Rikki-Tikki-Tavi's Battle

by Rudyard Kipling *from Rikki-Tikki-Tavi*

*Rikki-tikki-tavi is a brave young mongoose. He lives in an English household in India, where he protects the family from a dangerous pair of cobras, Nag and Nagaina. Rikki has already helped kill another snake, Karait, who almost killed the English boy, Teddy. Now he has learned of the cobras' plot to kill the human family and prepares to battle the evil Nag.*

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Angry as he was, Rikki-tikki was very frightened as he saw the size of the big cobra. Nag coiled himself up, raised his head, and looked into the bathroom in the dark, and Rikki could see his eyes glitter.

"Now, if I kill him here, Nagaina will know; and if I fight him on the open floor, the odds are in his favor. What am I to do?" said Rikki-tikki-tavi.

Nag waved to and fro, and then Rikki-tikki heard him drinking from the biggest water-jar that was used to fill the bath. "That is good," said the snake. "Now, when Karait was killed, the big man had a stick. He may have that stick still, but when he comes in to bathe in the morning he will not have a stick. I shall wait here till he comes. Nagaina—do you hear me?—I shall wait here in the cool till daytime."

There was no answer from outside, so Rikki-tikki knew Nagaina had gone away. Nag coiled himself down, coil by coil, round the bulge at the bottom of the water jar, and Rikki-tikki stayed still as death. After an hour he began to move, muscle by muscle, toward the jar. Nag was asleep, and Rikki-tikki looked at his big back, wondering which would be the best place for a good hold. "If I don't break his back at the first jump," said Rikki, "he can still fight. And if he fights—O Rikki!" He looked at the thickness of the neck below the hood, but that was too much for him; and a bite near the tail would only make Nag savage.

"It must be the head!" he said at last; "the head above the hood. And, when I am once there, I must not let go."

Then he jumped. The head was lying a little clear of the water jar, under the curve of it; and, as his teeth met, Rikki braced his back against the bulge of the red earthenware to hold down the head. This gave him just one second's purchase, and he made the most of it. Then he was battered to and fro as a rat is shaken by a dog—to and fro on the floor, up and down, and around in great circles, but his eyes were red and he held on as the body cart-whipped over the floor, upsetting the tin dipper and the soap dish and the flesh brush, and banged against the tin side of the bath. As he held he closed his jaws tighter and tighter, for he made sure he would be banged to death, and, for the honor of his family, he preferred to be found with his teeth locked. He was dizzy, aching, and felt shaken to pieces when something went off like a thunderclap just behind him. A hot wind knocked him senseless and red fire singed his fur. The big man had been wakened by the noise, and had fired both barrels of a shotgun into Nag just behind the hood.

Rikki-tikki held on with his eyes shut, for now he was quite sure he was dead. But the head did not move, and the big man picked him up and said, "It's the mongoose again, Alice. The little chap has saved our lives now."

## Questions

Use the context of the sentence or phrase to discover the meaning of the underlined word or words. Circle the letter of the correct meaning.

1. "A hot wind knocked him senseless..."
  - A. far away
  - B. against a wall
  - C. in great pain
  - D. unconscious, unfeeling
  
2. "...he was battered to and fro as a rat is shaken by a dog..."
  - A. violently
  - B. carefully
  - C. back and forth
  - D. playfully
  
3. "...he held on as the body cart-whipped over the floor."
  - A. slithered
  - B. cracked like a whip
  - C. crawled
  - D. banged slowly
  
4. "...something went off like a thunderclap just behind him."
  - A. a sudden, loud crash
  - B. bright light
  - C. soft whisper
  - D. dull thud

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**Vocabulary List**

Each of the vocabulary words below are used in the reading passage. As you read the passage, pay attention to context clues that suggest the word's meaning.

1. coiled
2. glitter
3. bulge
4. savage
5. purchase
6. battered
7. preferred
8. senseless

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**Context Clues**

Using context clues from the sentences in the passage, underline the correct meaning of the word in boldface.

1) "Nag **coiled** himself up, raised his head, and looked into the bathroom"

- a. stretched    b. wind, curl, or loop    c. slithered up    d. moved forward

2) "Rikki could see his eyes **glitter**"

- a. blink or wink    b. look around    c. move sideways    d. shine, glimmer

3) "Nag coiled himself down, coil by coil, round the **bulge** at the bottom of the water jar"

- a. a rounded part that sticks out, a bump    b. saucer    c. decoration    d. handle or knob

4) "He looked at the thickness of the neck below the hood, but that was too much for him; and a bite near the tail would only make Nag **savage**."

- a. escape, get loose    b. break apart    c. violent, wildly angry    d. uncomfortable

5) "This gave him just one second's **purchase**"

- a. grip or hold    b. run after, chase    c. goods to be bought    d. decision

6) "Then he was **battered** to and fro as a rat is shaken by a dog"

- a. wet, covered in liquid    b. followed    c. beaten, damaged    d. covered up

7) "for the honor of his family, he **preferred** to be found with his teeth locked"

- a. refused    b. wanted, would choose    c. admitted    d. tried, attempted

8) "A hot wind knocked him **senseless**"

- a. onto the ground    b. very hard, strongly    c. painfully    d. unconscious, without senses