

“Those who kill snakes get killed by snakes,” said Chuchundra, more sorrowfully than ever. “And how am I to be sure that Nag won’t mistake
200 me for you some dark night?”

“There’s not the least danger,” said Rikki-tikki; “but Nag is in the garden, and I know you don’t go there.”

“My cousin Chua,⁸ the rat, told me—” said Chuchundra, and then he stopped.

“Told you what?”

“H’sh! Nag is everywhere, Rikki-tikki. You should have talked to Chua in the garden.”

“I didn’t—so you must tell me. Quick, Chuchundra, or I’ll bite you!”

Chuchundra sat down and cried till the tears rolled off his whiskers.

210 “I am a very poor man,” he sobbed. “I never had spirit enough to run out into the middle of the room. H’sh! I mustn’t tell you anything. Can’t you *hear*, Rikki-tikki?”

Rikki-tikki listened. The house was as still as still, but he thought he could just catch the faintest *scratch-scratch* in the world—a noise as faint as that of a wasp walking on a windowpane—the dry scratch of a snake’s scales on brickwork. **H**

“That’s Nag or Nagaina,” he said to himself, “and he is crawling into the bathroom sluice.⁹ You’re right, Chuchundra; I should have talked to Chua.”

220 He stole off to Teddy’s bathroom, but there was nothing there, and then to Teddy’s mother’s bathroom. At the bottom of the smooth plaster wall, there was a brick pulled out to make a sluice for the bath water, and as Rikki-tikki stole in by the masonry curb where the bath is put, he heard Nag and Nagaina whispering together outside in the moonlight.

“When the house is emptied of people,” said Nagaina to her husband, “*he* will have to go away, and then the garden will be our own again. Go in quietly, and remember that the big man who killed Karait is the first one to bite. Then come out and tell me, and we will hunt for Rikki-tikki together.”

“But are you sure that there is anything to be gained by killing the people?” said Nag.

230 “Everything. When there were no people in the bungalow, did we have any mongoose in the garden? 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.” **I**

“I had not thought of that,” said Nag. “I will go, but there is no need that we should hunt for Rikki-tikki afterward. I will kill the big man and his

H SUSPENSE

Reread lines 203–216. What details make the conversation between Chuchundra and Rikki-tikki suspenseful?

I PREDICT

Think about what Nag and Nagaina are planning to do. How do you think Rikki-tikki might respond?

8. **Chua** (chōō’ə).

9. **bathroom sluice** (slōōs): an opening in a wall through which the water in a bathtub can be drained outdoors.