

# *How Raja Rasâlu's Friends Forsook Him*

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Indian

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*Intermediate*  
*3 min read*

Now, on the first day, Raja Rasâlu journeyed far, until he came to a lonely forest, where he halted for the night. And seeing it was a desolate place, and the night dark, he determined to set a watch. So he divided the time into three watches, and the carpenter took the first, the goldsmith the second, and Raja Rasâlu the third.

Then the goldsmith lad spread a couch of clean grass for his master, and fearing lest the Prince's heart should sink at the change from his former luxurious life, he said these words of encouragement—

'Cradled till now on softest down,  
Grass is thy couch to-night;  
Yet grieve not thou if Fortune frown—  
Brave hearts heed not her slight!'

Now, when Raja Rasâlu and the goldsmith's son slept, a snake came out of a thicket hard by, and crept towards the sleepers.

‘Who are you?’ quoth the carpenter lad, ‘and why do you come hither?’

‘I have destroyed all things within twelve miles!’ returned the serpent. ‘Who are *you* that have dared to come hither?’

Then the snake attacked the carpenter, and they fought until the snake was killed, when the carpenter hid the dead body under his shield, and said nothing of the adventure to his comrades, lest he should alarm them, for, like the goldsmith, he thought the Prince might be discouraged.

Now, when it came to Raja Rasâlu’s turn to keep watch, a dreadful unspeakable horror came out of the thicket. Nevertheless, Rasâlu went up to it boldly, and cried aloud, ‘Who are you? and what brings you here?’

Then the awful unspeakable horror replied, ‘I have killed everything for thrice twelve miles around! Who are *you* that dare come hither?’

Whereupon Rasâlu drew his mighty bow, and pierced the horror with an arrow, so that it fled into a cave, whither the Prince followed it.

And they fought long and fiercely, till at last the horror died, and Rasâlu returned to watch in peace.

Now, when morning broke, Raja Rasâlu called his sleeping servants, and the carpenter showed with pride the body of the serpent he had killed.

‘Tis but a small snake!’ quoth the Raja. ‘Come and see what I killed in the cave!’

And, behold! when the goldsmith lad and the carpenter lad saw the awful, dreadful, unspeakable horror Raja Rasâlu had slain, they were exceedingly afraid, and falling on their knees, begged to be allowed to return to the city, saying, ‘O mighty Rasâlu, you are a Raja and a hero! You can fight such horrors; we are but ordinary folk, and if we follow you we shall surely be killed. Such things are nought to you, but they are death to us. Let us go!’

Then Rasâlu looked at them sorrowfully, and bade them do as they wished, saying—

‘Aloes linger long before they flower:

Gracious rain too soon is overpast:

Youth and strength are with us but an hour:

All glad life must end in death at last!

But king reigns king without consent of courtier;

Rulers may rule, though none heed their command.

Heaven-crown'd heads stoop not, but rise the haughtier,

Alone and houseless in a stranger's land!

So his friends forsook him, and Rasâlu journeyed on alone.

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