

# 1 Attila

R K Narayan

Read the given story and do the activities given below.

*Attila was the ruler of the Hunnic Empire, the territory of central and eastern Europe. During his reign, he was one of the most feared enemies of the Roman Empire. Now, read this hilarious story about a pet called Attila. Let's see if he lives up to his name.*

In a mood of optimism, they named him 'Attila'. What they wanted of a dog was strength, **formidableness**, and fight, and hence he was named after the '**Scourge** of Europe'.

The puppy was only a couple of months old—he had square jaws, red eyes, pug nose and a massive head, and there was every reason to hope that he would do credit to his name. The immediate reason for buying him was a series of house-breakings and thefts in the neighbourhood, and our householders decided to put more **trust** in a dog than in the police. They searched far and wide and met a **dog fancier**. He held up a month-old black-and-white puppy and said, "Come and fetch him a month hence. In six months, he will be something to be feared and respected." He spread out before them a **pedigree** sheet which was stunning. The puppy had, running in his veins, the choicest and the most **ferocious** blood.

<b>formidableness</b>	the quality of arousing fear
<b>scourge</b>	curse; plague
<b>dog fancier</b>	a person who breeds dogs
<b>pedigree</b>	record of descent
<b>ferocious</b>	frightening and violent

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They were satisfied, paid an advance, returned a month later  
down seventy-five rupees, and took the puppy home. The pup  
as I have already indicated, did not have a very prepossessing  
appearance and was none too playful, but this did not prevent  
owners from sitting in a circle around him and admiring him.

There was a prolonged debate as to what he should be named.

The youngest suggested, "Why not call him Tiger?"

"Every other street-mongrel is named Tiger," came the reply.

"Why not Caesar?"

"Caesar! If a census were taken of dogs, you would find  
at least fifteen thousand Caesars in South India alone.

Why not Fire?"

"It is too fantastic."

"Why not Thunder?"

"It is too obvious."

"Grip?"

"Still obvious, and childish."

There was a **deadlock**. Someone suggested 'Attila', and a show  
joy went up to the skies. No more satisfying name was thought  
for man or animal.

But as time passed our Attila exhibited a love of humanity  
was **disconcerting** sometimes. The Scourge of Europe—could  
ever have been like this?

They put it down to his age. What child could help loving all  
creatures? In their **zeal** to establish this fact, they went to the



of **delving** into ancient history to find out what the Scourge of Europe was like when he was a child. It was rumoured that as a child he clung to his friends and to his parents' friends so fast that often he had to be beaten and separated. But when he was fourteen he showed the first sign of his future—he knocked down and **plunged** his knife into a fellow who tried to touch his marbles.

Ah, this was encouraging. Let our dog reach the parallel of fourteen years and people would get to know his real nature.

But this was a **vain** promise. He stood up twenty inches high, had a large frame, and a forbidding appearance on the whole but that was all. A variety of people entered the gates of the house every day—**mendicants**, bill-collectors, postmen, tradesmen and family friends. All of them were warmly received by Attila.

The moment the gate clicked he became alert and stood up looking towards the gate. By the time anyone entered the gate Attila went blindly charging forward. But that was all. The person had only to stop and smile, and Attila would melt. He would behave as if he apologised for even giving an impression of violence.

<b>prepossessing</b>	<i>beautiful; attractive</i>
<b>deadlock</b>	<i>a situation in which agreement in an argument cannot be reached because neither side will change its demands or accept any of the demands of the other side</i>
<b>disconcerting</b>	<i>disturbing</i>
<b>zeal</b>	<i>enthusiasm</i>
<b>delving</b>	<i>looking or searching thoroughly for information</i>
<b>plunged</b>	<i>(caused someone or something to) move or fall suddenly and often a long way forward, down or into something</i>
<b>vain</b>	<i>(here) unsuccessful; of no value</i>
<b>mendicants</b>	<i>beggars</i>

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He would lower his  
head, curve his body,  
tuck his tail between  
his legs, roll his eyes,  
and moan as if to say,  
“How sad that you  
should have mistaken  
my gesture! I only  
hurried down to greet  
you.” Till he was patted  
on the head, stroked,  
and told that he was  
forgiven, he would be in extreme misery.



Gradually, he realised that his bouncing advances caused an  
unhappy misunderstanding. And so when he heard the gate  
he hardly stirred. He merely looked in that direction and wagged  
his tail.

The people at home did not very much like this attitude. They  
thought it rather a shame.

“Why not change his name to Blind Worm?” somebody asked.  
“He eats like an elephant,” said the mother of the family. “You  
can employ two watchmen for the price of the rice and meat  
consumes. Somebody comes every morning and steals all the  
flowers in the garden and Attila won’t do anything about it.”

“He has better business to do than catch flower thieves,” replied  
youngest, always the defender of the dog.

“What is the better business?”

"Well, if somebody comes in at dawn and takes away the flowers do you expect Attila to be looking out for him even at that hour?"

"Why not? It's what a well-fed dog ought to be doing instead of sleeping. You ought to be ashamed of your dog."

"He does not sleep all night, Mother. I have often seen him going round the house and watching all night."

"Really! Does he **prowl** about all night?"

"Of course he does," said the defender.

"I am quite alarmed to hear it," said the mother. "Please lock him up in a room at night, otherwise he may call in a burglar and show him round. Left alone, a burglar might after all be less successful. It wouldn't be so bad if he at least barked. He is the most noiseless dog I have ever seen in my life."

The young man was extremely irritated at this. He considered it to be the most **uncharitable cynicism**, but the dog justified it that very night.

Ranga lived in a hut three miles from the town. He was a 'gang coolie' often employed in road-mending. Occasionally at nights he enjoyed the thrill and profit of breaking into houses.

At one o'clock that night, Ranga removed the bars of a window on the eastern side of the house and slipped in.

<b>stirred</b>	<i>moved</i>
<b>prowl</b>	<i>move around quietly in a place</i>
<b>uncharitable</b>	<i>unkind and unfair</i>
<b>cynicism</b>	<i>showing distrust or contempt</i>

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He edged along the wall,  
searched all the trunks and  
almirahs in the house, and  
made a neat bundle of all the  
jewellery and other valuables  
he could pick up.

He was just starting to go  
out. He had just put one foot  
out of the gap he had made  
in the window when he  
saw Attila standing below,  
looking up **expectantly**.

Ranga thought his end had  
come. He expected the dog  
to bark. But not Attila. He

waited for a moment, grew tired of waiting, stood up and put  
forepaws on the lap of the burglar. He put back his ears, licked  
Ranga's hands, and rolled his eyes.

Ranga whispered, "I hope you aren't going to bark..."

"Don't you worry. I am not the sort," the dog tried to say.

"Just a moment. Let me get down from here," said the burglar.

The dog obligingly took away his paws and lowered himself.

"See there," said Ranga pointing to the backyard, "there is a cat."  
Attila put up his ears at the mention of the cat, and **dashed** in  
direction indicated. One might easily have thought he was go  
tear up a cat, but actually he didn't want to miss the pleasure  
company of a cat if there was one.



As soon as the dog left him, Ranga made a dash for the gate. Given a second more he would have hopped over it. But the dog turned and saw what was about to happen and in one spring was at the gate. He looked hurt.

"Is this proper?" he seemed to ask. "Do you want to shake me off?"

He hung his heavy tail down so loosely and looked so miserable that the burglar stroked his head, at which he revived. The burglar opened the gate and went out, and the dog followed him. Attila's greatest **ambition** in life was to wander in the streets freely.

Now things seemed to be shaping out ideally. Attila liked his new friend so much that he wouldn't leave him alone even for a moment. He sat before Ranga when he sat down to eat, sat on the edge of his mat when he slept in his hut, waited patiently on the edge of the pond when Ranga went there now and then for a wash, slept on the roadside when Ranga was at work.

This sort of companionship got on Ranga's nerves. He implored, "Oh dog. Leave me alone for a moment. Won't you?"

Unmoved, Attila sat before him with his eyes glued on his friend.

Attila's disappearance created a **sensation** in the bungalow. "Didn't I tell you," the mother said, "to lock him up? Now some burglar has gone away with him. What a shame! We can hardly mention it to anyone."

<b>expectantly</b>	<i>thinking something pleasant or exciting is about to happen</i>
<b>dashed</b>	<i>went somewhere quickly</i>
<b>ambition</b>	<i>strong wish to achieve something</i>
<b>sensation</b>	<i>an event that causes a lot of excitement and interest</i>

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"You are mistaken," replied the defender. "It is just a coincidence. He must have gone off on his own account. If he had been a thief, he would have dared to come in..."

"Whatever it is, I don't know if we should after all thank the thief for taking away that dog. He may keep the jewels as a reward for taking him away. Shall we withdraw the police complaint?"

This facetiousness ceased a week later, and Attila rose to the rank of a hero. The eldest son of the house was going towards the market one day. He saw Attila trotting behind someone on the road.



"Hey," shouted the young man; at which Ranga turned and galloped into a run. Attila, who always suspected that his new friend was waiting for the slightest chance to throw him, galloped behind Ranga.

"Hey, Attila!" shouted the young man, and he also started running. Attila wanted to answer the call after making sure of his friend's safety, and so he turned his head for a second and galloped faster.



Ranga desperately doubled his pace. Attila was determined to stick to him at any cost. As a result of it he ran so fast that he overtook Ranga and clumsily blocked his way, and Ranga stumbled over him and fell. As he rolled on the ground a piece of jewellery (which he was taking to a receiver of stolen property) flew from his hand. The young man recognised it as belonging to his sister, and sat down on Ranga. A crowd collected and the police appeared on the scene.

Attila was the hero of the day. Even the lady of the house softened towards him. She said, "Whatever one might say of Attila, one has to admit that he is a very cunning detective. He is too deep for words."

It was as well that Attila had no powers of speech. Otherwise he would have burst into a lamentation which would have shattered the pedestal under his feet.

<b>facetiousness</b>	<i>joking or jesting</i>
<b>clumsily</b>	<i>awkwardly</i>
<b>lamentation</b>	<i>words or actions to show you are sorry or sad</i>
<b>shattered</b>	<i>crushed</i>
<b>pedestal</b>	<i>a long, thin column that supports a statue, or a tall structure like a column on which something rests</i>

### About the Author

R K Narayan (1906 – 2001) was an Indian writer, best known for his works set in the fictional south Indian town of Malgudi. His stories unfold beautifully and gently through his characters and their actions in everyday life, bringing out the peculiarities of human relationships. Narayan wrote his first novel *Swami and Friends* in 1930. It was one of his best-received works.

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## Think and Answer



1. Why did the family think that the puppy would do credit to his name?
2. Why did they think it necessary to have a dog at home?
3. How did Attila greet anyone coming to the house?
4. What did the youngest son consider to be the worst example of uncharitable cynicism? How did the dog justify his cynicism?
5. Was Attila a hero? Give reasons for your answer.



## Using Words

Read the words given below. They have been used in the story to refer to the movements of Atilla.

charging, prowl, trotting, galloped

**Fill in the blanks with the right words to describe movements. Use the correct form of the words.**

loiter	plummet	zoom	prowl
stride	dart	scamper	strut

1. The squirrel \_\_\_\_\_ down the trunk of the tree and disappeared in the bushes.
2. The car \_\_\_\_\_ past us at a great speed.
3. The old woman seemed to be in discomfort as she \_\_\_\_\_ across the road.
4. The tiny tots \_\_\_\_\_ around the stage in their dancing costumes.

5. The children aimlessly \_\_\_\_\_ around the park.
6. Taking long \_\_\_\_\_, he was able to reach the venue in no time.
7. The roller coaster \_\_\_\_\_ downhill amidst screams and yells.
8. The rat \_\_\_\_\_ swiftly from behind the cupboard so no one could catch it.



## Appreciation

The story has elements of playful humour in simple language.

**Contrast** is a rhetorical device through which the writer can identify differences between two subjects, places, people, things or ideas. Opposition between two objects may be highlighted to emphasise their differences. However, in this story, the contrast emerges gently through the 'personality' of the main character, Attila the dog.

Attila, the dog, stands in contrast to Attila, the historical legend. Attila, the dog, is a simple soul who, unintentionally, emerges as a hero in the end. The author uses contrast to generate humour in the story. Look at the following statement from the story:

“Why not change his name to Blind Worm?”  
somebody asked.

The traits of Attila, which contrast with his name, are emphasised through a suggestion for a name-change by someone.

**Can you identify more instances of contrast in the story?**

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## Writing

The dog was named Attila because of his formidable appearance. The family had hoped that he would guard the house and his fierce appearance would he scare away intruders. Attila grew up to be completely to expectations.

**Write a character sketch of Attila based on your re the story.**

Remember to

- introduce the character to those who have not re the story.
- talk about the character traits that you notice.
- give instances from the story to demonstrate th
- make the character appear endearing by adding humour in your descriptions.
- use adjectives of quality.



## Discussion

**Work in pairs and discuss the many benefits of keep**

Talk about

- the different kinds of pets.
- the difference between owning a dog and a cat.
- whether you have a pet.
- your favourite pet.